Storm of protests

FROM PAGE 1 and people were seen busy in panic buying at kitchen markets.

Sporadic violence between police and angry opposition men also erupted on the Dhaka University campus in the afternoon.

Leaders of opposition political parties including the AL, 11-party combine, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (ISD), Gono Forum and National Awami Party (NAP), university teachers, and family members, friends and colleagues of the late leader attended the janazas.

No leader of the ruling alliance partners was seen at the burial

Meanwhile, a four-member AL delegation led by Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid met Speaker Zamiruddin Sircar at his office in the afternoon and discussed about holding a namaj-ejanaza of Kibria at the south plaza of Jatiya Sangsad as per a convention.

Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, who was on the team, told reporters they demanded of the speaker to withhold the scheduled speech of the president on the opening day of the first session of the House this year and to pass an obituary reference on CLASHANDFIRE

Demonstrators yesterday clashed

with police and set ablaze seven vehicles in the Central Shaheed Minar precincts. Witnesses said about 20 people,

mostly policemen including a deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, were injured in The burned vehicles in this area

include three buses, a microbus and a CNG-run three-wheeler.

Movement of traffic on the nearby roads remained suspended for nearly one-and a half hours. At least five vehicles were burned

and several others damaged in other parts of the city, while a mob set fire to a showroom of Dandy Dyeing, a cloth-dying company, in Mirpur Section 10.

Fabric worth about Tk 10 lakh was gutted in the 20-minute blaze. No-one was hurt in the incident. Pallabi police picked up four youths from the spot in this connection.

Another mob torched a doubledecker in Mirpur Section 1 at about 7:30pm while three youths set fire to a CNG-run autorickshaw near the Abahani playground in Dhanmondi. Two passenger buses were also

and near Rifles Square last nigh Besides, several buses were vandalised at Palashi, Kotwali, Shyampur AUTOPSY

Police and AL leaders took Kibria's body to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital morgue for autopsy at 9:15am from Birdem. Body of Abdul Hossain was also kept at the morgue.

A three-member committee headed by Dr Fazlul Karim, an assistant professor at the DMC forensic post-mortems on them. Bones of both the legs of Kibria

were fractured and splinters perforated his lungs, heart, liver and intestines. "He died of excessive bleeding from internal and external injuries," said a source.

Abul Hossain died of splinters injuries in the legs and the hands. PLEDGE TO CONTINUE

MOVEMENT Leaders of the AL and the leftleaning 11-party combine yesterday

pledged and urged all to build an allout movement to overthrow the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition, whom they blame for the 'heinous killings of opposition leaders one after

The top leaders of the AL and the combine at a meeting last evening with Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina in the chair discussed in detail the three-day countrywide hartal.

Other programmes will be announced after the stoppage, said acting AL general secretary Oabidul Quader after the meeting.

Envoys call FROM PAGE 1

ed to a climate of impunity which encourages a continuation of such

He was emerging from the resi-dence of late SAMS Kibria yesterday evening. The ambassadors and high commissioners of UK, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, Germany, Denmark, Norway and European Commission yesterday visited Kibria's Dhanmondi residence to offer sympathy to his family.

On behalf of the EU ambassa-

dors, Anwar Chowdhury termed the attack on the opposition rally tragic and called upon the government to ensure the due process of law through a proper investigation. The EU ambassadors also

expressed their deep dismay at the attack on the opposition rally that left former finance minister and four others dead and at least 70 injured. "Under these circumstances, the

EU ambassadors cannot emphasise enough the need for swift action by the government of Bangladesh," Anwar Chowdhury told the journalists.

The EU ambassadors offered condolences also for the families of the slain and prayed for the early recovery of the injured.

UNB adds: The United States Embassy in Dhaka yesterday urged the government to pursue vigorously the investigation into the Habiganj grenade blast. 'We're deeply saddened at the

death of Mr Kibria and we urge the government to pursue the investigation vigorously," a spokesman for the embassy told UNB: In another statement, the exter-

nal affairs ministry of the Indian government condemned the grenade blasts in Habiganj and called upon the government to bring the perpetrators to justice. All right-thinking people must

join condemning such acts of terrorism and the preceptors must be identified and due justice seen to be meted out," said Navtej Sarna, spokesman of the external affairs ministry. Japanese government has

expressed strong indignation at Thursday's grenade attack. In a statement issued by the Press

Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan urged the Bangladesh government to immediately probe the recent series of acts of violence, including Thursday's grenade blast in Habiganj. "The Government of Japan hopes

that the people of Bangladesh will be united to overcome political violence and restore law and order," it said.

The statement added that the Japanese government firmly condemns acts of terrorism and upholds its position that terrorism in any forms can never be justified.

The Japanese government extended its condolences to the bereaved families as well as its heartfelt sympathies for those injured in the Habiganj incident of

Clashes mark Habiganj

FROM PAGE 1 Rab-III Director Col Gulzar yesterday visited the place of occurrence --Boidder Bazar Government Primary School playground yesterday.

Police collected some splinters and grenade levers, an official informed. Marks of splinter hits were found on two trees, in the walls of a tin-made house and on the gate of

Until yesterday, police quizzed some 15 to 20 people including the injured and the neighbours of the rally ground. But they are still clueless about the terrorist act, said the officer in-charge of Habiganj Sadar Police Station, adding, "We are trying our

HARTALSNIPPETS Activists of AL and its front organisations started gathering in hundreds in front of the district AL office on Town Hall Road from the early morning. They then took position at differ-

ent points in the northeastern town and demonstrated against the government blaming it for the killing At about 1:00pm pickets attacked

a cement shop in Baby Stand area owned by a brother of Habiganj municipal chairman and district BNP General Secretary G K Gous. They dragged the furniture of the shop out on the street and set fire to The agitated mob also ransacked

three restaurants including one belonging to the acting president of district Jubo Dal, G M Moula, and some business establishments at Rajnagar in the town.

A Habiganj-Chittagong passenger coach also came under attack this time while a pick up and They also stopped some vehicles

of journalists coming from the capi-

them. nickets at Shavestanagar, They threw brickbats at the microbus and damaged it in part. They manhandled Madhu Tripura, cameraman, and Arefin Faisal, reporter, of the private television outlet and broke Tripura's video camera smashing it on the

The mob also damaged a camera of a photojournalist of the daily Ajker Kagoj prompting police intervention A demonstrator named Ashik Miah was severely beaten by police and was admitted to Habiganj Sadar

The pickets later promised not to damage any more vehicles of jour-

nephew Shah Manjurul Huda, and Siddique Ali and Abdur Rahim of Bongaon village was held after the Jumma prayer at Shirishtala. Thousands of people from all walks of life including the deputy commis-sioner and police super of Habiganj attended the service.

The bodies of Siddique Ali and Abdur Rahim were later sent to Bongaon and Huda's body to his llage home in Jalalshap under Nabiganjupazila.

After the Namaz, a condolence

procession marched the streets of the town. A protest rally was then held in the district AL office where local political leaders blamed and lambasted the government for the kill-ings and demanded neutral and speedy trial. They said the attack has

'put the politics of Habiganj on fire'.

Of the injured in the grenade attack, 49 people were admitted to the Habiganj Sadar Hosptal. Six persons including Kibria and district AL General Secretary Abu Zahir were sent to Dhaka Thursday night and

COMMUNICATION SNAPPED The entire Habiganj district as well as

vehicles gave a real tough time to the passengers who arrived at the town

The same group used Arges

FROM PAGE 1 seized in Amin Bazar in Dhaka late last year. We're quite sure operatives of a same chain made the Habiganj attack with the same motive."

Captain Rahman, however, said anything about the operatives and their motives could only be known after investigation.

Deputy Inspector General of Police, Sylhet, Mahfuzur Rahman yesterday also told newspersons here that "According to our initial findings the miscreants used Arges grenades." The Rab bomb squad reached the

Boidder Bazar Government Primary School ground from Dhaka yesterday morning and examined the hole in the ground created from the explosions. They cthecked marks of blood at the scene and also the trees, corrugated iron roofs of adjoining houses and the school's entry gate where splinters hit.

The Rab members collected splinters from a tree's branch and tried to identify the place from where the grenades might have been thrown. They suspect the grenades were charged from behind, the west-

ern side of the school ground.
Police have already collected a grenade lever and deposited it with

AKM Mahfuz, deputy inspector general of police (DIG), is now head-ing a high-powered investigation team comprising the NSI, Rab, policemen and the Special Branch. Senior officials of various intelli-

gence agencies including CID chief Farruk Ahmed Chowdhury along with high officials of Rab, DGFI, NSI and SB also visited the spot and the injured at Habiganj General Hospital

They later told reporters that it appeared to them that SAMS Kibria was the prime target of the attack.
Two Cases Lodged: Doubt over the

Organising Secretary of Habiganj district unit AL Abdul Mojid Khan filed two separate cases with Habiganj Police Station Thursday midnight. One is a murder case, while the other was filed under the Explosives Act.

Investigating officer (IO) of both the cases, OC of Habiganj Police Station Inam Ahmed Chowdhury said they could not arrest anyone until yesterday. But they questioned

'My son won't

FROM PAGE 1 Rahim left behind his father, mother, wife, a daughter and three sons. Wails of grief were breaking the silence of the village. The only daughter fainted again and again. They do not know how the family will run after losing its sole earning member. Similar was the scene at the place

of another victim, Saheb Ali alias Siddique Ali near Rahim's house. A day labourer, Ali also used to sell eggs for living.

Ali's wailing wife and children were also found fainting due to the

tremendous shock.

His wife Surota Banu said she does not know what she alone can do for her children. "How can I save my little boy? Who knows what fate awaits Her daughter asked in a choked

voice: "What crime did my father commit?" INITIREDATRIRDEM

Five injured AL leaders and locals are receiving treatment at the Birdem in the capital.

They are Abu Jahir, general secretary of AL district unit, Rajon Chowdhury, 37, organising secretary of the same unit, Abdullah Sardar, 30, organising secretary of AL Habigani sadar thana unit, Siddique Ali, 50, a supporter of AL, and Mohammad Abdul, 25, Kibria's employee.

Jahir was rushed to Dhaka along with Kibria Thursday night and is now in the intensive care unit (ICU) after undergoing surgery. He received a large number of splinters in his legs and body. The rest were shifted to ward No.

93 on the hospital's eighth floor. Jahir is now out of danger but will be under observation at the ICU for a few more days, Syed Kamrul Hassan, district AL member and Jahir's nephew, said quoting doctors. Rajon was shifted to the Birdem

yesterday from Habiganj General Hospital. He received numerous splinters in his legs, head, ears and all over his body.

"I'm facing acute hearing diffi-culty in my left ear as I was close to where the blasts occurred," said Rajon. "Birdem doctors said I'm now out of danger but it will take almost a year for my ear to cure."

Sardar was also rushed to the Birdem with Kibria. Splinters hit him on the face, hands, neck and other parts of the body, leaving his left leg broken. He was too weak to speak, as his face swelled and legs and hands were bandaged. The splinters broke Siddique's left

Abdul received splinters in his hands, legs and back and was brought to the Birdem at 2:30am yesterday. Siddique Ali, a cane-stool seller in

legandalso hit his left hand and right leg,

Habiganj, went to greet Kibria at Baidyer Bazar AL rally when the grenades blasted. "I admired him (Kibria) a lot and went to convey my salam after my day's sale," said injured Siddique,

now undergoing treatment at the 'As I entered the venue, I heard a loud bang out of the blue and I can't remember anything," he said.

Siddique, the only earning member of his nine-member family, further said, "When I regained my senses, I found myself at the hospital.'

Abdul, Kibria's employee, said he was just three feet ahead of Kibria "He (Kibria) handed me a bou-

quet of flowers and asked to make ready his vehicle to set off for Dhaka," said Abdul, adding, "I was making way for him when the grenades exploded and I collapsed to the ground."

about 20 injured people and others living in Boidder Bazar.

Sources said investigators hope to get any witness who has seen the grenade throwers. But if such a wit-ness is not available, it would be difficult for them to hunt down the

perpetrators.

The OC said during primary inquiries one man had said prior the grenade explosion a man was activating his motorcycle near Boidder Bazar and after the explosion another was seen rushing to the bike and they whisked away. Two four-member teams, each

neaded by an additional SP from Sunamganj and Habiganj, were formed to assist the IO. No Police Security at the Meeting The AL leaders here have ques-

tioned why security measures by police were not taken prior to the public rally Thursday. On the security issue, OC Inam told The Daily Star, "I had no infor-

mation about the public rally. In fact, they (AL) did not officially inform us about the scheduled event. They did not also ask for police protection. On the other hand, locals said since last Tuesday, announcements on loud speakers were made about the rally. There is no reason for police to have missed the announcement. So

the proposition of police not knowing about the scheduled event is absurd. Dr Musfique Hussain Choudhury, president of AL Habiganj unit, claimed police were informed about the public gathering. He said, "Prior to the event local newspapers published news about it with Kibria's picture. Yet police were not seen at the meeting venue."

Choudhury alleged despite being aware of the event police stayed away to help the killers carry out their

Choudhury also pointed to powe failure. The ambulance that carried injured Kibria came to a halt after one and a half kilometres as it had run out of fuel. What is even more shocking is that the ambulance did not have life saving oxygen cylinder. All these caused a loss of precious time until another ambulance had to be called to send Kibria to Dhaka Kibria bled heavily during the 'unnecessary' delay that might have led to his death, said those who were with Kibria in the ambulance.

Attack spot remains unprotected The place of the grenade attack has been abandoned without any police protection. Usually, for further nvestigations such spots are marked and encircled to prohibit public access so that evidence can be collected later. A Rab bomb squad led by Major

Moinul Hossain yesterday inspected the spot. They said many pieces of evidence have been destroyed, as the place remained unprotected. Gathering vital evidence could

have been much easier had the spot been kept protected," said Captain He, however, said, "We've gath-

ered enough forensic evidence that

would help us in further investiga-THREAT ON KIBRIA Anonymous callers had threatened Kibria with death several times,

Kibria's cousin Iqbal Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday. He said, "Kibria discussed with me the threats by the anonymous callers about a year back. The callers had

asked him to quit politics or get prepared to face severe consequences. Recalling the discussions, Iqbal also said, "Kibria often received such threats on phone but he did not inform anyone. His view was that since he was engaged in politics, it's quite natural some people would admire him and a few won't."

"I now feel that we should have taken the threats seriously," Iqbal

ARE THE ATTACKERS OUTSIDERS? Locals believe outsiders had carried out the grenade attack. A number of people of Bongaon village in Boidder Bazar said no-one of the village is capable of handling grenades. A student of Bongaon said, "I

strongly believe the attack was car-ried out by outsiders."

Opposition leaders

criticisms of the ruling BNP and its alliance partners. His regular column, that this paper carried for several years before he became the finance minister and the pieces he wrote occasionally after losing power in the last election, though written from a partisan perspective, were always logical, well developed and constructive. He tried to argue his case, as it should be, instead of bulldozing a particular point of view through that has become our politi-

cal practice. With all his education, experience, professionalism and rationality, he fell victim to a political culture of violence and irrationality that is dragging our country towards an abyss of intolerance and blindness which cannot lead to anything positive for our beloved country. Kibria's murder must be seen as a serious attack at the very core of the

Unlike the opposition, we will not be quick to blame the ruling coalition for this political murder. But we feel forced to question the government's sincerity in unearthing the crimes and identifying the criminals in the murders that took place before. This paper chronicled yesterday the large number of incidents of bomb attacks, grenade attacks and violent killings that have gone on since 1999. There is of course the fact that bomb attacks occurred even under the Awami League (AL) regime and nothing was done even then. But that cannot be a justification for the type of inaction and farcical investi-

gation that we have seen so far. The attack on an AL rally in the capital killing Ivy Rahman and 22 others and nearly killing the leader of the opposition last year was by far the biggest and most brutal on politicians that Bangladesh had seen since the restoration of democracy in 1991. The world was shocked and leaders from far and wide joined our people in expressing anxiety about our democracy.

The government seemed to share that shock initially. Our people felt somewhat asssured that finally some serious government action will be taken and the culprits will be caught. To our utter disappointment and shock, we saw a farce of an investiga-

tion which practically amounted to a clear signal to the perpetrators that they were safe and could go on with their brutality. And they did. To our sheer disbelief, we saw a story being woven that the ALitself did it to destabilise the government. Repeatedly did we hear the question from the ruling coalition leaders that 'how come none of the nearly a dozen grenades fell to the truck on which Sheikh Hasina stood, and all of them fell on the ground'. This was proof enough that the AL was the culprit!

Some even said that it was staged by Sheikh Hasina herself to garner sympathy for her anti-government movement. The ruling alliance appeared quite satisfied with this explanation'. As a consequence, the whole government machinery, instead of digging deep into the crime, was used to further maligning the opposition. The result, inevitably, was a deepening of the political chasm between the AL and the BNP and creation of greater opportunity for those who wanted to continue with the terrorist activities. This paper and this writer have

repeatedly urged the government to see the attack on the opposition as, what it truly is, an attack on democracy. The bombs thrown at the opposition rally today could easily be thrown at the BNP rally tomorrow. The choice of Kibria as the target and its alliance partners in the bomb should not be lost on anybody. His attacks, Mannan Bhuiyan said, "We was one of the staunchest voices for have formed the government secularism and against extremism, through public mandate. Why should we destabilise the country?" terrorism and the increasing use of

religion in our politics. His was one of the early warning voices against Taleban penetration into our national All that he said may not be true

but all that he hinted at have definitely come to haunt us today.

Democratic values and norms are under serious attack. It is far beyond the ruling alliance versus opposition issue. Unless concerted and tough actions against the perpetrators of political murders and terrorism are taken immediately, our democratic future may come under serious

Will Khaleda Zia and her party wake up to this eventuality even at this stage when it is already too late.

4th ODI today

ensure that the day-night encounter goes ahead without any trouble.

"Security personnel will be dou-bled and the Rapid Action Battalion will escort the teams to and from the said Adnan Rahman Dipon, vicepresident of the BCB's security committee vesterday. The match, which will be telecast

live on Bangladesh Television and ESPN from 1 pm, is crucial for the hosts as they trail the five-game series 2-1. Habibul Bashar's men lost the first two games in Dhaka and Chittagong. However, they bounced back with a 40-run victory in the third

match in the port city. The Tigers are expected to make one change from the squad that won at the MA Aziz Stadium with Test match hero Enamul Haque likely to make way for fellow left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique, who missed the

first three games due to injury. On the other hand, Zimbabwe were yet to announce their team but captain Tatenda Taibu hinted at possibly one change also on the

Culprits

FROM PAGE 1 'Investigation into all bomb and grenade attacks are on," Bhuiyan said, adding, "It is only a matter of time that the criminals will be

He said the government will take international help in finding out the He sought cooperation of all

including the opposition parties to bring the culprits into book. He also urged the opposition parties to shun hartals. Expressing deep shock at the killings of top AL leader and former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria and others, Bhuiyan said people

involved in the brutal attacks are

enemies of democracy, humanity and the country. The government has already formed a committee headed by a deputy inspector general of police to probe the incident, the minister said, adding that members from different intelligence agencies including Rapid Action Battalion and Directorate General of Forces Intelligence are also

The government is trying to ensure security in public rallies, which are targets of repeated bomb and grenade attacks, he said. He said punitive actions will be

on the committee.

taken against the police personnel found negligent during the AL rally in Habiganj. He, however, said that govbehind the latest grenade attack to ernment has till now had no report of stop recurrence of such tragic negligence by police during the rally. incidents". Brushing aside the role of the BNP

2 associates of Bangla Bhai arrested

UNB, Rajshahi

Four people, including two associates of Bangla Bhai, were arrested in Hamir Kuchha area of Baghmara upazila yesterday. Of the arrestees, Mushtaque and Moinuddin are the associates of

Bangla Bhai. The two others, Afzal Hossain and Hekmat Ali, are the activists of Purba Banglar Communist Party

Kibria killed

(PBCP), police said.

night of December 11 at the Mahbub Bhaban to plan killing a number of senior leaders of the party."

Besides, she mentioned that yet another meeting was 'held at an apartment at Agargaon in the city recently with the same motive'.

"Shah AMS Kibria is the latest to fall prey to the BNP-Jamaat government's cleansing blueprint," she

She urged the people to stand united against the 'killer govern-

"Only the resignation of the alliance government making way for a democratically elected government can ensure trial of the killers," she told the newsmen.

She said the prime minister instead of taking proper actions had made some remarks and statements that encouraged the killers even more. The opposition was not even allowed to discuss in parliament the August 21 grenade blasts. Moreover, the demand for international probe was deliberately ignored to the advantage of the perpetrators. Castigating the government for

raiding the AL and its front organisations' central office by the dog squad of a Rapid Action Battalion team, Hasina said she wonders what led the government to search the main opposition party's office by the anticrime force that found nothing. Citing from a national daily she said, "During a conference of BNP in

Gopalganj on Thursday a BNP

leader demanded that prime minis-

ter's son bring Bahauddin Nasim,

president of Awami League's volunteer wing, under the Rab crossfire". "Is it why the Rab went to the AI

office?" she asked. She also refuted the state minister's (for home affairs) claim that the government had contacted the Al leaders to fly SAMS Kibria in the capital by a helicopter. She termed the claim false and said, "Name the leader whom the state minister had

The opposition leader said her party would protest the killing of its awmaker in the coming session of

Beaten out

Leyla speaks coherently, but with a monotone voice, her body motionless, as if she were relating mundane details and not a harrowing tale.

Roaming around in the streets, I was offered 'a job' by an unknown man. He took me to his house, where he lived with his elder brother. Both of them tried to abuse me, but I protested, refused. Together with the other domestic worker, I again, headed for the street.

We were hanging around in the

park when the police picked us up.

They locked us up together with a

woman and her child. As the police suspected us of commercial sex work, they filed a case against us. The next day, the social workers of Aparajeyo-Bangladesh interfered. They pointed out we were still minors and the police finally

released us. I stayed in their shelter

during the time the NGO needed to My picture appeared in the papers, to shorten the search's duration. My father contacted the NGO, but also the man who used to

beat me. He demanded me back." Luckily, Leyla could stay at the shelter houses of Aparajevo-Bangladesh. With its legal assistance, the NGO convinced the police to dismiss the case against the

Indian PM

FROM PAGE 12 He noted that Shah AMS Kibria was a well-known figure in India. His work as Bangladesh finance minister and the executive secretary of Escap had won him many friends and admirers all over the world.

British Minister of State for Trade,

Investment and Foreign Affairs Douglas Alexander MP last night telephoned opposition leader Sheikh Hasina and offered his government's condolences on the killing of Shah AMS Kibiria and others in a grenade attack. Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Hasina's political secretary, told the

phone call at around 8:00pm on behalf of British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. Condemning the incident, the British minister said that an appropriate investigation should be carried out to find out the perpetrators

UNB that Alexander made the

He also assured Hasina that the British government would make contact with the Bangladesh government to convey their concern over the repeated incidents.

Living dangerously

FROM PAGE 1 much clearer. It is reported that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had investigated the incident and pointed fingers at Harkatul Jihad. A bomb factory was unearthed at the house of Harkatul Bangladesh chief, Mufti Hannan, who has since been on the run. Then again, during the Awami League regime, when US president Bill Clinton visited Bangladesh, his trip to Manikganj was cancelled because of threats from Islamist militants. The signal was very clear. And as usual, the Awami League was then on a denial mode like the BNP is now. So, nothing happened. Slogans were chanted on the capital's streets by religious bigots proclaiming that they would all become 'Taliban and turn Bangladesh into Afghanistan' and the Awami League government limited its actions to blaming the

into taking to the streets. Then every-thing was pushed under the carpet, believing this would clear the air. The picture later became even grimmer, more brutal and clearer. Soon after the 2001 general elections and the formation of a coalition government with two fundamentalist parties as partners, the militants gained more power and courage.

BNP for instigating fundamentalists

Minorities, specially the Hindus, and Awami League supporters were attacked and their property looted. The Daily Star ran detailed reports on the incidents, which were not accepted by the new government led by BNP, flushed with new confidence of a two-thirds majority

The Ahmadiyyas were the bigots' next target. They wanted Ahmadiyyas to be pronounced non-Muslims in the fashion of Pakistan. They wanted their books to be banned. And the government halfentertained their wishes by banning Ahmadiyya books and thus acknowledging them as a cogniza-ble force in the society, no matter how perverse their demands are. In even more sinister developments, arms flowed freely into the

country, not in ones or twos, but in bulks, trucks-full and in dangerous counts. Other than the media, no body seemed to care. Probes were dragged into nothing, while the gunrunners remained happily shielded. And then different Islamist groups popped up sporadically across the country -- al Baiyenat, Harkatul Jihad, Jamiatul Mujahideen, Shahadat-e-al-Hikma, Hijbut Tawhid and so on. But their existence, except for Shahadat-e-al-Hikma, which was later banned, was routinely denied. In Joypurhat, one of these groups, Jamiatul Mujahideen vowing to carry out an Islamic revolution, even fought with police and their den was busted. But then nothing else was done. Even before this group surfaced, a number of groups had been arrested in Rajshahi division. In Borguna, 36 militants were arrested at a mosque with documents showing they want to capture power by gun muzzle. As international focus fell on these groups, more denials came to counter them. Progressive intellectuals were targeted. The country's eminent poet Shamsur Rahman came

attack by Harkatul militants. The attack on Professor Humayun Azad, who was always vocal against the fundamentalists, became an eye-opener for all, but not for the government.

The pattern of such attacks became clear when cinemas were bombed in Mymensingh and Satkhira, New Year celebration of Chhayanaut was bombed in Dhaka and Jatras were bombed in Natore, Sherpur and Jamalpur. Instead of going for the real culprits, a number of intellectuals including Dr Muntasir Mamun and Shahriar Kabir were detained and implicated in the bombings. A journalist and political secretary to Hasina, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, was also implicated in the case.

Then came the fateful August 21. Grenades were hurled on an Awami League rally in the capital with a clear intention to eliminate the party's top leadership. After a few

days of bewilderment, genuine concern and embarrassed silence, the government once again resorted to construed lies and propaganda. The blame was once again thrown on Awami League itself.

More alarming was the formation of a so-called judicial probe body that came up with its own interpretation of the event based on guesswork and wishful thinking, blaming an unnamed country for the attack with the 'aim to put in place a puppet government with the backing of a section inside the country'.

The government did not bother to identify the 'foreign country' or the 'section' behind it. For such a major 'conspiracy', the reaction of the gov ernment seemed to be too soft. Whenever someone was caught with a bomb or grenade from time to time, they were linked to the grenade attacks on an adhoc basis, This further added to the overall confusion. Then came the infamous Bangla

Bhai episode with the rise of an

Islamist outfit in the northern region. With blessings of a section of minis ters and lawmakers, the selfproclaimed revolutionist carried out his handiwork -- killing of people and clamping down his own version of Islamic laws -- unabated. He even made advanced announcements of killings of so-called outlaws and carried out the crime 24 hours later. Police waited until the 'verdict' was executed and then entered the stage to collect the bodies. The media reported his activities and published his interview with pictures. But the government was bent on making the picture even muddier. The police denied the existence of him and his organisation. The home ministry said he simply does not exist and even the prime minister, after issuing an order for Bangla Bhai's arrest, said no-one called Bangla Bhai exists. But vexing is the fact that the same police now say there indeed is someone called Bangla Bhai. Where do then the people stand?

How should we read the situation? Is it that the Islamists have finally started their war? And very naturally the Awami League has become its first target? Because, whatever the Awami League stands for, the Islamists still consider it as the main obstacle to their way to take control of the state mechanism. Or is the motive something else? Something that is more political, with a sinister edge of militant

Islamist intention? The strings of attacks on the Awami League leadership has certainly shaken the party to its very roots. It is obvious that no Awami League leader is now safe from these killers. The spate of killings of AL leaders has definitely greatly reduced the party's capacity to undertake organisational preparations for the next election. Political observers are

speculating on the impact of these

killings on the opposition's capacity

to mount a serious challenge to the

ruling coalition. But who stands to gain by this? Certainly not democracy.

Asma Kibria

FROM PAGE 1 emotion-choked Asma Kibria told

dence yesterday. There are opposition parties in every country. But does it mean that they have to be killed for opposing the government activities?" she questioned.

about the killers, she said, "It is better to ask the coalition government." Meanwhile, Kibria's son Reza Kibria returned home from Kuwait at

10:30am. Upon his arrival, a heart-

rending scene was created in the house

Asked whether they have any idea

with everyone bursting into tears. Kibria's daughter Prof Nazni Kibria is expected to return from London this afternoon. Opposition Leader and AL chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday went to

Birdem hospital to pay respect to the deceased leader. From there, she went to Kibria's Dhanmondi residence and consoled his wife Asma Kibria and other members of the family. She staved there for

President terms

FROM PAGE 1 Minister M Saifur Rahman also condoled the death of SAMS Kibria. In a condolence message, the

president termed the attack 'bar-

baric' and 'cowardly' and recalled

with great respect the contribution of Kibria to institutionalising parliamentary democracy in the country. He also recalled the eventful career of the former diplomat and his important role at different national and international levels including as UN under-secretary general and executive secretary of

The president prayed for salvation of the departed souls and conveyed deep sympathy to the family members of Kibria and others killed in the attack. He also prayed for

the UN Economic and Social

Commission for Asia and Pacific

quick recovery of the injured. Expressing deep shock at the death of former finance minister SAMS Kibria and four others in brutal attack in Habiganj, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said the duty at this moment is to find out the culprits and ensure stern legal punish-

In a message of condolence, she prayed for salvation of the departed souls and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved families. The prime minister also prayed

their proper treatment.

Strongly condemning the cowardly incident, she said: "At a time when the government, with the support of people, is taking tough measures against terrorists, such an attack is part of a deep conspiracy against the country." The prime minister said she had directed all agencies concerned to identify the heinous criminals at any

them. She sought cooperation of all in this regard. "Kibria worked for long for the country as high government official, diplomat, economist and politician and also performed important duties in international organisations," the prime minister said.

cost and take proper action against

Expose those FROM PAGE 1 opposition," State Department spokesman Richard Bouchersaid.

Boucher said the failure to bring to justice the perpetrators of such political violence fostered an "intimidating climate of insecurity and impunity'

that encouraged further attacks.

The Bangladesh government,

Boucher said, needed "to act quickly to

identify, arrest and prosecute those responsible for political terrorism." Calling Thursday's attack "hei-nous," Boucher said the United States strongly" condemned it.

It is the "latest in a disturbing series of for quick recovery of those injured in often deadly attacks on prominent the incident and directed the leaders of the political opposition and civil society," he said, voicing steadfast authorities concerned to ensure US support for Bangladesh's democracy.

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when the grenades went off. most of the Sylhet region remained tal to cover the event and quizzed cut off from the rest of the country during the strike hours yesterday. A microbus with a crew of Channel I coming from the capital long-route transport entered came under a sudden attack by or left Habigani district. Absence of

seven on yesterday.