

Prothom Alo

FROM PAGE 12

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

Former president and 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 added.

"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.

AL, allies

FROM PAGE 1

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 fundamentalists 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

FROM PAGE 12

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

FROM PAGE 12

report and other documents to Bangladesh High Commission in Germany, which he claimed might have any information, please tell us to help the investigation."

Earlier, several ministers, including Tarique Islam and M Shamsul Islam, dozens of state ministers and BNP lawmaker met with Mannan Bhuiyan and discussed the situation.

All of them expressed grave concern at the recent spate of bomb attacks in the country and seemed worried at the attacks on Hasina. They said such attacks might also be made on them if the spree continues.

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.

They suggested it is time to make united drive with all political and social forces to safeguard the country's independence and sovereignty.

They also suspected that there might be a quarter behind the attacks that wants to prove Bangladesh as an ineffectual state and so are resorting to killing politicians, journalists, police and innocent people.

Ivy still in grave

FROM PAGE 1

of her 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.

She is 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.

Protests, shock rule

FROM PAGE 1

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-holed 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 Khorshed, former law minister, leading a procession in Baitul Mukarram National Mosque area after the AL held funeral prayers (namaj-e-janaza).

Some 20,000 people attended the 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 frilled 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-hartial raids.

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 the grenade attack.

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 brickbats at Bangladesh Rifles men watching the gathering.

Provoked by taunts and brickbats, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel threw the brickbats 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

Violence swells

From Page 1

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 brickbats 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.

Police arrested Altaf Hossain, owner of the building, and his accomplice Anwar Hossain on charge of the grenade attack.

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.

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

FROM PAGE 12

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

FROM PAGE 12

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 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 the health of 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 Mosaddeq Ali accompanied the prime minister during her visit to the CMH at Dhaka Cantonment.

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.

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

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