

AL demands

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the country since the BNP-led alliance government took over.

"We also demand judicial probe into the Sylhet blasts," said Hasina, leader of the opposition in parliament.

Hasina made the demands at a press conference at the local Circuit House yesterday. She came to Sylhet on a daylong programme.

"We have already talked to British parliamentarians and others. But the alliance rulers are not interested in any international probe since they are linked to the incidents of bomb blasts," she AL chief said.

Hasina visited Gulshan centre premises where the blast on Saturday night left Sylhet AL leader Mohammad Ibrahim killed and about 35 others injured. She also visited the injured now under treatment at MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Condemning the bomb blast, the opposition leader said such incidents were taking place in Sylhet one after another as people involved in them had the backing of ruling alliance top leaders and local lawmaker.

On incidents of violence in different regions of the country, Hasina said the same communal militant group, using different names, is involved in these. It uses the name Janajuddha in Khulna, Banglabhai in Rajshahi and Tiger in Sylhet region.

The coalition rulers have a hand in all these incidents, she alleged.

The former prime minister said Bangladesh is now portrayed abroad as a 'terrorist country' and the ruling coalition is fully responsible for this.

Referring to the recent killing of the prime witness in lawmaker Ahsanullah Master murder case, Hasina said, "We want to know who

ordered the killing."

On the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), she said the alliance rulers are busy creating various 'bahinis' with the tax payers money to hide their own crimes.

She alleged that two top BNP leaders' sons are involved in misdeeds in their own areas.

"The whole country is now in the grip of bombers, abductors and other criminals. Murders, arson and abduction have become everyday affair. Peace and security are nowhere. All this proves total failure of this government," the opposition leader said.

Militants are blasting bombs even in mosques, madrasas, temples and other religious places, she said. "People now want to get rid of such a suffocating situation."

Replying to a question, Hasina said, "I cannot understand why Sylhet is being targeted repeatedly. We are really worried about Sylhet."

Sylhet City Corporation Mayor and city AL President Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran also spoke on the occasion.

The mother of the boy killed in the August 5 blast in front of a local cinema hall, Firoza Begum, met Hasina at the Circuit House. Slain AL leader Ibrahim's brother Jafar also met her.

Hasina gave some money to the city mayor for treatment of the injured in Saturday's blast.

The AL president was accompanied by party General Secretary Abdul Jalil, Suranjit Sengupta, Abdus Shahid, Dewan Farid Gazi, AMA Muhiit, Sultan Mohammad Mansur, Obaidul Quader and Abdur Rahman.

Hasina visited the shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal and Hazrat Shah Poran.

7 bodies recovered

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Nurul Islam, 40, a rickshaw-puller, and Swapan Ali, 27, a garment factory worker.

Hundreds of locals and relatives of the drowned boat passengers gathered on the bank of Buriganga worriedly watching the floating bodies, their stink permeating the area.

"The boat was ferrying around 100 passengers from Kaliganj to Sadarghat at around 3:30pm Tuesday. Suddenly, a single-decker launch turned right towards the Sadarghat launch and ran over the ferryboat just 20 yards off the pontoon," Babul, a terminus staff who had witnessed the accident, narrated.

"Of the passengers, around 70 either swam ashore or managed to board some boats that came to rescue. The rest of the passengers went missing," he added.

Locals alleged when boatmen rushed to rescue the victims, police beat and dispersed them to keep the prime minister's route across the river free. The PM crossed the river about half an hour after the accident.

The policemen who watched the accident nonchalantly did not even inform the fire brigade.

"We received the information at around 6:30pm, three hours after the incident, and called out divers from

AL firm

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Jalil told The Daily Star yesterday.

August 15, the day Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated, was officially observed as the National Mourning Day during the AL's tenure in power from 1996 to 2001. After coming to power in October 2001, the four-party alliance government scrapped the day and its official programmes.

The hartal call in protest of this decision originated at the July 14 meeting of the AL's central working committee chaired by AL President Sheikh Hasina.

As per the decision, leaders of the AL and its front organisations will place wreaths at the portrait of the slain leader in Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at 12:01pm, one minute after the hartal ends. The national flag will be kept at half-mast at the offices of AL and its front organisations countrywide.

Certain quarter

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shun the path of violence and stand by the flood-stricken people to mitigate their sufferings.

The prime minister accused the opposition political parties of talking tall and sending press releases to the media criticising the government.

She was addressing the flood-affected people at Ulipur Stadium in the afternoon.

The prime minister also visited Saghata upazila of Gaibandha and addressed local people at Kachua High School ground.

She said none starved for want of food as the government took adequate steps in aid of the people hit by devastating floods across the country.

Assuring all out support of the government, Khaleda urged the farmers to go for intensive farming to recoup the losses incurred in the

Another abduction in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Criminals abducted a trader and demanded Tk 1 lakh for his release Wednesday night and the kidnapped businessman of Meherpur is still missing.

Police said criminals picked up Abdul Wahab, local fabric trader of Harinarayanpur village in sadar upazila in Kushtia, from his house at gunpoint.

The victim's family said the criminals kidnapped Wahab as he had failed to pay them Tk 35,000 as toll. His captors later demanded the ransom over telephone.

Sources said Wahab's family did not seek police help, as the criminals threatened to kill him, and is trying to buy his freedom.

In Meherpur, pulse supplier Hamidul Islam is still missing. Criminals picked up him from his house in Durlowpur village in Gangni Monday and demanded a ransom of Tk 2 lakh.

Hamidul's family said they are trying to negotiate with the captors, who threatened them not to go to police.

As many as 90 people including 36 school and college students were abducted in Kushtia in the last seven months. Of them, seven including two schoolboys were killed, 11 are still missing and the rest bought their freedom.

Organised criminals and outlaws are behind the kidnapping, police and victims' families said.

CPD fights

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"I am slightly amused that the CPD with its limited staff and capabilities, with only one centre in Dhaka, can pass judgement to overrule the UN and government's assessment figure, who have consulted thousands of field-level sources," said Jorgen Lissner, UN resident coordinator, on the sidelines of the launch of UN flash appeal.

"Their assessment is not credible and is baseless," he said on CPD's assessment figure of \$1.9 billion. The CPD also said the figure could reach a maximum of \$2.49 billion at worst.

Food and Disaster Management Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf said, "Sitting in an air-conditioned room in Dhaka, even I can cook up an assessment figure. I would ask the CPD staff to assess the damage after making field visits."

"Some say the damage figure could be even higher," Yusuf added.

Speaking to The Daily Star on telephone last night, Debapriya said their assessment report is based on government figures and if the UN appeal is based on government damage assessment, then the government report should be published.

The CPD in its report said 30 percent of the country had been inundated at the peak of the floods and their damage-assessment has been done accordingly. The UN in its report claimed that 75 percent of the country was inundated at the flood's peak, which Debapriya says is an indication of their damage-assessment exaggeration.

The United Nations Develop-ment Programme and the International Labour Organisation called for \$75.7 million to build cottage industry, provide shelter and livelihood for migrating communities, including 10,000 people, and restore lost infrastructure.

Over 190,000 families will be assisted in urgent need for shelter, with agencies depending more on providing them with materials such as corrugated iron, while 2,000 families will be given homes.

Although the government will ask multilateral donors later for long-term infrastructure development, Lissner said, the amount for the cottage industry is too low, as working capital given to flood-hit entrepreneurs might be inadequate.

Unicef has appealed for \$11.2 million to restore educational

CPD sees flood damage

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government at \$6.7 billion

"The main challenge the government faces now after the recession of floodwaters is to create domestic demand through adopting an expansionary economic policy by increasing public expenditure," Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the CPD, said at a press briefing on "Rapid Assessment of Flood 2004" in the capital.

Bangladesh with its own domestic resources can by and large finance the post-flood reconstruction work, the CPD maintains.

"A closer look at the allocations made under both Revenue Budget and Annual Development Programme (ADP) reveals that the government has at its disposal (either unallocated or earmarked for use of physical infrastructure development) at least Tk 3,426 crore.

"If one can tap into the Block Allocation for the other sectors (and not fully utilise the Unexpected Allocation) total amount of available resources may go as high as up to Tk 4,944 crore...the total cost of damage in the public sector, as estimated by the CPD, is about Tk 4,303 crore."

Dr Debapriya warned against continuing the incremental expansionary approach till the general elections, as it may weaken macroeconomic fundamentals, particularly by way of widening fiscal deficit underwritten by the government borrowing.

The CPD suggests the government restructure budget to enhance public investment in post-flood rehabilitation programme, increase credit flow in the agriculture and industrial sectors and woo additional foreign aid.

The worst flood-hit areas received less relief materials compared to moderately-affected areas, according to a CPD survey.

The government and the NGOs were sluggish to respond to the relief needs and their responses, too, were poor at the initial stage, many respondents of the survey told the CPD.

"The response of the NGO was surprisingly late. In some areas, the NGO response came after the government programmes were initiated," the CPD says quoting its survey.

"The distinguishing features of this year's flood was that individual level and community level philanthropic and relief operations were extensive in many areas and in many instances actually filled the vacuum left by the late response of the government and the NGOs," the CPD observed.

Dr Debapriya noted the NGOs have

wider scope in the post-flood rehabilitation and urged the government to take measures to immediately release foreign funds channelled to the NGOs.

Many raised allegations of nepotism, pilferage and politicisation in relief distribution operations.

The CPD sent its teams to 12 upazilas of nine districts to carry out the survey and interviewed some 900 flood-affected local people. They also talked with government officials including upazila nirbahi officers, magistrates, journalists and NGO activists.

The damage assessment was done on the basis of data and information gathered from government and non-government sources and also from media reports. Later, the CPD held an in-house dialogue with the government and non-government experts before finalising the report.

The private sector has lost Tk 7,115 crore to the floods -- agriculture Tk 2,916 crore, residential Tk 3,706 crore and industries Tk 493 crore, according to the preliminary estimate of the CPD.

The public sector damage stands at Tk 4,303 crore, of which infrastructure incurred Tk 3,857 crore, education Tk 345 crore, health Tk 48 crore, industries Tk 38 crore and agriculture Tk 3.9 crore.

The CPD suggests the government spend Tk 3,426 crore the budget set aside as block allocations and under repairs, maintenance and rehabilitation head for post-flood infrastructure rehabilitation.

It warns the government against corruption in repairing flood-damaged dams and embankments, bridges and culverts and roads and other physical structures.

The think-tank also advocates for expanding credit to agriculture and small and medium enterprises as, it observes, credit expansion played the crucial role in economic recovery after the 1998 deluge.

The CPD advises the government to negotiate with the development partners for another \$200 million in budgetary support in addition to the \$200 million it recently received from the World Bank.

This year's flooding affected 33.75 million or 24.96 percent of the total population and submerged 30,582 square kilometres area, as against 31 million or 24.55 percent of the total population and 100,000 square kilometres area in 1998.

Total farm damage in the latest floods stands at 1,694 crore, which was Tk 3,483 crore in 1998.

UN seeks \$210m

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191,075 tonnes of food and will run its post-flood rehabilitation efforts for a year. WFP asked for \$39 million in emergency food relief as part of the UN flash appeal.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) that will channel most funds into agriculture has appealed for \$11 million in donor assistance. FAO will provide technical assistance, support the most vulnerable farmers by supplying agricultural inputs to 3 million people.

The United Nations Develop-ment Programme and the International Labour Organisation called for \$75.7 million to build cottage industry, provide shelter and livelihood for migrating communities, including 10,000 people, and restore lost infrastructure.

Unicef has also asked for \$35 million to provide safe water, repair water systems and provide sanitary latrines and water treatment chemicals.

With the floodwaters receding, dangerous pathogens from sewage are likely to be on the rise, which became a major concern as diarrhoea will be a major killer if it is not controlled, Giersing said.

The same agency appealed for \$1.4 million to provide security for the most vulnerable by protecting children and women from neglect, violence and exploitation during

Detained girl awarded custody

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The National Women Lawyers' Association yesterday took into its custody the 14-year-old girl detained in jail without trial for more than a year.

Metropolitan Magistrate Jahangir Alam issued the order of custody the same day on a petition filed by Advocate Mahmuda Khatun, member of the association, on August 4.

Shama Nishat held under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) was produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka at 2:00pm from the Correction Centre in Tongi, Gazipur.

Police arrested Nishat on July 20 last year from her foster mother Rahatunnesa's house on Road No. 6/A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka after Rahat filed a general diary with Dhanmondi Police Station accusing Nishat of an attempt to kill her by a kitchen machete.

Police the next day produced Nishat before a court that put her in jail custody.

The law dictates that if the investigation officer (IO) does not press specific charge against one arrested under Section 54, the arrestee has to be set free.

The teenage girl was still languishing in prison, although IO Sub-inspector Abdul Mannan Munshi had not submitted any charge despite repeated instructions of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court.

The court also summoned Rahat several times to appear before it, but she never turned up.

Manpower export

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links between Bangladesh's candidature for the post of secretary general of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the delay in manpower export to Malaysia, which also contested for the post.

"We never received any indication from Kuala Lumpur that it has reservations about Bangladesh following its contesting the OIC post," a top official said.

Malaysia stopped recruiting fresh workers from Bangladesh in 1997 following influx of a large number of undocumented workers.

Around 1.13 lakh Bangladeshis are now working in Malaysia and their job tenure has been renewed for another five years.

In mid-90s, about half a million Bangladeshis got jobs in that country and most of them came back home in 2002 in the wake of a crackdown on illegal workers.

Cops on alert

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determination to carry out the programme.

Sources said IKNMB will mobilise nearly 20,000 adherents for the siege programme at Nirala Ahmadiyya Complex tomorrow while a large number of Ahmadiyyas from different parts of Khulna, Bagerhat, Jessore and Satkhira districts have already started to gather in the city to counter the siege.

Leaders of Khulna Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat yesterday told The Daily Star that they would do whatever it takes to resist the bigots from proceeding towards Nirala Mosque Complex.

They said nothing on earth would ever be able to remove them from the place that belongs to none but them.

Acting police commissioner of Khulna said they will maintain law and order at any cost. No one has any right to illegally evict anyone from anywhere, he added.

Moulana Mahmudul Hasan Mamtazi, central Amir of IKNMB yesterday in a statement said over one lakh people will join to lay siege to Nirala Ahmadiyya Mosque Complex. Government will have to bear responsibility for any attempt to quell the siege programme, Hasan Mamtazi warned. Only by declaring Ahmadiyyas non-Muslims the showdown can be averted, he added.

IKNMB yesterday brought out a massive truck procession to ask the people to take part in tomorrow's programme.

Olympics open

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circuit at the television center.

Friday's opening ceremony could be a real Hollywood-style spectacular -- Years in the making, boasting a cast of thousands, it has all the showbiz razzmatazz needed to sell Greece to the world in a three-hour epic.

The producers are turning the stadium into a giant sea by flooding the arena. A flaming comet is to shoot into the water and light up the five Olympic rings.

Hundreds of drummers thunder out a human heartbeat rhythm that reverberates around the stadium.

The finale had been kept under wraps but the Greek paper To Ethnos said on Thursday that Olympic 200 metres champion Costas Kenteris would be lighting a giant torch, standing by a blazing olive tree that rises from the shimmering sea.

But many top competitors have spurned the opening ceremony. Joining the interminable parade of athletes could blunt their edge on the eve of the greatest challenge of their lives.

"I can't afford a big night out the day before I compete," said cycling road race champion Jan Ullrich.

The world's two most famous swimmers -- American Michael Phelps and Australian Ian Thorpe -- will also be conserving energy for their titanic struggles in the pool.

(Bangladesh Television will telecast live the opening ceremony from 11.45pm)

Battle rages

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the heart of the city and pound Mehdi Army positions near his home in eastern Najaf.

By early afternoon, a spokesman said the militia was still in control of the centre around the shrine and vowed to fight until the bitter end.

"We are ready to fight until the last drop of blood if this is what the Americans want," said Sadr aide Sheikh Ali al-Sumeisim.

The government's pointman on security, Muwafaq al-Rubaie, headed to Najaf in a bid to meet Sadr face to face and end the assault on the holy city.

Najaf governor Adnan al-Zorfi said the provincial council was waiting for Sadr to respond to an initiative to end the fighting, but dismissed any prospect of negotiations.

"The situation is becoming unbearable, the militia must leave now," he said.

Sadr has pressed loyalists to fight to the end, regardless of whether he is killed or captured.

The office of Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi gave its assurance that the shrine would remain safe and that multinational forces would not be allowed to enter the mausoleum.

Shortly after the attack began, Najaf deputy governor Jawdat Kadam Najem al-Kuraishi resigned in protest against "all the US terrorist operations that they are doing against this holy city".

Meanwhile, the government said 24 hours of fighting across Iraq, mostly in the Shia south and Sadr's Baghdad stronghold, claimed 165 lives and wounded 594.

In Baghdad's district of Kadhimiyah and the British-patrolled southern city of Basra, thousands of people protested against US attacks on holy cities, held aloft pictures of Sadr and denounced Allawi.

A British soldier was killed in the city when his patrol was struck by a homemade bomb -- the second British soldier to die in 72 hours in Iraq.

Further north in Kut, which fell briefly to the Mehdi Army in Sadr's spring uprising against the US-led occupation, heavy overnight US bombing killed 75 people and wounded 148, the health ministry said.

Police said US planes pounded the southern Al-Shakia district, a densely populated Mehdi Army stronghold, for two hours overnight, but medics said many of the dead were women and children.

"We never expected to see so many bodies. Our hospital beds are full and many wounded are still lying in the

corridor," said doctor Khader Fadal Arar.

The bombs also flattened the local office of Sadr's movement, which a partisan said was empty at the time, following a day of fierce clashes between Iraqi security forces and insurgents.

Later, the Mehdi Army attacked a police station, killing one policeman and wounding nine. The interior ministry said nearly 100 of Sadr's militiamen had been arrested in Kut.

Sadr's uprising, which has fanned out across Shia cities south of Najaf and led to a British assault on Mehdi Army strongholds in Amara, has forced the closure of a southern oil pipeline, halving Iraq's crude exports.

Limited amounts of oil were being loaded at the Basra export terminal despite ratcheted-up Mehdi Army threats against oil infrastructure if US troops entered Najaf.

A shadowy Shia militant group also threatened to kill all those working with British troops in the region. It was not clear if the group had any direct links with the Mehdi Army.

The National Security Council has said the closure of the southern oil pipeline has cost the country 30 million dollars a day, sending prices soaring on world markets.

Meanwhile, two US marines were killed when a helicopter crashed in the volatile northwestern province of Al-Anbar late Wednesday, just hours after a US air strike on the Sunni Muslim insurgent bastion of Fallujah.

Baghdad offensive
The US military pounded what appeared to be insurgent positions in central Baghdad yesterday, as explosions rocked the capital and US warplanes flew overhead.

US tanks blocked off entry to Haifa street on Baghdad's west side, where insurgents regularly attack US forces, as heavy gunfire echoed across the district and thick black smoke billowed into the air.

At least three US helicopters hovered as US warplanes screeched through the sky.

Local residents fled the area and shouted at others to leave as the smoke billowed above high-rise apartment blocks and at least two cars were engulfed in flames, said AFP correspondents.

The residents said it was a fight between US forces and the Shia Muslim Mehdi Army militia, who are also locked in a fierce standoff in the central holy city of Najaf.

The neediest get the least

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index based on the daily bulletins of Ministry of Food and Disaster Management on flood damage and relief allocations.

The FDII showed a per capita relief worth Tk 17.94 was distributed in the six most severely deluge-hit districts, Tk 19.62 in 17 comparatively less severely hurt, Tk 20.06 in seven moderately damaged and Tk 28.13 in the six least affected districts.

Per head relief distribution was the highest in Laxmipur (Tk 628.09), followed by Kushtia (Tk 283.82) and Rangpur (Tk 90.91). Gazipur received the least per capita relief of Tk 7.60, compared to the national average of Tk 19.97.

A total of 3,47,76,000 people in 39 districts have been affected by the devastating floods, the CPD report said, where the government, excluding those given by the Prime Minister's Office, distributed relief materials worth Tk 69.45 crore.

According to the report, two north-western districts, Nilphamari and Joypurhat, suffering from drought and Noakhali, which was untouched by the flooding, also received government relief. The Food and Disaster Management Ministry distributed relief worth Tk 50.90 lakh in Joypurhat, Tk 18 lakh in Nilphamari and Tk 28.80 lakh in Noakhali.

The most severely flood-ravaged districts are Narayanganj, Netrakona, Sylhet, Sunamganj, Gaibandha and Comilla.

Rob murder

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leader Anwar Hossain murder case recorded with Khulna Police Station, sources said.

Unknown assailants gunned down the Jubo League leader near Shakha Market in Khulna city at about 8:00pm on January 30, 1999. A case was lodged the next day making Sanu the prime accused.

On Tuesday, the Speedy Trial Tribunal, Rajshahi awarded death penalty to the KCC ward commissioner along with two others in the Khulna AL leader SM Abdur Rob murder case.

13 hurt as JCD

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Shibir ransacked its office near the railway gate.

Police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

JCD and Shibir blamed each other for trying to influence the college authorities for admission of their cadres to the college.