

Amnesty Int'l for moratorium on executions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amnesty International yesterday urged the government to immediately impose a moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition of the death penalty and ensure that political interference does not mar judicial processes.

The organisation made the appeal in a statement issued hours after the Supreme Court upheld the death sentence of Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, a senior leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami, for crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.

Amnesty opposed the death penalty in all cases without exception, regardless of the nature or circumstances of the crime: guilt, innocence or other characteristics of the individual, or the method used by the state to carry out the execution, read the statement.

"The relentless push to impose death sentences in Bangladesh is deeply worrying. After a hiatus of nine months since the last death sentence was announced, three more men have now been sentenced to the gallows in the space of less than a week," said the organisation quoting its researcher Abbas Faiz.

The rights group pointed to the remarks of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Attorney General Mahbubey Alam where the PM, following the verdict of the SC against Kamaruzzaman's appeal, said the death sentences would be carried out. The attorney general also said there would be no possibility of any other judicial remedy.

Although the constitution guarantees the right of defendants to apply for a review of the judgment issued by the Supreme Court as the last avenue of appeal, the attorney general's statement against the possibility of any more reviews appears to undermine this right, it said.

"The outcome of ICT proceedings has become intensely politicised. The government must not bow to political pressure from its supporters, but instead immediately commute all death sentences in the country and impose a moratorium on executions with a view to full abolition," the statement mentioned quoting Abbas.

It also said 140 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Bangladesh was one of only nine countries that carried out executions every year between 2009 and 2013.

NIA team

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The proposed trip has become necessary as the probe into the October 2 blast in a Burdwan house has led to various leads that pointed to alleged involvement of JMB people, sources said.

The NIA last week announced a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh for information leading to the arrest of main accused Kausar, Nasirullah, Sajid (all believed to be Bangladeshis) and West Bengal residents Talha Sheikh and Maulana Yusuf Sheikh.

The blast took place inside a house at Khagragarh, killing one Shakil Ahmed instantly. Another person Sovan Mandal died of his wounds at a hospital. The two were suspected to have terror links.

The NIA, which was being assisted by West Bengal police, was unable to prepare sketches of either Sajid or Nasirullah. During its visit to Bangladesh, the NIA team will try to find out more about the two so that a sketch could be circulated among various police agencies, said sources.

Our diplomatic correspondent adds, New Delhi yesterday formally handed over a report containing the information on the blast and subsequent outcome of primary investigation by the NIA to Dhaka, a Bangladesh foreign ministry source told The Daily Star.

According to the source, the Indian government informed Bangladesh that no substantial evidence has emerged so far to give any clue about the exact plans of JMB on a plot to target Bangladesh government leaders.

Witnesses

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the district in 1971.

On the charge, the tribunal had awarded Kamaruzzaman a 10-year imprisonment which was upheld by the SC yesterday.

Expressing happiness, Hannan's wife Syeda Saleha Begum said: "He [Kamaruzzaman] had tortured my husband. Now he has got what he really deserves."

Meanwhile, Amzad Hossain, president of Sector Commanders Forum's Sherpur unit, yesterday in a rally said they had declared Kamaruzzaman one of the topmost war criminals on November 12, 2008.

"People of Sherpur are happy with the verdict," he added.

Soon after the SC pronounced its verdict yesterday, many inhabitants of Sherpur brought out processions and distributed sweets among themselves at various places.

Ponta leads Romania presidency vote after first round

AFP, Bucharest

Romania's Prime Minister Victor Ponta led the first round of the presidential election according to near-complete results yesterday, but he was pushed harder than expected by his conservative rival.

The European Union is watching the election closely because of fears that Ponta could reverse reforms aimed at tackling rampant corruption in one of the bloc's poorest countries.

Official results from Sunday's voting showed Ponta, a social democrat, took just over 40 percent of the vote after 91 percent of the ballots were counted.

"I am delighted that so many Romanians have voiced confidence in my programme which aims at developing Romania and ending discord," 42-year-old Ponta said.

But the race is tighter than expected, with his main rival, 55-year-old liberal Klaus Iohannis from the German-speaking minority, on 30.5 percent.

The second round will take place on November 16.

Analyst Mircea Kivu said the outcome was far from clear.

"There is still a lot to play for in the second round. Much depends on the instructions given by candidates eliminated in the first round," Kivu said.

The vote is seen as a crucial test for the former communist country at a

time when democracy has suffered setbacks in some neighbouring states such as Hungary, and as the Ukraine crisis has shaken relations between the European Union and Russia.

The election campaign has been marred by scandal, with numerous corruption probes including some aimed at allies of the prime minister, and a settling of scores between Ponta and his long-standing rival President Traian Basescu.

The popular centre-right Basescu, who has accused Ponta of being a former spy, cannot run for a third term. He and Ponta have shared two stormy years at the top of Romanian politics.

Whoever takes over the presidency will face pressing issues including recession and persistent accusations of corruption and bad governance.

Romania's head of state is responsible for foreign policy and top-level appointments such as prosecutors in the second poorest EU country after Bulgaria.

"I think these elections can be a maturity test for Romania," said Corina Rebegea from the Centre for European Policy Analysis in Washington.

The country needs "a president who can imprint a clear sense of vision about how we continue to build a democratic system of governance and rule of law, and prove that 25 years of transition are worth something."

23 Palestinians arrested in east Jerusalem

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli police arrested at least 23 Palestinians in east Jerusalem overnight and during yesterday, Palestinian officials said, in the latest crackdown after months of violent clashes in the Holy City.

But a police spokeswoman confirmed only four arrests, without accounting for the number of people who might have been arrested by other security forces.

Those arrested were from Issawiya and Wadi Joz -- Arab neighbourhoods in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem -- as well as the Old City, the Palestinian Prisoners Club said in a statement.

On Thursday, police shot dead a suspect in the attempted murder of a rightwing Jewish rabbi, sparking a day of clashes between stone-throwing Palestinians and security forces who responded with tear gas and rubber bullets.

The latest arrests came on top of the detention of some 111 Palestinians since October 22 over east Jerusalem violence, according to police figures.

Police have tightened security around east Jerusalem, and yesterday in the neighbourhoods of Issawiya and flashpoint Silwan, roads were barricaded with makeshift checkpoints, local activists said.

Violence soared in the tense eastern sector of the city during the summer, after

the brutal July murder of a Palestinian teenager by Jewish extremists in revenge for the killing of three Israeli teens in the West Bank, and during the ensuing 50-day war in the Gaza Strip.

Clashes have picked up again over the past few weeks, focused mainly on tensions around the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, a disputed holy site sacred to both Muslims and Jews in the heart of Jerusalem's Old City.

N Korea denies role in smartphone hacking in South

AFP, Seoul

North Korea's state media yesterday blasted South Korea's spy agency for alleging that Pyongyang hacked tens of thousands of smartphones in the South using malware disguised in mobile gaming apps.

The South's National Intelligence Service (NIS) said in a report to parliament last week that the North attempted to hack more than 20,000 South Korean smartphones between May and September.

The agency said it had worked with the owners of South Korean websites and government officials to remove the applications and block hacking channels.

Whole week gone

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forced the authorities to reschedule the JSC and JDC exams.

The English first and second paper exams scheduled for tomorrow and November 6 had to be rescheduled for November 19 and November 20. Frustrated, guardians and students alike expressed grave concern about frequent shifting of dates of the exams.

Due to the first round of 72-hour hartal that started from Thursday, the education ministry deferred Bangla first and second paper exams originally scheduled to take place on November 2 and 3 and set November 14 and 15 as the new dates for the exams. This deferral ruined the young learners' preparations and also put undue mental pressure on them.

Apart from the JSC and JDC examinees, tomorrow's hartal has also put some 522 O-level and A-level students in uncertainty as they are yet to know whether their exams scheduled for tomorrow will take place or not.

The exams on accounting, biology and mathematics of O- and A-level students are scheduled to take place tomorrow under Cambridge International Examinations conducted by the British Council at Oxford International School in Dhanmondi and Scholastica, Mirpur branch.

But neither the Bangladesh authorities nor the British Council could say anything if the exams will take place.

Teachers of different English medium schools told The Daily Star that they have informed the authorities about the hartal but are yet to get any reply.

Mohitur Rahman, head of the accounting department at Dhanmondi Tutorial, said students will have to pay dearly if the exams are

cancelled.

On October 29, Jamaat called a 72-hour hartal in two phases protesting the death penalty of its ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami by the ICT-1.

The second phase of the first spell of hartal ended at 6:00pm last evening as Jamaat yesterday announced to shorten it by 12 hours due to holy Ashura today, a government holiday.

On November 2, the party called another nationwide hartal for Thursday in protest against its leader Mir Quasem Ali's death sentence for war crimes.

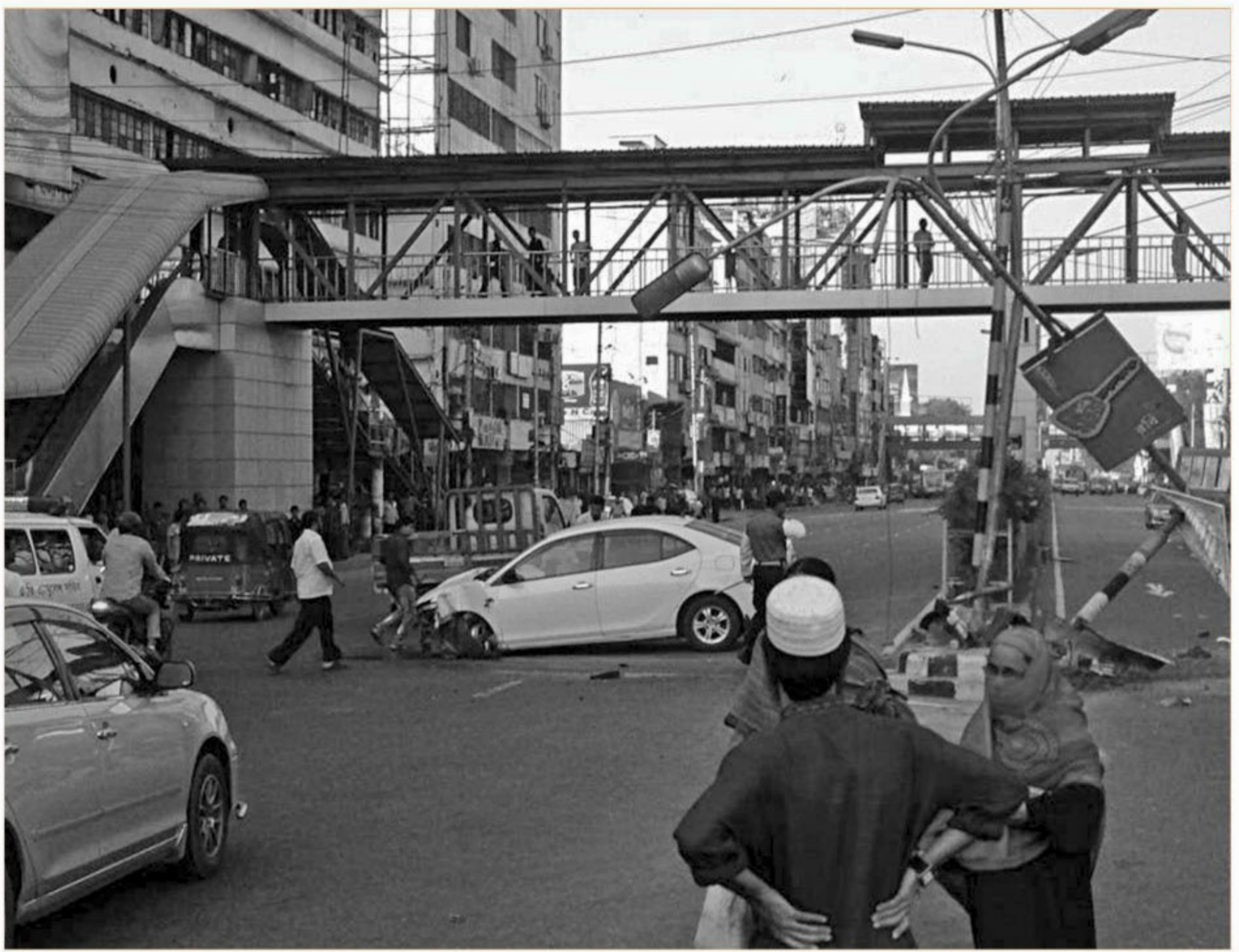
Education ministry said the JDC examinees will have to take their Arabic first and second papers on November 19 and 20 instead of November 5 and 6.

In yesterday's countrywide hartal, the Jamaat-Shibir activists blasted several crude bombs and vandalised five shops and four vehicles in Mohammadpur and Mirpur areas of Dhaka.

Pickets blasted a crude bomb in front of Manipur High School and College around 11:00am, but none was reported hurt in the incident, said Md Atiur, sub-inspector of Mirpur Police Station. Law enforcers detained a man in connection with the explosion, he added.

A huge number of public and private vehicles were seen plying the streets in Dhaka yesterday. Trains and launches operated normally but no long-route buses left Dhaka for other districts from any of the inter-district busterminals.

Police picked up 25 Jamaat-Shibir men from different areas of Dhaka, Chittagong and Bogra amid stray incidents of vandalism. Meanwhile, five people were injured in a clash between the activists of Jamaat and Awami League in Bogra yesterday.



The damaged car stranded on the airport highway near Banani on Thursday afternoon.

Dream gone

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Jafar Sadik, 23, son of Additional Deputy Inspector General Mozammel Hossain of CID, knocked down Mrityunjoy and dragged him yards along the street in Banani area on Thursday afternoon.

The victim died on the spot. Jafar, who was driving his father's Toyota Allion car, could not show any driving licence to police. Soon after the accident, Banani police arrested him and seized the car. He was freed on bail the following day.

The family now fears that they might not get justice. Ujjal, who filed a case with Banani Police Station, said a sticker reading "police" on the windshield was mysteriously removed by someone after the car was taken to the Banani Police Station.

Besides, Jafar was neither handcuffed nor kept in custody, Ujjal said, adding, "Many of Banani police tried to persuade me to negotiate with Jafar's father."

Contacted, Sub-inspector Aminul Islam of Banani Police Station said they treated Jafar as an offender, not as a son of a police official.

The additional DIG went to Mirpur to meet the family on Sunday. He could not be contacted for comments.

SC verdict

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Quader Mollah's case. We will file a review petition in this case as well," he said.

However, Attorney General (AG) Mahbubey Alam said after the Appellate Division delivered its verdict in Quader Mollah's case, a review petition was filed from the defence's side which was dismissed later.

"Besides, we have not yet received any judgment on whether the Appellate Division would allow any review petition," he said referring to the full text of the judgment on Mollah's review petition, which is yet to be published.

The attorney general however opined that there was no scope to file a review petition against the Supreme Court verdict that upheld Jamaat leader Kamaruzzaman's death penalty.

As for the defence's decision to file the review petition, Alam said, "The trial is being held under a special act [The International Crimes (Tribunals) Act-1973] which is a constitutionally protected law."

People of Sohagpur village in Sherpur will be happy with the verdict against Kamaruzzaman, he said referring to the charge on which the war criminal was awarded death penalty by the ICT-2.

The SC bench headed by Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha upheld the death penalty of Kamaruzzaman, by majority view, for killing 164 people at Sohagpur village in Sherpur during the Liberation War in 1971.

Prosecutor Tureen Afroz, in her immediate reaction, told reporters that the prosecution panel was satisfied with the judgment as it "fulfilled the expectation of the nation."

The government too expressed happiness with the Supreme Court verdict. About an hour after the verdict was delivered yesterday morning, Law Minister Anisul Huq too expressed his satisfaction when he was talking to a court correspondent of The Daily Star over the phone.

"The government will take necessary legal steps to execute the verdict against Kamaruzzaman," the minister said. He, however, did not give any detail about the procedure.

Ashura today

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year of 61, Imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh), along with his family members and 72 of his followers sacrificed their lives in the hands of Yazid's soldiers at Karbala desert. He stood for the supremacy of justice and righteousness.

The day is a public holiday. Various religious and social organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes to observe the day.

Shia community members will bring out tazia processions in the capital, marking the day.

Meanwhile, President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia have issued separate messages on the

occasion.

In his message, Hamid said the holy Ashura is significant for establishing truth and justice as well as a mourning day for the Muslims recalling the great sacrifice of Imam Hussain.

"On this day, I wish for unity and the continued progress of the Muslim Ummah alongside establishing a society based on equality and justice," he added.

In her message, Hasina has urged all to reflect the teachings of the holy Ashura in establishing the truth in national life resisting all injustice.

Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and private TV channels will air special programmes highlighting the importance of the day.

All verdicts

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commemoration of the assassinations of four national leaders -- Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, Capt M Mansur Ali and Quamruzzaman.

Referring to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's oft-repeated anti-government movement, Hasina, president of the ruling Awami League, said, "I am urging her to launch a movement, taking people with her and then we will have no problem. But you will have to cut ties with terrorists, militants and war criminals as there is no place for them in the country."

The BNP is finding it difficult to "swallow or spit out" its ally Jamaat-e-Islami. Khaleda can neither cut her ties with Jamaat, nor can she continue her relationship with the party, Hasina said.

Boycotting the January 5 national election was Khaleda's wrong decision, she said, adding that people were not supposed to get punished for her mistakes.

The premier lambasted Khaleda for her remark that the incumbent government is illegal.

"Ziaur Rahman declared himself president illegally and formed BNP in the same manner. So, as the chief of an illegal party, she [Khaleda] always considers everything of the present government illegal."

Hasina accused former president Ziaur Rahman of burying country's democracy by taking over the state power illegally and rehabilitating the anti-liberation forces in politics after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975.

She also accused her special envoy and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad of patronising and rehabilitating the killers of Bangabandhu and the four

national leaders.

The present government was elected through people's mandate, the AL chief said.

The whole world recognised the latest parliamentary election, she said, citing Bangladesh's victory in the battle for the top posts of two global parliamentary forums -- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Inter Parliamentary Union.

Referring to Khaleda's claim that her husband BNP founder Ziaur Rahman was the one who first proclaimed the nation's independence, Hasina asked why she had then inducted two war criminals into her cabinet.

The PM also recalled the contribution of the four leaders, killed in jail on November 3, 1975.

Deputy Leader of the House Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury presided over the rally where AL leaders Tofail Ahmed, Syed Ashrafur Islam, Matia Chowdhury, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and Mohammad Nasim also spoke.

The PM and other leaders and activists of the ruling party and its associate bodies and socio-cultural organisations in the early morning placed floral wreaths at the portrait of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the premises of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi in the capital and the graves of the national leaders at Banani Graveyard.

Talking to reporters at Dhanmondi, AL spokesperson Syed Ashrafur ruled out any possibility of a midterm election.

"There is no need for midterm election at this moment. Election will be held in time in continuation of the democracy."

Deal signed

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Architecture Co, ACE Consultants Ltd (Bangladesh), and DevConsultants Ltd (Bangladesh).

The joint venture was picked from a shortlist of four companies as it got the highest score in technical evaluation, according to the Bridges Division.

World Bank in 2012 cancelled its \$1.2 billion credit for the project over allegations of a corruption conspiracy involving Canadian company SNC Lavalin in appointing the supervision consultant.

Later, the government decided to construct the 6.15-kilometre rail-road bridge with its own fund.

As per the initial plan, one supervision consultant would do the job for the whole project. But now the work has been split into two parts and accordingly, two consultants have been appointed.

Bangladesh Army last year awarded the job of supervising the Jazira and Mawa approach roads and the service area with the assistance of Bangladesh University of Engineering

and Technology (Buet).

The costs of the approach roads, service area and the supervision work will amount to Tk 1,642 crore, of which the army will receive around Tk 206 crore.

China Major Bridge Engineering Construction Company in June got the main bridge construction work for Tk 12,133 crore. It will build the bridge in four years.

The Bridges Division has paid the company 15 percent of the amount as mobilisation advance. The bidder has already started the preparatory work.

Another Chinese firm Sinohydro Corporation Ltd has bagged the Tk 8,778 crore river training job.

Though the Padma bridge project expenses had been estimated initially at Tk 20,507 crore, the costs now have gone up to Tk 23,142 crore, said Bridges Division officials.

If the costs of land acquisition, resettlement of the displaced people and others are considered, the total expenses would be over Tk 25,000 crore.