

Slogans of solidarity reverberate

Protests continue to rage against communal attacks

STAR REPORT

On a day that saw a new round of vandalism in Habiganj, protests against the communal attacks continued across the country yesterday.

Hindu community members, rights groups, and people from all strata of life held sit-ins, hunger strikes, and torch light vigils condemning the recent spate of violence that spread after the initial attack in Cumilla on October 13.

In Dhaka, Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Oikya Parishad organised a sit-in and hunger strike at the Shahbagh intersection to press home their demands, including formation of a judicial probe commission to investigate the violence.

Hundreds of people joined the demo that started around 6am. After the programme ended around 11:30am, protestors blocked the intersection for an hour.

In a statement, parishad leaders said they will hold a march to the Prime Minister's Office next February if their demands are not met.

They also announced that Hindu devotees will boycott the traditional Dipabali Festival on Shyama Puja on November 4, and instead observe 15 minutes of silence covering their faces with black cloth.

The Oikya Parishad also demanded compensation for all temples, homes and businesses affected by the attacks, along with identification and action against members of

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As news of fresh attacks in Thakurgaon and Habiganj broke, the country was swept across by another day of protests. Clockwise, Feminists Across Generations held a torch light vigil in front of the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka; Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Oikya Parishad held a number of sit-ins and hunger strikes across the country, including at Shahbagh intersection in the capital, in the port city's Anderkilla area, in front of Barishal city's Ashwini Kumar Hall, at Khulna city's Picture Palace Mor and in Manikganj town.

PHOTO: STAR

DEMANDS

- Formation of judicial commission to investigate violence
- Compensation for all temples, homes, businesses affected by attacks
- Action against members of admin, law enforcement who failed to contain violence
- Restoration of 1972 constitution
- Enactment of Minority Protection Act
- Speedy implementation of minority commission

The Minority Protection Act should be enacted as promised before the eleventh parliamentary election as well as a speedy implementation of a minorities' commission.

RANA DASGUPTA

It's a big question why the head of state, head of government, opposition leader, chief of police and others did not visit the affected people. It is unacceptable.

SYEDA RIZWANA HASAN

Abused there, stigmatised here

Sufferings of female returnee workers far from over even after returning home

ISSUES

- Regularly subjected to unwanted remarks
- Face 'change of social attitude' towards them
- Get decision-making power curtailed
- Face more judgmental attitude

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Community-level awareness
- Social protection system
- Minimum wage structure
- Separate protection cell



They [female returnee workers] are no longer respected, they cannot raise their voice, and in many cases, they do not come out of home despite having no such restriction.

MANIRUL ISLAM
DEPUTY DIRECTOR (RESEARCH) OF BILS

JAMIL MAHMUD

Afroza Begum (not her real name) worked for three-and-a-half-years as a domestic help in Saudi Arabia.

In the gulf country, she endured long working hours and was not paid her due wage regularly. Yet, the 25-year-old from Faridpur continued her stay, all to support her ailing husband back home.

That is, until her return to Bangladesh in September last year.

It wasn't just financial woes -- nothing she experienced upon her return was pleasant. In her community, she kept facing derogatory remarks from a section of people.

"A lot of people hurled dirty words at me," she said. "They weaved stories around me and made light of the female migrant workers' never-ending struggle with sexual exploitation."

Afroza's case is far from the only one. According to a recent report by Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies

(BILS), returnee female migrant workers are regularly subjected to social stigma in the form of unwanted remarks from their communities.

The report, titled "Social and Economic Reintegration of the Returnee Female Migrant Workers: Success and Sorrows", stated 52 percent of the 323 returnees interviewed felt there was "a change of social attitude" towards them after the return.

The report found that the workers were treated as "low-class people", got their decision-making power curtailed, and faced more judgmental attitude from the community.

Besides, they were often subjected to derogatory remarks and became a common topic of gossip, says the report, published on September 27.

However, the report found that none of them made any formal complaints to any authority in this regard.

Another returnee, who worked in

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BNP infected with 'suspicion' virus

Says Quader

Bss, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday asked BNP leaders to make it clear whether the party is claiming responsibility for the communal attacks and violence against the country's Hindu community in 2001 after it came to power.

Quader, also road, transport and bridges minister, said this while addressing a press briefing at his residence in the capital.

In response to BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru's remark that no communal tension happens without the government abetting it, Quader said, "So is BNP now claiming responsibility for the communal tension in 2001? I expect the BNP leaders will make their position clear to this end."

Referring to Fakhru asking about Iqbal Hossain's whereabouts before he was arrested for placing the



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Hidden force controlling country

Alleges Fakhru

UNB, Dhaka

Stating that a plot to turn Bangladesh into a "communal state" is present, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday alleged that an "hidden" force is now controlling everything.

"We're always under surveillance... The power of an invisible force... is so deep-rooted that it's now controlling the country, its people and our society," he said.

Speaking at a discussion, the BNP leader said their party has been fighting for democracy amid an adverse situation. He called upon all opposition political parties to get united, putting aside misunderstandings and divisions

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The man in white and all that he stood for

Syed Abul Maksud remembered



Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury speaks about Syed Abul Maksud at a commemorative discussion yesterday, marking the journalist-columnist's 75th birth anniversary at The Daily Star Centre.

PHOTO: STAR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a commemorative discussion yesterday said journalist-columnist Syed Abul Maksud was a true patriot, who used his attire as a symbol to lodge a "one-man protest" against imperialist aggression.

Maksud was a tireless advocate of the disadvantaged and marginalised, as a writer as well as an activist, they noted.

Syed Abul Maksud Smriti Sangsad organised the discussion on "Syed Abul Maksud: Life and Glory" at the capital's The Daily Star Centre to observe his 75th birth anniversary.

Maksud died in February this year. Addressing the discussion, Prof Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury of

Dhaka University said Maksud's departure has created an irreplaceable void in the country's intellectual arena.

"He was a living archive," said Prof Serajul, adding that Maksud's presence is even more needed in the present-day situation, when the nation is undergoing a crisis.

Presiding over the discussion, Prof Serajul said Maksud turned his attire into a "symbolic flag" and lodged a protest by himself which was unique.

In his remarks, Communist Party of Bangladesh President Mujahidul Islam Selim termed Maksud a "comrade". Maksud was a politically conscious person who possessed left-leaning ideals, said Selim.

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AIR QUALITY INDEX

Dhaka world's 2nd most polluted city

UNB, Dhaka

Dhaka was ranked second in the list of cities with the worst air quality. The city's air quality index (AQI) was recorded at 159 around 9:15am yesterday, which is considered "unhealthy".

Kolkata and Mumbai, cities in neighbouring India, occupied the first and third spots, respectively, with an AQI of 193 and 158.

AQI between 100 and 200 is considered "unhealthy for sensitive groups". Similarly, 201 to 300 is said to be "poor", while 301 to 400 is considered "hazardous", posing serious health risks to residents.

Dhaka has long been grappling with air pollution issues. Generally, Dhaka's air starts getting fresher when monsoon rains begin in mid-June. The air remains mostly acceptable from June to October.

According to experts, authorities need to chalk out a special action plan to control Dhaka's terrible dust pollution, as it turns worse every winter, particularly from November to February, posing a serious health hazard to city dwellers.

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EXPERTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

- Sprinkle water on roads
- Stop movement of unfit vehicles
- Cover all construction sites
- Modernise brick kilns

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