



Udichi unhappy over verdict, wants judicial investigation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Udichi Shilpi Goshthi reacting to the verdict on the Jessore Udichi blast case yesterday demanded the government initiate a judicial probe into the murders.

In a statement, Udichi urged the government to look into the involvement of Islamist militants Mufti Hannan and Shaikh Abdul Rahman in the 1999 blast.

A Jessore court yesterday acquitted all 23 accused in the blast case.

On March 6, 1999, the blast killed 10 people and left over 100 injured who gathered on the Jessore Town Hall ground during a programme of Udichi Shilpi Goshthi.

Udichi said the police submitted charge sheet on December 14, 1999 accusing 24 people including Tariqul Islam, the environment and forest minister.

After the present government took office, the minister filed a leave-to-appeal with the High Court and was acquitted from the case.

Many accused of the case are activists and supporters of the present government.

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UDICHI BLAST VERDICT

All 23 accused let off the hook

Judge orders legal action against investigation officer over false confessional statement

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

A Jessore court yesterday acquitted all 23 accused in the sensational case for bomb attacks on an Udichi conference seven years ago in the district that killed 10 people and injured over 150.

While pronouncing the judgment, the court observed that the prosecution has failed to prove the charges against the accused beyond doubt.

The court also strongly reproached the investigation officer (IO) of the cases and suggested taking proper action against him for falsely preparing confessional statements of five accused.

In his reaction, Jessore district General Secretary of Udichi Sukumar Das said, "We knew what will come in the verdict. After Mufti

Hannan claimed his organisation's involvement in the attack, we demanded reinvestigation in the cases."

All hell broke loose at 1:10am on March 7, 1999 as two powerful bombs went off during the interval of the 12th Annual National Conference of Udichi Shilpi Goshthi at Munshi Meherullah Maidan in Jessore town.

The explosions, which police primarily suspected to have been triggered by a timing device, tore through the dais, killing two persons on the spot. Six more died at hospital the same day while two others died later. Twelve injured were maimed permanently.

The dead are Shandha Rani, Nazmul Huda Tapan, Noor Islam, Bulu, Ilias Munshi, Babul Sutradhar, Shah Alam Milon, Ratan

Roy, Shah Alam and Ram Krishna.

Although May 30 had been fixed for announcing the verdict, it was deferred as the judge needed more legal explanation and arguments from both the prosecution and defence lawyers.

Special District and Sessions Judge Abul Hossain Bepari started reading out the judgment at 11:57am in the presence of 22 of the 23 accused, lawyers from both the state and defence sides, and journalists.

Huge security measures were taken on the court premises as thousands of curious people gathered to hear the verdict.

As the charges against the accused were not proved "beyond doubt", the accused cannot be punished, the court said in the

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I don't want to be president

PM assures Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Refuting repeated allegation by her arch political rival Sheikh Hasina about "grabbing the post of the president," Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said that she has no intention to take up the post.

"I don't want to be the president... we don't have any such thought," Khaleda told parliament, brushing aside the opposition

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Reforms must be before polls

Hasina tells Sangsad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday in parliament called on the public to stay alert so that the ruling alliance cannot "plot to rig" the upcoming elections.

Accusing the government of hatching a conspiracy to deprive people of their voting rights, she said, "They (government) are doing everything possible to snatch the people's verdict in the next election."

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A Ghana supporter holds up a poster on the poor quality of refereeing during the World Cup before the start of the second round match between Brazil and Ghana at Dortmund Stadium Tuesday.



PHOTO: AFP

Stage set for big time games

AFP, Berlin

The "big guys" are coming says Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira of the World Cup quarter-finals which see a mouth-watering quartet of big occasion games.

They don't come any bigger than Brazil though and the World Cup favourites, who have yet to hit full flight, can now be expected to be tested to the full against a France team they have not beaten since 1992.

Worse still they have gone down to defeat the last two times they have played France in the World Cup - a heart-breaking defeat on penalties in Mexico in 1986 and a 3-0 thumping in the 1998 final in Paris.

It has been a curious Brazil so far

at the World Cup. They have won four out of four, scored 10 and conceded just one, but still on the whole disappointed. Parreira, who had a similar experience before his side lifted the

1994 trophy, is aware that all is not as it should be.

"We lacked consistency with our moves. It's one thing to have speed. It's another thing to be in a hurry."

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MPs urged to disclose assets to check graft

Treasury bench remains mum on the AL proposal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Awami League (AL) yesterday in parliament called for disclosure of assets by the prime minister, opposition leader, ministers and lawmakers to check all-pervading corruption in society but the ruling party kept mum on the proposal.

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan however expressed concern over the spread of corruption and said: "The practice of bribing is going on from top to bottom. We have to

build social resistance against corruption."

Bhuiyan, also secretary general of ruling BNP, echoed the Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid saying: "Stern punishments will have to be taken against the corrupt."

On the issue of hartal, Bhuiyan and Hamid agreed to sign an agreement during the caretaker government's tenure for not to enforce shutdown.

Participating in the budget discussion, Hamid said unabated

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UN for talks between key political parties

Expresses concern over political violence

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A UN mission, which visited Bangladesh to assess the pre-election environment in the country, expressed grave concern about high level of political violence here.

It stressed the need for constructive dialogue among key political parties to lessen the tension and for building public confidence in all aspects of the electoral process.

The mission from the Electoral Assistance Division of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs visited Bangladesh from June 18 to 27 also to evaluate how the UN may best assist in holding the elections in the country.

It recommended that several

basic elements of a democratic electoral process should be ensured in the weeks ahead.

It suggested that public confidence in the Election Commission and in all other election related constitutional and governmental authorities should be ensured; a level playing field should be created so that all electoral candidates and parties can carry out their activities properly with equal protection; a flawless voter list comprising only the names of eligible persons should be ensured in accordance with the principles of universal suffrage; and a safe atmosphere should be ensured where civil society organisations and the media will be able to carry

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PM asks EC to prepare flawless voter list

Blasts media for writing 'fiction'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday urged the Election Commission (EC) to prepare a flawless voter list including the names of all eligible people for holding the next parliamentary

elections in time.

"We don't want to see any fake voter on the list. We want a flawless voter list that will include every one who has become eligible for being registered as voters in the last few years," the prime minister said in parliament.

"We want the elections to be held in time and we hope the opposition will help in the preparation of the voter list. We also demand that the Election Commission do not bow down to anything unjust," she said in the discussion on the

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PHOTO: STAR

Arches built on roads in the capital, including this one in Demra, in May to mark former president Ziaur Rahman's 25th death anniversary are yet to be dismantled, hindering vehicular movements.

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