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Assassination attempt on Hasina

13 grenades thrown on AL rally : 16 killed, top AL leaders among 200 hurt

AL chief escapes unscathed; her personal security staff dies, Razzak, Amu, Suranjit, Ivy and Zafarullah critically wounded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A wave of grenade attacks on opposition chief Sheikh Hasina's rally on Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday left at least 16 people killed and 200 including top Awami League (AL) leaders Abdur Razzak, Amir Hossain Amu, Suranjit Sengupta, Ivy Rahman and Kazi Zafarullah critically injured.

Hasina, who was the apparent target of the attacks carried out from buildings in front of the AL headquarters, escaped unscathed as activists formed a human shield to protect their leader aboard a truck.

One of her personal security staff, Mahbub Alam, 42, who stood close by her, died.

The unknown assailants fired seven bullets at the bulletproof sports utility vehicle (SUV) that Hasina boarded immediately after the blasts. A bullet also punctured the rear wheel of the vehicle and there was a large hole on the rear right side of its window shield.

At least three bullets hit the right side of the front window shield, just opposite the front seat where the former prime minister sat.

Ivy, who lost both legs as at least 13 grenades exploded one after another, was in a critical condition at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). Doctors amputated her legs.

The deadly attacks started at 5:23pm just when Hasina wrapped up a rally of around 25,000 supporters protesting the recent Sylhet blasts with a call 'to end the rule of the government that inspires bomb attacks'. The AL central leaders were on the truck with Hasina.

As the grenades rained in from the sky, Hasina ducked on the truck and scores of supporters created a

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President, PM, speakers shocked

BSS, *Dhaka*

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid Siddiqui and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan last night expressed deep shock at the loss of lives in yesterday's bomb attack on Awami League (AL) rally in front of its central office.

In a statement yesterday, the president said, "Only the enemies of the nation can launch this type of barbaric attack."

The prime minister expressed deep shock at the loss of lives and

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Horror descends on trauma wards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thousands of distraught relatives and party activists thronged the city hospitals to see if their near and dear ones are among the dead and injured.

The hospital air turned heavy with people's screams and cry for blood as the authorities struggled to cope with the rush of the injured and their relatives.

People took no more than 10 minutes to rush to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) after the first injured was taken there.

The relatives, Awami League (AL) activists, law-enforcers and journalists crowded the entrance to the Emergency Ward, as more injured were rushed there.

Over 150 injured were taken first to the DMCH. The authorities moved old patients of ward No. 32 to other wards and made beds on the floor but still could not manage enough space for the injured.

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List of the victims

5 journalists hurt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 16 people were killed until filing of this report at 1:30am today. Thirteen died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), two at National Institute of Traumatology & Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor) and one at Metropolitan Hospital in Mohakhali.

The 13 died at the DMCH are Rafiqul Islam, 60, AL vice-president of ward No. 24, Sufia, 38, women affairs secretary of city AL, Hasina Mamtaj, 35, president of ward No.

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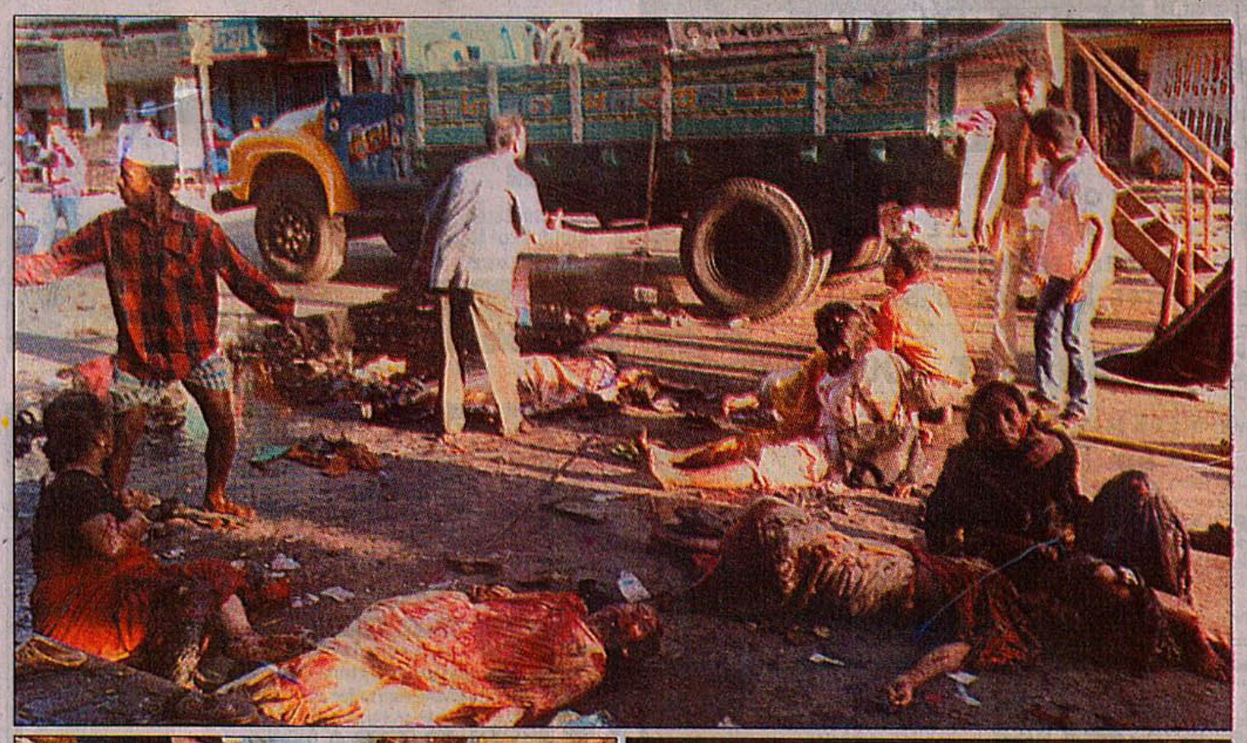

PHOTO: STAR

The dead and the injured litter beside the truck on which Sheikh Hasina was standing during the grenade attack in front of the AL headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday (top). Rescuers try to lift a shell-shocked Ivy Rahman with both her legs badly mauled (left). Blood-smeared Suranjit Sengupta is being taken to hospital (right).

WITNESS ACCOUNT

When all hell broke loose

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"All hell broke loose there, they made it look like doomsday," recalls Motaher Hossain, general secretary of the Krishak League, who was standing barely a yard from the dais raised on a truck when indiscriminate bombs and gunshots rocked the area.

"I scanned the area and saw some people on the rooftop of Ramna Hotel and adjacent buildings hurling bombs," he

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Staring death in the face

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There may come a moment when you find yourself not far away from death and The Daily Star photojournalist Anisur Rahman just found himself standing in the middle of a carnage that took place at the Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday afternoon.

The scene resembled something out of a war movie. Bloody bodies littered everywhere and

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Lensmen's request saves Hasina's life

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A simple request by photojournalists may have saved Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina from a terrible death when a series of grenade were thrown at her from nearby rooftops yesterday, an eyewitness said.

Hasina was coming down the truck right after her speech and

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Ivy's legs amputated

The AL leader sent to CMH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ivy Rahman, women affairs secretary of the Awami League (AL), lost her both legs in yesterday's grenade attacks on a party rally.

Doctors at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) amputated her legs, which were pulverised in the blasts. She was later shifted to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH).

The DMCH authorities said a three-hour operation was conducted on her and doctors were compelled to amputate her legs.

Sources at the DMCH said Ivy also had injuries to her chest and hands and her condition was critical. "She lost a good amount of blood that made her condition more vulnerable," said one doctor.

Some sources said the AL leader had another operation at the CMH at around midnight.

Witnesses said Ivy was close to the stage, the target of the attack. "She (Ivy) became one of the worst victims as the first bomb landed just 2/3 feet away from the stage," said one witness, Moni Akhtar, who is undergoing treatment at the DMCH.

"I was just two feet away from her (Ivy)," said Rani, a Mohila AL activist of Ward No 58. "The first bomb blast led to a chaos in the area and I saw bombs hurled from the ground level hit her when she tried to run away" she told a correspondent of The Daily Star.

"I crawled for a safer place and found her (Ivy) lying unconscious in a pool of blood," she added.

Verdict on jail killing Sept 7

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday fixed September 7 for the delivery of judgement in the sensational jail killing case.

After completion of the arguments of the prosecution and the defence, Judge Mohammad Motiur Rahman of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court fixed the date.

The court recorded the statements of 64 of 75 prosecution witnesses and the trial was completed in 277 workdays.

The aggrieved families of the four national leaders -- Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, AHM Quamruzzaman and M Mansur Ali who were assassinated in Dhaka Central Jail on November 3, 1975 -- accused the government of interference in the case.

They questioned the trial proceedings in the absence of special prosecutors appointed by the previous government and said the current government move was bent on depriving them of justice.

Frontline AL leader Mohammad Nasim, son of Mansur, earlier alleged the government was interfering with the case to save the prime accused -- BNP legislator KM Obaidur Rahman, Shah Moazzem Hossain and Lt Col (Retd) Khairuzzaman. Lawmaker Sohel Taj, son of former prime minister Tajuddin, and Brig Gen (Retd) Shafayet Islam, son of former acting president Syed Nazrul, also expressed the same view.

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Hasina blames govt, asks it to quit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition Shiekh Hasina blamed the BNP-led coalition government for yesterday's bomb and gun-attacks that she had narrowly escaped and demanded its immediate resignation.

"When the bombs were hurled, my leaders and workers shielded me in such a way that I could escape the attacks," Hasina, also president of the main opposition Awami League (AL), told the BBC Bangla Service last night.

"The leaders and workers of my party saved me from the attacks at the cost of their lives," she said in an emotion-choked voice.

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'Military, rebels use this type of grenades'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The grenades hurled at the Awami League (AL) rally yesterday are usually used by the military, but insurgents also carry those, said an officer of the Rapid Action Battalion-2 (Rab).

At least two grenades remained unexploded on Bangabandhu Avenue just opposite the AL headquarters but no explosive expert was

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City heart goes up in flames

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It was a scene of tears, protests, chaos and confusion. Some were crying standing by the injured, some torched vehicles in protest and some tried to pick their way out of the clouds of smoke and dust.

The heart of Dhaka including Bangabandhu Avenue, the scene of a series of near-simultaneous bomb explosions in a rally of the Awami League (AL), matched the set for a post-apocalyptic movie in the wake of the attacks yesterday evening.

The Bangabandhu Avenue headquarters of the main opposition reverberated with the sobs of the leaders and workers of the party. Some of the injured groaned sitting on congealed blood as fellow activists attended to them. Some whisked the injured to hospitals by rickshaw, motorcycle or even carts while some stared at the scene with utter disbelief.

Angry protesters torched and threw stones to vehicles chanting slogans against the attackers. Thick black smoke soon mushroomed from about 20 burnt vehicles in Bijoynagar, Purana Paltan Crossing, Dainik Bangla Intersection, Zero Point, Bangabandhu Avenue, Golap Shah Majar, General Post Office and Gulistan areas.

The burnt and damaged vehicles included two double-deckers including a Volvo bus, private cars and motorcycles. Angry people also smashed windows of more than 200

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Protest hartals on Aug 24, 25

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Demanding immediate resignation of the ruling coalition, the mainstream opposition political parties yesterday called dawn-to-dusk hartals on August 24 and 25 to protest the grenade attack on the Awami League (AL) rally in the capital.

"It is our instant reaction and programme in protest against the barbaric attack aimed at killing our leader Sheikh Hasina. We, all the

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