

Atia Mahal not yet livable

Two bodies still inside the building

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

With gas, power and water supplies restored and some shops and roads reopened, many people were returning home in Sylhet's Shibbari area, but many of them found the stench of decomposed bodies of two suspected militants at "Atia Mahal" difficult to bear.

Police allowed locals to return home on Friday afternoon, two days after the army-led "Operation Twilight" at the hideout came to an end.

However, the occupants of two buildings of "Atia Mahal", and an adjacent building were still awaiting police permission to return. A nearby school is also not being allowed to open.

An army team on Tuesday night handed the building over to the police. Police were yet to conduct a security sweep of the buildings and collect evidence, which would be done after an inspection by a bomb disposal unit.

During the army operation on Sunday, two militants, including a woman, were killed and their bodies were brought out of the hideout the following day.

Yesterday, the two unidentified militants were buried at Manik Pir Majar graveyard in the city.

The bodies of two more militants killed on Monday could not be taken out of the building.

Nazrul Islam, a resident of "Atia Mahal", said he had left all his educational certificates, important documents, some gold jewellery and money in his flat. He was worried whether he would find those undamaged.

Local Anwar Hossain said the stench of the militants' decomposed bodies have spread in the area. The smell was making it difficult for people to breathe.

He demanded the police take prompt steps to take the two bodies out of the building.

Debadapa Roy, deputy director at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, said residents of Shibbari area could develop respiratory problems as they were inhaling the smelly air.

Visiting Shibbari area yesterday afternoon, this correspondent found that a police team cordoned off "Atia Mahal" and blocked the nearby Sylhet-Fenchuganj road leading to the building.

Jahir Tahir Memorial High School near the militant hideout remained closed. Three more schools and a madrasa in Shibbari were yet to resume classes since March 25.

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Maldivian Aminath Muharrimath, facing the camera, amongst relatives at the Hetemkha Graveyard in Rajshahi city yesterday after she had laid to rest her daughter Raudha Athif, who was a medical student and a model.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

It's a green

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emitted in the process of carrying the delegates will be calculated and neutralised. This is important for sustainable development," he observed.

The IPU, the world's largest parliamentary platform, has decided to neutralise the carbon footprint to turn the gathering into a "green assembly".

Saber said they were planning to distribute improved cooking stoves among people as part of neutralisation of the carbon footprint.

Referring to a study, he said air pollution in Bangladesh kills around 80,000 people every year. That is why they are planning to distribute improved stoves among the people. "We are planning to distribute improved cooking stoves to the people who use traditional stoves. We will give a better technology to those who are using improved stoves," he added.

The type of fuel for the stoves has not been decided yet.

Saber said the objective was basically to keep harmony between consumption and conservation.

The IPU president further said that after calculating the carbon footprint, they would collect money through mobilisation including donation, corporate social responsibility fund and so on.

"It will be the first such kind of green assembly in Bangladesh, which is one of the worst victims of climate change..."

He said the improved stoves would be given to the people free of cost but could not say exactly how many stoves would be distributed.

Saber added that they had launched an app "IPU136" to avoid use of paper during the assembly. All the updates and information about the assembly would be available in the app.

As many as 1,348 delegates from across the world would join the assembly which would create a huge carbon footprint.

Founded in 1889, the IPU, a global organisation of parliaments, works to establish democracy, peace and cooperation among people.

Saima WHO champion for autism

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that the estimated lifetime costs of caring for individuals with autism range from \$1.4 million to \$2.4 million per case depending on the level of intellectual impairment, according to a statement issued by WHO.

In the low-and middle-income countries, children with autism don't get the medical attention and care they need. Their life is a struggle, often marred by stigma, marginalisation and discrimination. Autism continues to be a public health challenge that needs to be addressed with more focused efforts, Khetrapal Singh said.

WHO has been advocating for political commitment to the needs and services for autistic children,

the scaling up of resources and raising public awareness to facilitate early detection, community-based intervention and multi-sectoral approach to reduce the impact of ASD.

Among the region's 11 countries, Bangladesh has made focused interventions and much of the pioneering work has been initiated by Saima, daughter of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The health ministry has integrated mental health care into primary health care.

Autism Spectrum Disorder and other neuro-developmental-related disorders have been integrated in the health, population and nutrition sector development programmes.

Institute of Neuro-development

and Autism has been established, while 10 medical colleges have a special wing to screen childhood disability.

In recognition of her commitment to the cause of ASD in Bangladesh, Saima was honoured by WHO South-East Asia Regional Office with Excellence in Public Health Award in September 2014.

She has made important contributions to the regional and global efforts on the matter in her various roles and capacities. She launched South-East Asia Autism Network in July 2011 and is a member of WHO's global expert advisory panel on mental health.

Saima leads various national, regional and global advisory committees and networks. She is the chair of

Global Autism Public Health Initiative, Bangladesh, and National Advisory Committee on Neuro-developmental Disorders and Autism. She is the founding member of the Mental Health Accessibility Task Force of the Ontario Psychological Association, Toronto, and an international advocate for autism and neuro-developmental disorders for Organisation for Global Autism Bangladesh.

As WHO champion, Saima will be supporting WHO's advocacy with member countries for inclusion of ASD in national policies and strategies, promoting WHO's mental health initiatives and strengthening research and evidence of ASD for more focused interventions, according to the statement.

Suicide

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board are of the view that it is a clear case of suicide," he said.

The board yesterday submitted its report to Aatur Rahman, sub-inspector of Shah Makhdam Police Station, and also the investigation officer of the unnatural death case filed on Wednesday.

However, Raudha's brother Rayyan Athif, 18, told The Daily Star yesterday that his family members had no confidence in the report and that they "are considering seeking a second autopsy by an independent authority".

Raudha, a second-year student of Islami Bank Medical College, was found dead in her room at the women's dormitory of the college in Nawdapara area of Rajshahi city on March 29.

"We've seen her body, her tightly-held fists, wide strangulation marks on the neck and multiple bruises as if somebody strangled her. We are not ready to believe it was a suicide," said Raudha's mother Aminath Muharrimath.

Muharrimath, her son and nine relatives have been staying at Rajshahi Parjatan Motel since Thursday under police protection. She talked to The Daily Star correspondent at the motel's lobby yesterday.

On the night of her death, students of the dormitory saw Raudha going out of the hostel around 11:00pm. She went to see a doctor at the college's hospital as she was vomiting and felt sick. One girl from the hostel accompanied her to the hospital and another girl saw her return around 11:30pm, said the mother.

"The college authority on Thursday did not allow us to see her prescription, meet the doctor she saw or talk to security guards. They claimed that she did not go to the hospital. How is it possible?" said Muharrimath.

On Friday night, the college authority allowed the family members to talk only to the security guards who informed them that Raudha went out at 9:00pm, she said, adding: "I called her at 12:40am but I was put on call waiting, which means she was talking to someone."

Abdul Aziz Riyad, secretary of the medical college, said they were not "officially aware" of Raudha going outside around 11:00pm. They learned that she went outside around 9:00pm as she was having stomach pains.

Rayyan said the authorities claimed that students broke into the room seeing her hanging and got her down. "We did not see any sign of breaking in ... no cracks, dents on the door," he said.

Muharrimath said she did not request the police to hand over her daughter's body without an autopsy, as reported by this paper that quoted a police officer as saying so.

Amir Zafar, deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, said the victim's family already informed top police officials about the allegations.

Meanwhile, Raudha was buried at Hetemkha Graveyard in Rajshahi city by Quantum Foundation of Bangladesh in presence of her family. Maldives Ambassador to Bangladesh Aishath Shann Shakir was also present.

Raudha's brother Rayyan said she was buried in Rajshahi considering transportation issues. "Her body had already started decomposing. An autopsy has been done. We don't want to affect it anymore."

Let's fight terror together

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the top polluting nations to fulfil, without delay, their commitments on carbon offsetting made in different forums.

She said a large number of children of the developing nations suffer from stunted growth owing to malnutrition. They are deprived of healthcare and schooling. But the earth has enough resources for the survival of mankind. A little sympathy, support, mutual compassion and fraternity could easily make the globe hunger-free, she said.

Termining terrorism and militancy the new vices for humanity, she said, "We have to fight this menace together; otherwise, we would be pushed back to the Dark Age." She called for a united fight against terrorism and militancy.

After joining the IPU in 1972, Bangladesh is for the first time hosting the IPU assembly. About 1,400 delegates, including 53 speakers, deputy speakers and 209 women parliamentarians from 120 countries are taking part.

The five-day assembly is being

held with the theme: "Redressing inequalities: Delivering on dignity and well-being for all."

Nobel Peace prize winner and children's rights activist Kailash Satyarthi would present the keynote paper of the conference.

Welcoming the delegates of the conference, Hasina said she was deeply honoured by the opportunity to inaugurate the conference.

"It is indeed a matter of pride for us. This is also a testimony by the honourable members of parliaments across the world towards our commitment to democratic practices and values."

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, IPU President Saber Hossain Chowdhury, and Secretary General Martin Chungong also spoke on the occasion. UN Assistant Secretary General Miroslav Jenca read out a message from the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

The prime minister said democracy is viewed as a way "to ensure prosperity and security for our people". However, the journey for estab-

lishing democracy in Bangladesh was not smooth.

Hasina said thousands of leaders and workers of her party had sacrificed their lives for establishing the rights to food and vote. At least 19 attempts were made on her life including the most gruesome one on August 21, 2004, which claimed the lives of 22 people, she said.

She said the struggles did not deter them from the path of democracy.

Highlighting Bangladesh's democratic progress during her government, the prime minister said her government has been working relentlessly to build a nation free from poverty and hunger based on equality and non-communal democratic values.

She said all democratic institutions, including parliament and local government bodies of Bangladesh were strengthened. Every tier of the local government bodies, including union councils, upazila councils, municipalities, city corporations and district councils, are run by elected representatives.

thinking a cooperative spirit, passion, a gift of reading people, empathy, networking abilities, negotiating skills, drive to nurture family children as caregivers. All these invaluable traits help build a better society.

"If ever the world sees a time when women shall come together purely and simply for the welfare and benefit of humankind, it will be a power such as the world has never known before," the Speaker said.

IPU President Saber Hossain Chowdhury said, "We know that lot has been done and lot has to be done with regard to girls. And we know that investing in girls brings dividends to all. It must be our number one priority -- make no mistake about that."

The century-old forum, IPU, has been working to establish gender equality globally at the parliaments, Saber said.

"Equal representation in positions of power is a fundamental precondition for truly effective and accountable democracy," said IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong.

percent of the ministerial positions.

The speakers stressed the need for improving women's political empowerment for a fairer world where peace and prosperity would be ensured for all.

According to IPU, women's political empowerment and equal access to leadership at all levels are fundamental to achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

"With limited growth in women's representation, advancement in gender equality and the success of SDGs are jeopardised," observes IPU in the global map of women in politics.

SDGs call for actions to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

Referring to what is shown in the Women in Politics Map, women parliamentarians said the progress in women's gaining parliamentary positions is very slow.

As per the IPU study, the worldwide average of women in parliament rose to 23.3 percent in 2016 from

22.6 percent a year before.

In December 2006, women held 16.8 percent parliamentary seats across the world, which was a gain of 6.5 percentage point over the last decade.

Presiding over the debate, Dipu Moni, an MP of the Jatiya Sangsad, said the figure of 23 percent is smaller than expected.

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury said, "We need to comprehend women empowerment in a comprehensive way encompassing social, economic, political and legal empowerment to end the historic marginalisation of women in every sector including the political process and representation."

It is important to economically empower women. Economic empowerment gives them voice, and that is essential in the decision-making process that affects their lives fundamentally, said Shirin who is president of the 136th assembly of IPU.

"Women are agents of change. Women bring in different ways of

Way is women, men alliance

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IPU's study is based on in-depth interviews with 55 women MPs from 39 countries covering five regions of the world.

The study is an eye-opener that women in politics and in parliament face violence, said Salma Ataulhajan, a lawmaker in Canadian parliament.

"It had a great impact on the global parliamentary community and was given great attention in the media."

Participants in the debate organised by Forum of Women Parliamentarians pointed out the wide gender gap in political positions.

As many as 207 women MPs joined the debate styled "Women's political participation: A new impetus to break the glass ceiling" at Bangabandhu International Convention Centre.

According to the Women in Politics Map 2017, only 23.3 percent global parliamentarians are women who represent half of the world's population. Women hold only 18