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## MKA blames BNP, Jamaat for attacks on minorities

**Human Rights Report:** Home Minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir on 9th March accused both the main opposition BNP and its key ally Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami of unleashing attacks on the religious minority communities, reports UNB.

"Militant outfit Jamaat and its supporter BNP are carrying out attacks on the minorities. We've observed a reign of terror unleashed by this communal force over the last one week," he said.

The Home Minister was addressing the national convention of Bangladesh Human Rights Commission (BHRC) at the Kazi Bashir Auditorium in the capital's

Mahanagar Natya Mancha.

BHRC secretary general Saiful Islam Dildar, its Dhaka city unit president M and Matiur Rahman its London branch adviser Modabber Hossain, among others, addressed the programme with freedom fighter and rights activist Quazi Rezaul Mostafa in the chair. In an oblique reference to Jamaat, MK Alamgir said, "With the support of several political parties, a militant organisation is violating the human rights across the country in the name of protest."

Clarifying the government's stance over maintaining the law and order across the

country, he firmly said they would tackle the anarchists with an iron hand and bring them to book for their mis-"The government deeds. won't show any negligence in discharging its duty."

Turning to the recent attacks on the religious minorities, the Home Minister stressed the need for uprooting communal forces from the country to improve the human rights condition.

He urged the rights activists to stand by the minorities in their respective areas and work for ensuring their safety.

Mentioning the government's responsibilities to establish rights of all citizens, MK Alamgir said no state-run organisation and force have any right to violate human rights in the country.

Talking to reporters over Friday's bomb explosions at Shahbagh Ganojagaran Mancha after emerging from the programme, he claimed that they have already been able to identify those involved in the incident. He also blamed communal and anti-liberation forces for the incident.



Violent attacks on religious minorities in recent days have evoked popular protests at home and abroad, and the minority community thinks it is an attempt to force them to leave the country like in 1971.

They fear the extent of the dreadfulness of attacks on the might exceed minorities what they had seen during 2001 and appealed to the community international apart from the political parmight launch massive attacks on us exceeding the extent of dreadfulness of 2001," he said.

Responding to a question, Rana Dasgupta said they are holding protest rallies across the country peacefully and democratically.

"We'll hold a big rally in Engineers' Institution on April 19. We'll again call upon the international community to look into the matter," he said.

aren't safe in Bangladesh." Barua said religious harmony is prevailing in the country, which was absent during the BNP-Jamaat alliance government. "They want to destroy the religious harmony."

He also said the entire nation is united against Jamaat-Shibir and they are trying to create divisions in the national unity. "The 14-party government is determined to ensure religious harmony and complete the trial of war criminals."

Explaining the recent attacks, Rana Dasgupta said they had seen hartals in '90, '91, '92 and 2001. "But what we've seen following Sayeed's verdict is simply horrible. They've targeted the minorities like 1971."

ties to look into the matter seriously.

"It's an attempt to stamp out the existence of the minority community from here, force us to leave country and loot minorities' assets like in 1971. It's an act of the defeated force of the Liberation War," Advocate Rana Dasgupta said.

Rana Dasgupta, also general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad (BHBCOP), fears that the attacks might continue until the next national election is over. "We fear they (attackers)

The Parishad leaders have already requested the government and all democratic parties to take up a coordinated initiative to stop attacks on the minorities and take stern actions against the attackers.

Industries Minister Dilip Barua said there are four reasons behind the attacks on minorities. "First of all, they (Jamaat-Shibir) want to take control over the assets of minorities pushing them out of the country and secondly they want to give a wrong message to the international community that minorities

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He said some 1000-2000 people came under attacks in different ways and some 100 temples, mostly of Hindus, were attacked after the verdict. "They're dreaming of the 1971 dream again." Meanwhile, Green Club of Bangladesh (GCB) and Media Forum for Human Rights and Environmental Development have put forward a six-point demand to the government that includes formation of special tribunals to try those involved in the attacks.

GCB general secretary Asish Kumar Dey placed the demands urging the government to complete the trial within 90 days and give proper compensation to the affected families of those killed and injured in the attacks.

Renouncing the word 'minority', renowned artist Ferdousi Priyobhashini on Friday, said, "If we all are united, we won't be called minority." She further said, "Those who are carrying out the commu-

nal attacks indeed belong to the minority group. We can defeat them if we can be united."

Priyobhashini observed that women and men are human beings and therefore, they must enjoy every basic right as a human being.

The opposition BNP has already blamed the government for the attacks on minorities and urged the government to book the attack-Home Minister ers. Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, however, claimed that the allegation is totally baseless. Earlier, on March 13, violent attacks on religious minorities in Bangladesh in the preceding days have evoked popular protests in Delhi with residents of Jamia Nagar expressing strong condemnation and the protesters raising slogans against the government of Bangladesh. The Assam unit of BJP has recently demanded that the Centre ask the Bangladesh government to stop attacks on Hindus by Jamaat-e-Islami activists after a special court in the country convicted leaders of the fundamentalist group of 1971 war crimes. The saffron party's

demand came on a day when BJP activists' attempt to cross the India-Bangladesh international border was foiled by the state police and Border Security Force (BSF) at Akhaura in Tripura.

BJP also planned the march from Akhaura to Dhaka by crossing the international border in protest against the attacks on Hindu minority in Bangladesh.

## **Double scoop of celebration**

**Richard Jones** 

Not only is it the birthday of ties can learn a lot from the founder of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, but also it's St. Patrick's Day 'the patron saint of Ireland' - one of the largest celebrated religious festivals in the world, second only to Christmas.

St. Patrick's Day has all but lost its Christian exclusivity and become ecumenical, embracing all religions and peoples from all nationalities. It's the festivity of the people from all walks of life irrespective of age, nationality or creed.

Each year the Irish government confers honorary Irish citizenship on all citizens of the world for that day. Bangladesh tourist authori-

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Irish. Before the days of the Celtic Tiger and Ireland's economic boom (and subsequent collapse) tourism was the biggest money earner that prevented them from starving.

St. Patrick himself was a tourist, reluctantly. History shows he was born in Wales. In those days (around 330 AD) the Irish were uncivilized and a nation of plunderers and marauders, 'the terrors of the region'. The pirates of Somalia are mere amateurs in comparison! They regularly risked their lives in questionable seaworthy vessels, sailed to neigh-

bouring countries England,

Scotland and Wales, raided,

invited to speak at a function

hosted by Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina in tribute to her

raped, pillaged and plundered brutally and mercilessly for their rewards.

Patrick, then about 14 years, was abducted and taken back to Ireland as a slave. Six years later he escaped, returned to his family and joined the church. After his ordination as a bishop he had a vision that compelled him to return to Ireland and teach Christianity to the pagans. It is acclaimed he banished snakes from Ireland, but in all reality there is no record of snakes ever on the Emerald Isle. Instead, figurative language was often used in folklore tales and the 'snakes' most probably represented druids and pagans.

The three-leafed shamrock (a weed) came into prominence when Saint Patrick used it to explain the Holy Trinity to the pagan masses. The shamrock, which is plentiful throughout Ireland and is said to only grow there, is much similar to a clover, but without the white spot. It has three parts or symbolizing leaves, the Trinity; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but all connected to the one stem (God). By the seventh century he had come to be revered as the

patron saint of Ireland. Two letters written by him still survive. While primarily St. Patrick's Day is a day the Irish celebrate, no one gets left out. It is truly an ecumenical cultural party that invites all to participate, irrespective of their religious beliefs. It's a celebration of life itself.

America (New York especially) goes wild on March 17 and holds the biggest street procession with marching bands

and the A-Z of Irish-American organisations proudly marching to the beat of the drum, colourful floats, and the happy upbeat tempo sounds of Irish music 'that's good for the heart and soul'. American presidents have

hosted special St. Patrick's Day breakfasts at the White House for leaders of the Irish community on that day for decades. The Irish President or Prime Minister usually attends. President Obama will continue the tradition this year. A countless number of Americans have Irish ancestry and of those perhaps the most famous of all were President John F. Kennedy and his brother Bobby, the Attorney General, who literally changed the world for the better especially with their human rights initiatives. The BBC once asked Bobby how it felt to be Irish and he replied: 'If I weren't Irish I'd be ashamed!' The most popular and well-known Irishmen in Bangladesh for diagonally opposite reasons are William Hanna (EU Ambassador) and Sir Frank Peters.

Sir Frank created a unique poster that encapsulates the Bangabandhu speech that triggered the birth of Bangladesh that is now seen by many to be the unofficial Proclamation of Bangladesh. It hangs in the Bangabandhu Museum, The Awami League HQ and many foreign offices and the homes of presidents, prime ministers and other internationallyrenowned dignitaries throughout the world. The following year he became the first (and up to now, the only) 'foreigner'

father. In 1971 he also supported the homeless and starving people of Bangladesh through several successful fund-raising initiatives in the UK. He also ingeniously reinvented the famous Bangladeshi lungi by giving it a pocket to hold his mobile phone, pens and keys! It is most probably his recent crusade to abolish corporal punishment in Bangladeshi schools, however, that has indelibly inscribed his name in history Bangladesh and endeared him most to the nation. He once said in a BBC interview because he has been visiting Bangladesh for almost half of its existence as a republic, he considers himself

to be 'half-Bangladeshi'!

I'm not Irish, but I will become Irish for the day and celebrate the occasion like most foreigners in Dhaka. I've worked with many Irish people in many cities of the world including New York, London, Washington Boston, and Dublin and I've found most of them to have a great sense of humour, an enormous appetite for fun and people of great passion and compassion and always seeking ways to assist

the less fortunate. I wish Ambassador Hanna, Sir Frank and all Irish persons in Bangladesh - and those who become Irish for the day - a very happy St. Patrick's Day! (The writer was born in Cardiff, Wales, and is an international financial adviser to the banking industry).



# **Democracy in Bangladesh Digging the grave**

Mahfuzur Rahman

Bangladesh is in the middle of a political and communal crisis. It is facing one of its worst manifestations of violence since independence in 1971. So chaos intense is the in Bangladesh, one may find it miraculous how the country actually functions.

The trouble started brewing on February 5 after the verdict against Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdul Quader Mollah for his crimes against humanity during the country's Liberation War in 1971. Activists of Bloggers and Online Activists' Network first gathered at Shahbagh square demanding capital punishment for Quader Mollah shortly after the International Crimes Tribunal-2 sentenced him to lifetime imprisonment. The activists, along with many more people from blogs and social networking sites, rejected the verdict and started protesting it since the afternoon of February Protesters say Mollah 5. deserves much severer punishment for his crimes.

The situation turned even more volatile after the February 28 judgment of the International Tribunal-1 against Crimes Jamaat-e-Islami nayeb-e-ameer Delwar Hossain Sayedee sentencing him to life term imprisonment, also for his crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.

While the Islamist party enforced nationwide hartal protesting the death sentence unleashing violence, it was cel-

the country US\$3 billion so far.

ebrated by the young protesters who have taken to the streets to condemn Jamaat and demand justice in the war crimes cases against other party leaders. The death toll from violent clashes between the Jamaat protesters and security forces in the country hit at least 44 on March 1, a day after the tribunal handed down the death sentence to Sayedee. Since then, violence has become order of the day.

Meanwhile, the young activists, who had called for the Shabagh protests demanding death penalty to Jamaat leaders, have vowed to resist any hartal to be called by the Islamist party. They have initiated a movement that aims to spread awareness among youths about Bangladesh's secular national spirit.

Houses and worship places of the minority people also came under attacks at different parts of the country during the violence. Over 40 temples have already been burnt. The finger of blame has been pointed at the Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest Islamic party. Most of the leaders of that party are either in jail, awaiting sentencing for war crimes, or have been sentenced already.

The Jamaat-e-Islami has vehemently denied the claims, and they maintain their protest is against a war crime tribunal that is unfair and unjust. However, survivors of the attacks have all stated that the

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attackers were taking part in rallies organised against the Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir. The Jamaat-e-Islami has countered by blaming supporters of the ruling Awami League party for the violence. They have also claimed the whole tribunal process is an attempt by the ruling party to settle scores and not about delivering justice. Everyone had feared some sort of a backlash after the verdict against Sayedee, but the scale and intensity of the violence and the increasing casualty figures have surprised many. The BNP, an ally of the Jamaat-

e-Islami in the 18-party opposition, however, did not give any reaction to the verdicts against Quader Mollah and others. It suspects that the Awami League wants to go for elections later this year by sidelining the party and projecting the Jamaat as the main opposition. Bangladesh, a country of 160 million people, is likely to see more violence in the run-up to its parliamentary elections, in which both Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and opposition leader Khaleda will again compete for power.

The two women have shaped the country's politics since 1991, both serving terms as prime minister followed by spells in opposition. They routinely accuse each other of political vengeance and provoking violence.

Months of violence and hartals across the country have already claimed scores of lives and thousands of homes, but now they are taking their toll on the economy that is showing the sign of leading the country towards prosperity. Meanwhile, the work stoppage and lost productivity was said to have cost

Frustrated at the ongoing countrywide hartal and overall political situation, the country's trade body apex the Federation Bangladesh of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) - has been relentlessly requesting the political parties for adopting peaceful programmes. "The economy is hit hard by the destructive programmes. We need to decide what role we can play in this situation," says FBCCI director Abdul Haque. Besides the loss of lives, property and jobs, the greatest problem facing the country's economy now is continuing insecurity, which affects everything from fishing and agriculture to transport and construction. In a statement, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) said frequent hartals will impede the growth, discourage investment, and slow down export putting employ-ment at risk. "There should be peaceful political programmes instead of blockade or hartal...," the BGMEA and BKMEA leaders said in a statement urging the political parties to refrain from enforcing harmful programmes like hartal. They said many people would simply turn jobless overnight if the existence of the country's readymade garment sector is endangered for reasons like political instability. "The country's present economy doesn't have the strength to endure the burden of joblessness of a large number of people," the trade bodies said in their joint stateOn March 12, Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad said, "The country is gradually heading towards a deep crisis. The people of the country are passing their days in frustration, uncertainty and panic. People and police are facing the tragic end of their lives. The common people want to get rid of such a situation." He urged all the political forces to quickly resolve the country's political crisis through discussions showing respect to democratic norms. He says if things keep on going on in such a fashion, a deadly situation will emerge which will create the grave for democracy. "So, I say, there's still time. Find out an acceptable way of solution through discussions," the JP Chairman said. With the next national election is expected early next year, it can be said the new political landscape in Bangladesh is on the slippery slope. The main dispute between the ruling and the opposition camps over the election-time government is still remains unresolved. The opposition alliance is still hell-bent on its demand for non-party caretaker government to oversee the election to check any possible vote fraud. But the ruling party alliance is not showing any sign of compromise yet. Many observers consider that our politicians are to blame for the inflaming existing tensions. They think whatever the political parties - both in the ruling and in the opposition camps are doing they are doing simply to win the next election, as politics means 'fooling 60% of the people, 60% of the time'. Amid the deteriorating political situation, one has every right to ask: Who does actually care about

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the country and its democracy? Even then there is no reason to doubt that these political leaders have a history of rising to the occasion. In 1990, they through dialogue and discussions came up with a consensus and helped establish a 'non-partisan caretaker government' system, though they could not retain it.

Though the ruling Awami League stands firm on the issue of proceeding with the war crimes trials, it should not make the mistake of going for an election without the participation of the main opposition. As things stand today in Bangladesh, no election would be considered legitimate unless both the major parties - the Awami League and the BNP participate in it. The way the situation is evolving fast, everything now depends on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and opposition leader Khaleda Zia. They need to rethink and decide afresh what they really want. The politicians need to take lessons from the political tsunami of the recent past. With the AL in the driving seat, it is naturally expected that it will extend an olive branch to the opposition to find out an acceptable formula to hold a fair, free and transparent general election in the offing. The opposition parties, too, should come up with an open mind in response to the government's any move. Dialogue is the best way to resolve problems. It is the only

way to reach decisions that will be acceptable to all. Dialogue is the primary means of avoiding or resolving conflict and confrontation. The uniqueness of democracy is the practice of solving differences through dialogue.

During his threeday visit, Pranab Mukherjee strongly conveyed the message that India is committed to implementing all

ment.

the pledges including that of Teesta water sharing and Land Boundary Agreements. So, Mukherjee's Dhaka visit comes with promise of stronger ties between Bangladesh and India through the assurance of implementation of all agreed decisions between the two countries as he said, "We need to work together to maximise the potentials of our economic cooperation." We believe, Bangladesh has done its part so far, and people of Bangladesh have been

Seeking to grow together

#### **AKM Moinuddin**

et session," Foreign Minister Dipu Moni quoted Pranab as saying.

The Indian president also expressed his conviction that the bill will be passed in both the houses, she said adding that he had also hoped that the Teesta water sharing deal will be signed very soon.

"We're also preparing for the ratification of the LBA in our Parliament. We're hoping that Teesta agreement will be done as soon as possible," the foreign minister said.

Responding to a question on

der killing issue specifically, but discussed the initiatives being implemented jointly by the two countries on border

security. The visit went smoothly except for the unfortunate cancellation of Khaleda Zia's appointment with the Indian president.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni castigated opposition leader Khaleda Zia for the cancellation of her scheduled meeting with visiting Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and termed it a 'departure' from democratic norms.

"He (Pranab) is a very wellrespected person of this region...it's a very unfortunate (gesture) from her party, her side that the meeting was called off. I can only say it's very unfortunate, it shouldn't have happened," she said. Asked whether it was breach of democratic norms she said, "Obviously, it's a depar-

waiting for India to do its part.

During his stay here, Pranab Mukherjee expressed his hope that the much-awaited Teesta water sharing deal and land boundary agreement (LBA) would be signed very soon. He also said a bill related to the LBA will be placed in the budget session of Indian Parliament and hoped that the bill will go through. "The bill for ratification of the LBA 1974 and its protocol of 2011 will be placed in India Parliament in its budg-

the current political violence across the country, she said, "We didn't discuss the current political issues during the meeting with the Indian president." The foreign minister said they did not discuss the bor-

Who is a human rights activist ? The person who earns an honest living and spends a part of her / his earning for the cause of suffering humanity at large, always stand firm beside a person in distress, respectful to the law of the land and speaks out in favour of peace without fear of possible persecution is worthy of calling Human **Rights Activist.** - Bangladesh Human Rights Commission

Fure from that it really shows that not all political parties are similarly democratic in their attitude."

Dipu said Khaleda sought appointment and she was given the appointment and it was expected that she would call on the Indian president. The foreign minister also said through this departure the difference between the two major political parties was demonstrated, and it showed that not all political parties practice democratic norms equally.

Describing Bangladesh as a country having a good history of hospitality, Dipu Moni said it is also a departure from that. She, however, said the relationship between the two countries is solid enough, and that it is not going to suffer from this departure.

Responding to a question, Dipu Moni said the appointment was made through her party and the Indian High Commission in Dhaka.

Khaleda Zia, who was to meet the Indian president on Monday, cancelled the meeting citing security concerns amid a shutdown enforced by BNP's key ally Jamaat-e-Islami.

Asked whether Bangladesh has got any clear message from the Indian President on pending issues, Dipu Moni said, "Definitely, he very strongly conveyed the message that India is fully committed to keeping its commitment."

AN CONTROL **avbevakvi-10** 

He (Pranab) has said it in public on so many occasions over the last two days and it is very clear, Dipu Moini asserted. Asked how the Indian government will pass the LBA in Parliament facing opposition from BJP, the foreign Minister said, "I'm not in a position to talk about the internal politics of India."



## Zillur's battle ends

**Human Rights Report:** Zillur Rahman, one of the organisers of the country's Liberation War, breathed his last at around 4.47pm (BST). Contacted, prime minister's press secretary Abul Kalam

> A avbevna Kvi - 11

Since the commitment came from the highest political level and the highest office of the State it is hoped that it will be done very soon, she said.

The visit of the Indian President clearly indicates that better things to come in terms of the relationship with our neighbour and regional cooperation in the sub-continent overall in the days to come.

AKM Moinuddin (Moin), Senior Correspondent, United News of Bangladesh (UNB)

Azad confirmed the president had passed away to Dhaka Courier's sister news agency, UNB.

The prime minister expressed profound her shock and sorrow at the president's death. He left behind two daughters, only son, Nazmul Hasan Papon, MP, and a host of relatives, wellwishers, political colleagues and followers to mourn his death. Zillur, a close associate of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was admitted to Singapore's Mount Hospital Elizabeth on Monday morning for treatment.

Earlier, an air-ambulance of the Mount Elizabeth Hospital

Carrying him reached Changi International Airport at 5.00 am (Singapore time) on Monday. Bangladesh Ambassador to Singapore Mahbub Uz Zaman received him at the airport. Earlier, the president was admitted to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH), Dhaka on March 9 with respiratory problems. Zillur led the Awami League during its critical time after the 1/11 political changeover as the then army-backed interim government imprisoned its president Sheikh Hasina. He took oath in January 2009 as the 19th President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Md Zillur Rahman was born in a respectable Muslim family under Bhairab thana of Kishoreganj district in 1929. His father late Meher Ali Mian renowned was a lawyer, Chairman of the then Mymensingh Local Board and Member of the District Board. Zillur had been elected general secretary of the Awami League for fourth time in different terms. He had been elected Member of the

National Assembly (MNA) of Pakistan in 1970. He was elected Member of Parliament in 1973, 1986, 1996, 2001 and 2008. Zillur actively took part in formulation of the

Constitution of Bangladesh immediately after the victory in the war of Liberation as a Member of Bangladesh Constituent Assembly. He became the minister of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives in 1996. Apart from being Minister, as he also discharged his duties as the Deputy Leader in Parliament till 2001. Zillur Rahman passed Matriculation from Bhairab KB High School in 1945 and later obtained Intermediate of Arts certificate from Dhaka Intermediate College, Dhaka now renamed as

College. In 1954, he got his MA with Honors in History and LLB degree from the University of Dhaka. Zillur Rahman played an

active role in the great Language Movement in 1952. He presided over a student gathering held in the

Amtala (Mango historic grove) of Dhaka University on 19 February 1952 to voice the demand for Bangla as the State Language.

Zillur was elected uncontested Vice-President (VP) of Student Union of Fazlul Huq Hall, University of Dhaka in the year of 1953. He was expelled from the University and his Masters Degree withdrawn for his active participation in the Language Movement. He also performed his duties as the President of erstwhile East Pakistan Awami League Sechchhasebak (Volunteer front of the party). Ivey Rahman, the wife of the President Zillur Rahman, died two days after the brutal grenade attack on 21 August 2004 at a grand-rally of Bangladesh Awami League at Bangabandhu Avenue in the city in which she was seriously injured.

<u>Eternal</u> Truth Human being should be considered without any discrimination regarding religion, caste, creed, nation, tribe etc. In different religions like Islam, Hinduism, Christianity or Buddhism; everyone has been asked to show love, friendship and fraternity amongst themselves. A person who is successful in his own profession can only be considered as a total accomplished human being if he/she can devote her/himself for the humanity in total sense. We are "all for each other" should be the motto of our life & only then we can be proud of ourselves. - Bangladesh Human Rights Commission Xax