

Khulna reporter flown

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Khulna Medical College and Hospital (KMCH) immediately after the powerful explosion that also grievously wounded three other newsmen, including the press club's president.

His face, stomach and legs were seriously burnt and his left eye was extremely injured, said doctors at the KMCH, who amputated his left hand on Saturday night. They later referred him to the CMH failing to improve his condition even slightly.

Belaluddin was helicopter to Dhaka at 1:00pm yesterday. Doctors attending him at the CMH said his condition was still 'critical'.

Belaluddin's wife Tanjila Belal, a lecturer at Islamia Intermediate College in Khulna, Dr Moniruzzaman of Islami Bank Hospital, and two other people accompanied him in the Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) chopper.

Khulna City BNP President M Nurul Islam MP, local journalists, high officials of local civil and police administrations, and a large number of leaders of Jamaat, BNP and Awami League were present at the Khulna helipad when the chopper took off at 12:00pm.

On the other end, Social Welfare Minister and Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mujahid, Khulna City Mayor Tayebur Rahman and Ali Asgar MP received Belaluddin, who also is the Rokon of Khulna City Jamaat, at the old airport in Tejgaon.

A board of medical experts yesterday examined him. He is in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), CMH sources said.

Among the other three victims, the condition of Daily Jugantor Staff Photographer Zahidul Islam has not improved yet. He, too, was severely injured hit by splinters all over the body. He is undergoing treatment at Khulna Surgical Clinic in Sonadanga.

Khulna Press Club President and Prothom Alo Khulna Bureau Chief Shaikh Abu Hasan and The News Today Khulna Correspondent Rafiqul Islam Tutul have been released after primary treatment at a local clinic adjacent to the press club.

PROTEST PROGRAMMES

Journalists of Khulna brought out a procession yesterday noon in the city condemning and protesting the dastardly attack. Arally was held after the protest procession on the press club premises.

Speakers at the meeting bitterly criticised police for their failure to provide security for Khulna journalists despite frequent death threats given by extremists.

They demanded immediate removal of Khulna Police Commissioner Javed Patwary and also an impartial enquiry to find out why security forces were withdrawn from the press club on Saturday, which is believed to have made ample opportunity for the terrorists to launch a remote-controlled bomb attack on the club.

The assembled journalists also strongly condemned the termination of the investigation into the unsuccessful grenade attack on January 4 on Dip Azad, Khulna bureau chief of Dainik Jugantor.

Speaking at the rally, Dainik Purbanchal Editor Alhaj Liqat Ali expressed his deep concern at the rampant and ceaseless attacks on journalists in Khulna. He said the failure of police to track down the killers of journalists Haroon, Manik Saha and Humayun Kabir Balu has made this latest attack on newsmen possible.

Khulna Press Club President Sheikh Abu Hasan, Khulna Union of Journalists (KUJ) President Makbul Hossain Mintoo, Daily Tribune Editor Begum Ferdausi Ali, MUJ Acting President Anisuzzaman, Khulna Press Club Secretary Feruque Ahmed and KUJ Secretary Mohammad Shahab Ali also addressed the meeting.

Local units of BNP, Awami League, Jamaat and Jatiya Party in separate press statements strongly condemned the attack on press and demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment to the attackers.

Security upped

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Apart from the agitation programmes, the meeting would discuss party lawmakers' joining the parliament session that will resume on the same day, party insiders said.

"Counter programmes by the ruling alliance is nothing but attempts to cause anarchy in the country," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday told a press briefing. He said if the four-party alliance men attack the 'peaceful protests' of the opposition, AL along with other parties would be forced to take tougher programmes.

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina will announce fresh programmes on February 8," Jalil said.

Meanwhile, ruling alliance sources said after holding rallies across the country today they will take up a series of programmes to face the AL and other opposition parties on the streets. "We won't allow Awami League any chance to take control of the streets," said a BNP leader adding that programmes of the party will be set after examining AL's next programmes.

"We will face conspiracy and anarchic politics of the opposition politically. We are now observing programmes individually, but soon

Bangla Bhai

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said yesterday.

They said he is likely to fly to a Muslim country.

The political leaders expressed their solidarity with all programmes to be undertaken by the journalist community against the bomb attacks and murders.

Khulna Press Club, KUJ and MUJ will form a human chain today from 11:00am till 12noon in front of Picture Palace cinema hall protesting the bomb attack.

Journalists of all local newspapers will abstain from work tomorrow to stop publication of the February 8 issue.

A protest rally will also be held Tuesday morning at the press club.

PROBE & SECURITY

Khulna police yesterday arrested two persons - Habi Shaikh, 35, and Khokon, 32 - in the violence-stricken southwestern city in connection with the bomb attack. A special team of police officials is quizzing the two arrestees.

No complaint or case was filed with Khulna Sadar Police Station in connection with the bomb blast until filing of this report yesterday evening.

A nine-member team of army explosives experts headed by Major Khaled from Jessore cantonment came to the press club yesterday afternoon to collect evidence. Earlier, on Saturday night, Rab officials also visited the spot.

A one-member committee comprising a deputy commissioner was formed to find if police neglected in their duty during the incident. The team was scheduled to submit its report yesterday night.

The police authorities have deployed around 250 policemen at the local newspaper offices and the press club to provide round-the-clock security.

JMJ men

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But, Sources said, Mustafizur Rahman Mustaque, reportedly the second in command of the Islamist terrorist outfit, though was also remanded in police custody, is yet to disclose any information.

They said it is so because police have not been interrogating Mustaque as per an order of a top police official.

But Bagmara Police Station Officer in-Charge ABM Golam Kibria denied the allegation.

Meanwhile, Forman Ali, the leader of the 12 Islamist militants arrested in Natore, told police that a middle aged bearded man named Abdul Quayum used to be Natore regional leader of Jama'atul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB).

But Ali could not give any more details about Quayum and said he used to meet them only when he thought it to be necessary.

"Our party (JMB) is active in almost all areas in Natore and we do nothing but study the holy Quran and Hadith and call people to follow us," a police official quoted Ali as saying.

Ali also told police that they hate NGOs, as "they are spoiling our women and plotting to control our country. We should all resist them."

At a post-hartal briefing at the party's Dhanmondi office, Jalil blamed the BNP-led alliance for destroying the achievements of the Liberation War.

"If the four-party alliance government stays in power, it'll destroy democracy, rule of law and Bangladesh's political environment," Jalil added.

He alleged the government has created an anarchic situation and is trying to push the country towards conflict and confrontation.

The AL lawmaker said no-one is safe in this suffocating situation as the government is trying to snatch away people's constitutional rights of peaceful demonstrations.

"We demand of the alliance government to step down in a bid to establish a people's government and rule of law through an election under a neutral caretaker government," he said.

Jalil condemned police actions and arrest of his party activists during hartal hours and demanded their immediate release.

Awami League leader Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, MP, Mustafa Lal Mohiuddin, Obaidul Kader, Asaduzzaman Noor, MP and Nazma Rahman, among others, were present at the press briefing.

Hasina

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police protection," said the AL chief.

She added: "There were complaints that the police were posted on duty during the hartal without badge, only to facilitate the Chhatra Dal cadres in police dress to curb the hartal."

Hasina further alleged that though the BNP-Jamaat government speaks of facing its opponents politically, they were using goons to obstruct the movement.

She said Jamaat is a peaceful constitutional means of public protest, but the 'government mercilessly beat up' opposition leaders and workers, MPs and women on the street.

"Pregnant women are being tortured in police custody while infant's mother was tortured inhumanly after arrest," she complained.

"Our programmes are not meant to collide with the opposition's programme," Abdus Salam, general secretary of Dhaka city unit BNP, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Besides BNP, its allies would hold rallies today. Jamaat-e-Islami will hold a rally at North Gate of Baitul Mukarram Mosque and IOJ led by Mufti Aminil at the South Gate of the mosque.

Referring to government's decision to face them on the streets, AL President Tofail Ahmed said if the government take any repressive measures against the opposition parties, they would opt for an all-out 'action programme'.

'Programmes like hartals, road blockades, laying siege to the Secretariat and rallies are on the cards to force the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition to step down," he added.

Exploitation, abuse

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training courses to educate women about cultural and working conditions abroad and requiring recruiting agencies to compensate female workers in the event of exploitation or loss wages.

The repeal of the ban has lead to an appreciable rise in the number of women migrating abroad for work, experts and official sources say, adding that the increase is good for the country and good for the women themselves.

"Women tend to better utilize and send home more of their earnings as compared to men," said Tasneem Siddique, chairperson of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), citing a 2001 report published by her organization, Transcending Boundaries: Labor Migration of Women from Bangladesh.

"Employment abroad affords women economic independence and social empowerment," Siddique added.

Lower migration fees are another benefit of female labor, since in most cases women pay only Tk 40,000 to 60,000 to arrange their trips abroad, as compared to at least Tk one to two lakh for men. As a result, women have less debt to repay and therefore more money to send home.

Women working abroad offer tremendous economic and social prospects for Bangladesh. But lack of training and illegal migration makes them vulnerable to the system of exploitation underlying migratory labor.

The difficulties often begin even before they leave their native land since I most cases they must pay a recruiting agency Tk 60,000 to arrange their trip, including their visa and a place of work abroad. Often they sell their land or borrow heavily to pay the exorbitant fees, hoping to recoup the losses after they've arrived abroad. But many are not that fortunate, and find that they are forced to work long hours for less than they were promised. Some are not paid at all. The least fortunate are beaten or verbally assaulted on a regular basis.

Despite these hardships, many women are unable to simply leave or return home, since they often do not have money, are confined to their employer's home, or do not speak the language well enough to find for workers.

"We want the women of our

country go to other countries for work and contribute to Bangladesh's economy, but at the same time they must be well prepared, and their vulnerability and exploitation must be considered," said Syed Saiful Haque Asif, Chairman of the Welfare Association of Repatriate Bangladeshi Employees (Warbe), which operates 13 centers in the country helping Bangladeshi repatriates to rehabilitate.

This is a story repeated many times over Balarpur village of Kunda Union, Savar, where many of the residents have worked abroad. One of them is Shamsunnahar, 35, who went to Bahrain in 2000 to work as a domestic worker. The prospect of a better life cost her dearly: Tk 60,000, which she borrowed from her relatives at the interest rate of one hundred percent. One of her aunts, Piara, who has been working for a Bahrain family since 1988, arranged her visa with the lucrative offer that she could refund the borrowed money within a short time and then send back money for her children at home.

But Shamsunnahar's hopes evaporated almost immediately after she arrived in Bahrain, when she learned she could not follow the language of her employers. "My madam orders me to bring a bowl; I give a glass. Or she orders me to wash the toilet; I start sweeping the room," says Shamsunnahar, mother of two sons and a daughter.

"So, my sir and madam were very unhappy with me. They scolded, and even sometimes beat

me up. My aunt lived far from me, but still tried to help me learn the language, but it was quite impossible for me, and so I finally decided to return. It was only a one month and 8-day stay there," she says, sitting on the veranda of her one-room makeshift.

Shamsunnahar returned home with no money, three mouths to feed and an unimaginable amount of debt.

This is a tale repeated many times over by women in Balarpur village who have returned from Middle Eastern countries. Illegal migrants often face even harsher conditions, such as those suffered by Jamila, a domestic worker in Dubai whose tragic fate was chronicled in The Daily Star.

However, BMET director general S.M. Wahiduzzaman said BMET provides mandatory training for all workers, including women, to explain the customs and traditions of respective countries, as well as the nature of work and proper treatment abroad.

Illegal workers are not afforded the benefits of such training, rendering them vulnerable to exploitation, the DG said. "All who go for jobs must secure clearance from BMET," he said, adding, "The government cannot do much for those who go through illegal channels."

Some migration labor advocates, however, said the orientation provided by the BMET is not adequate for the unskilled domestic workers, since most of them hail from remote areas and lack the education training to understand the orientation. More than that, corrupt officials create opportunities for migrant workers, including women, to pay bribes so that they can receive clearance without actually attending pre-departure orientation classes, the sources added.

Migration advocates insist the system of female migratory labor is worth protecting, but needs more oversight and better training for workers.

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Earlier, leaders of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI), Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Tea Traders Association of Bangladesh (TTAB), Clearing and Forwarding Agents Association and Shop Owners Association met with the 14-party opposition alliance at the AL office at Darul Fazal Market to withdraw the hartal for the sake of economy.

CCCI Vice President MA Latif and BGMEA Director SM Nurul Haque urged the AL and other opposition parties to reconsider the fresh hartal call to save economy struck with a series of strikes recently.

"The whole country has already suffered terribly for hartals, and a fresh programme will only serve a crippling blow to the economy," they said.

The business leaders also condemned the brutal killing of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria, terming his death an irreparable loss to the country. They demanded proper investigation into the killing and exemplary punishment for the culprits.

Meanwhile, operations at the Chittagong Port were greatly disrupted due to yesterday's hartal.

Though cargo handling did take place to some extent, no delivery of goods could be made.

Nipah virus

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The CCCI experts have found at least two patients to be carriers of the deadly virus after examining both of the samples.

Meanwhile, a joint team of experts of Health Directorate and International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) has visited the infected area recently and collected more samples.

The joint team will again visit the infected area very soon and collect samples from different animals and plants to identify how the disease is transmitted to the human body," said one of the sources from Directorate of Health.

Cop killed, 80 hurt

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Saturday's bomb attack on the Khulna Press Club premises where four journalists were injured.

Police baton-charged and lobbed three teargas shells near Surma Market.

In Nilphamari, police virtually sealed off the district AL office and restricted a gathering of more than five persons anywhere in the district, writes our correspondent. Also police arrested former Chhatra League district general secretary Mizanur Rahman from his house during a raid on Saturday night.

Elsewhere, a cocktail was hurled near a police bus at Kalabagan at about 3:00pm, police intercepted activists of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) when they tried to bring out a procession from its central office on the Bangabandhu Avenue.

Hasina further alleged that though the BNP-Jamaat government speaks of facing its opponents politically, they were using goons to obstruct the movement.

She said Jamaat is a peaceful constitutional means of public protest, but the 'government mercilessly beat up' opposition leaders and workers, MPs and women on the street.

"It is a duty of the government to suppress the peaceful protest and deny the constitutional right to hold meetings and processions?" asked the opposition leader.

She wanted to know why police protection was not given at the public meeting of Shah AMS Kibria MP. "Ahsanullah Master MP was shot dead in daylight. Being a parliament member, he was not given police protection at his meeting?"

Had there been police protection, these two elected members of parliament would not have been killed," she said.

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