

22 die, 42 missing as immigrant boat sinks

AFP, Tunisia

Twenty-two would-be immigrants drowned and 42 were missing after a boat that was to have carried them across the Mediterranean broke up and sank off the Tunisian coast at the weekend.

The boat, which was carrying 75 people in all, sank overnight in the early hours of yesterday, the Tunisian navy said Monday in a statement that was carried by the official TAP news agency. The vessel was attempting to sail to Italy.

Eyewitnesses said the boat broke in two around an hour after it had sailed overnight from a beach in Sousse province, on the country's eastern coast. The navy said a helicopter, a launch and a ship were sent out to try and find survivors.

Late Sunday, 17 bodies were recovered but a further search by helicopter and naval ships later resulted in the recovery of five more.

Eleven of the occupants were either pulled alive from the water by the navy or managed to swim to shore.

It added that five of the occupants

Six student

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Opposition Awami League-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) President Liaqat Sikder said students and people of the country have rejected the speech of Mannan Bhuyan. He said they would not call off strike in the face of threat.

"We will call off the strike only when the university administration meets our demands," Liaqat said.

Jaliya Samajtantrik Dal-backed BCL General Secretary Ali Hasan Tarun told The Daily Star that the students and people of the country would resist the undemocratic process of LGRD minister.

The indefinite strike enforced by the six student organisations at the DU followed Jatityatabadi Chhatra Dal's attack on a rally of the six student organisations and ransacking the room of DU Teachers' Association president.

The seven-point demand of the six student organisations includes stern action against the attackers and removal of the proctor.

Tornado

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houses.

Meanwhile, heavy downpour yesterday swamped low-lying areas in the district intensifying miseries of the flood affected people in Kalaroa, Tala and Sadar upazilas.

More child-friendly legal system

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Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed and Minister for Social Welfare AAM Mujaheed, who were present at the roundtable, admitted to inadequate state systems to prevent abuse of confined children. They felt across-the-board changes in the legal system were necessary and said the amendments are in the pipeline to prevent abuse of children by the law.

"If need be, laws will be amended in case of juvenile justice to ensure that the age of a child offender is determined by the date of the offence committed," said Moudud at the roundtable titled, 'Children in trouble with Law', co-organised by Save the Children UK (SCUK) and The Daily Star at the latter's conference room.

As many as 1,004 children are currently in jail and 253 others in different Kishore Unnayan Kendras (KUK), according to a SCUK study titled 'Children in Trouble with Law'.

Among those in the KUKs, 57 children are under 5-year confinement, 14 above 5-year confinement, three in imprisonment for life and 179 others are in pre-trial or assessment stage.

Shohana Shabnam of the SCUK presented a keynote paper which said in 2002, an inter-ministerial committee was formed to protect the rights of the children and taskforces were constituted at national, district and upazila level.

The government also empowered 64 district women's affairs officers as ex-officio jail visitors and assigned upazila social welfare officers to render the duties of probation officers. The Police Headquarters also directed all police units to exercise the power of granting bail under Section 48 of the Children Act, 1974, the keynote paper added.

Speaking on the absence of birth and death registrations, which makes way for greater abuse of children, Moudud said that an act is on final stage to solve the issue and that he expects its passage in the next parliament session.

The minister also said the government is working on a mechanism to provide legal aid to Bangladeshi citizens imprisoned in foreign countries, particularly in the neighbouring ones.

Responding to an observation of advocate Salma Ali, executive director of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association, that many Bangladeshi children are confined to Indian jails, Moudud said the government would take similar measures to bring back

were Tunisian and the remaining 70 Moroccan. Of the 11 survivors, 10 were Moroccans and one a Tunisian.

Meanwhile the weekly Tunis Hebdo newspaper said the people in the boat were part of a group of some 280 who had gathered with the intention of trying to reach Europe.

The paper said that after the sinking of the boat most of the others - around 200 in all -- were arrested in the region around the town of Nabeul, some 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of the capital Tunis.

Grenades, AK-47

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copies of the daily Manabjamini carrying the news of the August 21 grenade attacks on an Awami League rally were also found on the spot.

Intelligence agencies have started probing if the seized arms and ammunition have anything to do with the carnage on Bangabandhu Avenue.

Rab sources said they are examining the grenades to see if they are similar to those hurled at the AL rally but could not confirm it as the brand names and other marks were rubbed off.

Locals said the shanty was under the possession of Mollah Shamim, a listed top criminal of the area who was killed in a shootout between Rab and his accomplices on September 6.

In a separate drive, Mohammadpur police seized 645 homemade bombs and firecrackers from a house and picked up landlord Almas and his sons Mokhles and Ekhlasi at North Adobar.

Acting on a tip off, a police team raided the house and seized the bombs.

Mokhles said he brought the explosives from Narsingdi to celebrate the upcoming marriage of Ekhlasi.

UP chairman

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district town at 6:00am.

Farid Uddin, officer-in-charge of Bagerhat Police Station, said they found the body with fatal injuries in his head.

A Rab press release said they recovered two revolvers and two rounds of bullets from Liton's house. A case was filed with Sadar Police Station under Arms Act.

Liton had alleged links with Janajuddho, a faction of outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party, intelligence agency sources claimed.

UK expects

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High Commissioner in Dhaka Anwar Chowdhury, Head of the South Asia Department at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Stephen Smith and Political Councillor Allan Shaw.

In response to Jay's views, the Awami League (AL) leadership told him that after the August 21 carnage, they went to parliament and wanted an 'institutional dialogue' on it, but the government did not allow.

"If the opposition is not given the minimum space to function, how could democracy flourish?" Political Secretary to the AL president Saber Hossain Chowdhury quoted the meeting as saying.

Saber said besides the August 21 grenade blasts, the huge arms hauls in Chittagong and Bogra and grenade attack on British envoy Anwar Chowdhury were among the other issues discussed.

The AL side told the British delegation that these incidents are not isolated, but rather intertwined. "They told us that they would communicate their concern about these incidents to the government", Saber added.

The AL leaders also told that the government remains indifferent to extremist Islamic groups though they (extremists) are a clear and present danger to the nation.

"If the government were sincere enough, they would have at least acknowledged the existence of the terrorist outfits," Saber said adding that, it will not be possible to combat terrorism as long as the government is in a denial mode.

AL leaders Abdul Jalil, Kazi Jafarullah, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Syed Abul Hossain and former diplomats Mahmud Ali and M Ziauddin aided the opposition leader.

Jay concerned

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national boundaries."

Babar said he showed solidarity with Jay in fighting terrorism in the region. "Asked by the undersecretary if Dhaka supports the global effort against it, I told him we'll not allow terrorism in our territory, be it internal or external."

The minister said Jay expressed his concern over any human rights violations in shootouts between the Rab and criminals.

Jay was informed that criminals died in shootouts as the Rab acted in self-defence, Babar said, adding, we have respect for human rights in Bangladesh where all corners appreciated Rab actions to fight crime.

1974 as a senior judge recently sentenced a child to death in a murder case.

Malik emphasised the need for more careful consideration by judges of cases relating to children.

Salma Ali observed that poor children who hardly receive legal counsel bear the brunt of the legal abuse and administrative neglect. She suggested a greater awareness among government workers about the sensitivities in dealing with juvenile offenders.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno, proposed effective steps to prevent children from being thrown into jail. She feared that even if the 1,004 children were to be released from jail, another thousand would be taken in if no significant preventive steps are there.

She asked the law-enforcement agencies to identify criminal gangs that exploit and abuse children for their own benefits. She also suggested a tighter monitoring of abuses by the law-enforcers in jail and in the KUKs.

Afsan Chowdhury, a child-rights activist, expressed shock at the existence of the 1943 Vagrancy Act, which he termed 'anti-poor' and 'counter-constitutional'. He said the existence of the law makes children more vulnerable to abuse by authorities and noted that the law perhaps is still there because of government support.

Wahida Banu of Aparajeo Bangladesh (AB) cited Chowdhury to say that most of the children put to jail under the law are more vulnerable because there is no-one to look after them.

She said their study shows certain criminal gangs exploit children by giving them arms and explosives in a bid to derive criminal and political benefits. Citing a lack of co-ordination among the government agencies, she said there is no co-ordination even among more than 200 NGOs working on child rights.

"Even the educated do not know how to behave with children. They respect the elders but neglect children in dealing with them," Banu said and urged for a child-friendly environment.

David Humphrey, programme director of the SCUK in Dhaka, called for greater understanding of the Children Act, 1974 that would lead to its proper implementation.

Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star who moderated the roundtable, called for specific government initiatives for more concrete results in ensuring the rights of the children.

Patients' plight

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a non-taxable item.

"We have met a customs official several times since early September, but he did not accept that the solution has long been imported without tax. We referred to books on tax at the official's work but he seems unmoved and stuck to his position," said Quiyaum Hasan, managing director of Bangladesh Health Product that imports the solution.

"I don't mind paying tax to clear the shipment. Perhaps the hospitals will also buy the solution, as it is an emergency medical item, but eventually patients have to bear the cost because of an additional 22.5 percent tax," Quiyaum said.

New tax will push up the price of Tk 1,600 a dialysis considerably and patients cannot afford such costly treatment in a country that needs five lakh litres of solution a year.

The tax burden may lead to the death of many kidney failure patients who rely on financial support from a few social workers," a kidney specialist said, asking not to be named.

The same dialysis solution, categorised as duty-free and imported by Janata Traders, was cleared from Chittagong Customs House on September 12.

"It's an emergency situation. We are running short of the stock but cannot refuse our patients because of probable public outcry," said Dr Mahmudur Rahman, managing director of Salvation Kidney Care and Dialysis.

ANM Azizul Islam, managing director of Millennium Hospital, echoed the concern saying: "We have about 20 kidney failure patients a day coming here for routine dialysis which is their only hope for survival. If we don't get a fresh supply, the situation can turn worse."

"We are worried. I wonder how I am going to deal with our regular

patients who have no option but to depend on us as there is a handful of dialysis machines in Bangladesh which remain booked all the time," said Dr Rafat Lotif of Millenium Hospital.

Contacted, Mir Farid Akhter, assistant commissioner of customs, deputised to oversee the work, said: "The solution can only be categorised as duty-free if it is labelled as hormone- or alkaline-based fluid. The imported solution is none of them and we had to impose tax in line with the rules."

Asked why the customs cleared the similar solution as duty-free, Akhter said: "The officials have made mistakes all these days."

Earlier, the customs official told The Daily Star that he would do all out to release the solution from the ICD soon. But the consignment is stuck at the ICD three days into his assurance.

Five foreign manufacturers operate here which regularly supply two main types of the solution. B Braun is the leading company followed by Fresenius, Baxter, Ain Medicare and Duopharma.

Public hospitals like Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital, Ibrahim Memorial Hospital (BIRDEM), National Institute of Kidney Diseases and Urology (NIKDU) and medical college hospitals in districts rely on the supply from private sources.

Authorities of public hospitals said they have run out of fluid and need an emergency supply to continue treatment for hundreds of poor patients.

The only plant that manufactures the kidney dialysis solution in Bangladesh in the public sector is the Institute of Public Health that cannot supply enough as it functions irregularly.

ful, safer and prosperous in their hands.

She mentioned the theme of this year's Children Day as time-fitting and said children are the most vulnerable to all types of disaster.

She referred to the experience of this year's flood and said the children mostly fell victims to miseries. The government, therefore, gave priority to children, elderly people and women in relief and rescue operations, she added.

Referring to the activities of the government, she said stipend programme has been introduced at the primary level as the government laid importance to education of the children.

Besides, the girl students are getting free education with other facilities up the 12th class and a Tk 5,000-crore programme has been launched for improvement of the standard of primary education.

The prime minister said new programmes like 'Reaching out of School Children' and 'Hard to Reach' have been adopted for the working, poor and disabled children.

The prime minister recalled her participation in the special summit at the UN General Assembly in May 2002 along with some child representatives from Bangladesh.

Unicef director Morten Giersingh appreciated the prime minister for her commitment to child development.

He also praised the government for its successful tackling of the recent floods and checking diarrhoea better than any other nation.

AL asks govt

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on external forces," said AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil at a press conference at the party's Dhanmondi office.

Jalil however rejected the commission report saying it has reflected the government version on the incident. "Both the commission and its report are not acceptable to Awami League. But it is a serious matter when the commission chief himself has pointed to the foreign forces' involvement in the incident", he said.

"The report is nothing but manifestation of efforts to protect the government. It echoed the views of the prime minister and her cabinet colleagues."

Jalil also demanded of the government to state the source of the grenades and who brought those into the country.

On Saturday, the one-member judicial inquiry commission headed by Justice M Joydul Abedin submitted its report. Although the commission chief did not make the report public, he shared part of it with newsmen, where it hinted that external forces were responsible for the incident. He however did not identify the forces.

A baseless probe report has proved the government is not sincere to identify the criminals, the AL general secretary stressed.

Experts debate

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On the other hand, Bangladesh had a crucial negotiation on ROO with India as both the countries had major differences on this issue in earlier meetings.

Bangladesh sought a maximum of 30 percent local value addition but India was rigid to make it a minimum of 40 percent.

Later, India agreed to lower the local value addition ceiling for Bangladesh. The ROO is still being discussed and a separate committee is working to make further progress.

"In our talks today, all the countries raised their concerns and expectations. We hope we would be able to reach a meaningful conclusion in the three-day negotiation," AKM Fazlur Rahman, who is leading the nine-member Bangladesh delegation at the talks, told reporters after the first day meeting.

He said Bangladesh is trying to make the ROO as simple as possible.

"The negotiation should be concluded by June next year so that we get at least six months to do other works at home. For that we have to make substantial progress in this meeting," he added.

A total of 38 government officials are participating in the three-day trade talks. The next expert committee meeting will be held in New Delhi in December.

Saarc foreign ministers at the 12th summit of the regional forum in Islamabad early this year signed a landmark agreement to establish Safta for better economic cooperation among the South Asian nations. The Safta will be effective from January 1, 2006.

Skop

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addressed the rally.

The left-leaning 11-party alliance also organised a rally in Muktangan in support of the strike. Communist Party Bangladesh President Manjurul Ahsan Khan, Gono Forum General Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik and Workers Party General Secretary Bimol Bishwas were present.

Americans win

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worked independently shedding further light on the olfactory system.

The medicine prize includes a check for \$1.3 million, but it's the aura of prestige a Nobel Prize confers that candidates crave most.

There are no set guidelines for deciding who wins. Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite who endowed the awards that bear his name, simply said the winner "shall have made the most important discovery within the domain of physiology or medicine."

The Nobel Assembly at Stockholm's Karolinska Institutet, which selects the medicine prize winner, invites nominations from previous recipients, professors of medicine and other professionals worldwide before whittling down its choices in the fall.

Last year's prize winners were Briton Sir Peter Mansfield and American Paul C. Lauterbur for discoveries that led to the development of MRI, which is used by doctors to get a detailed look into their patients' bodies.

The award for medicine opens a week of Nobel Prizes that culminates Oct. 11 with the economics prize. The peace prize, the only one bestowed in Oslo, Norway, will be announced Oct. 8. The physics award will be announced Tuesday and the chemistry prize will be announced Wednesday in the Swedish capital.

A date for the Nobel Prize in literature has not yet been set by the Swedish Academy, but is likely to fall on Thursday, Nobel watchers said.

The awards always are presented on Dec. 10, the anniversary of Nobel's death in 1896.

Mymensingh mob

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crackers from the robbers.

Microbus and the money belong to the Chhoto Bazar branch of National Bank in Mymensingh, police said.

Police and bank sources said, Cash Officer Ruhul Amin, with two security guards and a driver, was going to the head office of National Bank at Dilkusha in Dhaka.

The dead, identified as Alamgir, 35, Majnu, 32, and Nazrul, 30, hailed from Mirpur of Dhaka. Of the injured, Maruf, 30 and Tong 28, were from Jurain of Dhaka and Jewel, 20, from Matlab upazila in Chandpur.

The bodies were sent to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) for autopsy.

Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Akkas Uddin Bhuiyan told the reporters that high officials of visited the spot where raids were still on.

The recovered money would be handed over to the bank officials in the presence of the top brass of the district administration, police sources said.

UNB adds: Leader of an inter-district gang of robbers, was killed in a shootout between police and his henchmen at Magurjora in Trishal early yesterday.

Police said Abdul Khaleq, 45, died in crossfire when his accomplices opened fire on a police team that took him to Magurjora at about 2.30am for arms recovery.

Khaleq died on the spot while two sub-inspectors of police were injured.

Earlier on Saturday night, police arrested Khaleq from Tongi.

Injured sub-inspectors Maqsudul Momin and Mansur Habib were admitted to Trishal Health Complex.

Series of car bomb

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troops and 2,000 Iraqi soldiers, backed by US warplanes and artillery, stormed the city, 60 miles north of Baghdad, in an effort to dislodge an estimated 500 to 1,000 guerrillas.

US forces said they killed 125 fighters and captured 88 in the assault, which destroyed dozens of buildings and, according to locals, inflicted a heavy toll on civilians.

Residents of Samarra tried to bury their dead yesterday -- the cemetery was off limits on Sunday -- progressing through the streets of the city waving sticks with white flags attached, family members weeping as they bore the coffins for burial.

Iraq's interior minister, who comes from Samarra, said he did not believe any civilians had been killed in the offensive, a statement which drew an angry response from residents. The US military said it had tried to avoid civilian casualties.

Aid agencies returned to the city on Sunday, delivering food, water and medicine to families forced to flee. Much of the city still lacked water and electricity on Monday.

The two biggest challenges facing US and Iraqi forces are Falluja and Ramadi, guerrilla strongholds west of Baghdad which the US military tried unsuccessfully to capture in April.

There are also areas of Baghdad, including the Shia slum district of Sadr City, that will have to be seized from rebels.

In rebel-held Fallujah, American warplanes unleashed strikes on two houses early yesterday, killing at least 11 people, including women and children, hospital officials said.

The military, which regularly accuses hospitals of inflating casualty figures, said the strikes targeted followers of Jordanian terror mastermind Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and their associates.

A strike in the central al-Jumhuriyah area killed nine people, including three women and four children, said Dr. Adil Khamis of Fallujah General Hospital. Twelve were injured, including six women and three children, he said. They include residents of neighboring houses that were damaged in the blast.

A second strike in the city's southern Al-Shuhada neighborhood killed two more people, Khamis said.

The military said a "precision strike" at about 1 a.m. hit a building where about 25 insurgents were moving weapons on the outskirts of Fallujah.

Intelligence sources said insurgents were using the site to store weapons and conduct training, the military said in a statement.

"Throughout the operation, multiple measures were employed to ensure no innocent civilians were present when the strikes took place," the statement said.

Shortly before 3:30 a.m. coalition forces struck a site where members of al-Zarqawi's network were believed to be meeting, another military statement said.

It was the latest in weeks of strikes

Media policy

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The acting secretary pointed out that private satellite television channels are operating in the country without any specific policy. "There are many newspapers which are being published only to have government advertisements."

He also said the government would take opinions from individuals and groups involved in media before finalising any media policy.

Presenting the keynote at the seminar, Rizwan-ul-Alam, assistant communication officer of Unicef, Dhaka, said even after 33 years of Bangladesh's independence, there is no policy of development communication.

"Sometimes the government talks about objectivity of media but objectivity and the government cannot work together as they often clash each other," he told the seminar titled 'Development Communication: Problems and Prospects in Bangladesh.'

Afsan Chowdhury, director of

in the city west of Baghdad aimed at groups with links to terrorists, particularly al-Zarqawi's network. Followers of the Jordanian militant have claimed responsibility for a string of deadly bombings, kidnappings and other attacks across the country.

Yesterday's violence comes a day after Iraqi security forces emerged to patrol Samarra following a morale-boosting victory in this Sunni Triangle city of Samarra.

American and Iraqi commanders have declared the operation in Samarra, 60 miles northwest of Baghdad, a successful first step in a major push to wrest key areas of Iraq from insurgents before January elections.

Also in Baghdad, a senior official of Iraq's Sciences and Technology Ministry and a female employee were assassinated Monday, the Interior Ministry said. Tamir Abdul-Latif and the woman were killed near Baghdad's southeastern Zayona suburb, said Col. Adnan Abdul-Rahman.

Donors support

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extension -- prioritizing them on the basis of short, medium and long terms.

The APB has been prepared following the ASR launched a year ago under a joint initiative of the government and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations.

The recommendations include establishing a permanent advisory committee on agriculture linking with grassroots level committee to undertake periodic review of key issues affecting the development of the sector.

And bringing policy reforms and strengthening infrastructure and other facilities for marketing and agribusiness, and increasing quality seed availability.

It stressed the need for strengthening the seed certification agency and establishing a bridge to develop private sector in seed producing.

"Our priority is to address seed and irrigation problem and reduce yield gap as the weakest points," agriculture Minister MK Anwar told the concluding session of the workshop in the afternoon.

He billed the APB as an essential document that noted the past of Bangladesh agriculture, present status and future goals as well as the ways to overcome the challenges.

"Government is very keen to address all the issues and has already taken some steps," he told the meet.

The donor community assured their cooperation in the government efforts to implement the recommendations.

Danish Ambassador to Bangladesh Niels Severin Munk, UNDP deputy representative Larry Maramis, World Bank representative Dr Mohinder Mudhar and FAO representative Dr Saifullah Shao were present at the workshop.

advocacy unit, Brac, said development communication is a notion of the west. "Time has come to think whether development communication and information can work together according to the western notion."

Actor Ramendu Majumder said transmission cost of information relating to social development has to be reduced. "Electronic media in the country should create an opportunity so that social development advertisements can be broadcast on 50-70 percent commission," Ramendu Majumder suggested.

Presided over by Dr Ahmed Kamal, a Dhaka University (DU) professor, the seminar was also addressed by Wolfgang Vollmann, country representative of Unesco, Prof Golam Rahman, chairperson of DU Mass Communication & Journalism department, Dr Subrata Shankar Dhar of the World Bank, Dhaka, Shahidullah Lipon of Chittagong University and Arifa S Sharmin of CARE, Bangladesh.

Bhuiyan issues

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'issueless' hartal the AL has called aims to destroy the national economy.

"Hartal is now considered a political weapon to destroy the country. Hartal no longer reflects the hopes or demands of people because they are opposed to it," he stressed.

The BNP secretary general said his AL counterpart Abdul Jalil had earlier warned of tougher programmes including hartal if the government obstructed its public rally (on Sunday) but they (AL) called hartal although the government took all possible security measures to ensure holding of the rally without any obstructions.

On the August 21 grenade blasts at an AL rally, Bhuiyan said the main opposition party does not want proper investigation or trial of people involved in the incident. They (AL) just want to capitalise on the incident to go to power and that is why they are demanding resignation of the government, he added.

"We will not step down even a