

HINDUSTAN TIMES EDITORIAL

## Call for trial of Star editor criticised

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Leading Indian newspaper The Hindustan Times yesterday editorially criticised the call made by Sajeed Wajid Joy for the arrest and trial of eminent civil society activists, a renowned jurist and the editor of The Daily Star for alleged treason.

The paper called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to firmly eschew such moves.

The comments appeared in the lead editorial under the headline "Avijit Roy Murder: The fallout of Bangladesh's broken politics", condemning the murder of blogger Avijit Roy and current volatile political situation in Bangladesh.

"The attack in Dhaka [the killing of Avijit on February 26] points to disturbing trends both in Bangladesh and further afield. Religious extremists are attacking liberal, secular figures and their worldviews, using hate speech and physical violence," said the daily.

"Such challenges can only be tackled with credible State capacity, which Bangladesh seems to have little of at the moment."

Referring to BNP's call for a country-wide transport blockade and the resulting violence, The Hindustan Times said: "Hasina has to take her share of the blame for the deteriorating situation. She has strong secular credentials but is showing authoritarian tendencies under pressure."

In another editorial, The Times of India on Monday said the killing of Avijit Roy "is another instance of growing intolerance in Bangladesh...."

Awami League swears by secular credentials but has time and again succumbed to pressures from zealots."

The paper asked the Bangladesh government to swiftly arrest and punish Avijit's killers and "take long-term steps against fundamentalist organisations and the Jamaat-politician nexus that uses religion for political ends."

Joy, son of Sheikh Hasina, in his official Facebook page on February 26 said jurist Dr Kamal Hossain, The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam and Nagorik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna should be arrested and tried for "treason".

## Chehlum of Koko today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The chehlum of late Arafat Rahman Koko, younger son of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, will be held today across the country.

As part of the programme, a special doa mahfil will be organised at Khaleda's Gulshan office in the city after Asr prayers, said Shamsuddin Dider, a member of the BNP chief's media wing.

Koko died of heart failure at his rented house in Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur on January 24.

## Kerry asked to help

FROM PAGE 1

Ed Royce, Eliot Engel, Grace Meng, Steve Chabot and Ami Bera.

Unidentified assailants killed Avijit, a Bangladesh-born US citizen, and badly wounded his wife Rafida Ahmed Bonya on Dhaka University campus after the couple came out of the Ekushey Boi Mela on February 26.

He had repeatedly been receiving death threats from Islamist fundamentalists in Bangladesh and it is presumed that this was a religiously motivated attack, read the statement dated February 27.

"The US Embassy and Department of State must remain engaged, and work with Bangladesh's government, to insist that Roy's killers are brought to justice, and to ensure that threats to other secularists and writers in Bangladesh are taken seriously," it read.

The Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris last month, the synagogue shootings in

# HUNDRED YEARS OF HARDINGE

On March 4, 1915, Lord Hardinge, then viceroy of colonial India, inaugurated train operation on the Hardinge Bridge. A century has gone by. The 1.8km rail bridge still stands strong over the Padma at Pakshi in Ishwardi upazila, Pabna. Its construction began in 1910 under the supervision of British Railway. Today, colourful programmes will mark 100 years of the historic bridge.

PHOTO: BANGLADESH RAILWAY ARCHIVE/STAR



## Khaleda won't go to court

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, the government and the ruling Awami League policymakers remain undecided about detaining Khaleda, insiders said.

Some say Khaleda's arrest might add fuel to the opposition movement, and the BNP-led 20-party combine might benefit from it. But some others are for taking tough actions against the former prime minister, including her arrest by today. They are also in favour of sending Khaleda to her residence from her political office.

Amid this, Khaleda has given "special instructions" to at least 54 district BNP leaders to intensify the agitation and not be demoralised even if she is arrested, said sources at her Gulshan office.

Several district leaders, including those in Khulna and Bogra, confirmed this over the phone.

According to BNP sources, Khaleda wants the government to arrest her,

because while this will invite international pressure on the government, it will also boost the opposition morale.

The police remain inactive even a week after the arrest warrants were issued.

On February 25, a Dhaka court ordered the arrest of Khaleda for skipping court hearing on four consecutive dates in Zia Charitable Trust and Zia Orphanage Trust graft cases.

Asked, police yesterday said they were yet to receive the orders.

Gulshan police, however, received a court order to search Khaleda's office for communication devices only hours after it was issued on Sunday. Police were yet to search her office till yesterday.

Contacted, State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal claimed the police stations concerned and his ministry did not receive the search and arrest orders.

"We will act as per the law. We will

not deviate from the law even by an inch," he told this correspondent yesterday.

He added they were also waiting for the directives of the High Court where Khaleda filed two petitions, expressing no-confidence in the trial court judge dealing with the two graft cases in question.

"If she [Khaleda] appears before the court tomorrow [today] and is granted bail, we will have nothing to do in this regard," he said.

In another development, Khaleda's counsel Sanaullah yesterday filed two petitions to the court, which issued the arrest warrants, seeking withdrawal of the orders.

The petitions said the BNP chief filed two petitions with the HC on January 28, expressing no-confidence in the trial court judge and seeking transfer of the cases.

"The arrest warrants should be withdrawn until the two petitions

[before the HC] are disposed of," said the petitions.

Judge Abu Ahmed Jamadar of the special judge's court-3 of Dhaka fixed today for hearing the petitions.

Yesterday, Khaleda filed two more petitions with the HC seeking stay on the arrest warrants.

When the special court on February 25 ordered Khaleda's arrest, it also ordered Sanaullah, who is representing Tarique Rahman (now in London) in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case, to produce him before the court today.

Asked about this, Sanaullah said, "I could not contact him."

Law Minister Anisul Huq said Khaleda was a "fugitive accused" and she had violated laws by not appearing before the court in the graft cases for 56 times.

The latest political development has raised fear in public mind that violence would escalate. In the past two months, at least 81 people have been

## Political crisis to deepen if Khaleda held

Predicts Int'l Crisis Group

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The arrest of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia could seriously escalate the ongoing political crisis, says International Crisis Group.

The Brussels-based think-tank made the observation in its monthly bulletin on current and potential conflicts released on Monday, within a week when a Dhaka court issued arrest warrant against the former prime minister in two graft cases.

The arrest warrants were issued on February 25 against Khaleda for skipping court hearings on four consecutive dates in two graft cases -- Zia Orphanage Trust graft case and Zia Charitable Trust graft case.

The Crisis Group in its report said political crisis in Bangladesh continued, "threatening severe destabilisation of [the] country".

At least 81 people were killed and over a thousand injured in violence since the BNP-led alliance declared the countrywide blockade on January 5. Besides, 41 people were killed in "shootouts" with law enforcement agencies during this period.

"Anti-corruption court on February 25 issued warrant for BNP leader Zia's arrest for non-appearance, raising fears of escalating violence in case warrant [was] executed," it said.

The report also says United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon last month urged Hasina and BNP leader Khaleda to engage in constructive dialogue.

Earlier on February 9, the group said political crisis was fast approaching the point of no return, and could gravely destabilise the country unless the ruling Awami League and the BNP took practical steps to reduce political tensions.

killed in violence, mostly in arson attacks on public transport.

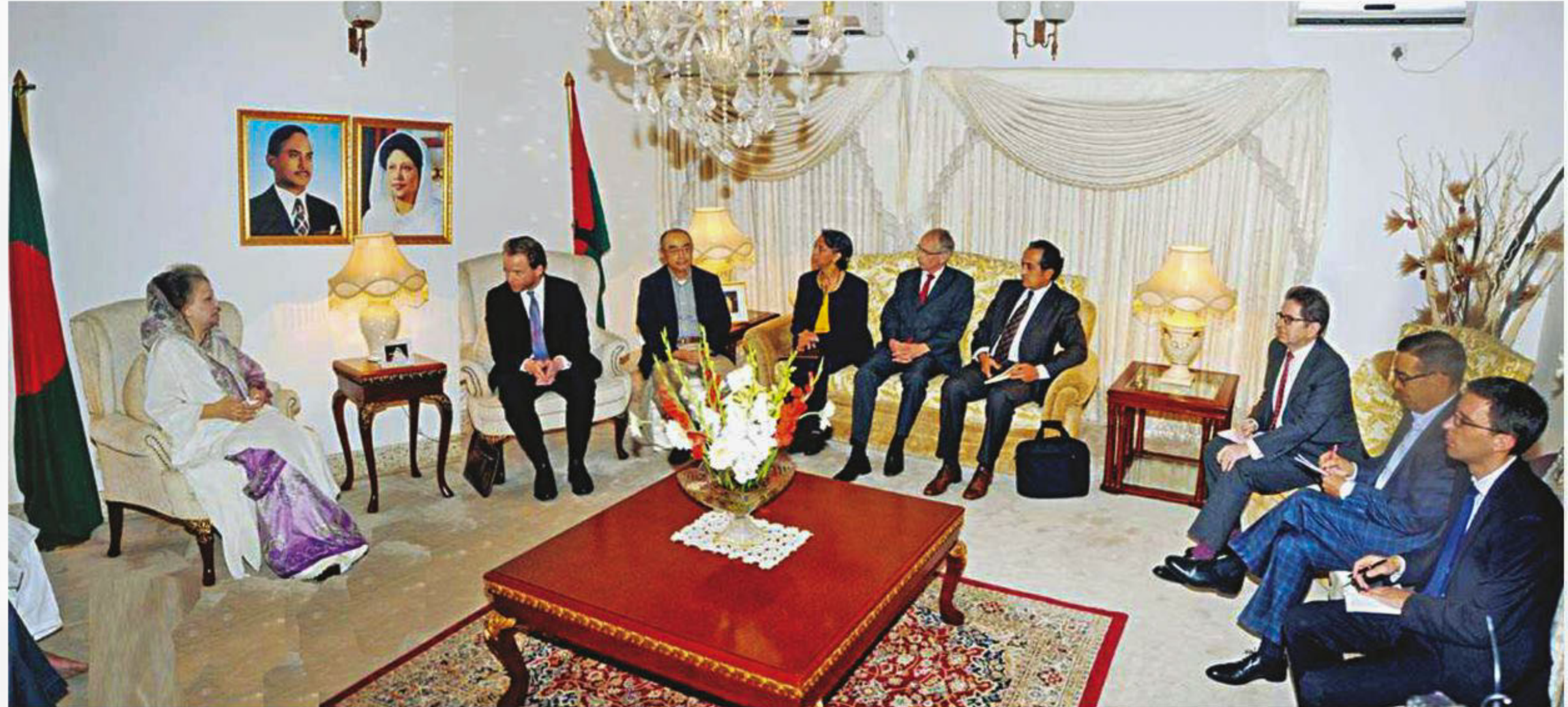
Over security concerns, the US embassy in Dhaka yesterday announced that services would not be available today at the American Centre, EMK Centre and American Corners in Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna and Rajshahi.

In Dhaka, the embassy will limit its operations to essential services only, according to a notice on the embassy's Facebook page.

"All visa and consular appointments for March 4 have been cancelled. Clients who had March 4 appointments are advised to check their email for further instructions," said the notice.

The embassy expects to resume normal operations tomorrow.

Asked about the unscheduled closure, embassy Spokesperson Monica L Shie said, "Operations will be limited due to security concerns."



Some foreign diplomats called on BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office in the city yesterday evening.

PHOTO: BNP

## FBI team likely to arrive this week

FROM PAGE 1

responsibility of her going back to the United States.

"Her health improved further," he told The Daily Star, while Square Hospital officials said they released Bonya early yesterday.

Talking to reporters about the investigation yesterday, Monirul Islam, joint commissioner of DMP, said FBI officials might come this week.

The official added a religious fanatic outfit might be involved in the Thursday night's hacking of the couple on Dhaka University campus.

Asked about Ansarullah Bangla 7, which claimed responsibility of the killing on Twitter, he said they were still looking into it.

Police sources said more suspected killers are expected to be arrested soon

as investigators are conducting drives in Dhaka and elsewhere.

State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan, talking to reporters at his secretariat office yesterday, said one more suspect was arrested by detectives but he did not give any details.

FARABI ON REMAND

Shafiur Rahman Farabi, a key suspect arrested on Monday, was placed on a 10-day remand yesterday.

Metropolitan Magistrate Md Rezaul Islam of Dhaka passed the order after Fazlur Rahman, a Detective Branch inspector and investigation officer of the case, produced him before the court with a 10-day remand prayer.

In the prayer, the officer said Farabi's comments incited the killing.

The arrested youth needs to be remanded to know the whereabouts of

those who executed the murder and to recover the weapons the killers used, he added.

Farabi, who had issued repeated death threats to Avijit, was held by the Rapid Action Battalion at Jatrabari, Rab officials said.

No lawyer was defending Farabi, a 29-year-old who was detained twice before -- for vandalism at Chittagong University in 2010, and in 2013 for issuing death threat to the imam who conducted namaz-e-janaza of slain blogger Rajib Haider.

Joint Commissioner Monirul said they are yet to find Farabi's direct involvement in the killing, but undoubtedly he was the instigator.

"We will get crucial information about the killing once Farabi is extensively interrogated," he said.

## Not just a PM

FROM PAGE 1

Some of her opponents, mostly pro-Jamaat politicians and intellectuals, saw motives behind that visit. They tried to say, directly and indirectly, that there was a political equation in the visit because Rajib, killed on February 15, 2013, was an activist of Shahbagh movement, the unprecedented youth uprising that took off on February 5 that year. The prime minister, her entire cabinet and the ruling party had thrown their weight behind the movement, which soon gained much popularity at home and abroad.

Claims of politicking behind Hasina's visit, however, did not appear to have much currency.

The visit was inspiring to Rajib's family, friends, and fellow bloggers. It was also something of significance to those

who had long been fighting religious fundamentalism. During her meeting with Rajib's mother, Hasina boldly said that Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir have no right to do politics in Bangladesh, as the organisations believe in terrorism, not democracy. She also said she would do everything necessary to tackle the scourge of extremism. She said so because fanatics were blamed for the killing.

She had indeed offered some ray of hope on a day that was full of despair stemming from the brutal killing overnight.

Fast forward to the present, over two years after Rajib's murder, a lot has happened in the meantime. We have seen moments of gloom -- rise of Hefajat, Jamaat's mayhem, split in the

Gonojagoron Mancha, the government's distancing itself from the Shahbagh movement, and of course wanton violence and killings in the name of enforcing blockade and hartal.

And a few days ago, we lost another blogger, Avijit Roy, and this time too fingers were pointed at fanatics.

But this time Sheikh Hasina was not yet seen with Prof Ajoy Roy, father of Avijit. We also haven't seen any statement or reaction from her.

She must have been busy for obvious reasons. We don't want to believe that the images -- face of the grief-stricken father, Avijit's wife Bonya bodied but still standing, Avijit's lifeless body in a pool of blood -- haven't moved her.

We don't want to believe that this time she is just a prime minister.