

Bagerhat blast  
Army Chief visits spot:  
Statements of 12 witnesses recorded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The Chief of Army Staff General Haroon-ar-Rashid visited Mollahat yesterday. He went to the place where a powerful bomb blast on Sunday left nine people killed.

Police have so far arrested five persons in connection with a case recorded with Mollahat thana at midnight on Monday night. The names of four arrested persons have been disclosed. They are Abul Kalam Gazi, 36, Sadek Molla, 45, S M Hannan, 38 and Nasir Munshi, 40.

Nasir Munshi is an employee of Mollahat branch of Sonali Bank, while SM Hannan hails from Lokpur village under Matlab thana of Chandpur. He reportedly came to Mollahat two days before the blast, police said. He is being quizzed by CID.

ASP of CID Mohammad Kashrul Huq of Khulna-Jessore Zone has been made IO of the case. Docket of the case was sent to Khulna office of CID on Tuesday night. Kashrul Huq who also investigated SMA Rob murder case was not available for further information as he is now staying at Mollahat for conducting operation to arrest the accused.

Members of CID team are also searching for those who were found loitering around the venue of meeting.

Meanwhile, statements of 12 witnesses were recorded by a home ministry team led by Additional

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## Steps to enable women who couldn't cast votes for years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in cooperation with the Election Commission (EC) has taken up a special programme to encourage women voters to cast their votes in the ensuing parliamentary election.

There are many villages in the country where women could not cast vote for many years due to social, religious and other barriers. The EC has identified such localities in several districts.

To deal with this issue effectively, a high level committee was formed recently comprising representatives from the religious affairs ministry and directorate of women's affairs and others, headed by a joint secretary of the women and children affairs ministry. Several sub-committees were also formed and

those are already working to implement various decisions in this regard.

"The aim of this initiative is to encourage women, particularly in the areas where women voters face religious, social and other barriers. Our intention is to break the barriers and enable women to exercise their franchise," said Adviser of the caretaker government Rokia Rahman who holds charge of the women and children affairs ministry.

Addressing a press conference at the ministry yesterday, Rokia Rahman who is also Adviser for Labour and Employment and Social Welfare said, "I have written to the chief adviser of the caretaker government and the chief election commissioner and also requested the law enforcing agencies concerned to ensure special security for women voters at the polling centres

during the election."

Rokia said, "We have instructed all our field staff to go from door to door and persuade women to cast vote in the coming election. The Election Commission would deploy 1,20,000 women ansars especially for the security of women at the polling centres. In every centre, there would be four women ansars in addition to army and BDR personnel."

The EC also instructed its district officials to encourage women voters to caste vote and take all possible steps in this regard.

In some areas where distance is a big barrier to women voters, there would be polling centres at places nearby.

Rokia added, "The idea is to empower women to vote and there is no reason why they should not

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Awami League President Sheikh Hasina (inset) smiles having received a bouquet minutes before addressing an election meeting in Srimangal yesterday.

## BNP-Jamaat out to subvert polls fearing defeat: Hasina

AL chief ends cross-country tour

NAZMUL ASHRAF, from Sylhet

Sheikh Hasina yesterday rounded off her cross-country election tour in Sylhet by offering *fateha* at the mazar of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) just as she did touch off campaigning exactly a month ago.

With the October 1 just three days away, the Awami League president, who returned to Dhaka last night, is highly unlikely to go outside the capital on electioneering.

During her whirlwind country-wide tour, the immediate-past prime minister covered all the 64 districts and more than 200 of the 300 constituencies.

On the campaign trail, Hasina highlighted her party's electoral pledges besides harping on her government's success stories. She was also critical of Khaleda Zia, the BNP and its allies in the four-party

combine. In some cases, she castigated the caretaker government for, what she termed, its bias to her opponents.

Hasina also accused the alliance of triggering the recent spate of violence with a view to foiling the upcoming election. She alleged that the BNP-Jamaat nexus, having anticipated defeat, was attacking her party activists in different parts of the country to subvert the polls.

On the last day of her two-day tour of six northeastern districts yesterday, the AL chief demanded that the authorities take immediate actions against the terrorists and create an atmosphere conducive to a free, fair and peaceful election.

Referring to Amini, who is sharing the BNP election symbol, she accused her opponents of abusing Islam for their political ends.

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prosperous Bangladesh, if re-elected.

The AL president addressed her first meeting at Sorail playground in Brahmanbaria-2 constituency where her party nominee, Abdul Halim, is expected to face a stiff challenge from the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) leader Fazlul Haq Amini, an Islamic extremist.

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