

RISKY LIVING IN CTG HILLS

18 houses demolished

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

To avoid casualties caused by landslides during this monsoon, the Chittagong district administration has launched its eviction drive against the hill dwellers vulnerable to the calamity.

A drive was conducted on the Motijharna hills in the city's Lalkhan Bazar yesterday after the hill dwellers were served notices on Thursday. An announcement about the eviction was also made on Friday, said district administration officials.

However, the evicted families claimed that they were not informed about yesterday's drive.

Led by four executive magistrates of the Chittagong district administration, a team comprising of representatives of police, fire brigade and other government organisations started the drive around 11:20am.

"An announcement was made through loudspeakers in the area before the eviction. During the drive, we found many houses empty as the dwellers had already moved else-

where," said Executive Magistrate Saiful Islam.

Eighteen tin-shed houses were dismantled at Badal Colony in Motijharna area.

Illegal water, gas and power connections to the slums were also disconnected, the magistrate said.

"Nobody served any notice to us or talked about the issue before the eviction," alleged Parvin Begum, who works as a domestic help.

"My husband lives in another place. Now where will I go with my son and two daughters?" she asked.

"If we had got a place to live in from them [the administration], we would never been in such a miserable condition," said Khateza Begum, 60.

Contacted, Abu Hasan Siddique, assistant commissioner (land) of Chittagong, said they did not evict all the hill dwellers on humanitarian grounds. They evicted those who were most vulnerable to landslides.

Landslides killed 127 people in the port city in 2007, 17 in 2011 and 28 in 2012.



Families watch as the administration tears down their homes on the Motijharna hill slope in Chittagong yesterday. The dwellings were deemed vulnerable to landslides during the rainy season. The families alleged they have been rendered homeless without being offered rehabilitation.

PHOTO: STAR



Khaleda critical of connectivity deals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Criticising the recent connectivity deals made with India, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia last night said some heavy vehicles of others will run on the roads without paying and that cannot be friendship.

"Friendship is good, but no one wants to make any friendship sacrificing own interests. It is friendship when it ensures equality, otherwise it becomes slavery," Khaleda said, without mentioning India.

She made the comments while speaking at a views-exchange meeting with Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum of Mymensingh District Bar at her Gulshan office.

"If you want to go to North-Bengal using the Jamuna bridge, you will have to pay toll. But there are some [countries] who will be able to use our country [highways and bridges] without paying anything.

"... Are our roads capable of taking the load? We are not barring them from using our roads, but they should pay," she said.



On the Rampal power plant, the BNP chief said, "We are not against the power plant, as Bangladesh needs electricity. If the coal-based plant is established, the Sundarbans will be destroyed."

She urged relocating the project site.

Lambasting the government for providing Bangabandhu family members with 19 kinds of facilities, she alleged that the family members get all the facilities and the rest of the people of the country get nothing.

"The country is now under the rule of one family. In fact it is a monarchy, while people have no basic rights."

She criticised the government for "firing" and "harassing" several BNP-backed mayors in different city corporations.

She claimed that the last polls to city corporations proved that no fair elections could be held by the Awami League government.

Police are more powerful than the government. The police say that they have kept the Awami League in power, she said.

Thousands flee as Syria Kurds advance

AFP, Akcakale

Kurdish forces pressed their advance on a strategic jihadist-held town in northern Syria yesterday as terrified residents fled in droves and were pushed back from the Turkish border.

Backed by Arab Syrian rebel factions and air strikes by the US-led coalition, Kurdish militia were closing in on Tal Abyad, a town used by the Islamic State group as a gateway from Turkey into its bastion province of Raqa.

Kurdish sources say the goal is to cut off a crucial supply line for the jihadists, who have been accused of bringing in foreign fighters and supplies across the Turkish border.

Many from the area's mixed population of Arabs and Kurds were fleeing in anticipation of a major battle, and thousands were gathered behind barbed wire fences around the Turkish border crossing of Akcakale, an AFP photographer reported.

As they had on Saturday, Turkish troops were preventing anyone from crossing, sporadically firing water cannons to ensure the Syrians stayed back from the fence.

Flood-hit people face drinking

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situation worsens.

Those marooned and living on embankments and roads alleged that they were facing shortage of food and drinking water but the authorities have not yet come up with relief materials.

"Most poor people of the flood-hit areas are facing acute crisis of food and drinking water. They are gathering and waiting for relief every day, but no organisation has come up to help yet," said Abdul Gafur, Jattrapur UP chairman, in Kurigram.

Around 40,000 people of 42 unions in Kurigram have been marooned by the Brahmaputra, Dudhkumar, Dharla, Teesta and the Gangadhar rivers overflowing.

The plying of heavy vehicles via Bhurungamari-Sonahat Land Port Road has been suspended as about 50 metres of the road was eroded by the Dudhkumar river yesterday.

In Gaibandha, the Brahmaputra was flowing 21 cm above the danger mark at Fulchari yesterday, flooding fresh areas.

Over 25,000 people have been marooned in char areas of Gaibandha, while many are living with cattle and poultry on embankments and roads.

Cracks have developed in the Singria Flood Control Dyke at three places prompting the Water Development Board (WDB) to sand-bag the embankment.

Many of the 10,000 people living on embankments in Shariakandi and Dhunat upazilas of Bogra said they were in dire need of relief materials.

The Jamuna was flowing 14cm above the danger level at Shariakandi and the partial collapse of a flood control embankment on Friday aggravated the flood situation.

Around 400 families in four unions of Bhuapur upazila in Tangail lost their homes to the mighty Jamuna.

The Bhuapur-Tarakandi Road, which also serves as an embankment, schools, police outposts, mosques, temples, and poultry farms were under threat of being devoured, locals said.

Meanwhile, around 220 metre area of Sirajganj Flood Protection Embankment at Sirajganj was eroded yesterday. Some 400 houses and a huge area of cropland were damaged in Chowhali upazila in Sirajganj.

The river devoured parts of six schools in Chowhali.

Kamrul Islam of Chowbarisa in Chowhali claimed that WDB was negligent in protecting the embankment, which made hundreds homeless.

Some 7,000 families in five upazilas of Sunamganj were under threat of inundation as the water of the Surma, Cholti, Patli and the Jadukata rivers were likely to go over the danger level in the next two days, WDB officials said.

Even though the people now homeless moved to nearby flood protection embankments, roads and other places, they were passing days in misery under the open sky. They need drinking water and food, locals said.

Firoj Khan, deputy-assistant agriculture officer in Sunamganj, said,

"Many farmers are being forced to sell off their domestic animals at throw away prices as they try to deal with the miserable situation."

Our district correspondents contributed to this report.

Three shot dead

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Around 7:00am yesterday, some criminals sprayed bullets targeting the house, leaving the three dead on the spot. The other UPDF men managed to flee.

The killers also set the house on fire while leaving the spot, added locals.

Niron Chakma, head of UPDF's information department, blamed their rival Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) cadres for the killing.

Sajeeb Chakma, assistant information and publicity secretary of the PCJSS, denied the allegation.

Abul Kalam Azad, officer-in-charge of Longodu Police Station, said following information they recovered the bodies from the house.

Later, the bodies were taken to Rangamati Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

UPDF and its associate bodies brought out a procession at Kutukchari union under Sadar upazila to protest the killing.

Rakhi Chakra, wife of Juddo Moni Chakma, filed a case with Longodu Police Station against some unknown accused.

Why Khaleda didn't meet Pranab

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anything happened to me, the blame would have been pinned on Jamaat-e-Islam," she said.

This was the "game plan of her opponents" and this is why the meeting was called off, the BNP chief added.

"Today I am sharing with you the real story," Khaleda told The Sunday Guardian in an interview published yesterday.

"I had to call off my meeting with the President then as we received inputs that had I gone there to meet him, I would have been attacked. In fact there could have been a life threat. And if you recall, at that very spot near his hotel which I was supposed to cross, there was a petrol bomb explosion," she told the New Delhi-based weekly.

The Sunday Guardian caught up with Khaleda, also a former prime

minister, at her Gulshan office just hours after she met Indian PM Narendra Modi on June 7.

Asked about growing criticism for her ties with Jamaat-e-Islami, Khaleda said, "Jamaat is our alliance partner and that's it. In the alliance they have to listen to the BNP."

Talking about her meeting with Modi, she alleged the Hasina government had tried to thwart her meeting with Narendra Modi in Dhaka. "The government tried whatever they could do to stop the meeting."

"Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali publicly ruled out 'any possibility' of my meeting PM Narendra Modi during his stay in Bangladesh. But then New Delhi put out the facts straight," Khaleda said. "How can you justify this?"

Without mentioning any specifics,

she said her meeting with Modi was "satisfactory." "It was a one-on-one meeting, you see. I cannot really spell out what all we talked about, but it was definitely a very satisfactory meeting."

Asked about her party's widely known anti-India stance, Khaleda said, "Why should I be anti-India?"

She alleged there is a concerted propaganda by the ruling government trying to paint her as "anti-India and anti-Hindu."

"There is well-oiled propaganda machinery that works relentlessly to project me and BNP as anti-India."

India and Bangladesh have had very strong bonding, she said and added, "We recognise full well the contribution India made for our liberation. Prime Minister Modi's visit is aimed at strengthening India-Bangla ties further."

No trace of 598

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of the list.

And, the stories they told were similar to those of other victims of the modern-day slave trade, as the clandestine business is often called.

The victims were lured by traffickers with promises of lucrative jobs in Malaysia. Then they were put on boats and taken to some jungle in Thailand from where the traffickers called the victims' relatives in Bangladesh and demanded ransom. Some paid, some failed but all of them were yet to get their near ones back home.

Delwar Hossain of Habiganj paid Tk 2.1 lakh on May 15 for the release of his younger brother Emdadul Hossain, who left home for Malaysia on April 2.

On June 6, he got a phone call from an unknown person who told

him that his brother was held hostage in a camp. The next day, he called that number and talked to his brother.

"My brother said he was taken to a Thai detention centre along with some 20 or 25 Bangladeshis. He cried to me and requested me to immediately arrange his return. But an unknown man then told me over the phone that we must pay Tk 1.20 lakh for my brother's release from the Thai jail.

"The traffickers kept pressing for the money. They called me even this morning [yesterday]," Delwar said.

However, Harun Al Rashid of CARAM Asia said they had information that Emdadul along with 19 others were rescued by Thai authorities on Saturday from a camp run by the traffickers.

Not everyone was as lucky as

Delwar and Emdad.

Take Halima Akter of Arahazar upazila in Narayanganj. Her husband Royel Mia left home for Malaysia in March with two other relatives. But now she has no clue to his whereabouts.

"He was the lone breadwinner for our six-member family. Now I cannot afford to send my children to school. My little sons have to work as day labourers for our livelihood," she said.

Relatives of six more victims from the same area were also present at the NHRC office.

Mosharraf, Abu Hanifa, Afsar Uddin, Sabuj, Mainuddin and Sharif -- all aged between 15 and 20 -- left home between March and April this year. Since then, their families are in the dark about their fate, the relatives said.

Khaleda follows in Zia's footsteps

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As Gen Zia gradually grabbed state power and transformed himself into a political leader, he introduced his own style of politics -- which appeared as a blessing for the anti-liberation forces and religion-based political parties.

In his efforts to consolidate his position in politics, Zia did not hesitate to make anti-liberation leader Shah Azizur Rahman a minister in 1978 and the prime minister the following year.

In 1978, Zia also made Abdul Alim a minister. Alim was convicted of crimes against humanity in 2013.

The military ruler also picked Justice Abdus Sattar as his vice president. Sattar had worked as Pakistan's Chief Election Commissioner after the independence of Bangladesh and he returned to Bangladesh later on. After Zia's assassination, Sattar kept on pursuing Zia's politics and appointed Shah Aziz as the prime minister again in 1981.

Gen Zia amended the constitution through martial law proclamations in 1977 lifting a constitutional ban on religion-based politics. This opened the door for anti-liberation political parties including Jamaat-e-Islami to resume activities in independent Bangladesh. Jamaat and some other parties had been constitutionally banned after the country's independence for their role against the country's Liberation War in 1971.

In addition, the Collaborators Order of 1972 was earlier repealed in the interest of anti-liberation politicians as the law had disenfranchised those parties and politicians who had opposed the birth of Bangladesh.

Eminent political scientist Rounaq Jahan in her latest book "Political Parties in Bangladesh" analysed that these leaders then became Zia's political allies and gradually became rehabilitated in Bangladesh politics.

Around 11,000 alleged collaborators who were detained under the

Collaborators Order were also released by Gen Zia.

Zia also deleted secularism from the constitution for the same purpose. He did all this with the goal of strengthening his political power base.

BNP's senior leader Moudud Ahmed, who was an influential leader and minister of Zia's government, recalls the politics of Zia in his book "Democracy and the Challenges of Development."

He writes that as the party in power the BNP attracted all sorts of people into its fold -- the conservative right, Freedom Fighters, collaborators, communists, secularists, touts, opportunists and shameless sycophants -- all of them had to be accommodated.

"His (Gen Zia) sole aim was to maintain a balance between these widely divergent forces and in this he was successful. As a result every committee he formed was a mixed group that helped establish his own preeminence at the cost of cohesion and com-

radeship," writes Moudud.

Now come to the politics of the BNP under Khaleda Zia's leadership.

The BNP led by Khaleda had forged an unofficial compromise with the anti-liberation force Jamaat in some constituencies in the parliamentary election in 1991 to defeat the Awami League. The BNP also extended support to some Jamaat backed candidates in the same way.

Khaleda's BNP, after winning the 1991 election, made anti-liberation leader Abdur Rahman Biswas Speaker of the parliament. Within six months, he was elected the President of Bangladesh on BNP's nomination in October 1991.

In so doing, Khaleda followed in the footsteps of her husband Zia who had made Biswas a minister of his cabinet in 1979.

Khaleda Zia, however, had taken it to the next level.

During Gen Zia's regime, anti-liberation politicians were given

important positions in the government only after they had joined the BNP.

But Khaleda Zia had shared power with Jamaat directly after winning the 2001 polls in which BNP and Jamaat were electoral alliance. She inducted Jamaat's Ameer Matiur Rahman Nizami into her cabinet and gave him important portfolios -- first the agriculture and later the industries.

She also made Jamaat's secretary general Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed a technocrat minister.

Both Nizami and Mojaheed were sentenced to death by the International Crimes Tribunal on charge of committing crimes against humanity during the liberation war in 1971.

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 last year, while delivering the verdict in the Nizami case, strongly denounced the appointment of Nizami as a minister by the then BNP-led government in 2001.

The court said the appointment was a great blunder and a clear slap in the face for the Liberation War as well as three million martyrs and two lakh women who had sacrificed their honour for the liberation of Bangladesh.

The "slap in the face for the Liberation War" has no meaning to the BNP high commands.

For them, electoral alliance with Jamaat is a winning strategy for elections, as they did in 2001.

Together they had waged unprecedented violent street agitations in several phases against the AL-led government since 2013, but their agitation failed.

Khaleda still opts for maintaining a tie with Jamaat for returning to state power by winning the election. This clearly shows that she is following the political philosophy of Zia to consolidate power base by any means. Till date Khaleda Zia has not really done anything that disowns the anti-liberation forces.