

Khaleda won't join

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She said they decided on refraining from joining the rally, as a peaceful way of creating moral pressure on the government.

Placing a four-point charter of demands for creating a congenial atmosphere for a national consensus, the opposition leader said in her written speech, "I hope good sense will prevail in the government. A congenial atmosphere must be created, if they sincerely want a national consensus, and our cooperation."

Prerequisites for a congenial atmosphere, she spelled out that the government must establish the rule of law, stop interfering with the judiciary, end repression and the practice of torture on opposition activists during demand, and act as the government of the country instead of a party by putting an end to nepotism and petty partisanship.

"A process of reaching a national consensus on different national issues may start once the government creates the proper environment for that, otherwise the call for eradicating poverty will continue to remain substanceless," she said.

Khaleda, however, thanked Speaker Abdul Hamid for his sincere efforts to make the rally a success and said she also understands that he has limitations too. She also said a letter of regret would be sent to him right after the briefing.

Before addressing the briefing, Khaleda met with senior BNP leaders including the secretary general.

While talking to The Daily Star after the briefing, a number of BNP leaders expressed their astonishment at the reversal of their chairperson's decision, saying they had not been aware of the reversal even on Thursday night.

When a reporter asked whether her decision for not joining the prime minister at the rally will increase the chasm between the government and the opposition, Khaleda said her party wants to bridge the gap, but they cannot see how it would be possible considering the government's treatment of opposition activists in the last few days.

"It is mainly the government's role to eradicate poverty, the opposition has a little role to play in it. We did not announce any demonstration in the last ten months in an effort not to disturb the development process of the country, rather we gave suggestions to the government regarding the country's development," she said.

Asked what will be the posi-

Rocket attack kills 3 Pak soldiers

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AFP, Peshawar

Suspected Taliban militants launched a rocket attack killing three Pakistani soldiers and wounding four at a military camp in a remote tribal area yesterday, officials said.

Militants targeted the Landi Noor army camp in Shikar area of South Waziristan, a Taliban and al-Qaeda stronghold near the Afghan border where the military is said to be planning a ground offensive to flush out extremists.

The rocket strike left three soldiers dead and four wounded, a security official said, requesting anonymity.

Fighter jets pounded suspected militant hideouts in the area but details of casualties were not immediately available, officials and residents said.

Before dawn, a Pakistan drone crashed near Jandola town in South Waziristan.

"The crash was caused by a technical fault and no hostile fire was involved," a senior official said.

"Due to these we are worried and fearful, and considering the situation we supported the initiative for the anti-poverty rally in the capital," she said adding that they wanted to "provide a sense of direction" to the initiative.

But it has been proven that unilateral efforts of cooperation will not bring any benefit while the government has failed to protect the country's interest, law and order have deteriorated, and the government has forgotten all its electoral pledges, she added.

The country is losing equilibrium and being thrown into the dark, and under such a circumstance we think providing cooperation to the government will be tantamount to supporting crime, anarchy, and human rights violations," she said.

Khaleda Zia said the Awami League-led government has surpassed the military-backed immediate past caretaker government in its tyranny in the last nine months.

She said if the situation continues, the people of the country will not tolerate it for long, and her party will stand by the people when the time comes.

Senior BNP leaders including Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain, members of the standing committee, members of the chairperson's advisory council, and party lawmakers were also present among others.

Women repression

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laws, it is really tough to stop violence against women that has become part and parcel of our male partners' behaviour," said the advocate who runs shelter home for the repressed women, children and aged people.

Shamima Akhter (24) with her six-month-old daughter was looking for an official at the Nari Nirjatan Protirodh Cell of Women and Children Affairs Department to get legal support for her daughter's paternal right.

She narrated the sorry tale of her conjugal life: "Within four months of our marriage, my husband Mozammel Haque alias Khokan started to torture me. And finally while I was six-month pregnant, he walked out on me as my poor parents failed to give him the dowry of Tk 30,000."

Hailed from city's Lalbagh area, Shamima now visits Nari Nirjatan Protirodh Cell at Eskaton Garden at least four days a week with her daughter.

She said, "I have come here on foot. I started at 7:00am and have reached here at 11:00am for the hearing."

Like Shamima, at least 20 others who are victims of violence visit the Nari Nirjatan Protirodh Cell each day, said sources at the department. "We also receive some foreign women victims who got married to Bangladeshi men," said a record keeper officer of the cell who mainly files up complaints.

Pressure is building on the military to take action against an escalation of militant attacks this month, including a humiliating hostage siege at Pakistan's army headquarters near Islamabad.

The government in June ordered an operation into the mountainous South Waziristan stronghold of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, but so far only air raids and occasional artillery strikes have hit rebel sanctuaries.

Helicopter gunships pounded suspected rebel bases in Bajaur, another tribal area, on Friday killing 10 people, officials said.

The gunship helicopters raided suspected militant hideouts which left 10 people dead, local administration official Iqbal Khattak said.

Security officials confirmed the attacks but gave no casualty figure.

Villagers chase

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The villagers later staged angry demonstrations on the road and urged the government to take necessary steps against the illegal activities to save their houses on the riverbank from erosion.

Sources said a number of companies, in connivance with the local administration and some unscrupulous people, have carried out such illegal business in the river Bonshai, presenting a threat to the land and houses along the river.

Some of the villagers of Firingi Kanda, which is one of the places being eroded by the river, alleged that they jointly resisted the criminals to see the reluctance of local police and administration.

When contacted, Savar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Nasir Ullah admitted the protest of the villagers against the sand collectors. "As the villagers are conscious people, they resisted the illegal act and drove away the criminals," he added.

South Keraniganj OC Mohammad Asaduzzaman said no one filed any complaint with them in this connection.

College student

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where he succumbed to his injuries around 11:00pm.

The body was handed over to his family after autopsy.

Students of the college marched in procession yesterday and agitated for arrest of the killers within a time frame of 24 hours. They also threatened to go for a strike and lay siege to police stations in protest at the incident if the culprits are not arrested in the given time.

Rassel's uncle Golam Mostafa lodged a case with Rajpara Police Station accusing three or four persons including Monirul Islam Nimi.

Nimi is son of Moni Begum who runs a restaurant near the dormitory. Nimi hated Rassel as he made comments on Nimi's love affair, alleged M Akramul Hossain, assistant commissioner of Rajpara Metropolitan Police.

Lieutenant Colonel Muzammel Hossain, commander of Teknaf 42 Rifles Battalion, said they came to know about the incident through an application submitted by the fishermen.

"We will send a letter to the Nasaka to send back the fishermen," he said.

An immediate investigation into the murder should be made to arrest the perpetrators, she said.

The affected locals under the banner of the Samiti also staged a protest rally on the Dhaka-Mawa highway on July 10, 2009 and formed a human chain on July 17. But all their efforts to save their own lands fell on the deaf ear.

Bashundhara Group Senior Executive Director MA Sattar who has been involved for long two and a half years in the company's land projects said he could not say anything about it, as he is no longer

torture for dowry.

Meanwhile, the human rights-based organisation Odhikar reported that at least 338 women including 158 girls were raped in nine months beginning from January of 2009. Sixty-eight women and 51 girls were gang-raped, 50 women and 22 children were killed after rape during this period.

A total of 247 women were subjected to dowry-related violence. One hundred seventy-six of them died due to the violence and 64 of them were tortured in various ways.

Seven of these women allegedly committed suicide, as they couldn't bear the brunt of torture, Odhikar statistics stated.

At least 27 women fell victim to illegal fatwa while 45 women and 12 girls became the victims of acid throwing, it said.

A third civilian minister has resigned from the government in protest at the killings, reports the AFP news agency.

On Thursday, the International Criminal Court (ICC) said it had opened a preliminary investigation into the deaths.

Human rights groups say soldiers raped and sexually abused women during the crackdown.

The military government put the number of dead at 57 and says most were trampled to death and not shot, as opposition activists say.

A statement on the French foreign ministry website says that the security situation has worsened since the 28 September protests.

"Banditry, in particular

armed robberies, have increased and there is no short-term prospect that the situation will improve," the statement says.

It says that criminals have been following travellers from the airport and then robbing them when they get home.

A foreign ministry spokesman, however, said that there was no prospect of mass evacuation and French expats were being urged to use commercial flights to leave, reports the Reuters news agency.

He said the government is also in talks with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Dhaka, requesting her to persuade the Myanmar authorities so that no more refugees are pushed in.

Asked what actions Bangladesh has taken following the military build-up by Myanmar, the home secretary said the government has no intention to engage in a conflict but put on alert all forces, including the BDR, navy, air, army and coastguards.

On the presence of Myanmar military personnel on the border violating international laws, he said Bangladesh objected to the incident urging the country's government not to bring in military on the border.

Border guards are supposed to be on both sides of the border. But if one country brings in its army on the border it triggers tension," said the home secretary, adding that the Myanmar authorities

informed Bangladesh that their military personnel visited the border to see various activities by Nasaka (border force of Myanmar).

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But some foreign ministry officials, seeking anonymity, confirmed the diplomatic manoeuvring to resolve the crisis peacefully. "You can term it silent diplomacy," said one of the officials.

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