

Prothom Alo

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Protests continued yesterday against bigots' threat to stop circulation of the Prothom Alo.

Former president and Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) chief AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury yesterday expressed his concern over the threats of the bigots.

The BDB chief in a statement said the country's constitution has guaranteed freedom of the press under certain logical conditions.

"If newspaper reports hurt the interest of any person or organisation, they can seek justice from either the Press Council or court," he headed.

"But instead, they (some madrasa teachers and students) resort to offensive activities against the daily," he said.

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a rights organisation, also expressed its concern over the bigots' threats against Prothom Alo.

Police refuse case

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AL leaders to file a GD.

However, police could not make any halfway into the investigation, sources said.

Sub-inspector (SI) of Motijheel police Amir Hossain was appointed as the investigation officer (IO) of the attack case and SI Monir Hossain of the rampage case.

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar at a meeting, meanwhile, directed all intelligence agencies to look into the incident yesterday.

However, no active move was made to hand the charge of investigation to any intelligence agency until 8:00 last night, 27 hours into the grenade attack.

Some AL leaders led by General Secretary Abdul Jalil first made an attempt to file a case with Ramna Police Station in the afternoon. But the officer-in-charge (OC) was not available and SI Asmani, also duty officer, refused to record the case.

AL legislator Asaduzzaman Noor then made a phone call to OC Mahbubur Rahman. Jalil asked the OC to direct his deputies to enter the case. The OC turned down Jalil's request saying the area of the blasts is not under his territorial jurisdiction.

Jalil argued that a part of the area is under Ramna Police Station but the OC repeatedly refused him and asked the AL leader over phone to go to Motijheel police.

The AL leaders rushed to Motijheel Police Station to find that OC Rafiqul Islam was not in his chair. His deputies also refused to accept the case in absence of the OC. The AL leaders left the police

Cops on red alert

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of BNP, told journalists after the meeting.

He rejected outright the AL allegation that goons patronised by the government made the attack saying, "No government wants to endanger its position by resorting to such an act."

On the AL's demand for the government's resignation, Bhuiyan said the government has both successes and failures, but "I can assure that we are determined to identify the criminals and root out the crime at any cost," for which he emphasised united efforts by political and social forces.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Babar said police and all intelligence agencies were instructed to keep vigil and guard against any such barbaric attack.

"We have put the highest importance to the incident and taken all-out steps to detect the masterminds behind the bomb- and grenade-attacks," he claimed, adding, "The attackers are not the enemies of just Awami League or the BNP... They are the enemies of the country and we are looking for them."

He said all intelligence agencies were given sharp instructions to identify the criminals at any cost. Besides, police, paramilitary troops and armed police battalion have been deployed to keep vigil on movement of suspects.

Babar said, "Though we are not yet certain about the target of Saturday's grenade attack and the explosions in Sylhet, we are fully convinced that Bangladesh is the prime target."

Yesterday, the state minister in charge of home affairs had lengthy meetings with the chiefs of the intelligence agencies, including Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), National Security Intelligence (NSI) and Special Branch (SB) of police. He also held meetings with top police, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and ministry officials.

Highly placed sources said the intelligence agency chiefs, like in the past, came in the meeting without any clue to the Saturday grenade attack.

"The agencies seem to have no mechanism to detect the criminals involved in the attacks. They have miserably failed to

AL, allies

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The mainstream opposition parties are yet to work out the programmes, but are in touch with one another to fix the strategy of simultaneous demonstrations.

A top opposition leader hinted at simultaneous programmes also by the front organisations of their parties.

They are also planning to bring different professional bodies and social organisations under the movement platform.

AL policymakers are also reviewing whether it would join the upcoming session of the Jatiya Sangsad amid the environment of horror, an AL top leader said.

The left democratic front held a meeting to discuss the situation yesterday before its scheduled meeting with the AL probably today.

AL Organising Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury said there were no options but to launch a movement against the Islamist fundamentalists.

"We'll do everything in a democratic way to dislodge the fundamentalist-allied government from power and fight the fundamentalists,"

Communist Party President (CPB) Manjurul Ahsan Khan on Saturday night proposed to AL President Sheikh Hasina to hold a high-level meeting to chalk out the future course of action.

"We don't want to waste time. The more we wait, the more we lose... (We) hope we can launch a united movement soon," Manjurul told The Daily Star yesterday.

JSD President Hasanul Haque Inu has already initiated a process to bring all progressive political parties under a common platform.

At a meeting at the AL chief's residence on Saturday night, the opposition parties committed to building greater cohesion to fight the fundamentalists.

"We should not hesitate to launch a movement against the government after the grenade attacks on the AL president and other frontline leaders," Inu told The Daily Star yesterday.

The JSD president said the AL should not join the next session of parliament.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said they would continue to hold talks to work out a strategy, hoping that all progressive political and social organisations would join hands in the greater interest of the nation.

Pakistan foils

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The targets were all in the capital Islamabad and its twin city, Rawalpindi.

Hayat said the arrests were made between August 11 and 15 and the plot had been masterminded by an Egyptian Al-Qaeda suspect named Sheikh Esa alias Qari Ismail. The Egyptian was also among those arrested, he said.

"He is the chief player in the plot," the minister said adding that a co-planner, Farrukh Usman, had also been detained. The nationality of Usman has not been released. "They had been working on the plan since last year," Hayat said.

The arrests marked the latest major success in a stepped up crackdown launched by Pakistani security agencies in July. More than 60 suspects, among them some key Al-Qaeda operatives, have been detained.

Information Minister Sheikh Rashid told a news conference late Saturday the conspiracy, if successfully executed, could have killed hundreds of people.

"These people were planning to carry out destructive and bloody terrorist attacks during a week-long time starting from August 13," he said.

Rashid said the huge cache of arms and ammunition recovered from the suspects included bombs, grenades, rockets, rocket launchers, detonators and around 50 explosive devices. "We are looking for three or four more suspects in connection with the plot."

Azad's family

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report and other documents to Bangladesh High Commission in Germany, which he claimed might misuse them.

Describing himself as a well-wisher of the family, the caller suggested the family rely solely on German Embassy in Bangladesh to deal with the process of bringing back the body.

Worried, the family members informed Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof SMA Faiz and Dhaka University Teachers' Association of the incident.

One of Azad's family members said they have become very concerned over the threat.

Ivy still in grave

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offer round the clock, he informed.

The former president of AL's women wing, Mohila Awami League, was sitting close to the stage at the rally organised to protest recent bomb and grenade blasts in Sylhet.

Bombs hit her when she tried to run away seconds after the first blast.

With both her legs pulverised in the blasts and injuries to her chest and hands, Ivy was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors amputated her legs in a three-hour operation.

She was later shifted to the CMH where she underwent another operation Saturday midnight.

The Daily Star received daylong inquiries regarding her condition.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday visited the CMH to see Ivy.

Protests, shock rule

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Bangladesh Railway Public Relations Director Mostafa-e-Jamil told The Daily Star.

As firefighters reached the scene to douse the flames, the mob attacked the fire brigade vehicles, injuring four firemen.

The mob of around 250 also clashed with police and one person was bullet-hit in police firing while 19 others were hurt in the clash. The railway authorities were forced to suspend all trains scheduled to depart from Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong stations and kept other trains on wait at different stations. The mob also attacked the local post office and several banks.

The government yesterday did not let the AL leaders take out the bodies from the DMCH morgue in fear of violent backlash. Paramilitary BDR personnel and police have been deployed there to tighten security. Anxious relatives of the wounded are still crowding outside the main entrance to the hospital.

"There is no instance anywhere in the world that the government does not hand over bodies," said Abdul Matin Khosru, former law minister, leading a procession in Baitul Mokarram National Mosque area after the AL held funeral prayers (nama-e-janaza).

In Chittagong, police arrested 225 AL activists during pre-hartal raids.

Gloom at Sudha Sadan

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Diplomats, business leaders, politicians, university teachers, lawyers, leaders of the AL and its front organisations and other party leaders visited Hasina, who suffered grievous inner ear and leg injuries.

Party workers who could not access the house as security was tightened stayed out for hours -- some all day long -- and every time rushed to their leaders on their way out to know the condition of the AL chief.

Hasina, who came as close as one possibly can to being assassinated, broke down talking to her expatriate son and daughter by phone. Her sister Sheikh Rehana was with her in the fallout of the carnage that shocked the nation to the core.

US Ambassador Harry K Thomas, who met Hasina yesterday morning at her residence, said: "I'm incredibly surprised by the grisly attack."

He spent about 55 minutes with the former prime minister and learnt from her and other party leaders about the wave of attacks that relive post-apocalyptic movie scenes. Thomas offered sympathy for her on his and the US government's behalf.

"In a democratic society peaceful protest is common. But attacks on such a peaceful demonstration are most unfortunate. The responsible people must be tried," he said.

Thomas saw for himself the poked-marked jeep that carried Hasina home from the scene amid a hail of bullets fired by chasing assassins.

Later in the day, Indian High

funeral prayers at the mosque as tension ran high. Later, a procession broke the security cordon on the Bangabandhu Avenue and marched through the city streets. The processionists torched a BNP office at Bangabazar, pelted the office of the state news agency BSS and smashed about 100 vehicles.

The capital balked down in apprehension as two more grenades were retrieved, one from Dhaka Central Jail and the other from the toilet of Hawkers' Market close to the AL headquarters where Saturday's mayhem occurred. City roads were mostly deserted. Twenty platoons of BDR personnel and riot police dotted the main streets.

The city was in a somber mood. The police and BDR also sealed off the Bangabandhu Avenue from all sides. The truck on which Hasina was standing during the grenade attacks still lies there. Party workers have filled the mayhem spot with black and red flags.

Most schools shuttered up and attendance in offices was thin. Many foreign organisations started office at noon. Dhaka's city heart was deserted by lunchtime as staffers hurried home before the funeral prayers.

In Chittagong, police arrested 225 AL activists during pre-hartal raids.

Commissioner Veena Sikri visited Hasina and expressed sympathy: "I came here to express my deepest and heartfelt sympathy."

"All of us must join in condemning such incidents which represent a direct attack on the fabric of democracy that the people of Bangladesh are striving to weave for themselves," Sikri told a programme of a private airline later.

Rafiqul Islam, waiting outside Sudha Sadan, said: "I am feeling empty. I just don't know what to say. It's like we were going to lose everything. Hasina's survival is an act of God."

Anwar Mia, a rikshawpuller, was waiting for over two hours there to learn anything about Hasina. Talking to The Daily Star, the middle-aged man described her as the symbol of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

A worker of Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student chapter of the AL, linked Saturday's attack to the killing of Bangabandhu and most of his family on August 15, 1975.

Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain, Supreme Court Bar Association President Rokonuddin Mahmud, leaders of the Jatiya Party (Manju) Anwar Hossain Manju and Sheikh Shahidul Islam, BGMEA President Annisul Haq, former chief of army staff Mustafizur Rahman, former Dhaka University vice-chancellor Professor AK Azad Chowdhury also met Hasina and expressed sympathy.

Sonia, Advani, Rocca

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envoys in Dhaka also condemned and expressed profound concern over Saturday's deadly attack apparently assassinate the opposition leader and her colleagues.

US EMBASSY

A US embassy statement said, "We condemn this blatant and reckless act of political terrorism."

It said democracy and the future of Bangladesh would have suffered a terrible blow if this audacious commando-style assault had succeeded in eliminating the leadership of the main opposition political party.

The US embassy called upon the government to promptly bring to justice the perpetrators of the heinous crime and to demonstrate clearly its commitment to providing a free and secure environment for constitutionally protected political activity.

"Yesterday's assault is unfortunately only the latest and the most alarming in a series of incidents in 2004 attacking basic human rights in Bangladesh," the statement observed.

"During this difficult time we urge all Bangladeshis to exercise maximum restraint and to act only in a peaceful and lawful manner fully consistent with the best traditions of democracy in Bangladesh," it added.

The US embassy extended the deepest condolence to all the bereaved families, friends and colleagues.

EUROPEAN DIPLOMATS

Head of Delegation of the European Commission in Bangladesh Ambassador Esko Kentrschynskij yesterday strongly condemned the grenade attack and offered his deepest condolence to the bereaved families.

A joint statement of European diplomats in Dhaka urged the Bangladesh government to thoroughly investigate the attacks and bring those responsible to justice.

They also called for providing adequate protection to the opposition leaders.

ENVOYS VISIT HASINA

US Ambassador Harry K Thomas and

Indian High Commissioner Veena Sikri yesterday visited Hasina at her Dhanmondi residence, Sudha Sadan, and expressed deep sympathy over the loss of lives in Saturday's deadly attack.

During their separate visits, they strongly condemned the attack and offered sincerest condolence to the families who have lost their dear ones in it.

Thomas enquired about the security arrangements taken by police for Hasina's rally on Saturday, police security measures for rallies in normal time as well as what the government did following the attack.

Thomas expressed the hope that the people responsible for the barbaric act would be identified and tried.

Later, briefing newsmen, Hasina's Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury said the US envoy had come to express sympathies, both personal and on behalf of the US government.

During a 30-minute meeting with the opposition leader, Indian High Commissioner Veena Sikri termed Saturday's grenade attack unexpected in a democracy.

On whether her government would help Bangladesh in probing the bomb blasts, Sikri told newsmen after the meeting that they would see if Bangladesh government makes the move.

One-man probe

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She directed the state minister for home affairs to take all necessary measures to maintain peace and order and ensure security of life and property of the people.

She also asked the state minister to strengthen the efforts to find out the culprits in Saturday's incident and take steps to mete out due punishment to them.

She asked the health minister to ensure proper treatment for the injured who are at different hospitals and clinics. She also directed to provide the injured with necessary blood and medicine.

Sonali Bank manager strangled in Naogaon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A manager of Sonali Bank was strangled allegedly by the owner of the building that houses the bank in Raninagar, Naogaon, yesterday morning.

Abu Taher, manager of Trimohoni branch, was found dead with his hands and legs tied up and a gamchha (towel) wrapped around his neck, said his colleagues. The body was lying on the ground floor of the building where the owner resides.

Police arrested Altaf Hossain, owner of the building, and his accomplice Anwar Hossain on charge of their involvement in the killing.

Police said Altaf invited the manager in for a cup of tea at around 9:00am after he (Taher) came to his office located on the first floor of the building.

As the manager did not return after a long time, worried colleagues came to the ground floor only to find him dead.

Preliminary investigation suggested that Taher was strangled, police said but could not establish the motive for the killing.

100 injured

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at Tungipara in Gopalganj district.

In Khulna, Netrakona and Mymensingh, the dawn-to-dusk hartal passed off peacefully amid deployment of huge contingents of police and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles.

DMC hands over

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deceased Hasina Momtaz, a woman AL activist of Ward No. 15, said, "I came to the DMC at 7:00am but police did not let enter it despite my repeated requests. I pleaded to be allowed to take my wife's body from the mortuary with no result. A police officer misbehaved with me and ordered his men to push me out of the building."

Like Bashir, many others waiting outside the DMC gave similar views. "Can you imagine, my brother is inside lying dead and the security men won't even let me go near the coffin," cried out one of the relatives standing in the street.

Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, former BMA secretary general and an AL leader designated by his party to receive the victims' bodies from the DMC morgue, alleged, "I had 16 ambulances ready to carry the bodies since 9:00am, but the security men guarding the premises ordered the vehicles to be moved away."

He alleged that the doctors were too slow to carry out postmortems.

Khaleda visits

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Hospital was also of the right sort, the doctors said.

Khaleda asked them to ensure the best treatment possible to Ivy.

Later, the prime minister visited retired major general Tareq Ahmed Siddiqui, who was also injured in the Saturday's grenade attacks on AL rally in front of its Bangabandhu Avenue central office.

The PM inquired about Siddiqui's health and asked the doctors to take proper care of him.

Siddiqui also gave a brief narration of the attacks to Khaleda.

Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, PM's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury and BNP lawmaker M Mosaddek Ali accompanied the prime minister during her visit to the CMH at Dhaka Cantonment.

Heavy fighting

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cleric Moqtada al-Sadr appeared to have stalled after negotiators failed to agree on how to surrender control of the Imam Ali shrine, where Mehdi militias remain holed up.

In Najaf, Mehdi militias fired mortars at US positions and the sound of gunfire crackled from near the shrine. US helicopter gunships clattered above the labyrinth of narrow streets not far from the gold-dome mosque.

Near Najaf, clashes between US troops and militias on Saturday killed 40 people in the town of Kufa, a Shia stronghold from where Sadr has led Friday prayers. Interior ministry officials said the dead were militiamen and civilians.

Earlier yesterday, a US military AC-130 gunship unleashed rapid cannon and howitzer fire on rebels in Najaf.

A Baquba report says, a suicide car bomb blew up near a convoy carrying local Iraqi officials north of Baghdad yesterday, killing two people and wounding eight.

The bomber appeared to have been targeting Ghasan al-Ghadren, the deputy mayor of the volatile town of Baquba. The official survived the attack, which took place not far from Baquba, the officer said.

Violence swells

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and looted and damaged over 100 shops along Topkhana Road yesterday evening. Some shop owners alleged the demonstrators looted Tk 7,000 from them and damaged outdoor billboards.

Policemen at Paltan Crossing fired two to three gunshots and rubber bullets in a knee-jerk reaction to disperse the unruly activists as they went damaging vehicles in front of the National Press Club.

The same group sent a swell of panic earlier, breaking pottery on display in front of Curzon Hall and picking up bricks to hurl at paramilitary and police forces lining the streets.

Mid-level leaders of the AL and its front organisations calmed them down to keep it a peaceful procession to mourn the dead, while some others took it as an opportunity to avenge the grenade attack victims.

With the procession reaching the Central Shaheed Minar, senior AL leaders such as Abdul Jalil and Motia Chowdhury made brief speeches at a short-lived rally and the same unruly activists threw bricks at Bangladesh Rifles men watching the gathering.

Provoked by taunts and brickbats, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel threw the bricks back and pointed their guns at the mob prompting a brief stand-off.

Both BDR men and angry AL activists were then pulled back by on-duty

Assistant Commissioner (Patrol South) AKM Ehsan Ullah and mid-level AL leaders.

The rally over, leaders and most activists left and the unruly group marched towards Paltan Crossing through Topkhana Road where they unleashed the rampage.

The police swooped on the group and dispersed them with batons into small alleys of Shegunbagicha and Naya Paltan. The police patrolled the area until 8:00pm.

From afternoon onwards, traffic was thin as buses and private cars kept off the roads fearing violent aftershocks from Saturday's grenade attacks.

Rumours of curfews and heavy riot police presence restricting entry to Motijheel and Gulistan bent office timetables.

OTHER FLASHPOINTS

The violent incidents were reported in parts of Dhaka: seven to eight buses were damaged in Mouchak and Maghbazar areas.

Shops were damaged in Mohammapur, while two vehicles damaged on North-South Road. Violence swept through Motijheel, Jatrahari and Palashi.

At least 10 people were picked up from the flash points in Dhaka. Violent AL activists damaged at least 80 vehicles in Malibagh, Kakrail, Rampura and Badda.

Detectives baffled

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same spot and same time unless the assailants were well-trained.

"It is certain that the assassins were split into several groups and took position in different places and a group was coordinating their teams," one of the officials who visited the spot of the blasts said.

They are desperately looking for leads to the masterminds and source of the grenades. The investigators are also thinking of looking into the possible links of the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the attacks after the discovery of the grenade on the Dhaka Central Jail premises.

Colonel (Dismissed) Farukur Rahman, Colonel (Dismissed) Sultan Shahryar Rashid Khan, Colonel (Dismissed) Bazul Huda and Colonel (Retired) Muhiuddin are now in the central jail.

The investigation officer of the murder case filed in connection with Saturday's killings, Sub-Inspector Amir Hossain said told The Daily Star, "We have got no clue to the incident and there has been no progress in the investigation. All detective agencies are working on the case."

Coalition partners

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attacks one after another.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday some of them demanded of the government to initiate all out measures to stop bomb attacks immediately to save the nation from a looming disaster.

They also condemned Saturday's attack on Awami League rally that so far has killed 18 and injured over 300.

IOJ Secretary General (SG) Fazlul Haque Amini lambasted a certain section of the government saying it always says everything is all right and said, "This type of sycophants should be ousted immediately from the government."

"If the trend of bomb attacks isn't stopped, the government won't be able to continue in power for the next two years [the rest of its term]," Amini maintained.

Berating its failure to unveil the mystery of any of the bomb blasts the IOJ SG said it would do no good to the government to keep mum: "I don't know why the government remains silent after such attacks."

Separated by death

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the entire area, followed by a series of others. A frantic run for cover took me to a safer place. I called her by the mobile phone several times, but she did not reply."

At about 7:00pm, Bashir came to know that she was wounded and immediately rushed to the DMCH.

"She could not tell me anything," Bashir said. "Her voice stopped long ago."

Mostaq Ahmed Sentu, 35, a central leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League, student front of the AL, died in his brash bid to save people at the heart of horror.

Mostafa Amin Imran, his close associate, told The Daily Star at the morgue that when the grenades continued to fall, he tried to guide people to safety.

"Finding a grenade hurtling through the air towards them, he pulled a boy by his hand and pushed him aside. The boy escaped death, but he himself could not," Mostafa said.

Scrum of relatives of the dead were grieving near the DMCH morgue for the bodies as the administration did not allow anybody to get close to it or take the bodies of their loved ones.

"Nothing