

Cinema blasts kill 17 in Mymensingh

200 also injured in series of bombings

ABUL KALAM AZAD and AMINUL ISLAM, from Mymensingh

At least 17 persons, including two women, were killed and 200 others were injured in powerful bomb blasts in four cinema halls in the district town on Saturday evening.

Some dead bodies were so badly mutilated that it was difficult to identify them.

The dead are identified as Jahangir 18, Tapan 22, Mahmuda 20, Anwar 25, Tofazzal 18, Hazrat Ali 28, Sajib 18, Imran 25, Suman 14, Shafiqul 18, Dilip 20, Mofazzal 21, Kamal 15, Humayun 24, Nikhil Sarkar 35, a six-year-old girl Nila, and

an unidentified young man aged about 25.

Of them, 11 died on the spot, while six others died at the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH). A total of 66 persons were admitted to the hospitals. Of them, the condition of 15 was critical.

Editorial on page 4

Dr AZM Zahid Hossain told this correspondent at the MMCH that all the 17 persons died owing to heavy splinter hits.

Witnesses said that the first bomb went off at Ajanta Cinema Hall during the interval between two shows at around 6:05. "One person who desperately tried to enter the hall with a bag

was stopped by a security guard at the gate. As the security guard, Anwar, a victim of the incident, did not allow him to get in with the bag, the man left the bag to the security guard and went away," said Fazal, a film operator of the hall.

He said the security guard called another security guard, Shahin, and an operator, Shamim, and told them to see what was inside the bag. "At one stage we took the bag to the office of the hall manager on the second floor. As we were trying to bring out the heavy iron material it exploded," Fazal, whose legs had to be amputated below the knees, told this correspondent at the hospital.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: STAR

Muntasir Mamun, Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Shahriar Kabir (below) are being taken to CMM's Court, Dhaka yesterday.

Swoop on city residences of AL leaders, columnist

Tofail, Saber Chy, Shahriar and Muntasir held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four Awami League leaders and two columnists were arrested from their city residences in a pre-dawn swoop yesterday.

The arrests followed the serial bomb blasts, causing at least 20 deaths, in Mymensingh on December 7.

Editorial on page 4

The arrested are Sheikh Hasina's political secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury, AL leader Shafi Ahmed,

AL Relief and Social Welfare Secretary Mukul Bose, and Dhaka city AL Organising Secretary Sheikh Bazur Rahman. The columnists are Muntasir Mamun and Shahriar Kabir.

Police said they were arrested under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) for suspected involvement in 'anti-state activities'.

At least 10 more AL ward-level leaders were also arrested on the same day.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



PHOTO: STAR

Army men run checks on the site of a bomb blast inside the Aloka Cinema Hall in Mymensingh town yesterday after serial bomb blasts at four cinema halls killed 17 people Saturday.

Planned terrorist act: Khaleda

BSS, Mymensingh

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said Saturday's bomb blasts in Mymensingh were a planned terrorist act.

"It's a major act of terror ... an well-orchestrated terrorist incident," she told newsmen at the Circuit House here after visiting one of the four cinemas rocked by a string of deadly bomb blasts and the wounded in hospitals.

She said the persons responsible for the bomb blasts would be brought to book after proper investigation by a judicial inquiry commission.

Khaleda, who flew in here to see the situation after Saturday's bomb explosions in four movie theatres, said those who were making smear anti-Bangladesh campaign at home

and abroad and conspiring to tarnish country's image seemed to have links with such terrorist incidents.

She said security would have to be beefed up across the country, especially in all public gatherings, in cinemas, shopping centres, religious sites and other important places.

The prime minister said the authorities have arrested some people for their alleged involvement in the bomb blasts.

She visited Aloka Cinema Hall, one of the blast sites, and the wounded at the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) and Combined Military Hospital here.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Act of extremists in ruling fold, says Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina suspects involvement of a 'terrorist fundamentalist group' within the ruling alliance in the bomb blasts at four movie theatres in Mymensingh.

Hasina in a statement yesterday expressed grave concern over the incidents and described them as carnage.

"The incidents manifest the BNP-Jamaat alliance's failure to protect people. It appears that an identified fanatic terrorist group within the alliance is behind the heinous bomb blasts," said Hasina.

She referred to a Reuters report

that quoted Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury as saying that the al-Qaeda network of Osama bin Laden might have been involved in the bomb blasts.

"The offenders are now under the shelter of the ruling alliance." The government cannot walk away from its responsibilities by shifting the blame onto others, she said.

The leader of the opposition in the House demanded immediate arrests of those responsible for the explosions and urged countrymen to resist the ruling alliance.

Hasina prayed for the salvation of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Puzzling probes

STAR REPORT

The authorities are yet to have any leads on the motives and the masterminds behind several powerful bomb explosions since 1999 that have claimed nearly 100 lives.

The pattern of the series of blasts suggests that these were pre-planned acts of a powerful network. The government ordered inquiries, judicial or otherwise; however, for reasons not known to the public, the investigations remained incomplete.

In most cases, the agencies apparently made progress at the initial stage only to slow down in course of time before grinding to a halt.

Investigators have so far submitted charge sheet in only one case -- the bomb blast at the Udichi function in Jessore on March 6, 1999.

The CID investigators submitted charge sheet in the Udichi case

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Altaf rules out al-Qaeda link

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury yesterday ruled out any al-Qaeda link with Saturday's serial blasts at four Mymensingh cinemas, terming these "sabotage and conspiracy against the nation".

"I want to reiterate in unequivocal terms the al-Qaeda elements do not exist in the country, nor do they have any place here," the minister said at a press conference at the home ministry conference room.

He, however, refused to make any comment as to who might be behind the incidents "without the report of a formal inquisition".

The home minister said the masterminds of the serial explosions would be traced down and put in the dock, however powerful they are or whatever ideology they subscribe to or whichever party they belong to.

Altaf said Bangladesh is a shining example of communal harmony and people of all faiths enjoy equal rights and practise their religious activities without any fear. "Bangladesh is a liberal democratic country and the people believe in religion but not extremism."

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Reuters remarks put Altaf in tight corner

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury yesterday was severely criticised by his cabinet colleagues for his reported remarks to Reuters that the al-Qaeda may have links with the bomb attacks in Mymensingh.

Sources said the home minister clarified his position to the prime minister, senior ministers and top officials at the Prime Minister's Office and claimed that he did not talk to Reuters.

But most of the ministers appar-

ently were not very convinced, sources said.

None of the ministers or BNP leaders wanted to make any comment in public about Altaf's reported remarks. Sources said the government was embarrassed by the home minister's remarks especially when India has launched a campaign against Bangladesh to portray it as an al-Qaeda base.

Sources said some senior BNP leaders requested a number of ministers to hold a press conference to repair the damage done by Altaf's

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Only cheer from Kapali

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's batting blues showed no signs of ending as they were bundled out for 139 on the opening day of the first Test against West Indies at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Returning to action four days after losing the one-day series 2-0, the home team suffered the same top-order collapse and was eventually shot out in 54.1 overs.

The tourists, in reply, scored 118 for no loss at stumps, raising the prospect of yet another 'three-day Test'. Wavell Hinds was batting on 73 and Chris Gayle 49.

The two left-handed openers sent the Bangladesh bowlers on a leather hunt with Hinds, the more aggressive of the two, completing his 50 off 75 balls that included ten savage hits across the rope.

The morning however showed totally a different picture after West Indies captain Ridley Jacobs won the toss and invited the hosts to bat first.

Left-arm paceman Pedro Collins, returning to the side after

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh all-rounder Alok Kapali gets rapped on the pads plumb in front of the wicket by West Indian quickie Vasbert Drakes (not in picture) on the first day of the first Test at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The Reuters riddle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury's comments linking al-Qaeda with Saturday's bomb attack as reported by Reuters and his subsequent denial have baffled the country's media.

Reuters on Saturday night in its despatch headlined, "Bangladesh Cinema Bombs Kill 15, Wound Nearly 300", quoted the home minister as saying that the attacks could be the work of Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network or any other terrorist group and that he ordered a national security alert.

"Police suspect Al-Qaeda or any other terror groups are behind the bomb blasts," Chowdhury told Reuters.

The international news agency also quoted the home minister as saying that political opponents also could be behind the explosions in a bid to destabilise the government.

"We are trying to find out who are actually involved in these cruel acts," he was further quoted as saying. "The government has

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



Shuvra Dev nabbed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Popular singer Shuvra Dev was arrested on Thursday in connection with the attempt to smuggle top criminal Abdur Rashid alias Kala Faruque out of the country as a member of a cultural team. Faruque was later killed in police custody on November 5.

Ramna police arrested Shuvra from his Pallabi residence and took

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Dipjal arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The army arrested Monwar Hossain Dipu alias Dipjal, a Dhaka city ward commissioner and movie actor, from the Zia International Airport on Tuesday.

He was quizzed by an army team and later handed over to the Mirpur police. He was produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka and was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail on the following day.

Army raided Dipjal's residence on October 19 and recovered seven firearms and ammunitions.

Dipjal and his family members went to Jeddah by a Biman flight on November 18 and returned at about 3:00pm Tuesday.

He was stopped at the airport by immigration officials and within half an hour, an army team arrested him from the airport. He was taken to an army camp and handed over to the Mirpur police at about 10:45pm.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



Our Chittagong correspondent reports that the joint forces recovered 24 firearms including one AK-47 assault rifle from Chittagong and Cox's Bazar during the last 72 hours ending Saturday night. They also arrested two pirates from Moheshkhali.

The AK-47 and 15 firearms were seized from different parts of Fatikchhari upazila alone. A .303 rifle with eight rounds of bullets, two pipe-guns and a signal launcher

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7