

## Pledge to fight

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and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to fight the terrorism and drug menaces.

They referred the proposal of forming "Saarcpol"—a regional law enforcement agency—to the member states for further study before the next Saarc home ministers' meet scheduled to be held in India next year.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia inaugurated the daylong conference at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel in the morning.

"We have reached understanding which is very important to combat the menaces through joint efforts. It is a good beginning," State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar, who has been at the helm of the home ministry since March 25, 2004, told reporters at a post-conference briefing.

"Our greatest achievement is that the home ministers expressed their vows to strongly combat terrorism in their respective countries to ensure the overall economic prosperity of South Asia," he said.

While discussing Saarc police chiefs' proposal to form Saarcpol, the ministers noted that there is a lack of details in the concept paper submitted by Nepal.

Although Nepal submitted a revised concept paper, Saarcpol's organisational structure, financial matters and technical aspects are still not clear, Bangladesh Inspector General of Police (IGP) Abdul Quayyum told reporters during the briefing.

The IGP said the home ministers' conference also discussed issues like money laundering, terrorist financing and laws to plug the conduits.

After working out the details, experts of the member states will meet in Islamabad in December and send their decisions to the next home ministers' conference.

On drug smuggling, the home ministers decided that Pakistan will work out specific steps to stop spread in synthetic drugs in South Asia and will finalise the structure of a computer-based emergency response team.

Expert groups will be formed to study how to make effective Saarc Terrorism Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) and Saarc Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD). A database will also be formed while the experts and a focal group will hold two workshops in India. The two bodies will be made functional with these groups' opinions.

The Saarc home ministers decided to share the experience of their law enforcement agencies in

## Iran says

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will be destroyed."

The Iranian leader, known for his fiery rhetoric, made his remarks to cheering students and in a television interview during a visit to the world's largest Muslim majority nation amid a deepening standoff with the West over Tehran's nuclear program and suspicions it is seeking atomic weapons.

Asked what it would take to begin talks with the United States to resolve the standoff, Ahmadinejad told Metro TV that Iran "is ready to engage in dialogue with anybody."

"There are no limits to our dialogue," Ahmadinejad told Metro TV station. "But if someone points a weapon at your face and says you must speak, will you do that?"

Key UN Security Council members agreed Tuesday to postpone a resolution that would have delivered an ultimatum to Tehran, giving Iran another two weeks to reevaluate its insistence on developing its uranium enrichment capabilities.

The Chinese and Russians have balked at the British, French and U.S. efforts to put the resolution under Chapter 7 of the U.N. Charter. Such a move would declare Iran a threat to international peace and security and set the stage for further measures if Tehran refuses to suspend its uranium enrichment operations. Those measures could range from breaking diplomatic relations to economic sanctions and military action.

## 11 women MPs

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But after eight months since issuance of the circular, the Parliament Secretariat and NBR came up with a new clarification and allowed 11 women members the privilege of importing duty-free cars. The lawmakers' being elected to the past parliament was stated to be the rationale behind the abrupt move.

Deputy Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddique told The Daily Star on Wednesday that he did not know much about the developments and declined to comment on the NBR bar on newly elected lawmakers.

"Only those who were members of the fifth and sixth parliament have been given the permission," said a source.

As per the rules, lawmakers elected to parliament for consecutive terms cannot import duty-free cars unless eight years have gone since importing the first car.

"The decision violates the latest NBR circular that requires one to pass minimum two years as a member of current parliament to bring in a duty-free car," said an NBR official preferring anonymity.

Members who have been given the permission belong to ruling BNP. Alongside 27 others, each of them gave Tk 3 lakh to the party purse for nomination.

According to the sources, the lawmakers who have been given the nod are State Minister for Cultural Affairs and Joint Secretary

fighting terrorism and other crimes.

"The communication between the experts and expert organisations will be strengthened and for this the Saarc Secretariat will prepare a database by this year," said Babar.

Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka proposed some training programmes for Saarc police personnel, he added.

On formation of an association for Saarc police chiefs to enhance the implementation and evaluation of decisions taken at the home ministers' meeting, the meeting decided that the police chiefs will meet twice a year. The next meeting will be held in Pakistan by the end of this year.

The Saarc Secretariat will compile the laws introduced by Saarc member countries regarding implementation of the Saarc Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, Saarc Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, and additional protocol for suppression of terrorism to facilitate the member states to know the legal framework in other countries.

"We can achieve substantial success in checking terrorism, drug trafficking and other crimes by strengthening our association with the Asean and UNODC. The Saarc Secretariat will submit specific proposals in a few months to strengthen this association," Babar told reporters.

He specifically mentioned that they have set timeframes for implementing each step.

Asked if they discussed inroad of explosives and drugs into Bangladesh across the border, Babar said these issues are bilateral in nature and he had conveyed Dhaka's concerns to the neighbouring countries earlier and during bilateral meetings.

On the message the conference puts across for terrorist networks, Saarc Secretary General Chenkyab Dorji said, "Our leaders condemned all forms and manifestations of terrorism. All want to curb this menace to bring peace and stability; we all are united to tackle the issue in terms of exchanging and monitoring."

## Govt should

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militants in the proposed committee to discuss the reform agenda, leading the country towards confrontation.

Saying that an accurate voter list is a prerequisite for free and credible polls, he said the coalition government seems all set to rig the next election and preparing a 'fake' voter list is only a part of its blueprint for the "election engineering".

Senior leaders of the 14-party including Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Motia Chowdhury, Sahara Khatun, Obaidul Quader, MA Gani, among others, spoke at the rally.

The opposition alliance will hold demonstrations at Shanir Akhra today, Mirpur-10 tomorrow and at Lalbagh on May 14 to press home the demand for uninterrupted supply of power and water.

Meanwhile, Kendriya Jubo Sangram Parishad (KJSP), a platform for the youth fronts of the 14-party, yesterday demonstrated against the government for "failing to contain the price hike of essentials and solve the water and power crises".

According to its rescheduled programmes, Jubo Sangram Parishad will lay siege to the power offices across the country on May 17, demanding adequate power supply, district election offices and the Election Commission Secretariat in the capital on May 22 and upazila election offices on May 24, seeking cancellation of the 'fake' voter list and resignation of the CEC and two election commissioners.

Bangladesh Krishak League held a rally at Bhaluka in Mymensingh protesting the power, water and gas shortages. AL leaders Suranjit Sengupta, Abdur Razzak, Motahar Hossain Mollah, Dr M Amanullah, among others, addressed the rally.

## Terrorists can never use our soil

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Indian Home Minister Shivraj Patil, Pakistan's Interior Minister Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao, Bangladesh's State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar, Bhutanese Home Minister Lyonpo Jigme Thinley, Maldives Home Minister Ahmed Tasmeen Ali and Saarc Secretary General Chenkyab Dorji also spoke at the function.

Ministers, diplomats, MPs, home secretaries and senior officials from Saarc countries, among others, were present.

Referring to the rise of some terrorist forces in Bangladesh recently, the prime minister said her government has faced these challenges firmly.

"We have mobilised all our forces and succeeded in arresting most of those who committed crime and violence in the name of religion," she said.

The terrorists are being tried under the laws of the land, she said, adding that the security forces have been asked to remain vigilant, so that such elements do not find any opportunity to grow in future.

Referring to Saarc's adoption of a regional convention on suppression of terrorism and a convention on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, she said the forum has adopted an additional protocol on financing terrorism during the 12th Summit in 2004, aiming to make the convention on terrorism more effective in the changed context of post-September 11 scenario.

"It is gratifying to note that by the time we met for the 13th Summit and all countries had ratified the regional conventions including the

additional protocol," Khaleda said.

"These indeed demonstrate our collective commitment in fighting the common challenges relating to peace and security."

The prime minister expressed her confidence that the Saarc countries would be able to implement the provisions of these regional conventions, which would surely lay the foundation for economic progress in South Asia and would also demonstrate their common resolve in fighting terrorism and all related challenges facing the world.

Referring to the decisions taken during the 13th Saarc Summit in Dhaka in last September, she said the decisions are aimed at ensuring peace and security in this region, which is crucial for creating a firm basis for economic prosperity of millions of South Asians.

The Saarc chairperson said the Dhaka Summit resolved that Saarc's third decade would be one of implementation and emphasised that the decisions should be focused, result-oriented and time-bound.

"At the same time, we also recognised that our home ministers and home secretaries should meet regularly to discuss our collective concern relating to regional peace and security."

She expressed her satisfaction that the home ministers of the South Asian region are meeting for the first time in Saarc history where they have a number of agenda including combating terrorism, terrorism-financing and drugs trafficking.

The prime minister said Bangladesh has always demon-

strated its commitment to fighting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and its government is implementing all provisions of the UN Security Council Resolution 1373.

Bangladesh already ratified 11 out of the 12 global instruments relating to counter-terrorism, she said, adding: "We shall shortly ratify the 12th one relating to financing of terrorism. At the same time, we have brought about necessary amendments to our domestic laws."

Termining terrorism as a challenge to all states and a threat to entire humanity, she said it violates the fundamental values of the Saarc charter and also that of the United Nations.

Speaking on the occasion, Indian Home Minister Shivraj Patil said India is willing to cooperate with all member countries to combat terrorism jointly and share experiences and exchange information to achieve the goal.

He said they would be happy to host the second Saarc home ministers' conference in New Delhi next year and thanked Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her government for hosting the first home ministers conference in Dhaka.

Pakistan's Interior Minister Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao called for carrying out respective responsibilities by each member countries to make Saarc an effective tool for making a happy, prosperous and secure region.

Pakistan is committed to implementing the Saarc regional convention on suppression of terrorism and other protocols.

## Demra people

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said it was made only to pave way for Salahuddin to return to his constituency. A number of the attendees of the meeting said the BNP men lured them to the rally with food or money.

The Sangram Parishad at a press conference yesterday at Dhaka Reporters Unity alleged the people of the locality are getting angry again as no pragmatic steps were taken to meet their demands.

"Although the mayor assured us that he would meet all our demands but there were no initiatives taken to meet the other demands like installing a water pump and minimising power cuts," The Sangram Parishad Convenor Moshlehuddin Masud said.

He alleged Salahuddin's cadres are patrolling the area to create panic. They threatened the locals to keep away from the movement.

The Sangram Parishad urged the government to meet their demands immediately and stop harassing locals. Otherwise the people of Demra and Shyamspur will be compelled to take to the streets again. They reaffirmed that none would be able to make any political benefit from this movement.

Demra-Shyamspur Water-Power Sangram Parishad will hold mass-contacts and views-exchange programmes in the locality until May 18 and will hold a public meeting on May 19.

Although around 5,000 people turned up at the BNP rally most of them left the meeting place on reaching the meeting spot in processions.

Sentu, 15, an assistant machine operator of Imam Garments at Shyamspur, said his boss asked him to come to the meeting. He along with 70 male and female workers were ordered to attend the rally.

Swadhin and Tajui, employees of a motor workshop at Postagola said their employer, a local BNP leader, gave them food to attend the meeting.

## Gaping hole

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mation by age groups with a gap of five years.

The Daily Star methodology The population which was 13 years and above in 2001 will be the voters in 2006 if no deaths had occurred. But BBS district-wise census contains no age group beginning from 13 years, but it shows an age group of 10-14 years. To calculate the eligible voters, The Daily Star deducted the population falling in the bracket of 10-12 years.

The BBS report showed the percentage of the nation-wide population aged 10, 11 and 12 years to be 8.65 percent while those people falling under 13-14 age group as 4.14 per cent. This means, the ratio of these two age groups is 67.63 and 32.37. Based on this ratio, The Daily Star calculated the population of 10-12 years, which should not enter the 2006 voter roll from the population figure of 10 years and above in 2001. This keeps only the population of 13 years and above who would become voters in 2006.

For example, 15,98,880 people in Brahmanbaria were in the age bracket of 10 and above in 2001 census report. Of them 3,14,880 people were in the age bracket of 10 to 14. If the 10-12 years ratio of 67.63 per cent is applied, this age bracket population comes to 2,12,953 persons who cannot be voters in 2006. When this figure is deducted from the total population of 15,98,880, the number of eligible voters comes to 13,85,927. But the 2006 voter list shows a much higher figure of 18,17,851 in Brahmanbaria. This is 23.76 per cent higher than the maximum possible voter number.

The rise calculated by applying the same methodology is reflected in the graph.

## India's exploration

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In fact, India had been holding its exploration bids over the area, maintaining about 50km distance from the Bangladeshi block 21 always. There was no scope for a dispute," he said.

He, however, admitted that it is hard to say for sure how much the Indian blocks actually overlapped the Bangladeshi territory. "The map can be deceiving as it does not specify the exact geo-position of the Indian blocks. But visually we can find that these blocks have crossed 89 degrees longitude. Indian block D-23 also appears to have overlapped Bangladeshi block 21."

International law allows each country to claim 200 nautical miles from its coast as its sea territory.

However, this is a tricky matter as the coasts of India and Bangladesh and Myanmar follow a curve which imply overlapping of territories. As per international practices, neighbouring countries settle such issues through mutual understanding before venturing into bidding and exploration.

But there had been no discussion or exchange of information in this case. "As per international laws, India can not take such step. India should have informed Bangladesh," he said.

A similar situation arose between Indonesia and the Philippines. But instead of ignoring the neighbours, both countries struck a cordial deal and they went on to jointly explore and develop the disputed block.

Petrobangla, which spearheads the oil and gas block bidding in Bangladesh, has been pressing for the demarcation of the deep sea areas for long to no avail.

In 2004, the foreign ministry formed a committee with members from Petrobangla, Geological Survey of Bangladesh, the Navy, Spaars, Inland Water Transport Authority and Surveyor of Bangladesh for this purpose.

The committee was to recom-

mend the government how to demarcate the deep sea territory, fulfilling requirements of the United Nations. But the committee became dysfunctional within a year and its foreign ministry members were busy making foreign trips.

When The Daily Star asked the foreign ministry about the committee and the issue of block overlapping, it replied in the negative. A top official, however, said that he would personally inquire about the matter and take appropriate action.

Though the government opened block 21 in two rounds of oil and gas bidding, there had been no offer in it as this area is the most isolated one of all the blocks. In the second round bid, a European company Maersk Oilie had negotiated over blocks 19 and 20, adjacent to block 21. Maersk, which talked about good prospects of finding oil and gas in the stretch ranging from blocks 19 and 21, eventually withdrew from the bid as negotiations fell flat.

All leading explorers in the world are turning their attention to all potential blocks as the oil prices continue to soar of late, said an executive of an oil company.

"This is the right time for investment in the deep sea exploration for oil and gas because of higher prospect of returns," he said.

## Buddha

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community will celebrate the festival today as full moon of the Baishakh falls today.

The festival is being celebrated in all monasteries and other religious organisations through daylong programmes.

## Mahi for president

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the latest development in the investigation of the mysterious fire.

Addressing the press conference Mahi Chowdhury, also the spokesman of BDB, gave an ultimatum to the government to unearth the mystery behind the fire by May 15. He also demanded that the government must give them information about the development of the investigation. He also demanded judicial investigation into the incident.

"I will personally submit a memorandum about the incident to the president after May 15 and will meet the BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan for his assistance," he added.

Mahi said BDB would enforce political programmes if the government did not inform them about the developments of the investigation by May 15.

He said the former president and his family members have become refugees after the incident since the government is not allowing them to return to the house with the excuse of crime scene protection.

The government has to clarify that they are not involve in this, otherwise it will only prove their hand behind the incident, he added.

Mahi Chowdhury also alleged the investigation officer (IO) of the case is not working to solve the case.

BDB will also form an investigation team headed by City BDB Convenor Major General (Retd) MA Halim, he added. The BDB spokesman alleged a number of unknown people are hampering their lives by keeping them under surveillance.

"If the government wants to follow our activities, which is against the law, then the intelligence agencies should use their organisational monograms on their vehicles," Mahi

## BNP men attack Netrokona AL office, shops

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrokona**

BNP cadres in Netrokona damaged the district Awami League (AL) office, personal office of a former AL lawmaker and ransacked about 20 shops in local markets in a nightlong rampage on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the hartal enforced by the 14-party opposition in the district yesterday, protesting the attack on their procession the previous day, passed off peacefully.

Following the clashes with AL activists on Wednesday, about 50 BNP men, armed with sharp weapons, started damaging the shops at Chutabazar, Machubazar and Barabazar in the town at around 9:00pm. They also looted goods from the shops.

At about 11:00pm, the BNP cadres attacked district AL office at Chutabazar and damaged it. They also damaged the personal office of former MP and ex-president of district AL Fazlur Rahman Khan.

After ransacking the AL offices, the BNP men attacked the business centre of district Krishak League Secretary S M Kamrul Hasan Shahin at about 2:00am.

Police picked up at least 25 AL activists on Wednesday in connection with the clash including district AL leader Dibyendu Datta Roy Mohor, Ujjal, Raju, Titu, Tapon and Kanon.

The New Age journalist Saïdur Rahaman Mintu was arrested at his house at New town early yesterday even after he showed his ID card.

He was, however, released yesterday noon.

## 2 criminals

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back.

Hadi got caught in the 'crossfire' during the shootout while trying to escape. He died on the spot. His accomplices, however, managed to escape.

Hazaribagh police recovered the body and sent it to Sir Salmullah Medical College Morgue for an autopsy. The body bore bullets in chest and head, morgue sources said.

Talking to the reporters, Minu, younger sister of Hadi, accused a BNP lawmaker of her brother's death, saying that Hadi was murdered as he denied working for the lawmaker again.

Hadi was an activist of Jubo Dal, youth front of the BNP, and was released from jail one and a half months back on bail after serving two years' imprisonment, she added.

UNB says Mahbubur Rahman alias Mohi, 35, of Devraj village in Morelganj upazila of Bagerhat was killed during a shootout between the police and his cohorts.

Mohi was arrested from a boat in Panguchhi river in Morelganj Wednesday morning, police said.

Later following his confessional statement, police took him near the Barukhali river area to recover hidden firearms. As soon as they reached the spot, accomplices of Mohi opened fire on them, against which the law enforcers retaliated.

"Mohi was caught in the shootout and died on the spot," said a spot account.

Two firearms and eight bullets were seized from the scene.

Two policemen were also injured during the gunfight.

Police said Mohi, accused in a number of cases including murder, was also involved in abducting Bawalis (wood collectors) for ransom in the Sundarbans areas.

## Two expatriates

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Mainuddin, 42, having education up to intermediate level, joined BD Foods as a general employee in 1995 with a monthly salary of Tk 2,100. He told the investigators that the management of the company promoted him to the post of manager being satisfied with his performance and faithfulness and he draws Tk 25,000 per month.

Sources said Mainuddin, cousin of BD Foods chairman Badrul Haider Chowdhury, resides in his own apartment at Shantinagar in the capital. He has three sons — two of them are studying in Motijheel T&T Colony madrasa.

Mainuddin, hailing from village Omaria of Sudharam upazila in Noakhali, looked after the exports of BD Foods.

Meanwhile, the probe team members met State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar on Tuesday and informed him about the progress of their investigation.

**PROBE BODY EXPANDED**  
A representative from the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) has been included in the CID-led four-member investigation team.

The home ministry approved the representation from the DNC yesterday after the head of the probe team wrote to the ministry seeking representation from the DNC. However, the name of the DNC representative could not be known.

A special superintendent of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police is heading the team, with one official each from the Bangladesh Bank (BB), Special Branch (SB) of police, and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) as members.

**BB YET TO REPORT ON SUSPECT FIRMS**  
Bangladesh Bank could not provide the probe team with all the banking information of 12 business houses including BD Foods and its nine sister concerns until yesterday as most of the commercial banks have not submitted their reports to the BB.

The BB on May 3 asked all the commercial banks to report within a week all banking information of the 12 suspect business firms.

"We are yet to receive all the banking information of these firms," said a member of the investigation team.

## Indian Communists

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hope that the opposition will cooperate with the government in its good work and play a responsible role," he said.

"Our target was to secure more than 50 per cent votes in West Bengal this time and our performance has been highly impressive," he added. The Left Front came to power way back in June 1977 and has been winning since then.

However, CPI(M) suffered a major setback when state Labour Minister Mohammad Amin lost to Abdul Khaleque Molla of Congress by over 8,000 votes.

Amin was the seniormost minister in the outgoing cabinet. He had served as the acting chief minister in the absence of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee several times.

In Tamil Nadu, DMK led by 83-year-old film script-writer-turned-politician M Karunanidhi, another alliance partner of Congress, regained power in the state defeating film actress-turned-politician Jayaram's Jayaram's AIADMK in the assembly elections.

But Congress President Sonia Gandhi retained her prestigious Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh with a huge margin of votes, though her party was ousted from power in Kerala.

Manmohan Singh described Sonia Gandhi's electoral victory as "magnificent and glorious" and went to her residence and congratulated her.

The election in northeastern Assam state threw up a fractured mandate with ruling Congress failing to secure majority, but emerged as the single largest party. Now much would depend on what stand the nascent Assam United Democratic Front, consisting of Muslim outfits, takes in supporting a coalition government.

In Assam the ruling Congress bagged only 52 of the total of 126 seats, followed by main opposition Asom Gana Parishad 28 and AUDF 45 and BJP 8 seats.

The Congress leadership has decided to dispatch three senior leaders, including Mohsina Kidwai and AICC General Secretary Digvijay Singh to Guwahati to try and cobble a

coalition government. The meeting of the newly elected Congress Legislature Party will be held at Guwahati on May 13 to elect its leader.

Chandan Bagchi, who is in charge of Congress affairs in Assam, expressed confidence that the Congress would be able to form the government again with the help of "like-minded" parties.

Tamil Nadu is likely to have its first coalition government headed by DMK leader M Karunanidhi after Chief Minister Jayalalithaa was voted out of power.

The DMK, which heads a coalition called Democratic Progressive Alliance (DPA) that includes Congress, is all set to win 162 seats in the 234-member state legislature at least 117 seats are required for outright majority. The AIADMK is projected to end up with 71 seats.

In Kerala, riding the crest of an anti-incumbency wave, the CPI-M-led Left Democratic Front has secured majority in Kerala with 99 seats, snatching power from ruling Congress-led UDF coalition, which finished with 41 seats.

CPI-M veteran and LDF chief ministerial probable V S Achuthanandan won from Malampuzha constituency by a huge margin of 20,017 votes.

Congress, however, retained power in the tiny state of Pondicherry, adjacent to Tamil Nadu.

In Pondicherry, Congress won 20 of the total of 30 assembly seats and is set to form the new government.

The assembly elections in West Bengal, Kerala, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry were held in April and May this year.

Referring to the outcome of the assembly elections in the five states, Manmohan Singh said, "it is a victory of secular forces. This is a victory for United Progressive Alliance".

## London bombings

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culpable failings in preventing the four bombers carrying out Britain's worst terror attack, which killed them and 52 other people.

In the first full account of the events before and