



Bangabandhu's grandson Radwan Mujib Siddiq with US Secretary of State John Kerry at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on Dhanmondi Road-32 yesterday. Right, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, party Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, US Secretary of State John Kerry and US Ambassador Marcia Bernicat in a meeting at the US embassy yesterday.



PHOTO: BSS AND COURTESY OF BNP

Together, we fight terror

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step up efforts to fight extremist violence and protect and promote human rights amid increasing concern about terrorism.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali were very clear about their willingness to cooperate with the United States very closely in battling terrorism and violent extremism, he added.

In his speech at a mixed gathering after meetings with Hasina and Ali, Kerry said elements of Islamic State are "connected to some degree" with operatives in Bangladesh.

He said, "There is evidence that ISIL in Iraq and Syria has contacts with about eight different entities around the world, and one of them is in South Asia."

"They are connected to some degree with some of the operatives here and we made that very clear in our conversation. There was no argument about it."

Bangladesh government has all along maintained that there is no organisational presence of Islamic State in the country and the recent terrorist attacks here are acts of home-grown militants.

However, a number of such attacks have reportedly been claimed by IS.

Replying to a query on Bangladesh government's stance on these attacks, Kerry said when the government says it's "home-grown" it's not a foreign fighter who's coming in to do it.

"It's somebody here who's chosen to do it. But that doesn't mean it wasn't influenced by elsewhere -- on the internet, social media, and so forth."

The top US diplomat arrived here from Geneva yesterday morning as Foreign Minister Ali received him at the VVIP terminal of the airport with a flower bouquet.

Kerry left Dhaka for New Delhi around 5:30pm, wrapping up his whirlwind visit. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam saw him off at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

After Hasina's meeting with Kerry, her Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told reporters that the US secretary of state expressed the United States' eagerness to work closely with Bangladesh's intelligence agencies.

During the hour-long meeting with the PM, the US secretary of state put emphasis on exchanging information

with Bangladesh. He mentioned the US has some experts who can help fight violent extremism.

Hasina said Bangladesh wants to have information from the US as the country is advanced in technology. "If you give us information, it will be helpful for us to hunt down terrorists," Ihsanul quoted the PM as saying.

Kerry also said the non-Syrian terrorists of the IS were returning to their homelands after facing defeat in the battlefield.

When the PM wanted to know about the sources of funds and arms of the IS, Kerry said the IS terrorists get money by selling oil from the areas which have been captured by them. "They also impose higher tax on people in invaded areas."

Regarding the recent trend of terrorism, Hasina said it was surprising that the children of well-off families were getting involved in such activities.

"They've everything ... these youths are getting involved in such activities as their parents are not giving proper attention to them," she said.

Kerry responded saying children are playing games containing themes of violence when their parents are out of the house, reports UNB.

Later, addressing the gathering of civil society representatives, youngsters, government officials, media persons and labour leaders at the EMK Centre in Dhanmondi, the US secretary of state said terrorist threats to any society can quickly become a threat to all.

"For each of these reasons, the United States works closely with Bangladesh and with partners on every continent to defeat vicious terrorist networks -- particularly those of Daesh [Islamic State] and al-Qaeda."

On the July 1 Gulshan cafe attack, in which 22 people including 17 foreigners were killed, the top US diplomat said the attack "was an outrage clearly designed to divide Bangladesh, designed to try to cut off this welcoming society from the outside world".

"These heinous acts of violence and too many others worldwide are a stark, painful reminder that those who aid terrorist groups or perpetrate these acts have no respect for national boundaries, no concern for the rights of others, no regard for the rule of law."

He said dozens of smaller-scale

attacks have been carried out during the past several years, often directed at members of religious minorities, foreigners, bloggers, and security officials.

Kerry described the fight against violent extremism as one of the world's paramount challenges -- one that will take a generation or more to resolve.

"No country is immune from terrorism, and no one of us can win this fight without support from others. We have to stand together -- and the United States is standing with Bangladesh in this fight."

Kerry said when individuals can address their grievances, when civil society is allowed to flourish, when people can participate freely in public debate and are therefore less vulnerable to subversion -- they have a stake in building their society, not being inspired to use violence to tear their communities down.

He renewed the sense of faith in the future of the relationship between two countries.

Referring to US-Bangladesh cooperation, Kerry said a longstanding counterterrorism dialogue has intensified in recent months and work with the Bangladeshi police and military will continue with an eye toward further cooperation.

"And we talked about all aspects of it including the importance of inclusivity, working with people, making sure that you protect the democratic process even as you come down tough on the perpetrators themselves. We think there is much we can do to cooperate in that regard," he said while responding to a question.

Kerry laid emphasis on fighting terrorism from a number of fronts that include financing front, communication front, and prevention front. "No nation can succeed without information sharing and communication."

In his 35-minute speech, beginning at 3:15pm, Kerry said security and stronger civil society are essentials to ensure continuation of development.

And he had a very broad discussion on security cooperation, climate change and workers right and regional and global issues.

There may be no single answer to the question of why people become terrorists, Kerry said, adding that democracy still provides the "most resilient and

reliable platform" they have for preventing and responding to violent extremism.

Kerry also urged the Bangladesh government to resist the temptation to shut down public debate or stifle opposition groups as a way to combat the threat.

"Democracy still provides the most resilient and reliable platform we have for preventing and responding to violent extremism ... to defeat terrorists, we must uphold, not betray, the democratic principles we cherish and they abhor," he said.

TALKS FRUITFUL: FM

Foreign Minister Ali said Bangladesh and the United States held open and fruitful talks encompassing issues of bilateral ties and cooperation in areas including militancy and trade as Kerry met senior Bangladesh ministers.

"We had a very open discussion on issues of Bangladesh-US relations ... it was a fruitful discussion," Ali told a media briefing along with the Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, emerging from the talks with Kerry at the state guest house Padma.

He said the issues of cooperation in combating terrorism and militancy largely dominated the talks. But he declined to elaborate, saying this was not the right time.

Ali, however, said Kerry was very appreciative of Bangladesh's ongoing fight against militancy and terrorism with particular mention of the PM's "zero tolerance policy" in this regard.

"Kerry also praised our development initiatives saying Bangladesh is marching forward," the minister added.

According to a statement of the US State Department, Kerry recognised Bangladesh's notable accomplishments in achieving inclusive economic growth, reducing poverty, and improving maternal and child health.

He offered his condolences for deaths in the recent terrorist attacks in Bangladesh and pledged strong US support to continue combating the threat. He also emphasised upholding human rights and democratic values as effective measures in counterterrorism and countering violent extremism efforts.

The top US diplomat had a meeting with former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at the residence of US Ambassador Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat in the afternoon.

John Kerry briefly talked with the leader of the opposition, Raushan Ershad, at the EMK Centre after end of his speech.

At the EMK Centre event, noted personalities who were present include former caretaker government adviser Rokia A Rahman, Distinguished Fellow of CPD Debapriya Bhattacharya, Executive Director of Yunus Centre Lamiya Morshed, Managing Director at Transcom Foods Akku Chowdhury.

US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Nisha Desai Biswal, US Ambassador Marcia Bernicat and other high officials from the US and Bangladesh were also present at the programme.

[With inputs from our diplomatic correspondent, UNB and BSS]

SC order

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the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha is scheduled to deliver the verdict.

On Sunday, the bench concluded the hearing on the petition and fixed today for announcing the judgment.

The other judges of the bench are Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, Justice Hasan Foez Siddique, Justice Mirza Hussain Haider and Justice Mohammad Bazlur Rahman.

The review petition of Quasem tops the day's cause-list of the apex court bench, according to the SC website.

On November 2, 2014, the International Crimes Tribunal-2 handed down the capital punishment on 63-year-old Jamaat-e-Islami leader Quasem over crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War in 1971.

The Appellate Division upheld the verdict on March 8 this year and released the full text on June 6, hours after which the ICT had issued a death warrant for him.

On June 19, Quasem submitted the petition to the apex court through his lawyers, seeking review of the verdict.

'Democracy will be restored with US help'

Says BNP after Khaleda Zia meets John Kerry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP has sought US assistance in restoring democracy and rule of law in the country.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia made the request during a meeting with US Secretary of State John Kerry at the US embassy in Dhaka yesterday.

After the meeting, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir told reporters, "We and the US are hopeful that along with economic development of the country, democracy will be restored in Bangladesh with the help of the US."

Fakhru said Kerry told them that the US was eager to work with Bangladesh as a friend to "restore democracy, people's rights and the rule of law".

Khaleda went to the US embassy around 4:15pm and left almost an hour later.

A four-member BNP delegation led by the BNP chief held over half-an-hour long meeting with Kerry and discussed a wide range of issues, including militancy, absence of democracy, rule of law, next general election and freedom of the press, Fakhru said.

The secretary general said they had a detailed discussion on the next general election with the US diplomat. He, however, did not disclose the details on the discussion.

BNP standing committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and Khaleda Zia's adviser Sabihuddin Ahmed were also present.

'Sifat confesses role in Dipan murder'

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Suspected militant Moinul Hasan Shamim alias Sifat yesterday confessed before a Dhaka court his involvement in the killing of publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan, said court sources.

The metropolitan sessions judge of Dhaka recorded his statement. Led by Sifat, five suspected militants took part in the killing, added the sources.

The judge later ordered the police to send Sifat to jail.

Earlier, the investigation officer of the Dipan murder case prayed to the court to record his statement.

Hours after Sifat's arrest on August 24, Monirul Islam, chief of Counter Terrorism Unit of DMP, told reporters that motivated by their operation commander and sacked army Major Syed Ziaul Haq, Ansar al-Islam members killed Jagriti Prokashoni owner Dipan for publishing books of Bangladesh-born US citizen Avijit Roy.

Forty-three-year-old Dipan was hacked to death at his office on the second floor of Aziz Cooperative Super Market in the city's Shabbagh on

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Send back killers of Bangabandhu

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Terming the US-Bangladesh relationship wonderful, Hasina said the bilateral ties would be further consolidated in future.

She also urged the US secretary of state to allow duty and quota-free access of all Bangladeshi products to the US market.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, prime minister's adviser Gowher Rizvi, Bangladesh Ambassador to the US M Ziauddin, US Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Nisha Desai Biswal, Foreign Secretary M Shahidul Haque, PMO Secretary Suraiya Begum and US Ambassador to Bangladesh Marcia Bernicat were present.

Earlier, the PM herself received Kerry at the Prime Minister's Office.

AT BANGABANDHU MUSEUM

The US secretary of state yesterday observed that Bangladesh was moving ahead in line with the vision of Bangabandhu under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's strong leadership.

He made the observation in the comment book at Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on Dhanmondi 32 during his visit there in the morning to pay his respect to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Bangabandhu along with most of his family members was assassinated on the night of August 15, 1975 in the house.

In the comment book, Kerry wrote: "What a tragedy to have such valiant and courageous leadership stories from the people of Bangladesh in such a moment of violence and cowardice. But today, Bangladesh is growing in the vision of Bangabandhu - and under the strong leadership of his daughter. The United States is proud to be a friend and strong supporters of the

fulfilment of his vision. We look forward to growing and working together for peace and prosperity."

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam and Radwan Mujib Siddiq, son of Bangabandhu's younger daughter Sheikh Rehana, received Kerry at the museum around 11:45am.

FUTURE OF RELATIONSHIP

Addressing a gathering of civil society representatives, youngsters, government officials, media and labour leaders at the Edward M Kennedy Centre in Dhanmondi, Kerry talked about the future of the US-Bangladesh relationship, our diplomatic correspondent reports.

"I am not sure anyone would have predicted even a decade ago that our nations would be consulting closely on regional security, that Bangladesh would be using American cutters to patrol the Bay of Bengal, and that our shared agenda would include everything from counter terrorism to the environmental health and sustainability of our oceans, something we're also working on together," he said.

It should be no surprise that the US and Bangladesh are not just partners pursuing common interests, but friends as well, added the US secretary of state.

Kerry said he came to Dhaka to reinforce that friendship and strengthen bonds. "I look forward to working with all of you to accomplish that important mission to the benefit of Bangladesh, America, and the world."

He said the culture of this country is one of the world's most rich, diverse, and beautiful and it truly is a "shonar bangla" -- a "golden Bangla".

KERRY ON 1971 WAR

The banyan tree that former senator Edward M Kennedy planted at Dhaka University remains a living symbol of

the blood, sacrifice and courage that brought this country into being, the US secretary of state said.

"And it remains a symbol of friendship between the citizens of the United States and the people of Bangladesh," Kerry told his audience at the EMK Centre, reports UNB.

Back in 1971, when the men and women of this beautiful land were under murderous attack -- some across the globe wanted simply to look the other way, he said.

"I was fresh out of college and fresh out of a war in Vietnam. And one of the things that made me proud was the way my home state senator and my home state supported Bangladesh in its quest for independence and freedom," Kerry noted.

At that time, when the violence was at its height, senator Kennedy flew to this region, visited the camps where refugees were gathered, and returned home to bear witness to what he called "a systematic campaign of terror", he went on saying.

"Early the next year, Kennedy returned and planted a banyan tree at Dhaka University, to replace the majestic one that rampaging soldiers had destroyed," said the US secretary of state.

Addressing the US embassy officials in Dhaka, he said Kennedy had supported the independence of Bangladesh, as did people in his (Kerry's) state of Massachusetts.

"So you're serving here in Bangladesh in a very exciting time, a time of transformation, a time of huge possibilities, and yes, a time of challenge."

"But believe me, not many people get the opportunity to get up every day and go to work and make a difference in the lives of other people, and that's what you're doing," added Kerry.

A budding life cruelly cut short

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eighth grader turned their world upside down.

While talking to The Daily Star yesterday, the father was unable to hold back tears as he recalled days before the tragic end of his daughter's life.

"She was everything; my dreams, my hopes... everything," wailed Ramzan, a cable operator in Siddique Bazar area in the capital.

The lion's share of his income used to go on the studies of his three children. "I don't have much money, but I had dreams.... The stalker shattered them."

Risha achieved GPA (Grade Point Average)-5 in her primary terminal examinations in class-V and was preparing to do equally well in the Junior School Certificate exams this year.

The stalker named Obaidul waylaid Risha on her way back from Willes Little Flower School and tried to talk to her the day before he stabbed her on the Kakrail footbridge near the school.

"She didn't tell me anything [about the incident] thinking that I might get tensed. I wish she told me.... I would have escorted her from the school," Ramzan said.

Risha died on Sunday, four days after the stabbing.

When she was suffering from stab injuries outside the school premises, guardians and her classmates requested the school authorities to provide transport to take her to hospital, Ramzan said.

"The authorities refused to give any vehicle, saying it was a police case," he added.

Later, Risha was taken to Islami

Bank Central Hospital, less than half a kilometre away, by a rickshaw, "which caused her to bleed more," the father said.

The school's principal, however, refuted the allegation.

Ramzan expressed dissatisfaction over the police's efforts to arrest Obaidul, the lone accused in the case filed by his wife, and said he wants exemplary punishment of the stalker.

He quoted schoolchildren as saying that the stalker was not alone when he stabbed the girl.

However, Shiblee Noman, assistant commissioner (Ramna zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said police had heard of only one man involved in the incident.

"It will be possible during the investigation to determine if more people were involved," he said.

Meanwhile, students of Willes Little Flower School once again took to the streets yesterday, blocking the busy Kakrail road since 11:40am.

Carrying placards and posters with slogans like "Justice for Risha", "We demand justice for Risha", they demonstrated for over two hours.

They said they would hold the protest programme until the attacker was arrested.

Imran H Sarker, spokesperson of a faction of Gonojagoron Mancha, joined the demonstrators, expressing solidarity with them.

The protesters withdrew the demonstration around 2:00pm after police assured them of arresting the killer within 48 hours, Shiblee Noman said.

Earlier, the school authorities organised a doa mahfil for Risha.

The parents of the victim were present at the programme.

NAHID VISITS WILLES LITTLE SCHOOL

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid went to the school around 12:00noon and assured students of ensuring justice for Risha.

The killer will be given exemplary punishment so that no one can dare to commit such crime in future, he said. He also called upon law enforcers to arrest the killer as soon as possible.

LEGAL NOTICE

Eunus Ali Akond, a Supreme Court lawyer, served a legal notice to the government, asking it to arrest the killer in 24 hours.

He also requested the government to take steps within the time to provide security around Vigarunnisa Noon School and College and Siddheswari Girls' College at Bailey Road and Willes Little Flower School.

In the notice, he said he would file a writ petition with the High Court, seeking necessary directives if the government did not arrest the accused and provide security.

The home secretary, inspector general of police, Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner, director general of the Rapid Action Battalion and officer-in-charge of Ramma Police Station have been made respondents to the notice.

Meanwhile, expressing grave concern, National Human Rights Commission and Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association demanded a proper investigation into the incident and immediate arrest of Obaidul.