

100 hurt as AL men ‘attack BNP activists’ in Khulna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Around 100 BNP leaders and activists were injured in an attack allegedly by Jubo League and Chhatra League men in Khulna city yesterday evening.

Some 30 motorbikes were vandalised during the attack.

Witnesses said activists of Jubo League and Chhatra League, the youth wing of the ruling Awami League and the pro-AL student front, went near Baitun Noor Masjid in New Market area in a procession around 7:00pm.

All of a sudden, the ruling party activists, many wearing helmets, attacked the BNP men when they were holding a ward-level meeting there, added witnesses.

Shafiqul Alam Tuhin, member secretary of Khulna City BNP, alleged that Jubo League and Chhatra League men attacked them with sticks, iron rods, and hurled brick chunks, leaving about 100 BNP men injured.

Many injured received treatment at different hospitals and clinics in the city, he added.

Md Momtajul Haque, officer-in-charge of Sonadanga Police Station, said a clash ensued in New Market area when a procession of Jubo League was passing by a meeting of BNP.

Police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control, he said.

Meanwhile, Khulna City Jubo League in a statement yesterday alleged that BNP men carried out an attack on Jubo League and Chhatra League activists in the evening when they were taking rest after attending a programme by Jubo League. It claimed that five Jubo League men were injured in the attack.

AL FACTIONAL CLASH Man stabbed to death in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man was stabbed to death and at least seven others were injured in what police said was a clash between two groups of Awami League activists in the capital's Korail slum last night.

Al Amin, a grocery store owner, was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with stab injuries where doctors pronounced him dead around 9:30pm, said Nur-e-Azam Mia, officer-in-charge of Banani Police Station. His body was sent to the morgue for an autopsy.

The groups clashed over formation of a committee, the OC added.



A view shows buildings hit by a Russian missile strike in a resort area in Odesa region yesterday, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, in this handout picture released by press service of the Operational Command South.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SERIES OF BLOWS IN CRIMEA

Russia shakes up Black Sea fleet command

Guterres to meet Zelensky, Erdogan in Lviv; UN ship with grain leaves Ukraine for Africa

AGENCIES

Russia's Black Sea fleet based in annexed Crimea has installed a new commander, RIA news agency cited sources as saying yesterday, after Russian military bases on the peninsula were rocked by explosions in the past nine days.

If confirmed, the removal of the previous commander Igor Osipov would mark the most prominent sacking of a military official in the nearly six months since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in which it has suffered heavy losses in men and equipment.

State-owned RIA cited the sources as saying the new chief, Viktor Sokolov, was introduced to members of the fleet's military council in the port of Sevastopol.

One source said it was "normal" that the appointment was not publicly announced at a time when Russia was conducting what it calls its special military operation in Ukraine.

The Black Sea Fleet, which has a revered

history in Russia, has suffered several highly public humiliations in the course of the war that President Vladimir Putin launched on February 24.

In April, Ukraine struck its lead warship, the Moskva, with Neptune missiles, causing it to catch fire and sink.

Last week its Saki air base in southwest Crimea, near the fleet's headquarters at Sevastopol, was devastated by a series of explosions that destroyed eight warplanes, according to satellite imagery.

Then on Tuesday, blasts rocked an ammunition depot at a military base in the north of the peninsula. Russia called that an act of sabotage, and Ukraine hinted it was responsible.

Yesterday, Russia's FSB security service said it had detained six members of what it called an Islamist terrorist cell in Crimea, though it did not say if they were suspected of involvement in the explosions.

Crimea, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014 and has extensively fortified since then, provides the main supply route

for Russian invasion forces occupying southern Ukraine, where Kyiv is planning a counter-offensive in coming weeks.

On the diplomatic front, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres is scheduled to meet Ukrainian President Zelensky and President Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv today.

They will discuss "the need for a political solution to this conflict," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

Guterres will then visit the Ukrainian port city of Odessa tomorrow -- one of three ports being used in the deal to export grain -- before heading to Turkey.

Meanwhile, China's defence ministry said yesterday that Chinese troops will travel to Russia to take part in joint military exercises led by the host and including India, Belarus, Mongolia, Tajikistan and other countries.

China's participation in the joint exercises was "unrelated to the current international and regional situation", it said in a statement.

3 to die for killing teacher in Jhenidah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A local court yesterday sentenced three accused to death and another to life imprisonment in the murder case of schoolteacher Khan Md Alauddin Ali in Jhenidah's Shailkupa upazila.

Judge Md Nazimuddaula of the District and Sessions Judge's Court delivered the verdict around noon in presence of all seven accused in the case.

Accused Rannu Khan, Jamal Khan and Kanu Khan were handed capital punishment and fined Tk 40,000 each. Shamsur Rahman Khan, another accused, was given life imprisonment and fined Tk 25,000, said court sources.

According to the case statement, the accused, armed with sharp weapons, attacked the teacher in Shidli village of Shailkupa on September 7, 2014, over a land dispute with a neighbour. Critically injured Alauddin breathed his last at the upazila health complex later that day.

The following day, the teacher's wife, Sheuli Khatun, filed the murder case with Shailkupa Police Station accusing seven people.

The court yesterday acquitted the three other accused as the charges brought against them were not proved beyond reasonable doubt.

Former UP member found dead in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police recovered the body of a former union parishad member from a field near his home in Chattogram's Boalkhali upazila yesterday morning.

The dead, Haradhan Chowdhury, 55, was a former member of Karaldanga Union Parishad. He was a resident of Karaldanga village, said police.

Harun went out of home around 3:00am without saying anything to his family members, said Tariq Rahman, additional superintendent of police (Patiya circle), Chattogram, quoting the family members.

As he did not return home, family members started looking for him. They spotted the body in a field around 500 metres off his house in the morning, the ASP said.

The body was sent to Chattogram Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

US strike kills 13 al-Shabaab fighters

AFP, Washington

The Pentagon said yesterday that US forces killed 13 fighters of the al-Shabaab militant group in an airstrike in Somalia.

The strike took place on August 14 near Teedaan in the central-southern part of the country while Shabaab fighters were attacking Somali National Army forces, the Pentagon's Africa Command said in a statement.

"US forces are authorized to conduct strikes in defense of designated partner forces," the statement said.

It said that an initial assessment of the strike showed that no civilians were injured or killed.

Last week US forces killed four Shabaab members in a strike in the same region.

Allegations alarming

FROM PAGE 1

Minister Sheikh Hasina, ministers for foreign affairs, home affairs, law, and education, the National Human Rights Commission and representatives of civil society, foreign diplomats, leaders of the BNP and trade unions.

She also has visited the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar and spoken at a seminar on climate change.

At the press conference, Bachelet lauded Bangladesh for its leadership in international forums on issues like migration and climate change and for sheltering more than a million Rohingyas.

She also appreciated Bangladesh's socio-economic progress and likely graduation out of LDC status soon, but added that it is now more important than ever to make critical reforms of institutions that improve governance, democratic practices, media freedom, civil society space and human rights.

"Particularly given the long-standing frustrations at the lack of progress in investigations and other obstacles to justice, I encouraged the government to create an independent, specialised mechanism that works closely with victims, families and civil society to investigate allegations of enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killing," she said.

"As the biggest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN peacekeeping missions, Bangladesh should ensure it has a robust system in place for the careful human rights screening of security personnel."

Inviting the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances to visit Bangladesh would also show a commitment to decisively address this issue, she said and called upon the government to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Bachelet stressed the need for

acknowledging the allegations against law enforcers, sharing her own experience as the president of Chile.

She said her father also died by torture in 1974 and she shares the pain of Sheikh Hasina whose father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family members were killed in 1975.

"I always felt when I received any allegations of any kind, it is better to say what if it is true. Because it may not be my policy but something is happening. If you know that it is happening, you can do something about it."

Referring to her meeting with the National Human Rights Commission, Bachelet said she got its report that acknowledged some of the incidents of extrajudicial killings and death by torture. So, it is important to implement the proposals made by the UN.

Her comments on rights issues are significant in that the Rab and seven of its current and former officials face sanctions imposed by the US in December last year over extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. The government denies the allegations but at the same time says it takes actions when allegations are raised.

HOLD NATIONAL DIALOGUE

While meeting the ministers, Bachelet suggested a national dialogue, especially when the people's problems are increasing with the economy suffering in the wake of Covid pandemic and Ukraine-Russia war, and the general election is due next year.

All may not agree on all aspects, particularly ahead of the national election, but she hoped surely everybody can benefit out of the dialogue. Even people can see that and have trust on the institutions.

"The whole spectrum of political parties and civil societies -- can you not agree on five to six issues and

work on that?"

Bachelet said the election period will be an important time for Bangladesh to maximise civic and political space -- including freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly of political activists, human rights defenders, opposition parties and journalists.

"There needs to be space for more dialogue among political parties and with a wide range of civil society actors to prevent grievances from building and erupting in social unrest. The voices of women, religious minorities and indigenous peoples, and especially young people need to be heard."

It is also important to ensure that law enforcement forces have the necessary training to manage protests without resorting to the excessive use of force, she said.

The UN rights chief noted that Bangladesh historically had a wealth of civil society expertise in various fields, but successive UN human rights reports have documented a narrowing civic space, increased surveillance, intimidation and reprisals often leading to self-censorship.

"Laws and policies over regulating NGOs and broadly restricting the freedom of expression make it difficult -- and sometimes risky -- for them to function effectively."

Bachelet said the UN Human Rights Commission and Bangladesh government are engaged in dialogue on review of the Digital Security Act.

She acknowledged the need for regulating the online space and checking online hate speech, disinformation and cybercrime. But, she said, addressing these concerns is not simple as regulating communications always creates risks for the protection of freedom of expression.

Her office has submitted recommendations for repeal and revision of certain provisions of the Act, with a view to ensuring their

compliance with international human rights laws and standards, and preventing arbitrary application or misuse.

She also looks forward to the government's feedback and timeline to expedite the review and discuss the importance of working closely with civil society and the UN to ensure that the new draft Data Protection Law and the OTT platform regulations meet international human rights standards.

PROTECT MINORITIES

Bachelet stressed the importance of protecting minority groups, such as Hindus and indigenous peoples from violence or land encroachments.

While lauding the Peace Accord in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, she called for its full implementation, demilitarisation of the area and unrestricted access for independent actors to visit there, given the continued allegations of human rights violations, linked with land disputes.

She said Bangladesh has a solid framework in its constitution, laws and international commitments to draw from in facing human rights challenges. Now it is important for the government to focus on implementation and an institutionalised system to follow up. Bachelet said as Bangladesh continues to grow economically, effective, accountable and inclusive institutions -- in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 16 -- are essential for achieving the next level of development.

"Strengthening the independence of institutions, including the national human rights commission, the elections commission and the judiciary, will be key. The UN Country Team stands by to support implementation of all SDGs."

She said two UN special rapporteurs -- one on climate change and human rights and the other on human trafficking -- will visit the country soon.

Rohingyas must return

FROM PAGE 1

Bachelet asked Hasina to increase opportunities for education and work for the Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

Hasina told her that such initiatives would not be possible to implement in Cox's Bazar but could be taken in Bhasan Char.

The PM's meeting at the Gono Bhaban was also attended by Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus and UN Resident Coordinator in Dhaka Gwyn Lewis.

Bachelet at another event at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies yesterday discussed the impacts of the refugees on the environment with students and young professionals.

"There has been no progress regarding negotiations with Myanmar. If we send them back to unsafe conditions, they are going to come back again," she said, adding, "We cannot make them go through the same experience that they had before."

She also spoke on Chattogram hill tracts and said rapid deforestation for tourism could lead to ecosystem imbalance and impede the rights of the indigenous people.

She emphasized "rights-based environmental action" and commended the decision of the Supreme Court to grant the rights of personhood to the Turag.

She said Bangladesh is on the frontline of climate change, both in terms of impact and as an agent advocating for action. "While some countries are clearly more responsible than others, we all have responsibilities," she said.

Shahriar Alam spoke about the environmental havoc being experienced by the country and said, "We have struggled to negotiate with the big boys regarding loss and damage."

The session at the BIIS was addressed by the organisation's director-general Major General Mohammad Maksudur Rahman, senior research fellow Sufia Khanam and research fellow Shanjida Shahab Uddin.

Bachelet also addressed refugee rights in her concluding statement made yesterday.

"The international community must sustain its support to Bangladesh in its response, and press Myanmar to create conditions for return, address the root causes, and pursue accountability," she said.

"Unfortunately, the current situation across the border means that the conditions are not right for returns. Repatriation must always be conducted in a voluntary and dignified manner, only when safe and sustainable conditions exist in Myanmar."

"The refugees I spoke to in Cox's Bazar, and indeed refugees and internally displaced people I've met in various parts of the world, stressed that they do not want to be dependent on aid. They want to be productive, to earn a living, to contribute to society and improve their conditions of life. I encourage the government to give space to community-led initiatives in the camps in Bhasan Char and Cox's Bazar, so that those with such aspirations are able to support and contribute to serving the needs of fellow refugees," she added.

"I am very worried about increasing anti-Rohingya rhetoric in Bangladesh, stereotyping and scapegoating Rohingyas as the source of crime and other problems," said Bachelet.

"I call on the government and all Bangladeshis to be vigilant against such harmful rhetoric, to actively counter misinformation with facts, and to foster understanding with the host communities."