

Political talks

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Sources said the breach between the government and opposition further widened in the wake of the recent bomb attacks, especially after the suicide bombings in Gazipur and Chittagong, that diminished the possibility of a dialogue on electoral reforms.

In such a situation Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on Wednesday called upon all the political parties and distinguished personalities in the country to sit across the table to find the ways to stop terrorism.

Referring to the PM's dialogue offer, Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday told journalists that the government will formally take initiative for the talks with all political parties.

BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, replying to a reporter's query about the talks, yesterday said the government, if needed, may send letters to invite the political parties for the talks.

But the opposition leaders yesterday said they will consider the dialogue offer only when the prime minister will show her government's seriousness to root out militancy by axing Jamaat-e-Islami and other 'patrons of militants' from the government.

Leader of the Opposition and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday in a statement said the prime minister's call for talks is nothing but a deception to the countrymen.

"We can't think to sit in a dialogue with the militants to stop militancy," Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday told The Daily Star, terming Jamaat, a partner of the alliance government, as the main patron of militancy.

"Militants exist within the government. So the government has to prove first its sincerity by removing Jamaat from the alliance and expelling the BNP men who have link with the militants," said Jalil, also coordinator of the 14-party.

About opposition's demand for expulsion of Jamaat from the coalition before any talks, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda said it's a "trickery" of the opposition as they don't want to sit with the government to resolve the problem of militancy.

"They should respond to the prime minister's call within the existing form of the coalition government. It's not fair to drop anyone before the dialogue," he said.

"If the talks find anyone's involvement in militancy then there will be a scope to decide the matter," Huda, also a vice president of BNP, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Huda and his party BNP seem to be determined to keep Jamaat in the four-party coalition, political observers analysing the prevailing situation believe.

Sources in the ruling coalition said most of the BNP high-ups are very concerned about the ominous rise of Islamist extremism, but they

Bomb materials

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same kind of splinters weighing around three kilograms were collected from the site of Tuesday's blast.

The nature of the bombs blasted in Gazipur suggests that the same group is involved in manufacturing them, he said.

The primary investigation of yesterday's blast also revealed that the bomb was not tied with the bomber's body, who rather hurled it, the expert said.

It's clear today

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College ground here yesterday.

"We have achieved independence of the country through war at the cost of blood. People cannot be made captive, nor can the country be made subservient by blasting some bombs."

She said acts of terrorism are occurring in many countries of the world, and those countries are taking united stand through discussion to resolve the problem.

But in Bangladesh, the prime minister said, instead of cooperating with the government and coming forward for discussion to seek ways of tackling the problem, hartals are being enforced to encourage terrorism and bomb explosions.

"They don't want to stop bomb terrorism, nor want wellbeing of the people...it has become clear today who are behind the bomb blasts."

She said when the country is advancing in all fronts--employment, investment, health, education, and increasing life expectancy and per capita income--a conspiracy has been put into play by those who want to make Bangladesh backward, to destroy the judiciary and do not want education of children. "Bomb terrorism is a part of that conspiracy."

Criticising false campaign abroad about the country's communal harmony, Khaleda said Bangladesh is a moderate country and will remain so, where people of all faiths are performing and celebrating religious rituals and festivals peacefully. "There is no division among us."

Urging the people to help catch the perpetrators of bomb blasts, as it is a moral responsibility, she said

appear to suffer from a tunnel vision as they need the support of Jamaat to win the next polls.

Many political observers believe the prime minister and her cabinet colleagues, taking the importance of Jamaat in consideration, have launched a counter propaganda on the rise of militancy by putting the blame on the previous Awami League government.

Such statements of the ruling party leaders are apparently to prove that Jamaat-e-Islami does not have any link with the militants, the observer said.

"The bomb blasts started to occur during the last Awami League regime and they did not take any step to stop such carnage," the prime minister said on Wednesday.

About the allegation against Jamaat of harbouring militants, she earlier told in and outside the parliament that it's a conspiracy to split the four-party alliance.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan last week said instead of helping the government in the fight against militancy, the opposition is trying to reap political gains out of the issue.

Nazmul Huda also termed the opposition demand for expelling Jamaat from the ruling alliance "a long-term conspiracy" to split the ruling alliance.

"The opposition leaders know it very much that they will not be able to assume power if they can't break the BNP-led four-party alliance," he observed.

Senior leaders of the 14-party however termed the prime minister's call for talks "a farce" and said she made the call to save BNP's alliance partner Jamaat-e-Islami which is blamed for its role in militant activities.

"Actually the government has no political will to curb the militants," Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain said on Wednesday.

The senior opposition leaders have also proposed a national dialogue of all political parties, excepting Jamaat, to face the national crisis.

Rejecting the prime minister's call for all-party talks, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Haque Inu said the ultimate aim of the prime minister is to save Jamaat-e-Islami in the name of offering dialogue.

"The prime minister in the same speech spat venom at the opposition parties accusing them of involvement in militancy. Senior ministers have also launched a campaign against the opposition parties linking them with the militants," Inu said.

"Under this circumstances there is no atmosphere for a national dialogue," the JSD president said.

AL meets

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AL sources said the government's proposal to sit for dialogues to face the problem of militancy and also for electoral reforms may be raised at the 10:00am meeting.

"We will sit to review the latest political development in the country, specially after the suicide bomb blasts in Gazipur and Chittagong," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star about today's meeting.

On holding the national council, Jalil said a special council will be held as the existing committee is going to complete its three-year term this month. He said no change in the leadership is likely at the special council session.

the perpetrators will be punished under the laws of the land.

Reiterating the government's determination to stop bomb terrorism at any cost, she said a tough law will be enacted, if necessary, to give punishment to the perpetrators through quick trial.

The prime minister urged people to cooperate with police, Rab, Ansar and other law enforcement agencies to arrest the perpetrators of bomb blasts.

"Those carrying out bomb terrorism are not followers of any religion; they are terrorists," she said.

Listing her government's development activities, Khaleda said the BNP-led alliance will again come to power by people's mandate to complete the ongoing development programmes.

Chaired by local BNP leader Anwar Hossain Bakul, the rally was addressed, among others, by Health and Family Welfare Minister Khandakar Mosharrif Hossain, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, Jute and Textile Minister Shajahan Siraj, Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury and State Minister for Communications Salahuddin Ahmed.

Earlier, the prime minister inaugurated over 500-meter-long Sayed Masud Rumi Bridge over Gorai river on Kushtia-Rajbari road in Kumarkhali. She also opened the upgraded Kushtia district hospital

Janajuddha top

brass held

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The second-in-command of the Janajuddha faction of outlawed Purbanchal Communist Party (PBCP), Sumon, was arrested in the capital by the members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday evening.

Rab sources said a team of the elite force raided a house in Mohammadpur area and arrested the notorious criminal.

On September 5, Sumon's elder brother Ripon Ahmed alias Shoeb, 28, chief of the Janajuddha faction, was arrested and killed in an encounter with Rab at Jubusa under Rupsha upazila of Khulna. He was a charge-sheeted accused in journalist Humayun Kabir Balu murder case.

After the killing of Soheb, Sumon was next to Abdur Rashid alias Tapan alias Dada Tapan of the Janajuddha faction of PBCP.

Hartal observed

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morning and expressed solidarity with the SCBA.

The shutdown saw courts, schools, private offices and business houses closed. Buses, trucks and private cars stayed off the streets. Rickshaws however plied as usual.

The Dhaka Bar Association (DBA) formed a human chain near its office at 10:00am to condemn the bomb attacks while Jatiyatadabi Ainjibi Forum, Dhaka unit, brought out a procession protesting the hartal.

The SCBA brought out a procession from the court premises at about 8:00am, led by its President Advocate Mahbubey Alam. The procession marched different city streets and its participants then held a rally at Purana Paltan crossing.

The 14-party combine led by the AL, which supported the SCBA hartal, also brought out processions and then held a rally at Muktangan. Later, AL leaders and activists attended the SCBA rally.

The organisations and parties that expressed solidarity with the SCBA included Bangladesh Bar Council, Dhaka Bar Association, Sammilita Ainjibi Samannoy Parishad, Peshajibi Samannoy Parishad, Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad, Ghatak Dalai Nirul Committee, Sammilita Nari Samaj, Gonomuktee and Jatiya Sampad Rasakha Andolan, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and Workers Party of Bangladesh.

Addressing the rallies, leaders of the professional bodies and political leaders blamed the BNP-Jamaat government for the rise of Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and its militant operations across the country.

The government's negligence to investigate the bomb and grenade attacks in the past encouraged the militants, Ainjibi Samannoy Parishad Convenor Barrister Amir-Ul-Islam said.

Demanding immediate resignation of the government for its 'failure' to ensure security of the people, Advocate Mahbubey Alam mentioned that Jamaat Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami blamed Indian RAW and Israel for the August 17 bomb blasts but did not name the JMB.

The government's special force Rab can kill Sarbaharas (leftist extremists) but why can't they kill JMB militants, asked Mahbubey Alam, who chaired the SCBA rally.

He demanded that the government pay a compensation of Tk 50 lakh each to the families of those killed in the bomb blasts and announce a handsome amount of money for the JMB men's return to normal life.

Leaders of the 14-party, different bar associations and Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists also spoke at the rally.

Our staff correspondent in Chittagong reports: The shutdown was peaceful in the port city. Delivery of cargo to and from Chittagong port remained suspended but loading and unloading of cargo took place to some extent.

Our Bogra correspondent reports: At least 30 AL and BNP activists were injured in a clash between the two sides in Dhunat upazila during hartal hours. The clash occurred as pro-hartal activists and anti-hartal ones in two processions faced each other.

AL leaders alleged the BNP activists damaged a restaurant of Dhunat upazila Jubo League President Boni Alam Mintu and set fire to two motorcycles. Additional police force was deployed to avert further clash.

Our correspondent in Netrakona reported that 10 AL activists were injured as police charged baton on a procession of the 14-party alliance at Kendua upazila headquarters. Police also intercepted a pro-hartal procession in Purbadhala upazila.

Reports of peaceful observance of the hartal were received from our staff correspondent in Sylhet and correspondents in Comilla, Barisal, Jessore, Pabna, Mymensingh, Dinajpur and Gopalganj.

Outlaw killed

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accomplishes fled, police said.

One shutter gun and 12 bullets were retrieved from the scene.

Accused in 15 cases including seven for murder, Shamsah had long been on the run from police. Recently Chuadanga police announced Tk 20,000 bounty on him.

CHT peace deal

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human-rights movement all across the world.

But unfortunately the accord could not bring any exemplary development of the situation except the halting of regular fighting between the state security forces and the indigenous guerrillas. PCJSS alleged that the basic terms of the peace agreement were not implemented in the last eight years and the incumbent government completely suspended the implementation process of the CHT peace treaty.

The government, however, said it is not true that they have halted the implementation process of the peace treaty.

Implementation of an agreement is a continuous process and it is going on. But a qualitative change in the political culture of the country is necessary to implement the treaty properly.

PCJSS sources told The Daily Star that the anti-peace treaty activities of the present coalition government include keeping the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs under the Prime Minister instead of appointing a full-minister to the ministry, appointment of a non-hilly Bengali person to the post of chairman of CHT Development Board, not bringing the Board under the Regional Council, not activating the advisory committee of the concerned ministry and formation of cabinet committee instead of Treaty Implementation Committee.

In a press conference held in the Jatiya Press Club on November 30, on the eve of the eighth anniversary of the signing of the accord, the PCJSS alleged that the government has been carrying out several other anti-peace accord activities. Those activities include continuation of

military operations in the hill region, not allocating sufficient funds to the Regional Council and District Council, encouraging outsider Bengalis to settle in the hills with the assistance of the administration, provocation to create communal conflict among the people in the region, security forces obstructing the implementation of the peace treaty through Bengali settlers.

As the government has not implemented the accord, the Bengali settlers are trying to form a movement against the peace accord. The Parbtya Chattagram Samo-Odhikar Andolan, the forum of the settlers' Bengali people staying in the CHT region is still demanding a cancellation of the accord.

At a meeting held yesterday at the Muktangan, Samo-Odhikar demanded a combing operation of the army.

The PCJSS leaders alleged that the Bengali settlers have been torturing and depriving the indigenous people with the support of army.

Moni Swapan Dewan, deputy minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, said at a roundtable meeting recently that the problem in Chittagong Hill Tracts region is a political and national problem.

"It needs to be solved in the light of the peace treaty. But a qualitative change in the political culture of the country is required in this regard," he said.

The deputy minister said he took initiatives to create a congenial environment in the political culture of the hill region despite having many limitations.

Ctg bomber dies

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supporting equipment was withdrawn at 12:20pm, hospital sources said.

His body was sent to the CMCH morgue for autopsy.

Hossain was admitted to CMCH with both the legs and one hand completely blown off.

On Wednesday, he made confessions to police and intelligence agencies after regaining consciousness, giving important information about the banned Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and its activities.

The investigators considered the death of Hossain a loss to the probe into the ghastly bomb attack that left two including a police constable dead.

"We desperately wanted to keep him alive," said Assistant Commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) Detective Branch (DB) KM Mosharrif Hossain Manjee. "The police personnel here did not hesitate to donate more than twenty bags of blood for him," he added.

Meanwhile, the condition of constables Prakash and Sriman, who were flown to Dhaka for better treatment after suffering severe injuries in the Chittagong suicide blast, was improving, sources said.

HUNT FOR MILITANTS LAUNCHED
The CMP and district police on Wednesday night launched a combing operation in the city and district to net JMB cadres, particularly three named Mohammad, Mizan and Mehedi, following a meeting with the deputy inspector general of

Chittagong police.

All the JMB cadres arrested in connection with the October 3 and November 29 bomb attacks on the Chittagong Court Building premises named the three as the key JMB operatives in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar.

According to their confessions, Mohammad was in charge of Chittagong district while Mizan and Mehedi were responsible for making and providing the bombers with explosives.

AFGHAN-BACK GUERRILLA NOT SHOWN ARRESTED
Meanwhile, Joyanal Abedin Kutubi, the suspected veteran of Afghan war held Tuesday from his residence in the city's Bakalia area, was not yet shown arrested.

"We are still quizzing Kutubi to extract information about his suspected involvement with militant activities and his stay in Afghanistan for militant training," Senior Assistant Commissioner of DB Mosharrif Hossain Meazi told this correspondent yesterday afternoon.

Tight-lipped about his findings from Kutubi, the DB only said he has denied being trained up in Afghanistan.

However, Kutubi's elder brother M Shahjahan told journalists that Kutubi was in Afghanistan in 2002 to "fight for the cause of Islam and against its enemies."

Bomb threat

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upazila of Jhenidah.

Sources said an unknown person called Assistant Private Secretary to the Foreign Minister Ataul Haque at around 1:30pm and made the threat.

The APS informed Foreign Minister M Moshed Khan immediately of the renewed threat.

"Have you heard the news of Gazipur blast today (Thursday)? Now your office will come under attack," the unidentified caller was quoted as saying.

Security at the foreign ministry has been tightened further following the threat.

An official on condition of anonymity told The Daily Star that the news of bomb threat was instantly communicated to the state minister for home and the authorities concerned.

Witnesses said the entry of vehicles and visitors to the ministry has been restricted. Officials said another metal detector will be soon installed at the main gate while the other entrances will remain closed.

Plainclothes policemen were seen rounding every floor and compound of the ministry yesterday.

AC-Land in Gazipur yesterday told the journalists that the suicide squad members of the banned JMB yesterday threatened to kill him and other officials and blow up his office.

The unnamed bombers of JMB called the AC-Land within a couple of minutes of the suicide attack in front of Gazipur DC office and issued the threat.

The authorities informed the law enforcers of the threats, prompting deployment of additional forces in and around the office.

Our Kushtia correspondent reports: The banned Islamist outfit JMB in a letter on Wednesday threatened to kill the UNO of Kaliganj upazila in Jhenidah.

Businessmen

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to stop such terrorism."

He feared that the recent attacks will create a negative impact on the foreign buyers at a time when Bangladesh is making rapid growth as the only Asian country in textile and clothing exports in the post-MFA era. "We may not survive in the open market competition," Awal said.

AK Azad, president of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries, said the political parties, trade bodies and the civil society will have to unite and find out the ways to stop this suicide bomb terrorism.

FBCCI Director Abu Moteleb said if the suicide bomb blasts are not checked immediately, Bangladesh will turn into a place like Afghanistan or Iraq in the near future.

Habibur Rahman, senior vice-president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Towhidur Rahman, vice-president of Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association, SM Shafiuzzaman, president of Bangladesh Aushadh Shipila Samity, FBCCI First Vice-President Mohammad Ali, Vice-President Dewan Sultan Ahmed, and directors Abul Kashem Ahmed, Helal Uddin, Delwar Hossain, Gias Uddin Chowdhury and Harun Ur Rashid also spoke at the function.

200 JMB men

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August 17 blasts and are waiting for operations yet to come, the sources added.

The sources confirmed that Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai stayed at the house of a pro-Jamaat journalist after he was released on bail from Bagerhat jail on November 20, 2002.

Bangla Bhai, operations commander of Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh (JMMJB), was introduced to the lawyers, who moved his bail petition, the next day.

A top official of Bagerhat police speaking anonymously said Bangla Bhai came to Mollahat upazila in the district on a recruiting mission in August 2002.

In course of time, the recruited members were made JMB or JMMJB cadres through brainwashing and adequate training at different mosques and madrasas, the cop added.

"The JMB cadres made dedicated and committed to laying down their lives are moving in the guise of the general public. It is very difficult to trap them now," the policeman said.

I'll kill everyone

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about to board a rickshaw to return home finding the DC office closed.

"A youth appeared from the west and ran to the DC office gate. Soon I heard an ear-deafening bang. There were sparks of a fireball and smokes blowing up," Azad said.

Moments later, he found four to five people lying on the ground, one of them looking for something. Firefighters rushed in and showered water on the youth, he added.

In an interval of one day, a gloomy scene again descended on the DMCH as 19 of around 30 injured in the suicide attack were committed to the hospital.

An unidentified man in his forties succumbed to his injuries on the way to the DMCH.

The wounded started coming to the hospital on their own around 1:15pm. Doctors and nurses were ready for the situation, as the DMCH authorities had already been informed about the matter.

Doctors alleged a huge rush of family members, relatives, visitors and lawyers is hampering the treatments.

"At times we even could not reach the seriously injured patients, as they were surrounded by people," said a doctor showing apparent anger.

Lawyers from Gazipur and the Supreme Court also turned in to visit their colleagues.

Safta finalised

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Saarc Summit in 2004 is to be fully operational from 2016.

"Implementation of Safta will further strengthen our trade relations with Saarc countries," Nath said welcoming the finalisation of agreement according to an official release.

Under Article 7 of Safta, a phased tariff liberalisation programme from the date of its coming into force, is envisaged. In first two years, non-LDCs (non-Least Developed Contracting States) will bring down tariffs to 20%, while LDCs will then down to 30%. Non-LDCs will then bring down tariffs from 20% to 0-5% in five years, Sri Lanka (which a non-LDCs) in six years and LDCs (from 30% to 0-5%) in eight years. Moreover, non-LDCs will reduce their tariffs for LDC products to 0-5% in three years. This tariff liberalisation would not be applicable to the tariff lists included in the Sensitive Lists to be incorporated in this Agreement as an integral part.

SC hears govt's

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Attorney general office sources said that after hearing the government petition, the chamber judge referred the matter to be heard with the regular full bench of the Appellate Division of the SC on Sunday.

In the rule, an HC bench had asked the government to explain why its "inaction" in conducting effective investigations and in containing court bombings since August 17 should not be declared a "failure" in protecting citizens' fundamental rights.

JMB suicide bomber

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two other trains through Gazipur was also delayed due to the incident.

THE BOMB STRIKE

Security at the DC office in Rajbari area had been stepped up following threats and Tuesday's carnage. "Sixteen police and Armed Police Battalion members were stationed at the gate, the place where the bomb attack was made yesterday. They had instruction to scan the baggage and bodies of everyone entering the DC office and the court buildings," said a police official.

Several lawyers had passed through the gate and others were in queue when a tea-vendor aged around 20 years arrived there, eyewitnesses said.

They said the youth, carrying a flask in one hand and a plastic bag containing cigarette packets in the other, looked suspicious.

Al-Amin, a peon at a local court, said he suspected the youth and asked the on-duty law enforcers to check him. "He had a peculiar look in his eyes and did not seem normal," said police Nayek Belal, adding, "I asked one of my colleagues to scan him."

Advocate Nurul Amin was standing very close when the bomber was passing through the gate and a policeman challenged him. "I saw the policeman approaching the youth. But he pulled a wire attached to his body and the bomb went off," he described.

Some other witnesses, on the other hand, said they saw the youth doing something with his flask that triggered the bomb off.

The deafening explosion in the open rocked the entire Rajbari area and was heard even from several kilometres away.

Witnesses said a cloud of smoke permeated the air, while the clothes of the people standing nearby caught fire. Around 15 people seriously injured dropped on the ground, while the restran for fire.

Fire Service and Civil Defence reached the spot and doused the fire.

SMILES THE KILLER

After the explosion, the bomber remained standing alive.