

Blasts kill 87

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State television said "terrorists launched two rockets" at the campus.

The university lies in a government-controlled area of the battleground northern city, which has been wracked by violence since last summer when regime forces launched an offensive to halt a rebel advance.

Meanwhile, two car bombs killed at least 22 civilians in the Syrian city of Idlib yesterday, the official SANA news agency reported.

Idlib city remains under the control of forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad but most of the rest of the northwestern province on the border with Turkey is in the hands of rebels fighting to oust him.

Elsewhere in Syria, the army sent reinforcements to the town of Daraya, southwest of Damascus, as warplanes and rockets bombarded the rebel enclave, said the Observatory,

describing the violence there as the worst in several weeks.

Amateur video posted on the Internet by activists showed a massive tower of smoke rising above the now mostly empty town, which once boasted a population of about 200,000.

Assad's brother and elite Fourth Division chief Maher al-Assad, "has given orders to take control of Daraya even if that should mean destroying whatever buildings remain in the town," according to Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman.

More than 60,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in Syria's conflict, according to the United Nations, while the Observatory says it has documented more than 48,000 dead.

In a day of raging violence, at least 207 people were killed across Syria on Tuesday, including 137 civilians, said the Observatory.

Action plan

FROM PAGE 1
National Coordination Committee for Workers Education, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association and Bangladesh National Council signed the statement at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in the capital on Tuesday.

They promised to actively develop, promote and implement a collaborative, participatory and transparent mechanism to ensure fire safety in Bangladesh, according to the statement which is available on the website of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

This is the first major unanimous commitment by the stakeholders since a deadly fire at Tazreen Fashions Ltd in Ashulia last November killed at least 112 garment workers.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment and the ILO office in Dhaka organised the tripartite meeting. It highlighted the necessity of combined actions to prevent similar occurrences in future.

The statement calls for implementing the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and

Health Convention, 2006, the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 and other instruments of the ILO relevant to the framework for occupational safety and health.

The signatories also called upon international development organisations, buyers, donor agencies and non-governmental organisations to assist them in implementing the plan, once it is made.

They requested the ILO to help them organise necessary consultation meetings and with technical support. A source in the ILO office in Dhaka said they had brought all parties together to create a platform so that they could discuss issues, improve the labour safety standard and other conditions in factories and cooperate among themselves.

"We believe that if all the parties stick to their commitment, the number of incidents, including fire, will go down remarkably," he told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the European parliament yesterday began a two-day session to discuss Bangladesh's labour safety issues in the garment sector.

GSP issue

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FBCCI president said yesterday.

"Continuing or scrapping the GSP facility is no longer a matter of ensuring labour rights and workplace safety. It also involves many political issues," said Annisul Huq, former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

He spoke at the closing ceremony of Gapexpo-2013, a four-day exhibition on garments accessories, packaging and related machinery, at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka.

The US allowed duty-free benefit to Colombia in July last year under the GSP (generalised system of preference) scheme, though around 2,600 labour leaders were killed in the country during the last 12 years, he said.

Around 670 workers were killed in 2011 in Colombia, said Huq, who is also a former president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

"The US offered the GSP facility to Colombia because of the political and development interests," he said.

Although the GSP covers less than 1 percent of Bangladesh's total exports to the US, the country's image will be tarnished due to the move, he said.

"It will bring a disaster to the garment sector if the EU also scraps the GSP facility for us," said Huq.

So the government should resolve the GSP issue immediately, he added.

Civil Aviation Minister Faruk Khan said the government is working seriously and has already set the country's strategy to address the issue.

Appare accessory and packaging makers, however, are happy over the performances at the annual event.

Sircar charged with graft

UNB, Dhaka

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday submitted a charge sheet against former speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar in a graft case for embezzling public money worth over Tk 4.4 lakh.

Khandaker Akhteruzzaman, deputy assistant director of the ACC, submitted the charge sheet before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka.

ACC sources said Sircar withdrew the money from the Public Works Department and the city division of the Parliament Secretariat, showing fake bills of gas and power during 2001-06.

Late BNP leader Khondaker Delwar Hossain was chief whip at that time.

Although the former chief whip's family used two electricity meters and two gas burners as per the approval of Sircar, Delwar withdrew additional money showing 12 electricity meters and eight burners.

Together they misappropriated over Tk 4.4 lakh from the government exchequer.

As Delwar passed away earlier, his name was dropped from the charge sheet, ACC Public Relations Officer Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya told UNB.

SAVAR RAPE

Key accused arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty three days after the rape of a college girl in Savar, police on Tuesday arrested the prime accused at Barguna.

Identified as Zahidul Islam Raju, 22, student of Savar University College, the accused was picked up at one of his relatives' house. With this, police have detained six people, including a female who happened to be a "friend" of the victim.

Superintendent of Police of Dhaka district Habibur Rahman at a press briefing in the Media Centre of Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday claimed that all arrestees had admitted to their involvement in the incident.

The 20-year-old victim, wife of an expatriate living in the Middle East, was violated by Zahidul in a flat on the fourth floor of a five-storey building near Chhapra mosque in Bank Colony area of Savar.

The accomplices of Zahidul also took footage of the incident. Police have already recovered the footage from one of the arrestees.

On January 4, Savar police arrested five youths, Rayhan, 20, Mohidur Rahman, 21, Wasim, 20, Danesh, 32, and Liza, 20, in connection with the rape.

It's part of govt

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would wage a tough movement to foil the conspiracy, it warned.

The combine gave the warning at a press conference at the BNP central office at Naya Paltan in the city. BNP standing committee member and coordinator Tariqul Islam, flanked by other alliance leaders, spoke at the press conference.

A Dhaka court on Tuesday took into cognisance the charges against Khaleda and three others in the case.

The Anti-Corruption Commission on August 8, 2011 filed the case with Tejjgaon Police Station, accusing the four of abusing power to raise fund in the name of Zia Charitable Trust.

Tariqul said people outside the then government were behind formation of the Trust. "Besides, no government money was spent for it. And the money meant for it was spent duly."

But even then the case was filed against the BNP chairperson, he added.

Tariqul also blasted the government for implicating BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir in two more cases yesterday, and demanded his release from prison.

Plea for death penalty

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International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973) and the prosecution have successfully been able, by adducing both eyewitnesses and hearsay witnesses, to prove the charges beyond any shadow of reasonable doubts.

"The accused deserves to be awarded capital punishment under section 20 of the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973 and the entire nation is waiting for it," said Ali.

Section 20 (2) of the Act says, "Upon conviction of an accused person, the tribunal shall award sentence of death or such other punishment proportionate to the gravity of the crimes as appears to the tribunal to be just and proper."

On December 27, 2012, Ali sought the same after completing his arguments on legal and factual aspects.

On the other side, the defence said the prosecution have "failed" to provide material evidence to prove the charges.

After completing his factual arguments, Mollah's counsel Abdus Sobhan Tarafder told reporters his client has to face the trial after 40 years of independence "only for political purposes".

"My personal opinion is that the prosecution couldn't produce any punishment worthy evidence against the accused. Our client will be acquitted," said Sobhan.

On May 28, 2012, the tribunal indicted Mollah with six charges of crimes against humanity committed during the nine-month-long war.

Twelve prosecution witnesses including two investigation officers of the case testified against Mollah, while six defence witnesses including the accused himself gave testimonies as defence witnesses.

After yesterday's court proceedings started at 12:03pm, Sobhan, for the fourth day, placed his arguments citing testimonies of two investigation officers and six defence witnesses.

Citing Mollah's testimony, Sobhan said their plea of alibi is that Mollah was not in Dhaka during the Liberation War.

Mollah, in his testimony, said he left Dhaka on March 11 or 12 in 1971 for his village and spent the rest of the year and almost entire 1972 running a business there.

Sobhan said AIM Lokman, sixth defence witness and then imam of Shahidullah Hall of Dhaka University, where Mollah used to reside, was acquainted with Mollah and said the accused regularly took part in the prayers.

Lokman "corroborated" with Mollah's testimony as he said the accused had left the campus for home three to four days after the historic March 7 speech by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The tribunal said Lokman testified that he was in the hall during the war and Mollah had returned to the dormitory perhaps in the last part of 1972 or in early 1973.

But Mollah testified that he had come to Dhaka in the last part of July 1971 and stayed in the hall around 20-21 days for taking part in the practical examination, the tribunal added.

"Mollah had said his prayers 105 times (during his stay at hall), but he [Lokman] didn't see him. Isn't it contradictory?" said the tribunal.

"The tribunal should not consider such minor things," said Sobhan.

The prosecution, however, would not get any benefit of it, the tribunal said.

Sobhan said Shushil Chandra Mondal and Muslem Uddin Ahmed, second and third defence witnesses respectively, supported Mollah's testimony that he was at Faridpur during the war.

Sobhan said the prosecution had claimed police arrested Mollah in Faridpur, 1972, when he went there after Mirpur was freed on January 31, 1972 on charges of "committing crimes", but released him within hours.

"If he [Mollah] was arrested for committing crimes, why was he released within hours?" questioned Sobhan.

Mosammat Sahera, sister-in-law of martyr Pallab, who was allegedly killed upon Mollah's instruction, said Akhter Gunda and Biharis killed his brother-in-law during the war.

Altab Uddin Mollah, fifth defence witness, testified to discredit two prosecution witnesses -- Shafiuddin Mollah and Amir Hossain Quader Mollah had directly taken part with Pakistani army in the killing of around 400 Bangalees at Alubdi on April 24, 1971.

After lunch break, Mohammad Ali gave replies to legal questions raised by Abdur Razzaq during his closing arguments in the case.

Abdur Razzaq claimed the purpose of the trial after 40-year delay was "political" as Mollah is a leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, which did not side with Awami League in the 2001 elections.

The prosecution have "failed" to give a reasonable explanation for the delay in the formal charge, Razzaq claimed.

Ali said the charge was not brought against Jamaat or any political party, rather those who "directly took part or aided in committing crimes against humanity were charged".

"There is no political reason behind the trial," he added.

Ali said the prosecution had given explanation about the delay during their arguments and it was not mandatory to explain the delay in the formal charge.

Razzaq argued that as 195 Pakistani army officials, who were the principal perpetrators, were given clemency through a tripartite agreement in 1974, "their aides and abettors" couldn't be prosecuted after 40 years.

Ali said the tripartite agreement was an executive act that cannot provide any premium to the local perpetrators of crimes committed during the Liberation War. Besides, abetting and aiding are distinct offences.

Giving example of the trail of former Liberian president Charles Taylor, Ali said he was charged for simple aiding and abetting.

"Do you want to charge Mollah as an individual or a member of an auxiliary force?" asked the tribunal.

Ali said Mollah should be charged as an individual as well as a member of an auxiliary force because "he was a prominent leader of Al-Badr and Al-Badr was an auxiliary force [of Pakistani army]".

Ali added "Sun Set at Midday" written by Mohiuddin Choudhury, a local Jamaat and Peace Committee leader in 1971, is a prosecution document in which the writer says, "The workers purely belonging to Islami Chhatra Sangha were Al-Badr".

Citing the book "The Betrayal of East Pakistan" by Pakistani army commander of the Eastern Command (1971) Lt Gen AAK Niazi, Ali said Al-Badr and Al-Shams were two wings of Razakar force.

The then Pakistani government made Razakar an auxiliary force of its army through a gazette notification on August 2, 1971, according to historic documents. Mollah, in his testimony, said he was elected president of Shahidullah Hall unit Islami Chhatra Sangha in 1970.

Razzaq argued that only one witness testified for the charge no six in the case.

Citing a decision of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Ali said "no corroboration" is required for the testimony of sexually assaulted witness and the third prosecution witness, lone witness for the sixth charge, was both a victim of sexual and physical assault.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Judge M Shahinur Islam heard the replies before adjourning the case proceeding until today.

ICT-1
The International Crimes Tribunal-1 yesterday adjourned its morning session following a prayer of the defence, who said they could not come to the tribunal due to hartal.

both the defence and the prosecution completed their submissions on the petition of retrial order's review.

The tribunal-1 fixed January 21 for an order in this regard.

Prosecutor Haidar Ali placed his closing arguments for about one and a half hours in the war crimes case against Jamaat leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee.

He placed arguments for five more charges yesterday. Earlier on Sunday, he placed arguments for 11 charges.

Sayedee is facing 20 charges for crimes against humanity committed during the war.

Ctg girl raped

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The culprits also snatched her gold earrings worth around Tk 13,000 after assaulting her, family sources say. The victim was a packaging worker of Apex Fisheries at Sagarika in Pahartali.

Police arrested Wasim, 20, in this connection yesterday evening.

Rozina Akhter, colleague of the victim, told The Daily Star they were returning from workplace around 5:30am after doing night shift. "After arriving in front of our colony by a rickshaw, I was paying the fare and my colleague was walking ahead," she said.

"As I was bargaining with the rickshaw-puller over the fare, four people wielding daggers attacked her and dragged her to the hillock behind Kaibalyadham shrine," she added.

Rozina said she had made an attempt to save her colleague, but two of the criminals drove her away brandishing machetes.

A helpless Rozina rushed to her colleague's house and informed her family. They recovered the victim from the hillock in an unconscious state and took her to Chittagong Medical College Hospital's One-stop Crisis Centre (OCC) around 9:30am, said Jahurul Islam, sub-inspector of the CMCH police camp.

Dr Nitai Prasad Dutt, coordinator of the OCC, said the victim was stabbed in the hand but is out of danger now. "We are also taking legal measures to help her," he added.

Rozina said they know two of the culprits by their faces but don't know their names.

"The two teased us in last couple of months on our way to office and home. They also proposed to develop an affair with them and sought our cellphone numbers. They might have attacked us as we turned down their illicit proposal," she added.

Both the stalkers are involved in mugging for long in the area and were arrested a few days ago. But they came out on bail and returned to their old profession, she informed.

A case was filed last evening against Wasim and his accomplice, said SI Dhiman Barua of Khulshi Police Station.

Khaleda

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capital.

Interestingly, neither the US Embassy nor Khaleda's office had informed the media about the meeting that started around 8:10pm.

"They discussed issues of mutual interest," Maruf Kamal Khan, press secretary to the opposition leader told The Daily Star after the meeting. Most BNP leaders declined to make any comment on the discussion.

A party insider, however, told The Daily Star that the BNP raised different recent issues, including a Dhaka court's taking into cognisance the charges against Khaleda in the Zia Charitable Trust graft case and indictment of the party's acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir in several cases.

The party also cleared its stance in favour of a non-party caretaker government to ensure a free and fair election, added the source.

BNP Standing Committee member Abdul Moyeen Khan and its Vice-Chairman Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury were present in the meeting.

In August, 2012, the US ambassador in a surprise move held a one-and-a-half hours' meeting with Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan residence.

BAHRAIN FIRE Govt decides to compensate 13 victims

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to compensate the families of the 13 Bangladeshi workers who were killed in a fire in Bahrain on Friday afternoon.

The families of the deceased will get Tk 2 lakh each, said Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, expatriates' welfare and overseas employment minister, yesterday.

Besides, the government will bear the costs of bringing home their bodies and donate an additional Tk 35,000 for the burial of each, he added.

The minister made the announcement at a views-exchange meeting with journalists in the ministry's conference room, saying the government is trying to bring the bodies from Bahrain as soon as possible.

The government is strengthening its efforts to realise the workers' wage arrears and compensation from their employers, Mosharraf added.

According to officials in

the Bahraini capital Manama, 135 labourers including the 13, lived in a building where no maintenance work had been carried out for long, reported UAE newspaper Gulf News on Tuesday.

The roof of the three-storey building caved in as the blaze swept through the camp, situated in the crowded Mukharga neighbourhood in Manama.

Bahrain police on Monday arrested the owner of the building, added the newspaper.

About the registration of Bangladeshi workers for Malaysian jobs, the minister said over four lakh people in Dhaka and Barisal divisions have registered their names.

He thanked the media for its role in encouraging the people in the government's efforts, such as the first-ever online registration for Malaysian jobs.

Earlier yesterday, a five-member delegation of Bahrain government led by lawmaker Mahmoud Youssef Almahmoud met Mosharraf at his office in the morning.

Ties with Russia

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Russia" at Moscow State University.

Hasina said, "As we connect our approaches, willingness and intentions, our friendship would continue to grow stronger to bring prosperity and progress to our countries and people."

She expressed her immense pleasure to have the opportunity to speak before the scholars and students of the prestigious university.

The premier recalled the support of Russian government to Bangladesh's people during the Liberation War in 1971. "Soviet Union not only stood by us in our bloody struggle but also in our rehabilitation efforts."

Hasina mentioned that one of her government's first initiatives after taking office in 2009 was to engage with Moscow for robust and intensified cooperation.

"President Putin has reciprocated spontaneously for productive cooperation between the two countries," she told her audience.

Hasina said Bangladesh offers most attractive fiscal incentives amidst tough globalisation and increasing competition regime. Its location between South and South-East Asia provides gateway to a huge market and major economies.

Soon after Bangladesh's independence, the former Soviet Union had assisted in establishing several power stations. "Now Bangladesh needs Russian assistance to renovate these power stations," she said.

The 2,000 megawatt nuclear power plants with Russian technological and financial assistance would be the beginning of more to come in the future, she added.

Hasina said Bangladesh and Russia can also build up a strong collaboration on agricultural cooperation. "Bangladesh's agriculture is becoming mechanised both in terms of production and processing."

Russian investors can find Bangladesh as a gateway to the vast regional market, she added.

Laying importance on strong engagement of the private sectors and people to people contact, the premier proposed for formation of a Joint Business Council to deepen cooperation between the chambers.

She also proposed for an extensive student and cultural exchange programme.

Hasina said in the global

arena Bangladesh has been acclaimed for her value-based approach and proactive and objective engagements.

"Bangladesh has recently joined the Asem. We also hope to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in the same perspective with support from Russia," she hoped.

The premier also said her government has attached highest importance to education while allocating annual national budget. "It resulted in accruing tremendous success particularly in women education and promotion of ICT studies."

Hasina said skilled and trained people of Bangladesh could complement Russian technology and financial resources, and a part of the workforce can work in Russian economy, particularly in manufacturing and service sectors.

Prof Victor Sadovnichy, rector of the university, conferred a diploma on the Bangladesh premier for her visit and lecture to the academics.

Hasina presented some books and a painting to the university authority.

Later, Hasina met Valentina I Matvienko, chairperson of the Council of Federation of Federal Assembly of Russia, at her office in the Council of Federation Building.

They stressed mutual cooperation on counter-terrorism initiatives during the talks.

WORK ON ROOPPUR PLANT THIS YEAR

The Director General of Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation 'Rosatom' Sergey Kirienko met Hasina at her hotel lobby yesterday afternoon.

The Russian government wants to start the groundbreaking work on the proposed nuclear power plant at Rooppur in Pabna within this year, Kirienko told Hasina.

"But for this, both sides should have to complete some preparatory works quickly," he added.

In response, the premier agreed to complete the preparatory works as per the work plan, PM's Deputy Press Secretary Bijan Lal Dev briefed reporters after the meeting.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, State Minister for Science and Technology Yeafesh Osman, among others, were present at the meeting.

Hasina is scheduled to return home this morning wrapping up her three-day Moscow tour.