

Exercise caution

Rights boss to law enforcers tackling blockade violence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Human Rights Commission Chairman Mizanur Rahman yesterday said the law enforcers should be careful while using force to tackle the ongoing blockade violence, and they should make sure that human rights are not violated.

"We think sometimes force should be used to protect people's rights and ensure their security. At the same time, the National Human Rights Commission is urging the law enforcers to exercise caution You have to apply force within the ambit of the law," he told the "Rally for Peace" at the Central Shaheed Minar.

His comments came days after President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had ordered the law enforcement agencies to take stern action to stop the countrywide violence. On Thursday, Amnesty International condemned the government move to use "excessive police force" for containing the violence.

Referring to the statements by the Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, and Asian Human Rights Watch on using "excessive force" by law enforcers, Mizan said, "Please tell us about the ways that should be followed [by the law enforcers] to stop the brutality and the war waged against the common people."

The blockade and hartals, he added, have put the lives of around 15 lakh examinees of SSC and equivalent exams into uncertainty. "Please call off the programmes if you are doing politics for the people's welfare. Don't push the future generation into darkness."

Organised by the NHRC, a procession paraded the city streets from in front of the National Museum at Shahbagh to the Central Shaheed Minar, with the slogan -- "No to Violence and Terrorism".

NHRC members Kazi Reazul Hoque, Prof Mahfuza Khanom and Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed of Dhaka University spoke, among others.

Tigers to test

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Brisbane on February 5.

Bangladesh, according to Australian media reports, on their part have chalked out a plan to stretch Clarke to the limit in the practice match.

"It will be a big loss for Australia if Clarke does not play for them in Australia. He can score as many runs in the practice game as long as he does not score against us during the World Cup," said ace-allrounder Shakib Al Hasan.

Bangladesh's bowling coach Heath Streak added that they might push the field back to try to get Clarke take as many cheeky singles as he can.

Crick Australia confirmed Clarke's inclusion yesterday. The match will give an opportunity for the Australian team management to judge Clarke's fitness levels.

READER'S eye

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FUNNY pics

POLITICS-FREE HOME ... An ad seeking a roommate describes the flat at Chatterwari in Chittagong as "modern and politics free" apparently in bid to ward off pesky tenants.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS



Khaleda without power for 19 hrs

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close aides. She also vowed not to leave the office.

Later around 10:20pm, Desco employees restored the power connection within five minutes keeping nearby street lights switched off.

After snapping and restoring power, the staff left the scene in the shortest possible time. But two of their men, however, could not dodge the media as they lagged behind their team-mates to get on their pick-up van.

Moksed Ali, a limeman who was involved in disconnecting the electricity supply, told the media that they have conducted the drive following directives from Gulshan police.

Another staff, who was involved in the restoration, just said: "On instructions of higher authorities, we have restored the line." He denied disclosing his name and designation.

However, cable, internet and phone lines to the office remained disconnected as of 3:00am today.

The BNP chief earlier had been kept confined to the office for more than two weeks till January 18 in the name of "stepping up her security".

The move to disconnect electricity

and other connections came hours after the BNP on Friday evening called a 72-hour hartal from this morning on top of the ongoing blockade that enters its 27th day today.

BNP's Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed, who announced the hartal through a press release, was detained by the Rab almost at the same time of cutting the connections.

A number of ruling Awami League leaders, who earlier in the day said disconnecting the lines was aimed at forcing Khaleda to leave the office, couldn't say anything about last night's development.

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan, however, claimed that labourers and employees affected by the blockade cut off the lines. "The government did not snap the lines," he told journalists at Madaripur.

The minister at a rally in the capital on Friday afternoon threatened to snap the utility connections to Khaleda's office if she did not call off the anti-government agitations by February 2.

Yesterday evening, Khaleda came up with her reaction through her press secretary Maruf Kamal Khan Sohel, who briefed newsmen at the Gulshan

office.

"This is the government's worst kind of cruelty. I have no words to express my reaction. I am stunned," Maruf quoted her as saying.

Khaleda also said, "A civilized government cannot do this... it is beyond the imagination in a civilized society."

"Cutting off power, cable and internet lines without any notice is violation of my civil and human rights."

Bringing reference to an action of the authorities in 2013 when sand-laden trucks were placed in front of her Gulshan residence to restrict her movement before the January 5 one-sided election, she said, "This time, the government has set a worse example."

"I have passed a sleepless night with my two daughters-in-law following disconnection of power line. It's unprecedented."

A staff of the Gulshan office said, "We were gripped by fear -- why would only madam's office have a power cut? IPS of her room started operating minutes after electricity line was snapped by a team of Desco."

It took about an hour to start the generator. Four drums of fuel were

brought to keep the generator running, he added.

As the government did not allow her to hold a planned gathering on January 5, Khaleda had called the countrywide blockade, which turned violent. As many as 37 people were killed; most of them were burnt to death as arsonists threw petrol bombs on public vehicles.

RIZVI HANDED OVER TO POLICE

The Rapid Action Battalion-1 detained Rizvi Ahmed in Baridhara around 3:00am yesterday.

Lt Col Tuhin Mohammad Masud, commanding officer of Rab-1, said Rizvi was caught from house No 98 on Park Road in Baridhara for his alleged link with the recent violence and subversive activities.

The Rab handed the BNP leader over to Badda Police Station in the afternoon.

Police showed him arrested in a case for a bus arson on January 20 and handed him over to Detective Branch (DB) around 5:00pm, said MA Jalil, officer-in-charge of Badda Police Station.

Rizvi will be produced before a Dhaka court today, the OC added.

Thirteen killed

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Kamal, also a security guard, received 35 percent burn injuries and is in a critical condition, said Burn Institute of DMCH sources.

Rabiul, an injured, said about 40 workers of the factory were working on the ground floor when the fire broke out.

After hearing the explosion, most of the workers escaped through windows and other openings of the building.

One of the deceased was identified as Rashida Begum, 37, of Nalchity upazila of Jhalakathi.

Her son Russell, 19, was working on the first floor and he escaped unhurt.

Eighteen fire engines doused the fire in about an hour and a half. Inside the building, the top floor of which was made of corrugated iron sheets, there were flammable materials, plastics and gas cylinders, believed to be the reason behind the fire spreading fast.

At the scene, law enforcers were struggling to control hundreds of onlookers crowding the spot. A wall of the factory collapsed as over enthusiastic bystanders tried to enter the building after the fire was put out.

During a spot visit, at least five mangled and exploded gas cylinders were seen. There were cracks on several walls of the building.

DMC morgue sources said most of the deceased had been burnt beyond recognition.

A three member probe committee was formed by the fire service. The committee is to submit its report in three days.

10,000 people

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and 3:30pm yesterday.

The action affected users in nearby areas due to shutting down of network equipment.

Grameenphone in a statement said: "On Saturday, January 31, 2015, at 3:38am Grameenphone and other mobile and WiMAX operators received a written directive from the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to restrict access to all mobile services [voice and data] to a specific address in Gulshan-2, Dhaka. The directive is based on 'security reasons' and until further notice. Due to this restriction, Grameenphone's customers in some part of the Gulshan-2 area of Dhaka may experience disruptions on mobile services."

The Daily Star reached out to BTRC Chairman Sunil Kanti Bose over the phone, but he declined to comment.

Our reporter stationed outside Khaleda Zia's office said he had to go either to Gulshan 2 intersection or near Baridhara Lake to make or receive mobile phone calls after 2:00pm yesterday.

"Teletalk users, however, could make calls," he said.

1 killed in petrol bomb

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dead, 26 were common people who had no links with politics.

Police and locals said Gonesh was going to Koddar More point from Sirajganj town by the three-wheeler. When the vehicle reached Ramgati, alleged blockaders threw several petrol bombs at it, burning Gonesh alive around 9:00pm, said Habibul Islam, officer-in-charge of Sirajganj Sadar Police Station.

On the 26th day of blockade yesterday, at least eight buses were torched in different districts including Dhaka, Gazipur, Pirojpur, Gaibandha and Jessore.

For the first time since the beginning of the blockade, two power offices in Magura and Kishoreganj came under arson attack yesterday.

Alleged pro-blockaders hurled several petrol bombs inside Magura power office and blasted a cracker near Kishoreganj power office. There were, however, no casualties.

Magura police denied any such incident took place. Sources at Kishoreganj Sadar Police Station confirmed the blast.

In the capital, two crude bombs went off some 50 yards away from the Gulshan Office of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia around 9:30pm. Police, however, could not arrest anyone in this connection.

In another incident, two television journalists received splinters injuries after alleged blockaders hurled crude bombs at the TSC on Dhaka University campus last evening.

Injured Zahed Selim, staff reporter of Maasranga Television, and Syed Moazzem Hossain, a cameraperson of the TV channel, took treatment at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

One of the alleged bomb throwers, Sourid Zaman, a first-year DU student, was caught by people and handed over to police, sources said.

Meanwhile, three people suffered minor injuries yesterday as suspected blockaders hurled petrol bombs at a

passenger bus in the Sobhanighat area of Sylhet city.

Alleged blockaders hurled petrol bomb at a cattle-laden truck and vandalised five buses in Jhenidah yesterday. None, however, was hurt.

After the attack, alleged activists of Awami League set fire to the district BNP office in Jhenidah around 7:15pm.

In two more incidents, pro-blockaders torched a plum-laden truck in Chapainawabganj and a passenger bus in Narayanganj. None however was injured.

Qaeda in Yemen says France top enemy

AFP, Dubai

The ideological leader of Yemen-based al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) said Friday that France had surpassed the United States as the top enemy of Islam.

With the "weakening" of the United States in recent years, France has replaced America in the "war on Islam," Ibrahim al-Rubaish said in an audio message published by AQAP's media arm on YouTube.

US intelligence agencies consider AQAP to be the most dangerous branch of the jihadist network.

One of the group's ideologues, Nasser bin Ali al-Ansi, has claimed in a video that AQAP was behind the January 7 attack on French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo that left 12 people dead.

Cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed published by the magazine have angered many Muslims.

Western governments say it remains unclear if AQAP directly orchestrated the attack on the weekly, although they do believe one or both of the attackers, brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi, spent time with jihadists in Yemen.

UN chief backs regional force to fight Boko Haram

Clashes kill 3 Chad soldiers, 123 Boko Haram militants in Cameroon

AFP, Addis Ababa

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon yesterday welcomed an African Union proposal to set up a regional five-nation force of 7,500 troops to fight Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamist militants.

Support for the initiative, announced at an African Union summit being held in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa, came hours after the Chadian military said three soldiers and 123 militants were killed in two days of fighting with a Chadian army contingent in northern Cameroon.

"I welcome the decision of the AU and regional countries to establish an MJTF (Multinational Joint Task Force) against Boko Haram," he told reporters on the sidelines of the summit.

"They have committed unspeakable brutality. Those terrorists should be addressed with a regional and international cooperation. Not a single country, even the regional countries, can handle this alone," he said. "The United Nations is ready to fully cooperate with the African Union."

Ban nevertheless said that "military means may not be the only solution."

"There should be very careful analysis of the root causes why this kind of terrorism, and extremism, violent extremism, are spreading," he told reporters.

At least 13,000 people have been killed and more than a million forced from their homes by Boko Haram violence since 2009. The group also carried out the mass abduction of 276 girls from the town of Chibok in April last year.

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