

Opposition vows

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make the entire country collapse," said Abdul Jalil, convener of the coalition's liaison committee also general secretary of Awami League (AL).

"The government will be responsible for all consequences if people reacts to such repression," he warned at the briefing held at the AL's Dhanmondi office. He also urged the coalition activists to build resistance at every place where the police or the government-backed goons try to prevent people from joining tomorrow's rally.

Jalil alleged that the government is also putting pressure on the owners of buses and trucks for not to rent out transports for the rally purposes.

"The call for the November 22 rally has created enthusiasm among the people and they themselves are taking preparations to attend the rally with the slogan Lets Go to Dhaka," he said. He predicted that about 25 lakh people will join the rally.

Senior opposition leaders including Abdur Razzak, Suranjit Sengupta, Hasanul Haq Inu and Bimal Biswas were present at the briefing.

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar denied the allegations and said the police are only carrying out their routine work of arresting 'troublemakers'.

"We have taken foolproof security measures for the opposition's Paltan rally," Babar told journalists at the secretariat yesterday.

MINIMUM NATIONAL AGENDA AND AGITATION PROGRAMMES

Leader of the main opposition also the AL chief Sheikh Hasina in presence of all the top leaders of the 14-party opposition coalition will announce the common minimum national programme from tomorrow's rally. She is also expected to announce the coalition's fresh agitation programme for forcing the BNP-Jamaat led ruling alliance to step down.

Senior leaders of the coalition partners told The Daily Star yesterday that the rally is mainly to pledge what the parties will do if they go to power and to give the coalition a concrete shape against the ruling alliance.

"You will see more parties joining us after the rally," said a senior AL leader, adding that these new parties may join the opposition's common platform or initiate simultaneous movement for the end of the present government's rule.

"The final outline of the movement and the common minimum programme to form the next government will be announced from the rally," Jalil said.

Senior opposition leaders held a meeting at Jalil's residence in the city last night where they discussed the draft of the common minimum national programme. The meeting also discussed possible agitation programmes to be announced from the rally.

Sources in the meeting said the draft of the minimum national programme will be finalised at a meeting tomorrow morning before the rally. "We will also finalise our programmes for fresh agitation Tuesday morning before the rally," said an AL leader.

"If the government continues with its repression to foil the rally and obstructs people from joining it, we may go for a 48-hour hartal (general strike)," said a senior opposition leader.

The coalition's common programme will focus on some preferred sectors including education, health, industry, commerce, man-

Foreign airlines

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also firmly refuted the allegation of any shady deal with the former civil aviation state minister regarding the inflated Hajj flight fare, saying the airline offices in Bangladesh do not have any authority to increase or decrease the fares without the approval of the head offices.

Irfanul Huq, manager (sales and marketing) of Saudi Arabian Airlines, Hanif Zakaria, sales manager of Emirates, Qais Al Shatti, senior manager of Kuwait Airways, Merwyn Fernandes, general manager of Gulf Air and Hidayatullah Baloch, country manager of PIA, attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, the religious affairs ministry yesterday extended the deadline for depositing "Mualim" fees until November 24 as pilgrims had earlier missed two deadlines--November 15 and 20--due to HAAB's suspension of booking tickets and depositing fees in protest at the government's indifference to the Hajj flight crises.

Dhaka-Ctg

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removed the derailed compartments from the tracks.

Railway sources said Noakhali-bound inter-city Upakul, Kishoreganj-bound Egarosindhur, Sylhet-bound Parabat, Chittagong-bound Mahanagar, Dhaka-bound Surma Mail from Sylhet, Dhaka-bound Egarosindhur from Kishoreganj and Dhaka-bound Subarna Express from Chittagong were stranded at different stations for hours.

Armed Forces

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conveyed his sympathies to the martyr families and injured freedom fighters.

He appreciated the role of armed force personnel in safeguarding the independence and the sovereignty of the country, tackling disaster and in nation building activities.

They are also performing their duty abroad with reputation as members of United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping force, he said.

He also prayed for salvation of the departed souls of those who died policing peace in different troubled corners of the world.

In a separate message, the prime minister said this day is very important in national history.

Khaleda Zia paid tribute to the martyrs, conveyed her sympathies to the injured freedom fighters and also greeted the soldiers who participated in the Liberation War.

"Bangladesh is free and independent today for their supreme sacrifice," she said.

She said the armed forces formed in the Liberation War have now become powerful professional forces which have been glorified worldwide.

The prime minister assured that her government would continue the programmes undertaken by Ziaur Rahman for the modernisation of the forces.

She hoped the chain of success of the armed forces would continue in the future.

Khaleda Zia said she believed the forces would be "able to contribute meaningfully in the development of the country and nation through achieving professional proficiency".

JMB raised

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not have gathered such strength had they been dealt with by an iron hand during the AL rule. "They came out of their shells during the AL tenure."

"We read newspaper stories about the armed and combat training at Kawmi madrasas in Chittagong, Noakhali, Sylhet, Comilla and Barisal during the AL regime."

He also referred to the bomb attacks on the Udichi rally in Jessore, Ramna Batamul and Narayanganj AL office and the planting of a bomb at the venue of a rally of the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina in a bid to assassinate her.

The most surprising fact is that the AL government failed to arrest the mastermind, Mufti Hannan, who planned to kill Sheikh Hasina, he said. "But the present government has arrested him and the trial is underway," he said.

About JMB leader Bangla Bhai's activities in Bagmara, he said: "I have heard people of Bagmara in 2003 became organised and formed a 'Committee to Save Life' which comprised members from AL, BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Jatiya Party, JSD, Communist Party and also the leaders of the Hindu community.

When these well-organised people tried to save their skin from the "leftist outlaws," a group of opportunist people floated the JMB capitalising on the situation, he said.

He disagreed with the recent comments of Rajshahi City mayor and the ruling BNP lawmaker Mizanur Rahman Minu and another BNP lawmaker Abu Hena about the JMB activities and their patrons.

State minister

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It was learnt that Janokantho reporter Tapan Biswas went to the minister's office and put before him a barrage of questions on the Monga situation in the minister's area and about changing his personal assistant 18 times and assistant personal secretary nine times. He also asked the minister if it is true that he draws salaries for six orderlies although he has two.

The minister became excited at this and exchanged heated words with the reporter. At one point, the minister manhandled the reporter, the latter claimed to the press.

"The minister grabbed the collar of my shirt and tore up my notebook," Tapan told The Daily Star yesterday evening. The minister also allegedly snatched Tapan's cell phone as the latter tried to make a call.

Following the scuffle, the minister first asked Tapan to leave his office but then changed his mind and asked him to sit in his rest room.

After a while, some leaders of the photojournalists' association went to the minister's room to invite him to their convention. Two Jatiyatabadi Krishak Dal leaders also entered the minister's room at around the same time. Their presence cooled down the situation.

Earlier in 2003, Kabir once reportedly drove away some local journalists from a meeting on law and order situation held in Rangpur.

The Dhaka Reporters' Unity protested yesterday's incident.

Rules violated

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every sitting shall be available for the asking and answering of questions.

The speaker did not say anything about the fate of question-answer session; rather he just let the lawmakers felicitating the prime minister, delaying the question-answer.

The session, which began amid boycott by the main opposition Awami League (AL), will continue till November 24 with only five workdays as decided by the Business Advisory Committee.

The speaker initiated the unscheduled discussion by congratulating the Leader of the House Khaleda Zia while delivering his welcome address at the beginning of yesterday's sitting.

"I congratulate Prime Minister and Leader of the House Khaleda Zia for making the Saarc summit a success and being elected its chairperson," Jamiruddin said.

By adopting an obituary reference and nominating a panel of chairmen as per the rules of procedure, the speaker attempted to enter the day's scheduled business, but Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman took the floor to congratulate the prime minister.

Sircar also allowed the lawmakers of both factions of Jatiya Party (JP) to participate in the discussion. Among others, JP (Ershad) lawmaker Rawshan Ershad and Anwar Hossain Manju, the lone lawmaker of another faction of JP, spoke on the occasion.

However, as JP (Ershad) lawmaker Golam Habib Dulal was drawing comparisons between the contributions of former presidents Ziaur Rahman and HM Ershad to establishing the Saarc, a number of senior ministers interrupted him and the speaker switched off his microphone.

"Ziaur Rahman initiated steps but

he could not complete the process of forming the Saarc. It was HM Ershad who had accomplished the job," the lawmaker continued amid protests by the ruling party lawmakers.

Amongst the ruckus, the speaker turned the microphone off and entered the day's business and began question-answer session.

OPPOSITION ACCUSATIONS AGAINST SPEAKER

The main opposition AL lawmakers who have been boycotting parliament since last year yesterday reiterated their accusations against the speaker of bias in running the House.

They also accused the speaker of flouting the rules of procedure by allowing an unscheduled discussion at the beginning of the sitting.

"Jamiruddin Sircar has violated the rules of procedure by allowing the lawmakers felicitating the prime minister for holding the Saarc and being elected its chairperson," Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid told a press briefing yesterday.

Hamid said the speaker lost his neutrality also by congratulating the prime minister. "Sitting in a neutral chair, he [the speaker] cannot congratulate the prime minister and describe the Saarc summit as successful when we are saying the summit was nothing but a sheer waste of public money," Hamid argued.

"The speaker runs the House, following the directions from the treasury bench," he added.

The opposition leader termed farce the speaker's initiative to bring the AL lawmakers back to parliament.

AL lawmakers Motahar Hossain, ABM Fazle Karim Chowdhury and Abul Hye were present at the briefing held at Hamid's office in parliament building.

Sylhet cops

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Syed Shah Zaman Raj, deputy inspector general of police (Sylhet), however, said progress in the investigations into the blasts is much better in Sylhet than in other districts.

The police are yet to arrest Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) men Delwar and Murad, but have gathered sufficient evidence about their involvement in the blasts.

He said they suspect Delwar and Shamim, a former leader of Islami Chhatra Shibir arrested in Habiganj, are the key persons behind the blasts in the region.

Sylhet police have made several attempts to arrest Delwar and also alerted Muktagachha Police Station from where the militant hailed.

Aggrieved locals

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already been occupied by vested interest quarters, it said, adding that there is another wide road for movement of people of the area.

But the locals said the army is trying to occupy the road that has been used by them for 30 years.

If the road is blocked, the people of Arzatapra will have to go three kilometers round to Mohakhali whereas it is only a 500-metre way now, they said, adding that it will also create permanent traffic jam in the area.

"We have been using the road for the last 30 years and the 12-foot road is mentioned in the land survey record.

The sewerage connection for the area has been made under the road and also there are electricity pillars on the road," said a resident requesting anonymity.

Earlier the army tried to take the road under their possession but refrained after intervention by local dignitaries, sources said.

Jamaat leader

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Rafiqul Islam Chowdhury alias Hasan, Goda Yunus, Iqbal Hossain Shadhin, Mirajul Islam Miraj and Ekhlashur Rahman -- all in Khulna district Jail.

The case for murdering Shaikh Belaluddin Ahmed was filed with Khulna thana under Section 302 of Bangladesh Penal Code (BPC) on February 16 this year.

Officer-in-charge of Khulna thana Mohammad Iqbal, who is investigating officer of the case, submitted the chargesheet.

In March this year, State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar had named Dhira as the mastermind behind the murder of Belal.

He was arrested from Dhaka on July 5 this year and brought to Khulna. Police interrogated him while on remand for four days as an arrestee in two other murder cases filed with Sonadanga thana and Khanjahan Ali thana of the city. But he could not be quizzed in Belal murder case because of a High Court (HC) order. In August, he was released on bail granted by the HC.

The charge sheet named 49 prosecution witnesses. Of them, Anowar Hossain had earlier made a judicial statement before CMM's Court.

Three of the chargesheeted accused also made statement the Court of Metropolitan Magistrate Atiqul Haque confessing to their involvement in the murder and naming Dhira as the mastermind behind the killing.

The OC said he will also submit a supplementary charge sheet under the Explosive Substances Act today, accusing Dhira and Ekhlashur. The main chargesheet under this act was submitted to court on April 25 this year, naming extremists Hasan, Shadhin, Miraj and Goda Yunus as accused.

Dhira is closely linked to Islamist extremists for long in the name of Jamaat politics.

Members of the family of Belal including his wife were satisfied with the charge sheet. They demanded immediate arrest of Dhira and exemplary punishment of the killers.

Belal, Khulna bureau chief of Dainik Sangram, was fatally injured in bomb attack on the night of February 5 on Khulna Press Club premises. He succumbed to injuries on February 11 while under treatment at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka.

Kiln kills canal

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the water flow of the canal, the brick kiln owner has not only ended navigability of the canal but also paved the way for others to grab the entire canal.

"For about three months in the winter, the canal dries up at places where villagers used to grow winter vegetables. But now many people claim the canal to be their own land," said Suruj Ali of Looterchar, who comes to the capital daily to sell the milk produced at his cattle farm.

"This canal was excavated once in the late 70s, which greatly benefited people of the villages in the area. But negligence of the authorities to protect the canal has encouraged many to grab it," said Mohammad Alam, a trader at Atir Bazar.

In a bid to solve the problem of waterlogging in the capital, the government last year launched a drive to recover the natural canals in and around it, which have long been encroached upon. The existing laws to protect water bodies provide for heavy punishment including imprisonment of encroachers.

JMB threatens

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the district and sessions judge of the matter and sent copies [of the letter] to the deputy commissioner and superintendent of police.

CHITTAGONG

An anonymous caller identifying himself as a JMB activist yesterday threatened to blow up the Chittagong Railway Station, reports our Chittagong correspondent.

Station Manager Shafiuddin Ahmed the same day filed a general diary (GD) with Government Railway Police in this connection.

"Following the GD, we have deployed additional forces in and around the station," said ATM Shahidul Islam, officer-in-charge of GRP in Chittagong station, yesterday afternoon.

Station sources said Shafiuddin received the first call at around 12.25pm yesterday.

"We are bona fide JMB cadres. You will not be able to save the railway station with the help of Rab or police. We are going to blow it up soon," the caller was quoted as saying.

Later, the same caller phoned the reservation counter and the office of Subarna Express and made similar threats.

ABDURRAHMAN IN PANCHAGARH?

Acting on information from Rab Headquarters in Dhaka that JMB chief Abdur Rahman might be held up somewhere in Panchagarh town or adjacent areas, police yesterday combed the northern district yesterday but to no effect, reports our Panchagarh correspondent.

Teams of Ansar, DB and Special Branch also took part in the raids alongside 12 police teams.

A source in the Detective Branch (DB) of police said they began the operation on learning that Abdur Rahman, suspected to be down with heart condition, was hiding in Panchagarh.

Earlier he was believed to be hiding in the capital's Banasree area.

Rahman's son-in-law and a member of JMB Majlish-e-Shura, Abdul Awal was arrested in Thakurgaon in fact while he was on his way to see ailing Rahman, said the source.

After Awal's arrest, police arrested JMB suicide squad member Tanviruzzaman alias Salman alias Murad, Shafiqul and Ashjad alias Awkat.

Before his arrest, Awal met Tanvir twice in the Friday morning. But Tanvir failed to say what Awal did the rest of the time. Police believe he passed the time with his father-in-law.

Although Panchagarh superintendent of police brushed aside the idea, police are carrying out routine raids following directions from higher authorities that Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai are hiding somewhere in the northern districts.

Meanwhile, a case was filed under Explosive Substances Act against Abdul Awal, Tanviruzzaman, Shafiqul and Ashjad Saturday.

The First Class Magistrate's Court in Panchagarh placed the three on a seven-day remand each.

PABNA

Our Pabna correspondent reports: Police arrested nine JMB activists includ-

ing three women in Santhia and Bhangura upazila in last two days.

Abdul Majid, 22, and his wife Mariam, 20, of Shafipur upazila and Morshed Ali, 22, and his wife Asma, 18, of Charfashion of the coastal district of Bhola, Yusuf Ahmed and his wife Ayesha Begum of Sunamganj district and Hafez Abdullah Sikdar and his wife Taslima Begum of Bhola were among the arrestees.

During the raid, police also recovered some bomb-making materials and Islami books.

Locals alleged that the arrestees, who had been staying in the upazilas for the last few months, have been trying to brain-wash the people into joining the 'jihad' in the name of invitation to 'Kalema'.

The JMB men told the police that Abdul Mazid, a teacher of Charfashion College, is their religious leader.

The arrestees will be sent to the Pabna court today, police added.

JESSORE

Our Jessore correspondent adds: Three suspected JMB men were arrested in a club room at Bharo Bhaina village of Keshabpur upazila in the district on Saturday night.

The arrestees are Shahabuddin, 17, of Bagerhat, Mohibullah, 17 and Mahmud Hasan, 22, of Pirojpur.

SATKHIRA

Our Satkhira correspondent reports: Over 150 suspected JMB activists who fled the area shortly after the August 17 bomb blasts in the district, seem to have regrouped, taking advantage of the slackness of the law enforcers.

Sources said the failure of police to arrest the militant leaders who recruit and train the youths under the umbrella of JMB has helped militants raise their head again.

The JMB men in trousers and shirt instead of pyajamas-panjabi and cap have recently started to move freely in the locality.

Six GIs die

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"We can confirm there was one fatality and four injured," British army spokesman Major Steve Melbourne said.

Earlier, five other American soldiers -- assigned to the third Brigade Combat Team of the 101st Airborne Division -- died in a pair of roadside bombings near Beiji, 255km north of Baghdad, the US command said. Five others from the same unit were wounded.

Another soldier from the 101st died in a US hospital in Germany of injuries suffered two days ago when his vehicle was deliberately rammed by an Iraqi car near Beiji, the US command said Saturday.

At least 2,091 members of the US military have died since the war began in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count.

Also on Saturday, a suicide bomber detonated his car in a crowd of Shia mourners north of Baghdad, killing at least 36 people and raising the death toll in two days of attacks against Shias to more than 120.

Bush, Hu wrestle

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of political dissidents who "we believe are improperly imprisoned."

Bush also said he had urged Chinese leaders to discuss Tibet's fate with its exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and tried to convince them they should invite Vatican leaders to discuss religious freedom.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that Washington was complaining "quite vociferously" to Beijing after Chinese authorities took forceful steps to keep dissidents and activists out of sight during Bush's visit.

She also said that "one has to be concerned" over China's military buildup because "there's a question of intent" but that Washington was confident of keeping the region in balance.

Still, both Hu and Bush took pains to emphasize the importance of US-China relations, pledging after a 90-minute meeting at the Great Hall of the People to work through what Hu described as "inevitable" tensions. As their talks got under way, Boeing signed a four-billion-dollar deal in Beijing to supply seventy 737 aircraft to China between 2006 and 2008 as part of a broader arrangement to eventually supply 150 of the 737s.

"Win-win cooperation is the mainstream of China-US relations," said Hu, who promised to work to reduce economic tensions on issues such as currency reform and China's massive trade surplus with the United States.

Hu said China was "continuously raising the level of human rights" enjoyed by its people but that progress must reflect "China's national conditions" and that the country would have "democratic politics with Chinese characteristics."

The two leaders said they would next meet in the United States in early 2006 -- a visit that will replace Hu's planned trip in September, which was indefinitely postponed because of Hurricane Katrina.

In a bid to solve the problem of waterlogging in the capital, the government last year launched a drive to recover the natural canals in and around it, which have long been encroached upon. The existing laws to protect water bodies provide for heavy punishment including imprisonment of encroachers.

the United States, which was expected to run to about 200 billion dollars this year.

US officials, who have expressed frustration that similar pledges on economic reform in July and September have not borne fruit, said much more work remained to be done on all those issues.

The two leaders also agreed to pursue joint efforts to defuse the North Korean nuclear crisis through six-country talks, and to ramp up cooperation to battle the spread of deadly bird flu amid fears of a global pandemic.

The US side reported no breakthroughs on Sunday but pointed to less tangible signs of success, with one senior Bush aide insisting that Hu had been more specific in promising to crack down on rampant counterfeiting of US goods.

Tackling another perennial irritant in Sino-US relations, Taiwan, Hu said that Beijing was "committed to peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits" but warned that "we will by no means tolerate so-called Taiwan independence."

Beijing considers Taiwan a renegade province that will eventually be reunited with the mainland.

Earlier, Bush attended services at the government-approved Gangwash church and suggested that China had made progress toward religious freedom, saying "it wasn't all that long ago that people were not allowed to worship openly."

"A healthy society is a society that welcomes all faiths and gives people a chance to express themselves through worship," said Bush, who accepted a Chinese Bible and wrote "May God Bless the Christians of China" in the guestbook.

On a light note, Bush, a fitness enthusiast, went mountain bike riding with Chinese athletes who are training for the 2008 Beijing Olympics -- and jokingly reported back later that he would not qualify to represent China at the Games.

Bush, who had earlier visited Japan and South Korea, was to wrap up his trip to the region with a brief stop in Mongolia on Monday.