

PM focused more

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The prime minister said a neutral probe committee was formed yesterday ensuring representation of the army, air force, navy, police and Rab.

The new committee was formed as neutrality of the previous one headed by the home minister was questioned.

Hasina blasted the remarks that Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia made during discussions on the obituary motion.

Referring to her meeting with army officers in Dhaka cantonment earlier in the day, she said the opposition lawmakers were echoing some of the views aired there.

Participating in the obituary discussions, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia came down hard on the government's strategies to resolve the crisis.

She again termed the general amnesty a mistake, and said the prime minister's talks with the BDR mutineers "in the name of ending the revolt was not right".

Hasina rebutted the criticisms from her opposite number.

In a veiled reference to local BNP men, she said they had brought out processions in Hazaribagh and other areas surrounding Pilkhana to encourage the killers. They chanted slogans like "BDR-Janata Bharat" (BDR-people are brothers).

"Just when the mutineers were about to lay down their arms, they were told by some

quarters not to surrender," she continued.

"I want to know... who had arranged speedboats to help the mutineers flee... who gave them dresses to change and who brought a grey truck inside the BDR compound?"

She said since the investigation is on, she would not say much.

Mentioning coups and counter-coups in the military since 1975, she said, "It's so unfortunate that our army officers come under vicious attacks all too often and get killed for someone else's lust for power and ambition. Why they have to endure so much pain."

"As many as 565 air force officers were hanged in one incident alone in 1977."

About concerns over unprotected border in the wake of crisis in the border force, she told the House that all border areas are well protected now.

The prime minister announced that her government will give Tk 10 lakh to each of the victims' families. Besides, they will be given Tk 5 lakh more by the army.

Hasina said children of the slain army officials will be able to study at the cadet colleges or other institutions for free.

About the process of trial, Hasina said Lalbagh police have filed a case, and the Criminal Investigation Department is working on it. Some 646 BDR personnel are now in police custody.

She outright rejected the allegation that the government

had appointed rebel BDR member Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) Touhid Alam as director general of the paramilitary force.

She said, "Touhid has already been arrested. He is now in police custody."

The prime minister said her government's timely measures saved lives of army officials and their family members who had been taken hostage.

Israel vows retaliation for Gaza rocket fire

AFP, Jerusalem

Outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert vowed yesterday to hit back "severely" if militants in the Islamist Hamas-run Gaza Strip continue to fire rockets into Israel.

If the rocket fire from Gaza continues, we will hit back severely, so much so that the terrorist organisations will understand that Israel is not ready to resign itself to this, Olmert said at the start of the weekly cabinet meeting.

"At the end of the week 11 rockets were fired against southern Israel," he said. "Defense Minister Ehud Barak will give directions so that Israeli forces bring calm to southern Israel."

He spoke a day after seven rockets fired from Gaza landed in Israel without causing casualties although one smashed into an empty school, and a day before an international conference on rebuilding Gaza is to be held in Egypt.

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