

Kerry calls Hasina

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continue with the fight against global extremism.

Obama yesterday strongly condemned the dastardly terrorist attack on a Gulshan cafe in Dhaka, saying the United States is ready to provide any assistance to Bangladesh in rooting out terrorism and militancy, reports BSS.

"US Secretary of State John Kerry conveyed this to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina when he talked to her over the phone this [yesterday] evening," PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told BSS.

On behalf of the US president, Kerry said Obama strongly denounced the Friday night's terrorist attack on Holey Artisan Bakery restaurant in Gulshan and expressed sympathy to the family members of those killed and injured in the attack.

In reply, Hasina thanked both the US president and the secretary of state and said the United States could help Bangladesh by providing investigative information.

She told Kerry that her government has formed a "counter-terrorism unit" for the police to fight terrorism and militancy.

The premier also extended her thanks to Obama for always standing by Bangladesh.

British Prime Minister David Cameron said the scale and nature of the terrorist attack is unprecedented in Bangladesh and called for close cooperation in the fight against terrorism and extremism, and in addressing the root causes.

He said the attack represents a dramatic confirmation of the threat that extremism and international terrorism now pose to all countries which reject intolerance and stand for

democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

In a letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on July 2 after the attack, Cameron reiterated his personal commitment to standing by Hasina in her fight against terrorism.

Mentioning his discussion when they met in Japan in May, he said, "As a close friend of Bangladesh, the UK is committed to working with you, and stand ready to discuss any assistance that the UK may be able to provide."

Expressing deep shock, the British premier said his thoughts are with the victims and their families, including the families of the brave policemen who died trying to defend those caught up in the attack, according to the letter, a copy of which The Daily Star has obtained.

"I also share the pain of the people of Bangladesh at this difficult time. Nothing can justify such an attack on innocent people going about their daily lives," he said.

Cameron said in this holy month of Ramadan, as families are preparing to come together to celebrate Eid, all should strengthen resolve to proclaim Islam as a religion of peace and to reject those who seek to justify violence in its name.

The Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Russian Federation, in a statement said: "We are indignant at this yet another inhuman terrorist attack, which has no justification. We express our sincere condolences to the relatives of those killed and wish the injured quickest recovery."

"What happened in Dhaka once again proves that it is necessary to immediately combine efforts of all the

global community to fight international terrorism," it added.

Pakistan also condemned the terrorist attack in Dhaka that has led to the loss of lives and injuries to many innocent people, says a press release of the country's foreign affairs ministry.

The government and the people of Pakistan extend their heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and the brotherly people and the government of Bangladesh over the loss of innocent lives and wish the injured early recovery.

Pakistan stands in solidarity with the brotherly people of Bangladesh and is confident that the government of Bangladesh will effectively counter this cowardly attack.

Donald Tusk, president of European Council, in a statement condemned the brutal attack in Dhaka "in the strongest terms" and extended his condolences to the families and relatives of all the victims.

"The fight against terrorism will continue unabated. The European Union stands united against all forms of extremism. These attacks must not be allowed to undermine our common values," the statement reads.

In a joint statement, British High Commissioner Alison Blake, acting High Commissioner Mark Clayton and the staff of the British High Commission in Dhaka said the attack at Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka was a senseless act of terror against innocent people living and working in Bangladesh.

Earlier, UN Security Council, top UN officials, Japan and Italian prime minister issued similar statements condemning the attacks that claimed 22 people, including nine Italians, seven Japanese, one Indian and five

Back from the jaws

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roof and managed to escape.

However, nine staff members hid themselves in a washroom on the ground floor and closed the door from inside. They were suffocating inside as the washroom was too small for nine adults, one of the nine staff told this correspondent at his Shahjahanpur home in the city yesterday.

"We were about to die, but we had nothing to do. We could sense that killing was going on. There were cries, screams and loud bangs," said the staff.

The nine were praying the gunmen would leave the eatery.

DOOR OPENS
The gunmen were searching for people in each and every corner of the bakery. Around 2:30am on Saturday, they knocked on the door of the washroom.

"We didn't open the door immediately, but they shouted at us to come out or face death," the staff added.

Soon they opened the door and saw the young gunmen in jeans and T-shirts.

"We were terribly frightened when we saw the gunmen. As an attacker pointed his gun at pizza chef Saiful Islam, we thought we were gone," said the staff.

"Who are you? Are you Bangalee Muslims?" questioned one of the gunmen.

They nodded and said they were restaurant employees.

The terrorists said they were not out to kill Bangalees or Muslims but the Jews and the Nasaras.

The staff members at that time saw several blood stained bodies lying on the restaurant floor.

Twenty civilians -- nine Italians, seven Japanese, two Bangladeshis, a Bangladesh-born American and an Indian -- were killed on that night.

The gunmen then ordered the nine to enter the toilet again. They locked the door from outside.

The staff were somewhat relieved thinking that they would not be killed.

TURN OF EVENTS
"It was around 6:30am. We could not tolerate the suffocation. We broke the shower pipe and hit the door with it to break open the door," said the staff.

Seeing this, the militants rushed there and angrily asked the staff why they broke the door open.

"We said we were about to be suffocated," the employee added.

The armed men then enquired the staff about fasting. The staff told them that they drank water for sehri.

The militants then recited verses from the holy Quran and explained their meanings and advised them to pray and fast regularly as per Islamic rule, according to the staff.

The gunmen said they were facing death as they already killed "Jews and Nasaras".

The staff had been with the militants until around 7:40am when a commando operation began to free the hostages.

Before letting the nine go, the gunmen hugged them and said: "We'll see you in heaven."

The staff members soon came out of the restaurant. Some army men cordoned them off to the gate before handing them over to police.

"We had a new life," said the staff.

Meanwhile, in an interview with Argentine TV channel C5N, Argentine Diego Rossini yesterday described how he survived the deadly attack.

A chef at the restaurant, Rossi said he was still in shock.

He said the attackers were "very well prepared with bombs and guns".

"I can't still believe this happened. It was like a movie. They pointed their guns at me and I could hear shots passing by. I was very afraid like never before in my life."

Prof Yunus

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military or terrorist, can no longer be contained in one country or region. We are seeing this everyday, and must wake up to the fact that violence in one place breeds violence even in remotest places of the world."

He also said, "I plead to the powerful nations please overcome differences among yourselves to bring peace in the Middle East so we have better chances of peace in our cities and communities around the world. I urge the civil society leaders to bring pressure on relevant parties and super-powers to stop violence and to go to the negotiating tables to bring immediate peace in the Middle East."

Roadside shops

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Marzina, a housewife, was looking for a dress at the shops near the Tejgaon College for her four-year-old daughter.

"The price is low, but I do not know whether I have to gamble on the quality," she said.

The vendors said they are hoping to get more customers on chand raat (the night before Eid) as people like rickshaw-pullers, cobblers, transport workers, street vendors and day labourers wait till that night to save up enough money.

Whatever the status of the shops, many shoppers come and shop happily. "We come here as we get many things at an affordable price," said Solaiman, a customer.

UN chief

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the UN is prepared to assist in efforts to prevent violent extremism in all its forms, the spokesperson said.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) members have also condemned the heinous and cowardly attack.

They expressed their deep sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims, to the people and the government of Bangladesh, as well as the people and the governments of foreign victims, and they wished speedy and full recovery to those who were injured.

The members reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.

They stressed the need for taking measures to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism, terrorist organisations and individual terrorists, in accordance with resolutions 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015).

The UNSC members also underlined the need for bringing perpetra-

tors, organisers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice. They stressed that those responsible for these killings should be held accountable, and urged all states, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with all relevant authorities in this regard.

The UNSC members reiterated that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of its motivation and wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed, and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization, or ethnic group.

They reaffirmed the need for all states to combat by all means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and other obligations under international law, including international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

Five still in DB custody

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The man told investigators that he used to lead prayers for drivers working at a building near the Holey Artisan Bakery. Investigators were verifying the claim.

Another suspect was from Jaldhaka of Nilphamari, said the official, adding that he gave investigators nothing but his name during the interrogation, leading to suspicion.

Apart from the five, another man, who was released, has been now under the investigators' watch.

The man, who was seen talking to one of the attackers in a video that emerged online, was around 45 and a Bangladesh born UK citizen.

He returned home one and a half years ago, after staying in the UK for about 20 years.

Since then, he has been teaching at the private university where some one of the attackers reportedly studied.

He had gone to the restaurant with his family members.

The DB official also said five of the attackers killed in the "Operation Thunderbolt" were members of the suicide squad of the banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh.

He said they had information that JMB has seven to eight suicide squad members and two of them had already been killed.

The Daily Star could not independently verify the claims.

Earlier, 22 of the 27 rescued or detained from the Gulshan cafe were released and their families communicated with them after a long wait.

They were taken to the DB office on Saturday morning.

Before their release, their family members passed anxious hours.

A mother of one of them said, "The officers told us that they need to complete some formalities with them. They also told us not to be worried as they will send our family members back home by their vehicles."

"Haven't they completed the formalities even in the last 33 hours?" she asked.

The Daily Star is withholding their names for security reasons.

The mother said her son along with his wife and their children -- one is 13 and another eight -- went to the upscale restaurant to celebrate his daughter's birthday.

Their world turned upside down when the news of holding their son hostage circulated. The parents waited anxiously till morning beside the police cordon outside the restaurant.

As the army-led commando operation came to an end around 8:30am on Saturday, the four came out of the restaurant and reunited with their family. Minutes later, they were taken to the DB office to give their accounts, said the father of the rescued son.

Meanwhile, the bodies of the 20 victims are expected to be taken to the Army Stadium today.

Namaz-e-janaza

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to pay tributes to the victims at 10:00am.

The bodies of the three Bangladeshis will be handed over to their families and the 17 bodies of the foreign nationals to the representatives of the governments of Japan and Italy, sources said.

Home-goers

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Faraz was killed on Friday night when terrorists attacked the Holey Artisan Bakery and Restaurant in the city.

The Department of Shipping (DoS) is responsible to issue fitness certificates and fix passenger-carrying capacity of the vessels, while the BIWTA is responsible to check plying of unfit vessels and overloading.

Talking to The Daily Star, DoS Chief Engineer Fakhruddin Islam said carrying double passengers than its capacity imposes a high risk to the passengers. It may cause a major disaster anytime.

BIWTA Chairman Mohammad Mozammel Haque, however, claimed they have taken all necessary steps to check overloading.

Speaking anonymously, staff of more than a dozen launches said eid holiday is the prime time for their business. If they carry just equal number of passengers of their capacity, they would end up earning very poor profit.

The most alarming situation is that the launch operators think carrying double passengers of the capacity is not risky at all.

"We can understand the weather, water flow of the Padma and balance of the vessel. We think it would not be a problem if we carry some extra passengers," said a crewmember of a launch asking not to be identified.

However, most of the passengers, who were crossing the Padma through speedboats, were seen wearing lifejackets.

On average, 250 people are killed every year in accidents in the waterways across the country, said National Committee to Protect Shipping, Roads and Railways (NCPSSR) that works for passengers' safety.

HIGHWAYS AND FERRIES
On the third day of the nine-day eid holiday, holidaymakers yesterday also enjoyed almost hassle-free journeys as no major traffic gridlock was reported.

Although there was a huge rush of vehicles, the authorities concerned smoothly managed the ferry services on the Mawa and Paturia ghats.

Japan, Italy send in top officials

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Airport at 9:30am yesterday, carrying a five-member high profile Italian delegation.

The team would meet high government officials, visit the spot in Gulshan diplomatic zone and take back the bodies of nine Italian citizens who were killed in the attack on Holey Artisan Bakery in the city on Friday.

An Air Self-Defense Force jet of Japan arrived in Dhaka last night carrying 18 relatives of the victims, members of the International Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Collection Unit, emergency response team of the foreign ministry, members of the Consular Affairs Bureau of Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica), press relations experts and medical officers.

Meanwhile, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday expressed anger at the terrorist attack in Dhaka that claimed the lives of seven Japanese volunteers working on a government development project.

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said, "Confronted with the madness of those who want to undo the Italian way of life, Italians have been struck but not broken."

An Indian diplomat said his country was also quite concerned about Friday's attack as no such terrorist attack took place in Bangladesh before. India is extremely pained to share that the terrorists killed 19-year-old Tarishi Jain, who was taken hostage during the attack, he added.

The killing of nine Italian, seven Japanese, one Indian and a US citizen has raised concern among foreign governments about the danger of violent attacks on their citizens in Bangladesh. The incident also sparked a debate over whether the Islamic State or other radical Islamist groups were behind such attacks.

Diplomatic sources said the Italian and Japanese people were deeply shocked and saddened by the loss of lives in Bangladesh. The foreign victims wanted to work and help the socio-economic development of Bangladesh.

They said two innocent people -- Italian Cesare Tavella and Japanese Kunio Hoshi -- were killed in Bangladesh last year. Tavella was the local project manager of a Netherlands-based global development agency and Hoshi was working on advanced farming techniques.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Bangladeshi diplomats in Rome and Tokyo missions said government officials and many citizens of those countries asked them whether their nationals were at all safe in Bangladesh.

The seven Japanese were part of a group of eight people working with Jica to ease the heavy traffic in Dhaka, a city of around 1.5 crore people.

"Engineers who strived for the development of Bangladesh were involved in the incident, and I feel strong resentment," Jica chief Shinichi

Kitaoka said in Tokyo yesterday.

They were identified through photographs and belongings, said Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga.

The eighth person in the Jica group is Tamaoki Watanabe, an Almec employee. He was rescued after being shot in the face.

Sources said officials from the Japanese embassy in Dhaka talked to Watanabe at the hospital where he has been undergoing treatment. His injuries were said to be not life-threatening.

The Japanese have been increasingly becoming concerned as their citizens are falling victims to terrorist attacks in different parts of the world. As a result, the Japanese government is under pressure at home for ensuring safety of Japanese citizens abroad, according to diplomatic sources.

Since 2001, a good number of Japanese citizens became victims of major terrorist attacks. Over 50 Japanese were killed, including 24 in the al-Qaeda terrorist attack on twin towers in New York on September 11, 2001, 10 in Algeria in January 2013 and the latest seven in Bangladesh. Japanese citizens were also killed in Indonesia, India, Iraq and Tunisia.

"We intend to continue to take all possible preparations to ensure the safety of Japanese citizens both at home and abroad...we intend to work in cooperation with the international community in order to root out terrorism," Japanese PM Shinzo Abe said

Great soul

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As they slowly overcome the shock, many also started to contemplate whether it is the beginning of an end.

But the same incident also presented a beacon of hope: Faraz Ayaz Hossain.

It is pronounced in unspoken words that there is something to look forward to.

Faraz went to the restaurant with two of his high-school friends, Abinta Kabir, a US citizen of Bangladeshi origin and also a student of Emory University in Atlanta as him, and Tarishi Jain, an Indian national and a student of the University of California, Berkeley.

When the captors came to know about his friends' citizenship they refused to release them. They however allowed Faraz to go.

He had the opportunity to leave his friends behind and return to safety like many would have done in times of danger, but he chose greatness and declined to depart alone.

The former student of Sir John Wilson School and American International School in Dhaka was among the 20 people who were killed in the hands of militants at the restaurant.

Rezaul Karim, whose son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren were taken hostage but were later freed, told The Daily Star yesterday: "My daughter-in-law told me that she heard a Bangladeshi youth refused to leave the restaurant when the militants offered to free him but not his two other friends."

Only 20 years of age, Faraz was gallant, conscientious, well-mannered and innocent. He went to study abroad but his heart remained with Bangladesh.

He was getting ready to serve the country by following the examples of

his father, mother and grandparents, who have been doing the same through setting up industries and creating jobs for decades.

When the poisonous seed of radicalism is being sown in the hearts of many youths, Faraz was a different soul.

He taught Bangladesh not to give up even in times of danger as there are many like him who are very tender in age but possess immense courage, and the country can count on them.

By sacrificing his life, Faraz has shown the power of love for others and how it makes people indomitable.

Mohammad Isam, a Dhaka-based journalist working for a foreign media outlet, wrote on his Facebook page: "Faraz, all we can say is thank you. But we should not just mourn your passing away."

"We must all extend ourselves like you did. You are one of us. We are sorry that we failed you because till that last moment, you didn't fail us, humans and Bangladeshis."

Classmates of Faraz and Abinta remembered them as genuine and intelligent people who had no enemies.

Kereisha Harrell, a classmate, says she worked with Faraz and Abinta on a committee at Emory's Oxford College that planned school-wide events. She says both were part of an honour society recognising academic achievement.

"We are honestly shocked," she said, according to Associated Press.

"A lot of us are not ready to talk about it. But we were a family. It hit us hard. There are a lot of people very upset. We're just trying to support each other through this."

In a statement, Emory University said Abinta was a rising sophomore at Emory's Oxford College and Faraz was a graduate of Oxford College and a

student at the university's Goizueta Business School.

"The Emory community mourns this tragic and senseless loss of two members of our university family. Our thoughts and prayers go out on behalf of Faraz and Abinta and their families and friends for strength and peace at this unspeakably sad time."

Nearly 120 killed

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Another video posted on social media showed a large blaze in the main street of Karrada, a largely Shia district with a small Christian community and a few Sunni mosques.

Reuters TV footage taken in the morning showed at least four buildings severely damaged or partly collapsed, including a shopping mall believed to be the target, and gutted cars scattered all around.

The toll climbed during the day as rescuers pulled out more bodies from under the rubble and people succumbed from their injuries.

Comments posted on social media accused security forces of continuing to use fake bomb detectors at checkpoints filtering traffic in Baghdad, five years after the scandal broke out about a device commonly known as the 'magic wand'.

A police officer in Baghdad confirmed these hand-held ADE 651 detectors were still in use. They were sold to Iraq and other nations by a British businessman who was jailed for 10 years in 2013 in the United Kingdom for endangering lives for profit.

AL SHAAB ATTACK
In a second attack, a roadside explosive device also blew up around midnight in a market in al-Shaab, a Shia district in the north of the capital, killing at least two people, police and medical sources said.