

Citizens

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custody of Pakistani occupation army for nine months during the Liberation War and therefore, she believes in the statements of Pakistanis, not in the independence of Bangladesh, he noted.

He complained that BNP wants to erase the history of genocide committed by the Pakistani occupation forces and their collaborators.

The freedom fighters in BNP will have to decide now whether they will take the responsibility for the war crimes, mentioned Shahriar.

Liberation war veteran Ferdousi Priyabhashini held Khaleda Zia responsible for the ongoing violence in the country as the opposition leader has "opposed the trial of war crimes suspects and instigated Jamaat-e-Islami for the disturbances."

"Khaleda Zia should be put on trial for making war crimes suspects Moitur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojaheed ministers; for allowing them to visit the Shaheed Minar during the tenure of her government; and also for opposing the ongoing war crimes trial," she mentioned.

She asked Khaleda to learn from the youths at Shahbagh how a movement can be run peacefully.

Famed educationalist and writer Muntassir Mamoon said Jamaat has been carrying out attacks on people and torching the houses, temples and pagodas of the Hindus and Buddhists as a continuation of its acts in 1971.

A government cannot tolerate such acts of violence, and its action against such rampages cannot be termed genocide, he noted.

Khaleda did not witness the genocide in 1971 and she does not know what it is. That is why she termed the government's action genocide, said Muntassir.

He observed that there is no difference between the BNP and Jamaat as both the parties have been trying to protect the war criminals.

Haroon Habib, a freedom fighter and acting secretary of Sector Commanders' Forum, said Khaleda Zia by making the statement has supported the terrorism unleashed across the country by Jamaat and student front Islami Chhatra Shibir since November last year.

By making such a statement, Khaleda has tried to cover up the criminal offences of Jamaat, he said, adding that the opposition leader is unfit for holding the top post of any responsible political party.

Sarwar Ali, trustee of Liberation War Museum, said Khaleda's comment proves that she does not know the definition of the word genocide.

The Jamaat activists have unleashed violence across the country over the last two days and the law enforcers have retaliated to maintain law and order, which cannot be termed genocide, he argued.

The BNP chief is giving more importance to the election issue than morality, observed Sarwar.

"It would be very much unfair if the killing of 35 or 40 persons is compared to the mass killing of 1971. In no way it is acceptable," noted economist MM Akash told BBC Bangla Service yesterday.

It was a hostile act in which policemen, Awami League and Jamaat activists and also common people had been killed, he said, adding that every killing should be investigated.

Front liner of Shahbagh movement Imran H Sarkar last night expressed disappointment over BNP's declaration of nationwide dawn-to-dusk hartal for Tuesday.

Addressing the demonstrators at Shahbagh he said the hartal would go in favour of anti-liberation forces Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir, and their nationwide violence including attacks on the minority community.

He urged BNP to withdraw its hartal and boycott Jamaat and Shibir.

Spread of violence

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However, the government is not taking the calm for granted and has kept the law enforcers on high alert. Intelligence agencies say Jamaat may come out in its marauding mood again during its two-day hartal beginning tomorrow.

CITYSCENE
Except for demonstrating in a few districts, including Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Chapainawabganj, Chittagong and Noakhali, Jamaat and seven other Islamist party men could not implement their scheduled programmes, police officials said.

Members of different law enforcement agencies with riot gear took position outside mosques hours before the Juma prayers. Many in plain clothes were inside the mosques.

Police and Rapid Action Battalion patrolled on armoured vehicles and water cannons in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country. They searched suspected people at the entrance of many mosques in Dhaka, including Baitul Mukarram, the national mosque.

"We took all-out measures to thwart violence and ensure safety of the devotees," Lt Col Ziaul Ahsan, director of Rab intelligence wing, told The Daily Star in front of Baitul Mukarram after Juma prayers.

The ruling party men also turned in huge numbers in different mosques.

Jubo League Chairman Omar Faroque said, "Several thousand Jubo League leaders and workers offered Juma prayers at Baitul Mukarram Mosque."

As the north gate of the mosque was closed as per a previous decision, the presence of devotees was low compared to any other Friday. But those came to pray seemed relaxed and happy about the security measures.

"We had no problem in offering our prayers," said one devotee while another noted, "The house of Allah is no place for politics."

Alert to possible violence, a couple of thousand AL men also joined the prayers at Kataban Mosque, said Chhatra League General Secretary Siddiqui Nazmul Alam.

The atmosphere in and outside the mosque was completely different from other Fridays. There was calm all around with the heavy presence of law enforcers and AL men outside the mosque.

No untoward incident took place at Baitul Mukarram or Kataban Mosque.

Across the country, AL lawmakers held meetings with local leaders, imams and other religious clerics, explaining to them that places of worship could not be used for political purposes.

"We directed all our leaders to tackle together with the people any attempts of chaos to hinder the war crimes trial," said AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif. "We hope our leaders and the people will be able to prevent any such efforts."

Law enforcers and intelligence officials say they would be on top alert for the next few days as they apprehend that Jamaat with supports form its sympathisers and allies may try to upset law and order.

"We will strictly maintain law and order until the situation becomes normal," said Lt Col Ziaul Ahsan, adding that they were considering Jamaat-Shibir's recent violence to be "terrorist act," which he said had similarities to militant activities since 2004.

Following last Friday's reign of terror unleashed by Islamists party men, including Jamaat-Shibir, a sense of panic prevailed among the devotees. Many feared of a repeat of last Friday, when the Islamists party men targeted mostly journalists and law enforcers.

As part of its strategy to frustrate the religious fanatics, the AL high-ups asked its party men to join yesterday's prayers and help law enforcers to prevent violence if need be, AL sources said.

Veil ban overturned in Spain

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A Spanish court has overturned a city's ban on wearing face-covering Islamic veils in municipal buildings, saying it infringes religious liberties.

In 2010, Lleida, in the northeastern region of Catalonia, became the first Spanish town to impose such a ban. It was temporarily suspended by a regional court following an appeal by a Muslim association but then later upheld.

Spain's supreme court on Thursday accepted a second appeal and said the city was not entitled to order such a ban.

BNP, Jamaat

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yesterday afternoon, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia claimed that the government in a planned way had attacked the houses of the minority communities to divert focus from the democratic movement.

Issuing a statement, Jamaat also claimed that the ruling party men had launched the attacks on the temples, pagodas and houses of Hindus and Buddhists to divert the Islamists' movement for trial of "atheist" bloggers.

The statement issued by Jamaat central committee member Hamidur Rahman Azad also denied Jamaat-Shibir's involvement in such attacks as reported by different media.

Meanwhile, Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif yesterday said it was crystal clear that Jamaat-Shibir men had attacked the temples and houses of the religious minorities.

He termed the claim by BNP and Jamaat a blatant lie. "They have been resorting to lies since 1971 and this time they have shown their faces again," he said.

The AL leader said the anti-liberation forces wanted to take political benefit as they did in the past by attacking on the religious minorities.

At least 33 people were killed on Thursday as Jamaat-Shibir men went on the rampage across the country soon after the International Crimes Tribunal-1 awarded capital punishment to their leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee.

60-day ban

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anyone found violating the ban could face fines ranging from Tk 5,000 to Tk 10,000, be jailed and have their fishing nets confiscated and destroyed.

Commuters

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out of order and a wood-laden truck overturned at Sultana Mandir in Sitakunda.

Vehicles were seen moving at snail's pace on both directions.

Boni Adam, a truck helper, said they started for Chittagong from the capital around 10:00 pm on Thursday and reached Feni at 3:30 am yesterday.

"But it took nearly five hours to reach Sitakunda upazila from Feni, which was a one-hour journey on regular days," he added.

Nurun Nahar, an advocate, who started for Sitakunda from Chittagong city, reached her home nearly four-and-a-half hours late than usual time.

According to the highway police, the highway saw huge presence of traffic from 2:30 am and the gridlock finally eased in the afternoon.

Sohel Imtiaz, officer-in-charge of Sitakunda Highway Police, said they removed broken down vehicles from the highway by 1:30 pm.

He also blamed some truckers for worsening the traffic situation with their vehicles haphazardly kept on the highway.

Passengers, who left for the port city in the morning, found their return trip to the capital difficult within the speculated time.

"Vehicular movement became normal on the highway around 2:30 pm," OC Sohel added.

3 killed in fresh clash

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against humanity committed during the Liberation War.

A few district administrations yesterday imposed a ban on gatherings to avert untoward incidents.

Yesterday, Jamaat-Shibir activists blocked highways, threw brick chips at police, vandalised vehicles and roadside shops, and removed railway sleepers disrupting rail commutation with some districts.

Following Thursday's violence, police in several districts filed cases against large numbers of Jamaat-Shibir activists.

In the capital, at least 10 people were injured when Jamaat-Shibir men clashed with law enforcers at Malibagh.

Witnesses said around 300 activists brought out a procession in Malibagh Chowdhury Para area after Juma prayers and police fired rubber bullets and teargas shells to disperse them.

The Jamaat-Shibir men vandalised around 10 vehicles.

GAIBANDHA
Two people were killed in a clash between activists of ruling Awami League and Jamaat-Shibir men at Dhanesher Bazar in Sunderganj upazila.

The deceased were identified as Awami League adherent Nurunnabi Sapu, 22, and tea stall owner Sajju Mia, 30.

Witnesses said the clash erupted around 7:00am when Shibir men chased ruling party activists. Jamaat-Shibir men caught Sapu and beat him to death.

Following his death, Awami League men vandalised Al-Hikma Madrasa and five Jamaat-owned business establishments.

Jamaat-Shibir activists in turn vandalised 25 shops at Dhanesher Bazar.

Sajju was admitted to Sunderganj Upazila Health

Complex with injuries and he died at 1:00pm.

Meanwhile, two police constables, who were injured in an attack by Jamaat-Shibir men at Sundarganj police camp on Thursday, died yesterday at Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

The deceased were: Hazrat Ali, 40, of Rahamatpur Char village of Pirgachha upazila and Tozammel Haque, 38, of Rajarhat upazila in Kurigram.

CHAPAINAWABGANJ
A man was killed and 10 others, including a local journalist, were injured in a clash between Awami League men and Jamaat activists at Shahbajpur of Shibganj upazila yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Abdur Rahim, 45, who died on the spot. Jamaat claimed that Rahim was their activist.

Witnesses said defying the ban on gatherings, both groups clashed at Pardailpur village of Shahbajpur around 11:00am.

NOAKHALI
Nur Uddin, 17, of Khaliterhat village in Noakhali died yesterday morning. He had sustained bullet injuries in Rajganj of Begumganj upazila on Thursday during a clash between Jamaat and police.

Meanwhile, a clash erupted between Jamaat-Shibir men, and police and Border Guard Bangladesh personnel when Jamaat-Shibir brought out a procession and blocked three roads with logs and electricity poles around 9:00am. The clash left 15 injured.

Shibir called a half-day hartal in Noakhali today.

CHITTAGONG
Jamaat-Shibir men blocked College Road and hurled brick chips on roadside houses and shops on Sirajud-Daulah Road and at Chawkbazar intersection yesterday.

A few thousand Jamaat-Shibir activists, led by Jamaat city unit Ameer Shamsul Islam, MP, brought out a procession at Anderkilla intersection after Juma prayer.

A few homemade bombs were hurled from the procession at policemen near Oli Khan Mosque that left six cops injured.

Jamaat-Shibir men also set fire to three vehicles on Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

RAJSHAHI
In Rajshahi, two journalists were injured while covering a clash between Jamaat-Shibir and law enforcers at Binodpur in the city yesterday afternoon.

The clash ensued around 2:15pm when around 100 Jamaat-Shibir men brought out a procession and hurled homemade bombs at law enforcers. The law enforcers fired around 500 rubber bullets to disperse them.

SATKHIRA
Abdus Salam, 50, of Rajarbagan, Satkhira, was shot Thursday during a clash at Kadamtala Bazar, and he died, police said. At least four people were killed during the violence on Thursday in the district.

OTHER PLACES
In Narsingdi, at least four policemen were injured when Jamaat-Shibir men threw brick chips on them from a procession brought out after Juma prayers.

In Dinajpur, Jamaat-Shibir men blocked Dinajpur-Dhaka highway and in Pabna they vandalised a Rab patrol car at Chandidaspur.

In Narayanganj, at least five people, including a police constable, were injured in separate clashes between police and Jamaat-Shibir men when the latter tried to bring out processions yesterday.

In Jessore, 15 people were injured yesterday in Jamaat-Shibir assaults and homemade bomb attacks.

Withdraw

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Therefore, business communities do not support any political violence and anarchy in connection with the on-going trial proceedings, it said.

"Such suicidal programmes, like hartal and strike, are leading our country to utmost crisis, which is not acceptable to anyone of us", FBCCI said.

The apex business body also asked some parties to refrain from politics of confrontation and follow policy of mutual understanding.

Meanwhile, Md Sabur Khan, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), called upon the political parties to find an alternative way to resolve the crisis.

Mentioning that businessmen were the ultimate sufferer of the shutdown, Khan said the government should take the first step and sit for discussion with opposition parties to resolve the crisis.

"If the government wants to do so, we [businessmen] will take every necessary measure to make it [discussion] possible," he said.

Rokia Afzal Rahman, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), said the three-day hartal would hamper country's export-import activities.

She stressed the need for an alternative path to resolve crisis.

Victims feel

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Police and firefighters arrived in the evening, but it was already too late.

During a visit to the villages, many of the victims were seen struggling to overcome the shock in vain. Many were found sitting speechless with no food or additional clothes.

Santana Rani, who was still in panic, said the attackers had threatened to return later. Rani Chowdhury, another victim, termed the attack a revenge on them as a Hindu had given witness against Sayedee.

Noakhali District Administrator Dr Zafar Ullah visited the spots and promised to allocate Tk 1 lakh for each of the temples and Tk 50,000 for each of the 76 affected families. Deputy Commissioner Sirajul Islam distributed 50 kilograms of rice to each of the families and the mayor of Chowmuhan Municipality gave a tonne of rice for the victims.

The Gandhi Ashram Trust also started distributing food and clothes among them.

Panic gripped the Hindus of Banshkhal upazila once again as Jamaat-Shibir men equipped with arms brought out a procession yesterday, reports our Staff Correspondent of Chittagong.

"We are still in fear," said Amrita Karan of Jaldi union, adding, "We still do not know what would happen tomorrow?"

Witnesses said the Jamaat-Shibir procession rounded Napora and Puichhari villages after Juma prayers. They however fled as soon as Rapid Action Battalion and Border Guard Bangladesh personnel appeared.

Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Abdul Mannan visited the villages and assured the victims of proper security.

Contacted, MA Sabur, officer-in-charge of Banshkhal police, said a platoon of BGB men and additional three platoon police personnel were in hand to ward off further attack.

4 on a bike

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highway near Khakhanapur bridge at about 6:30am, said Masudur Rahman, in-charge of highway police in Ahladipur of the district.

Nazrul, Al Amin and Saidul died on the spot while Shafiqul on the way to Faridpur Medical College Hospital around 9:30am.

The driver and helper of the truck fled the scene.

The bodies were sent to Rajbari Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

Khaleda calls it 'genocide'

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enforcers soon after Delawar Hossain Sayedee received the sentence for crimes against humanity during the Liberation War, 1971.

Jamaat-Shibir men were already out on the streets to enforce a shutdown when the International Crimes Tribunal-1 pronounced the verdict.

The violence claimed at least 33 lives.

In a press statement later that night, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir termed the incident the "cruelest genocide in the history and worse than the genocide by the [Pakistan] occupation army during the Liberation War in 1971."

Yesterday, Khaleda Zia at the press conference said, "I am stunned. I am outraged. I am deeply hurt. I have no words to condemn and protest. Heinous genocide is taking place again in our country. People are being killed like birds."

"The government has gone on a barbaric killing spree. Old people, children, adolescents and even chaste women are not being spared. It looks like foreign occupation forces are committing atrocities against the people of Bangladesh."

"It's beyond our imagination that a government can carry out genocide against its own people. We liberated our motherland in 1971 standing against such genocide. We cannot accept that any government for any reason would choose the path of genocide in that independent country."

The opposition leader demanded the government immediately stop this "genocide". "Otherwise," she warned, "the consequences will be dreadful." She also urged the people to demand justice for the "cruel killings".

Khaleda Zia called upon all the members of police and other law enforcement agencies not to use the weapons bought with the people's money against the same people mindlessly.

She urged them not to engage in "genocide" by carrying out unjust order of

a "failed government". Expressing her solidarity with the people's "agitation and resistance against fascism", she said, "I think it will be possible to save the country from anarchy created by the government only by establishing democracy and people's rights."

Khaleda, also the opposition leader in parliament, said the government had adopted the tactics of "murder and genocide" to divert public attention from its unlimited failure and corruption and to retain power via a farcical election.

The BNP chairperson defended the recent agitation by some Islamist groups against "hurting Islam by atheist bloggers of Shahbagh", and questioned the motive of the youth movement and neutrality of the war crimes tribunals.

The former PM also alleged the government launched planned attack on houses of minorities to divert the people's democratic movement.

Flanked by senior party leaders, Khaleda said the country is in grave crisis and such a dreadful situation was not created since the independence. "The whole nation is now divided."

She alleged a vested quarter had been engaged in ill campaign against Islam, the Almighty Allah and Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) in the name of the spirit of Liberation War.

Ordinary citizens who are soft on religion were being tortured and termed war criminals, anti-liberation elements and collaborators when they took initiative to protest peacefully against the anti-Islam campaigns, she added.

Khaleda said the government was patronising a group which was spreading hatred as well as provoking division in the nation.

Referring to the Shahbagh youths, she said they were threatening the country's eminent citizens for expressing personal views. They were also threatening to stop anti-government newspapers

and television channels and putting pressure on the government to arrest brave editor Mahmudur Rahman.

Turning to the ongoing war crimes trials, she said the government had totally destroyed the atmosphere of getting justice through fascism which amounts to crimes against humanity.

"We have clearly again and again said we want the war crimes trial. But the trial has to be transparent and of international standard. But you all know a lot of questions are being raised at home and abroad centring the trial process, tribunals and its law."

Khaleda said the government expressed solidarity with the movement against a war crimes verdict although none but the government had formed the tribunals and prosecution and war crimes investigation teams.

The opposition leader said the remaining hope of getting justice was shattered when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in parliament supported the Shahbagh youths demanding capital punishment to all convicted war criminals and called upon judges to consider the demand.

Under the circumstances, Khaleda said, it would not be possible for any of the judges to conduct trial process and deliver verdict independently and neutrally.

"Therefore, every verdict of these tribunals will be questionable now," she said, adding that the government has no right to stay in power after extending support to protesters who are putting pressure on the trial process.

After the press conference yesterday, Mahbubul Alam Hanif, joint general secretary of ruling Awami League, said the BNP chief had announced the hartal to obstruct the ongoing trials of war criminals and to make Jamaat happy.

Talking to The Daily Star over the phone last night, he also criticised the opposition leader for speaking against the Shahbagh youths.