

Khaleda's speech is spiteful

Says Obaidul Quader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Khaleda Zia's remarks were nothing but an expression of spite towards Sheikh Hasina, said ruling Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader in his reaction to BNP Chairperson Khaleda's comments at the Suhrawardy Udyan rally yesterday.

About the BNP's chief demand for a non-partisan interim administration for holding the next national election, Quader said the polls would be held under the Election Commission, like most other countries.

The government will assist the commission in holding a free, fair and credible election, he said, adding, "The election will not be held under any partisan government."

Quader, also road transport and bridges minister, was giving his reaction to reporters at AL president's Dhanmondi office about the BNP

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



The usual congested street in front of Gabtoli Bus Terminal was almost empty yesterday as police stopped vehicles entering Dhaka at Amin Bazar and searched them, top right. This caused long queues on Dhaka-Aricha highway forcing many passengers, bottom right, to get down from buses and walk.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

People suffer as transport kept off roads

FROM PAGE 1
and her husband got down from the bus at Hemayetpur and started walking, braving the scorching heat.

"We walked all the way from Hemayetpur to Gabtoli," she said, handing over her ailing baby to her husband.

Like them, thousands of commuters heading towards the capital from nearby districts suffered immensely as police stopped vehicles near the entrance to the city to conduct searches before the BNP rally.

Talking to this newspaper, Additional Superintendent (Dhaka district) of Police Saidur Rahman said they had set up checkpoints on the highway to ensure security of people. He declined to speak further.

The sufferings of Dhaka-bound commuters were compounded by a shortage of transport.

Seeking anonymity, a bus driver in Narayanganj alleged that they were instructed by the transport owners' association not to hit the roads yesterday.

A bus conductor of the VIP Transport service on Dhaka-Gazipur route also echoed his words.

Contacted, Khandakar Enayetullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, dismissed the allegation of giving any such instructions.

He claimed that the presence of public buses on the city roads was normal. But the number of buses coming to Dhaka was less than usual as some owners decided to keep their vehicles off the roads for fear of vandalism.

"We all know what the BNP did during its blockades [in 2015]. We have seen violence and attacks on

vehicles at that time," said Enayetullah, also vice president of Dhaka city AL unit (south).

However, there was a lack of transport in the capital and people were seen waiting for long at bus stops in Mirpur, Farmgate, Paltan and Gulistan areas. Failing to get any transport, many of them returned home.

Besides, roads around Suhrawardy Udyan saw traffic congestion due to the BNP rally. Hundreds of vehicles were stuck in long tailbacks between Paltan and Shahbagh.

Talking to this newspaper, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed alleged that the government suspended public transport services to bar the leaders and activists of the party and its allies from entering the city so that they cannot attend the rally.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and

Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said it needs to be investigated who barred BNP leaders and workers from joining the rally.

"When we looked into their allegations in the past, we didn't find any basis of those," he said at a programme in the city.

DISRUPTION IN BUS SERVICE

Seeking anonymity, a staffer of Village Line bus service on Dhaka-Manikganj route, said 17 buses of the company left the capital for Manikganj from 6:00am while only one could reach the city from Manikganj till 1:00pm.

"Pro-ruling party transport leaders told us not to operate buses for two to three hours," said the staffer around noon, adding that around 50 buses of the company ply the route every day.

Ayub Ali, president of Bandhan Paribahan Owners Association in

Narayanganj, said they stopped the service as transport workers didn't join work.

"We owners didn't stop the service [on Dhaka-Narayanganj route]," he told our Narayanganj correspondent.

Narayanganj Minibus Owners Association President Moktar Hossain said some buses left for the capital but those were forced to stop near Shanir Akhra.

These buses didn't return and the service was halted, he added.

Asked who obstructed the buses near Shanir Akhra, he refused to say anything.

In Gazipur, commuters were seen waiting for transport at several bus stops.

Talking to our Gazipur correspondent, district BNP President Fazlul Haque Milon said police allowed public buses and other transports to leave the capital, but they prevented

those from entering the city.

Saleh Uddin Ahmed, assistant superintendent of police (traffic division) in Gazipur, however, said they didn't obstruct any vehicles. Rather, transport workers avoided the route to the capital yesterday.

Asked why they did so, he didn't give any reply.

In Munshiganj, many commuters were seen waiting for buses at different points on Dhaka-Mawa highway in Louhajang upazila since morning due to a sudden halt to Dhaka-bound bus services from Shimulia Ghat bus stop.

Asked why the services were suspended suddenly, transport workers at the bus counters kept mum.

Anisur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Louhajang Police Station, said, "I have heard about it but don't know the reason."

Non-partisan govt a must

FROM PAGE 1
minister during the next parliamentary election scheduled to be held at the end of 2018 or early 2019.

The BNP has been asking for an election-time non-partisan government. But the ruling party's position remains unchanged.

Khaleda's strong opposition to the election with Hasina in power comes against this backdrop.

"Election will not be held under Hasina," the BNP chief said at the rally.

She said the BNP had placed some proposals before the EC and urged it to accept the proposals for an inclusive and fair election.

She also said that she preferred army deployment over electronic voting machines (EVM).

"Why does the CEC talk about EVMs? It means that they listen to the government. EVMs will not do. Army should be deployed for the polls."

Khaleda added that she does not

oppose police presence during the polls. "But Hasina's cadres have got arms, with which they are regularly killing people. If the army is not deployed, they will take over the polling stations. The army must be engaged and given power, so that they can work."

Holding the rally in Dhaka after 18 months, Khaleda called for national unity to bring what she called a qualitative change in politics.

Khaleda also urged the AL to "learn its actual popularity" by holding the next election under a neutral government. "People are waiting for a change in power."

"We say, you have been in power by force for a long time."

The AL, she said, is so engaged in killing, enforced disappearances and other misdeeds that if voted to power, her party will purify AL.

"Unlike you, we will not do politics of vengeance. Unlike you, we will not

pick people up, put them in jail or kill them. We do not pursue the politics of violence.

"But we want to purify you. We will launch a purge to do so... We will try to turn you into true human beings."

She started her hour-long speech with an allegation that the government blocked roads and suspended traffic at different points to keep the BNP leaders and activists from joining the rally.

"They [ruling party] even tried to create obstacles for me on the road. Empty buses were parked on the road. They have shown how mean they are. It is not possible to do politics or do something good for the country with such mean-mindedness."

People heading towards Dhaka suffered a lot as transport services from nearby districts were disrupted. People in the capital suffered shortage of transport as well.

The former premier urged political parties to unite, acknowledging that

there would be differences of opinion in multi-party democracy. "But we all need to unite for the interest of the country and the people."

She alleged that the government was afraid of people's representation in democracy. That is why the AL is trying to restore one-party ruling system Baksal.

Khaleda said she pardoned the AL for its misdeeds but did not know whether people of the country will do the same.

"I say, to bring back the congenial atmosphere of the country and to bring back democracy, good governance, rule of law and accountability, a change is required.

"Election is the only way to bring that change. Voting rights should be returned," she said, adding that a neutral administration ensured that people could cast their votes without fear.

Describing what she said a gloomy picture of the country's economy and financial institutions, the former pre-

mier alleged that the ruling party men has been plundering public money and national resources in the name of development.

Citing different international organisations' data, Khaleda said money was being siphoned off the country and invested in off-shore companies. Names of people appeared on "Panama Papers", but no action was taken.

The BNP chief also alleged that Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha was sent abroad forcibly and that he wanted to return home.

"Sinha has spoken some truth. That is why he was forced to resign. He said a few days ago that the lower court is controlled by the government that now wants to control the apex court as well."

Saying that Rohingya influx was a big problem for the country, Khaleda called upon the USA, UK, European Union, China, India and Russia to mount pressure on the Myanmar gov-

ernment to take Rohingyas back to their motherland.

Although the rally was scheduled for 2:00pm, party leaders and activists began to arrive at the venue since morning. It was almost full by 3:00pm. Wearing a white saree, Khaleda took the stage at around 3:30pm as party leaders and activists cheered.

The banner on the stage read, public meeting demanding restoration of democracy and free and fair election on the occasion of national revolution and solidarity day.

The BNP leaders and activists thronged the venue carrying placards, festoons, and colourful pictures of party founder Ziaur Rahman, Khaleda Zia and Senior Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman. Aspirant candidates showed off of their followers to be noticed by the party high ups.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir chaired the programme.

Rohingya women gang-raped

FROM PAGE 1
efforts and humanity will be remembered in history and her office stands ready to amplify the voices of the survivors and to bridge them to the international community in order to keep a spotlight on this crisis.

"This includes keeping the spotlight of international scrutiny on the perpetrators. I want the survivors to know that they are not alone; I also want to ensure that the government of Bangladesh will not be alone in coming to their aid."

She said they observed a pattern of widespread atrocities, including sexual violence against Rohingya women and girls who have been systematically targeted on account of their ethnicity and religion.

"A clear picture is emerging from the alleged perpetrators of these atrocities and their modus operandi. Sexual violence is being commanded, orchestrated and perpetrated by the Armed Forces of Myanmar."

Other actors involved include the Myanmar Border Guard Police and militias composed of Rakhine Buddhists and other ethnic groups.

She also mentioned about other forms of sexual violence like forced public nudity and humiliation, and sexual slavery in military captivity.

"Several sources informed us that some women and girls have been literally raped to death," said the UN envoy.

She said some of the Rohingyas expressed their willingness to return home, provided they would be granted citizenship and equal status while others said they have



Pramila Patten

nothing left to return but ashes.

"The wounds are extremely raw. Women and girls dissolved into tears when recounting the extreme brutalities they both endured and witnessed," said the UN envoy.

Patten said one woman shared three concrete recommendations that made a deep impression on her.

"We want peace, we want a leader who can take responsibility of our community and we want a safe place where we can share our stories with our sisters," Patten quoted the Rohingya woman as saying.

She said all the women she spoke with wanted to see the perpetrators punished. "They all -- without exception -- demanded justice. And yet, not a single soldier or commander has been called to account for these atrocities."

Appreciating the role of the government, Patten said Bangladesh not only opened borders for Rohingyas but also opened their homes and hearts.

Upon her return to New York, the UN envoy will brief the

Secretary General on the situation she observed on the ground.

Her office will compile the annual report of the Secretary General on conflict-related sexual violence to be presented to the Security Council next March which includes a dedicated section on Myanmar.

She laid emphasis on intensifying pressure on Myanmar and said the UN Security Council could also establish a mechanism to investigate the crimes.

Patten said she will also discuss the issue with the President of the International Criminal Court during her meeting soon.

Responding to a question, she said what has happened could be crimes against humanity and it could also be genocide and others have called it ethnic cleansing, but she first wants to analyse the information she acquired.

The UN envoy visited Bangladesh to better understand the patterns and trends of the sexual violence related to the conflict in Myanmar.

The special representative visited several field locations, including the Bangladesh-Myanmar border itself.

She met relevant Bangladeshi authorities in Dhaka and Cox's Bazar, including the security services, to discuss strengthened collaboration and coordination with the UN to respond to sexual and gender-based violence, as well as potential protection concerns arising from the unprecedented influx of Rohingyas into Bangladesh.

PM, please intervene

FROM PAGE 1
Mubashar, a researcher of political Islam and assistant professor of political science at NSU, disappeared after he had left his workplace around 4:30pm on Tuesday. Police said he last talked with someone over his cellphone at 6:41pm when he was near Lions Eye Hospital at Agargaon.

He is among a host of individuals who might have fallen victim to either abduction or forced disappearance in recent months. At least nine people, including journalist Utpal Das, book importer Tanvir Yasin Karim and some political leaders, have gone missing since August 22.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan has meanwhile said law enforcers are working and will be able to rescue those, including Mubashar and Utpal, who went missing in recent months.

"Detectives are investigating. We are sure we will be able to rescue them at any moment," he told reporters, emerging from a programme marking the fourth anniversary of Marine Police in the capital yesterday.

The minister urged all to have patience.

Yesterdays human chain was formed in continuation of citizens' raising voice in public and social media demanding the administration's prompt step for his safe return. NSU will organise a human chain on its campus tomorrow to press home their demand to rescue the faculty member immediately.

Former students of the department and journalists including Zahid Newaz Khan of Channel-i, Shafiqul Alam of AFP Bangladesh Bureau, Shariful Hasan of Brac, Rakib Hasnet

concerned to trace Mubashar as soon as possible and said the state must take the responsibility for his sudden disappearance and find him.

"Disappearance of a person without any clue is unacceptable," he observed.

Speaking at the human chain, Mubashar's younger sister Tamanna Tasmin alleged a few media houses were publishing "baseless stories" against her brother. She said if anyone has proof in support of their claim, they should talk to her family.

She demanded prompt and unconditional steps from the administration to trace her brother. "I want my brother back, safe and sound," she added.

Prof Robayet Ferdous of the department