

Stray bullet left him in tragedy

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Shuvodev Bhowmik hardly talks and she always has the photo of his mother in his hands. His visiting relatives only get a blank stare from the 12-year-old. "Sometimes he bursts into tears after a long stare at the photograph. We cannot bear it and we have nothing to console him with," said his 29-year-old step-brother Basudev Bhowmik.

Shuvodev's mother Jharna Rani Bhowmik was one of the four people killed in the militant attack on the nation's largest Eid congregation at Sholakia in Kishoreganj on Thursday.

A stray bullet of the gunfight between the attackers and police came through her kitchen window and hit her on the forehead instantly killing the 40-year-old Hindu woman.

Eid might not be their religious festival but it was always special for the family as it was the time everyone was home for the holidays. Jharna was cooking something special for the family then. She had already prepared vermicelli, considered a must at homes during Eid.

"My mother used to make the environment festive when I returned from Dhaka during the holidays as it was an opportunity to unite all four of our family. Especially during big religious festivals, her happiness knew no bounds," said Basudev about his step

mother. "I lost my mother in 1995 when I was a student of class-VII and my father married her but she immediately became very close to me and took away all my sorrows with her motherly affection," said a sobbing Basudev, now a teacher of Tejgaon Women's College in Dhaka.

"Now I am motherless for the second time ... She was persuading me to get married soon and was looking for a suitable bride for me ...," he said.

His father Gourango Nath Bhowmik said, "It is not like she went outside. She was home and the window was closed. People are no longer safe even at home."

She was very happy as her elder son came home. She was cooking for her sons, said Dulal Chandra Bhowmik, brother of Gourango.

"She was a good soul. She never fought with anybody. She made a duck dish on Wednesday night and shared it with us," Dulal said.

It is very hard to accept that she died this way, said Madhab Gobinda Das, a neighbour of the Bhowmiks.

Family sources said the shradhya (a



Jharna Rani



A huge pile of garbage is left right beside the railway lines near Moghbazar level crossing in the capital. Locals have been using the railway land as a garbage disposal site. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

WAR IN SOUTH SUDAN Bangladeshi peacekeepers safe: ISPR

BSS, Dhaka

Amid the sporadic gunfights between army loyal to President Salva Kiir and supporters of Vice-President Riek Machar in South Sudanese capital Juba, United Nations peacekeepers from Bangladesh posted in the African nation are safe and secured, an ISPR release said yesterday.

According to the sources, the two forces engaged in fierce gunfight near Presidential Palace and United Nations Camp on July 8, resulting in the deaths of around 150 people.

Occasional gunfights have been reported yesterday too in the suburban Jebel area.

Speaking yesterday afternoon, Information Minister Michael Makuei blamed the former rebels for the fighting and insisted the government was "in full control of Juba" even as shooting could be heard in parts of the city.

Makuei said President Salva Kiir would call for a ceasefire later in the day. "We are expecting his Excellency the president will issue a unilateral ceasefire, binding on his forces. We hope the First Vice President Riek

Missing youths under spotlight

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The police HQ also ordered the force to beef up security across the country to prevent possible militant attacks, said a top police official.

At the meeting, the cabinet committee also decided to ask all private universities in Gulshan, Baridhara and Uttara to inform the home ministry immediately about any missing students.

Besides, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid asked the authorities of all educational institutions in the country yesterday to report to his ministry about any students absent from the institutions for more than 10 days.

Talking to reporters at the secretariat, he said he would discuss with the authorities the steps to be taken to check militancy.

Meanwhile, authorities of North South University (NSU) recommended cancellation of studentship of any student found absent without valid reasons for one semester, instead of two semesters as in the past.

A final decision, however, will be made after the higher authorities approved it, Belal Ahmed, deputy director (public relations) of NSU, told The Daily Star.

Following some recent attacks, it emerged that a number of the attackers were current and former students of

the university.

As part of the government's anti-terror campaign, the home ministry would hold talks with the owners, teachers and student representatives of all private universities in the capital.

The four-hour cabinet committee body chaired by Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu also decided to shut all unauthorised educational institutions and business establishments in Gulshan area.

"We have decided to enhance capabilities of police and intelligence agencies," Amu told reporters after the meeting at the home ministry.

Sermons during Friday Juma prayers at all mosques will be monitored to see if imams misinterpret Islam and encourage militancy in any ways.

At the meeting, representatives from Armed Forces Division recommended forming a special unit comprising law enforcement agencies, fire brigade as well as members from the forces to tackle attacks, especially like the one on the Gulshan café. But the meeting did not make any decision in this regard, sources said.

One minister pointed to intelligence failures for the Gulshan and Sholakia attacks.

The July 1 attack on the upscale restaurant in the high security diplomatic zone is the worst terrorist attack in the country, which came after three

years' of targeted killings of writers, bloggers, freethinkers, university professors, foreigners, gay rights activists and members of minority communities, including Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and Shias.

Terror groups Islamic State and Ansar-Al-Islam claimed credit for many of these past attacks, but the government maintains that IS has no presence in the country.

Within hours of the Gulshan attack, IS claimed its operatives killed 20 hostages, 17 of them foreigners, and two police officers. Military commandos later stormed the café and killed "six attackers" as well as captured one alleged attacker.

But no group has yet claimed responsibility for the Sholakia attack on the Eid Day. Two policemen and a woman from a nearby home were killed during the attack. Police later shot dead one alleged attacker and detained two others.

However, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said primary investigation into the two incidents found JMB men were involved in the attacks.

"Homegrown militants are responsible for those attacks. Homegrown militants are trying to connect with IS through social media. But IS has no organisational base here," he told The Daily Star after the meeting.

Contacted police officials in

Chittagong, Rangpur, Tangail and Bogra said they were yet to make a full list of the missing youths.

Various intelligence agencies have started gathering information about such youths based on the general diaries filed with the police, said officers-in-charge of several police stations in the capital.

However, it may be mentioned that over the past few years, dozens of families across the country filed general diaries, claiming their relatives were picked up by members of law enforcers. Many of these victims of forced disappearance remain missing as well.

Also, many police officials said they were facing difficulties in collecting information about youths as many had gone into hiding to avoid arrest in scores of "political cases".

Meanwhile, Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday urged all the judges to be more rigid in granting bail to the accused detained in terror cases.

"I appeal to the judges to be stricter in granting bail to those arrested in militancy-related cases, considering the responsibilities of the judiciary and the country's law and order," the minister said at a programme in the capital yesterday.

The government has instructed the prosecution to place strong arguments before the court against bail petitions of militant suspects, he said.

Iraq war

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motion declaring Tony Blair guilty of "contempt", following the release of the Chilcot Report.

The motion, set to be tabled by outspoken Conservative MP David Davis, alleges that the former prime minister deceived the House of Commons while making the case for Iraq.

The Labour leader, who this week apologised on behalf of his party for the war despite being having long personally opposed it, said he would "probably" back the motion when asked.

"I urge colleagues to read the Butler Report and the Chilcot Report about the way Parliament was denied the information it should have had, the way there was lack of preparations for the conflict's aftermath, and the way in which assertions of weapons of mass destruction [were made]," he told BBC One's Andrew Marr Show.

"Parliament must hold to account, including Tony Blair, those who took us into this particular war. That is surely how a parliamentary democracy works. I haven't seen [the motion] yet, but I think I probably would [back it]."

The motion is likely to be debated in the next few weeks if it is accepted by the Speaker.

PM vows to be as tough Dhaka to weigh all aspects before

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media for not appreciating the government for its successful commando operation in the Gulshan café, the PM said they are rather criticising the government.

She said the commandos from the army, navy and air force personnel, and police, BGB, Rab and other law enforcement agencies promptly launched the operation at Holey Artisan Bakery and rescued 13 people, including foreigners.

She congratulated all concerned for carrying out the operation successfully.

Describing the countrymen as liberal-minded, the premier said the people of all faiths are living in the country in harmony.

"What type of human beings are they?" she said of those who launched the dastardly attacks on the Gulshan café and near the Sholakia Eidgah in Kishoreganj by skipping Esha, Tarabih and Eid prayers.

Later, Hasina alleged that it was the BNP-Jamaat alliance that had sowed the seeds of terrorism and militancy in the country.

She said the "BNP-Jamaat terrorists" killed 24 Awami League leaders and activists by carrying out a grenade attack on Bangabandhu Avenue several years ago.

"Such brutal attack was made on me though I was a former prime minister and the leader of the opposition," she said.

"They were involved in the killing of SAMS Kibria and Ahsanullah Master as well as synchronised bomb blasts that took place at 500 places across the country during their misrule," she said.

At the programme, the PM also highlighted various government successes in the socioeconomic sector.

She said those achievements have been possible due to the government's policy and determination and asked the officials concerned to complete the work of the projects being implemented under the PMO at a faster pace.

Advisers to the PM, and the princi-

pal's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters after the meeting at the PMO.

Hasina said she always relies on the people and is working having their trust in her.

"That's why the spirit of the Liberation War could not be destroyed and the trial of war criminals could not be stopped despite unleashing terrorism and militancy as the people are always against the twin monsters."

She urged the countrymen to keep a constant vigilance to check militancy and terrorism.

"We will have to make people aware of militancy and terrorism and take the country forward by facing these social menaces," she said.

The PM called upon all to form committees at district, upazila and union levels to resist terrorism and militancy. "Sermons against terrorism and militancy will have to be delivered at the mosques regularly."

Referring to the Gulshan café attack, she said such incidents happen even in developed countries as it (terrorism) is now a global problem.

Hasina said these incidents are being perpetrated to tarnish the image of Bangladesh at a time when the country is marching forward in every sector.

Some elements are killing people by summoning the path of Islam. "We did not think that some educated people would be fanatics," she said.

The premier then called upon the teachers and guardians to bring to the notice of the authorities concerned if any student remained missing.

She also said the international community will have to be more vocal against terrorism and militancy.

Later on, she called for finding out the teachers who are patronising militancy in the country.

Taking a swipe at a section of the

Bangladesh's bilateral relations with the United States and the security situation.

The two sides discussed training of law enforcers and new strategies to counter terrorism, he said.

There had been discussions on technical support in the past. "Their expert teams are continuing to help Bangladesh. We discussed [this time] how these efforts can be intensified," said the foreign secretary.

Shahidul said Biswal had offered the US expertise that "we are already taking in many ways" in combating terrorism.

Biswal is expected to hold another round of meetings with top leaders today, including Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her International Affairs Adviser Dr Gowher Rizvi, and the business community.

Earlier, she visited Dhaka on May 5-6 after the brutal murder of USAID staff Xulhaz Mannan in Dhaka.

US-INDIA MEETING

Nisha Desai Biswal and High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh Harsh Vardhan Shringla had a meeting at the residence of the US ambassador yesterday evening.

A highly-placed diplomatic source told The Daily Star that Biswal and Shringla discussed about the current security situation in Bangladesh following the July 1 and July 7 terror attacks in Dhaka and Kishoreganj.

"It was a very good meeting and both the countries are keen to support the government of Bangladesh in its fight against terrorism. So our objectives coincide," said an Indian diplomat, wishing not to be named.

"We believe the international community needs to come together in this common endeavour," he added.

The diplomat further said the United States, India and Bangladesh are the on the "same page" in fighting terrorism and violent extremism, but

India has different views on the Bangladesh situation which does not always match with that of the US. However, the common goal is curbing terrorism and extremism, he added.

Shringla and Biswal had met last in May in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, a diplomatic source told The Daily Star that both the US and Bangladesh are finding out new strategies for countering terrorism.

The US want to have an anti-terrorism deal with Bangladesh under which America will support expertise in building counterterrorism capabilities, latest tech-intelligence training, cyber security and learn to gather intelligence in a better way from the Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies to prevent future attacks.

Dhaka has taken the US proposal positively in accepting supports from the US and agreed to continue discussion on the deal, the source added.

BTRC to build

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At a meeting, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) decided to have a rapid action plan so that it could respond faster in critical situations and ensure cyber security.

The meeting also decided to block certain videos on YouTube and other platforms. It plans to have meetings with mobile operators in the coming weeks to make the process faster.

Earlier, the BTRC directed internet gateway operators to block video clips of the Gulshan café attack and the clip of three Bangladeshi youths threatening further attacks.

Before Eid, it had directed the internet gateway operators to block sermon videos of three local Islamic preachers.

In the meeting, BTRC officials discussed the challenges in blocking contents of a dynamic website.

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He was talking to the owners and executives of different private TV channels at the conference room of Press Institute of Bangladesh. The meeting was convened as the government high-ups were annoyed with a few TV channels over live broadcast of the July 1 Gulshan attack.

According to the cabinet committee's observations, the programme contents of Peace TV, in many cases, are inconsistent with the spirit of the holy Quran, Hadith, Sunnah, and also the constitution, culture and heritage of Bangladesh, Inu said.

"So the committee has decided to stop the broadcast of Peace TV."

ATTACKS AIMED AT TOPPLING GOVT

The information minister claimed that both the Gulshan and Sholakia attacks were carried out with the aim of toppling the government.

"Those two attacks were made as part of 'a mega plan' to topple the democratically elected Sheikh Hasina government."

Terming terrorism a global phenomenon, he said terrorists don't believe in the holy Quran or Islam and the centuries-old culture and heritage of Bangladesh. They are enemies of the country, humanity, religion and people.

Referring to CNN's live telecast of the Gulshan attack, Inu said the US broadcast network might have "an agenda" of its own, said meeting sources.

At the meeting, TV channel owners and top executives urged the minister to keep them updated on incidents such as the Gulshan attack.

They also requested the minister to make sure that the authorities concerned don't hold back any information on any incident, saying it may give birth to rumours that won't do any good to the government.

Noting that the country is now going through a very difficult time, Inu sought cooperation from the media to fight terrorism and urged all to remain alert.

Govt decides