

Hon Speaker

FROM PAGE 1
Wouldn't you agree that what you permitted in the name of a debate was nothing but a one-sided tirade against the main opposition?

Now let us examine the nature and content of what the treasury bench MPs said under the 'general debate' that you so generously permitted after having duly 'protected' the judicial inquiry by refusing the opposition demand for an adjournment motion under rule 62. Almost all the MPs of the ruling coalition, in speech after speech, stated mostly directly and some not so directly, that it was the AL that was responsible for the grenade attack on its own rally. Anybody who listened to the speeches would be left without any doubt as to who the perpetrators were of that heinous act of August 21. The ruling party MPs even 'laid bare' the possible motive as to why they thought the AL was the culprit. Some of them even named Abdul Jalil (who himself is an MP, protecting whose prestige and dignity is also in your hands) as a possible culprit because he had 'threatened' to destabilise the government following his party's failure to topple it on April 30 last. If this is not trying to influence the investigation, then what's?

If your intention was to protect the investigation from a prejudicial debate, and we believe that it was, then we urge you to go through the records of Wednesday's proceedings and see for yourself how well you served that cause. You may say that you permitted the discussion with a fair mind and good intentions and that naturally you had no idea what the MPs would say. We accept that. But then shouldn't you have stopped them when you heard what they were actually saying.

For the sake of fair investigation, which you wanted, shouldn't you have asked the MPs to refrain from saying anything that would prejudice the investigation, the very reason for which you rejected the opposition's plea for debate under rule 62? For nearly four hours, in the name of debate (which consisted of very little other than vilification) the opposition were put on the dock, accused and found 'guilty' as charged of the grenade attack on its own rally -- all this in your presence. May we also humbly point out that although officially you allocated five to seven minutes for each speaker, you actually allowed many of them much more.

Rules 61 to 67 deal with adjournment motions. Of them, rule 63 deals with restrictions to make such motions. For the purpose of our discussion the relevant portion is contained in paragraph X of rule 63, which we reproduce below:

"the motion shall not raise a discussion on a matter pending before any statutory tribunal or statutory authority performing any judicial or quasi-judicial functions or any commission or court of enquiry appointed to enquire into, investigate any matter **but the speaker may, in his discretion, allow such matter to be raised** (emphasis added) as is concerned with the procedure or subject or stage of enquiry, provided it is not likely to prejudice the consideration of such matter by the tribunal authority, commission or court of enquiry, as the case may be."

The reason we reproduce the paragraph is to humbly ask as to whether or not you had some scope for discretion here. To help understand the issue better we can also read paragraph XI which states: "the motion shall not deal with any matter which is under adjudication by a Court of Law having jurisdiction in any part of Bangladesh;" In contrast to the previous paragraph, paragraph XI is categorical, and does not give any discretionary power to the speaker. In fact among all the 12 paragraphs of rule 63 (that deal with restrictions on adjournment motion) only paragraph X provides scope for discretion of the Speaker. The framers of our constitution and the rules of procedure for running parliament must have foreseen a purpose for providing scope for discretion of the Speaker in this specific paragraph.

You are, of course, the best judge of the House rules, but a question has risen in our mind- and we would be most grateful if you correct us- that you could have used your discretionary powers to permit the adjournment

motion given the gravity of the situation.

If you had done that then we may have been spared the spectacle of the opposition denigrating the House by chanting slogans inside it. We agree with you that such behaviour does not go with the dignity and prestige of this august body, and the opposition should not have done it.

Honourable Speaker, reportedly eight to ten powerful grenades were thrown at a rally that was addressed by the second most important member of the House over which you preside -- namely the leader of the opposition. She is also the former leader of the House. By all accounts it was a miracle that her life was saved. Several MPs of your House were injured, 20 people were killed along with an eminent woman leader and over 200 wounded. And yet you couldn't bring yourself to use your discretionary powers. If your slight gesture could have brought a united House to debate on this serious matter, wouldn't the public have been better served?

Mr. Speaker, we, the ordinary citizens of this country, do not know much about the rules of procedure or the technicalities of how a parliament functions. But we do know that parliament is the House of the People. It is here that the voice of the people is heard. If nowhere else, it will be on the floor of this august House where people's wishes and concerns get reflected. We think you know, like everybody else, that the events of August 21 shocked us all to the very core. People are worried and they want to hear about a way forward. It is in moments like these, more so than ever, that people look up to parliament for guidance, courage, strength and most of all unity.

When the government is letting us down, when the opposition is extremely negative (they seem to have lost their entire vocabulary except NO), it is from the Jatiya Sangsad that people expected a way out. Parliament, as the supreme law-making body, the most powerful institution of democracy and the ultimate repository of the core values of our people, it remains our last hope to extract us out of the political quagmire in which we find ourselves today. As the guardian of that supreme body you carry a very heavy burden on your shoulder. Wasn't it possible for you to take a broader picture of the present situation and think how the whole nation was looking up to you to create scope for both sides to participate in a debate? We know all too well that by itself a debate would not have produced much (except perhaps more mutual recrimination), but it could have provided, under your able guidance, an opening -- a ray of light through a crack in their mutual hatred -- for something constructive. In fact, Honourable Speaker, you could have been a catalyst for a historic breakthrough. You could have taken parliament to a greater height.

FM off to NY

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minister said he is likely to meet US Secretary of State Colin Powell, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and South Asian foreign ministers, among others, on the sidelines of the UNGA session.

Morshed is also expected to attend ministerial-level meetings of the Non-aligned Movement, Organisation of Islamic Conference, Commonwealth, Group of 77 and D-8 and Saarc-Asean dialogue.

He hinted at meeting his Indian counterpart Natwar Singh depending on their schedules.

The foreign minister also said he would raise the issue of collaboration in counter-terrorism efforts by Bangladesh, India and Pakistan at the Saarc foreign ministers' meet on the sidelines of the UNGA session.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was expected to address the plenary session but she is not making the trip because of pressing domestic issues, Morshed said.

Indigenous

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long beard believed to be linked to underground militants, and some members of notorious chairman Kashem bahini have long been roaming the hilly villages close to Chittagong's Fatikchhari upazila. Kashem is the prime suspect in the sensational businessman Jamal Uddin (Chittagong) abduction case.

UPDF men Royal Marma, Topan, Jyoti Chakma, Amor Bikash, Milon Chakma Sugota, Robi Chandra Chakma, Vaskor Chakma and Shamir Bikash Tanchangya led the repression on the villagers, people sheltered at Ghagra alleged.

Kalonjoy Chakma, a village doctor of Dolupara, said the UPDF men have become violent after they faced a strong encounter from pro-peace accord armed men about a month back. "Since then, they (UPDF men) are forcing villagers to back them with money and other necessary things," he told newsmen.

UPDF men killed Chikon Chan Chakma, 65, of Dolupara and abducted two others-- Singha Moni Chakma, 30 and Shappya Chakma, 35. The two were yet to be recovered, said village headman

Patindralal Chakma and Budhamoni Karbery.

"Firefight between armed men of both the sides -- pro and anti-peace accord-- goes on intermittently till now," said Bono Kumar Chakma and Shushil Chakma, former member of Fatikchhari Union Parishad, who are among people at the community centre.

When contacted yesterday, Additional Superintendent of Police (crime) Khosrul Haque admitted the rampage in the villages and said he has sent the officer-in-charge of Kawkhali Police Station to Ghagra community centre but he is yet to return.

On Thursday, the Upazila Officer of Kawkhali visited the victims, officials said.

Deputy Commissioner of Rangamati Jafar Ahmed Khan last night told The Daily Star he has instructed the UNO to make a list of the affected families to provide them relief immediately.

"Since the problem is political, I have asked a senior member of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council, Ushaton Talukdar, to look into the matter."

Kakri joins Gumti in flooding

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said. "There will be light to moderate rains in Dhaka and the rest of the country in the next three to four days. But the situation is improving."

KAKRI FLOODING
The rain-engorged Kakri washed away stretches of the flood protection embankment at Ramchandrapur and Kala Bagan in Choudhogram upazila Wednesday night submerging 50 villages.

Water Development Board Chief Engineer Aminul Islam said nearly one lakh people are marooned in the flooded area.

The worst-affected villages are Kashinagar, Shuvapur, Munshirhat, Alkhara, Bakgram, Sripur, Mongolpur, Poranpur, Alipur, Hitalnagar, Shibpur, Balimuri, Hazaripur, Dhanispara, Gozariya, Bitorpur, Sharifpur and Kalikapur. They are under five to six feet of water.

Choudhogram Upazila Nirbahi Officer Sultan Nasrin said the local administration has already started repairing the embankment.

AL-BNP CLASH
Cadres of ruling BNP allegedly attacked and severely injured 14 Awami League activists, including four leaders, while they were going to Devidwar to distribute relief among the victims of the Gumti dam burst.

The condition of an injured, a businessman named Raoshan Ali, was reported to be critical.

The BNP men also allegedly looted Tk 2-lakh relief money and two cellphone sets.

According to an AL press state-

ment, a group of about 40 to 50 AL activists and leaders was attacked by BNP cadres when it reached Shailchar Bridge on Comilla-Sylhet highway at Vinglarbari.

The raiders beat away at the AL members with hockey sticks and also chased senior AL leader Fakhruul Islam Munshi.

At a press conference in Comilla, Fakhruul demanded arrest of the attackers and exemplary punishment to them.

GUMTI FOLLOWUP
A 100-foot stretch of the Gumti dam was washed away Wednesday evening near Comilla town, 150km off the capital.

Around 5 lakh people in 13 unions are marooned. The local administration has opened six shelters in Devidwar. Many of the affected people took refuge on the embankment and local educational institutions.

As the Comilla-Sylhet highway near Devidwar was reeling under floodwater, Roads and Highways Department prohibited all traffic on the road.

Locals said the strong river current stormed through a crack in Gumti embankment at Bara Alampur area developed three weeks ago. Onrushing floodwaters submerged five unions in Devidwar, Choudhogram and Burichang upazilas until Thursday night and devoured more villages until yesterday noon.

The worst-hit areas are Fatehabad, Bara Alampur, Elahabad and Gonaighar unions, Devidwar municipality, and Varella,

Mokam and Peerjatrapur unions of Burichang upazila.

Heavy current has damaged almost all the roads in those areas.

Army contingents have been deployed to check further crack in the riverbank but the repair works was yet to begin until yesterday, as the breach was very wide and current too strong to carry out any repairs.

The Shalda, a tribute of Gumti, was also overflowing yesterday submerging some adjacent villages.

RAINS IN DHAKA
After incessant torrential downpour for six days, city dwellers enjoyed sun for a considerable time yesterday. But the plight of people living in the low-lying areas was same as before, still waiting for water to recede from their houses.

Although Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority pumped out water from most parts of the city, there was stagnant water inside the DND (Dhaka-Narayanganj-DEMARA) embankment, old part of the city and Mohammadpur.

This week's deluge forced thousands of families in the suburban DND embankment area to flee their homes, with about 17,000 people taking shelter on the embankment and in various high-rise buildings.

The city roads looked quite normal yesterday as most vehicles started plying again. Many markets resumed business and more people came out of home.

8 Ctg bus crash victims still in critical condition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Eight of the injured in Thursday's fatal bus crash remained in a critical condition yesterday while the rest were improving.

Including the eight, 47 of the injured were receiving treatment at Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) until yesterday.

Meanwhile, a number of the injured were discharged from the hospital as their conditions improved, CMCH sources said.

"The eight are still unconscious and not out of danger", Resident Surgeon of CMCH Dr Motiar Rahman Khan told The Daily Star last evening.

Sources said Dumuria of Anowara from where most of the victims hailed was smarting from the midnight crash. A sense of desolation gripped the villagers while many of them crowded the CMCH to attend to the injured.

Relatives of the injured said they were struggling to meet the huge medical expenses. Besides, they have to count the cost of living in the city to take care of the patients.

Residents of Dumuria, however, raised a fund of some Tk 15 thousand to help the victims on Thursday. But the amount is negligible considering the huge cost of treatment, locals said.

A case was filed with Karnaphuli Police Station.

Ctg port security

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(Operations) Kamrul Hossain.

"The project is aimed at effective monitoring of all activities and controlling traffic at the port's outer anchorage," he said, "as the present system of traffic control with VHF radio doesn't ensure a comprehensive vigilance."

The project was first proposed two years ago when CPA faced a volatile situation of frequent piracy, ships fleeing from its harbour and recurring accidents. What lent urgency to its implementation and got it rolling this time was the advice of International Maritime Organisation (IMO), a UN agency concerned with safety of shipping and cleaner oceans.

"Installation of such a video surveillance system is a need of the hour under the IPS Code enforced in this port from July 1st this year as per the advice of IMO against the backdrop of various security threats," Hossain said, "We can also prevent the ships detained at the port from fleeing."

Sophisticated video cameras will be set up near the Karnaphuli estuary to cover the entire port limit areas, while some others will be positioned inside the port to watch over jetties, protected sheds and other building, officials said.

Eng-SL tie

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Opener Marcus Trescothick hit an unbeaten and streaky 64.

The winners will take on world champions Australia in the semifinals next week.

Sri Lanka could have restricted England further in the 32 overs bowled if they had taken their catches, Mahela Jayawardene spilling an easy chance at slip when Andrew Flintoff, batting on 21 at the other end, was on one.

Nuwan Zoysa and Sanath Jayasuriya also dropped catches in the deep off Trescothick and Andrew Strauss.

Strauss was run out for seven soon after his escape, attempting to run two after ticking the ball to third man.

Opener Vikram Solanki edged Farveez Maharof behind for 18 after Sri Lanka captain Marvan Atapattu chose to field first with menacing clouds overhead.

Captain Michael Vaughan was bowled middle stump by Zoysa for five when he wandered across his stumps to leave England on 52 for two after 15 overs.

Rail links

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adjacent haor. The incident apparently caused a huge damage on the local ecosystem and water bodies.

There were no reports of casualties but railway officials said the fire gutted a house and two women were slightly injured as they jumped into the nearby pond in panic. They said the fire also burnt a big tree near the rail tracks.

Fire fighters from Sylhet rushed to the scene and brought the fire under control at about 3:00am after hours of efforts.

Sylhet Fire Station Chief Jahid Hossain said the derailed wagons caught fire at about 9:00pm about one-and-half-an-hour after the accident.

Railway authorities formed a three-member enquiry committee headed by chief traffic manager (eastern zone) and asked it to submit report in three days.

A railway spokesman quoting primary estimates said damage caused by the accident has been estimated at Tk 65 lakh. Tk 50 lakh was assessed for loss of oil, Tk 10 lakh for the damaged wagons and the rest for damaged rail tracks.

But oil traders said their loss was much higher than the railway estimates.

The locomaster of the train carrying kerosene, diesel, petrol and octane from Chittagong in nine wagons was immediately suspended, railway officials said.

Materials for fake bomb

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Commons chamber at Westminster have now been released on police bail.

Commons leader Peter Hain is reportedly "absolutely furious" about the latest breach of Westminster security.

Dudman said reporter Anthony France was able to get a job as a waiter using false references - which were not checked in any way but "couldn't have been more bogus".

The materials he smuggled in in the midst of heightened security on Thursday included batteries, wire, a timer and modelling clay.

Dudman said it "couldn't have been anything other" than a bomb, the only difference being it was 20g of modelling clay instead of semtex.

Photographs of the reporter also show him serving tea to Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott while at Westminster.

Dudman told the BBC's Today programme: "It just simply beggars belief that on the day that ... everybody was saying: 'I can assure you we are going to ratchet up security, it's never going to be tighter', that same day a man from the Sun walks in carrying what could have been a bomb."

"It's simply unbelievable." The reporter's picture had already been on the paper's front page after he smuggled a fake bomb onto a plane at Birmingham International Airport.

Hain said the stunt had confirmed all his worst fears about security in the Commons, exposing "the amateurish and old-fashioned culture which threatened the very cockpit of our democracy".

"It's not just government minis-

15 Hindus hurt in attack in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

At least 15 Hindus were wounded, five critically, and their temple was burnt to ashes in an attack allegedly led by a BNP leader in Menujchhara village in Pargachha upzila Thursday.

Of the injured, Shudha, 3, Dinubala, 60, Suján, 25, Ranjit, 27, and Kalicharan, 38, were admitted to Pargachha Health Complex in critical condition, while others received first aid.

Sources said criminals led by Anisur Rahman, president of Parul union unit BNP and former Union Parishad chairman, carried out the attack. They also abducted Manoranjan and set fire to the Hindu temple.

A team of police led by Additional Superintendent of Police Golam Rabbani rushed to the spot and later rescued Manoranjan from a nearby village.

The sources said there has been a feud between the Hindu community and the BNP leader over setting up of a Brac school. Both the sides wanted the Brac, school to be set up in their own village, they added.

Anisur threatened some Hindus with dire consequence a few days back if they did not withdraw their demand. However, the Hindu community stuck to their demand.

Police have picked up three accused in this connection. A platoon of police has been deployed in the village as tension prevails.

About a month ago, criminals carried out arson attack on another Hindu village in Pargachha.

73 Iraqis killed

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began before dawn near around the Haifa Street area. The US military said its troops had fired on a car packed with explosives that was driving toward a checkpoint, killing two men in the vehicle. Later, blasts and gunfire echoed from Haifa Street as US troops moved in.

Iraqi police said they had arrested 63 militants, including Syrians, Egyptians and Sudanese, in a sweep in Haifa Street.

West of Baghdad on Thursday, three US marines were killed in action in separate incidents, the American military said. At least 777 US military personnel have died in action in Iraq since the US-led invasion last year.

In his interview, Powell disputed UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's assertion that the US-led war in Iraq was illegal, saying it was "not a very useful statement to make at this point."

"We should all be gathering around the idea of helping the Iraqis, not getting into these kinds of side issues."

The United Nations has played down Annan's statement, which spokesman Fred Eckhard said Annan felt was no different from what he had been saying for more than a year.

On Thursday, in the latest kidnappings of foreigners, gunmen abducted two Americans and a Briton from a house in an affluent neighborhood of central Baghdad.

Police said they had found the body of a man believed to be a Westerner, apparently dead for some time, late on Thursday near Samarra, north of Baghdad.

Australia has been investigating a claim that two of its citizens were kidnapped in the area.

Two male French journalists and two Italian female aid workers have also been taken hostage in the past few weeks.

ters at risk but the 14,000 other people who work in the Palace of Westminster who are at risk in this modern age of suicide bombers," he said.

"I have immediately asked the security services to close the loophole exposed by the Sun."

Hain has called for the appointment of a central director of security to oversee the protection of Parliament, to take over responsibility from the sergeant-at-arms and his staff.

Shadow leader of the House Oliver Heald described the latest breach as a "scandal" and said security checks needed to be tightened.

The Liberal Democrats also said Commons security needed an overhaul, with a greater role for Scotland Yard.

Incessant rain Thousands of fixed phones go out of order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Incessant rain has thrown thousands of subscribers out of the fixed phone network of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) in the capital.

As many as 7,640 telephones went out of order since the unprecedented deluge started on Saturday.

BTB personnel are yet to repair the telephone connections despite repeated complaints, many subscribers alleged.

But BTB Chairman Nurul Islam said, "Maintenance workers have been working round the clock to keep the network active." They repaired about 3,000 phones till yesterday, he mentioned.

Many telephones went out of order as rainwater entered telephone cables and cabinets.

Repair work is being impeded as opening of telephone cabinets during rain may damage other phones, he said.

Citing example of Fakirapool telephone exchange, he said, the lines have been kept active using generator during persistent power failures. The BTB has procured two generators to face such situations.

The BTB sought help from fire brigade as rainwater started inundating the cable chamber of the central exchange.

It has opened a central complaint coordination centre at the chairman's office in addition to its camps and complaint centres.

Call completion rate and voice quality have dropped substantially due the heavy rain, subscribers alleged.

Normalcy in telephone service will return as soon as the floodwater recedes, BTB officials said.

The state-owned fixed phone monopoly provides around one million fixed phone connections of which about 4,50,000 are in the capital.

3 killed, 49 hurt in Kurigram road accident

UNB, Kurigram

Three people were killed and 49 others injured, 31 of them seriously, in a road accident on Kurigram-Bhuranagar road yesterday.

Witnesses said the mishap took place at about 7:30am when a Kurigram bound minibus from Bhuranagar fell into a roadside ditch at Jamtala in Nageshwari.

The dead are Abdul Majid, 35, Mahbub, 12, and Asiron, 50. Majid and Mahbub died on the spot, while Asiron at Ranpur Medical College Hospital at about 4:00pm.

The injured are now undergoing treatment at Modern Hospital, Rangpur Medical College Hospital and Nageshwari Health Complex.

The driver and helper of the minibus managed to flee the spot soon after the accident.

Locals blocked traffic on the road protesting the accident. Police later brought the situation under control.

Chhatak blast

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Both the cases were transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which gave a final report on the case filed by the MP. The CID ASGP Aminul Islam submitted a charge sheet against seven people including Muhibur Rahman Manik.

The other accused are Manik's cousin Abul Lais Chowdhury, Biplab Bhuiyan, son of Abdul Hannan Bhuiyan of Itna upazila of Kishoreganj, Billal Ahmed, son of Khairul Islam of Jamtala under Chhatak upazila, Zakaria Chowdhury of Chhatak and MP's bodyguard Abul Kalam Babul of village Silam and Arif Haider of Pathantola, Sylhet. Babul and Arif died on the spot.

After the charge sheet, police arrested Manik and other accused, but they were released on bail. Manik also submitted a 'naraji' petition against the charge sheet to the Special Tribunal at Sunamganj, which rejected the prayer.

The case was later transferred to the Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal, Sylhet in January last year.