

Human chain demands trial

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The human chain stretched from the university's Central Library to Shahbagh intersection.

Most of the participants, largely university students, were in green and red symbolising the national flag. Some of them put on black T-shirts imprinted with the slogan "try the war criminals".

Many people who came to visit the university campus on the Victory Day joined the human chain spontaneously.

Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Liberation War Air Vice Marshal (ret'd) AK Khondkar, Sector Commanders Lt Gen (ret'd) Mir Shawkat Ali Bir Uttam, Maj Gen (ret'd) KM Shafiullah Bir Uttam, Major General (ret'd) CR Dutta Bir Uttam, former army chief and Coordinator of Sector Commanders' Forum Lt Gen (ret'd) M Harun-or-Rashid, and Convenor of the war crime fact-finding committee MA Hasan also joined the human chain.

Some foreigners also joined the programme. Japanese citizen Jeong-Sug, working as a volunteer in Bangladesh, said she saw the participants holding banners demanding trial of the war criminals and joined

the human chain to express solidarity with them.

University students in cooperation with the left-leaning student organisations organised the programme.

Another group of students placed a monument named "Razakar-Ghina-Stambha" in front of DU Central Students' Union (Ducus) to express hatred towards the war criminals. Air Vice Marshal (ret'd) AK Khondkar inaugurated the monument at around 3:00 pm.

Different organisations organised programmes to celebrate the Victory Day. Charon Sangskritik Kendra organised a photography exhibition on Liberation War at the university's Teacher-Student Centre (TSC).

Besides, different organisations organised blood donation programme at the TSC. Earlier, DU teachers placed floral wreaths at the national memorial at Savar in the morning.

Meanwhile, hundreds of freedom fighters took "oath" at 'Shikha Chironton' at Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday to resist the anti-liberation war forces.

They demanded trial of the war criminals and promised to build a

country free from Razakar and Al Badr who sided with the Pakistani occupation forces.

The freedom fighters said they did not fight for the present Bangladesh where the war criminals dare to talk against the country's liberation war.

Muktijoddha Oikya Parishad, a platform of the organisations of freedom fighters, including Muktijoddha Sanghati Parishad, Muktijoddha Somonoy Parishad, Muktijoddha Nou-Commando Association, Muktijoddha Sangram Parishad, Mohila Muktijoddha Sangsad, Muktijoddha Ainjibi Parishad, Muktijoddha Smriti Rokkha Parishad and Bangladesh Muktijoddha Foundation, arranged the "oath" taking.

Freedom fighters carrying national flag, banners and placards thronged Suhrawardy Udyan at about 12:00 noon and placed wreaths at the Shikha Chironton. Several social organisations also placed wreaths.

They stood in silence for two minutes to show respect to the liberation war heroes.

The freedom fighters said they would eliminate Razakar and Al Badr from the country so that they don't dare to talk against the liberation war.

"If needed, we will sacrifice our lives to get rid of the anti-liberation war elements," they declared.

Col (ret'd) Shawkat Ali, chief of Muktijoddha Sanghati Parishad, conducted the oath-taking ceremony.

Pak parties

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"absolutely fair" and invited international observers to attend the election.

In addition to lifting the emergency, however, the president also decreed that measures imposed during emergency rule could not be challenged in the courts.

Curbs on the media remain in place and sacked anti-Musharraf judges will not be given back their jobs.

"He is behaving like a man who commits a crime and then exonerates himself," said Raja Zafar ul Haq, a senior official in Sharif's PMU-N party.

"The period of emergency was short. But in 42 days, the poison he infused into the body politic will continue to have adverse effects for a long time to come," Haq told AFP.

The president kicked off months of political turmoil in March, when he suspended the chief justice of the Supreme Court, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry.

Chaudhry has since been sacked and remains under house arrest. In his first official act after lifting the emergency, Musharraf swore in a new chief justice, Abdul Hameed Dogar, and other judges on the Supreme Court.

Musharraf is a key figure in the US-led "war on terror," and his Western backers had insisted that he lift the emergency before the parliamentary vote.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown of Britain said Saturday he had used a phone call with the president to call for a "level playing field" at the polls.

"The international community supports his wish -- and that of the people of Pakistan -- to hold free and fair elections," Brown said.

War heroes

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Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed and central executive committee members Maulana Abdus Sobhan, Mohammad Kamaruzzaman and Maulana Delwar Hossain Sayedee, who stand accused of numerous atrocities in the course of their campaign against the birth of Bangladesh, attended the function held late in the afternoon.

Leaders of pro-Saifur Rahman faction of the BNP including its acting chairman Saifur Rahman, acting secretary general Major (ret'd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed and former minister Moyeen Khan were also present there.

Hafiz Uddin Ahmed told the reporters, "It's a state programme. That's why we were there."

On the growing public demand for trial of the war criminals, he said: "I definitely want the trial but it must not be politicised."

Pro-Khalefa faction of the BNP on the other hand, opted out of the reception as Khandaker Delwar Hossain, secretary general appointed by the chairperson, was not invited as the party's secretary general.

Among others, Speaker Ruhulldin Sircar, Chief Justice M Ruhul Amin, advisers of the caretaker government, Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda, judges of the Supreme Court, diplomats, some other politicians, editors, business leaders, academics, artists and senior civil and military officers attended the function.

Earlier, AL working committee decided that no one from the party would attend the Bangabhaban reception if Jamaat leaders and war criminals are asked to be there.

Talking to The Daily Star on Saturday night, former army chief and Co-ordinator of Sector Commanders' Forum Lt Gen (ret'd) M Harun-or-Rashid said they would boycott the event if anti-liberation forces are invited.

Bangladesh Kalyan Party Chairman Maj Gen (ret'd) Syed Mohammad Ibrahim refused to attend the reception for the same reason.

V-Day celebrated

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Ruhul Amin, advisers to the caretaker government, the chiefs of three armed forces, freedom fighters, families of the Birstreshthas, diplomats, and top civil and military officials later placed wreaths at the memorial.

Leaders of different political parties including Awami League (AL), BNP, Jatiya Party, the Communist Party of Bangladesh, Workers Party, and Bikalpadhara Bangladesh also placed wreaths at the memorial.

Different socio-cultural organisations, rights groups, organisations of professionals, educational institutions, and a cross-section of people also placed wreaths at the memorial.

Bangladesh proclaimed its independence on March 26, 1971 and stopped being East Pakistan after 23 years of struggle for self-determination by its people, bringing down the erstwhile West Pakistani armed forces' genocidal wrath on its people the night before.

The invading Pakistani military carried out one of the cruellest genocides in recent history of mankind in the nine months preceding their defeat at the hands of the allied forces of Mukti Bahini and the Indian armed forces on December 16, 1971.

Celebration of the 36th Victory Day yesterday adorned the government, semi-government, and private buildings in the capital and elsewhere in the country with the green and red national flag, while many vehicle owners also sported the flag on their vehicles.

Drawing people from all walks of life, the National Memorial was the main celebration site yesterday, as this year's Victory Day came amid a state of emergency barring public gatherings by political parties.

The number of outdoor public celebrations was rather limited this year due to the restrictions

imposed by the state of emergency.

Thoroughfares and road dividers were decorated with miniature flags and bunting while some government buildings were illuminated also.

Schoolchildren sported a colourful parade at Bangabandhu National Stadium in the capital where scouts, a band of the Ansar-VDP, and horse-mounted cops entertained the crowd with their performances.

Meanwhile, freedom fighters and pro-liberation political parties boycotted a reception at Bangabhaban in the capital by President Iajuddin Ahmed, protesting his move to invite Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh.

Newspapers published supplements, and television channels broadcasted special discussion and cultural programmes on the occasion.

Special prayers were offered in all mosques in the cantonments across the country seeking divine blessings for peace and progress of the country and development of the armed forces.

Members of the armed forces joined the nation in observing the day by waking up the residents of the capital with 31 gun salutes at dawn from the Old Airport.

Bangla Academy, Shilpakala Academy, and Bangladesh Shishu Academy organised cultural programmes including film shows and painting competitions on their premises.

AL leaders also placed wreaths at the portrait of the leader of the liberation struggle Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the morning after laying wreaths at the National Memorial.

While leaders and activists of both factions of BNP also visited the mausoleum of late president Ziaur Rahman -- the founder of the party who was also one of the sector commanders during the liberation war.

8 still missing

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Sources said despite the recovery of five bodies so far, at least eight more remain still trapped inside the once famous building which has become rather infamous through the events surrounding it over the last few months.

Rajuk officials, however, said they will be able to remove the debris from the building and recover the trapped bodies before Eid-ul-Azha.

Mansur Ali Haider Sikder, a Rajuk official, told reporters, "We hope to recover all trapped bodies and remove the debris before the Eid."

He also said Rajuk decided to pay Tk 1 lakh to the families of each deceased worker.

More than a hundred rescue workers are involved in the operation, he added.

But the rescue workers said no more than 20 of them are carrying out the operation, a number with which it will be impossible to complete the job before the Eid.

No celebration

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when we see local collaborators of the occupation Pakistani forces still roam scot-free and dare to make disrespectful remarks about the Liberation War," Fatema Amin, daughter of Birshreshtha Ruhul Amin, said when she went to National Mausoleum to place a wreath.

As the governments were indifferent to meet the demand of the sector commanders, freedom fighters, political parties and different sociopolitical organisations and rights groups, the seven families asked the caretaker government to take steps to bring the war criminals to book.

The families of all the seven Birshreshthas were invited for the first time to attend together the national celebration of the Victory Day.

"My father's soul won't rest in peace until the war criminals are tried. The government had conferred the highest honour to the valiant fighters. Why can't they bring the war criminals to trial?" a tear-choked Fatema said while talking to reporters at the national memorial.

"Besides their trial, I would also ask the government to take steps so that the war criminals can't take part in the upcoming elections."

Thanking the government for inviting them, Mostafa Kamal, son of Birshreshtha Nur Mohammad Sheikh, said: "The departed souls of the martyrs will not rest in peace until the war criminals are brought to trial."

Mili Rahman, wife of Birshreshtha Matir Rahman, said: "My husband sacrificed his life for the country. I am proud of him. We want the trial of those who had slaughtered people during the Liberation War."

Asked about her expectations on the Victory Day, Mili Rahman said: "I want to see implementation of the spirit of the Liberation War."

The remains of Birshreshtha Matir Rahman were brought back from Pakistan on June 24, 2006. He was buried in full state honour at Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard in Mirpur in the capital.

Saying that she has got millions of sons and an independent country after losing her son, Mokidunnesa, mother of Birshreshtha Munshi Abdul Rob, said, "I have a demand: when will the war criminals be tried?"

"I don't have any other demand to the state. I only want the collaborators and war criminals to be tried," she said.

Adviser for Liberation War Affairs Maj Gen (ret'd) MA Matin who also went to the national memorial to pay homage to the martyrs, however, dodged any response on the demand.

But the Birshreshtha families said they would keep on demanding.

Khulna Jute Mills

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observed a token hunger strike from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm in front of mill gate to press home their demands.

A group of workers of Alim Jute Mills have already decided to go for self-immolation any day if government fails to fulfil their demands, CBA leaders Abdul Halim Sardar, Sheikh Ansar Ali and Amirul Islam said.

Laid off and retired workers of five other jute mills of Khulna-Jessore industrial belt will also join tomorrow's road blockade programme, Abdur Rahman, publicity secretary of Khulna-Jessore Regional Unit of Patkal Sangram Parishad (PSP), said.

On August 21 this year, 801 of 811 workers, 50 out of 57 employees and 6 out of 20 officials of Alim Jute Mills applied to the management for quitting their jobs under VRS.

The management, however, accepted the applications of 223 workers and 45 employees on October 1.

The mill was laid off for the first time on September 22 for a month. The layoff was extended three times and the last layoff notice was issued on December 6.

Cattle supply sparse

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market in the city, where the biggest trading of sacrificial animals this year is anticipated to take place.

Mohammad Zahir, a cashier at the market's 'hasil' counter, said, "Usually around 1,600 animals are sold every day at the market. During Eid-ul-Azha, the sale triples."

As the Eid day comes closer, hundreds of traders with their animals from all over the country will gather around the Gabtoli market and even on the Mirpur embankment. The market committee plans on setting up eight hasil counters at various points of the market this year as well.

Traders at the market speculate that the buyers who usually spend an exorbitant amount of money on the higher-priced animals are not likely to turn out in great numbers this year due to the ongoing anti-corruption drives.

Last year's top two sales were a bull sold at Tk 2.5 lakh and a camel at Tk 1.4 lakh, said Zahir.

So far, only six camels have been brought to the market this year whereas 50 camels and 12 dumba were on sale last year.

Meanwhile, the DCC has made Tk 5.67 crore -- the highest in its history -- this year from tender biddings of the 12 makeshift cattle markets in the city, said DCC officials.

To ensure smooth operations during four days of trading in the markets, the DCC will deploy five-member patrol teams for each market.

"The mobile teams will take action against anyone selling sick animal or not following the fixed rate

during collection of hasil," said Anwar Pasha, a DCC magistrate who will be supervising the patrol teams.

"Hasil" is a service tax to be paid by buyers. It has been fixed at 5 percent of the animal price.

"Any organizer creating traffic congestion outside the market area or any other public nuisance will be punished. The DCC mobile courts will put these markets under close watch," Pasha said adding that complaints can be lodged at DCC camps to be set up in each market, said the magistrate.

A temporary police camp and a DCC camp, comprising a zonal executive officer, a health officer and officials from the cleaning division, will be set up in each of the markets to maintain law and order.

The corporation will deploy 850 labourers and 1,000 cleaners to clean up the waste inside the markets.

The makeshift DCC cattle markets are to be set up on the ground next to Chitra Hall at Armanitola of Naya Bazar, Jigatala-Hazaribag ground, Rahmatganj playground, Dhupkhola ground, Hosseni Dalan Road (from Chankharpul crossing to Bakshibazar traffic signal), Balur Math, playground by Brothers Union Sporting Club at Kamapur, on the playground of Government Primary School at Azampur of Uttara and the adjoining open space of Rajuk, Meradia Bazar playground, open space in front of Alam Market at Postogola, Rayer Bazar playground, open space adjacent to Khilgaon-Tatola bus stand and the open space beside Agargaon LGED Bhaban.

Loan sharks

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Jahbar, 30, and Khalil, 35, of the same area also got their loans from the same moneylender for a monthly interest rate of 15 percent.

When contacted, moneylender Mizanur Rahman justified the money lending business by saying, "Why shouldn't I receive interest from locals when the banks pay me interest for the money I keep with them?"

Paper bag manufacturer Sufia Begum, 36, from Charkhali village in Mirzaganj upazila started the business with a Tk 10,000 loan from an NGO in the area.

After Sufia lost everything to the cyclone, she sought a fresh loan from the NGO to start over. But the NGO rejected her request saying that operations of the NGO have been suspended till March 31, 2008.

Sufia had to turn to a local moneylender for a Tk 5,000 loan with a monthly interest rate of 20 percent.

Kuddus Howlader, 32, Moriam Akhter, 25, and Fuljan Bibi, 45, from the same village also had to approach the local moneylenders for high-interest loans as NGOs such as Asa, Brac, Grameen Bank and Uddipana have suspended loan distribution.

Salim, a small businessman from Bahalgachhia of sadar upazila, said, "Since I have only one outstanding instalment payment against the Tk 10,000 loan I got from SSDP (a local NGO), I requested them to receive the payment and endorse a fresh loan for me. But they turned me

down and said that all their activities including receiving instalment payments and disbursing fresh loans have been suspended until further notice from their head office."

The government should ask the NGOs to receive instalment payments from the willing borrowers and allocate fresh loans among the affected entrepreneurs, he added.

The loan sharks are taking advantage of the situation and preying on the helpless people as the NGOs have suspended their micro credit programmes, said Afzar Habib, of Codec (Community Development Centre), an NGO.

Sap official Abdul Mannan said people from the low-income group would be the worst victims of the loan sharks unless micro credit operations are resumed in the cyclone-affected area soon.

AGM Mir Moshir Alam, deputy commissioner (DC) of Patuakhali, at a meeting in his office on Thursday asked all local NGOs to suspend collection of instalments from the borrowers and at the same time assist the cyclone victims revive their businesses with fresh loans.

The NGO officials however told the DC that since the monthly payments they collect are part of their revolving fund and without recovering a huge amount of outstanding payments from the borrowers, they would not have sufficient funds readily available for disbursement as loans.

Sector commanders

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The commanders also vowed to wage another battle like the war of independence against the war criminals and urged the freedom fighters to drum up support for the demand of war criminals' trial among the people in their localities.

They were addressing a reunion function at the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), organised on the occasion of the Victory Day.

"I want to ask the present government to please try the war criminals before time passes, otherwise you will have to face the wrath of the people if they become furious over the issue," Commander of Sector 5, Lt Gen (ret'd) Mir Shawkat Ali Bir Uttam said.

Air Vice Marshal (ret'd) AK Khondker, the deputy commander-in-chief of the Liberation War, said the trial of those who killed tens of thousands of freedom fighters and people in general, raped thousands of women and resorted to arson and lootings, must have to be taken place on the soil of this country. He urged all freedom fighters and pro-liberation war forces to help accomplish the task.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said that they all have to be united for bringing the war criminals to justice, otherwise the history of the country would move towards a wrong direction.

The DCC has named many city roads after freedom fighters in a bid to honour them, the mayor observed.

Several thousand freedom fighters attended the function amid festivity along with the sector and sub-sector commanders.

The DCC has been organising the function on the Victory Day for the last few years so that the freedom fighters of Dhaka come close to each other.

Addressing the function, Lt Gen (ret'd) Harun-or-Rashid, coordinator of the sector commanders' forum, observed that the present government's distinction as a non-partisan and neutral caretaker government becomes blurred at times, when it does not take any action against those who make audacious comments against the country, its Liberation War, independence and the constitution.

"We want to know why the state is silent when they (Jamaat leaders) say that there had not been any government's distinction as a non-partisan and neutral caretaker government becomes blurred at times, when it does not take any action against those who make audacious comments against the country, its Liberation War, independence and the constitution."

Harun said. "If we cannot be united then one day the war criminals will try us for 'dividing Pakistan,'" he said suggesting the freedom fighters to drum up support for the demand of war criminals' trial among the people in their localities.

Commander of Sector 7 Kazi Nuruzzaman Bir Uttam observed that the war criminals could be brought to book if only the freedom fighters could come to power, as no previous governments had tried them.

He suggested the freedom fighters to join politics for attaining this goal.

The freedom fighters present, however, became angry and chanted slogans against Nuruzzaman as the commander did not make any direct demand for the trial of the war criminals. The resulting chaos subsided after a few minutes when other veteran freedom fighters intervened.

Lt Gen (ret'd) Mir Shawkat Ali urged the freedom fighters to be united on the question of Liberation War and trial of war criminals.

Jamaat-e-Islami, who had misinterpreted the religion, Al Quran and Hadith, is not only the war criminal but "religion criminal" as well, he observed.

Commander of Sector 4, Maj Gen (ret'd) CR Datta observed that if the present caretaker government does not try the war criminals, they might have to appear in the dock too.

Urging all field level freedom fighters to be united on this issue, he said the government would be forced to try the war criminals if they are united.

Maj Gen (ret'd) KM Shafiullah, commander of Sector 3, said that time has now come to be organised like in 1971, as he said that they had been disorganised for the last 36 years.

He said they would bring the war criminals to trial one way or another for protecting their existence. Also a former army chief, Shafiullah said the government, not any individual, would have to take the responsibility of trying the war criminals.

The present government should initiate the process of bringing the war criminals to justice so that the next elected government can follow it.

Sub-sector commanders Maj Gen (ret'd) Inyudin and Col (ret'd) HMA Gatter Chowdhury, freedom fighter Mohammad Anwar Hossain, among others spoke at the programme followed by a cultural programme.

Eid tickets vanished

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route, but now the launch staffers are charging around Tk 70 more ahead of Eid.

Launch and bus terminal officials, however, claimed that they are charging fares fixed by the government.

The launch staff claimed that they charge Tk 300 for a single cabin and Tk 600 for a double cabin although the government fares are Tk 600 and Tk 1,200. The fare they charge for the deck is also less than that fixed by the government, they said.

Bus terminal authorities said on usual days they charge around Tk 50 less than the fare fixed by Bangladesh Road Transport Authority to get more passengers, but ahead of Eid they charge the full fare.

Meanwhile, launches have as usual started carrying more passengers than their allowed capacity.

Launches leaving from Sadarghat terminal yesterday afternoon were seen carrying three times more people than their capacity.

Launch Owners' Association Convenor (Dhaka Zone) Kamal Hossain admitted the fact but said it was done "for the sake of the passengers".

During a visit to different launch counters for a ticket on Dhaka-Amtoli (Barguna) route, the counter staffs told The Daily Star correspondent that all tickets exhausted

seven days ago.

A staff of Mitali-6 launch, however, agreed to sell a double cabin ticket only after he was assured that money did not matter. He initially demanded Tk 2,000 as the fare but later agreed at Tk 1,600 after bargaining. Usually the fare of such a cabin is Tk 600.

Bangladesh Railway (BR) officials said they have 23 electricity expresses and five mail trains and six private mail trains and that these trains have a capacity to carry around 20,000 passengers every day. But, they will sell 20,000 more tickets for the Eid vacation so that all people can go to their destinations.

Considering the pressure of passengers on the eve of Eid, the BR has made special arrangements including adding extra three-five compartments to each intercity express trains, operating extra trains and more trips on several routes.

Selling of advance train tickets started on December 11 and ended December 15.

Karimul Hossain, Station Master Akm Shamsul Haq Prodan said all advance tickets for December 16-20 have been sold out, but tickets without sitting arrangement will be sold considering the pressure of passengers.

He said around 30,000 passengers will be carried every day immediately before Eid vacation.

He, however, denied the allegations of irregularity in ticket selling.

Bids for rental power

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augment 300MW power supply by April. The government is ready to pay more for this power which can be brought online very quickly and uninstalled effortlessly, according to a top power ministry official.

In contrast, small power plants and Independent Power Plants are set up on a long-term basis and charge lesser power tariff.

The PEC headed by the director general of Power Cell recommended a consortium of Indonesian Kaltimex and local GBB Power Ltd for the Bhola 34.5MW gas-fired rental power plant.

The consortium sought a price of 5.198 US cents per kilowatt-hour of power. However, Kaltimex's experience documents don't clearly show that it has implemented any power project on rental basis.

For the Shahzibazar 50MW gas-fired rental plant, the PEC recommended local Energy Prima, a joint venture with Russian Geo-Spectrum Group, Energy Prima and Hosaf Meter Industry that offered 4.517 US cents.

The legal documents of this joint venture have not been registered under the Companies Act, and therefore it lacks the legal basis as a bidder.

The same Energy Prima consortium was again recommended for Kumargaon 50MW power plant with a tariff offer of 4.148 cents and for Bogra 20MW plant with a tariff offer of 3.607 cents.

Energy Prima and Hosaf Meter are both owned by Moazzem Hossain. Energy