

Eid-ul-Fitr celebrated

FROM PAGE 12
The biggest Eid congregation of the country was, however, held at the historic Solakia Eidgah Maidan in Kishoreganj district.

Maulana Abul Khair Mohammad Nurullah, principal of Hazratnagar Madrassah, led the prayers and Munajat attended by thousands of devotees from home and abroad, including India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other Muslim countries.

Earlier in the morning, President Iajuddin Ahmed and Mrs. Ahmed hosted receptions for diplomats and people from all walks of life at the Bangabhaban.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia visited the mazar of late President Ziaur Rahman on the occasion of the holy Eid-ul-Fitr.

Khaleda placed wreaths at the mazar of the late leader and offered feteiha there. She prayed for peace, progress and welfare of people of the country.

Ministers, legislators, party leaders and her family members were present.

She later exchanged greetings with a cross section of people at the Prime Minister's Bhaban.

She extended Eid greetings to the countrymen and wished peace, progress and prosperity of the country and the Muslim Ummah.

Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar put on special programmes commemorating the festival.

Improved diet was served to the inmates of hospitals, jails, orphanages and vagrants centers.

Important buildings in the city including the Bangladesh Supreme Court and Bangladesh Secretariat were illuminated with colourful lights. Road islands, main thoroughfares in the capital and in other cities were decorated with miniature flags and posters inscribed with "Eid Mubarak" in both Bangla

and Arabic.

Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina exchanged Eid greetings with her party leaders and workers, professionals, journalists, poets, intellectuals and foreign diplomats at her Sudha Sadan residence Friday morning.

In the afternoon, she went to the Bangabandhu Bhaban and Banani graveyard and offered munajat and feteiha there seeking eternal peace of the departed souls of her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, mother Fazilatunnesa Mujib, brothers Sheikh Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel and other relatives.

She also prayed for peace and prosperity of the nation.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia called on President Iajuddin Ahmed at the Bangabhaban Friday evening to exchange Eid greetings.

She stayed with the President for some time.

Puzzling probes

FROM PAGE 1
implicating Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Tariqul Islam, now the information minister, and a number of leaders of a regional smuggling syndicate.

However, the BNP termed the charge sheet a politically motivated step to defame its leader.

The 'failure' of the investigation agencies has kept the people in the dark about why these are happening, creating a widespread sense of insecurity.

Upon taking office in October last year, the BNP-led coalition set up a judicial commission to probe the bomb explosions that took place during the Awami League tenure.

However, the report the commission framed earned fame for its political motivation which also embarrassed the government. Understandably, the government did not proceed with the report and shelved it.

The first such incident took place in Jessore where bomb explosion at an Udichi function killed 10 people and injured more than 100 others.

During the AL regime about six such incidents of bomb explosion took place across the country.

After the BNP came to power the first explosion took place in Sathkhira on September 28 this year.

Two powerful bombs simultaneously exploded at a cinema and

the district stadium where a circus was going on and claimed lives of three and left many others injured.

The latest bomb explosions in Mymensingh on Saturday evening in four movie theatres killed 17 people and left more than 200 others injured.

In another blast at a Kadiani mosque in Khulna on October 8, 1999 killed seven people and left 10 others injured.

Explosions at the CPB rally at the Paltan Maidan in the city and on the Bangabandhu Avenue on January 20, 2001 left seven people killed and more than 50 others injured.

Ten people were killed and more than twenty others were injured in an explosion at the Ramna Balamul during the Bengali New Year celebrations on April 14, 2001.

In June 3, 2001 bomb blast at a Catholic church at Bainerchar in Gopalganj claimed 10 lives and left at least 30 others injured.

Another explosion at the Narayanganj Awami League office on June 16, 2001 left 22 people killed and over 100 injured.

During the regime of the caretaker government in 2001 three incidents of bomb explosions took place.

Explosion at a public meeting of the Awami League at Mollarhat in Bagherhat district in September last

year left at least nine people dead and more than 30 others injured.

In another explosion at the Upazila Health Complex quarters in Sunamganj in September 2001 four people, including an eight-year-old boy, were killed. On the same day in another explosion at a house in Sylhet two others died.

Moreover, the law enforcers and different intelligence agencies recovered powerful bombs from a public meeting venue of the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Kotlajpara in Gopalganj, the Janakantha newspaper office and other explosives from different mosques in the city. But the authorities failed to find out clue of the sources and the men behind it.

Road accidents

FROM PAGE 12
A case was filed with Bhaluka police but no one was arrested.

In Tangail, our correspondent writes, at least nine people were killed and 30 others seriously injured when two passenger buses collided head-on at noon on the Dhaka-Tangail highway.

The dead included the drivers of the two buses and a helper.

According to police and eyewitnesses, two passengers died on the spot, four on the way to hospital while the rest at the Mirzapur Kumudini Trust Hospital.

The victims could not be identified. A case was filed with the Mirzapur Police Station.

In Narayanganj, two people, including an old woman, were killed and 25 others injured when a passenger bus skidded off the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Tribordi Saturday.

According to police and eyewitnesses, the Dhaka-bound bus fell into a roadside ditch due to a brake failure, killing two instantly.

The victims could not be identified and their bodies were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for autopsy. The injured were sent to the hospital.

Although police seized the vehicle, its driver and helper escaped.

In Barisal, according to our correspondent, a woman and her sister were run over by a passenger bus on the Dhaka-Barisal highway at Kashemabad in Gournadi Upazila Saturday.

Marium, 20, and Jitu, 7, were rushed to the Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital where they died.

The same day, one Berek Munshi, 50, was hit by a passenger bus on Bandh Road in the town.

On Thursday, at Madhabpara in Babuganj Upazila, one Abdul Khaleque, 55, was knocked over by a passenger bus.

90 shops

FROM PAGE 12
Over 20 fire-fighting vehicles from Tejgaon, Mohammadpur, Palashi, Kurmitola and the Fire Brigade Headquarters were employed in dousing the fire.

They brought the fire under control at 11:30pm and doused it by 2:40am, saving over 80 shops.

The market housed 181 shops, most of them groceries, hotels, restaurants, hairdresser's and spice shops.

Altaf: Al-Qaeda

FROM PAGE 1

The home minister also refuted a Reuters despatch that quoted him as saying the attack "may be an act of al-Qaeda". "I have never spoken to any Reuters correspondent either over telephone or in person."

He termed the report "baseless, imaginary and motivated" and requested Reuters to withdraw the "untrue and misleading" news.

He described the blasts as "not only sad but also cruel, ruthless, painful, despicable and unpardonable" and said these were part of a conspiracy to kill innocent people.

Seventeen people have so far been killed and many others injured in the blasts. Of the injured, 36 have been admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, six to Mymensingh Combined Military Hospital and one to Suhrawardi Hospital, Altaf told the press conference.

"Security forces have cordoned off and combed the entire area immediately after the tragic incidents. Twenty-one people have so far been arrested on suspicion and all-out efforts have been taken to identify the criminals involved with the incident," the minister said.

Altaf also referred to the prime minister's and his visits to the bombed cinemas in Mymensingh. "She (prime minister) has ordered that the culprits would have to be identified. She has termed the incidents a sabotage and conspiracy against the entire nation and it is the responsibility and duty of all citizens to resist this conspiracy."

The home minister said it is also the responsibility of the press to investigate what the conspirators wanted to prove through killing innocent people inside cinemas when people got a relief from crime as there is almost no criminal activity due to the current anti-crime drive.

After reading out the written statement, the home minister

showed the newsmen a piece of paper, saying the prime minister had asked him to meet her and so he would only answer a few questions.

In response to a question, he said after coming to know of the bomb attacks, he had first talked to the prime minister and then talked to the civil administration concerned, army, police, the BDR and ansars but not to a single journalist.

"I have talked to a total of 37 people, but none of them was journalist, so the question to give any reaction to Reuters does not arise at all."

He said that there is a register of all incoming and outgoing phones at his home and anybody can check whether he had talked to any journalist or not.

When asked whether he talked to Reuters over his mobile phone, he said his mobile had gone out of order as the battery ran out. Besides, there was also no network signal inside his residence.

On the arrest of Awami League leaders Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Shafi Ahmed, and columnists Shahriar Kabir and Muntasar Mamun, he said "Their arrest is not linked with the explosions in Mymensingh."

Altaf's remarks

FROM PAGE 1
comments, but none wanted to venture out. "Let him (Altaf) face the music," said one minister, according to sources.

Many suggested that the government should completely deny Altaf's reported comments to Reuters while others wanted to keep themselves away from the crisis.

A section of high officials of the PMO, foreign, home and information ministries along with the journalists-turned advisors at the home ministry were busy preparing a statement to be readout by Altaf at yesterday's press briefing.

The draft statement was communicated to a number of senior party leaders and ministers and then it was decided that the best damage control mechanism would be to deny the comment.

Finally, an influential official at the PMO advised Altaf to prepare a written statement denying his remarks. He also advised that the home minister should claim that he (Altaf) had never talked to any journalist after the incident.

The home secretary and other officials then prepared the statement and it was read out by Altaf.

PM: Terrorist act

FROM PAGE 1

"I am deeply saddened at the tragic incident," she said, expressing her deep sympathy for the members of the bereaved families.

The prime minister said mourning day would be observed today in Mymensingh for those killed in the bomb blasts.

Members of law enforcement agencies and Aloka Cinema Hall authorities apprised her of the bomb attack. The three other movie houses that came under bomb attacks were Ajanta, Chayabani and Purabi.

While visiting the wounded moviegoers at the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital and Combined Military Hospital, the prime minister asked the attending doctors to ensure adequate treatment including food and medicine for them. She also wanted to know from some of them about the incidents.

She extended her sincere thanks to all those officials of the district administration, physicians and the people of Mymensingh town who immediately after the bomb blasts extended their all-out support and cooperation in rescuing the victims.

The prime minister said some evidence have been collected. She hoped that it would be clear to the nation within a few days who were

the persons responsible for the act of terror and where it was planned.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Khandaker Musharraf Hossain, Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources AKM Musharraf Hossain, Delwar Hossain Dulu MP, Shah Shahid Sarwar MP, Raushan Ershad MP, Kader Siddiqui MP, Fazlul Huq Amini MP, Chairman of Red Crescent Society ZA Khan and GOC of Mymensingh Cantonment Major General Moin Uddin Ahmed were present on the occasion.

At a meeting with ministers, MPs, officials of district administration and area commander and GOC of Mymensingh at the circuit house, the prime minister asked the people to remain alert about those who are out to create anarchy in the country. She called for beefing up security at all public gatherings and public places.

Deputy commissioner of Mymensingh briefed the prime minister on the incidents and how officials and dwellers of the town came to the aid of the bomb victims. He said 41 wounded people were now undergoing treatment at different hospitals.

Riddle

FROM PAGE 1
ordered a security alert all over the country to prevent any such attempts of terror acts."

But at a press conference at his office yesterday afternoon, the home minister flatly denied having said anything to Reuters.

He also issued a rejoinder to Reuters that says the following: "The report has quoted me as saying that the bombing could be the work of Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network or some other terror group."

"I would like to assert that never ever have I spoken to any Reuters correspondent on any issues in recent days. There is therefore no question of my speaking to anybody on the Mymensingh incident. It is indeed surprising that an international news agency of such a high repute could take recourse to such untruth based on figment of imagination."

"I would also like to categorically state here that there is no Al-Qaeda network on the soil of Bangladesh. This fact is very much known to the whole world. There is however a group of people which is, in league with some external forces, trying to play a false Al-Qaeda card. Its motive is very simple. It passionately believes that this is the best ploy to harm a government that came to power a year ago through a massive mandate of the people."

"It is determined to malign a country for its narrow political ends. I hate to believe that Reuters, for which I have the highest personal respect, may unwittingly play into the hands of this vicious choir of such people," is the home minister noted in the rejoinder.

The Daily Star contacted Reuters last night following the issuance of the rejoinder and Reuters stood by its report.

International media all over the world including the Voice of America (VOA) picked up the Reuters report. The VOA broadcast the home minister's observations that Al-Qaeda or similar terrorist groups might have carried out the Mymensingh attack.

Hasina: Extremists

FROM PAGE 1

the departed souls and expressed deep sympathy with the bereaved.

The former prime minister recalled some incidents of bomb blasts that took place during her rule (1996-2001) and alleged that the perpetrators joined hands with the BNP now.

She believes the bomb blasts are part of a ploy to eliminate the spirit of the country's independence, secular democracy, liberal thinking and the opposition AL.

Many BNP-Jamaat men were on trial in connection with the bomb blasts at Jessore, Ramna Batamul, Narayanganj and Paltan, but they were relieved of the charges after the alliance came to power, she said.

Hasina has also said the arrest of her political secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury, other party leaders and Muntasar Mamun, a columnist, and Shahriar Kabir, a journalist, within hours of the Mymensingh bomb blasts demonstrates that "it's a staged drama".

AL team off to Mymensingh

An AL delegation led by senior presidium member of the party Abdus Samad Azad left Dhaka for Mymensingh yesterday to visit the sites of bomb blasts and meet the victims' families.

The delegation members are AL presidium members Abdur Razzak and Abdul Jalil and central leaders Motia Chowdhury, Abdul Mannan Khan, Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, Abdul Latif Siddiqui, Dr Abdul Mannan, Dr Aman Ullah, MP, Syed Ashraful Islam, MP, Mirza Azam, MP, and Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj, MP.

Shuvra Dev nabbed

FROM PAGE 1

him to the police station. He was produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka with a prayer for remand, but the court sent him to the Dhaka Central Jail.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Mohammad Abdul Quayyum told journalists that Shuvra was arrested for his 'involvement' in forgery and distorting of information about his cultural team which was scheduled for a trip to Sweden.

Faruque was arrested from an aircraft at the Zia International Airport prior to leaving for Sweden. Police also held another member of the team, Qureshi, who is now in jail. Faruque was later taken to the Airport Police Station and then to the Uttara Police Station.

According to police, Faruque was shot in the leg as he tried to escape when he was taken to the Osmany Hostel of the Textile College at Tejgaon on November 5 to nab his accomplices. Injured, he was taken to the National Orthopedics (pongu) Hospital where the on-duty doctors declared him dead.

Uttara Police Station filed a case on Monday with the Ramna Police Station accusing Shuvra Dev, ABM Shajahan and Nazrul Islam Qureshi, a programme director of Channel i of involvement in including Kala Faruq in the cultural team.

Ramna police said Shuvra was one of the masterminds to have helped Kala Faruque become a member of the cultural team.

Police said they are looking for Shajahan.

Faruque was arrested from an aircraft at the Zia International Airport prior to leaving for Sweden. Police also held another member of the team, Qureshi, who is now in jail. Faruque was later taken to the Airport Police Station and then to the Uttara Police Station.

According to police, Faruque was shot in the leg as he tried to escape when he was taken to the Osmany Hostel of the Textile College at Tejgaon on November 5 to nab his accomplices. Injured, he was taken to the National Orthopedics (pongu) Hospital where the on-duty doctors declared him dead.

Saber, Shahriar, Muntasar held

FROM PAGE 1

AL leaders Saber and Shafi were produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court yesterday afternoon along with columnists Muntasar and Shahriar, with two separate forwarding reports.

After rejecting the bail petitions filed by the defence, the court granted a three-day remand for each of them. The police had sought a ten-day remand for Shahriar and a week's remand for each of the three others arrested.

The investigating officers recommended their detention under the Special Powers Act, 1974.

Saber, Muntasar and Shafi were taken to the court hajat at 2.15pm and an hour later they were produced before the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Mamun-ul-Rashid.

Barrister Shawkat Ali Khan, Barrister Amir-ul-Islam, Advocates Syed Rezaur Rahman, Rahmat Ali MP, Abu Sayeed Sagar, Shahara Khatun, and Abdur Rahman Howladar moved the bail petitions for the arrested and demanded cancellation of remand.

Metropolitan Public Prosecutor (PP) Abdullah Mahmud Hassan and Additional Public Prosecutor Golam Mostafa Khan opposed the bail petitions and prayed for seven days' remand.

Kabir was taken to the court hajat at 3.30pm and an hour later he was produced before the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Nurul Karim Majumdar.

Defence counsels moved the bail prayer for him but the prosecution opposed it and prayed for a 10-day remand. After hearing the two sides, the magistrate rejected the bail petition and enlarged Shahriar with a three-day remand.

In both the cases, the defence lawyers submitted petitions seeking stay orders of the remands on the plea that they would file criminal revisions with the High Court

against the remand orders. However, the prosecution opposed it and the magistrate rejected the bail petitions.

The defence also strongly pleaded for the arrested not to be put under the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) during the remand period. They recalled that in some previous instances Shahriar and Saber were tortured in the name of interrogation by the JIC.

Responding to plea, the court instructed that during their remand periods only the respective investigation officers would interrogate the arrested persons.

Relatives of the arrested persons and political leaders and activists crowded the whole court premises from early morning. Additional Metropolitan Magistrate Mamun-ul-Rashid.

Policemen, both in uniform and plainclothes, also raided the residences of former ministers and opposition leaders - Tofail Ahmed, Amir Hossain Amu and Mofazzal Hossain Moya - and columnist Abed Khan in a bid to arrest them but none of them were at home, police said.

The law enforcing agencies and detective teams made separate attempts to arrest 'suspected people' mostly linked with opposition parties, sources added.

Of the four arrested politicians and columnists, Shahriar was nabbed for his alleged involvement with the two foreign journalists, who are now in the Dhaka Central Jail. The three politicians are facing charges of playing a subversive role with the objective of creating lawlessness, damaging communal harmony, and tarnishing the image of the country abroad.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Md Abdul Quayyum told the journalists yesterday that police had strong evidence of the arrested persons' involvement in blurring the country's image

abroad.

Family members of the arrested persons claimed that while picking them up from their residences at dead of night, the policemen did not show any arrest warrants; rather in some cases they (policemen) said that they were being taken out only for interrogation and not for arrest.

Detectives raided Saber's Paribagh residence at about 3:20am and took him to the Minto Road office of the Detective Branch (DB) for interrogation.

Saber got freed from jail on November 20, following a November 13 High Court order declaring an earlier detention order illegal. Arresting him from Zia International Airport on October 20, prior to his departure for London, the police brought seditious charge against him and sent him to one-month detention under the Special Power Act on October 23.

Saber's wife told The Daily Star yesterday that she was greatly frustrated over the fresh arrest of her husband, within two weeks of his release upon a High Court order. "I'm surprised that the same charges have been brought against him (Saber). He was just released upon court order declaring his earlier detention illegal," she said.

Another DB team raided the Ramna residence of Dhaka University teacher, historian, and columnist Muntasar and picked him up at 2:30am.

His wife later told The Daily Star that "they (policemen in civil dress) looked for Muntasar. When I asked for their identity, they claimed to be detectives. They said their boss Deputy Commissioner of the DB Mahfuzul Haq wanted to talk to Muntasar".

Later Muntasar's wife tried to visit him at the DB office in the morning but failed. She handed medicines for Muntasar over to an on-duty sentry there.

A team of Gulshan police along

with detectives raided the Mohakhali residence of writer, columnist Shahriar at about 2 am and took him to the Gulshan Police Station. He was later taken to the Cantonment Police station before being produced in the court in the afternoon.

Shahriar's daughter Arpita told The Daily Star, "The policemen knocked at our door at 2 am and as my father opened it they wanted him to go with them to the Gulshan Police Station saying that the officer-in-charge wanted to talk to him. He (Shahriar) wanted to know whether he was to be arrested or just to be interrogated. They said he would be interrogated only."

"Later on my uncle went to the Gulshan Police Station taking water and a shower for my father." But as the day progressed, Arpita said, the family lost contact with Shahriar as Gulshan police said Shahriar was taken to some other place under directives from the 'higher authorities.'

Shahriar was arrested on November 22 last year, on his return home from India, and a seditious charge was pressed against him. However, he got released on January 20 this year.

Another team of the DB raided the residence of young AL leader Shafi's Dhanmondi residence and arrested him at about 3:30am. The wife of the former student leader told The Daily Star that plainclothes entered into the house and picked her husband without showing any warrant of arrest. She said that the plainclothes told her that they went to arrest him upon orders from very high officials.

Family members said that Shafi is on bail in a case that was filed against him to harass him politically.

Dipjal arrested

FROM PAGE 1
were recovered at Muktapur area of Fatikchhari on Saturday night.

In Moheshkhali, army recovered nine firearms and arrested two pirates on the night before the Eid.

In Magura, army recovered a pistol and a bomb along with three rounds of bullets from the residence of a union leader at Madhukhali Bazar.

Cinema blasts kill 17

FROM PAGE 1
The panic-stricken people rushed to the second floor of the hall seeing smoke emitting from the rooftop but only found several fatally injured people in a pool of blood. "Some of them had their hands blown off while others had lost their legs," said Sainuddin, a witness.

Three more explosions took place, one after another, in three other cinema halls when local people and Fire Brigade personnel were busy rescuing the victims of Ajanta Hall and were rushing them to the MMCH.

The second bomb exploded on the first floor of Chhayabani Cinema Hall at about 6:45pm followed by blasts at Purabi and Aloka cinema halls. These three bombs exploded in a span of half an hour.

All the four halls were overcrowded with viewers, as it was the second day of the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays. Anticipating the heavy rush, the hall authorities arranged for extra accommodation facilities at the halls, local people said.

Immediately after the explosions, local people shut down their shops and joined the rescue operations with the Fire Brigade and army personnel. They took the injured to the MMCH. Hundreds of people rushed to the hospital to see their near and dear ones.

Till yesterday, thousands of people from the town and the nearby villages thronged the MMCH, the Military Hospital, and different clinics, in search of their relatives.

People also spontaneously donated blood to save the lives of the victims. Police picked up 21 of the cinema halls for interrogation.

Shipi, who had both of her legs badly damaged, said, "I along with my husband and one-year old child were enjoying a film at Chhayabani Hall." I suddenly heard a big sound around me and later saw both of my legs hit by splinters." Her husband and child, however, escaped unhurt.

"I went to Chhayabani Hall with my husband to watch a film. An explosion minutes before the interval created a big smoke