War trial sets Ekushey tone

FROM PAGE 1

Jamaat-Shibir", were on a huge number of banners.

However, the slogan "Shaheed Dibas Amar Hoke" remembering the Language Movement martyrs was on almost all the banners.

It was announced at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday, "Ekush [21] in 2013 is very significant. This year, Amar Ekushey has been observed when the entire nation has woken up under the leadership of the young generation. Being inspired by the spirit of Ekush, the nation is now united in the demand for war crimes trial."

Thousands of barefooted people from all walks of life converged at shaheed minars across the country to pay homage to the Language Movement martyrs.

On this day in 1952, Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Jabbar and a few other brave sons of the soil sacrificed their lives to establish Bangla as one of the state languages of then Pakistan.

February 21 has since been observed as the Amar Ekushey and the day is globally being observed since Unesco in November 1999 declared it as the International Mother Language Day.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was the first to pay homage to the language martyrs placing floral wreath ceremonially at the Central Shaheed Minar as the song "Amar Bhaiyer Rokte Rangano Ekushey February" was solemnly played.

People thronged the Central Shaheed Minar and they continued to pour in until yesterday afternoon.

The people also expressed how they feel with their attires. About 20 garment workers went to the Shaheed Minar wearing Panjabi of the national flag colours.

They walked on to the Shaheed Minar with a 15-foot-long flag.

A large number of students from schools, colleges and universities were seen wearing bandanas with "war criminals must be hanged" written on them.

"We are here to pay tribute to the martyrs of the Language Movement but we also did not forget the martyrs of the Liberation War. We want punishment of the collaborators who killed or abetted killing of Bangalees," said Sohrab Hossain, a college student.

Mamun Morshed, student of a private university, said, "We want capital punishment to those who tried to rob me of my language as well as my freedom."

Even the physically challenged were not at home watching the proceedings on TV. They were there.

Shamsuddin, who is eight, went to the Shaheed Minar on his wheelchair with the help of his mother yesterday.

"He was very enthusiastic about coming here," said Shamsuddin's mother Rahima Begum, adding that she had been going to the Shaheed Minar for the last three years.

Like Shamsuddin about 20 children yesterday came at the Shaheed Minar under the care of Bangladesh Shishu Kalyan Parishad yesterday.

Eminent writer Prof Muhammad Zafar Iqbal hoped that Bangladesh would be the best country on the face of the earth soon because of the love and respect shown by its people for the country and their mother tongue.

The Central Shaheed Minar and its adjacent areas have had a facelift like the previous years, Bangla alphabets and lines of poems were on the walls.

The day is a public holiday. The national flag was hoisted at half-mast at government, autonomous and private buildings.

Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and private TV channels aired special programmes.

Bangladesh high commissions and embassies across the world observed the day in a befitting manner.

PHOTO: STAR

The students of Northern International School and Scholasitca who progressed to the divisional round of The Daily Star Spelling Bee contest yesterday.

Prayers, no propaganda

FROM PAGE 1

Prime Minister's Special Assistant Mahbubul Alam Hanif told The Daily Star that mosques across the country had been told that clerics would be free to give any religious speech, not any hate speech, after the Juma prayers.

Sources in the home ministry said if any attempt is made to create chaos in any area today, the authorities will consider restrictions on the movement of more than three persons in a group.

According to law enforcement agencies, forces would be deployed near all important mosques to avert any untoward incidents.

The government has held talks with dozens of clerics in the last two days over Jamaat's smear campaign against the Shahbagh youths, and urged them not to buy into the propaganda, said the sources.

In the meantime, Islamic Foundation has taken steps to prevent Jamaat from using any of its mosques -- nearly 40,000 across the country -- for the smear campaign against the Shahbagh movement, said sources.

It sent two representatives to Chittagong to hold talks with Moulana Ahmad Shafi, chief of Hefazat-e-Islam that got published advertisements in three newspapers a couple of days ago with anti-Islami contents.

The radical Islamist organisation claimed that the contents were posted on the internet by bloggers involved in the Shahbagh movement.

Hefazat-e-Islam earlier announced that they would bring out processions from mosques across the country after the Juma prayers, demanding trial of "the atheist bloggers".

Contacted, Monirul Islam, joint commissioner of Detective Branch of police, said adequate security measures have been taken for today.

Intelligence officials said there could be an attempt to bring out a large procession from Hathazari Madrasa run by Shafi in Chittagong. Several other Islamist parties, including a faction of Islami Oikya Jote, Nejame Islami, Khelafat Majlish and Islami Andolon, might try to hold rallies at different mosques in the capital.

Intelligence sources add they have information that subversive activities might be carried out at important places like Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, Jatiya Press Club and Bangladesh Secretariat throughout this month.

Hanif, also joint general secretary of the ruling Awami League, said, "The government remains alert about the Jamaat plot and it will not tolerate any attempt to create chaos in the name of religion."

"Law enforcers will be there [near mosques] to maintain law and order." Hanif said he believed that no true cleric would be misguided by Jamaat's propaganda.

He urged all Islamist parties not to indulge in violence over any propaganda, as the government has already blocked those blogs that had anti-Islami contents.

Hanif said it was not the bloggers who had posted those contents on the internet, rather it was Jamaat that hacked into the websites, and posted those offensive contents to taint the Shahbagh movement. He said the bloggers respect religion like others.

Three newspapers published objectionable advertisements and news items to serve Jamaat's purpose, and if they continue to do so, legal action will be taken against them, said Hanif.

Jamaat under the banner of a few radical Islamist groups and parties plans to bring out demonstrations from mosques and madrasas, branding the Shahbagh youths as atheists, anti-Islamic and anti-social elements, according to intelligence officials.

Misbaur Rahman Chowdhury, chairman of another faction of Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), said Jamaat and its student wing Shibir have been carrying out smear campaign in the name of religion to taint the Shahbagh movement.

"Jamaat men created those blogs with anti-Islami contents, and used them to hurt religious sentiments."

He said true Muslims will never fall for Jamaat's smear campaign, as they know the parties that opposed the 1971 Liberation War exploit religious sentiments.

Rahman, also member of Islamic Foundation's board of governors, said they would not allow Jamaat to use any of their 40,000 mosques today for its smear campaign.

"We plan to hold a grand rally soon to make people aware of Jamaat's propaganda and let them know the truth. Ten to 12 Islamist parties will be with us," said the chief of the IOJ faction, a component of the Awami League-led grand alliance.

Shamim Mohammad Afzal, director general of Islamic Foundation, said they have urged the clerics to alert people so that Jamaat and its allies cannot create any chaos in the name of protests today.

He said Jamaat is practising the political ideologies of Abul Ala Maududi and has no relations with real Islam.

Home Minister Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir told BBC Bangla Service that action would be taken against Jamaat and its allies, if they try to create anarchy in the name of demonstration today.

Act before March 26

FROM PAGE 1

Ekushey, all eyes were on the "Gonojagoron Mancha" as the movement held its third grand rally.

Hundreds of thousands thronged the Shahbagh intersection, now known as Projonmo Chattar, to join the rally while million others were glued to the TV at home and abroad.

The programmes announced at the rally include holding more grand rallies, demonstrations and cultural programmes at different parts in Dhaka and other divisional cities.

The protesters, who have all along maintained calm and showed respect for all religious beliefs, began yesterday's programme with the recitation of verses from the Holy Scriptures of the four major religions in the country -- the Quran, Gita, Bible and Tripitaka.

After the recitations, thousands of people, irrespective of faith, age, profession and ethnicity, stood as one and sang the national anthem. The rendition of the national anthem and the recitations from the Scriptures showed, once again, that "religion is personal, but the state is for all".

Giving the ultimatum and announcing the programmes, Imran Sarker, said: "We want to clearly state that this Gonojagoron Mancha is firm in its demand for justice for war crimes. We hold nothing against any religion. Rather, our struggle is to end the ill politics of Jamaat-Shibir that exploits religion for political gain."

"With a view to banning politics of Jamaat-Shibir, bring war crimes charges against Jamaat-e-Islami under the amended law [The International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973] and start the legal process by March 26," he added.

The spirited protesters, their mood one of unyielding determination, burst into thunderous cheers as he spoke.

People of from all walks of life, mostly dressed in black and imbued with the spirit of the 1952 Language Movement and the 1971 Liberation War, flocked to the Shahbagh intersection to express their solidarity with the protesters. They chanted fiery slogans throughout the day, demanding capital punishment to all the war criminals.

Protesters carried national flags, banners and placards that read: "Death to Razakars" or "Death to war criminals." Many joined the protest directly from the Shaheed Minar.

The crowd stretched from Matsya Bhaban in the east to Kataban intersection in the west and from Hotel Ruposhi Bangla intersection in the north to TSC in the south.

Protesters took to the streets in the afternoon of February 5, hours after Jamaat assistant secretary general Abdul Quader Mollah was sentenced to life in prison for war crimes in 1971. Protesters say a life term is too lenient a punishment for Mollah, known as the "Butcher of Mirpur" for his notorious role in the killing of hundreds during the war.

A group of youths, mostly bloggers and online activists, initiated the movement but it soon turned into a people's movement, spreading across the country.

A mass signature campaign will also begin today and continue till March 7 in and outside the country to register people's solidarity with the six-point demand.

"In our veins runs the blood of Shurjoshen and Khudiram. I am here driven by their ideologies," said Tariq Ali, one of the trustees of the Liberation War Museum.

Jahangirnagar University Vice-chancellor Anwar Hossain, Communist Party of Bangladesh President Mujahidul Islam Selim, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal leader Shirin Akhter, cultural personalities Nasiruddin Yousuff Bachchu, Mamunur Rashid, Sara Zaker, Asaduzzaman Noor, Rokeya Prachi, Ferdousi Majumdar, Ramendra Majumdar, Tropa Majumdar, and journalist Abed Khan, among others, joined the grand rally.

Although attempts were made to co-opt the movement by certain political quarters, the protesters refused to allow any party to do so.

The stage, said the organisers, belonged to the ordinary citizens, activists and bloggers.

As the mass protests continued, grief descended upon Shahbagh as one of their key organisers, Rajib Haidar, was hacked to death on February 14, allegedly by Jamaat-Shibir men. Another protester, Tariqul Islam Shanto, died of a heart attack while taking part in the on February 18.

As the movement gained momentum and spread across the country, Jamaat-Shibir resorted to a smear campaign against the movement, with the help of a few radical Islamist groups in and outside the BNP-led 18-party alliance and media houses.

Terming Projonmo Chattar anti-Islamic, the anti-liberation forces tried to stir controversy and confusion among the general public.

The demonstrators, however, strongly rejected such allegations and the general public, too, dismissed them as fictitious.

Land boundary deal

FROM PAGE 20

kilometre-long undemarcated border.

Bangladesh parliament ratified the agreement in 1974, but the Indian parliament is yet to ratify it.

During his visit to Dhaka on September 6, 2011, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had signed the protocol to the agreement.

The Indian cabinet on February 13 approved the draft of the constitutional amendment bill on the LBA and its protocol.

Three days later, Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid at a press conference in Dhaka assured that the additional protocol to the 1974 LBA would be ratified in the upcoming budget session of the Indian parliament.

If the Indian House passes the constitutional amendment bill, it will address all the outstanding land boundary issues between the two countries.

The outstanding issues include enclaves, adverse possessions and 6.5 km undemarcated land boundary in three sectors (Daikhata-56, West Bengal; Muhuri River-Belonia, Tripura; and Dumabari, Assam).

The un-demarcated boundaries in all three segments have already been demarcated and the two countries have already exchanged the strip maps.

As per the LBA, 111 Indian and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves will be exchanged with a population of 37,334 and 14,215 respectively.

Besides, some adversely possessed land along the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam will also be exchanged.

With the demarcation of the boundary, India will get 2,777.038 acres of land from Bangladesh and give 2267.682 acres back to Bangladesh.

Officials said the boundary issue has been settled keeping in mind people's aspirations.

PM warns

FROM PAGE 1

Language Day, 2013 at the International Mother Language Institute in the capital.

The premier said people of all religions can now perform their religious festivals freely and with festivity in the country.

She also said the aim of her government is to make the country self-reliant and establish it at global stage by 2021 when the country would be celebrating its golden jubilee of independence.

In her previous term, Hasina said, Bangla earned its global recognition, and initiatives had been taken to establish International Mother Language Institute to preserve all mother languages of the world.

"It's a big responsibility and we'll have to perform it properly," she told her audience.

Hasina suggested the ministry of education and International Mother Language Institute to initiate a move to effectively preserve different mother languages and conduct researches on them.

"We've earned the dignity of our mother language shedding blood. So, we'll practice it giving due importance and protect it, and that's our goal," she added.

The premier said the benefits of the language movement followed by the independence movement need to reach the common people, and the present government has been working relentlessly to this end.

"Hopefully, we'll be able to do that because we the Bangalees don't accept defeats....we shed blood for our language, independence and democracy. So, no one will be able to suppress us," she told her audience.

Hasina mentioned that the government was trying its best to make Bangla one of the official languages of the United Nations and she herself had placed a proposal to this end before the UN General Assembly.

"We've made compulsory the extensive use of full-fledged Bangla key pads in basic mobile handsets of all brands, taken initiatives to launch dotbangla domain and already launched new Bangla font Amar Bornomala," she said.

Earlier, the premier launched the website of the International Mother Language Institute by pressing a laptop button. She later visited the language museum at the institute.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid presided over the inaugural function while Education Secretary Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury gave the welcome address and International Mother Language Institute Director General Zinnat Imtiaz Ali delivered the vote of thanks.

The International Mother Language Day has been observed every year since February 2000 to promote linguistic, cultural diversity and multilingualism.

Sylhet BCL

FROM PAGE 20

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activists attacked the JCD activists when the latter went to the Shaheed Minar to place wreaths in the morning.

Later, the JCD activists aided by some outsiders attacked their rivals and damaged some window glasses of a building inside the campus.

The ruling party activists then drove the JCD activists out of the campus. The feuding groups later clashed at Baluchar Bazar.

BCL SAU unit president Shamim Mollah alleged that the JCD activists attacked their workers in a pre-planned way.

M Masudul Islam, JCD senior joint convener of SAU unit, rejected the allegation saying that the BCL activists attacked them when they went to place wreaths at the Shaheed Minar.

Hyderabad blasts kill 20

FROM PAGE 20

and bomb-disposal experts were trying to defuse three more unexploded devices. The charred wreckage of parked scooters lay on the ground.

"This is a terror attack for sure," Hyderabad deputy inspector of police Shiv Kumar told AFP, while adding there had been no claim of responsibility.

Twenty people died in the attack, said Kumar, while an officer in the police control room said 82 people had been wounded in the blasts in the Hyderabad suburb of Dilsukh Nagar.

"This is a dastardly act and the guilty will not go unpunished," Prime Minister Singh said of the attacks, the most serious to hit India since 13 people died in a 2011 bombing outside the High Court in the capital New Delhi.

But Singh, speaking in New Delhi, also appealed for "calm" in the aftermath of the Hyderabad blasts, as police struggled to keep order with large crowds massing at the scene.

N. Kiran Reddy, the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, told reporters in Hyderabad that the blasts were intended to incite communal violence in the city, which has a large Muslim population.

"This attack is only to disturb all communities living in the city. I request people to maintain calm and they should not visit the blast site."

Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai, the top civil servant in India's external affairs ministry, did not rule out foreign involvement.

"I am not sure there is any evidence it could be home-grown terrorism. We have had a number of attacks which have been traced to inspiration or leadership outside the country," he said at a Washington think-tank.

But Mathai avoided direct criticism of nuclear-armed rival Pakistan, which New Delhi blamed for the 2008 Mumbai attacks in which 166 people were killed when Pakistani-born gunmen laid siege to the city.

Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde said the two devices that exploded were planted close to each other.

"The two bombs were placed on two different bicycles and the distance between them was about 100 to 150 metres (yards)," Shinde told reporters in New Delhi.

While Hindus form the majority of the population in Hyderabad, one of India's largest and most historic cities, there is a sizeable community of Muslims living in the old quarter.

In May 2007, at least 11 people were killed in a blast at a mosque in Hyderabad and five more died when police fired at Muslim protesters.

Months later in August, at least 40 people were killed in Hyderabad when two blasts hit an auditorium and an outdoor restaurant.

It remains unclear who carried out the 2007 attacks.

The latest explosions came on the same day as India's parliament opened for its key budget session, amid tensions following the hanging earlier this month of the Kashmiri separatist, Mohammed Afzal Guru.

The execution of Guru, who had been convicted of helping to plot a 2001 attack on the Indian parliament that left 10 people dead, has driven up tensions in the Himalayan region of Kashmir, which India disputes with Pakistan.

5 Shibir men

FROM PAGE 20

Police (North), said they have information that thousands of activists of Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Shibir are making preparation to carry out destructive activities across the port city demanding release of several top Jamaat leaders who are facing trial for committing crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War.

Police have been conducting drives in the city to avert any untoward occurrence, he added.

Seven more

FROM PAGE 20

Anyone who has not qualified for the next round through the school can still participate in the online game on www.champs21.com.

The finals of the competition are to be held in June.

Detailed information about the contest is available on www.champs21.com, the first e-learning portal of Bangladesh. Students who want to participate in the event through the online round can visit the website and play the Spelling Bee game.

Gain, loss

FROM PAGE 1

committed during the 1971 Liberation War.

It is indeed an achievement for the protesters in their journey together for the last 17 days non-stop.

Enraged by a life sentence passed on Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah for war crimes, a handful of activists under the banner of Bloggers and Online Activists Network initiated the protest at Shahbagh on February 5. As the days went by, people from all walks of life and ages poured in, expressing solidarity.

The manifestation of strength and unity was such that the protest within this time proved wrong the idea that the war crimes trial was only an agenda of the ruling Awami League.

Probably the biggest non-partisan movement in the nearest past, it succeeded in uniting the nation against the Jamaat-e-Islami, a key ally in the BNP-led 18-party opposition, and also in making people aware of its misdeeds during and after the Liberation War.

But nothing happened without any cost.

Ahmed Rajib Haidar, a blogger and activist of Shahbagh movement, was found stabbed dead on February 15 while Tariqul Islam Shanto, a cartoonist and staunch supporter of the demonstration, died of cardiac arrest on February 18.

On February 10, the protesters submitted to the Speaker a six-point demand, including death penalty for all war criminals and an amendment to the 1973 act, allowing appeals from the government, informants and complainants against any verdict of the war crimes tribunals and making mandatory disposal of appeals from both the defence and the prosecution within three months of their filing.

In the quickest move, the government decided to amend the act and the cabinet approved the amendment on February 11.

While passing the amendment on February 17, the House also incorporated a provision to empower the war crimes tribunals to hold trial of any organisation for involvement in war crimes.

On Tuesday, State Minister for Law Qamrul Islam said the government would lodge an appeal next week against the life sentence of Quader Mollah with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

The protesters at yesterday's grand rally at Shahbagh vowed to continue their movement and announced a series of programmes to pressure the government to fulfill their other demands.

Palestinians clash with Israeli troops

AP, *Ramallah, West Bank*

Hundreds of Palestinian protesters are squaring off against Israeli security forces in the West Bank at a demonstration in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Some 2,000 people gathered at the Beitunia military checkpoint on Thursday, hoping to march to a nearby military prison. When the military prevented them from proceeding, protesters began throwing stones and burning tires. Israeli soldiers are responding with rubber-coated bullets and tear gas to disperse the crowd.

The Israeli military estimates the crowd size at about 300 people and says it is using nonlethal means to break up what it calls a violent riot.

Bulgarian parliament accepts govt's resignation

REUTERS, *Sofia*

Bulgaria's parliament accepted the government's resignation on Thursday after a spate of violent protests over high utility bills, opening the way for an early election and underscoring anger in Europe over weak growth and austerity.

Outgoing Prime Minister Boiko Borisov, who had won praise from investors by cutting the Balkan state's budget deficit, is now struggling to rebuild support among voters weary of persistent poverty and graft.

Lawmakers voted to accept his government's resignation. President Rosen Plevneliev will now ask parliament's three biggest parties if they want to form a government to rule until an election due in July.