

Sonia, Advani, Rocca express concern
Envoys, diplomats condemn attack
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Congress of India Chair Sonia Gandhi, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha of India L K Advani and US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca yesterday phoned to Awami League President Sheikh Hasina expressing concern over Saturday's grenade and gun attacks on her and her party's rally in the city.

They condemned the dastardly act that so far have killed at least 19 and wounded over 200, and offered deepest condolence to all those who lost loved ones, friends and colleagues, and wished every injured person a complete and speedy recovery.

The US, European and Indian

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One-man probe body formed
BSS, Dhaka

The government yesterday formed a one-member enquiry commission into the grenade attacks on opposition rally in front of Awami League (AL) central office on Saturday afternoon.

The commission, comprised of a senior justice of the High Court Division of Bangladesh Supreme Court Justice Md Joynul Abedin, will submit its report within three weeks.

After a series of meetings with ministers and officials concerned at her office yesterday Prime Minister Khaleda Zia ordered to form the judicial probe commission.

During the meeting with senior ministers, the prime minister also expressed concern over the bomb explosions and other acts of sabotage at different parts of the country.

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Angry demonstrators, *top left*, burst through a police cordon to reach the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday in procession to protest a series of grenade attacks on an Awami League rally that killed at least 19 people; patients injured in the attacks huddle on the floor, *right*, as the service of Dhaka Medical College Hospital is overstretched; and a black flag, *bottom left*, marks the scene of Saturday's carnage on Bangabandhu Avenue.



PHOTO: STAR

DMC hands over bodies at last

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka Medical College (DMC) authorities finally started handing bodies of Saturday's grenade attacks to relatives at 8:45pm last night after security men held back claims by relatives and Awami League (AL) leaders.

Postmortems of 13 bodies of the total 19 were complete by 3:00pm yesterday, but the authorities refused to hand them to anyone because of 'instructions from the high-ups', a DMC official said.

Relatives of the victims and senior AL leaders including Dr ABM Iqbal, Abdul Motin Khosru arrived at the mortuary. But the forensic department officials deliberately delayed postmortem of the victims, alleged relatives and the AL leaders.

Bashir Ahmed, husband of

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Educational insttts remain closed on clash fear

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fears of a repeat of clashes after the grenade attacks on Awami League (AL) rally on Bangabandhu Avenue sent most educational institutions in the capital suspending classes yesterday.

Viqarunnisa Noon School and College suspended its classes in the wake of the attacks that killed at least 19 people on Saturday. The Ideal School and College has also put off classes and examinations for today.

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student chapter of the main opposition AL, called an indefinite strike in all educational institutions to protest the carnage.

BCL President Liakat Sidker

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100 injured as AL men clash with cops in dists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 100 people were injured as activists of the Awami League (AL) fought pitched battles with police and damaged vehicles during varying hours of hartals in a number of districts yesterday protesting attack on a party rally in Dhaka.

The hartals closed schools, businesses, banks and other commercial activities and virtually crippled life in Chittagong, Rajshahi, Barisal, Pabna, Kushtia, Brahmanbaria, Bhola, Jamalpur, Hobiganj, Patuakhali, Gopalganj, Satkhira, Manikganj and other districts.

Opposition activists held gayebana janaza across Bangladesh seeking divine blessing for 18 people killed in a series of grenade attacks in front of the party headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue on Saturday.

Roads of most cities and towns were deserted of vehicles as people stayed indoors.

Police arrested about 300 leaders and activists of the main opposition and its allies during the hartals called

by local units of the party.

In Rangpur, at least 40 people including 30 AL leaders and activists were injured as police used baton on their procession in Pirganj.

Agitated opposition activists damaged at least 50 buses and trucks in the wake of police action.

Thousands of residents of Pirganj put up a blockade on the Dhaka-Rangpur Highway between 9:00am and 12:00pm protesting the attack.

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In Chittagong, police arrested 225 people including local leaders of the AL, ward commissioners and activists of Juba league and Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) suspecting their roles in the rampage in the port city on Saturday evening.

Of the arrested, 15 were held during the hartal while others in a special drive on Saturday midnight.

Police arrested AL leader and sitting Ward Commissioner Tarek Solaiman

Selim, former ward commissioner Ahmadur Rahman Siddiqui, leader of Patenga unit of AL Sekander Azam and Juba League leader of Pahartoli Delwar Hossain, police and party sources said.

Cargo handling at Chittagong port remained closed.

In Sylhet, police picked up 15 agitators during the hartal from different city areas while chase and counter chase between the police and AL activists took place at Mirabazar, Tilagarh, Chouhatta, Surma Market, Madan Mohan College, Taltoila and Ambarkhana areas.

Pickets ransacked about 10 trucks, minibuses and autorickshaws at Tolagarh, Mirabazar, Kazitola and Surma Market areas.

In Gopalganj, at least 50 people were injured, five of them seriously when police charged baton during the hartal.

Police swung into action after agitating people ransacked a branch of state-owned Janata Bank and set fire to a bus-counter of Comfort Line

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Intellectuals condemn attack on Prothom Alo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-six intellectuals yesterday condemned the attack on the daily Prothom Alo by the fanatics for publishing reports on alleged militant activities of extremist groups in Chittagong.

The signatories in a joint statement in the city expressed deep concern over the destructive activities of the fanatic groups. They urged the government to take necessary steps against the lawlessness of such groups and ensure freedom of the press.

Recently the fanatics staged demonstration and demanded cancellation of the declaration of the Prothom Alo. They also burnt copies of the daily and created obstacle to its circulation.

They vandalised billboards of the Prothom Alo-The Daily Star-GrameenPhone news service.

The signatories were Rehman Sobhan, Emaz Uddin Ahmed, Fazle Hasan Abed, Badruddin Omar, Mojibul Haq, Kalim Sharafi, Shamsur Rahman, Sufia Ahmed,

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Separated by death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Afroz understands his loss. He knows his grandfather will not come any more with chocolates for him.

"Grandpa has died. I have watched his death on television. He would not come back," said Afroz, six-year-old grandson of Rafiqul Islam, 75, a city Awami League (AL) leader at their Sepahi Bagh house.

Rafiqul was one of the 18 people who died on Saturday at a series of near-simultaneous grenade attacks on an AL rally in front of its Bangabandhu Avenue headquarters that also left over 200 people injured.

The five sons and three daughters of Rafiqul, popularly known as 'Ada Chacha' among AL workers for free distribution of homemade dry ginger among fellow party men, were anxiously waiting to receive his body.

Mahbuba Begum, daughter of Rafiqul, said her father was a devoted leader of the AL and loved to say that he had developed 'an

addiction' for the party's processions and rallies.

"My father had a wish to die before his party President Sheikh Hasina as he would say he would not survive her loss. His wish has been fulfilled," said Mahbuba, as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Rafiqul told his family before leaving that he would not return home for launch. "But we did not know that it would be his last talk with us," said Mahbuba, demanding a proper probe and punishment to the bombers.

Fish vender Mohammed Hanif, 60, slipped from his house to attend the rally to escape family pressure not to attend any political programme at the advanced age.

An activist of Sramik League, the workers front of the AL, Hanif left home never to return alive again.

"My father was aged and we did not want him join political rallies in recent days. But he used to join every rally of the party slipping from the house," said Delwar, 22, son of Hanif.

Hanif was the key earner of his nine-member, poverty-stricken family that lives in a shanty in Manik Nagar and the family does not know how to scrape through the trying time without him.

Piyara Begum, wife of Hanif, stared vacantly at the sky, sitting in front of his 10 feet by 10 feet small room.

Hasina Momtaz, a leader of city Women AL, joined the rally along with her husband Bashir Ahmed, convener of the Juba League.

They were together from the moment of leaving their Balughat house to listening to the frontline party leaders, including Hasina. But a wave of explosions separated them forever.

Bashir cried in front of the DMCH morgue along with hundreds of others who lost their loved ones like him.

"Just three minutes before the explosion, she wanted to drink water and I went to bring it," Bashir said.

"A sudden explosion rocked

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Pakistan foils al-Qaeda linked plot to attack its leaders, key sites

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan has smashed an Al-Qaeda linked plot to kill high profile civil and military officials and attack key sites including the US embassy and the military headquarters, officials said yesterday.

The government said intelligence agencies had arrested around a dozen local and foreign militants who hatched the plot to launch strikes on August 13 and Pakistan's 57th Independence Day celebrated on August 14.

The targets included "the parliament, the military headquarters, Prime Minister House, Presidency, US embassy and the Chief of Army Staff House," which is the residence of President Pervez Musharraf as army chief, Interior Minister Faisal Saleh Hayat said.

"They were planning suicide attacks," Hayat told AFP yesterday "security agencies recovered rockets, electronic gadgets and explosives usually used in suicide bombings."

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Heavy fighting near Najaf shrine: 40 killed in Kufa

AFP, Najaf

Heavy shooting and mortar fire erupted near the Imam Ali shrine in the holy city of Najaf yesterday afternoon, as Shia Muslim militiamen clashed with US troops, an AFP correspondent witnessed.

Mehdi Army fighters, loyal to radical cleric Moqtada Sadr, launched multiple attacks on US tanks, parked around 300 metres away from the shrine.

US tanks fired back, as the reverberations of gunfire and mortar bombs could be heard from inside the mosque compound.

Overnight, US warplanes pounded the central holy city between 2:30 and 3:00 am local time causing three large

Bomb threat to Azad's family

DU CORRESPONDENT

An anonymous caller late on Saturday night phoned the family of late Prof Humayun Azad and threatened to hurl bombs if any of them goes to the airport to receive his body scheduled to arrive in Dhaka next Friday.

The caller, who claimed to have returned from Germany two days ago, also asked the family members not to hand over Azad's postmortem

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Prayer Timing		
August 23		
Fair	Azan	Jamaat
Zohr	4-30	5-05
Asr	12-45	1-15
Maghrib	4-45	5-00
Esha	6-33	6-36
	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Repressive laws put journos at peril

South Asian media conference told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Redundant, repressive and vaguely worded laws and lack of accountability of the bureaucracy put the journalists in the line of duty in grave peril, said speakers at a conference on press freedom and media laws yesterday.

"Laws that were made during the colonial era do not protect the citizens' right to information and are responsible for exposing the journalists to risks," said Abdur Rob Mollah, a former judge, in the opening session of the conference organised by the South Asian Free Media Association (Safma) at the National Press Club.

"Most laws in the penal code are open to extensive interpretation and are used to harass journalists," said

Mollah in his review of the existing press laws.

Mollah added that legal provisions like the Official Secrets Act and some other obsolete laws allow the executive and the government to refuse the journalists access to information held by public bodies. When journalists are arrested under these laws they do not have even the right to know on what charge they are being held.

Mollah said greater accountability and transparency in the government are the cornerstones of a democratic society. It is not right if the government intervenes in attempt to prevent citizens from gaining access to information,

he

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Journalist abducted and killed

UNB, Khagrachhari

Masked assailants abducted and killed Manikchhari Upazila Press Club General Secretary and Aker Kagoj correspondent Kamal Hossain in the early hours yesterday.

The criminals broke into the Tintari Madhyapara house of Kamal, 32, also general secretary of Manikchhari unit Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, at 1:00am and picked up him at gunpoint.

Police recovered his body from Khantamara area yesterday morning.

His family said Kamal hid on the false ceiling of his tin-shed house but was forced to come down as the criminals threatened to kill his two-year-old son.

Police said Kamal was an outspoken person and wrote several reports on criminal activity in the area.

Detectives baffled by bomb attacks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives are baffled by Saturday's attempt to assassinate Leader of the Opposition and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina and frontline leaders of the main opposition party by raining grenades on her rally and firing indiscriminately at her vehicle.

The well-orchestrated explosions of high-powered grenades and the shooting to wrap them up in the heart of the capital, which left at least 18 killed and about 300 wounded, have taken some officials of the detective agencies completely by surprise.

Police retrieved two more grenades from the capital yesterday, one of them from a toilet of the former railway super market near the very site of Saturday's explosions. An army

team of explosives experts took them away at around 11:30am.

The other one was found in a drain of Dhaka Central Jail in the morning and the shocking discovery has baffled detectives involved with investigations into other bomb blasts in the country. They even asked The Daily Star correspondent to tell them who are behind the deadly blasts and with what motive, if he stumbles onto behind-the-scenes facts.

The security officials, speaking on condition that they not be named, said about Saturday's blasts that it would have been impossible for one group to throw grenades from the rooftops of nearby buildings and the other one to fire indiscriminately at the AL chief at the

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