

## Hasina demands early polls

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occasion of the alliance government's three years in office.

Political leaders, academics, bureaucrats and diplomats attended the function. The AL and other mainstream opposition parties observed the day as a "Black Day" for the nation.

Hasina urged all to reach a national consensus to put an end to 'the misuse of the alliance government' and build a modern, secular and democratic Bangladesh.

She promised people that if voted to office, her government would not try to settle scores out of political vengeance.

The opposition leader painted a detailed picture of what she said were misdeeds of the 36-month Khaleda administration, including the slide in law and order, price hikes of essentials, lack of public safety, unabated corruption, existence of religious militant groups, nepotism and politicisation and persecution of political opponents.

Hasina alleged that the government has unleashed 'state terrorism' for political ends, as it has been killing the prospective leaders of the main opposition, sensing its defeat in the next polls.

The former prime minister also touched on issues including her party stance on the joining parliament, major bomb blasts and arms hauls, custodial killing and successes of the previous AL government.

The former prime minister accused the government of not investigating the grisly grenade attack on a rally of her party on Bangabandhu Avenue. The evidence has been destroyed and the perpetrators are being protected.

Turning to next elections, Hasina said the level of failure and misuse of the government is so acute that the ruling coalition is 'trying to come to power by circumventing people's mandate' through 'election engineering'.

She outlined manipulative methods the coalition has used to achieve its goal. These include strengthening methods of vote rigging and casting of false votes, as seen in Dhaka-10 by-election, use of illegal money to influence elections, attempt to create an obedient executive through politicisation, minority repression to discourage voting, attempt to influence and control the media, selective killing of popular opposition leaders and repression of AL workers at the grassroots level to create panic.

Hasina said the BNP-Jamaat government has failed to provide security to people and instead, the government itself has become a threat to people's life and properties.

"The crisis is so horrific that foreign envoys are becoming victims of grenade attacks, while donors have to flee the country in fear of their lives."

Activities of the religious extremists have tainted the secular character of the country, she added.

On killing of people in "crossfire" in the custody of Rab, Hasina said what is going on is inhuman. "Every citizen has the right to justice and everyone wants trial of criminals".

She said as many as 307 people have been killed in custody so far. "Killers of Manzurul Imam, Manik Saha, Humayun Kabir Balu and Shamsur Rahman were killed in crossfire only to save godfathers of the criminals," she alleged.

Most parts of the country have turned into valleys of death, she told the gathering. "Victims of rape and acid violence are forced to commit suicide as they know they would not get justice," the AL president observed.

At least 10 journalists were killed and over 1,200 others attacked for reporting on criminal activities and corruption of the prime minister, her cabinet colleagues and ruling lawmakers, she alleged.

She also spoke about mass arrests and closure of mills and factories that left thousands jobless.

"People of the country want elimination of conflicts and political vengeance," she said. "The Awami League does not believe in taking revenge on political opponents and we will stick to this policy in spite of endless repression of its leaders and workers," she said.

She said a total of 153 people were killed and 1,304 injured in 12 bomb blasts in last three years, but no-one was arrested in connection with the incidents. National security is under threat as huge illegal arms have been smuggled into the country.

"In every incident of bomb blast, pro-liberation democratic political parties, Bangali festivals and shrines were targeted. And it is clear

that those who have delivered speeches against the War of Independence and democracy and taken position against the shrines are the perpetrators of the blasts", she added.

The former prime minister claimed her government had conducted investigations into the bomb blasts at that time. "Later, the alliance government halted those and excluded the chargesheeted criminals while some of them became ministers and lawmakers," she alleged.

Speaking on their boycott of parliament, Hasina said despite non-cooperation and hostile attitude from the government, the AL made a conscious effort to go to parliament. But the AL lawmakers were not allowed to voice their opinion in parliament and the rejection of 2,413 opposition notices and the prime minister's refusal to answer to 921 opposition questions testify to the ruling coalition's attitude.

"Even the sensitive topic of August 21 grenade attack and the subsequent carnage that was a concern of every citizen of the country regardless of political affiliations was not allowed to be discussed in parliament," she mentioned.

Giving a detailed picture of the price hike of essentials, Hasina said cost of living has shoot 80 percent in three years under the alliance rule.

On economy, Hasina said foreign investment plunged 70 percent from what the AL government had left. Chittagong Port has been labelled as "second dangerous port" in the world and a latest report of Transparency International, Bangladesh reveals that about Tk 763 crore has been paid in bribe to the port officials.

On politicisation, the opposition leader said under the directives of a certain 'Bhaban', promotion rules are being violated. A record number of contractual jobs, mass postings, forced retirement and random axing has left the administration ineffective.

Hasina alleged that corruption has been institutionalised in the last three years. "Bribes and commissions for Hawa Bhaban play a regular role in each development project, international tender and transactions."

Corruption is rampant in education, agriculture, industries, social welfare, environment and communications ministries, she said. "Scams in the purchase of textbooks, wheat, fertilisers, sugar, jet fuel, CNG-run vehicles and F-28 planes, Hajj flights, involvement of an influential minister in gold smuggling and land grabbing by a minister's wife are the reasons why Bangladesh leads the way in corruption worldwide," she added.

On foreign policy, Hasina said the coalition government has completely failed on the foreign policy front.

"Bangladesh has been black-listed because of terrorist activities. In the eyes of international community, Bangladesh is a country synonymous with human-rights violations," she said. "The Muslim world has rejected the nomination of a war criminal and a smuggler for the post of OIC secretary-general. Bangladesh is losing friends every day."

The AL president said her party wants to see Bangladesh as one of the most attractive investment destinations in Asia.

"People don't want Bangladesh to be a safe home for religious militants, we, like the citizens, want to see Bangladesh as a bright example of communal harmony free from violence and political confrontation," she added.

"The AL does not believe in political vengeance. The father of independent Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman conducted national affairs with beliefs of benevolence and forgiveness. We have not veered from that belief in the face of oppression and torture and we will not do so in the future, God willing."

"We want to build a secure Bangladesh for people in the backdrop of the horrific slide in law and order," the opposition leader said.

She added the AL wants to create a nation for future generations where merit, not political obedience, would be the benchmark. "I want a modern generation who would make Bangladesh proud and internationally renowned in the fields of science, technology, education and sports."

"We want to rescue the judiciary, the last resort for the oppressed, from destruction and ensure its independence," Hasina said.

"We want to keep the armed

forces, built and developed from the Liberation War, above politics and create professional and modern armed forces."

She said a reformed and flawless electoral system is required to protect democracy and constitution so as to ensure people's right to choose the government they wish.

## More than one in three want Blair to go

REUTERS, London

More than one in three Britons say Prime Minister Tony Blair should resign over the Iraq war but a clear majority do not blame him for the beheading of Kenneth Bigley in Iraq, an opinion poll shows.

In the first comprehensive sounding taken since the death of Bigley, the YouGov poll in The Mail yesterday showed 36 percent of voters wanted Blair to step down.

But 65 percent said he was not to blame for Bigley's beheading by militants in Iraq, while 59 percent believed the government had done everything it could to secure the engineer's release.

"They are not blaming the government for Bigley at all. Blair's problem is trust and what has happened in Iraq generally," YouGov's Peter Kellner told Reuters.

Bigley's hometown of Liverpool staged a day of mourning for him on Saturday and Blair rang the family to offer his condolences.

Coming soon after a report from the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), which destroyed Blair's main argument for waging war on Iraq, the killing looks certain to keep Iraq at the top of the political agenda seven months before an expected election.

Up to 58 percent of those polled by YouGov said they believed the conflict in Iraq had undermined the health of Blair, who underwent an operation on October 1 to quell heart palpitations.

Blair has said he will stand for a third term but will not stand for a fourth, an announcement that has aroused fevered speculation over who might succeed him.

Despite his plummeting trust ratings, all polls still point to the Labour Party being the comfortable winner of the next election as the opposition Conservatives have failed to capitalise on his woes.

The latest poll in The Sunday Telegraph, taken after the Conservatives' annual party conference, showed the opposition party garnering just 30 percent of support — nine points behind Labour.

Writing in the Independent on Sunday, former U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix accused Blair and President George W. Bush of "clinging to straws" to justify their decision to go to war in Iraq.

Both leaders seized on the suggestion by Charles Duelfer, leader of the ISG which hunted in vain for evidence of banned weapons in Iraq after the U.S. invasion, that Saddam Hussein might have started producing weapons of mass destruction again if U.N. sanctions had been lifted.

"This is the new straw to which the governments concerned have begun to cling," Blix wrote.

## Beijing to install condom machines to fight Aids

REUTERS, Beijing

Beijing will install about 1,000 condom vending machines in hotels, bars, universities and on construction sites in the Chinese capital this month to fight the spread of AIDS, the official Xinhua news agency said yesterday.

The machines will dispense condoms for 1 yuan (12 U.S. cents) a piece and their quality will be guaranteed, a Beijing Disease Control and Prevention Center official was quoted as saying.

The new machines will supplement 1,700 machines already in the capital, many of which are often out of service or empty. Existing machines will be repaired this month, Guan Baoying, a city health bureau official, said.

China says it has 840,000 HIV/AIDS cases, but experts say at least 1 million poor farmers were infected in the central province of Henan alone as a result of a botched blood-for-sale donor scheme.

The United Nations has said the number of AIDS victims in China could quickly rise to 10 million if serious steps to fight the epidemic are not taken.

Low quality and sometimes unpackaged condoms made up nearly three quarters of the two billion condoms used in China last year.

## Mahi

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Community centre authorities asked Shawkat Bepary, organiser of the function and a resident of Mahi's constituency, to drop the BDB leader's name from the guest list of his daughter's marriage party.

Mahi said he did not attend the occasion after Shawkat informed him about the matter. "I don't know why I was not allowed. As a lawmaker, I have the right to attend any social event," he added.

## Opposition observes

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The law enforcers also picked up AL Sports Secretary Dewan Shafiul Arefin Tutul and Mahila Awami League leader Ashrafunnesa Mosharrarf in the morning and kept them confined at Dhanmondi Police Station until evening.

A large number of women AL activists were also hauled up to police stations and released in the evening. The demonstrators damaged at least three buses at Moltijheel and Azimpur during the hartal amid deployment of over 7,500 forces including paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), Armed Police Battalion (APB) and the police in the capital.

Most of the shops, business centres and private offices remained closed during the shutdown. Attendance in government offices was thin. Automobiles went off the road in Dhaka and other cities, although rickshaws plied almost as usual.

The shutdown disrupted operations of Chittagong and Mongla ports, stock exchanges in Dhaka and Chittagong and transactions in most banks. No classes were held at the educational institutions.

In Dhaka, the activists of AL and its front organisations were baton-charged by the police when they took out processions in Lalbagh, Nawabpur and on Dhaka University campus.

The police went on action at Old Dhaka's Chowkbazar crossing after the AL activists from a procession led by former MP Haji Selim pelted stones on them. A police sub-inspector received head injuries during the battle.

Witnesses said the demonstrators turned unruly and chased the law enforcers when they cordoned the procession off at around 8:15am. Police also lobbed teargas shells to disperse the demonstrators and picked up 18 people from the spot.

Another AL procession led by Asaduzzaman Noor MP came under police clubbing in Moltijheel when the protestors tried to march towards Dainik Bangla intersection breaking police barricade. Three AL activists were injured in the clubbing.

The AL leaders scuffled with the police when they were dragging seven Mahila AL and Sramik League leaders to a police van.

At least 15 AL supporters were wounded when police charged baton to disperse them at Rathkhola in Sutrapur. The demonstrators hurled stones and bricks at the police.

On the Dhaka University campus, the police clubbed the AL-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activists when they took out a procession at about 11:00am. Seven demonstrators including BCL President Liaquat Shikder and Vice-president Balam Poddar were injured and three BCL activists arrested.

The police picked up AL leader

Dewan Shafiul Arefin and Ashrafunnesa Mosharrarf along with 11 others from near Dhanmondi road-32 at 10:30am.

Fifteen AL activists were picked up when AL leader Farooq Khan MP led a procession near Zia International Airport at about 10:30am.

The police dispersed opposition activists when they were trying to take out processions in Mirpur, Jatrabari, Mohakhali, Tejgaon, Azimpur, Shyampur and Mohammadpur areas.

Abdul Kalam, a rickshaw passenger, suffered injuries when unknown people hurled homemade bombs at the rickshaw at Surtola in Kotwali at 12:30pm.

A procession of the AL lawmakers marched on the Mirpur Road from Sangsad Bhaban while another procession led by Mohammad Nasim MP joined it before staging a street rally at Russell Square amid police cordon.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid and AL leaders Mohammad Nasim, Abdul Matin Khasru, Dr Abdul Mannan, Prof Abu Sayeed, Panchanan Biswas, KM Jahangir, Shahjahan Khan and Jubo League leader Mirza Azam addressed the rally.

In a separate rally in front of the AL headquarters, AL leaders said the alliance government in its three-year rule has absolutely failed to run the country. They demanded immediate resignation of the government, otherwise threatened to oust it.

AL presidium members Toifal Ahmed and Motia Chowdhury, among others, addressed the rally.

Different left leaning political parties also observed the 'Black Day' and held rallies in the city yesterday.

Leaders of the 11-party alliance, Communist Party Bangladesh (CPB) and JSD- Inu in separate rallies in the capital demanded resignation of the government.

The CPB leaders said the BNP-led coalition government has disgraced the country's liberation war through including war criminals in the cabinet.

The JSD leaders termed the three years of the coalition government as failure.

Our staff correspondent from Chittagong reports the hartal was observed peacefully in the city. The police arrested 207 people in 24 hours ending yesterday morning.

Our Khulna and Comilla correspondents add: the hartal passed off peacefully in both the divisional and district towns without any major incidents.

## 156 missiles found

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which houses a state warehouse for cargo containers.

Some of the projectiles imported with scrap have been found in Delhi's commercial district of Mayapuri, police said, adding that they have also recovered tank turrets and dismantled machineguns originating from countries in Asia, Africa and the Gulf.

Experts Saturday found 100 shells from metal consignments at Tughlaqabad and said the arsenal comprised mortar rounds, anti-tank shells, anti-aircraft missiles and fragmentation shells.

In a similar hunt Sunday, the experts in the northern city of Jaipur recovered 20 live shells from a private foundry, police superintendent Anand Srivastava said.

He said police Saturday recovered more than 1,000 mortar rounds and bombs from another local factory but only 90 of these were unstable.

"Tonnes of scrap buried probably along with live shells is being dug out and searched," Srivastava added.

"Some of the ordnance is unstable and it's a miracle they did not blow up the ships that ferried them

to India," he said as the army destroyed part of the Tughlaqabad cache Sunday.

In the nearby city of Ghaziabad, four shells were found in two of 11 trucks that were searched, an army spokesman said.

Police also found 50 shells in containers in the western port of Kandla during the nationwide hunt for war junk, officials said Sunday but added the bombs had been disarmed before the shipment.

The alarming recoveries prompted the Indian government to tighten rules Saturday on scrap metal imports, especially from war-affected countries such as Afghanistan and Iran.

"Import of scrap will now be permitted only in shredded or compacted form while other metal waste will be allowed into the country after total inspection at major ports," the Directorate-General of Foreign Trade said in a statement.

Media reports Sunday quoted customs officials as saying that it was almost impossible to rummage through some 1,000 containers that arrive daily at New Delhi's Tughlaqabad warehousing complex after landing at various ports of the country.

it would discharge its due responsibility.

She said her government could not dishonour the people, deny their preference and ignore their opinions. There are no alternative to dealing sternly with political terrorism and undemocratic activities to ensure safety of people and safeguard democracy.

Khaleda said no civilised nation could give an open licence to anarchy, terrorism and destruction of property in the name of politics.

She urged all to move forward on the basis of reality by containing emotion and forge ahead by remaining united.

The prime minister said her government has achieved much success despite relentless movements, threats and smear campaigns outside the country by the opposition and vowed to sustain the trend in the next two years.

Khaleda expressed her thanks to the public for electing the BNP-led alliance three years back through a silent revolution of ballots.

On the adverse impact of negative politics on life, she said her government had been trying hard to confront the politics of darkness and destruction.

Reminding the people of her seeking cooperation from the leader of the opposition to fight terrorism, Khaleda said she (opposition leader) had rejected their efforts to that end and only wanted the government to step down.

(BSS, UNB)

## Crashed F28

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pany.

Biman has a \$3 million insurance coverage for the F28 aircraft with UK-based Lloyds Aviation Insurance Company Ltd. State-run Sadharan Bima Cooperation (SBC) is the reinsurer of the insurance agreement.

Peter Tyrer, senior surveyor and adjuster of CTC, a member organisation of Lloyds, and Shanti Narayan Das, deputy manager of SBC, yesterday thoroughly inspected the ill-fated aircraft that skidded off runway injuring 30 of the 83 passengers and crew on board Friday.

A Biman official said insurance officials will start analysing condition of the aircraft whose nose went four feet deep into a canal, causing serious damage to its cockpit. The wings also got damaged but the fuselage of the plane is still in a relatively good condition, he said.

The Biman official said if the Lloyds representative finds that the plane can be repaired to make it worthy for flight, it will be recovered from the crash site. The insurance company may seek logistic help of Civil Aviation Authority (Caab) to drag the plane out of the canal.

"However, if the insurance company think the plane cannot be made fit for flight, the company will put the engine and other scraps for auction and pay the insurance coverage money to Biman," the Biman official said.

Refuting the allegation about the poor condition of the runway as the cause of the crash, State Minister for Civil Aviation Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin said, "As the runway is all right, operation of flights is now going on smoothly in the airport."

"We would have to wait for a few more days for the probe body report. The Caab chairman-led probe committee will submit the report at the earliest," he told a press conference at the VIP lounge of the airport.

He said the government will undertake a Tk 120 crore expansion project for the Sylhet airport which includes increasing the runway by 500 feet, establishment of boarding bridge and construction of new terminal building.

"On implementation, the project will ensure safer operation of flights, especially for wide-bodied aircraft which Biman is going to procure soon," the minister said.

The minister also rejected comments on the quality of F-28 aircraft and said, "The planes were procured for their cheaper cost. Due to fund shortage, Biman cannot buy modern and costly aircraft."

The minister said the cost of damage caused by Friday's crash would be measured by the insurer. "Biman would decide on and take steps for using the engines of the craft, as they were reportedly still in good condition," he added.

Caab Chairman and probe committee head Zahed Qudus, Biman MD Mahmudur Rahman and Biman's internal probe body members also visited the crash site yesterday.

Meanwhile, doctors at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) yesterday released Captain Sahana Begum who sustained injuries in Friday's crash. Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, executive director of Brac, who was trapped in the plane for six hours, is improving fast. Doctors said he is out of danger.

First officer of the flight Abu Safa was released from the CMH on Saturday.

## Clarification

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government regularly monitors fiscal deficit. On a different note, it said the government has only prioritised programmes to mitigate the flood-damage within the resource constraints in the budget as funds for post-flood rehabilitation were already provided in the current year's budget.

**OUR REPLY**

The report was based on information gathered from Bangladesh Bank's "Major Economic Indicator: Monthly Update" for September, which is based on government borrowing from banks in July.

## German

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religions are being used in politics."

Citing recent attacks on the Ahmadiyya community, protests against women's sports, existence of the Vested Property Act, Andreas termed these incidents indicators of religious militancy in different forms, and said the government needs to address the issues.

Moudud in his statement said, "Although fundamentalism and terrorism may exist in Bangladesh, it's too limited in scope and size to elicit fear."

"The situation in India and Pakistan is much worse and absence of serious communal violence in Bangladesh in the aftermath of the Gujarat incident testifies to its tolerance," he said, adding, "The recent attack on the Ahmadiyya sect is an aberration in Bangladesh's long tradition as a moderate and tolerant Muslim state."

"We should practice more tolerance," Moudud said, adding that our prime focus should be on achievements made in the development of Bangladesh, especially in the education and health sectors.

On Iraq War, the law minister said it is a war against terrorism, not Islam.

The four-day conference on the current realities of religious militancy and its link with nationalism and terrorism in different countries in the region and possible ways to address the problem, ended yesterday.

## Afghan polls fair despite

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But midway through Saturday, all 15 rivals of U.S.-backed interim president Hamid Karzai had announced they were boycotting the poll because a system to prevent voting fraud had failed.

Many demanded a new vote but Karzai, the favorite to win, rejected the demand.

At issue was indelible ink put on the finger of everyone who voted to stop them voting again. Some election workers used the wrong pen to mark voters, and the ordinary marker ink was quickly washed off.

And with questions over the late and rapid registration of 10.5 million voter cards in a population of about 28 million, there were accusations of illegal multiple voting.

"While the reasons for the incorrectly applied indelible ink remain to be seen, a fairly democratic environment has generally been observed in the overall majority of polling centers," FEFA said.

Karzai said the wishes of the people had to be respected.

"I would advise my fellow countrymen, the 15 other candidates, that we must all respect the fact that millions of Afghans came out on foot, in rain and snow and dust and waited for hours to vote," he said.

"Just because 15 people have said 'No', we can't deny the votes of millions."

**COUNTING TO GO AHEAD**

Before the election, the main worry had been the threat posed by the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban guerrillas and their vow to sabotage the poll.

But there was only some scattered election-related violence. The Interior Ministry said 10 members of the security forces had been killed in the violence while 25 militants were killed in a firefight in restive Uruzgan province.

"The millions who came to the polls clearly wanted to turn from the rule of the gun to the rule of law," said the Organization for Security and Cooperation of Europe, which had 40 experts accredited.

"The validity of election results should be dealt with as the law provides. The candidates' demand to nullify the election is unjustified," the OSCE said.

The Joint Election Management Body of UN and Afghan experts were to investigate the irregularities over the ink. But it said vote counting, likely to begin Monday after ballot boxes are collected yesterday, would go ahead.

In Kabul's main Pul-i Khisti bazaar, back to its usual chaos after the vote, opinions about the poll were divided.

"I'm happy for what happened yesterday," said Mohammad Yousuf, his urban and shawl framing his bearded face. "And to the person I voted for, I am appealing to him to please look after our country and help the poor."

But another man, Nasir Ahmad, said: "It is clear that yesterday's elections were fraudulent and illegal because a person can only vote once, not five times. They should

hold another election."

Saturday's vote came three years after U.S.-led forces invaded Afghanistan to oust the Taliban regime for harbouring Osama bin Laden, architect of the Sept. 11 attacks.

President Bush, facing his own election battle next month, has claimed the Afghan vote as a foreign policy success and is hoping it can be mirrored in Iraq.

"Today's an appropriate day for Americans to remember and thank the men and women of our armed forces who liberated Afghanistan," Bush said as he campaigned in St. Louis on Saturday.