

Pak Shia families refuse to bury dead

AFP, Quetta

Shia families refusing to bury their dead after twin bombings in Pakistan's troubled southwestern city of Quetta vowed to continue their sit-in protest yesterday until the army takes over security.

Hundreds of protesters have gathered on the main road near the snooker hall that was the scene of Thursday's twin suicide attacks, alongside more than 60 coffins carrying the victims' shrouded bodies, senior administration official Hashim Ghilzai told AFP.

The refusal to bury the bodies is an extreme position in Islamic society where the dead are normally buried the same or next day, but families say they will not leave until authorities agree to put the security and administration of the city under army control.

"The government machinery has failed, there is no protection for people in Quetta," local Shia party official Hashim Mausawi said.

"We will not end our protest until we get an assurance that the Pakistan army will take over security and administrative control in Quetta."

Sunni militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for the bombings.

It was the worst ever sectarian attack on Shias, who account for around 20 percent of Pakistan's 180 million population.

Akheri Munajat

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The president, prime minister, leader of the opposition, ministers, lawmakers, political leaders and diplomats are expected to join the munajat, said Tablighi Jamaat sources.

Defying bitter cold, yesterday's rituals started after Fazr prayers with the sermon by Pakistani cleric Abdul Wahab.

As there are restrictions on women's participation, several hundred women from different districts rented houses adjacent to the Ijtema ground to listen to the sermons.

A multi-layer security system by 12,000 uniformed and plainclothes members of police, Rab and intelligence agencies was in place at the Ijtema ground to ward off any trouble.

Free medical camps have been set up to the north of the ground to provide medical assistance to the ailing devotees.

At least 33 devotees were admitted to hospitals in Tongi and Dhaka after they fell sick yesterday.

A special bus service between Shahjalal International Airport and Tongi has been introduced to carry foreign devotees to the Ijtema venue.

Many more couples are expected to get married in the second phase (January 18-20) of the Ijtema, Maulana Mohammad Gias Uddin, a senior member of the Ijtema committee, told The Daily Star.

Law enforcers have so far rounded up more than 200 people on charges of pick pocketing, mobile phone thefts and other criminal acts at the venue.

Onrush of devotees towards the Ijtema ground yesterday caused long tailbacks on most of the roads near Tongi, including Dhaka-Mymensingh, Tongi-Kaliganj and Ashulia-Savar roads, causing severe sufferings to the devotees as they had to walk on foot for kilometres.

Biswa Ijtema, the second largest congregation of the Muslims after Hajj, started Friday with the participation of lakhs of devotees from home and abroad, including people from 32 districts of the country and 8,000 devotees from 116 countries including Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Bahrain and the USA.

30 teachers hurt

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men with a large number of outsiders yesterday started demonstration before the administrative building protesting the teachers' prolonged agitation.

Around 1:30pm, some teachers of "Shapla Forum", known as supporters of the former VC and pro-VC, met newly appointed VC Prof Abdul Hakim Sarkar and asked him to talk to the demonstrating BCL men.

Talking with the BCL members, the VC assured them of solving the ongoing crisis and asked them to stop their agitation.

But the activists of the pro-Awami League student body led by BCL IU unit president Jahangir Alam went to the IUTA office around 3:00pm and assaulted the teachers with iron rods and bamboo sticks when some 100 teachers were in a meeting, with IUTA president Prof Nozibul Haq in the chair.

The BCL activists then chased the teachers out of the office and kept it under lock and key, forcing the teachers to take refuge at the Teachers' Lounge. But the attackers again assaulted the teachers there, causing the casualties.

Among the attackers were BCL IU unit joint secretaries Mahmud Hasan Lelin, Mizanur Rahman Tito and Kashem Mahmud and its organising secretaries Russell Hossain and Illias

Govt succeeded

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Mashiur strongly disagreed with the BNP leader and said the system was cancelled through a legal procedure.

"In democracy, people are the source of all authority. The constitution has been amended after taking opinions of the people, since the lawmakers are elected by them," he argued.

When Khasru referred to the recent newspaper opinion polls in which the majority of people wanted caretaker system for a fair and peaceful election, Mashiur questioned the questionnaire of the opinion polls, saying people's reply depends on how you phrase the question.

Asked whether a situation like 1/11 would arise again and the military could seize power, the BNP leader responded positively. "People know very well who should be blamed for that."

On the other hand, Mashiur saw no scope for the military or any undemocratic force to seize power again.

"Scope for seizing state power illegally has been blocked through an amendment to the constitution. It will be treason if anybody takes over power illegally," he said, adding that AL would never support such a takeover.

Responding to a remark that the prime minister in her recent speech to the nation only highlighted the success stories not the failures, Khasru said Awami League came to power with many promises but fulfilled none.

"If we evaluate the current law and order, political culture and rule of law, we find no success of the government," he said.

But Mashiur ruled out his claims and said he didn't find any mentionable failure of the government.

"Economic growth continues, while disparity in the society has come down. So, you can't say the government has any failures," he claimed.

On Padma bridge corruption, the adviser termed the World Bank's "complaint" of corruption in the project baseless.

"The global lender made the allegation, but we still don't know what it actually means. The newspapers that were very active in publishing the complaint said nothing about it," said Mashiur.

He said none has seen the diary which is said to be the main source of allegation.

The adviser said it was the responsibility of the complainant and those newspapers to make the evidence public.

When told that the WB gave the proof to the govern-

ment, the adviser said, "We asked but the World Bank did not give us that."

Deterioration of law and order, poor state of rule of law and financial mismanagement came up as the government's big failures at the BBCS Anglap.

Action Aid Bangladesh Country Director Farah Kabir, who was the panel discussant, found government success only in education and agriculture sectors.

According to her, deterioration in law and order and repression on women and children were the big failures of the government.

Ali Reza Iftekhar, managing director of Eastern Bank Ltd, said the absence of dialogue between the two major parties is the biggest problem in the country. He also mentioned financial mismanagement as one of the failures of the government.

Mashiur and Khasru also contradicted each other on Generalised System of Preference by the USA. But both said the government should negotiate properly to retain the facility for the sake of the garment sector.

3 Rohingyas

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passports were found to be fake during verification, according to APBn officials.

"During interrogation, they admitted having paid Tk 1.5 lakh each to a broker named Jasim to manage the passports and visas," said an APBn official.

He added that they pretended to be Zamir Hossain, Rakibul Islam and Abdul Jalil respectively to get the Bangladeshi passports and visas.

The three lived in a Rohingya camp at Cox's Bazar.

They were set to go to Saudi Arabia on a flight of the Qatar Airways, the official said.

The APBn also nabbed two Bangladeshis around 11:30am yesterday. The two were to take a flight of Jet Airways to South Africa.

In recent times, over 300 Rohingyas Muslims have been arrested in Bangladesh while they were trying to go abroad with fake papers.

The Saudi Arabian authorities last year arrested around 700 Rohingyas, who had made their way into the country with Bangladeshi documents. The Saudis are now pressing Bangladesh to take them back, sources said.

Once abroad, many Rohingyas commit different crimes, tarnishing the image of Bangladesh, said immigration and foreign ministry officials.



Islamic University students block Kushtia-Khulna highway yesterday, demanding immediate resumption of academic activities.

PHOTO: STAR

Better medicare

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The seminar titled "ESL and social media for professionals: Focus on global health education" was jointly organised by International Medical College (IMC) and Kean University, New Jersey, USA, and held at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre. The Daily Star was the event's media partner.

Speaking at the seminar, Commerce Minister Ghulam Muhammed Quader said an acute shortage of qualified nurses, medical technologists and paramedics in the country was impeding quality healthcare services.

Bangladeshi nurses have the potential to work abroad, but they need to be proficient in English first, he added.

Prime minister's Health Adviser Syed Modasser Ali said about 70 percent of the success in preventing communicable diseases in the country was the result of awareness campaigns in the media.

The government asked all medical colleges to introduce nursing courses considering the need for qualified nurses, he said.

National Professor Shahla Khatun, chairperson of International Medicare Ltd (IML), said social recognition was a problem of the nursing profession since its formal inception in the mid-50s.

Although the situation has improved significantly, steps taken by the government and non-government organisations in this regard are not sufficient, and more practical approaches are needed, she observed.

"Our plans should focus more on educating nurses and improving their status," said Shahla.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said every effort to promote healthcare in Bangladesh must be lauded and supported highly.

"Public knowledge about health issues and problems, in a way, is as important as expanding the facilities," he said, adding that some basic healthy habits could transform a nation's health status.

Underlining the need for expanding nursing education in the country, he said though most hospitals abroad have a doctor-nurse ratio of around 1:12, the situation in Bangladesh is quite different.

Mahfuz Anam also noted that nurses are not underestimated in the rural areas, rather it is the rich and elite in the capital who do not give the nurses the recognition they deserve.

To fight this stigma, he added, upgrading the nursing profession is essential alongside awareness campaigns.

IMC Chairman Major Gen (retd) M Abdul Rab said health professionals with inadequate proficiency in English face communication barriers, especially while working abroad.

"Keeping that in mind, IMC introduced ESL (English as a Second Language) and TOEFL courses for MBBS and nursing students," he said.

In a presentation, Michael Searson, executive director, School of Global Education and Innovation, Kean University, highlighted different features of social media and mobile devices that facilitate healthcare services.

The other speakers included Prof SAM Khairul Bashar, chairman of international advisory board of IMC; Faruque Ahmed Chowdhury, director, human resources of Kean University; and MA Mubin Khan, deputy managing director of IML.

Blaze kills 11 Bangladeshis

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Bangladesh embassy in Manama.

They are Swapan Miah and his brother Saiful Islam Sabuj, sons of late Shahid Miah of Kaitala of Nabinagar in Brahmanbaria; Zaru Mia, son of Chan Mia of Khariala village of Brahmanbaria; Shahadat Hossain and his brother Titu Miah, sons of Alam of Nawpura of Kachua in Chandpur; Jasim Uddin, son of Naser Miah of Goali of Nabinagar in Brahmanbaria, Mohammed Anwar Miah, son of Abul Bashar of Gurigram of the same upazila; Nazir Ahmed, son of Sagir Ahmed of Char Khizirpur of Boalkhali upazila in Chittagong; Mahbub Alam, son of Haji Rashid Ahmed of Batua of Patia upazila of Chittagong; Jamal, son of Abdul Aziz of Maripara of the same upazila; and Md Osman Gani, son of Abdur Rahim of Kashipur in Sonaimuri upazila of Noakhali.

Zafar Ahmed Khan, secretary of the expatriates welfare and overseas employment ministry, said the bodies of the workers would be brought back home in two to three days on completion of necessary formalities.

The bodies were kept at the mortuary of King Hamad Medical Hospital in Manama. The two injured Bangladeshis were undergoing treatment at the same hospital.

The families of the victims had pegged all their hopes on the men who had gone to Bahrain to work and change the family fortunes, report our correspondents in Brahmanbaria, Chandpur and Chittagong.

Sumon Miah, brother of deceased Swapan and Saiful, at his home in Brahmanbaria said Swapan had gone to Bahrain four years ago and

Saiful only last month, reports our Brahmanbaria correspondent.

Shah Alam, father of Shahadat and Titu of Chandpur, told The Daily Star that Titu went to Bahrain to earn enough money so that he could come back and have a proper livelihood here.

He said his elder son Shahadat had called him two days ago to let him know that he would be home in two months.

Meanwhile, sources said the high figure of casualties in Bahrain was attributed to the large number of people staying inside the building on Friday, the weekend, and to the windy and cold conditions outside.

They said the workers were crammed into the building that was not designed to accommodate a large number of people. Seven to 10 people lived in each room.

The unapproved building mostly had "free visa" workers from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, said the Bahrain-based newspaper Gulf Daily News.

Sources said the fire prompted a wave of condemnations and calls to ensure better safety-compliant accommodation for foreign workers as fire incidents are frequent in Bahrain.

Reports from Bahrain said many unskilled workers from Asian countries, mostly from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, often end up being crammed into buildings that were not designed to accommodate a large number of people.

Special compounds for migrant labourers are common across the Gulf. For years, rights groups have been pressing for better living conditions for the mostly South Asian workers.

Bahrain is host to around 5.6 lakh foreign workers.

According to local media report, Friday's blaze was Bahrain's second deadliest tragedy to strike a labour accommodation since 2006 when 16 workers were killed in a fire at the Gudhaibiya neighbourhood in Manama.

On May 27, 2012, at least 10 Bangladeshi workers died in a fire at a building in East Riffa.

On November 8, 2008, three Bangladeshi workers were killed in a fire that broke out in a two-story residential building in Jid Hafs on the outskirts of Manama.

According to the Bahrain Interior Ministry, the public prosecution has launched an investigation into the fire incident.

INDIA KUMBH FESTIVAL 100m head to Ganges

AFP, New Delhi

A procession of around 100 million devotees, from naked sprinting gurus to worshippers completing simple rituals, will stream into the river Ganges next week for the world's biggest festival.

The Kumbh Mela in northern India, starting Monday and stretching over 55 days, attracts ash-covered holy men who run into the frigid waters, a smattering of international celebrities, as well as millions upon millions of ordinary Indians.

Its name translates as the "Pitcher Festival" and every three years it provides a unique spectacle of colour, noise and Hindu religious devotion, particularly on what are deemed to be the most auspicious bathing days.

Crime by lawmen on rise

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many as 805 women and children were violated last year of whom 70 were killed after rape.

The number of dowry-related violence was recorded to be 822.

Releasing the report at Jatiya Press Club yesterday, the rights organisation said the country's overall human rights situation was "disappointing".

Odhikar Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan said, "The state is ignoring national and international outcry against enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings."

The report says 24 people, including BNP central leader Ilias Ali and garment workers' union leader Aminul Islam, were victims of enforced disappearance last year.

Rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) in its recent report put the figure of unexplained disappearances in the country at 56 during the same period.

The annual document was prepared on the basis of newspaper reports and information collected from Odhikar workers across the country. Only the disappearances linked to state-run agencies have been counted for the report.

Attacks on minorities, indigenous communities, women and journalists also reached a new record, according to the document which highlighted the attacks on Buddhist community and temples in Ramu and Ukhia of Cox's Bazar.

Five journalists were murdered and 161 injured in 2012. In addition 72 people

were reportedly tortured by different law enforcement agencies. Among them seven subsequently died.

The report also states a total of 70 persons fell victim to extra-judicial killings in the year while ASK puts the figure at 91 in their report for the same period.

Other significant statistics in the report include the killing of at least 132 persons in mob beatings and at least 63 deaths in custody. At least 169 people were killed in political confrontations in 2012. The ASK report however puts this figure at 84 in their report.

Indian Border Security Force killed 38 Bangladeshis and injured 100 others at the same time.

Odhikar President CR Abrar chaired the press conference.

Cold snap to last

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weather was comparatively bearable, since there was sunshine during the day.

Yesterday, fogs kept disrupting ferry services and train schedules like the past few days.

Ferry services on Mawa-Kaorakandi route resumed in the morning after around seven hours' suspension causing miles-long tailbacks on both sides of the Padma.

Due to poor visibility, two ferries carrying at least 40 vehicles had to anchor mid-river around 1:30am, said

Sirajul Haque, manager of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC).

The vessels started to move again around 9:00am after the fog lightened up a bit.

Because of dense fogs, the Sylhet-Chittagong trains have been falling behind schedule over the last week.

In Rangpur and Dinajpur, two northern districts badly affected by the cold snap, the lowest temperatures were recorded at 5.6°C and 5.7°C yesterday.

A 75-year-old woman died in fire in Biharpur village of Joypurhat in the morning. Nanibala, the victim, was warming herself by a fire but ended up catching fire. The district's lowest temperature was 5.5°C yesterday.

Miladunnabi

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The Rabiul Awal month will begin tomorrow.

On the 12th of Rabiul Awal of the Hijri calendar, Muhammad (Sm) was born with divine blessings and messages of peace for humankind.

US condemns attacks in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

The United States has condemned the "senseless and inhumane" extremist attacks in Pakistan after a day of bomb blasts that killed 126 people and sparked angry protests by Shia Muslims.

Two suicide bombers killed 92 people and wounded 121 when they targeted a crowded snooker club in the southwestern city of Quetta Thursday, in an area dominated by Shiite Muslims from the Hazara ethnic minority.

US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland on Friday said Washington offered "the families of those killed in these brutal attacks in Quetta, in Swat, in Karachi... our deepest condolences".

"We obviously stand with the people of Pakistan in strongly condemning these senseless and inhumane acts," she added.

"We remain concerned about extremist violence of any kind in Pakistan and remain committed to working with the government of Pakistan to combat terror."

Extremist Sunni militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for what was the worst ever sectarian attack on Shiites, who account for around 20 percent of Pakistan's 180 million population.

Hundreds of Shiites staged a sit-in at the devastated snooker hall on Friday, refusing to bury loved ones until the army takes responsibility for security in Quetta from paramilitary and police officers.

The government in Baluchistan province, which is also fighting a separatist insurgency, announced three days of mourning, but the protesters squatted on the road alongside around 30 bodies draped in shrouds and placed in coffins.

It was the deadliest attack in Pakistan since suicide bombers killed 98 people outside a police training centre in the northwest in 2011 -- an assault claimed by the Pakistani Taliban.

Meanwhile, unidentified men fired rockets on NATO containers carrying goods for international troops operating in Afghanistan, killing one person and destroying at least five vehicles in the Hazar Ganji area on the outskirts of Quetta on Friday.

"A group of at least 12 unidentified men attacked the terminal and fired rockets, which triggered a massive fire and gutted five out of 10 containers parked there," senior local police official Hamid Shakeel told AFP.

People

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Sayem Ahmed, chairman of the executive committee of Dutch-Bangla Bank, said Bangladeshi banks still use the card system of old technology that cannot ensure security.

Nowadays cards with chips are more secured, he said at the discussion moderated by Prof Dr Jamilur Reza Choudhury, vice chancellor of University of Asia Pacific.

Mahboob Zaman, managing director of IT firm DataSoft, said there is a psychological barrier to the online trade as the word 'trade' itself has become a synonym for 'theft'.

"People even do not believe the sellers while purchasing physically, so how will they believe when they will buy online?" he raised a question.

The keynote speaker, Abul Kashem Md Shirin, deputy managing director of DBBL, said the banks should introduce the multi-factor authentication system to increase security in payment.

Shopkeepers can easily reuse one's credit card by taking some information of the card, he said.

The central bank should come up with a directive in this regard soon, he said, adding that India is already using the multi-factor authentication system.