

Tired hajis toil

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Aftab along with two other fellow pilgrims from the same area was waiting at the entrance to the Hajj Camp in Ashkona having no clue to what to do go home.

Frustration gripped him and his two companions -- Khamir Ali, 90, and Yusuf Ali, 75, after the owner of the bus that was reserved to carry them home had cancelled the trip as hajal supporters vandalised a bus carrying pilgrims the previous day.

The ninety-year-old has none to blame but their fate. Asked what he would do, he only pointed his hand to his forehead and remained silent.

Abdul Malek, assistant hajj officer, told The Daily Star around 5,000 pilgrims had returned from Saudi Arabia in the last two days and 115 of them were languishing in the camp.

Many others left for home as vehicles carrying the pilgrims were out of the purview of hajal, while many were staying with relatives in the capital.

"I have just landed at the airport with no information about the hajal. I don't know how I will reach home at Raninagar in Naogaon," said Ratan Sarkar who works at a construction firm in Dubai.

"My relatives had earlier come to Dhaka and stayed at a hotel in Fakirpuri. I found a CNG-run auto-rickshaw that demanded Tk 1,000 for a trip there," Ratan added.

Many passengers at the airport said they had come hurriedly to Dhaka on Saturday after the hajal was announced. Many of them stayed at relatives' houses, while many others had to check in at different city hotels.

"I left most of my luggage home and could not see off my relatives as I had to hasten to come to Dhaka," said Mohammad Suman of Noakhali.

Many of the migrant workers, who are immensely contributing to the national economy and development by sending remittance, expressed utter dissatisfaction and frustration over the ongoing political unrest.

"It is really unfortunate that we are experiencing miseries due to whimsical political agitations," said Yasin Ahmed of Comilla who returned from Saudi Arabia after five years.

All the 103 Bangladeshi workers, who were scheduled to fly yesterday for plantation jobs in Malaysia under state arrangements, have meanwhile left the country despite the hajal.

They however had to face a bitter experience in reaching Dhaka by early Sunday morning before the hajal hours started.

Haji pilgrim Firoza Begum, 55, who was critically injured in the early hours yesterday in an attack by hajal pickets on a bus carrying 38 pilgrims, was receiving treatment at the intensive care unit at Samorita Hospital.

Earlier, she underwent neurosurgery because of the brain and scalp injuries caused by the attack on the bus to Bogra from Dhaka.

She was sitting beside her husband on the bus when something hit the right side of her skull around 3:30am, Abdur Rashid, a friend of Firoza's husband, told The Daily Star.

She was initially rushed to Mohammad Ali Hospital and was shifted to Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital and finally to Samorita Hospital around 11:00am, Rashid said.

He informed that Firoza and her husband had arrived in Dhaka around 4:00pm on Sunday. They started around 11:00pm for home in the bus hired by their hajj agent.

Rashid said the bus did not have a windshield.

The officer-in-charge of Bogra police said the bus had come under attack near Noymail, Jamalpur on the Dhaka-Bogra Highway.

China keeps heat on Japan in island row

AFP, Tokyo

China yesterday kept up the pressure on Japan over the disputed Senkaku islands, sending its coastguard to the area following Beijing's weekend mention of "war" after Tokyo reportedly readied to down its drones.

Four Chinese coastguard vessels sailed into the territorial waters of the islands -- which Beijing calls the Diaoyus -- on Monday morning, the Japanese coastguard said, where they remained for about two hours.

The manoeuvre came days after China, in one of its strongest statements so far in an increasingly acrimonious spat over the islands, said if Japan fired on its unmanned aircraft it "would constitute a serious provocation, an act of war of sorts".

"We would have to take firm countermeasures, and all consequences would be the responsibility of the side that caused the provocation," China's defence ministry said.

Those comments, published Saturday, came after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe invoked support in Asia for a robust response to what he said was Beijing's attempt to "change the status quo by force".

They also followed reports that Abe had given the okay to a plan to shoot down drones entering Japanese airspace if they did not heed warnings to leave.

On Sunday, he told troops the "security environment surrounding Japan is becoming increasingly severe".

"You will have to completely rid yourselves of the conventional notion that just the existence of a defence force could act as a deterrent."

RPO amended

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the way for making war criminals ineligible for running in the general elections.

The amendment got rid of a section of the RPO that prevented from running in the polls party candidates who had not been in the party for a considerable period of time.

Previously, candidates who had been in a party for three years or more at a stretch from the day he or she filed the nomination papers were allowed to run, reports Bangla daily Prothom Alo.

The newly passed law also increases the security money and election expenditure for candidates in the national election, reports UNB.

It, however, excludes the election expenditure from the expenses to be incurred by the party chief for travelling to various constituencies for electioneering.

Violence escalates

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private TV station Channel 24, leaving a reporter in the capital's Mouchak, while some pro-hajal men beat up a cameraman of Somoy TV in Rajshahi. A district correspondent of Rtv was injured in a clash between the AL and BNP at Kanaikhalia in Natore.

Our district correspondents report: BNP-Jamaat men vandalised houses and looted shops owned by Hindus, uprooted railway tracks in Lalmonirhat, damaged a pilgrim-carrying bus in Bogra, and set fire to AL and Jubo League offices in Pabna.

In Old Dhaka, crude bombs went off on the premises of Dhaka District and Sessions Judge Court, on the rooftop of Dhaka police super's office, and at the entrance to Dhaka deputy commission's office.

Pro-hajal activists also blasted cocktails in more than 100 places in the capital. They set ablaze an AL office at Dania and torched and vandalised at least eight vehicles, including a minibus at Shahbagh, said police.

In Jhenidah, a group of about eight miscreants threw crude bombs on Abul Hossain, 55, president of Harinakundu upazila BNP and chairman of Daulatpur Union Parishad in the upazila, at Daulatpur bazar while he was returning home from office around 12:00 noon.

As Abul fell on the road, miscreants hacked and shot him to ensure his death, said Harinakundu police.

District BNP president Moshiur Rahman accused local AL cadres of committing the murder. Denying the allegation, AL district general secretary Azizur Rahman said Abul was murdered in an internal feud of BNP.

Activists of opposition combine set fire to a Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) office and at least 15 business establishments owned by the ruling party men at Harinakundu upazila.

In Chandpur, at least 20 AL and BNP activists were injured as they fought pitched battles at the town's Puranbazar.

Witnesses said the clash ensued when some ruling party men chased a BNP procession at Loharpur of Puranbazar area around 8:30am.

The rival groups regrouped within four hours and got engaged in another clash. Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas shells to disperse the troublemakers.

A local resident Mohammad Arzu received bullets in his head and other parts of his body and died on way to a hospital.

Although district BNP claimed that Arzu was a Chhatra Dal activist, victim's mother Farida Begum said her son was never involved with any political organisation.

The district administration imposed section 144 in the municipality area till evening today, said Amir Zafar, Chandpur superintendent of police.

In Chittagong, trucker Md Wasim, 32, was going to Cox's Bazar from the port city, with different grocery commodities loaded in his vehicle.

When he was crossing Chheda area of Satcharia upazila, some hajal supporters started hurling brickbats at the truck. Getting panicky,

Wasim lost control of the steering. The vehicle skidded into a roadside ditch, leaving the driver dead, said Nazmul Hasan, assistant superintendent of police (south), quoting witnesses.

On information, police rushed to the spot and recovered the body.

In Lalmonirhat, a passenger train from Shantahar station was derailed as pro-hajal activists uprooted railway tracks near Mohendranagar station in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, leaving at least 50 passengers and the train driver injured.

Some passengers complained that they were mugged by some unidentified masked men when the train was derailed.

Injured train driver Manik Miah said miscreants had uprooted six to seven feet of the track. The number of casualty was less as the train was running slowly, he added.

Hajal supporters also uprooted railway tracks on Lalmonirhat-Burimari land port route near Hatibandha upazila, disrupting train services for few hours.

In Kishoreganj, one Hasan Ali of Batpara in Kuliarchar upazila died of cardiac arrest at Zahirul Islam Medical College Hospital in Bajitpur yesterday evening, said hospital sources.

Mazharul Islam, general secretary of district BNP, claimed that Hasan was a Jubo Dal activist. He fell sick from a tear gas canister lobbed by police during a clash between the opposition activists and law enforcers at Agarpur bus stop.

Subrata Kumar Saha, officer-in-charge of Kuliarchar Police Station, said no such clash took place at that spot.

Meanwhile, at least 50 people, including 10 policemen, were injured in a clash between the opposition and AL activists at Bajitpur bazar in Bajitpur upazila.

The local administration imposed section 144 in Bajitpur to be effective from 5:00am today.

In Narsingdi, Shibir activists hurled two crude bombs on the premises of deputy commission's office, damaging the vehicle of the additional district magistrate.

In Chapainawabganj, miscreants cut the tendons of Chhatra League leader Sabuj Rahman Sweet in his right hand and left leg at Sibganj fishery market in the evening.

Local BCL leaders alleged that Chhatra Shibir men carried out the attack on Sabuj.

Explosion, vandalism, and running battles took place also in Bogra, Pabna, Patuakhali, Noakhali, Brahmanbaria, Dinajpur, Gazipur, Jhendi, Thakurgaon, Pirojpur, Chapainawabganj, Netrakona, Jamalpur, Barisal, Munshiganj, Feni, and some other districts, leaving at least 275 more injured.

Police detained 61 people in the capital and 58 more elsewhere in the country.

SHIBIR MESS RAIDED

Ramna police last night raided a mess of Shibir activists at the capital's Noyatola and detained three Shibir men.

Police said they raided the mess at 11:00pm and recovered 10 crude bombs and bomb making materials.

No love lost between 'em

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carried out the attack," said a minister, quoting Hasina.

Khaleda also told Hasina, "You killed many people after '71," according to the minister, who was present at the meeting.

The Daily Star contacted BNP leaders to get their version.

One of them said when Hasina raised the issue of the August 21 attack, Khaleda said, "I wish you a long life. I also want you to be in politics for long.

"Can you [Hasina] remember? ... If not, you can go through records that you had planned to hold the rally at Muktagan. But without informing anyone, you shifted the rally venue to in front of your office. Why did you do this?"

At one stage, Hasina asked Khaleda why she should celebrate her birthday on the National Mourning Day, when August 15 is not her real birthday, the BNP leader said.

In reply, the BNP chief said, "Many people were born on that day. Won't they celebrate their birthday? I will celebrate my birthday."

AL Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, who was present at the Gono Bhaban during Saturday's conversation, quoted Hasina as saying, "You [Khaleda] visited our Dhanmondi-32 house and saw my younger brother Russell many times. Don't you remember the face of little Russell when you cut cake and celebrate your birthday?"

A BNP leader quoted Khaleda as telling Hasina, "We should look ahead and take the country forward."

He said Hasina accused Khaleda of harbouring politics of killings in the name of anti-government movement.

In reply, Khaleda said, "It's not me; rather it was you and your party that had been involved in killings. Taking Jamaat on its side, your party observed shutdowns for a total of 173 days. You paralysed the whole country and the sea port [in Chittagong]. Your brother [Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim] confessed that people were burnt alive on a bus set alight with gun powder [on a hajal day]

on your instructions."

On Hasina's doubts whether the opposition leader's red phone was really dead, Khaleda said, "The phone line has been disconnected for the last three years. We know you are very powerful, but not powerful enough to make a dead phone ring," according to the BNP leader.

Hasina said she tried to reach Khaleda over the red phone for about half an hour. "I have nothing to say if you [Khaleda] don't speak the truth. I called you several times in the afternoon. Your phone rang. How could it be dead? I don't know whether it was dead or kept dead? I will have it checked," an AL leader quoted Hasina as telling Khaleda.

(The report was prepared before the transcript of the phone conversation was available.)

Charge sheets

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cases, including the five submitted by Ukhia Police Station yesterday, have so far been submitted out of a total of 19 cases.

Md Azad Mian, superintendent of police in Cox's Bazar, ensured the submission of charge sheets, and said police had carried out an extensive investigation for one year to identify the perpetrators in the cases.

In the first information report (FIR), 107 people were accused. Police finally submitted the charge sheets to the court against 161 people.

Advocate Shahjalal Chowdhury, Nayeb-e-Ameer of district unit of Jamaat-e-Islami, and also chairman of Ukhia upazila; his younger brother Sarwar Jahan Chowdhury, general secretary of upazila unit of the BNP; and Sultan Mahmud Chowdhury, organising secretary of the same upazila unit of the BNP, among others, were made accused in the charge sheets, police sources said.

Jamaat leader Shahjalal, however, secured bail from the High Court after being in prison for long.

In early September this year, police submitted charge sheets in seven cases. Of those, Ramu police submitted one, and two each by Ukhia, Cox's Bazar and Teknaf police.

Faruk Ahmed, assistant superintendent of police of Ukhia Circle, said the investigation was at the final stage in the remaining seven cases with Ramu Police Station. The charge sheets of those cases would be submitted soon, he added.

Islamist fanatics ransacked, looted and burnt 12 Buddhist temples in Ramu on September 29 night last year, one of the worst communal attacks in the living memory.

They also looted 50 dwellings and torched 15 houses at Buddhist villages in the area.

The zealots set fire to five Buddhist temples and ransacked two Hindu temples in Ukhia the next day. They also ransacked 11 houses at a Buddhist village in Teknaf the same day.

Police later filed 13 cases in connection with the incidents, while the victims lodged six more cases with four police stations, accusing 15,182 people.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Ramu and Ukhia on September 3 this year, and inaugurated the Buddhist temples reconstructed after the attacks.

Nizami's lawyers continue to skip proceedings

Tribunal now to stop recording testimonies of defence witnesses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

If Nizami's defence lawyers do not show up before the International Crimes Tribunal-1 today, like they did yesterday and the day before, the court would close recording defence witnesses' testimony.

The three-member tribunal, led by Justice ATM Fazlul Kabir, yesterday observed that the lawyers of Jamaat chief Motiur Rahman Nizami were not cooperating with the tribunal.

Since the formation of the tribunals, counsels for Jamaat leaders had been staying absent on hajal days with the excuse of security concerns even though the court on several occasions offered counsels police protection.

The tribunal yesterday also offered police security for senior defence counsel Mizanul Islam. "The car is ready. Police protection will be given immediately after it has been sought," said Justice Kabir.

Junior defence counsel Asad Uddin, who appeared on behalf of senior counsel with a two-day adjournment petition,

said the defence counsels do not feel safe to come to the tribunal under police security.

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