

BNP-Jamaat govt plotting to kill Hasina: Samad Azad

UNB, Dhaka

The Awami League yesterday said all "nefarious machinations" by the BNP-Jamaat govt are targeting Sheikh Hasina to strike a blow to her life.

"Situation is being dragged into a dangerous end and the government will solely be responsible for any consequences," AL presidium member Abdus Samad Azad MP told newsmen at the party's Dhahmondi office in the afternoon.

He referred to the hurried scrapping of special security act and withdrawal of security for Sheikh Hasina, police raid on the house of Bahauddin Nasim. All this is nothing but a deep conspiracy for an attempt on her life, the AL leader said.

"Khaleda Zia had openly declared to stage another 15th August and she is now implementing her design," Azad said, adding that future of democracy in the country is being made vulnerable again by the present regime.

Awami League presidium members Abdul Jaill MP, Suranjit Sengupta MP, cultural secretary

Obaidul Qader, office secretary Abdul Mannan Khan and ex-student leaders ABM Mozammel and Pankaj Debnath were present in the press briefing.

Denouncing the arrest of Sheikh Hasina's special assistant Bahauddin Nasim, Azad said entire government machinery had been deployed against Nasim and government remand, which is unprecedented. "Even the police forcibly collected his signature on some white papers during the interrogation, which also gives a bad signal."

Earlier, police had arrested 10 central leaders of Chhatra League without any specific charge from outside the residence of Sheikh Hasina at Dhahmondi, he mentioned and said the home minister's statement on their arrest is "ludicrous and childish."

The AL leader said the prime minister is inviting the opposition to join parliament on the one hand and on the other persecuting the Awami League leaders and workers, "which reflects political vengeance of the government and a double standard to confuse the international community."

Accused in murder case killed in road accident

UNB, Sirajganj

A man was killed and seven others were injured in a road accident near Hatikumrul crossing in Salanga thana here yesterday.

The dead was identified as Abdur Razzak, 33, one of the accused in Tofa murder case. Tofa was a resident of Sabujbagh area in Dhaka.

The injured, including another accused of the case, Bachchu, were admitted to Srajanj Sadar Hospital. He was later taken to police custody.

Police said the accident took place at about 7:30 am when a truck dashed a private car bound for Bogra leaving Razzak dead on the spot and seven injured.

Later, police seized the truck but its driver and helper managed to flee.

Meanwhile, a BDR Lance Naik Abul Kalam Azad, 36, was run over by a minibus at Barohar Budhgachha area in Ullapara thana on Bogra-Nagarbari highway Thursday evening while returning home in a motorbike.

Hasina's tour

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of Mahima at Kanthalbaria village in Putia thana in Rajshahi, who committed suicide after being gang-raped allegedly by activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, student wing of ruling BNP.

She will hold party workers' meetings and address public meetings in other districts. She will return to the capital on March 5.

High alert

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sions or demonstrations were staged yet, showing tolerance over the delicate situation.

Police were kept on alert before and after Juma prayers yesterday (Friday) apprehending that people might bring out processions against the Hindu-Muslim rioting in western India.

Syndrome

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village homes, resulting in temporary abstention from work.

In this context, the culture of work abstention, as some call it, is considered undesirable in some quarters in view of our pressing need for accelerating the pace of development activities in all spheres. But as some observers point out, there is a positive aspect to this phenomenon. The deserted city roads and the stalled business activities are soon enlivened with people returning from their villages reinvigorated with renewed zest and enthusiasm. From this angle, the so-called culture of work abstention, which is transitory in nature, has a great socio-economic significance for city dwellers.

There is another aspect. When such a large number of customers from government and non-government establishments will not be there, many shopkeepers, for example, do not feel it worthwhile to come back from village homes and open their establishments for a limited number of customers.

As a result of the brief lull in commercial activities, there are, of course, some consumers who greatly suffer for the failure to meet various needs. Many consumers, particularly belonging to other communities, suffer because they cannot meet their daily needs. Even in cases of need for medical attention for a sick patient on an emergency basis, non-availability of suitable transport or ambulance during the holidays can create a critical situation.

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Extortionists?

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Prime Minister Tony Blair, who arrived at Coolum late yesterday, has called for immediate sanctions against Mugabe, branding him dictatorial.

Mugabe hit back yesterday saying Britain, Zimbabwe's former colonial master should "go to hell".

"It's not the right or responsibility of the British to decide on our elections...why should they poke their pink noses in our business?," Mugabe was quoted by the official Herald newspaper in Harare.

Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), poses the strongest challenge to Mugabe since he led his ZANU-PF party to power 22 years ago.

McKinnon told reporters about 40 Commonwealth observers were monitoring the election in Zimbabwe and would report back.

"This issue of observers on the ground is very important...and clearly will have some bearing on the future course of action," McKinnon said at a luxury resort in Australia's tropical Queensland state, where the summit will take place watched over by jet fighters and 6,000 police and troops.

"The general tenor of reporting...is that the situation is certainly not good, the situation is deteriorating."



BRTC introduced 10 Swedish-made Volvo double-decker buses on the Mirpur-Motijheel route in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Villagers flee houses

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Local leader or activist of any political party could not be contacted in any of the violence-torn villages as they have gone to safer places for fear of being attacked by outlaws.

The Union Parishad chairmen have also gone into hiding following death threats from armed cadres of the two outlawed parties now locked in gunbattles for supremacy in Rupsha-Terokheda area, so long dominated by PBCP.

"We have been passing sleepless nights for the last one week due to gunbattles. Our villagers are in the grip of armed cadres of the two rival outlawed parties", said an elderly man of a village in Mohishguni union in Rupsha upazila. Several other old men and women at villages in the two upazilas said the same thing.

Police operations have increased their fear and sufferings. Most of the people nabbed by police are innocent, the villagers claimed.

They said BCP cadres are led by their leader Shoib Dhali of Durgani Mahal and those of PBCP by Abdur Rashid.

Both the groups possess sophisticated firearms, said a UP chairman who escaped an attempt on his life on midnight Wednesday night.

Nazma Begum, wife of Shoib

Dhali, said, "Additional SP MA Wahab is responsible for creating this violence in the two upazilas. He (Additional SP) asked my husband for 200 activists to crush hideouts and strongholds of PBCP and arrest alleged killers Hasan Biswas who was murdered at Mokapur recently."

"My husband asked some of his party men to help Wahab to arrest PBCP cadres. Armed cadres of PBCP launched an attack when the Additional SP entered Joar Badal village to nab PBCP cadres with the help of BCP men. The police officer planned to fish in trouble waters by using wanted criminals against alleged killers of Hasan Biswas. Now Wahab is using his forces against both the outlawed parties, which has created the violence", Nazma said.

When asked, Wahab refuted the allegation and blamed Awami League and BNP for the violence between the rival outlaws.

Talking to this correspondent, two UP Chairmen in Rupsha Upazila claimed that Police Super Mosharaf Hossain has failed to contain the violence and crush the strongholds of outlawed parties as he is politically biased.

When asked, the Police Super admitted that tension still runs high.

Gunfight may again erupt if Section 144 is withdrawn, he said.

People of Badal village said police and BCP cadres launched attack thrice, damaging properties worth several lakh taka. Standing crops on over 300 bighas of land have also been damaged by police and BCP cadres during raids for nabbing PBCP men, they said.

Tension will never cease unless PBCP armed cadres and their leader Rashid are nabbed, said some fishermen at Durjani Mahal, who are allegedly being used for helping BCP cadres.

Some supporters of PBCP at Durjani Mahal said they will avenge the murder of their cadre Hasan Biswas at any cost.

Meanwhile, police have arrested 31 people. But local people claimed that most of them are innocent.

This will complicate the situation and not curb violence, said leaders of BNP and AL, blaming each other for harbouring the outlaws for political motives.

Local MP Nurul Islam is yet to go to villages to see the extent of damage.

Visa: S'pore will take steps

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foreign ministry to look into the matter "expeditiously to ensure visa smoothly without any hassle."

Khaleda Zia told Tong that over 50 thousand Bangladeshi people work in Singapore, but recently Singapore government introduced a new system for some countries in getting visa, which is "causing difficulties for Bangladeshi businessmen, traders, patients and other genuine passengers."

Khaleda requested the Singaporean prime minister to relax the new system for Bangladesh in view of friendly and traditional relations between the two countries.

Mentioning suitable investment climate in Bangladesh, the prime minister also sought increased investment from Singapore in various sectors, especially IT and health.

In this respect, she proposed setting up of private hospital in Bangladesh under joint-venture arrangements with the two countries.

The Singaporean prime minister agreed to the proposal and suggested that all inclusive business

delegations from Bangladesh may visit Singapore for specific and detailed discussion with their relevant Singaporean counterparts.

He also suggested exchange of visits by business chambers of the two countries.

Responding to another request by Khaleda, her Singaporean counterpart assured that scholarship, technical training and other affairs for aspiring Bangladesh nationals in Singapore would be continued.

Tong also assured Khaleda that he would apprise Singaporean enterprises of the business and investment opportunities in Bangladesh.

She also requested the Singaporean leader that the number of Bangladesh citizens working in Singapore should not be curtailed as they contribute to economies of both the countries.

Khaleda invited Tong to visit Bangladesh at a mutually convenient time and the invitation was accepted. The date will be worked out through normal diplomatic

channel.

The summit-level meeting between the two countries that lasted nearly an hour from about 5.00 pm was held in a friendly and warm atmosphere.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, PM's Principal Secretary Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui and Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury were on the Bangladesh side, while foreign minister of Singapore and other senior officials were present on the other side at the meeting.

Foreign Secretary Mobin Chowdhury briefed newsmen on the outcome of the talks.

9 held at Bogra

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Haq Master and three others were sent to jail here.

Shafiqul Islam, convener of Sonatala pourasava unit of JCD, was stabbed during Thursday's clash. Later, JCD filed a case with Sariakandi thana against 30-35 activists of Awami League backed Jubo League and Chhatra League.

Britain to back US strikes on Iraq

AP, London

Britain would be prepared to support US-military strikes on Iraq in the "right conditions," Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon said yesterday.

"I am confident that if the right conditions were set out that we would support the United States," Hoon told British Broadcasting Corp radio.

He insisted that no decisions had yet been taken on military action against the regime of President Saddam Hussein.

Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W Bush have both singled out Saddam as a threat to world stability, accusing him of accumulating weapons of mass destruction, including chemical and biological ones.

Blair told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. Thursday he agreed with the sentiment behind Bush's recent description of Iraq as belonging to an "axis of evil" that also includes Iran and North Korea.

There have been persistent reports that Iraq will be next on the list of targets in the war on terrorism.

Meanwhile Iraq has challenged Britain to prove it is developing weapons of mass destruction, saying it was ready to receive "right now" any British team in the country, an official spokesman was quoted as saying in Baghdad yesterday.

"Iraq is ready to receive right now any British team sent by Blair and accompanied by the British media to show the world where and how Iraq developing such weapons," the unidentified Iraqi spokesman was quoted as saying by the official al-Thawra newspaper.

Britain's Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon, speaking to the British Broadcasting Corp Friday, said: "They (Iraq) have consistently

refused to allow UN weapons inspections and that must mean we are deeply suspicious about what is going on. They are a concern that we have to address," Hoon said.

"That is what we have to learn from the appalling events of Sept. 11, that we cannot afford to ignore issues that can provoke a threat to our own security," he added.

Iraq's comments appear to be a response to Blair's statement on Thursday that Iraq's accumulation of weapons of mass destruction poses a threat to the world.

Iraq maintains it has dismantled its weapons of mass destruction, but it has refused to admit UN weapons inspectors back in the country since they left ahead of US-British airstrikes in December 1998.

The spokesman was quoted as saying that Blair's comments in a television interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corp were "aggressive and is leading," and challenged him to present "true information to support such allegations against Iraq."

"The accumulation of weapons of mass destruction by Iraq poses a threat, a threat not just to the region but to the wider world, and I think George Bush was absolutely right to raise it," Blair said on Thursday.

Speculation has been growing that Iraq may become a target of a US military action, after US President George W Bush called it part of an "axis of evil," warning Baghdad to let in the inspectors or face consequences.

C'wealth meet

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bers being in that category. The Ministerial Group of Small States has already held its meeting and discussed the issues of economic, environmental and security-wise vulnerability of small states.

A High Level Review Group will also present its report on the role of the Commonwealth in the 21st century and its existence as a relevant and credible international institution.

The conference takes place at a security-swept venue, Hyatt Regency hotel, with the balmy ocean breeze and the luscious countryside surrounding it.

Coolum is an ideal place for leaders to discuss issues of common international interests through personal interaction.

As customary, there will be a retreat for the leaders here in Coolum, where the delegates are staying.

Gujarat violence

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Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Union Finance Minister in view of the situation in Gujarat and the Union Budget.

The party activists burnt effigies of the prime minister, home minister and finance minister, sat on dharnas and brought out processions across the state in response to the country-wide agitation programmes launched by the party against the union budget and the Godhra incident.

The Gujarat state home secretary, K Nityanandam, ordered police to shoot rioters and arsonists on sight. Nine people were killed in police firing yesterday, said state minister K Jadeja.

The state said 900 soldiers were patrolling the city of 3.5 million.

Journalists saw many soldiers sitting in their trucks, however, watching as Hindu crowds waved sticks and shouted death threats across streets to covering Muslims, while a few policemen stood between them.

One Muslim woman clung to a news photographer's leg, begging him not to leave the scene for fear that she would be killed.

Gangs blockaded roads, searched cars for Muslims, and set fire to shops and homes, continuing the rampages that had gone on Thursday night. Victims' where they fell through the night, with guns firing, fires burning and chilling mob war cries.

Survivors ventured out to collect their dead and seek treatment for their wounds when the sun rose.

The death toll rose when four more bodies, two of them teen-age boys, were discovered in the ashes of a burned shed where seven bodies had been recovered earlier.

Police said it appeared the shed had been set on fire after the 11 people crowded into it to hide.

Police opened fire at Muslims and Hindus tossing homemade bombs at one another near a mosque in the suburb of Bapunagar, said Deputy Police Commissioner RJ Savani.

Six people were killed by the police fire, and 70 were hospitalised, said state officials and police.

"All through Thursday we were busy trying to protect the minority community (Muslims) from attacks from Hindus, but since this morning the retaliation has started," Savani said. "It has now turned to group clashes."

Nityanandam said 1,200 people had been arrested since Thursday, when Hindu mobs began their

rampage through Ahmedabad, the commercial capital of Gujarat, and 31 other towns, killing Muslims and burning their property during a strike protest that the state government had supported.

Hindu nationalists affiliated with the party that governs Gujarat and India called the strike yesterday to protest the burning of a train on Wednesday, by a Muslim mob that killed 58 people, mostly Hindus.

There was stone-throwing in Bombay, India's financial capital in a state bordering Gujarat. A train carrying thousands of passengers was derailed when some 100 Hindu activists placed concrete blocks across the tracks in a northeastern Bombay suburb. No injuries were reported.

But in New Delhi and elsewhere, people were going to work, and there was little evidence of a strike, although police were out in force.

Despite curfews in 36 towns in Gujarat, there was no let up in arson, looting and assaults prompting Muslim groups to call for direct federal rule in the state. People continued to stream into hospitals, mostly for treatment of stab wounds, but also just for safety.

Most of the Muslims in the shantytown of Narora, on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, had fled on Thursday, fearing they would be targets of the Hindu mobs that roamed the city as police watched, unwilling or unable to stop them.

Other slum dwellers remained sleeping in their huts, and were burned to death at 2am by 300 Hindus, said Deputy Police Commissioner P B Gondya. Seven women and eight children were among the first 27 bodies recovered.

All through Thursday, Hindu mobs, wielding iron rods and cans of petrol and kerosene, roamed the blockaded streets of Gujarat towns, attacking Muslims.

A Hindu mob of 2,000 people set fire to an apartment block where six families lived in an affluent Muslim neighbourhood in Ahmedabad and burned to death at least 38 people, including 12 children.

Residents had pleaded with police for two hours to come to their aid, but officers said they could not get past the roadblocks set up by the Hindu mobs.

"Police can't protect each lane and bylane," said Police Commissioner P C Pandey, responding to criticism that thousands of police watched silently as Hindus targeted Muslims.

Mohammadpur BNP leader shot during clash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A ward level BNP leader received bullet and stab injuries during a clash at Nanda housing area in the city's Mohammadpur yesterday afternoon.

Didar Hossain, 29, assistant organising secretary of the Mohammadpur thana unit was stabbed indiscriminately and shot in the right leg during a clash between Afsan group and Sohel group at about 2:30pm, hospital sources said.

Local people rescued critically injured Didar from the spot and send him to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Police and witnesses said the clash erupted between the two groups following a row over distribution of cash from sale of animal hide.

The duty officer of Mohammadpur police said he was aware about the incident but no case was filed in this regard.

Going high

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flight paths, needs CAAB clearance if the building plan is to be approved by Rajuk.

But Borak did not wait for its plan to be endorsed by for either of the authorities and went ahead with the construction. It has now completed 24 storeys on a 1.25 bigha plot. Noor Ali said Rajuk passed Borak's plan to build 20 storeys in 1997 but retracted in 1999.

"Meantime, I had already invested crores of taka, signed up the foreign investors and also laid the foundation of the building," Ali said. "Now, Rajuk should let me pay for the additional four storeys that I have built."

"After the election I told Rajuk to accept the payment, but they told me they had instructions not to accept the payment."

All however continued with the construction after getting the go-ahead.

"This project would definitely enhance the prestige of the country and create jobs for many," Noor Ali said.

CAAB has approved plan for a 24-storey structure at the site and so, Rajuk should have nothing to object to, Ali maintained.

264 presses at fault

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such a move but advised this correspondent to contact the relevant section of his office for details.

Mostafizur Rahman of the magistrate's section said since these printing presses failed to reply to a show-cause notice sent by the DFP earlier, his section has been asked to take action.

Asked how many printing presses they had permitted in the district, the officials failed to give any specific numbers. They said that they only had yearly data and that 'many' licenses have so far been issued this year.

The so-called move also surprised the leaders of the Bangladesh Printers' Association, who said they did not know of any such government move. "As a printer it is my responsibility to ensure that I do not take up a job that could be against the interest of the state or obscene. I don't understand how I am at fault by printing a material for my business," said a top leader of the association, request-

ing anonymity.

"It is the responsibility of an editor or a publisher to let the authorities know about what is there in the printed material," the leader added.

Madaripur house

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the police misbehaviour by police. UNB adds: Criminal Investigation Department has started interrogating Bahauddin Nasim.

He was questioned on various issues as he passed the first day of 10 days' police remand in CID custody.

He has been sued in two cases -- smuggling of foreign currency and firing on the then opposition leader, Khaleda Zia's motorcade last year.

Official sources said police yesterday examined 26 CDs recovered from Nasim. He was asked about the motives of carrying these CDs.

He will be quizzed by a joint interrogation cell today.

Mahima's family

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entertaining visitors," Mahima's father Abdul Hannan said.

Several hundred people including political leaders, ministers, NGO activists, police and government officials, journalists and sympathisers visit the family everyday.

Mahima's mother has fallen sick. The poor family that depends on agriculture cannot work in their fields also, they said.

"The most painstaking matter is questions, often rude and embracing, from the visitors," said Hannan.

Some villagers also said they often feel embarrassed in replying questions from visitors.

Police vigilance on movement of the family and their neighbours has also become a cause of embarrassment and inconvenience for them, they said.

Mahima committed suicide at their house at Kathalbaria village in Putia upazila on February 19 after being gang-raped allegedly by four JCD activists Selim, Ujjal, Farid and Farooque on February 15. The rapists also took photo of rape scene.

Her father filed two cases in this connection. Police arrested six persons and recovered the photo

film. The arrested are Ujjal, Musharraf, Khalil, Muteleb, Sikander and Jahangir. Musharraf, Khalil, Muteleb and Sikander are fathers of Ujjal, Selim, Farooque and Farid respectively and Jahangir is Semil's maternal uncle and a local leader of Jamaat-e-Islami.

Four of them are now on five days' remand. They are Ujjal, Musharraf, Khalil and Jahangir. Muteleb and Sikander were not produced in court for remand.

Exotic fish

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comes from the far-flung states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu and, of course, neighbouring West Bengal where pisciculture has become a big business.

Abul Mia noted that if there was a proper mode of transportation like refrigerated vans, the city dwellers could taste delicious fish dishes. Even those brought by river routes from southwestern fish farms of the country remain in better condition, he said. Because of the transportation problem, and with that the losses, the price of quality fish vary, he said.