

Jamaat plots

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A top official of the intelligence wing of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) also apprehends Jamaat-Shibir may unleash massive violence in the city cashing in on BNP's hartal today.

Speaking anonymously, the Rab official said Jamaat-Shibir men remained almost silent in the capital for last few days which is not a good sign.

Against this backdrop, BNP would enforce its countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal in an already tensed situation when Jamaat-e-Islami unleashed a wave of terror during its 48-hour shutdown that ended this morning.

The main opposition, which is considering a hard-line stance, said it would form countrywide "committees for public safety" to, what it said, counter the ruling Awami League's threat to resist opposition movement.

"We will build resistance through these committees," said BNP Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed at a press conference yesterday without elaborating on the matter.

People, especially the city dwellers, fear an increase in violence following a number of incidents yesterday.

The situation in the capital was almost peaceful in last few days when huge violence rocked some districts leaving more than 60 people including six policemen dead.

Before BNP, its main ally Jamaat enforced the 48-hour countrywide shutdown since Sunday morning on the same grounds to protest against Thursday's violence over capital punishment to its leader Sayedee.

Jamaat-Shibir men have been carrying out violent attacks on police and damaging public property since Thursday.

"We will not leave streets. Many BNP workers supported our programmes. Many of our workers will also join BNP men to enforce tomorrow's [today's] hartal," Abu Taleb

Mandal, secretary of Pabna district unit Jamaat, told The Daily Star.

The BNP, in line with its hard-line stance against the government, would enforce the hartal in efforts to gear up street agitations to press home its core demand for installation of a non-partisan election-time government, a number of BNP leaders said.

They added if the law-enforcement agencies try to harass and oppress the opposition, BNP might declare hartal for Wednesday.

A Jamaat leader also hinted that they might declare hartal for tomorrow. Party insiders say Jamaat policymakers want to observe the situation during the BNP-called hartal.

Jamaat acting secretary general Rafiqul Islam Khan in a press statement said they would declare their next programmes today.

MK Anwar, member of the national standing committee of BNP, told The Daily Star, "We are likely to enforce hartal for another day if the government uses police to foil our tomorrow's [today's] programme."

He added the BNP would gradually go for all-out movement against the government by enforcing tougher agitations like siege, blockade and shutdowns.

LT Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, another member of the national standing committee of BNP, echoed the same.

He said BNP did not have any alternative to gearing up street agitations to press home its demand for the election-time government.

Referring to cancellation of party chief Khaleda Zia's meeting with visiting Indian President Pranab Mukherjee, a BNP policymaker said it meant they had opted for a hard-line stance. "It would also send a signal to Jamaat that BNP is with them," the policymaker said asking not to be identified.

Meanwhile on the eve of today's hartal, miscreants torched buses and vehicles in Agargaon, Khamarbari of Farmgate, Gabtoli, Mirpur, Hatirpool and several other areas in the capital.

A good number of homemade bombs had also been blasted in Khilkhet, near Mohakhali Police Box, in front of BNP central office in Nayapalton and other places in Dhaka.

(this) opportunity to confer the Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sammanona on you," she added.

Cabinet Division Secretary Mohammad Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan read out a citation describing Pranab's role during the Liberation War. The event began with the playing of national anthems of Bangladesh and India.

Ministers, lawmakers and a large number of dignitaries, including some foreign guests, were present at the ceremony, which was followed by a state banquet hosted by Zillur Rahman in honour of Pranab.

Earlier in the day, the University of Dhaka at its 47th convocation honoured Pranab by giving him an honorary Doctor of Laws Honoris Causa.

Former Indian PM Indira Gandhi was first among the foreign friends conferred with the highest state honour -- Bangladesh Freedom Honour -- in recognition to her contribution to the struggle that led to the birth of Bangladesh.

Her daughter-in-law Sonia Gandhi, also president of India's ruling Congress party, received the posthumous award from Zillur Rahman on behalf of Indira Gandhi in a special ceremony at Bangabhaban on July 25, 2011.

The state accolades, titled "Bangladesh Liberation War Honour" and "Friends of Liberation War Honour" went to over 200 individuals and organisations from different countries across the world.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Prof MM Akash, Khushi Kabir, among others, were present at the press conference.

Shahbagh defies hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several hundred people yesterday joined a procession led by the Shahbagh youths denouncing the Jamaat-sponsored hartal.

Starting around 10:00am, they marched through Bangla Motor and Karwan Bazar before returning to the Shahbagh intersection.

The protesters condemned attacks on religious minorities by Jamaat-e-Islami and its allies and demanded legal action against the perpetrators.

The Shahbagh intersection, widely called Projonmo Chatter, reverberated with slogans against hartals, Jamaat-Shibir and war criminals throughout the day as usual.

The signature campaign, which began on February 22, continued as on previous days.

A colourful stage has been constructed adjacent to the Public Library gate to showcase cultural performances based on the theme of resistance. The programmes, including documentary screening, songs, poetry recitations and theatre skits, will take place every evening till 10:00pm.

"Since the movement will go on for a long time, this [the cultural programme] will add a new dimension to the movement," said Bappa Ditto Basu, a core organiser of the movement and president of Chhatra Moitree.

"It will also help us make the movement more sustainable."

The organisers urged the people to join today's grand rally at Jatrabari in the capital.

Indian hunger striker rejects suicide charge

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian human rights activist who has been on hunger-strike for 12 years appeared in a New Delhi court yesterday charged with attempting to commit suicide.

From Sharmila, 40, who is force-fed through a drip in her nose, was tearful as she pleaded not guilty to the charge, saying the hunger strike was her way of attracting attention to human rights abuses in her home state of Manipur.

She began her fast in November 2000 after witnessing the killing of 10 people by the army at a bus stop near her home in north-eastern Manipur, which is subject to the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

Crimes

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Some eminent citizens and human rights activists organised the conference at the Liberation War Museum in the capital. They demanded immediate banning of the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Sultana Kamal, executive director of rights body Ain o Shalish Kendra (ASK), read out the statement of the conference with Prof Anisuzzaman in the chair.

Sultana Kamal said the anti-liberation force had been creating anarchy across the country in the name of rejecting the tribunal's verdict against Delawar Hossain Sayedee. Such violence was similar to the crimes against humanity.

With this offence, the anti-liberation forces were trying to desecrate the glory of martyrs, she said.

She hoped that every political party would play a more responsible role in controlling the current situation.

Sultana Kamal also urged the law enforcement agencies to ensure security of all people including the minority communities.

Urging all not to fall in the trap of the anti-liberation forces, Prof Anisuzzaman said people should build resistance against their activities.

He thanked the youths for playing a commendable role in the Gonojagoron Mancha, saying everyone should raise their voice against the war criminals.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Prof MM Akash, Khushi Kabir, among others, were present at the press conference.

Tobacco industry

FROM PAGE 20
Sources said tobacco companies have been very active in lobbying the ministries to delay the entire process.

The Daily Star talked to the health, finance and agricultural ministers to know how the provisions were dropped.

The ministers said the provisions should have been kept in the final draft considering the steady growth of tobacco cultivation and consumption, and its deadly impact on health.

"I was against keeping any smoking zone in smoke-free public places, especially in airports. But many cabinet members found it necessary," said Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque.

On loan and subsidy to farmers for tobacco cultivation, he said many farmers take loan and cultivate tobacco for profit. "We must give them alternatives and encourage them to cultivate other crops."

The minister said tobacco companies might have lobbied different ministries to bring changes to the draft. "They are active in every sphere."

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury recently told The Daily Star, "My ministry wanted to keep the provision for not giving soft loan or subsidy for producing tobacco that absorbs a great amount of nutrient from soil and reduces its fertility."

She said her ministry decided in principle not to give any loan or subsidy for tobacco cultivation. "We give subsidy for alternative crops."

Reeling from shock

FROM PAGE 20
made here hours after the International Crimes Tribunal sentenced Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee to death on charges of arson, rape, murder and forced conversion during the 1971 Liberation War.

Arnab Chattarjee, a class-three student of Thakur Bari of Rajganj union under Begumganj, wonders as to why his home was vandalised, his books were burnt and his family members beaten.

The entire area looks like a deserted place now. While visiting Rajganj bazar yesterday, this correspondent found almost all the shops on both sides of the streets shut. Hindu families have sent their young female members to safety. Children have stopped going to school fearing that they may be attacked on the way.

"They (attackers) will beat me the way they beat up my father and uncles," said Arnab. Whenever he sees any stranger he cringes away.

"All my books have been burnt. What will I read now," said Anni Bhattacharjee, a five-year-old girl of pre-primary class. She was seen crying and trying to bring together the burnt pieces of her books.

Like Arnab and Anni, children of Bhuiyan Bari, Mali Bari, Acharjee Bari, Aldinagar Banikya para, Kuri Bari and Kalirhat of Rajganj are struggling to come out of the trauma they have gone through.

Unidentified criminals damaged at least six temples, torched 36 houses and vanda-

Net instigation

FROM PAGE 20
"The government would not be able to jam or stop frequency of radio channel very easily like any other websites and social media Facebook, twitter or television channels," says one post.

"So make all necessary arrangements so that we can use the 'alternative media' whenever we need it."

The page, which is run by the pro-Jamaat-Shibir online activities, is also trying to incite common people saying, there are some bus services, including Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation, plying the streets in the capital. "Brothers, show the Dhaka people what a hartal is."

A comment posted by one Aditya Sarowar says: "Shut everything down and chant slogans in the name of [Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain] Sayedee."

According to another

When asked about the exclusion of the provision, Matia said other ministries were also involved in the process.

Anti-tobacco campaigners and officials in the health and agriculture ministries pointed their fingers at the finance ministry for making the changes in the draft under the influence of tobacco companies.

However, Finance Minister AMA Muhith claimed he had no idea how the provision for not providing soft loan or subsidy for tobacco cultivation got dropped from the final draft.

"The provision might have been dropped following inter-ministerial meetings." And the reason could be that tobacco companies now provide credit and subsidy for tobacco cultivation, he said.

Muhith said the draft could be changed in the parliament with the inclusion of necessary provisions.

The minister said he was against the idea of having smoking zone in smoke-free public places. "If smoking zones are kept, the entire area will ultimately be affected."

As the Anti-Tobacco Law, 2005 was deemed insufficient to control tobacco use, the government in 2010 decided to amend the law. The cabinet in December last year approved the draft that included all chewing tobacco in the list of tobacco products.

It also contains provisions for having pictorial warnings on tobacco packs, increasing the number of smoke-free

lised 40 others after looting those at Alampur and Aladin Nagar villages in Rajganj on the day. Many of the seventy-six victim families accused the Jamaat-e-Islami and its ally BNP of the attacks but leaders of the parties' district units denied the allegation.

The Hindus are now fearing further attacks while the Muslim population of the area are dreading arrests.

"The miscreants attacked my shop on that day (Thursday). Now, I have been keeping my shop closed to avoid further trouble," said Pintu Kumar Kuri, owner of a jewellery shop at Rajganj bazar.

A restaurant owner Dulal Miah said police had picked up his son on Sunday though he was innocent. Later, police released Dulal's son in the face of villagers' demand.

"People fear mass arrest." Many families of the minority community are not letting their children and female members step out of their homes while some have sent their children to their relatives.

"My daughter is 16. A day after the violence, I have sent her to Noakhali town for safety," said Sankar Bikash Majumder.

Meanwhile, some victims have brought corruption allegations over distribution of relief.

Deputy Commissioner Sirajul Islam refuted such claims and said relief materials were being distributed transparently.

"We are distributing relief materials according to the

public places, tightening control on tobacco advertisements and sponsorship, and raising fines for violation of tobacco law.

The amended law will not be effective without the two vital provisions, said Taifur Rahman, advocacy and media coordinator of Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, Bangladesh.

Anti-tobacco campaigners said the exclusion of the provisions will result in an increase in tobacco production. They said if smoking zones are kept in smoke-free public places, it will eventually affect the non-smokers.

According to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control to which Bangladesh is a party, smoking zones cannot be kept in smoke-free public places.

There has been a steady rise in tobacco cultivation in the country, as tobacco companies continue to target more and more fertile land.

According to a study of private organisation Ubinig, tobacco was cultivated on 75,880 acres of land in Bangladesh in 2006, and it rose to 1.83 lakh acres in 2010.

Bangladesh is among the five countries that are affected the most by tobacco use. On an average, 165 people die from tobacco-related diseases every day in Bangladesh, according to a study of World Health Organization.

The study shows that the cost of treatment for tobacco-related diseases is double of what the government earns from the tobacco sector.

need of the victims -- to repair their houses and bring those back to the previous condition."

The district administration has donated a sack of rice, 5kg of pulses, 5kg of potato for each of the families that came under attack on Thursday and 50 blankets, 160 bundles of tin-sheet and Tk 4.80 lakh for all.

Besides, Ekramul Karim Chowdhury, general secretary and MP of Noakhali-4 constituency, donated Tk 3.80 lakh.

Administrator of Zila Parishad has promised to donate Tk 6 lakh for repairing the six temples and Tk 50,000 for each victim family. Gandhi Asram Trust in Noakhali has bought clothes and cutlery for victim families.

Two cases have been filed in connection with the incident, accusing 71 by name and at least 1,500 others unidentified. As many as 28 were arrested till 6:00pm yesterday, said Syed Mohammad Ahasanul Islam, officer-in-charge of Begumganj Police Station.

In a new development yesterday, a Hindu temple was set on fire at Lakhirpar village, Kotlipara of Gopalganj district, said Tota Mia, officer-in-charge of Kotlipara Police Station.

Plot to kill 10

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to this end.

Officer-in-Charge Pradip Kumar Das of Panchlaish Police Station, however, said the Shibir men actually planned to kill the teachers of Jamiah Ahmadiya Sunnia Alia Madrasa located at Bibirhat.

The arrestees -- Mahmud Hasan, 21, Abdur Rahman, 19, Jamir Uddin, 23, Rezaul Karim, 23, Md Yunus, 23, Ashrafullah, 27, Osman Gani, 26 and Arifur Rahman, 16 -- hailed from Cox's Bazar.

One of the arrestees, Mahmud Hasan, is a student of the madrasa.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team raided Shyamoli residential area around 3:00pm and nabbed Mahmud with the help of locals, said the OC.

With information from Mahmud, the team nabbed the others from a three-storied building in Kala Mia Bazar area of the city around 5:45pm.

Mahmud said he went to Shyamoli as planned to collect information about the teachers so that they could beat them up later.

The teachers are Ashrafuzzaman Al Quaderi, Jalaluddin Al Quaderi, Obaidul Haq Naimi, Joyal Abedin Jubae, Sagor Ahmad Usmani, Osir Rahman, Abul Kashem Nuri, Abdul Wazed, Mufti Yunus and Tawhidul Alam.

Another train

FROM PAGE 1
This raised the death toll in clashes between fanatics and law enforcers to 71 since Thursday, when Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee was awarded death penalty by International Crimes Tribunal-1.

In the capital, miscreants yesterday set fire to three compartments of Upakul Express at Kamalapur Railway Station around 4:00pm, minutes after it had reached there from Noakhali.

The compartments got totally burnt before firefighters had reached the spot. They however separated the burning coaches from main train to contain the blaze, said witnesses.

Railways Minister Mazibul Hoque blamed Jamaat and Shibir for the arson.

Miscreants also exploded a homemade bomb near Sonargaon Hotel in the capital where visiting Indian President Pranab Mukherjee is staying.

No injury had been reported in the blast, said law enforcers. Mukherjee, who is here on a three-day state visit, was in the hotel when the bomb was blasted, said officials of Indian High Commission in Dhaka.

Press Secretary to the Indian president Venu Rajamony said, "Indian security officials have expressed the view that this was a minor explosion. Bursting of such cocktails [homemade bombs] is common in Bangladesh during hartals and those cannot be described as bombs."

Meanwhile, a boy was injured when police trying to disperse marauding Jamaat-Shibir men opened fire in the capital's South Kamalapur. The protesters had first hurled two homemade bombs at the law enforcers.

Injured Junaidul Islam Tonmoy, student of class-VIII, was at the balcony of their house when a stray bullet fired by police hit him.

Jamaat-Shibir activists also brought out processions and exploded several homemade bombs in West Shewrapara, Banasri, Babubazar and Shyambazar areas of the capital. Police dispersed the protestors and arrested 19 activists.

SATKHIRA
Local administration has imposed Section 144 for an indefinite period since 12:30pm yesterday in Kalaroa municipality after three people had been killed in a gunfight between Jamaat-Shibir men and members of Border Guard Bangladesh.

Witnesses said Jamaat-Shibir activists had blocked the Kalaroa-Sarashikatki road with logs since the morning. They attacked police when the law enforcers reached the spot from Sarashikathi outpost and tried to clear the road around 10:30am.

Outnumbered, the law enforcers were forced pushed back but soon they returned with BGB personnel. The unruly protesters surrounded the team and started pelting the law enforcers with brick chips.

At this, the law enforcers opened fire in which two brothers, Arif Billah, 40, and Ruhul Amin, 35, died on the spot, while three others got injured. Of the injured, Shamsur Rahman, 42, died at Satkhira Sadar Hospital at 8:30pm.

Jamaat-Shibir activists also looted and torched the houses of an Awami League union leader and three Jubo League workers in Kalaroa and Satkhira sadar upazilas.

SIRAJGANJ
A teenage boy was killed when police opened fire in the face of attacks by Jamaat-Shibir activists in Ullapara upazila. The deceased was identified as Mahfuz.

At least 15 people were also injured, two by bullets, during a clash at Delua village, said Sirajganj SP Humayun Kabir.

He said Jamaat-Shibir men had blocked the Bogra-Nagarbari Highway with logs at Delua point since the morning. They locked into a clash with police around 8:30am, when the law enforcers tried to free the highway.

Pro-hartal activists also removed several railway slippers of a bailey bridge at Baraipara in sadar upazila.

JOYPURHAT
Jamaat-Shibir men have looted and set fire to houses of

lage and Panchbibi and sadar upazilas of the district since Sunday night.

Police said the activists equipped with bamboo and sticks attacked and set fire to two houses of ruling Awami League adherents in Panchbibi upazila.

In the sadar upazila, they attacked and set the houses of two Hindu families on fire Sunday night.

CHAPAINAWABGANJ
Miscreants set fire to a temple at Alidanga area of Shibganj municipality early yesterday some time between 3:00am and 4:00am, said Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Shibganj AZM Sharzil Hasan.

Milon Pal, president of the temple, said the Hindu community of the area feared further attacks.

RAJSHAHI
Miscreants late last night charged at least 30 homemade bombs on police when law enforcers tried to keep the crowd from setting fire to a covered van of Opsonin Pharmaceuticals Ltd at Bonodpur area under Motihar Police Station.

Mothiar police claimed the miscreants to be adherents of Jamaat and Shibir. No casualty or injury has been reported so far.

CHITTAGONG
Criminals blasted at least five homemade bombs and set fire to an abandoned train engine at Chittagong Railway Station yesterday.

Security officials of the station doused the fire and managed to catch one of the miscreants. They handed him to law enforcers.

OTHER DISTRICTS
A state of panic prevailed in Bogra and Joypurhat where 15 people were killed in Sunday's violence. Most of the shops and business establishments of the two districts remained closed yesterday.

The clash in Bogra injured 21 policemen. Three of them were admitted to Combined Military Hospital in Bogra, confirmed Bogra Superintendent of Police (SP) Mozammel Haque.

Meanwhile, road communications of Cox's Bazar and Bandarban with rest of the country have remained suspended for the last four days, as Jamaat-Shibir activists blocked the highway by felling trees at Satkania upazila.

In Rangpur, Jamaat-Shibir men vandalised the Gonojagoron Mancha site at Badarganj Central Shaheed Minar in Badarganj upazila. They also desecrated the Shaheed Minar by walking on it with shoes on.

In Pabna, Jamaat-Shibir engaged hundreds of women and teenagers to block the Dhaka-Pabna highway in Bangabaria area of the sadar upazila. The protestors were equipped with brooms and sticks.

Jamaat-Shibir men vandalised shops and housed in Phulbari upazila in Kurigram and clashed with police also in Barisal.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1
against the Hindus, burning down houses and temples, shortly after a war crimes tribunal gave death sentence to Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee.

On March 1, the opposition leader categorically blamed the government for the "planned attack aimed to divert people's democratic movement and destroy the country's communal harmony".

Now, four days after the atrocities against minorities, Khaleda demands the government identify and punish the perpetrators through neutral investigation and compensate the victims.

The statement urged the media not to publish anything with prejudice or get confused with propaganda from a certain quarter.

Saying attempts were being made to destroy the existing religious harmony, Khaleda called for restraint.

She also said attacks on minorities were taking place at a time when people were waging movement against the "government's fascism and indiscriminate killings across the country".

"I called upon the administration and law enforcers to prevent such attacks on minorities with an iron fist," said Khaleda, also the leader of the opposition in the House.