

Mojaheed's trial at final stage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The trial of war crimes accused Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed is set to enter its final stage as International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday fixed tomorrow for the beginning of the closing arguments of the case.

The tribunal, led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Judge M Shahinur Islam, fixed the date as deposition of both prosecution and defence witnesses was completed yesterday.

As per relevant laws, after hearing the closing arguments from both the prosecution and the defence, the tribunal will set a date for delivering the verdict.

Mojaheed, who served as a minister in the BNP-led alliance government, was indicted on seven charges, which include murder, torture, genocide and hatching conspiracy to kill intellectuals during the Liberation War in 1971.

According to the prosecution, Mojaheed was the president of East Pakistan Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of the Jamaat.

He had become chief of the infamous Al-Badr force, which is historically known for orchestrating the killing of intellectuals in the last part of the war.

Earlier yesterday, the tribunal recorded the testimony and cross-examination of the lone defence witness as defence counsel declined to adduce more witnesses in the case.

As a defence witness, Ali Ahmed Mabur, the youngest son of Mojaheed, only exhibited some documents, mainly some books and newspapers articles before the tribunal.

Mabur, also a newsroom editor and news presenter of Diganta Television, said none of the documents show that his father had taken part in anti-liberation activities.

A total of 17 prosecution witnesses, including the investigation officer, gave their testimonies in the case while the tribunal allowed three defence witnesses to give their testimonies.

Eight killed

FROM PAGE 20

Khorshed Alam, officer-in-charge of Hatiya Police Station.

As the master of the sea-truck quickly tried to anchor the vessel near Nalchira ghat of the river, it partially capsized in the river, he said.

The vessel's passengers fell into the river and were washed away by the strong current of the river, he added.

Locals rescued many passengers from the river soon after the incident.

On information, coast guards from Hatiya joined them and recovered the bodies from the river.

28 rescued people were admitted to Hatiya Upazila Health Complex.

Rana sued

FROM PAGE 20

was filed by the wife of a garment worker who died in the building collapse in Savar.

Senior Judicial Magistrate Wasim Sheikh passed the order, directing the investigation officer of the case to merge it with an earlier murder case and investigate. The earlier one was filed by police on the day of the collapse.

The other two accused are Bazlul Samad Adnan, owner of garment factory New Wave Style that was housed in the building, and the chief engineer of Savar municipality.

The name of the engineer could not be known immediately.

Sheuli Akter, widow of Jahangir Alam whose body was recovered on April 24, the day Rana Plaza came crashing down, filed the case with the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

In her complaint, Sheuli said Rana and two factory owners led at least 622 garment workers, including her husband, to death in a way that was pre-planned because the building had been declared risky the day before the building caved in.

With this, Rana has so far been accused in five cases in connection with the collapse.

Of the five cases, two have been filed with Savar Model Police Station and two others under the labour act.

No one knows

FROM PAGE 1

BGMEA President Atiqul Islam told The Daily Star yesterday that looking at the old list it was impossible to say exactly how many people were inside the building at the time of the collapse on April 24.

"As far as I can remember, the list for two of the factories was updated at the end of 2012 and the rest were updated in February of this year," he said.

This means the list does not include the names of workers who were employed in those factories over the last few months.

Ripa, for instance, who used to work on the fourth floor, joined work only three days before the disaster, while Kohinor joined that very day as a sewing operator on the same floor.

It is understood that their names are not on the BGMEA list.

Labour leaders described the list as "completely unreliable" and urged the government to take steps to establish the actual number of missing workers.

"It is very unfortunate that the owners always suppress the actual number of deaths in such cases.

Looking at the number of people already rescued -- dead and alive -- it is quite clear that the BGMEA list is not dependable," said Wajed-ul Islam Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra.

According to their estimate, there were more than 4,000 workers in the five factories.

Maj Gen Chowdhury Hasan Suhrawardy of the 9th Infantry Division, who is in charge of the rescue operation, maintained he had not received any list of workers, despite requests for one to the BGMEA.

"The BGMEA is supposed to give the workers their wages on May 7 [tomorrow]. We are hoping to determine the number of missing workers by speaking to families who come to collect salaries," he told this paper yesterday.

The lack of a list having the exact number of victims is making it difficult for the rescuers to carry out the

operation swiftly.

Since most of the bodies recovered at this point are decomposed beyond recognition, the administration is referring to the ID cards and mobile phones of the victims to ascertain their identity. The bodies on which no ID cards or mobile phones are found are being kept for DNA tests.

So far, 32 unclaimed bodies have been buried at Jurain graveyard in the capital. Another 65 bodies were kept at different hospital morgues, including Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Many families still wait to find the bodies of their loved ones.

In another tragic turn of events, Ezazuddin Kaikobad, a civilian rescuer who had sustained severe burn injuries while attempting to rescue trapped garment worker Shaheena, died on Saturday night.

The 35-year-old was flown to Singapore for treatment on the instructions of the prime minister on April 30.

Ezaz was in the process of cutting a rod with a power saw when the sparks hit an oxygen pipe, causing a fire. Nearly 60 percent of his body was burnt, said Hasan Suhrawardy.

Meanwhile, the rescue operation picked up speed yesterday.

Rescuers recovered 71 bodies from under the rubble yesterday.

Major Kazi Shakil Hossain said the rescue team yesterday began to use the heavy machinery in a "flexible" way.

When asked if the use of hydraulic hammers and excavators would disturb the bodies under the rubble, he said, "We are still working manually around the spots that might hold bodies -- near the staircases for example -- and refraining from using heavy machinery there."

The process of recovering bodies is still slowing down the operation, insisted army officials overseeing the operation, as rescuers want to ensure that the bodies are salvaged without much distortion.

Last minute

FROM PAGE 1

A top policymaker of the government told this correspondent that the Hefajat chief had given them commitment to leave Dhaka after holding the rally at Shapla Chattar peacefully. And based on the commitment, the government gave them the permission to hold the rally. Subsequently the government allowed the Hefajat men who took positions at different entry points in the capital to go to Motijheel.

But everything went out of the government's grip around 3:00pm when, according to the sources, top opposition leaders managed to pursue the Hefajat chief not to join the rally and ask his men to leave the capital.

It was after this development that the AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam issued tough warnings to the Hefajat men.

In the afternoon, a Hefajat leader told this correspondent several times over the phone from Shapla Chattar that their chief would join the rally and give directives to the crowd. "We will follow what he says - leave or stay."

The Hefajat leader on condition of anonymity later said: "He was supposed to come and ask us to leave peacefully. But some opposition leaders communicated with several close leaders of our chief and gave directives to the crowd. "We will follow what he says - leave or stay."

A series of moves were taken from the government side to pursue Ahmed Shafi to go to Motijheel and make the call for departure of his hundreds of followers, but until late night all efforts went in vain.

A highly placed source said Shafi was on his way to Motijheel in the afternoon on a "red jeep with black window" but he made a U-

turn from Palashi area after getting a phone call from a top opposition leader who threatened him that the ties between Hefajat and the opposition would permanently end if he moved further towards Motijheel and ask his followers to leave the place.

Another Hefajat leader, however, said Shafi did not go to Motijheel as he was feeling "insecure".

In a late night development, Shafi in a press statement said a peaceful sit-in would continue at Motijheel until the government met their demands.

Earlier in the day, thousands of Hefajat men turned up for their post-siege rally at Motijheel.

Following the gathering at six entry points of the capital as part of their much-hyped Dhaka siege programme, the Hefajat men secured a last moment government permission to hold the rally at Shapla Chattar.

Thousands of Hefajat-e-Islam activists converged on Motijheel, the capital's commercial hub, to join the rally at around 3:00pm where its leaders asked the government to meet its 13-point demand, including introduction of a blasphemy law.

At 9:15pm, its Secretary General Junaid Babunagari asked the crowd to remain seated at Shapla Chattar until Shafi reached the venue. But he could not confirm when that might happen.

Meanwhile, briefing newsmen last night, BNP leader Shamsuzzaman Duda said party Chairperson Khaleda Zia had asked her party activists and people in general to support the Hefajat men.

At 2:45am this morning, several thousand police, Rab and BGB members began a joint operation to disperse the Hefajat men.

Flushed

FROM PAGE 1

Border Guard Bangladesh personnel, joined police and took position at strategic points about 100 metres away from Shapla Chattar.

As Rab personnel joined police near Dainik Bangla intersection and Notre Dame College end, Hefajat leaders began delivering provocative speeches before their activists who had occupied downtown Dhaka since morning.

Around 30 platoons of BGB men were positioned about 100 metres away to provide cover to police and Rab personnel.

Around 2:20am, Deputy Commissioner (Ramna) Maruf Hasan of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, who was leading the drive, briefed his force.

He ordered them to prepare to disperse the Hefajat activists who had been occupying the roads. He asked them not to use bullets unless it was absolutely necessary.

With no power in Motijheel, Paltan and surrounding areas, the demonstrators were burning makeshift roadside stalls and paper to light the area.

Earlier, Hefajat activists broke road dividers and used the rubble to block roads. In the afternoon, they went on the rampage in Motijheel, Paltan, and Shanti Nagar areas.

Yesterday, the government said leaders and workers of Hefajat-e-Islam must leave the capital peacefully by yesterday evening or else it would go tough on them.

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam, also general secretary of the Awami League, said the Hefajat men would no more be allowed to hold programmes in Dhaka.

"If necessary, they won't be allowed to come out of their houses," he said at a press briefing at the AL president's political office in Dhanmondi.

Ashraf went on, "The so-called Hefajat has unleashed a reign of terror by torching and vandalising political party offices, vehicles and public property. The government is ready to take any action to maintain law and order."

The minister said BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefajat are "one and the same" and a large number of BNP and Jamaat men joined the Hefajat's programme yesterday.

The government has so far been patient but that does not mean the government and the AL are weak, Ashraf said, adding his party alone could resist Hefajat if it resorted to violence any more.

The ruling party leader termed Hefajat men "sons of Razakar, Al-Badr and Al-Shams and believers of Pakistani ideology". He blasted them for using "vulgar and offensive language" against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at their Shapla Chattar rally.

"It was not expected that the ulema [religious scholars] will use vulgar words," he said, asking them to use decent language.

The minister also said many of the Hefajat's 13-point demand have already been met in the constitution.

He criticised the Islamist group for discouraging women from joining various professions.

A highly placed source said top leadership of Hefajat had earlier promised the government that they would leave the capital by yesterday evening after holding their rally.

As they failed to keep their promise, Ashraf spoke of tough action, said the source.

Officials of an intelligence agency had been trying to pursue the Hefajat chief to honour his word but he declined to budge after getting support from the BNP high command.

Shibir the instigator

FROM PAGE 1

city when the violence erupted. All of them wore the same tell-tale signs of the notorious Islami Chhatra Shibir men, a pro-Jamaat-e-Islami student body.

At exactly 7:15pm yesterday, a rowdy gang of young men in jeans, sneakers and tight shirts and T-shirts appeared at the Mouchak intersection. Hundreds of commuters rushed on foot to their destinations. Just then, a sports utility vehicle appeared from the direction of Bangla Motor. Mohammad Kamrul, a cigarette vendor, who witnessed the torching of the vehicle, said within seconds the driver and a front seat passenger were seen abandoning the car. And the car burst into flames. The rowdy youths melted into the crowd as a thick smoke from the burning vehicle rose into the sky.

"I saw them coming, they are not the mullahs, they looked like students," said

Kamrul.

Not very far from Mouchak on the Shanti Nagar round-about, gangs of youths lit a huge fire on the main road. The fire in turn lit up the adjacent buildings. While one group with iron rods in their hands tried to break into some shops, another group attacked the police box, setting it on fire. The gang did not stop until the police box was smashed into pieces, with flames consuming it from within. No policemen were in sight.

Volunteers from Bailey Road, one of the most famous shopping areas of the city, kept vigil in numbers and vowing to resist what they said Jamaat-Shibir men rampaging on the road.

At Kakrail round-about, other young men set fire to a number of shops. Under bright street lights they uprooted traffic signals and chunks of concrete slabs to

barricade the road. While hundreds of men from the Hefajat's meeting at Shapla Chattar walked past the scene at Kakrail round-about, the Shibir men unleashed their mayhem on the business houses around them. Not far from the scene near the intersection of Kakrail mosque, about 30 armed policemen sat idly. The entire road was littered with brick chips.

At the Paltan intersection, several hundred policemen stood at the intersection, firing shots in the direction of Baitul Mukarram and Bijoy Nagar, where heavy barricades had been set up and set afire. The sky lit up with fires started indiscriminately by the Jamaat-Shibir men around Baitul Mukarram mosque. Several hundred armed policemen, somehow trapped at the intersection, intermittently fired volleys of rubber bullets and teargas canisters in two directions.

Islamic book shops burnt

FROM PAGE 1

reaching the scene.

Firefighters, with the help of the police, brought the flames under control around 9:00pm, when shop owners frantically rushed back to salvage the remains of their livelihoods.

Police, taking position at Purana Paltan intersection, repeatedly fired rubber bullets as the demonstrators attempted to advance and attack them.

Even though the vendors were frightened, they remained there to save their belongings -- despite whatever consequences might have befallen them.

"I will not leave my shop even if I am shot dead," said Abdul Moin, who was selling T-shirts at the entry point of the north side of the mosque. His business has been well enough to run his family for the past 17 years, and the shop contained goods worth around Tk 1 lakh.

"The shop is my only resort. My family depends on it. Everything will be finished if it is set on fire," he said in a choked voice.

More than one hundred vendors like Moin were desperately trying to save their sole belongings from the onslaught of violence.

Shafique, a bags vendor, repeatedly requested the Hefajat men not to damage his shop.

"It is my only livelihood. Hurt me but please spare my stall," he pleaded a group of Hefajat men attacking his shop. They took his wooden stools and torched them.

Just after the clash, the attackers went berserk and torched more than 30 vehicles. They turned more violent in the evening as they vandalised, torched and pillaged the roadside stalls from Paltan to Dainik Bangla, Bijoy Nagar to Nightingale Mor and GPO to Stadium Market areas.

Hefajat strikes horror

FROM PAGE 1

(traffic) was set ablaze.

The government issued a warning to the Hefajat men that they either leave the capital immediately or face stern action. But the zealots ignored it and vowed to stay put.

As their Dhaka siege programme was over, Hefajat men started marching towards Motijheel for attending the rally. Wielding sticks, thousands of men in white robes converged in Motijheel by the afternoon.

CAPITAL TURNS BATTLEGROUND

Large parts of the capital, including Purana Paltan, Baitul Mukarram, Bijoy Nagar, Dainik Bangla intersection, Bangabandhu Avenue and Motijheel turned into a battle ground during the mayhem that began in the morning.

Two of the dead were identified as Siddiqur Rahman, 28, a worker of Hanif Paribahan, and Mohammad Nahid, 21, an employee of a shop in Baitul Mukarram area.

The identity of the other victim could not be known.

Meanwhile, a branch manager of an insurance company died of cardiac arrest while trying to escape the violence in Motijheel area.

Kamaluddin Khan, 55, of Desh General Insurance, was on his way home from his workplace in Motijheel in the evening.

Hefajat men vandalised more than 150 vehicles, including 50 buses of the public administration ministry, and set fire to 30 of those at Rajuk Avenue.

At least 10 vehicles were set ablaze last night in Sukrabad, Dhanmondi, Dolakhali, Sadarghat, Uttara, Malibagh, and Tejgaon industrial area in the capital and two places in Gazipur.

They also torched 100 shops and business establishments in Bijoy Nagar and Paltan areas, and looted shops at Baitul Mukarram market last evening.

The Islamists also set fire to the deputy commissioner's (traffic-east) office, showroom of Ideal products and office of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), smashed windows of offices on both sides of the road from Dainik Bangla intersection to Janata Bank intersection.

More than 5,000 rounds

of rubber bullet, teargas canisters and bullets were fired during the clashes, said police.

The clashes followed the explosion of a crude bomb at Paltan around 11:30am, hours before the Hefajat rally began in Motijheel.

More than 200 people were injured in the violence.

Several hundred Hefajat men tried to march towards Gonojagoron Mancha in Shahbagh defying police barricades, said Sheikh Maruf Hasan, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Ramna Division).

When police barred them, they got into scuffles with law enforcers, he said. **ATTACKS ON AL OFFICE** Thousands of Hefajat men aided by Shibir activists swooped on the roadside shops in front of the Awami League's central office around 2:30pm.

As the AL men and police tried to resist them, they attacked the AL office. At one stage, police fired bullets from shotguns. Siddiqui, a worker of Hanif Paribahan, sustained bullet wounds during the clash.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

The doctors said more than 100 injured, including five policemen, were taken to the hospital. Most of them were hit by bullets.

A traffic constable sustained severe burns when Hefajat men set fire to a police box at Bijoy Nagar. The radical Islamists also beat up a constable near Paltan intersection.

During the clashes with police, Hefajat and Shibir activists set off hundreds of cocktails, creating panic among the commuters.

Many people remained stranded in their offices at Motijheel and Paltan following the clashes. Electricity supply was cut off in the two areas last night.

The Hefajat men attacked several TV cameramen, including Mohammad Nasir Uddin of Mohana Television, while they were taking video footage of the mayhem.

The radical Islamists also assaulted several journalists, including a female reporter, and torched the toll collection booth on the road from Dainik Bangla intersection to Janata Bank intersection.

Talking to reporters at his office yesterday noon, Home

Minster Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir said Jamaat-Shibir activists mingled with the Hefajat men and resorted to violence during Hefajat's Dhaka blockade programme.

"Hefajat leaders kept constant contact with me. They said no Hefajat men indulged in violence, rather it was Jamaat-Shibir men who, in the guise of Hefajat activists, created anarchy," said the minister.

AL rejects

FROM PAGE 1

any ultimatum and it won't do so this time too."

Flanked by several senior leaders and ministers, he said, "Awami League thinks that dialogue is the only way to resolve the present political crisis. So I request you [Khaleda Zia] to accept the prime minister's call for dialogue."

He said the prime minister made the offer of talks, as many BNP leaders wanted "an unconditional offer of dialogue from the government".

"The Awami League will never hold a one-party election. We want an election participated by all," Ashraf said, mentioning the controversial election boycotted by major political parties in 1996.

He also criticised the role of the army during the 2001 parliamentary elections.

Replying to a query, Ashraf dismissed any possibility of a repetition of 1/11. "Something different may happen. But history does not repeat itself the same way."

Ashraf, also LGRD and cooperatives minister, said the government should ban garment factories in the high-rise buildings and urged all owners to move their factories to one-storey buildings immediately.

He feared that the garment sector would crumble if there was a repeat of the Rana Plaza disaster. "Even the government won't be able to save the sector if similar incidents happen."

He observed that the readymade garment sector was pro-owner and the owners did nothing for the welfare of the workers.

AL leaders Matia Chowdhury, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Abdul Latif Siddique, Mahbul Alam Hanif, Abdul Mannan, Abdur Razaque, AFM Bahauddin Nasim and Ahmed Hossain were also present.

Opposition

FROM PAGE 1

the government to come up with a clear announcement accepting the demand for the restoration of the caretaker system.

The blockade programme, however, will be finalised tonight after a meeting of Khaleda and the chiefs of her alliance partners, in line with a decision taken at a meeting of the standing committee.

It has also been decided that the opposition alliance will hold a rally in the capital's Naya Paltan area at 3:00pm today.

At around the same time, ruling Awami League-led 14 party alliance will stage a rally at Bangabandhu Avenue protesting "anarchy", AL leader Mohammad Nasim said at a press conference yesterday.

The BNP standing committee meeting, presided over by Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office, urged the people to protest "attacks on Hefajat-e-Islam's peaceful rally" at the capital's Shapla Chattar.

The meeting condemned the government for its "indecent criticism" over the 48-hour ultimatum, MK Anwar, a member of the committee, told the reporters.

He also alleged that activists of the pro-government organisations Chhatra League and Jubo League attacked the lawfully organised rally of Hefajat yesterday.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samik Federation has called for a six-hour work abstention from 6:00am today to protest the death of transport worker Siddiqui Rahman during a clash between Hefajat and law enforcers.

The federation, the country's largest body of road transport workers, will also bring out a protest procession from Phulbaria bus terminal in Dhaka today at 11:30am carrying the coffin of Rahman.

The workers will also hold processions with sticks and black flags across the country.

Also yesterday, Shamsuzzaman Duda, BNP chairperson's adviser, in a statement protested and condemned the attack on the participants of Hefajat's programme. He called upon the law enforcers to stop "attacking and shooting" Hefajat activists and the common people.

Earlier in the day, terming the participants of Hefajat's blockade programme as that by Musafir (travellers), the BNP urged the city dwellers to provide them with food and water.

Killings hike tension in Abyei area disputed by Sudans

AFP, Khartoum

Tension and anger gripped the Abyei region disputed by Sudan and South Sudan yesterday after the killing of a tribal chief and at least one peacekeeper, residents said, as the UN boosted security.

The Sudanese foreign ministry condemned the "isolated incident" which killed Khatun Deng Majok, the top Ngok Dinka leader in Abyei.

Khartoum said members of the Misseriya tribe, the other dominant group in the area, also died in Saturday's incident, along with three peacekeepers from the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA).

The United Nations earlier said one Ethiopian peacekeeper died and two other Blue Helmets were seriously wounded in the "attack by