



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina consoles an August-21 grenade attack survivor at a programme in the capital's Krishibid Institution yesterday. The attack in 2004 left 24 dead and more than 300 injured. Hasina narrowly survived that day.

PHOTO: PID

From jaws of death to life unbearable

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badly injured in the incident feels it was a curse rather than a blessing that she survived.

She has been carrying as many as 700 splinters in her body since.

There are many more similar stories of those who escaped death in the blasts on August 21, 2004 with severe injuries.

It was 5:22pm that day when Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, the then leader of the opposition, finished delivering her speech at an anti-terrorism rally organised by her party on Bangabandhu Avenue.

Suddenly, at least 13 grenades were hurled at the crowd. Twenty-four leaders and activists were killed and more than 300 others injured. Ivy Rahman, wife of late president Zillur Rahman, was among the dead.

AL chief Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped death with injuries to her right ear.

Remembering the grisly attack, survivors and family members of the

deceased attended a programme at Krishibid Institution Bangladesh yesterday.

The Awami League had observed the day every year at its headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue, where the



Khurshida

Rashida

attack took place. But for the first time this year, the party organised the programme at Krishibid Institution having a makeshift memorial set up.

Rashida, while talking to The Daily Star near the memorial, spoke of her unbearable sufferings and her present physical conditions.

"I became a sick person for the rest of my life. I am living with severe ear pain," she said, adding that whenever she was in pain she became senseless.

"It would have been better had I

died that day....Now I feel the taste of death every moment," said Rashida, woman affairs secretary of ward-69 of Dhaka city Mahila League.

Recalling the attack, she said she had exposed herself to a volley of incoming splinters that day, as she embraced Ivy Rahman to save her.

Rashida was so badly injured that doctors at DMCH at first deemed her to be dead and declared her so.

"Later a woman saw me moving under the shroud and informed [AL leader] Saber Hossain Chowdhury.

"He [Saber] informed the doctors and I was later shifted to Bangladesh Medical College Hospital for treatment."

Rashida visited India five times for treatment, but life has not been normal again.

She underwent several surgeries for injuries to her stomach. Now she cannot digest rice and so has to live on bread.

She thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, saying that it was possible for her to make a living only because of

Hasina.

Another August 21 victim, Khurshida Hena Baby shared her story of ordeal.

Khurshida, a central committee member of Dhaka city Mahila League, joined the August 21, 2004 rally after marching in a procession of about 10 km from the capital's Mohammadpur.

"I walked to the programme that day and today I came with others' help.... The grenade attack turned my life upside down."

Khurshida continued saying that she was having to take medicines more than food. "I can't have solid food....I passed many days only by taking water."

She is carrying splinters in her lower abdomen, breasts and right leg. She needs surgeries immediately.

"Since I have diabetes I could not undergo surgeries needed," Khurshida said, adding that she was unable to hear by her right ear.

"My pain will go and I will die with peace if the culprits are punished."

PM critical of CJ

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Hasina said it could not be acceptable that a Pakistan court removing its PM through a verdict would be used as a threat in Bangladesh.

She said people have the strongest power in Bangladesh and it has been enshrined in the constitution.

"People's court is the biggest court; no one can ignore it... I'm lodging my complaint with this court.... I want justice from people's court."

The premier said that usurping state power would not be allowed further in Bangladesh and if anyone tried to do so, he must face trial according to article 7 of the constitution.

The higher court was suddenly making "some political comments and issuing threats", she added.

Citing the SC observations that "lawmakers were criminals" and there were businessmen in parliament, the PM said, "Doing business is not a sin. What's the problem if any businessman becomes an MP?"

Mentioning that the president, as per the constitution, appoints the PM and the CJ, Hasina said the CJ was trying to snatch the president's power. "How can he take away the constitutional power from the president while he himself has been appointed by the president?"

About the Supreme Judicial Council, she said the CJ chose the system introduced by Ziaur Rahman who had grabbed power illegally.

"The chief justice doesn't like some articles that were in the original constitution, but he likes the Supreme Judicial Council which was introduced by Ziaur Rahman through some martial law ordinances."

Hasina criticised Sinha for blocking the Anti-Corruption Commission's probe against Justice Joynal Abedin for giving "a false report on the August 21 grenade attack as ordered by the then BNP government".

The PM said, "When the ACC sought to conduct an inquiry, the chief justice issued a letter stating that the probe can't go ahead. How could he say that being the chief justice? Saving a corrupt person and pampering him are not the tasks of the chief justice. This is showing negligence towards the constitution."

About the 16th amendment verdict, she said she was doubtful whether the other judges of the Appellate Division of the SC had the scope to freely give their opinion. "The chief justice might have not given them that scope."

She said there were many "irrelevant issues" in the verdict. Those issues should be placed before the nation because those could mislead the people, she added.

About the SC observations on the reserved seats for women MPs, the PM

said the CJ might have forgotten the appointment process. "He was appointed by the president who is elected by lawmakers. He should have resigned from his post before making any comment on the election process of the women MPs or after delivering the verdict."

Mentioning that there were many "contradictions" in the judgment, she said she was reading it and taking notes. "I'll speak about those in parliament."

Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, Public Administration Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam, Awami League leader Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader also spoke on the occasion.

Earlier, the PM placed wreaths at a makeshift memorial for those killed in the August 21 grenade attack. The memorial was set up by the AL in front of the Krishibid Institution.

Cabinet members, PM's advisers, senior leaders of the AL and 14-party combine and family members of the martyrs and those injured in the Aug 21 attack were present.

After the programme, Hasina met some relatives of the victims.

Woman raped

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A team of police rescued her the next morning about a kilometre away from her home and sent her to a hospital.

Her elderly mother remained tied to the pole until police reached there.

Moazzem Hossain, officer-in-charge of Dimla Police Station said police were looking for the accused.

Accused killed

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In primary interrogation, Enamul told police that his partner in the crime was a villager named Shipon Ali.

According to the OC, police teams taking Enamul with them, went to Shibpur village to hunt for Shipon.

"On the way, the police teams were attacked near a banana orchard. They shot at police to snatch Enamul. A gunfight ensued. Enamul, handcuffed, was shot dead when he tried to escape from the police van," Ratan claimed.

Police found two crude bombs and locally made gun from the scene.

The OC claimed that a gang led by Enamul and Shipon abducted Sagar when he was going home around 8:30pm on Wednesday.

Sagar's father Pradeep filed a case with the police station Thursday evening. Pradeep feared that the abductors might kill his son if prompt actions were not taken.

75pc passport seekers

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TIB Researcher Shahnur Rahman presented the findings.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman, TIB Trustee Board Chairperson Sultana Kamal, among others spoke at the programme.

Referring to another study done in 2015, Iftekharuzzaman said corruption and irregularities in passport offices have decreased.

According to the 2015 TIB survey, 77.7 percent respondents said they became victims of irregularities and corruption while getting passports while 76.1 percent said they paid bribes to get the service.

The TIB in its 12-point recommendations yesterday advocated abolishing the system of police verification and attestation of documents for getting new passports.

It said cancellation of police verification and attestation of papers would end the corruption and make the process easier.

On harassment during police verification, the report said that some respondents mentioned that for no reason police tried to find faults in the passport forms and intimidated passport seekers suggesting their involvement in militancy and certain political parties.

The law enforcers in many cases asked passport seekers to go to a tea stall or the police station to pay the bribe or demanded the money be paid through mobile banking channels.

About harassment centring attestation documents, the TIB report said the system was encouraging irregularities and corruption.

Many of the passport seekers were from remote areas and did not have acquaintances in urban areas. Therefore, they have to rely on brokers to get their documents attested.

A section of people with the attestation authority make money out of this, the study said.

Instead of the police verification, the TIB recommended introducing a biometric data bank for all citizens, distribution of smartcards, modernising and updating data banks of criminals, and making the data bank interlinked with the passport office

and immigration checkpoints.

It said many people did not get their passports by the time mentioned in the receipt given by the passport office.

The report said brokers dominated the insides and outsides of all passport offices in the country and that a section of brokers maintained communication with some Special Branch of Police members and officials of passport offices.

Brokers give a portion of the money they collect from passport seekers to those in the SB and staffers of the passport offices, the study claimed.

"Brokers have area based networks centring each passport office and a section of passport seekers come in contact with the brokers through that network."

The report said some brokers have the blessings of political and influential people.

The study revealed that although brokers claim that they help passport seekers get their passports ahead of the scheduled time, the study did not find any significant evidence in this regard.

"At least 75.1 percent passport seekers who took assistance of brokers said they got their passports on time while 72.2 percent said they got their passport on time without getting assistance from brokers," the report said.

According to the study, 27 percent respondents said it took 12 days more than the officially set time to get their passports.

The report revealed that 41.7 percent of the service seekers took the help of brokers or others for getting their passport and among them, 80 percent took brokers' help.

It said the rate of taking brokers' assistance was highest in Sylhet division, 60 percent, and the lowest was in Rajshahi, 20 percent.

In its recommendations, the TIB advocated introducing mobile banking as a medium for paying passport fees.

It also recommended making the passport forms more user friendly and easily understandable and increasing the duration of passport's validity from five years to 10.

Flood threatens

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anything with them," said Iqbal Hossain of Malikanda village in Dohar's Narisha union yesterday.

"Most of the houses in our village have remained inundated for over a week. Many people have left this village and gone to other places after losing their houses in the flood," he said.

Many villagers were cooking using LPG cylinders as their kitchens were partially submerged.

The schools in the area were shut. Local people were also facing difficulties in keeping their cattle safe.

Tapu Begum, a woman from Brahmandi village in Munshiganj's Lohajang, said her family had been left marooned for the last eight days. She was also not being able to feed her three cows.

The FFWC said the flood situation in the northern region would continue to improve as the water levels of the Jamuna, Dharla, Teesta and Dudhkumar rivers were going down.

It also said the flood situation at the Meghna basin would improve as the water level of the Surma river was falling.

The water level of the Padma was increasing but it was yet to cross the danger level, said the FFWC.

People in the northern and north-eastern flood-hit areas, especially those in remote places, continued to suffer due to lack of food and clean drinking water yesterday.

Meanwhile, a two-year-old child drowned in floodwater in Omar Majid union of Kurigram's Rajarhat upazila yesterday morning.

The victim was identified as Shajjad Hossain Rahat, son of Anisur Rahman of Bakshipara village.

Mayor Annisul

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Doctors hope that the mayor, who is still unconscious, will return to "normal" soon, Mizanur said.

Annisul is suffering from "cerebral vasculitis", which was not detected in Dhaka. He had been experiencing occasional spells of dizziness for the last two months, his wife Rubana Huq told The Daily Star earlier.

"This is because his brain's blood vessels were inflamed," she said, adding that doctors put him on steroid and other medications.

The mayor went to London on July 29 and was admitted to the hospital on August 13.



To escape the flood, this family moved to Dohar from Faridpur's Sadarpur upazila with whatever they could save on Saturday. However, they found many low-lying places of the upazila in Dhaka inundated as well.

Rare solar eclipse captivates US

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After weeks of anticipation, onlookers from Oregon to South Carolina whooped and cheered as the moon blotted out the sun, plunging a narrow band of the United States into near darkness and colder temperatures for two minutes at a time.

Even President Donald Trump stepped out of the White House to see the eclipse.

"It's more powerful than I expected," Robert Sarazin Blake, 40, a singer from Bellingham, Washington, said after the eclipse passed through Roshambo Art Farm in Sheridan, Oregon. "All of a sudden you're completely in another world. It's like you're walking on air or tunneling underground like a badger."

No area in the United States had seen a total solar eclipse since 1979, while the last coast-to-coast total eclipse took place in 1918.

The rare cosmic event was expected to draw one of the largest audiences in human history, including those watching through broadcast and social media.

Some 12 million people live in the 70-mile-wide (113-km-wide), 2,500-mile-long (4,000-km-long) zone where the total eclipse appeared, while

hordes of others traveled to spots along the route.

The eclipse first reached "totality" - the shadow cast when the sun is completely blocked by the moon - in Oregon at 10:15 a.m. PDT (1715 GMT) and began spreading eastward.

"It just kind of tickled you all over - it was wonderful - and I wish I could do it again," said Stormy Shreves, 57, a fish gutter who lives in Depoe Bay, Oregon. "But I won't see something like that ever again, so I'm really glad I took the day off work so I could experience it."

The phenomenon took its final bow at 2:49pm EDT (1849 GMT) near Charleston, South Carolina, where eclipse gazers had gathered atop the harbor's sea wall.

A number of towns within the eclipse's path set up public events. At the Southern Illinois University campus in Carbondale, Illinois, the 15,000-seat football stadium was sold out for Monday.

Other people in the eclipse zone hosted their own private viewing parties. At a mountain cabin in the woods in Murphy, North Carolina, the air grew cool as the moon slowly chipped away at the sun before covering it completely, leaving only a surrounding halo of light.

"That was the most beautiful thing. I could die happy now - I won't, but I could," said Samantha Gray, 20, an incoming graduate student at University of Chicago. "Anybody want to go on vacation with me in April 2024?"

Another total solar eclipse will cut from Mexico across the southeastern and northeastern United States on April 8, 2024.

For millions of others outside the zone of totality, a partial eclipse appeared throughout North America, a spectacle that attracted its own crowds in cities like New York.

In Washington, D.C., Trump was photographed on a White House balcony squinting at the sun without protective eyewear, as an aide below shouted, "Don't look!" Looking at the sun during a partial eclipse can cause severe eye damage.

Trump, first lady Melania Trump and their son, Barron, then donned protective glasses.

Nearby, thousands of people lined the National Mall at 2:45pm, when four-fifths of the sun was blacked out.

"It's amazing, super cool," said Brittany Labrador, 30, a nurse practitioner from Memphis. "It's kind of just cool to watch in the capital."