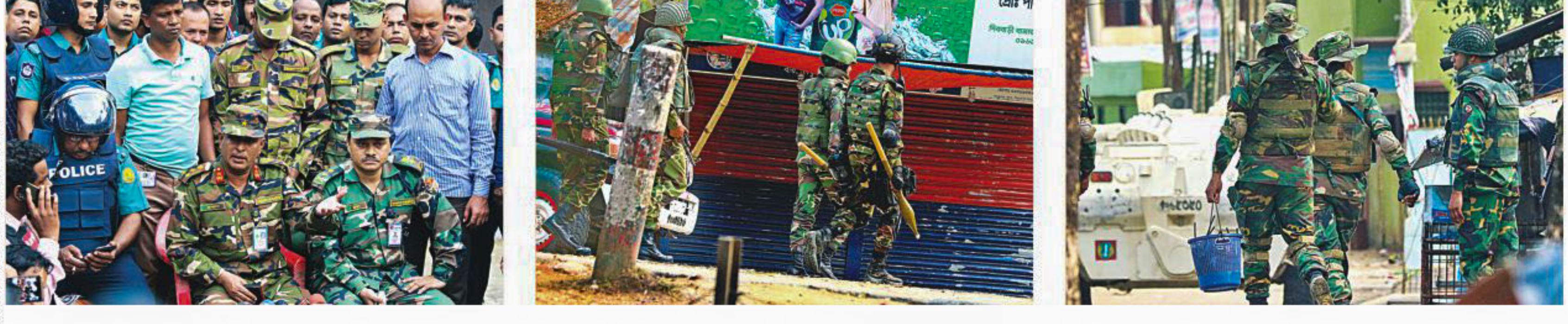




PHOTO: ISPR/AMRAN HOSSAIN/STAR



Clockwise from top left, an army officer taking a child to safety in an undated photo. Army personnel evacuating a family by moving them from the top floor of Atia Mahal to an adjacent building with a ladder. Army men near the building in Shibbari of Sylhet city yesterday. Armed with rocket propelled grenades (RPG), army personnel patrol the streets near Atia Mahal. Brig Gen Fakhru Ahsan holding a press conference near the building yesterday. Siblings of OC Monirul Islam, who was killed in Saturday's bomb explosion near Atia Mahal, wail in front of the morgue of Sylhet Osmani Medical College yesterday.

Two militants killed, raid on

FROM PAGE 1
This means, the militants are trained to cope with such military operations.

"We will finish it off," he said, but could not spell out how long it would take to end the standoff, which began around 1:30am on Friday when police first cordoned off the building in the city's Shibbari area.

Before the briefing, one police source told The Daily Star that there might be four to five militants, including a woman, inside the apartment, which has about 150 rooms in some 30 flats.

The army took over the charge of the operation from police on Saturday morning. On the first day of its operation, the army evacuated 78 residents from the building.

Amid the commando operation on Saturday evening, two powerful bombs went off at two separate places near the hideout, killing two police officials and four civilians and injuring over 40 others, including police and Rab members as well as journalists.

Terror group Islamic State took credit for the twin bomb attacks, US-based SITE Intelligence said, citing the

the militant outfit's Amaq news agency.

The police force has been advised to stay alert and step up security at police stations, police boxes and other important establishments across the country in the wake of the bomb attacks.

Taking to reporters for the first time since the standoff began, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said a top militant leader might be inside the den.

The operation is still underway. Nothing can be confirmed until it ends. But it seems there is a top militant leader," he told reporters in the capital yesterday, without naming any militant group.

He reiterated that there was no IS operatives in the country. "We are yet to trace anyone here who belongs to the IS."

All this comes in the wake of two suspected suicide bombings -- one inside a Rab barrack in the capital and the other near a police checkpoint near the Dhaka airport -- within a week. In both cases, only the suspected suicide bombers have died and IS claimed

responsibility for both.

The raid on Atia Mahal also comes a week after police busted two militant hideouts in Chittagong. In one of the raids in the port city's Sitakunda on March 16, four militants, including a woman, were killed. The woman was wearing a suicide vest, police said.

The sudden escalation of violence comes nearly a year after the Gulshan siege in which militants killed 20 hostages, 17 of them foreigners. The 12-hour standoff ended when army commandos stormed the cafe, Holey Artisan, and killed the five militants.

THE OPERATION

Since yesterday morning, law enforcers cordoned off not only Shibbari area but a good five kilometre radius of Atia Mahal.

People in those areas could not go about their daily business or buy essentials, including food. Many shops remained closed and traffic was thin.

The district administration imposed Section 144 in the area, to prevent gathering of more than five people in any one place.

The first of the gunshots were heard around 9:50am and they lasted about five minutes. A huge explosion rocked the area around 10:04am amid firing for about 20 minutes.

Between 11:10am and 11:45am, two more explosions took place while the firing continued.

After a pause for about two hours, fresh firing began around 2:20pm, followed by another huge explosion around 2:50pm.

Army troops took position on the north and the south side of the building while the commandos were on the back side.

An armoured vehicle was positioned at the entrance of the building. Police members were providing support to the troops.

Briefing reporters around 5:30pm at an open field some 400 yards from the den, Brig Gen Fakhru said the main objective of their operation was to rescue the residents safely and that the commandos accomplished that job at the quickest possible time. "Our next target was to neutralise the militants, keeping our men safe. There is

no hurry for that. For this reason, we are approaching carefully using various techniques.

"We employed different methods since the morning [yesterday]. First we used rocket launchers to create a big hole in the building. Then we used explosives. But those did not work that well."

Then the commandos used teargas shells, when the militants started moving inside the building.

"When two of them were running away on the ground floor, we fired at them and they collapsed. One of them detonated a suicide vest tied up with his body."

He suspects both the dead are male.

Asked if the troops faced any resistance, he said the militants fired shots with small arms and threw explosives and IEDs.

However, no member of the force was hurt yesterday, he said.

On Saturday, two injured army members were seen being taken, presumably for treatment, in an ambulance, though there was no official confirmation.

Replying to a query, he said there might also be female militant/s inside the den.

On the first day of the police operation codenamed Spring Rain, police on Friday asked the militants to surrender using a loudspeaker.

At this, one woman shouted back around 1:30pm from a window of the flat: "Bring SWAT quickly because you [police] won't be able to do anything to us... We don't have much time."

Police officers were also heard calling her by Marjina, though it was not clear how they learned her name.

About the operation to rescue the tenants, Fakhru said they entered the building using ladders from the adjacent building. Before evacuating the residents of the fourth floor, they blocked the third floor to prevent militant attack.

Applying the same strategy, they rescued the residents of the third, second and first floor.

It's not clear if there are tenants on the ground floor where the militants are believed to be.

Shun path

FROM PAGE 1
of terrorism and militancy," she said.

The PM said the ongoing drive of her government against terrorism, militancy and drug addiction would continue and her government would curb those with an iron hand.

Hasina was addressing a rally of children and juveniles at the Bangabandhu National Stadium marking the 47th Independence and National Day.

The Dhaka district administration organised the rally where Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Salahuddin gave the vote of thanks.

Before her speech, Hasina inspected a parade comprising various teams of students of the district's schools and colleges.

After her address, she took salute from the march past by the students of various schools. Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq was present.

The PM called upon the students to pay attention to their academic activities, listen to the advice of their guardians and teachers and never indulge in and go down the wrong path of terrorism, militancy and drug addiction.

Reminding all, including students, that Islam is a religion of peace, solidarity and brotherhood, she said, "Islam never supports killing

of people, rather it says that unleashing suicidal attack is a great sin."

The PM also urged all, including teachers and guardians, to put in their united efforts so that children and juveniles could get a better life, achieve good character and thus become good human beings.

Hasina also noted that children of today are tomorrow's leaders.

"The Father of the Nation had dreamt of building a hunger and poverty-free 'Sonar Bangla'. I hope the children of today would become the main force of building the long-cherished Sonar Bangla."

Extending her heartiest felicitations to the people of the country on the occasion of Independence Day, Hasina urged all to remain vigilant so that no one could taint the Liberation War's spirit.

Hasina also highlighted various steps taken by the Father of the Nation to reconstruct a war-ravaged country and for the welfare of the children and juveniles during his three-and-a-half-year tenure.

Besides, a video clip was screened at the stadium highlighting various development activities of the present government and its various international recognitions.

Later, Hasina enjoyed a colourful performance of the students and various artistes.

Delhi, Dhaka

FROM PAGE 16
brothers and sisters of Bangladesh, on this significant day. And I hope that Bangladesh marches ahead on the path of progress.

"I also assure the citizens of Bangladesh that India is a strong partner, and a good friend, and we will continue to work together shoulder to shoulder to contribute towards the

peace, security and development of this entire region," Modi said in his monthly address to the people broadcast over All India Radio.

He also said, "It is a matter of great pride for all of us that Rabindranath Tagore and his memories are a shared heritage as the national anthem of Bangladesh too has been composed by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore."

Joy turns into sorrow



Monirul Islam

Chowdhury Md Abu Koysoy

Wahidul Islam Opu

Jannatul Fahim

Shahidul Islam

FROM PAGE 1
Sylhet, two traders and two activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League. They have been identified by their relatives and law enforcers.

The court inspector is Chowdhury Md Abu Koysoy from Kutubpara in Sunamganj Sadar Upazila.

He lived with his wife in Sylhet's Shingan area. He had six brothers and a sister.

Contacted, his brother Chowdhury Md Abu Obayed, executive engineer of the PDB in Fenchuganj, said they learnt about Koysoy's death from police officials around 9:00pm on Saturday.

Another victim, BCL activist Jannatul Fahim, left his Puchail Dakhinpara home to attend a class at a local coaching centre in the city on Saturday evening.

Fahim was an HSC student of Puchail Israb Ali School and College.

Out of curiosity, he and some of his friends went to Shibbari area to watch the raid on the militant den.

The 18-year-old boy paid with his life for his curiosity.

He was wounded in the first explosion on Sylhet-Fenchuganj road in Gutartik area, and died at Osmani Medical College Hospital around 1:00am yesterday.

His maternal uncle Foysal Ahmed said he was forest and environment secretary of Dakkhin Surma Upazila BCL.

Fahim was vocal against militancy and also took part in anti-militancy campaigns in Sylhet, added Foysal.

Another BCL activist, Wahidul Islam Opu, who also went to Shibbari area to see the raid, was killed in the same explosion.

Opu, 23, was a student of Madan Mohan University College and an activist of Sylhet metropolitan BCL unit, said his uncle Shahin Ahmed.

Opu took over the family business of metal products since his father died two years ago. "He was the breadwinner of the five-member family," said Shahin.

Hearing the news of Opu's death, his youngest sister Fazilatunnesa Tuli fell ill and was admitted to a hospital, he added.

Another deceased, Shahidul Islam, 35, was proprietor of Prime Lightings that provides decoration service in Sylhet city.

Shahidul was the third among five brothers and three sisters.

He lived with his wife Nasrin Akhter and six-month-old daughter Afifa in the city's Dariapara area.

His elder brother Saiful Islam said Shahidul was fatally wounded in the blast in Shibbari area around 7:00pm while he along with his acquaintance Khadim Shah was going to his workplace by a motorbike from Dakkhin Surma after settling a business-related matter there.

Shibbari is on the way to Dakkhin Surma from his workplace in Dariapara area, he mentioned.

Khadim, 32, who was with Shahidul, was also killed in the blast.

Saiful said he found Shahidul's

mobile phone switched off since 7:30pm on Saturday. One of their neighbours, who saw on the social media the news of his brother getting seriously injured in the blast, informed them about it.

They reached Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital around 9:30pm only to find Shahidul dead.

Saiful said he didn't dare to tell their mother Noorjahan Begum, a heart patient, about his brother's death.

Khadim's father Ismail Ali said his son was involved in decoration business, and that he used to work with Shahidul.

Khadim from Sunamganj's Chhatak upazila lived with his wife in Sylhet city's Mirza Jangal area.

Ismail said Khadim married Ayesha Begum, a Muslim convert, four years back.

Learning about his son's injury in the blast on Saturday evening, Ismail along with other family members went to Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital and found his son dead.

FROM PAGE 16
seemed to think that the mother was acting well within her authority as a parent when she confiscated her son's phone and he dismissed the case outright, The Local reported.

"She would not be a responsible parent if she allowed her son to be distracted by the mobile phone and fail to study," said the court ruling from magistrate Luis Columna in Almeria.

She took the "correct action" as a

responsible parent, he said.

It's a brave new world for parents these days who can face unforeseen litigious challenges from their children in the digital world. For instance, last year an 18-year-old Austrian woman sued her parents for continually post-

ing photos of her going back to her childhood days on social media site Facebook.

"They knew no shame," she complained.

"Every stage was photographed and then made public."

Son sues mother for taking his phone

FROM PAGE 16
brothers and sisters of Bangladesh, on this significant day. And I hope that Bangladesh marches ahead on the path of progress.

"I also assure the citizens of Bangladesh that India is a strong partner, and a good friend, and we will continue to work together shoulder to shoulder to contribute towards the

peace, security and development of this entire region," Modi said in his monthly address to the people broadcast over All India Radio.

He also said, "It is a matter of great pride for all of us that Rabindranath Tagore and his memories are a shared heritage as the national anthem of Bangladesh too has been composed by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore."