

# Three get death for killing Mujib's men

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Press Trust of India  
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THREE FORMER Army officers were today sentenced to death by a Bangladesh court for murdering four national leaders inside the Dhaka Central Jail after the assassination of the country's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a coup in 1975, bringing to end a nearly three-decade-old case.

Judge Motiur Rahman of the Dhaka District and Sessions Court delivered the twice-deferred verdict at a crowded

courtroom amid tight security around the court complex.

The judge ordered three junior military officers to be hanged. Twelve people were sentenced to life imprisonment and five others, including four prominent politicians — former ministers Taheruddin Thakur, Obaidur Rahman, a ruling party MP, Shah Moazzem Hossain and Nurul Islam Monjur — were acquitted. The fifth is a retired Army Major, now serving in the Foreign Ministry. The three junior army officers were on the run

and had been tried in absentia.

Earlier, the verdict was scheduled to be delivered on September 7, but was deferred twice since then. It was deferred first as the judge was sick and then it was put back again for an extra hearing. The belated trial started in 1996, when the Awami League, led by Sheikh Hasina, now the main opposition leader, came to power.

The four national leaders, Syed Nazrul Islam, the acting President of the Bangladesh government-in-exile, his Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed along

with ministers Monsur Ali and A.H.M. Qamruzzaman, were killed on November 3, 1975. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, father of Sheikh Hasina, and most of his family members were killed in the first coup in August 1975.

Judge Rahman, in his 274-page verdict, made some observations saying, "the conspiracy theory against some of the accused could not be proved".

Blasting the officer-in-charge of the probe, he said: "I think the faulty investigation can affect the case seriously."

Investigating Officer Abdul Karar Akhand "has tarnished the police administration by his faulty investigation," the judge said. Soon after the verdict was announced, slogan-chanting supporters of the accused went around the road crossing the court.

"I am very happy," Shah Moazzem Hossain told reporters after coming out from the court. "We were wrongly implicated in the case to malign us."

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said by telephone that he had no immediate comment, as the ver-

dict was just delivered. "The Home Ministry will take steps if they feel so and we can only give a legal opinion," he said.

Leaders of the main opposition Awami League were also not immediately available for comment. But the families of the four leaders, in comments made to television channels, rejected the verdict, saying it was unacceptable to them. Of the 23 accused, three were in jail convicted for the 1975 killings, the five who were acquitted were all on bail, and the rest are fugitives.

# Khaleda's game

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Fraught with dangerous consequences

The report of Justice Joynul Abedin Commission, set up by prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia to investigate the August 21 grenade attack on Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka, where 22 people were killed, follows the line that she took — that the blast was the work of a neighbouring country trying to destabilise her government and install a puppet regime in Bangladesh. Short of naming India, Justice Abedin has said that the local agents of a neighbouring country were responsible for the blast and mayhem. Coming, on the heels of the Bangladesh foreign minister Morshed Khan's provocative statement that his country could play havoc in the north-east "as it was landlocked by Bangladesh", there is no doubt that the commission's finding will help Delhi to the conclusion that present rulers in Dhaka are no friend of India. Whatever illusions it had about the character of the Begum Zia's government is gone with the sudden steep rise in insurgency in the north-east. In fact, the recent blasts in Nagaland and Assam, which claimed over 40 lives, came soon after Morshed's threat on the north-east. And now that India is unjustly blamed for the 21 August carnage, Delhi's attitude to Dhaka is going to undergo a sea change.

There is no doubt that the commission's finding is going to result in Indo-Bangla relations touching a new low. Delhi knows the purpose of the commission's finding is aimed at shielding Islamists in Jamat and also within her own party responsible for the 21 August attack. It is also a clever move to divert world attention from the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism, now sweeping Bangladesh. It is also meant to muffle international outcries against attempts on Hasina's life. Senior world leaders from Kofi Annan, George Bush, Putin, Blair to Manmohan Singh have decried the attack and expressed concern over the attempt to wipe out the entire Awami League leadership. Some have gone to the extent of airing their doubts about the future of democracy in Bangladesh. That Justice Abedin's report has refused to identify the real identity of perpetrators of the dastardly crime is borne out by the fact that it says nothing about the recovery of Pakistan-made hand grenades from the scene of attack and also from inside the high security Dhaka central jail. Nor does it mention the bullet marks in Hasina's car. Actually Khaleda is trying a desperate cover-up so that the hardcore Islamists in her party and the Jamat, besides Mujib's killers, who attempted a repeat of 15 August 1975-like massacre, are never exposed and brought to justice. She has successfully botched all investigations into a score of bombings that have claimed over 150 lives in the last six years. Even attackers of the British High Commissioner in Dhaka, although identified, are not traced yet. She has allowed middle-east-based radical Islamic groups to operate and also let them slip out of the country when exposed. Actually Begum Zia is playing a dangerous game, much too dangerous for her comfort.

THE STATESMAN

13 OCT 2004

# Dhaka rally salvo

**FARID HOSSAIN IN DHAKA  
AND OUR DELHI BUREAU**

Oct. 3: A judicial probe into a deadly grenade attack on former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's rally has reportedly blamed a "foreign intelligence agency" — a euphemism usually used in Dhaka to describe India's spy agency, RAW.

The purported contents of the report, prepared by supreme court judge Jognul Abedin, were leaked at a time when the relationship between India and Bangladesh has turned frosty.

The disclosure — made in Dhaka's *New Age* daily — also coincided with the militant strikes in the Northeast, where Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi today again raised the issue of Indian fugitives' camps in Bangladesh

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and Myanmar with the Centre.

Hasina, viewed as pro-India in Bangladesh and who has been blaming the Khaleda Zia government for the attack on the rally that killed 21 people, rejected the reported findings of the commission.

"The chairman of the commission has spoken the words of the government," she told a cheering crowd today at her first public rally since the carnage in August.

Hasina's party has called for a nationwide general strike on October 10 to press for identifying the "real culprits behind the attack and bring them to justice".

While submitting the 162-page report to the government yesterday, Justice Abedin said: "We have identified the attackers and everything has been included in the report."

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He added that the "incident was a naked attack on the independence and sovereignty of the country".

But the judge did not disclose the findings, saying it is up to the government to decide whether to make them public.

The *New Age* reported today that "the commission observed that the motive behind the attack... was to blacken the image of the country and stop foreign investment by creating anarchy".

The Bangladesh government has not yet either denied or confirmed the newspaper report.

The grenade attack had sparked worldwide condemnation and prompted the intervention of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation and Interpol to help Bangladeshi investigators in the case.

THE TELEGRAPH

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# The fire in Bangladesh

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IT is exactly three years since the government led by Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh National Party and supported by the Jamaat-e-Islami fundamentalists, came to power. The operations of extremists pre-date this event; and even before the fateful election of 2001, there had been a number of bomb outrages, aimed principally at Leftist, secularist or Bengali cultural activities. Since that time, mysteriously untraceable atrocities have become more intense, and over 150 people have been killed in bomb blasts, responsibility for none of which has been attributed to anyone.

The presence of the Jamaat in the government of Bangladesh is, perhaps, astonishing, since it fought against the very existence of Bangladesh as a separate country in the War of Liberation of 1971, when Bangladesh broke away from Pakistan, whose Eastern (and subordinate) province it had remained since Partition in 1947. After the War, which witnessed one of the great massacres of the 20th century, the pro-Pakistani forces lay low; and, in any case, their power appeared dwarfed by that of the military, which emerged to rule Bangladesh after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, who had dominated the liberation struggle and ruled until he, along with most of his family, was killed in 1975. Zia ur Rahman formed the BNP from the Dhaka cantonment; and its strongly nationalist rhetoric provided an alternative to the secular, pro-Bengali, mildly Leftist Awami League, which had been the inheritor of popular support after liberation. The dictatorship of Ershad, following the assassination of Zia ur Rahman lasted from 1983 to 1990; when the "return to democracy" saw the election of Khaleda Zia (widow of Zia ur Rahman) until 1996, when she was ousted by the Awami League, led by the daughter of the murdered Mujib, Sheikh Hasina. The BNP returned to power in 2001, this time with the support of 17 Jamaat MPs.

The one-third of a century of Bangladeshi freedom has been characterised by a kind of low-intensity cultural civil war, in which the point of contention has been the struggle for the soul of this new country: does it embody a secular, pluralist Bengali culture, called

into being by a war of popular struggle against the Pakistani oppressors, or is it a potential Islamic state, nourished by a fierce patriotism, which thrives mainly on the omnipresence of its neighbour, India, which encloses it virtually on all sides?

The election of 2001 decisively tipped the balance towards the latter; particularly since this took place in the immediate aftermath of 11 September. I was in Dhaka on that day; and I met not a single person who at that time thought it a good idea to fly aircraft into public buildings, particularly when 64 Bangladeshi nationals were among the victims. However, by the time of my next visit, in February 2002, I met scarcely anyone who did not regard bin Laden as some kind of hero. Of the course, the war in Afghanistan had intervened; and the images of the dead and wounded of women and children had shown to the people of Bangladesh what appeared to be an equally arbitrary slaughter of the innocents by the greatest military power on earth. The consciousness of the whole country had changed in six short months, and in common with the experience all over the world, sympathy for the Americans had turned to wrath.

The past three years have also witnessed the intensification of the attacks by the Israelis upon the Palestinians, and the laissez-faire response of the Bush administration; the renewed assault on Chechnya by Vladimir Putin's increasingly violent and corrupt regime, and of course, the war in Iraq, Bush's malignant and mendacious pretence - ably abetted by the persuasive charms of Tony Blair - to seek out phantom weapons of mass destruction.

The effect of all this, both on the consciousness of the people, and on the audacity of extremists in Bangladesh, cannot be overestimated. It has to be acknowledged that none of this started with the Khaleda Zia government - the forces which were opposed to the freedom of Bangladesh were regrouping, awaiting their opportunistic moment, just as the neo-conservatives in the USA had been biding their time, waiting for the moment when they could ride forth with their war cries of dominance and destruction. From the 1970s to the 90s, more than 64,000 madrassas were

established in Bangladesh, many of them with money from Saudi Arabia, with large concentrations of these close to the borders with the Indian North-east. The conduct of these institutions lay outside of the purview of government. Many Islamic charities and non-government organisations were also operating beyond official scrutiny, including al Haramain, a "charity" which even Saudi Arabia banned in June 2004, although it was still operating in Bangladesh.

Their work was soon to bear fruit. No sooner were the election results known in Bangladesh in 2001 than attacks on minorities occurred in the rural areas. Many Hindus were dispossessed of their property, were threatened and mutilated. Some fled to India. The writer and broadcaster Shahriar Kabir interviewed some of them in West Bengal. For his pains, he was arrested, imprisoned and tortured by the government as soon as he returned to Bangladesh. This set the tone for a period of rising intolerance, violence and disorder in the country.

## new vistas JEREMY SEABROOK

This included an attack upon the Ahmadiya Muslims, the banning of their publications by the government, and by the assault on their mosques by extremists, declaring that they are non-Muslims and their mosques not authentic sites of worship. It has involved the murder of writers and journalists who are secular, humanist or proponents of Bengali culture. The writer Humayun Azad was attacked with a machete in February 2004; and died later, partly as a consequence of his injuries. The British High Commissioner was injured by a grenade at a holy shrine in Sylhet in April 2004. Experts from Scotland Yard were called in, but their investigations proved no more fruitful than the desultory efforts of the languid Bangladeshi authorities. Meanwhile, the activities of an elusive individual known as "Bangla Bhai" terrorised the North of Bangladesh, intimidating villagers and killing those they called "anti-social ele-

ments". Police have made no efforts to curtail these activities. An Awami League MP was gunned down at a rally in Tongi on 7 May 2004. One of the best-known NGOs, dedicated to secularism, Bengali culture and the emancipation of women, was targeted in the same month, the leadership arrested, detained and abused, accused of "sedition". The culmination of these events occurred on 21 August, when bombs at an Awami League political meeting killed 20 people, including the veteran women's affairs worker Ivy Rahman, and Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped with her life.

It is no accident that, earlier, Khaleda Zia had withdrawn the intense security which had surrounded Hasina. Death-threats to Hasina had been dismissed by the administration as "efforts to provoke sympathy" for the leader of the Opposition. Even after the outrage of 21 August, government spokespersons insisted it had been engineered by the Awami League for political purposes that remain obscure. While one should never underestimate the role of incompetence and corruption, the supineness of the BNP/Jamaat government in response to violence against law-abiding citizens who do not agree with its intransigent view of the country, suggests something more than mere indifference to law and order.

One of the apparently most astonishing elements in all this has been the relative silence of the West on these sorry events. The US under-secretary of state for South Asian affairs, had called Bangladesh "a model Muslim democracy". Even after the British High Commissioner had been injured, as soon as he returned to Dhaka he could not wait to underline the democratic credentials of the government. The West has been at pains to demonstrate that, although it has either initiated, or connived at, violent assaults on Muslims in Palestine, Chechnya and Iraq, it is not anti-Islam. In the so-called war on terror, it needs to provide itself with allies in the Muslim world; and Bangladesh is one of the countries appointed to fulfil this role.

An unfortunate choice; the more so since Musharraf, that notable instigator of terror, has been transformed from military dictator to statesman in the eyes of the USA, and he has promoted himself

as the saviour of his nation and the staunchest ally of George Bush in this increasingly abstract and eccentric "war on terror". But with the scrutiny turned by the West upon Pakistan, and equally, on Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, the centre of extremism has shifted; and Bangladesh has been the doubtful beneficiary of this chain of world events.

India is directly threatened by these developments. The rancour of Pakistan towards an India which assisted the coming into existence of Bangladesh has been rekindled through the good offices of the ISI and Bangladesh's Directorate General of Forces Intelligence. Since Pakistan is now officially engaged on dialogue with India, what could be more appealing than diverting its resources to assist the Bangladeshi nationalists and their Jamaat allies, who have been encircling India's North-east with the 200 or so camps, from where they can give succour and support to insurgencies against India? The foreign minister of Bangladesh has openly stated that Bangladesh has the power to create havoc in the North-east, since the seven states there are "Bangladesh-locked". To help destabilise India would be, not only a triumph for Bangladeshi "patriotism", but would also help the long-term project of the extremists of re-gaining, for a disputable version of Islam, an entity lost 33 years ago to Pakistan.

Bangladesh was born as a country committed to secularism, socialism, nationalism and democracy. The military erased secularism and socialism from the Constitution; and the fundamentalist forces are doing their best to stifle democracy also. If the present trends in Bangladesh go unchallenged, they will replace the ancient, secular and pluralist culture of Bengal with yet another regime built on the joyless intolerance and inflexibility peculiar to those elements of humanity, which exist in all religions, and think they are the sole proprietors of truth.

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# Bangla attack culprits identified

8110 PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DHAKA, Oct. 2. — The one-member judicial commission, inquiring into the 21 August grenade attack on a rally of Awami League that killed 21 people, today said it has identified the culprits responsible for it. "We have identified the attackers and everything has been included in the report we are submitting to the home ministry today," Mr Justice Joynul Abedin of the Supreme Court said at his makeshift office at Dhaka's Kakrail area after a 40-day probe.

The data gathered during the investigation could pin-point the culprits and their motive, Mr Justice Abedin said, but refused to disclose the findings, saying: "It is the government who will do it, not the commission." He criticised the role of security and Intelligence agencies. The civil society, political parties and the government "must work neutrally to ensure local or foreign plotters did not get scope to create anarchy," he said.

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# বাংলাদেশে জঙ্গি-শিবিরের ১৬টি এলাকায় চিহ্নিত

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার (নয়াদিল্লি) ও নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা (ঢাকা), ২৬ সেপ্টেম্বর: ভারত ও বাংলাদেশের মধ্যে সাম্প্রতিক স্বরাষ্ট্র সচিব পর্যায়ের বৈঠকে নয়াদিল্লি বাংলাদেশের হাতে সে দেশের মাটিতে বিভিন্ন জঙ্গি-শিবির বিধিয়ে সুনির্দিষ্ট এলাকাভিত্তিক মানচিত্র তুলে দিয়েছে। সেই তথ্যের ভিত্তিতে কী ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হচ্ছে, নভেম্বরের মধ্যে নয়াদিল্লি সেই ব্যাপারে ঢাকার তরফ থেকে একটা ধারণা (ফিড ব্যাক) পাওয়ার আশা করছে বলেও স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রক সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে।

ভারত যে ১৯৫টি জঙ্গি শিবিরের তালিকা বাংলাদেশকে দিয়েছে তাদের সুনির্দিষ্ট অবস্থান সম্পর্কে বিস্তারিত তথ্য দেওয়া হয়েছে বাংলাদেশের স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিবের হাতে। সেখানে ষোলটি এলাকা চিহ্নিত করা হয়েছে। স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রক সূত্রের খবর, তাদের দেওয়া

বিবৃতি দিয়ে কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রক জানিয়েছিল, জঙ্গি কার্যকলাপে ঢাকা ক্রমাগত মদত দিয়ে যাচ্ছে। বৈঠক থেকে ফিরে আসার পর অবশ্য সেই সূর খানিকটা নরম করে স্বরাষ্ট্র-সচিব ধীরেন্দ্র সিংহ সাংবাদিক সম্মেলন করে বলেন, জঙ্গি-সমস্যা-সহ সমস্ত বিষয়ের সমাধানের জন্য ভারত-বাংলাদেশ 'ঘনিষ্ঠভাবে' কাজ করবে। ধীরেন্দ্র সিংহের বাংলাদেশকে দেওয়া প্রস্তাবগুলোর মধ্যে ছিটমহল ইস্তাফুর, সীমান্ত চিহ্নিতকরণ, সীমান্তের ওপারে ভারতের কিছু জমি থেকে যাওয়ার মতো বিতর্কিত বিষয়গুলি থাকলেও তিনি কিছু বাংলাদেশে জঙ্গি শিবির নিয়ে তখন বিশদে মুখ খোলেননি।

আজ স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রকের এক প্রতিনিধি জানিয়েছেন, সাম্প্রতিক বৈঠকে ভারতের তরফ থেকে বাংলাদেশের মাটিতে জঙ্গি শিবিরের মানচিত্র

দেওয়া হয়েছে বাংলাদেশ সরকারের কাছে। বলা হয়েছে পাকিস্তান থেকে আসছে হয়ে চট্টগ্রাম বন্দর আর কক্সবাজারে অস্ত্র আসছে। সেখান থেকে ছড়িয়ে পড়ছে ভারতের বিভিন্ন সীমান্ত রাজ্যে। যেসব জেলাগুলি চিহ্নিত করা হয়েছে তার মধ্যে রয়েছে কক্সবাজার, মৌলভীবাজার, বান্দরবন, খাগড়াছড়ি, হবিগঞ্জ, রাঙ্গামাটি। শুধু জেলা-ই নয়, তার ভিতরের বিভিন্ন এলাকাও চিহ্নিত করে দেওয়া হয়েছে। বলা হয়েছে, মৌলভীবাজারের আদমপুর, বিশ্বমণি, শ্রীমঙ্গল এলাকা হবিগঞ্জের উবাটা, মুনীরখাট, সাতচড়ি এলাকা, খাগড়াছড়ির মারিরাঙা, বয়লাচড়ি, রাঙ্গামাটি জেলার বাগাইছাট এলাকায় এবং বান্দরবন জেলার তেঙ্গু, রায়ানখোয়াঙ্গ এবং ধাঞ্চি এলাকায় এই শিবিরের অস্তিত্ব রয়েছে। স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রকের এক কর্তা জানিয়েছেন,

“প্রয়োজন হলে আমরা এই শিবিরগুলির ছবিও ওঁদের হাতে তুলে দেব।” নয়াদিল্লির অভিব্যক্তি, আই এস আই কার্যকলাপে মদত দেওয়া হাড়াও এইসব শিবিরে উত্তরপূর্বাঞ্চলের জঙ্গিবাহিনীদের প্রশিক্ষণ, অর্ধসাহায্য এবং অস্ত্র জোগান দেওয়া হয়।

অন্যদিকে ভারতের বিরুদ্ধে একই ধরনের অভিব্যক্তি রয়েছে ঢাকারও তরফ থেকে। বি ডি আর সূত্রে জানানো হয়েছে যে বাহিনীর ডিজি জাহাঙ্গির আলম টোপুই বি এস এফের ডিজি অজয় রাজ শর্মা'র কাছে বঙ্গ সেনা, শিব বঙ্গ হিন্দু প্রজাতন্ত্রের মতো জঙ্গি-গোষ্ঠীগুলির বিরুদ্ধে ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ার, সীমান্ত পোরিয়ে পালিয়ে আসা বাংলাদেশি অপরাধীদের ঢাকার হাতে তুলে দেওয়ার ও ফেনসিভিলের মতো সব ওয়ুথের বাংলাদেশে পাচারের বিরুদ্ধে কড়া হওয়ার আর্জি জানানেন।

Bangladesh  
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# Lurking fear about larger neighbour

By Siddharth Varadarajan

**DHAKA:** In June, when the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan, visited New Delhi to greet the incoming Manmohan Singh Government, he said bilateral relations were on the upswing and that he and his Indian counterpart, Natwar Singh, had agreed not to speak to each other "through the media" but through the telephone. Last week, however, Mr. Khan appeared to disregard this sensible agreement in vigorously criticising the Indian Government before a conference room full of journalists. His remarks on trade, water-sharing and terrorism — which were replete with bitterness, anger and sarcasm — prompted a retired Bangladeshi diplomat to describe the speech as "thought-provoking, with the emphasis on the latter word."

It is not clear what the minister thought the consequences of his outburst would be but the next day's headlines — "Morshed blasts Delhi for 'unfair trade'" — must surely not have come as a surprise to him. Given the prickliness of South Block, he must also have known that his broadside would generate a tough response. Coming on the eve of bilateral secretary-level talks between the respective water resources and Home Ministries

— where a number of key issues and proposals are to be discussed — Mr. Khan's words led one Indian official to express pessimism about the meetings' outcome. "At this point, I think all bets are off".

Why did Mr. Khan say what he did? What has changed since the apparent bonhomie of June, and have bilateral ties now hit rock bottom?

## Rivalry is the reason

As with most things in Ban-

### INSIDE BANGLADESH — III

gladesh, the answer lies in the rivalry between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina. Begum Khaleda had been keen for the Indian Prime Minister to visit Dhaka and had sent Mr. Khan in June for that reason. Not only did the sought-after visit not materialise, the UPA Government further upset the Bangladesh Prime Minister by receiving Sheikh Hasina in Delhi in July days before her own meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the BIMST-EC summit in Bangkok in early August. Finally, Mr. Singh's decision to speak only to Ms. Hasina after the August 21 grenade attack — and not Begum Khaleda — greatly upset

the PM and her advisors. Indian officials say Mr. Singh called Ms. Hasina 45 minutes after learning of the attack on her life and that Begum Khaleda was not telephoned because "she was not the target". They also say that many other world leaders including Jack Straw and Donald McKinnon too spoke only to the Awami leader. However, given the sensitivities, New Delhi certainly erred in not speaking to the Bangladesh PM about what was after all an attack on the very existence of democracy in her country. Colin Powell did not make this mistake.

But if domestic politics is giving an unjustified rhetorical edge to Dhaka's policy towards India, the bulk of what Mr. Khan actually said — particularly his fears about India's river-linking project and the difficulty of Bangladeshi goods accessing Indian markets — resonates deeply with what most people here, cutting across party lines, feel about their larger neighbour.

## Over-reaction

Indeed, the Indian side has to guard against over-reacting to what the Bangladeshi Minister said. Certainly, the veiled threat to get the Tata group to cancel its \$2 billion investment plans in Bangladesh would be a case of cutting one's nose to

spite one's face. Indian officials who are quick to write off Bangladeshis as "anti-Indian" should realise there is tremendous public support inside the country for the Tata project. "It is truly a win-win situation for both us", says Rehman Sobhan, economist.

He argues that if India were unilaterally to allow free trade from Bangladesh, FDI inflows would increase — and not just from India — leading to improved production structures, better wages and greater employment. There would also be another spill-over benefit: As work prospects in Bangladesh improve, the flow of job-seekers to India would slow down, perhaps removing another irritant in bilateral relations.

## FTA holds the key

Indian officials say New Delhi is not averse to granting free access to Bangladeshi products but wants to embed this within the framework of a free trade agreement. An FTA in which Indian concessions are frontloaded while the Bangladeshis do not have to open up fully for, say, 10-15 years, might prove mutually acceptable. In exchange, India would have the right to expect Dhaka to soften its irrational opposition to the transshipment of goods to the north-east through its territory.

(Concluded)

# Opposition stir to oust Khaleda Government from today

Bangladesh 10.9

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By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, SEPT. 11.** The main Opposition parties in Bangladesh are planning three weeks of protest rallies and demonstrations from tomorrow to oust the Bangladesh Nationalist Party Government led by Begum Khaleda Zia.

The decision was announced on Friday by 14 parties — the Awami League, 11 Left parties, the JSD and the NAP.

The "one-point oust-Government movement" will include a grand rally in Dhaka, a "mass no-confidence human wall," a march to Parliament, rallies in district headquarters and demonstrations in Dhaka and other cities.

## Opposition charge

The Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League had been protesting against the Government following the grenade attack on a party rally in August.

The Opposition parties have alleged that the ruling coalition was responsible for the attack and hindering an impartial probe.

The Awami League general secretary, Abdul Jalil, said the parties which believed in democratic and non-communal politics have joined hands to oust the Government and establish a "secular Government steeped in the spirit of the Liberation War."

The Opposition leaders said: "Our movement is aimed at dis-

lodging the fundamentalists-allied Khaleda Zia Government from power for its failure to deliver and for patronisation of Islamic extremists."

The parties will march to the Jatiya Sangsad tomorrow, the opening day of the 13th session of Parliament and form a 40 km "mass no-confidence human wall" from Tongi to Narayanganj through the capital on September 18.

There will be countrywide protests on September 14 and marches across Bangladesh the next day.

## 'Human walls'

"Human walls" will be formed at upazilla headquarters on September 19 and at district headquarters on September 20. On September 21, the parties will stage separate demonstrations in Dhaka and other cities. The Awami League will hold a grand rally in Mymensingh on September 22 and another in Sylhet on September 24.

A "grand rally" will be organised at the Paltan Maidan here on October 3 to be attended by Sheikh Hasina and other leaders.

Sources said that the Jatiya Party, led by Gen. H.M. Ershad, the Bikalpa Dhara and the BKSJL are likely to join the programme.

The ruling BNP and its fundamentalist allies at a meeting of the ruling alliance on Friday decided to initiate a 'counter-offensive'.



# Bangla jail-killing verdict put off

Press Trust of India  
Dhaka, September 7

XG-17 89

A DHAKA court on Tuesday deferred to September 21 its long-awaited verdict on the historic 'Jail Killing Case' in which four of Bangladesh's independence leaders were killed inside the Dhaka Central Jail following a coup in 1975.

The high-profile case involves the assassination of Syed Nazrul Islam — acting President of the Bangladesh Government in exile, Tajuddin Ahmed — Prime Minister, M. Mansur Ali — finance minister and A.H.M. Qamaruzzaman — minister for home affairs, relief and rehabilitation.

Lawyers and reporters gathered at the



AFP  
Accused Taheruddin Thakur (right) arrives at a court in Dhaka on Tuesday.

court adjacent to the jail amid tight security but the Metropolitan Sessions Court judge,

Motiur Rahman, did not appear. Instead Judge Sirajul Haque took the seat and announced that Rahman was "sick" and thus the verdict would now be delivered on September 21. The delay of the trial has been blamed on repeated interventions by different governments and judicial tangles, particularly the Indemnity Ordinance which was repealed soon after the Awami League came to power in 1996.

According to the chargesheet, the four leaders were killed after they refused to join the post-1975 coup cabinet headed by former President Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed. Of the 23 accused in the case, three are in custody, five are on bail, 12 have been evading arrest and three are dead.

# BANGLADESH TERROR-II

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## Government Doesn't Solve Crimes But Harasses Opposition

By BIBHUTI BHUSAN NANDY

The countrywide post-election Hindu-cleansing operations in 2001 jointly conducted by the BNP and Jamaat workers subjected the minority Hindu community to a wave of centrally planned and directed murder, loot, extortion, arson and gang-rape that triggered a massive exodus of Hindus to India. Later, operating at the micro level, the fundamentalists, notably guerrillas of the J-e-I affiliate Islamic Chhatra Shibir, selectively killed a number of leading Hindus like college principal, school teachers and priests, and Buddhist monks to sustain and exacerbate the sense of insecurity among the minorities.

### Fundamentalist mayhem

Three years after the unprecedented mayhem under the BNP-Jamaat dispensation, atrocities against religious and ethnic minorities have continued unabated. Besides countless cases of dacoity, 226 serious cases of minority bashing were reported in the first half of the current year. These included murder (20), rape (22), kidnapping (17 including seven girl students) and extortion, loot and forcible occupation of houses and other immovable property (167). BNP and Jamaat cadres were mainly involved in the perpetration of these crimes.

In March this year, 11 members of a Hindu family at Sadhanpur village in Banskhalia area of Chittagong district were burnt to death by hired criminals at the instance of the brother of a BNP minister on the suspicion that they were supporters of the Awami League. Unable to withstand persistent persecution by the terror brigade of the four-party ruling alliance, 52 adivasis fled under cover of darkness one night to an unknown place from their village Malpora in Dinajpur district.

In Tangail, terrorists shot dead one tribal Christian and members of the ruling BNP forcibly occupied 150 bighas of land of the Hindu community. Supported by the army, Muslim settlers in Chittagong Hill district frequently kill Chakma tribals and rape Chakma women.

The small Ahmediya sect (100,000) has come under increasing attacks from the Jamaat-e-Islami and other fundamentalist forces. Since the government banned all Ahmediya publications earlier this year, the Jamaat has stepped up the Khatm-e-Nabat movement, killing the Ahmediya Jamaat

Ameer at Jessore, and vandalising and forcibly occupying Ahmediya mosques at Dhaka and other places. The J-e-I has been spearheading the demand for enactment of a blasphemy law, declaring, as in Pakistan, the Ahmediyas as non-Muslim.

In the past five years, 56 people have been killed in terrorist bomb attacks on Udichi musical concert, Bengali new year day

police torture.

Senior police officers investigating the terrorist attacks in Sylhet district allege that there are strong grounds to suspect involvement of known fundamentalist elements in each of the crimes, but, under instructions from "higher ups," they cannot document this in case records. Nor can such suspects be examined, much less interro-



congregation in Dhaka, Narayanganj district Awami League office, Awami League rallies at Sunamganj, Sylhet and Dhaka, cinema halls at Mymensingh and Sylhet, a church at Gopalganj and Sah Jalal shrine at Sylhet. In Sylhet district alone, there were 15 cases of bomb attacks killing 12 persons in the last six years. The bomb attack injuring the British High Commissioner to Bangladesh at Sylhet on May 21 this year was an internationally inspired crime.

### De-secularising Bangladesh

Thanks to the inability and unwillingness of the police, none of the cases of terrorist attacks have been resolved. Instead of seriously investigating the horrendous crimes the government has used them with cynical persistence to harass and persecute opposition leaders and secular intellectuals who had raised their voice against the atrocities on the minorities. Among many others, Awami League leaders Saber Chaudhury and Bahauddin Nasim, human rights activist Shahriar Kabir, university professor Mumtasir Namun and journalist Selim Samad have been charged with sedition. While in police custody they were subjected to inhuman

gated. This stratagem is meant to debunk foreign press reports of spread of Islamic terror in the country.

A good number of JUM, SuH and JMJB cadres were arrested from different places in the last two years with clinching evidence of their links to terrorist activities and possession of firearms and other weapons, but for want of follow-up they have been discharged by the courts.

Countless horrendous crimes have been perpetrated against religious and ethnic minorities over the years, but barring a very few cases, the police have not investigated them. Though the culprits were known and the press had named them all, no action was taken against them. Under the BNP-Jamaat regime, the sequence of crime and punishment has ceased to exist in Bangladesh in respect of all cases involving Muslim offenders and non-Muslim victims. In the given situation, the minorities have the stark choice of embracing Islam or migrating to India en masse. Uptil now they have chosen the second alternative.

For their part, the Awami League and other left-of-centre parties cannot absolve themselves of the responsibility of

indirectly contributing to the growth of Islamic militancy by their omission to resist state-sponsored de-secularisation and Islamization of the polity. The failure of these parties to come to the rescue of the minorities in the face of repeated onslaughts on them for fear of alienating the Muslims has cast serious doubts on their secular credentials. Staunch secularist Awami League leaders of yesteryears now believe that risking loss of 90 percent Muslim votes for the sake of the electoral support of 10 percent Hindus makes no political sense. At the same time, big-party chauvinism of the Awami League and larger than life ego of the badly splintered left stand in the way of forging unity against fascist and fundamentalist forces, that are gaining strength by the day.

### Fallout on India

The NDA government's policy of supporting the BNP-Jamaat government at a time when the minorities were being butchered in Bangladesh in the hope of getting supply of natural gas and transit and transshipment facilities for the Northeast region sent a wrong signal to Dhaka. Assured of inaction by the Indian government, Islamists backed up by the Jamaat and other fundamentalist forces have embarked on a sustained killing spree.

From all accounts, the disrupted and dysfunctional state of Bangladesh is set to become a monolithic Islamic state and a breeding ground of Islamic terror. The destabilising impact of such an eventuality will be incalculably disastrous for India and the rest of the South Asian region. Already as a result of unrestrained illegal immigration 20 million aliens (i.e. 15 percent of the Bangladesh population) have settled down in the border districts of West Bengal and other Northeast states, radically changing the demographic structure and communal complexion of the whole area.

The increasing political clout and aggressiveness of the infiltrators have posed a serious threat to the security of the original inhabitants in the border belt who have started shifting to safer places in droves.

The effective frontier of Bangladesh is thus pushing forward deeper into Indian territory, bringing the Islamic terrorists' dream of a transnational Islamic state in the region closer to reality.

(Concluded)

# BANGLADESH TERROR-I

## The Growing Spectre Of Radical Islam

By BIBHUTI BHUSAN NANDY

The deadly bomb attack on the Awami League rally in Dhaka on August 21 is yet another stark reminder that none, save the ruling clique and its fundamentalist allies, is safe in today's Bangladesh. There is no question Sheikh Hasina was the target of the attack. Though she escaped with minor injuries, it took a toll of 19 lives and injured upwards of 150 others, many of them crippled forever.

A hitherto unknown terrorist group, Hikmatul Jihad, has claimed responsibility for the dastardly act and threatened to kill Hasina within seven days. But indications are that it was the handiwork of the Harkat-ul Jihad-e-Islam (HuJI) that had unsuccessfully attempted to kill Hasina at Kotalipara in 2000 when she was the prime minister. The HuJI had placed a powerful explosive device under the dais from which she was scheduled to address a public meeting. Timely detection of the bomb saved her life. Mufti Hannan, the main culprit, is still at large and has been training HuJI cadres at some *quomi* mosques in Sylhet city suburbs.

### Incremental build-up

The latest attempt on the life of the leader of the opposition occurred not without prior warning. Last July, when she was in Turkey, Hasina received death threats from Bangladesh. So did Badruddin Ahmed Kamran, Awami League leader and mayor of Sylhet, as well as three professors of Dhaka University, known for their commitment to secular democratic values.

In the backdrop of a murderous attack on Professor Humayun Azad in Dhaka and assassination of Awami League MP Asanullah at Ghajipur, journalists Manik Saha and Humayun Kabir Balu at Khulna, and serial killing of Awami League activists and Hindus in Rajsahi district, these were not empty threats. But the callous government responded by ridiculing the subjects of death threats. Even after a bomb attack on an Awami League rally (Sylhet — August 7) addressed by Kamran that killed a district level party leader, the administration showed no interest in protecting these people. Clearly, for the incumbent BNP-Jamaat regime, lives of secular opposition leaders, minorities, and moderate Muslim intellectuals are expendable in the interest of perpetuating its hold on power.

A legacy of the Pakistan-era communal politics, the growth of radical political Islam in Bangla-

desh has been a process of incremental build-up brought about by a combination of internal and external factors. A identity crisis rooted in the conflict between the moderate Bengali cultural ethos and the harsh theocratic reality of Pakistan led to the war of liberation in 1971, but the post-liberation experiment ended abruptly in 1975 with the killing of Sheikh Mujib in a military

On return from Afghanistan these soldiers of Islam organised a host of terrorist outfits in the country with the aim to establish a Talibanized transnational state comprising Bangladesh, Assam, Tripura, Muslim majority districts of West Bengal and the Rohingya Muslim-dominated Arakan Hills of Myanmar.

The HuJI was formed in 1992 with ideological guidance and



putsch.

Gen Ziaur Rehman lifted the ban on the communal and fundamentalist parties and de-secularized the constitution in 1977 under pressure from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries. Gen HM Ershad declared Islam as the state religion in 1988. The process of Islamization initiated by the two military rulers reactivated the Jamaat-e-Islami and other communal and fundamentalist forces in the country. The boosting of political Islam was supported by a steady flow of petro-dollars from Saudi Arabia and other Middle East countries, leading to the mushrooming of mosques, makhtabs and madrassas in every nook and corner of the country.

### Transnational state

Beginning in 1984, the Jamaat-e-Islami, in co-ordination with its Pakistani counterpart and the ISI, recruited no fewer than 5000 madrassa alumni as mujahideens and sent them in successive batches to Afghanistan to participate in the jihad against the Soviet occupation army.

In Afghanistan, they came in close contact with the Hizbul Islam, Al Qaeda, Taliban and Pakistani terrorist outfits like the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. Inspired by Osama bin Laden and trained by Al Qaeda and Taliban, these mujahideens formed the vanguard of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh.

financial support from Osama bin Laden. In the congenial atmosphere created by the ascension of the Jamaat-e-Islami to power as a coalition partner of the BNP in 2001, a number of other Islamic terrorist outfits have surfaced in different parts of the country in the last two years. These include Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JuM), Sahadat al Hikma (SaH) and the JMJB. An umbrella organization called Bangladesh Islami Manch was set up in 2002 with representatives from these groups, and the Minorities United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (raised by the Jamaat-e-Islami in the late 1970s) to co-ordinate the activities of these outfits.

All these Islamic terrorist organisations have close links with local Jamaat-e-Islami leaders. They draw their cadres from the 1,462,500-strong alumni of the country's 6,500 *quomi* madrassas that are run by the J-e-I. With financial support from foreign Islamic NGOs and backing of the Jamaat, the RSO and the HuJI have been training terrorist recruits in *quomi* madrassas in the outlying hilly and jungle areas of Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar districts. Guerrilla training manuals authored by Masud Azhar, the Jaish-e-Mohammed leader of Pakistan, are extensively used as the curriculum of such training.

Earlier, with the coming to power of the BNP in 1991, and

with the support of the Jamaat, Islamic fundamentalist forces had become more aggressive, stridently demanding introduction of Islamic rule in the country. The backlash of the demolition of the Babri mosque in December 1992 triggered the worst ever pogrom on the minority Hindu community perpetrated by the ruling BNP cadres, in conjunction with the J-e-I and the HuJI. In the reign of terror unleashed by these forces loot, arson, rape, and destruction and desecration of Hindu temples and shrines became the order of the day, with the administration all the while looking the other way.

### After September 11

In a related development, mullahs issued *fatwas* pronouncing death sentence on the liberal writer Taslima Nasrin for writing *Lajja* — a novel that vividly depicted the post-Babri barbarities on the Hindu community. In tandem with the fundamentalist demand for the execution of Nasrin, the government banned the book, launched police investigation against her under section 295 of the Bangladesh Penal Code and had a warrant of arrest issued against the writer, forcing her to go into hiding. Only on the intervention of donor countries of the European Union could she leave Bangladesh in self-exile.

The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the post-9/11 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq by the US-led coalition have further fuelled Islamic militancy in Bangladesh. The J-e-I, Islamic Oikya Jote, Khilafat Andolan and all other fundamentalist groups mobilized Muslim masses on a rabidly anti-American platform declaring the US an enemy of Islam. No wonder, a 2002 survey by the Washington-based Pew Research Centre revealed that 58 percent of Bangladeshi Muslims believed that suicidal bombing was justified in the cause of Islam.

The countrywide post-election Hindu-cleansing operations, in 2001 jointly conducted by the BNP and Jamaat workers subjected the minority Hindu community to a wave of centrally planned and directed murder, loot, extortion, arson and gangrape that triggered a massive exodus of Hindus to India. Later, operating at the micro level, the fundamentalists, notably guerrillas of the J-e-I affiliate Islamic Chhatra Shibir, selectively killed a number of leading Hindus like college principal, school teachers and priests, and Buddhist monks to sustain and exacerbate the sense of insecurity among the minorities.

(To be concluded)

# আবার বিস্ফোরণ সিলেটে, নিহত ২

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, ঢাকা, ৫ সেপ্টেম্বর: ঠিক এক মাসের মাথায় ফের বিস্ফোরণ ঘটল সিলেটে। এ বারের বিস্ফোরণ সিলেট ক্যান্টনমেন্ট থেকে মাত্র দু'শো গজ দূরের একটি বাড়িতে। আজ সকালের এই ঘটনায় এক বালক-সহ দু'জনের মৃত্যু হয়েছে, আহত অন্তত ১০ জন। তাদের মধ্যেও বেশ কিছু শিশু রয়েছে। পরপর সন্ত্রাসের ঘটনায় জেরবার বাংলাদেশে আজই এসে পৌঁছেছেন মার্কিন সন্ত্রাসবাদ বিশেষজ্ঞ জে কফার ব্ল্যাক।

পুলিশ সূত্রের খবর, সিলেটের সেনাছাউনির কাছেই একটি বাড়ির বারান্দায় সকাল সাড়ে আটটা নাগাদ বিস্ফোরণ ঘটে। ঘটনাস্থলেই মৃত্যু হয় দিনমজুর আনোয়ার (৩০) এবং তাঁর ভাইপো জালিলের (১২)। জখম হয় কয়েকটি শিশু। সিলেট ওসমানি মেডিক্যাল কলেজ সূত্রের খবর, আহতদের মধ্যে অন্তত চার জনের অবস্থা আশঙ্কাজনক। প্রত্যক্ষদর্শীরা জানান, বিস্ফোরণের তীব্রতায় বাড়িটির ছাদ উড়ে গিয়ে মেঝেয় গর্ত হয়ে গিয়েছে। বোমা তৈরির সময় ফেটে যায়, না কি বাইরে থেকে বোমা ছোড়া

হয়, তা নিয়ে বিতর্ক রয়েছে।

সিলেটে অগস্টের প্রথম সপ্তাহেই কয়েকটি সিনেমা হল এবং আওয়ামী লিগের সম্মেলনস্থলের কাছে কয়েকটি বিস্ফোরণ ঘটে। মারা যান ১০ জন, আহতের সংখ্যা ছিল শতাধিক। তারও আগে মে মাসে ওই শহরেই বিস্ফোরণে আহত হন বাংলাদেশের ব্রিটিশ হাই কমিশনার আনোয়ার চৌধুরী। পরের পর বিস্ফোরণের প্রতিবাদে স্থানীয় মানুষ আজ পুলিশ ও প্রশাসনের কর্তাদের ঘিরে ফোভে ফেটে পড়েন। সিলেটের মেয়র বদরুদ্দিন কামরান বলেন, “জনগণের প্রব্লেম উত্তর আমাদের কাছে নেই। কারা এই ধরনের কাণ্ড ঘটাবে, কারাই বা সেই অপরাধীদের পাঠাচ্ছে— কাউকেই আমরা খুঁজে বার করতে পারিনি।”

এ দিকে, শেখ হাসিনার উপরে ২১ অগস্টের গ্রেনেড হামলায় জড়িত সন্দেহে আব্দুর রহমান নামে এক ব্যক্তিকে গ্রেফতার করেছে র‍্যাপিড অ্যাকশন ব্যাটালিয়ন। ঢাকা শহরতলিতে তার বাড়ি থেকে একটি জার্মান রিভলভার এবং ১৩ রাউন্ড গুলি পাওয়া গিয়েছে।

# Bangla blast greets US emissary

**Dhaka, Sept. 5 (Reuters):** Two people were killed and 10 wounded in a bomb blast in northeastern Bangladesh today in the latest of a series of attacks that have killed at least 107 people in the country since 2000, police said.

The latest blast coincided with a visit to Dhaka by US state department counter-terrorism expert Joseph Cofer Black, who met government and opposition leaders today.

Black told a news conference he was not, contrary to reports, in Dhaka to investigate an attack on an Opposition rally which killed 19 people and wounded 150 last month.

"I came for consultations with the government officials on global and regional terrorism issues," he said.

Black noted that there was a "disturbing trend of accelerating political violence in Bangladesh and that we encour-



**Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina (left) with US counter-terrorism expert Joseph Cofer Black in Dhaka on Sunday. (AFP)**

age the government to act swiftly and fairly to apprehend the criminals responsible for this heinous act."

He met Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, foreign minister M. Morshed Khan and Opposition leader Sheikh

Hasina. Hasina's political secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury told reporters they discussed the rally blasts.

Khan said Bangladesh would not exclude any American offer to probe into the incident at this point.

Police said today's blast occurred outside a cinema hall in Sylhet, 300 km from Dhaka, at 9:30 am. They said they had arrested a few suspects but said had no definite clue who might be involved.

Doctors at Sylhet Medical

College Hospital said they had admitted seven blast victims, some in critical condition. They gave no details.

"We still don't know who were behind this blast, but have picked up some suspects," said Rafiqul Islam Sarder, additional police superintendent in Sylhet. He did not say how many had been detained.

Witnesses said relatives thronged the Sylhet Medical College Hospital to see the wounded and take the dead home. "We are trying our best to save lives. Ironically, it has now become almost a routine job for us to handle bomb casualties," said hospital doctor Abdus Salam.

Sylhet has been the scene of several blasts since May, in which at least seven people have been killed and more than 250 wounded, including British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury.

# Political storm brewing in Bangladesh

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, AUG. 31.** A political storm is brewing in Bangladesh in the aftermath of the deadly grenade attack on the rally addressed by the Opposition leader, Sheikh Hasina, in Dhaka a week ago.

After their third highly responsive nation-wide hartal recently, the mainstream Opposition parties said they would announce a new programme soon to inject more momentum into the ongoing agitation for the "ouster of the Government". Another hartal was being enforced on Monday

at the call of the women's wing of the Awami League, backed by leading women's organisations in the country.

## New turn

Leaders of the ruling alliance are keeping a close watch on the developments, and the Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, has offered to hold a dialogue with the Opposition. However, the Opposition leaders rejected the offer outright.

The grenade attack on the rally has taken a new turn with Sheikh Hasina accusing the Prime Minister, her eldest son

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Tareque Rahman, the State Minister for Home, Lutfozzaman Babar, and the Prime Minister's parliamentary affairs advisor, Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, of being directly involved in the assassination attempt.

The Awami League, the 11-party Opposition combine and other minor parties are holding consultations in a bid to formulate a programme to force the Government out. The Opposition programme may be announced within a day or two and indications are that the agitation will not be a short one

nor peaceful. Pro-Government activists have already unleashed attacks on Opposition programmes in many parts of the country and the situation will only worsen in the coming days.

## Interpol to aid probe

Meanwhile, two Interpol experts have arrived to assist the Bangladesh police in probing the grenade attack.

The Opposition leaders, stating that they did not have any confidence in the local police who operate under the Government's orders, had demanded an international probe.

THE HINDU

\* 1 SEP 2004

# Turmoil in the region

5-9 21/8

**E**MERGENCY in Maldives, blockade of Nepal's capital, attempt on the life of Sheikh Hasina, coming as they do in quick succession these developments give a sense of regional crisis. Cumulatively, they tend to overshadow the fitful Indo-Pak dialogue that has brought a touch of hope to South Asia. Yet for all their undoubted seriousness, this string of crises should not give rise to exaggerated alarm. There is no running thread between them: they have arisen from unrelated causes and draw no support from each other. For India, nevertheless, these are disturbing events within some of its immediate neighbours, and it needs must look carefully at what has happened and what it implies.

The emergency in Maldives is especially unexpected. This tiny country is the true economic success story of South Asia. When Indira Gandhi visited in 1975, Maldives was little more than a sleepy spread of atolls, only three of which had been developed for foreign visitors. The capital Male was just a small collection of waterfront warehouses with a few modest structures behind. It was hard pressed to accommodate Mrs Gandhi's limited retinue. But today, only one generation later, it is a totally different story. A large number of Maldives' hundreds of atolls have been developed and the process continues apace. There is construction activity everywhere, numerous sleek resorts have come up, tourism thrives and drives the economy. Male has become a tight-packed urban hub. Even in remote atolls there are plenty of imported goods on display, testifying to the expanded purchasing power of the people. Indeed, per capita income is rumoured to be around US\$2000, so Maldives has leapfrogged all the others and taken top position within Saarc. Lifestyle changes have inevitably followed and traditional ways are fast being left behind. These changes seem to be reflected in the demand for loosening of the closely controlled political system.

The last time there was a change of government in Maldives, it was caused by some thugs who themselves were chased out summarily by Indian forces responding to a request for aid. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has been in uninterrupted command since his restoration some 25 years ago. In this period, Maldives has introduced a fair amount of democratic functioning as part of its modernising effort. There is an elected Majlis, or Assembly, voting is free, suffrage is universal. Yet,



An Awami League activist shouts anti-government slogans in Dhaka. — AFP

## wide angle

**SALMAN HAIDAR**

there are limitations on what the Majlis can do. The authority of the President is not to be challenged by parliamentary means. This seems to have given the incentive for the pro-democracy demonstrations that have provoked the imposition of emergency regulations. By some standards, the public protest was a minor affair, but in that small and vulnerable country, it appeared threatening. Some well-known local figures were involved, which would have added to the anxiety. The demonstrations have been firmly put down and a number of special envoys have been sent to important capitals to explain the emergency. The situation seems to have been controlled for the present yet the appeal for more democracy may continue to reverberate internally and internationally. The demand for change may not be easy to hold back.

What has happened elsewhere in the region is less of a surprise. In Nepal, the struggle between the elected government and the Maoists has been

going on for years. Democratic institutions in Nepal have been hard pressed to meet the Maoist challenge and have suffered a loss of credibility through their failure to provide stable rule. While Parliament has floundered, the monarchy has enlarged its role, which has become a further complication. It is a bewildering situation marked by violence and uncertainty. The blockade of Kathmandu dramatises the issues. India's reported readiness to break the blockade by airdropping supplies was fiercely resented: however intractable the problem, no one in Nepal seems to want visible Indian intervention. Yet, there is little sign of any effective move from within to address the problem, and the prospects for the future remain troubling.

In Bangladesh, the assassination attempt on Sheikh Hasina has added a dangerous edge to the political rivalries between the ruling BNP and the opposition Awami League. Accusations of BNP complicity, indignantly denied, have not been slow in coming from AL sources. The attempt is a sad reminder of past assassinations of Bangladesh's leaders, including that of the founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This makes for a bitter and divisive legacy for today's rulers, expressed in constant damaging strife between government and parliamentary opposition. It takes little to turn Bangladesh's internal frustrations into anti-Indian sentiment — and India has given plenty of scope through clumsy initiatives on several cross-border issues.

India faces a considerable problem in trying to develop an adequate response to these events. It cannot hold completely aloof, nor can it rush in with counsel and succour. The fact that at one time or other it has been drawn into active intervention in the affairs of each of these three countries shows how closely its interests are intermeshed with theirs. While any form of intervention would be anathema today, India needs to keep close to its smaller neighbours, maintain effective exchanges with them, and be ready to provide support when requested. It can also offer discreet advice on what needs to be done to resolve long running problems. If this is undertaken not with the detached hauteur that exasperates the smaller neighbours but in a spirit of sharing and constructive cooperation, it can achieve useful results.

*(Salman Haidar is a former Foreign Secretary, Government of India.)*

# Bangla Opp calls fourth general strike in a week

২৭/৮ ৫৫-১৩  
Agence France-Presse  
Dhaka, August 29

BANGLADESH'S OPPOSITION, further tightening the noose in its campaign to oust the government, has called yet another general strike for Monday, the fourth in a week and the 18th this year, a report said on Sunday.

The official BSS news agency said Monday's shutdown had been called by the Awami League's women's wing. The country was brought to a standstill on Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday by strikes called by the Awami League to protest a deadly grenade attack August 21 on its political rally in Dhaka which killed 20 people.

The latest strike will be the 18th called by the Awami League since February as part of its intensified campaign to oust the government, a four-party coalition led by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

The Opposition accuses the government of failing to crack down on crime and corruption.

Interpol, meanwhile, is to send two officials, one from Australia and the other from the US, to help investigate the grenade attacks, police said.

Meanwhile, the Bangladeshi government has offered a reward of \$173,635 on Sunday to anyone who identifies those behind the grenade attack.



# Right move by Hasina

Khaleda trying to deflect the real issue

It is difficult to say how sincere prime minister Khaleda Zia can be in discussing with Sheikh Hasina the murderous attempt on the Awami League leader's life last Saturday which claimed over 20 lives. This is because the security agencies are yet to apprehend anyone involved. This has left even the international community, including the UN secretary general Kofi Annan stunned. The Awami League chief is justified in spurning the talks offer since senior ministers of Khaleda Zia have accused Sheikh Hasina of "engineering the attack" so as to "become a martyr and also to belittle Bangladesh's image and destroy democracy" In fact a coalition partners of Begum Zia, the fundamentalist Jamat i Islam, whose cadres, according to circumstantial evidence, are responsible for the attack, has launched a massive disinformation campaign to divert the real issue — pinpointing the real perpetrators of the 21 August bomb outrage. Last June when callers from Dhaka on phone threatened to kill Hasina in Istanbul, Khaleda dismissed these threats as "Awami League engineered conspiracy to defame her government". Her ministers had even said that these calls were being "engineered to evoke popular sympathy for Hasina".

One of Khaleda's first acts on assuming office was to strip Hasina of special security provided to her. She had even said that none could touch Hasina as she was hated by people. What has complicated matters is that the American ambassador in Dhaka, Harry Thomas, has described Jamat as a "democratic party." Thomas is also pressurising Hasina to talk to Khaleda for "sorting out differences". Doesn't he know that none of the real culprits responsible for carrying out over a dozen bomb attacks in which 150 were killed in the last four years have been apprehended? Moreover what has been the fate of the inquiry commissions which were set up to investigate some of these bomb attacks? The commission reports were never published and the truth about the heinous crimes was never known. So Hasina can't be faulted for spurning Khaleda's offer.

THE STATESMAN

30 AUG 2004

# 80 injured in Bangla clashes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

51 " 29/8  
DHAKA, Aug. 28. — Bomb blasts and clashes during an anti-government general strike left about 80 people injured in Bangladesh today, as officials said an Interpol team was on way to Dhaka to probe the recent grenade attack on an Opposition rally in which former premier Sheikh Hasina Wajed narrowly escaped but 20 others were killed.

Several people were injured when a home-made bomb went off in Dhaka's Postagola area during the day-long strike called by main opposition Awami League, 11-Left party alliance, factions of the Left-wing Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and National Awami Party to protest the 21 August grenade attack and demand the resignation of the Khaleda Zia government, a private television channel said.

At least 70 others were injured in clashes between protesters and police or anti-agitators in six districts, including Narsinghdi and Kishoreganj, according to another TV channel. Some others were injured in overnight strike-related



*Riot police stand guard in Dhaka on Saturday. — AFP*

violence. Today's strike was the third in five days. In Dhaka, at least five protesters, including women, were detained by police.

A two-member Interpol team will arrive tomorrow in Dhaka from

Thailand to probe the grenade attack, a senior police officer said. He added the Interpol officers would help local intelligence organisations track down those behind the deadly attack.

## Over 20 little-known Islamic groups are wreaking havoc

**A**bdul Mannan's story is familiar to those who visit Sheikh Hasina's home in Dhaka's posh Dhanmondi area. When he was a boy of five or six, he was one day picked up by Hasina from a neighbouring street. She brought him up, got him a job on her personal staff and arranged his marriage. When Abdul, now a young man of 24, became a father recently, Hasina went about telling people she had become a "dadi".

On August 21, the world nearly came to an end for Abdul and for his "Ma". Grenades, bombs and bullets turned Bangabandhu Avenue in central Dhaka into a killing field. Hasina and other leaders of her party, the Bangladesh Awami League (AL), were the targets of the worst-ever assassination attempt in Bangladesh since August 15, 1975, when her father, "Bangabandhu" Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and 16 others of his family were killed in his house in an army coup.

For nearly an hour after the attack took place, Abdul did not know if "Ma" was alive. He rushed to hospitals, carrying the injured, his clothes soaked in their blood. "I couldn't think of anything. My mind went blank. I thought Ma was dead," he recalls. Only when he reached Sudha Sadan, Hasina's home, did he know she was alive. "Only then did I have time to break down."

It was much the same experience for Nakibuddin Ahmad, Hasina's relative and once her deputy press secretary. "When I fell at her feet here, crying uncontrollably, she said, 'Why are you crying? Can't you see I'm alive and safe?'" he remembers, sitting in the drawing room of Sudha Sadan.

Not every one present at that AL rally was alive and safe, though. Nineteen people had been killed on the spot, including one of Hasina's personal bodyguards, and at least 500 others grievously injured. Two days later, Ivy Rahman, leading lady of the country's women's movement and wife of Jilur Rahman, one of the seniormost AL leaders, succumbed to her grenade injuries.

"They (the killers) wanted to create another August 15," Hasina tells me. She, however, holds the government of Begum Khaleda Zia responsible for the grisly incident. "They have lost all sense. They think they can carry on in power if they can eliminate me. But it isn't 1975 any more."

Hasina may have survived yet another assassination attempt — the seventh since she returned home from exile in 1981. But more and more people feel that their country and its fledgling democracy are becoming increasingly unsafe. On the streets and in their homes, more and more people are feeling increasingly threatened.

It is not just a matter of a spiralling crime wave. Bangladesh is in the grip of a new "bomb culture" that threatens to tear apart its new democratic fabric. And there is a pattern in the bomb attacks. These are targeted at political parties, cultural groups and individuals that are associated with democracy, secularism and progressive culture. The attackers, on the other hand, are associated with 20-odd Islamic fundamentalist groups, most of them relatively unknown.

Over the past five years, they have targeted Hasina and her AL, the leftist parties like the Communist Party of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Workers' Party, cultural groups such as the Udichi, writers like Shamsur Rahman and Humayun Azad (who recently died in Germany under mysterious circumstances), journalists and minorities — Hindu, Christian and even the Ahmadiya sect — and cinema halls. In no case were the attackers identified, let alone arrested.

That is at the heart of the terror that has struck the nation. The common people have no idea who these assassins are. The government too has little clue. Worse, Hasina

# They wanted to create another August 15



**TERROR CLOUDS:** (Clockwise from above) An Awami League activist reacts after the August 21 blasts; Sheikh Hasina speaks at her residence the day after; Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. (PTI/AFP/Reuters)

Twenty-nine years after Sheikh Mujib's assassination, his daughter survived the seventh attempt on her life. **ASHIS CHAKRABARTI** reports on a new "bomb culture" that has gripped Bangladesh



and other victims of this terror accuse the government of Zia of being hand-in-glove with many of the fundamentalist groups. "How can the government get the culprits? It's they who are doing all this," she says. "That is why she has no faith in the inquiry that the government has ordered into the grenade attack on the AL rally on August 21. She wants an international inquiry. And she wants the government to step down. She is not alone in losing faith in the government."

A debate is currently raging in Dhaka's intellectual circles over whether Bangladesh has become or is becoming a "failed state". Some suspect that there is a conspiracy to reduce it to a failed state so that an army-backed regime can take over. "I'm usually an optimist. But I now find it difficult to stick to my optimism in this atmosphere of gathering darkness," the country's leading poet Shamsur Rahman, who had survived assassination attempts and threats, said in the aftermath of the attack on the AL rally. Leaders of the ruling parties such as Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Jamat-e-Islami have been struck almost defenceless by the August 21 catastrophe. On earlier occasions of bomb explosions, they tried to blame the AL. But the latest assassination attempt on Hasina has left them no scope to play the old game. "Those who have done it are enemies of the country who are out to destabilise it," senior BNP leader Abdul Mannan Bhuiana has said.

But they resent the charge that Bangladesh is becoming a failed state under their rule. "How can a country be a failed state?" snaps Haris Choudhury, political secretary to Prime Minister Zia. He also tells me that the "bomb culture" began during the previous regime of the AL. "Democracy is very much on a sound footing." As for the fundamentalist threat, he points out that it is a global problem. "You in India had a pogrom by Hindu fundamentalists in Gujarat. But our government has moved successfully against the religious fundamentalists." In his opinion, the charge of growing religious fundamentalist challenge. "In its anxiety not to hurt the people's religious sentiments and, more importantly, in its anxiety not to lose its vote-bank, the League has shrugged away from secularism," complains Manzurul Ahsan Khan, president of the Communist Party of Bangladesh. Even after the August 21 incident, the AL's main agenda is "not to seriously fight the communalists and religious fundamentalists, but to topple the government". Rashed Khan Menon, president of the Bangladesh Workers' Party, reiterates the charge against the AL. "Even in the Pakistani regime, I haven't seen so many members of Parliament wearing skull caps inside the House as I see now. And there is no denying the fact that more such people sit in the opposition benches than in the treasury benches." He is, however, hopeful that the August 21 incident has shaken the AL and the common people off the compromising attitude to the issue of secularism.

The political parties, however, have their own agenda. The aftermath of the August 21 tragedy has seen the anti-government parties trying to put their act together. Obviously, the AL is at the centre of this new political realignment. But the AL is moving fast to forge a new unity with the 11-party leftist alliance and other groups. The veteran politician and chairman of Gana Forum, Dr Kamal Hossain, whose clean image and credibility make him acceptable to a wide cross-section of the people, is playing an important role in this new attempt to rally all anti-government forces together. "What we could not achieve in two years we have now been able to achieve because of this incident," says Menon of the Workers' Party. The ruling coalition too is bracing to defend itself against a concerted political assault that could be similar to the mass upsurges against H.M. Ershad's military rule in 1990 and against the fake election under Zia's earlier regime in February, 1996. These, therefore, are uncertain times in Bangladesh. A worried international community is trying to force a rapprochement between Hasina and Zia. The Prime Minister too is again talking of a "national consensus". It is unlikely, though, that Hasina would submit to these attempts. She would not like to lose the political advantage she now has. "Besides, how can I betray the memory of those killed in the grenade attack by sitting in discussion with this government?" she argues. Bangladesh thus is set for another political battle between its leading ladies who have had no love lost for each other. But for the majority of the people, the country can no longer afford to ignore the real battle for democracy.

Many in Bangladesh may, however, find it difficult to share Menon's optimism. It is true that the fight for secularist and democratic ideals took centre stage in the waves of protests and processions that hit the Kendriya Shahid Minar in the Dhaka University campus and elsewhere in the country. Numerous small cultural groups came out on the streets to try and "revive the secularist ideals of the liberation war of 1971," as Mamun-ur Rashid of the Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation said at a gathering at the Kendriya Shahid Minar. "Shall we allow the grenades and bombs to prove more powerful than the history of our freedom movement, than the martyrdom of 20 lakh Bengalis?" he asks.



**Leaders of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party have been struck defenceless by the August 21 catastrophe**

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HD-12  
278

## MOMENT OF RECKONING

THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT on the Bangladesh Opposition leader, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, was a grave assault on the country's democracy. The co-ordinated series of explosions at a public meeting where Ms. Hasina was the main speaker showed this was no random attack but a well-planned attempt to eliminate the Awami League leader. Only by sheer chance did Ms. Hasina escape unhurt from the attack, which killed 19 persons (many of them party activists) and wounded 300 others. No group or individual has as yet owned up to the attack. But over the past two years Bangladesh has witnessed a series of terrorist bombings attributed to shadowy Islamist groups that have gained a foothold in the country. Some of the attacks have targeted independent individuals and politicians of Opposition parties who have dared to question the presence and activities of these groups in Bangladesh and to allege they have government backing. Only last month, a senior Awami League politician was killed in a grenade explosion at a public rally in Sylhet. The perpetrators of the latest attack have shown how far they are willing to go. Refusing to be cowed down, the Awami League has courageously organised protests against the terrorists and the state apparatus that has facilitated the attack. But the party would do well to keep in mind that retaliatory violence of the kind that engulfed Bangladesh over the weekend following the August 22 attack is no solution to the crisis in the country.

Days after the attack on the Opposition leader, the Khaleda Zia Government is yet to make any arrests in the case or even identify who was behind it. Prime Minister Zia, who heads the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), has described the attempt to kill her arch political rival

as a "dastardly" act and vowed to bring to book those behind it. But there is understandable concern that the case may remain unresolved. Thus far the BNP-led coalition has not demonstrated much seriousness in tackling the violence that has rocked the country over the past several months. In fact, the attack on Ms. Hasina is a direct result of the Government's failure to find the culprits behind the earlier violence. Not surprisingly, this *laissez faire* attitude towards the extremist groups — to the point of denying their existence — has lent credence to the Opposition charge that these outfits have links with two parties in the ruling coalition, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Okiya Islamic Jote. Notwithstanding strenuous denials by these two parties, the only way in which Ms. Zia can shore up her image and that of her Government and party is by ensuring that the assassins are tracked down.

For its part India must, through constructive diplomacy, keep up the pressure on Dhaka to crack down on all extremist groups operating in Bangladesh — Islamist and others. It has been New Delhi's contention that the insurgent groups of the Northeast such as the United Liberation Front of Asom and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation use the border areas of Bangladesh as a safe haven from which to launch attacks on Indian territory. A huge seizure of arms in Chittagong in April 2004, and before that in June 2003, showed that the Indian Government's concerns were not baseless as Bangladesh has consistently maintained. For reasons of political expediency, Prime Minister Zia might even now find it convenient to ignore the activities of extremist outfits in her country. But she must realise that by doing so, she will be playing with fire — and mortgaging the future of her country.

# Khaleda's gameplan

Kill Hasina and banish democracy

Saturday's grenade attack on the Awami League's rally in Dhaka, killing 20, including Ivy Rahman head of the party's women's wing, was not unexpected. It was meant to assassinate Sheikh Hasina and wipe out the party's entire presidium and make Bangladesh's principal political party leaderless. Saturday's outrage can be compared to that of 15 August 1975 when Sheikh Mujib and his entire family was wiped out in a bloody military coup with help of conniving politicians. The Dhaka attack was the fourth on Hasina and the most serious so far. Begum Khaleda Zia and her fundamentalist coalition partner, Jamat-i-Islami cannot, escape responsibility, since elements in government are openly threatening to "repeat 15 August" by "physically liquidating the father's daughter." Her party supporters are involved in the killing of two Awami League MPs, and there have been bomb attacks on other leaders, including the sitting MP Suranjit Sengupta, who sustained injury in Saturday's blast. The British High Commissioner in Dhaka too was attacked with grenades on the holiest of holy shrines in Sylhet. Last week the Awami League Mayor of Sylhet was attacked with bombs and grenades. Begum Zia Islamist partners are turning the country into a Taliban state. The fundamentalist Jamat-i-Islami, a collaborator with Pindi during the liberation war, has not forgiven the Awami League for encouraging intellectuals like Professor Humayun Azad, who supports a state with secularism, democracy and nationalism. What is of serious concern is that while anti-liberation and pro-Pakistani forces are united under Begum Zia, secular and pro-liberation forces are divided.

There is little doubt that Begum Zia's utterances like "Hasina will never come to power" have emboldened the anti-liberation and Islamist forces. She has done nothing to haul up the Jamat. Nor has anything been done to stop systematic persecution of Ahmadiyas by the Jamat and its move to declare them non-Muslims and take over their mosques. This despite the fact that the country's Constitution gives equal rights to all citizens to preach and practice their religion. On her instructions the police have put up notice boards on Ahmadiya mosques declaring them to be "non-Muslim places of worship". Also responsible is the former US ambassador to Dhaka, Mary Anne Peters, who accepts Jamat as a party of "democrats" and "moderate Muslims" despite knowing how Ahmadiyas are persecuted. Delhi's continuing indifference to events, specially persecution of minorities and secular democratic parties, has made Begum Zia's coalition more daring. Its time for Delhi to act firmly.

THE STATESMAN

26 AUG 2004

# দেখা করেননি, খালেদার চিঠিও নিলেন না হাসিনা

রহমান জাহাঙ্গির • ঢাকা

২৪ অগস্ট: প্রধানমন্ত্রী বেগম খালেদা জিয়ার সাফাকতের প্রস্তাব ফেরানোর পরে আজ তাঁর পাঠানো চিঠিও গ্রহণ করলেন না বাংলাদেশের বিরোধী দলনেত্রী শেখ হাসিনা। শনিবার ঢাকায় আওয়ামী লিগের সমাবেশে গ্রেনেড হামলার নিন্দা করে হাসিনাকে চিঠি লিখেছিলেন খালেদা। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সহকারী আপ্ত সহায়ক চিঠি নিয়ে হাসিনার বাসভবন সুধা সদনে গেলেও আওয়ামী লিগ সমর্থকদের বিক্ষোভের মুখে পড়ে চিঠি না দিয়েই ফিরে আসতে বাধ্য হন। ঘটনার তদন্তে বিচার বিভাগীয় কমিশন গড়ার যে সিদ্ধান্ত সরকার নিয়েছে, তা-ও খারিজ করে দিয়ে হাসিনা বলেছেন, “সামান্যতম লজ্জা থাকলে বাংলাদেশ জাতীয় দল ও জামাত-এ-ইসলামি জোট

সরকারের ইত্তফা দেওয়া উচিত।”

ইতিমধ্যে গ্রেনেড হামলায় আহত আওয়ামী লিগ নেত্রী আইডি রহমান আজ ঢাকার সেনা হাসপাতালে মারা গিয়েছেন। এই নিয়ে ওই ঘটনায় মৃতের সংখ্যা দাঁড়াল ২০। হামলার প্রতিবাদে লিগের ঢাকা দু’দিনের সাধারণ ধর্মঘটের প্রথম দিনে আজ দেশ জুড়ে লিগ সমর্থকদের সঙ্গে পুলিশের দফায় দফায় সংঘর্ষে আহতের সংখ্যা ৭০।

হাসিনাকে শনিবারের ঘটনার জন্য সহানুভূতি জানাতে কাল তাঁর সঙ্গে দেখা করতে চেয়েছিলেন বেগম খালেদা জিয়া। হাসিনা সেই প্রস্তাব পত্রপাঠ খারিজ করে দেন। এর পর আজ হাসিনাকে চিঠি পাঠান প্রধানমন্ত্রী। ‘প্রিয় বিরোধী দলনেত্রী’ সম্বোধন করে লেখা সেই চিঠিতে খালেদা বলেছেন, শনিবারের হত্যাকাণ্ডের জন্য ‘আমি

ব্যক্তিগত ভাবে আপনাকে গভীর সমবেদনা জানাচ্ছি’। সেই চিঠি নিয়ে সকাল সওয়া দশটায় হাসিনার বাড়িতে আসেন প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সহকারী আপ্ত সহায়ক মহিউদ্দিন খান মোহন। আওয়ামী লিগের ছাত্র শাখার কর্মীরা তাঁকে ঘিরে ধরে খালেদা-বিরোধী স্লোগান দিতে থাকেন। বেগতিক দেখে মহিউদ্দিনকে ফিরে যেতে হয়। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দফতর অবশ্য এখনও আশা না-ছেড়ে দুই নেত্রীকে মুখোমুখি বসানোর চেষ্টা চালিয়ে যাচ্ছে।

শনিবার আওয়ামী লিগের সদর দফতরের সামনে ওই হামলার জন্য কারা দায়ী, তা এখনও জানা যায়নি। ঢাকা সেন্ট্রাল জেল চত্বর থেকে দু’টি গ্রেনেড উদ্ধারের পরে ওই ঘটনার পিছনে মুজিবর রহমানের পলাতক হত্যাকারীদের হাত থাকতে পারে বলে অনুমান করছেন গোয়েন্দাদের একাংশ। সরকারি ভাবে অবশ্য বলা হয়েছে,

গ্রেনেড হামলার ব্যাপারে কোনও সূত্র মেলেনি। তদন্ত চলছে।

গ্রেনেড হামলায় ২০ জনের মৃত্যুর প্রতিবাদে আজ সকাল ছ’টা থেকে দেশ জুড়ে ৪৮ ঘণ্টার সাধারণ ধর্মঘটের ডাক দিয়েছে আওয়ামী লিগ। তার জেরে আজ সকাল থেকেই উত্তাল রাজধানী ঢাকা-সহ অন্যান্য শহর ও শহরতলি। খুলনা শহরে বিক্ষোভকারীরা একাধিক সরকারি ভবনে আগুন লাগিয়ে দেয়। বিভিন্ন জায়গায় রেললাইন উপড়ে ট্রেন চলাচল বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হয়। কাল রাতে খালেদাকে ফোন করেছিলেন মার্কিন বিদেশসচিব কলিন পাওয়েল। বাংলাদেশের শেষতম পরিস্থিতি নিয়ে দু’জনের মধ্যে পনেরো মিনিট কথা হয়। হাসিনার সঙ্গেও ফোনে কথা বলেন পাওয়েল। রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের মহাসচিব কোফি আন্নানও ঘটনার তীব্র নিন্দা করেছেন।

# ঢাকা রক্তাক্ত নিহত ১৪, আহত ৪০০

রহমান জাহাঙ্গির • ঢাকা

২১ অগস্ট: গ্রেনেড হামলায় বরাত জোরে প্রাণে বেঁচে গেলেন বাংলাদেশের প্রধান বিরোধী দল আওয়ামী লিগের নেত্রী শেখ হাসিনা। রাজধানীর বঙ্গবন্ধু অ্যাভিনিউয়ে দলের সদর দফতরের সামনেই একটি ট্রাকের উপরে দাঁড়িয়ে বক্তৃতা দিচ্ছিলেন হাসিনা। বক্তৃতা শেষ করে ট্রাক থেকে নামতে যাওয়ার সময়েই ঘটনাস্থলে আছড়ে পড়ে একটি গ্রেনেড। তার পরে আরও কয়েকটা। শোনা যায় গুলির শব্দও। রাস্তায় যারা দাঁড়িয়েছিলেন, তাদের মধ্যেই অন্তত ১৪ জন মারা গিয়েছেন। আহতের সংখ্যা ৪০০ ছাড়িয়েছে। এঁদের মধ্যে বেশ কয়েক জন সাংবাদিকও রয়েছেন।

বিক্ষোভের তীব্রতার বিচারে হতাহতের সংখ্যা বাড়বে বলে আশঙ্কা। এখনও কোনও সংগঠন বিক্ষোভের দায় স্বীকার করেনি। সিলেটে সম্প্রতি পরপর যে বিক্ষোভের ঘটনা ঘটে, তার প্রতিবাদেই আজকের সভা ঢাকা হয়েছিল। প্রত্যক্ষদর্শীরা জানান, সভা সেরে হাসিনা ট্রাক থেকে নামছিলেন। আলোকচিত্রীদের অনুরোধে একটু অপেক্ষা করায় তিনি রক্ষা পেয়েছেন।

ট্রাকের ঠিক পাশে দাঁড়িয়েছিলেন আওয়ামী নেত্রী আইভি রহমান। অদূরের রমনা পেট্রোল পাম্পের দিক থেকে ছুটে আসে একটি গ্রেনেড। প্রথমেই রক্তাক্ত অবস্থায় মাটিতে পড়ে যান আইভি। সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই হাসিনাকে আড়াল করে ফেলেন ট্রাকের উপরে থাকার নেতারা। তার পরেই সাত-আট মিনিট ধরে বেশ কয়েকটি গ্রেনেড এসে আছড়ে পড়ে। উপস্থিত সাংবাদিকেরা

জানিয়েছেন, ছড়োছড়ি আর অতঙ্কের মধ্যে গুলি চলার শব্দও পাওয়া গিয়েছে। আইভি রহমান, আমির হুসেন আমু, সুরঞ্জিত সেনগুপ্ত, মহম্মদ নাসিম-সহ প্রথম সারির বেশ কয়েক জন আওয়ামী নেতাকে গুরুতর আহত অবস্থায় হাসপাতালে ভর্তি করা হয়েছে। হাসিনা পরে বলেন, “সমর্থকেরা নিজেদের জীবনের বিনিময়ে আমার প্রাণ বাঁচিয়েছেন।”

ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ ফোন করে হাসিনাকে তাঁর সহানুভূতি জানিয়েছেন। আজকের ঘটনার প্রতিবাদে আগামী কাল চট্টগ্রাম বন্দ এবং মঙ্গল ও বুধবার বাংলাদেশে সাধারণ ধর্মঘটের ডাক দিয়েছে আওয়ামী লিগ। অবিলম্বে খালেদা সরকারের পদত্যাগ দাবি করেছেন তাঁরা। প্রধানমন্ত্রী খালেদা অবশ্য তীব্র নিন্দা করে এই ঘটনাকে কাপুরুষোচিত কাজ বলে বর্ণনা করেছেন। এ ধরনের ঘটনার পুনরাবৃত্তি রুখতে দলমত নির্বিশেষে সকলকে এগিয়ে আসার আহ্বান জানিয়েছেন তিনি।

আহতদের নিয়ে যাওয়া হয় ঢাকা মেডিক্যাল কলেজ হাসপাতালে। আহত রক্তাক্ত মানুষের ভিড়ে সেখানে চলছে চরম বিশৃঙ্খলা। হাসপাতালে উপস্থিত মানুষজন জানিয়েছেন, ঢাকা মেডিক্যাল কলেজে ঠাই না-হওয়ায় বহু আহতকেই অন্য হাসপাতালে নিয়ে যেতে হয়েছে। চিকিৎসকেরাই জানিয়েছেন, নিহতের সংখ্যা বাড়বে বলেই তাদের আশঙ্কা।

উত্তর-পূর্বের শহর সিলেটে কিছু দিন আগেই সিনেমা হলের সামনে এবং আওয়ামী লিগের সভাস্থলের বাইরে

এর পর সাতের পাতায়

## ঢাকা রক্তাক্ত

প্রথম পাতার পর প্রথম পাতায় কয়েকটি বিক্ষোভের এক আওয়ামী নেতার মৃত্যুও হয়। আজ সেই ঘটনার প্রতিবাদে আয়োজিত সভায় ফের বিক্ষোভের ঘটায় আওয়ামী সাংসদ আব্দুল জলিল অভিযোগ করেন, হাসিনাকে মারার জন্যই এই কাণ্ড ঘটানো হয়েছে। বিক্ষোভের পরে প্রাথমিক বিহ্বলতা কাটিয়ে সমর্থকেরা রাস্তায় নামেন। অন্তত এক ডজন গাড়ি ও বাসে আগুন ধরানো হয়। পরিস্থিতি নিয়ন্ত্রণের বাইরে চলে যাচ্ছে দেখে পুলিশ কাঁদানে গ্যাস ছোড়ে। বাংলাদেশে বিক্ষোভের ঘটনা এ ভাবে বাড়তে থাকায় প্রতিবাদ এ বার গণবিক্ষোভের চেহারা নেবে বলে প্রশাসন আশঙ্কা করছে। ঢাকার বিভিন্ন এলাকায় টহল দিতে শুরু করেছে আধা-সামরিক বাহিনী।

22 AUG 2004

# Bangla Opp violence injures 70

Press Trust of India

DHAKA, Aug. 24. — Protesting the weekend grenade attack on their leader Sheikh Hasina, Awami League workers went on a rampage today torching government offices, disrupting train services and clashing with police that left at least 70 people injured during a general strike.

In a related development, Bangladesh foreign minister Mr Morshed Khan said India, Pakistan, Britain and the USA have offered to help Dhaka in its bid to pin down those behind the deadly attack. "We will first assess our needs and if needed will seek their help," he told reporters, adding Interpol's help might be sought if anyone found linked to the attack was in a third country.

Opposition workers went on a rampage during the first few hours of the two-day strike today, torching several government offices, a local reporter in southwestern Khulna city said by telephone. "The workers also pelted stones at patrolling police," he said.

Police fired several round of tear gas in Dhaka in a brief clash with protesters near the home of Sheikh Hasina, leaving five injured.

Train services were disrupted at several points due to blockade or uprooting of tracks by the protes-

## Islamic outfit claims hand

DHAKA, Aug. 24. — An Islamic outfit calling itself Hikmatul Jihad today claimed responsibility for the weekend grenade attack on Sheikh Hasina Wajed and threatened to kill her "within seven days". Journalists at the Bengali daily *Prothom Alo* said the newspaper received an e-mail by the outfit claiming responsibility for the attack and the renewed threat against the Opposition leader. The letter was signed by Hider Rob with the address Hikmatuljihad@yahoo.com. — PTI

tors, ATN Bangla TV reported.

Government offices, shops and a ruling party office were attacked in several Bangladeshi districts during the strike.

Police and agitators also clashed in several places.

The nationwide violence left at least 70 people injured, witnesses and TV reports said.

Police beat up pickets in the panic-stricken capital Dhaka, where the streets looked deserted except for few buses and rickshaws.

Mr Mujahedul Islam Selim, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh which also backed the strike with other Left parties, was admitted to a hospital with shoulder dislocation after a scuffle with police near the party office in Dhaka.

About a dozen people were detained by police.

25 AUG 2004



# 80 injured in Dhaka clashes

*Bangka 9.2 25/8*

**Dhaka, Aug. 24** (Reuters): Opposition activists in Bangladesh attacked railway stations and battled police across the country today on the first day of a two-day strike called to protest against a deadly grenade attack at the weekend.

More than 80 people were wounded in clashes with police when protesters smashed railway stations and removed tracks to stop trains and attacked government buildings, witnesses and police said.

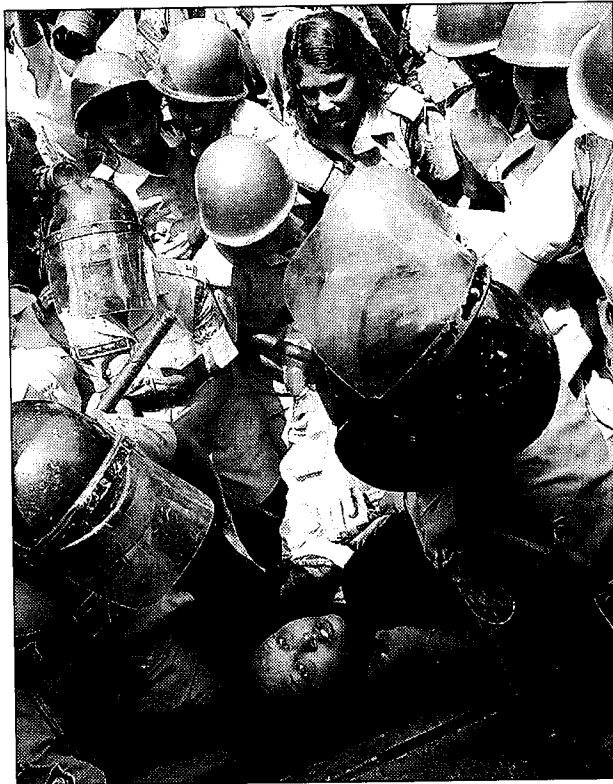
Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse anti-government mobs shouting: "Punish the bombers".

The dawn-to-dusk strike was called by the main opposition Awami League after a deadly Saturday grenade attack on a crowd listening to a speech by party president and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Hasina escaped with minor cuts, but 19 people were killed and about 150 wounded.

"This is a heinous and barbaric attack," foreign minister Morshed Khan said. "If we can avoid the blame game, all parties should put their heads together, take stock of the situation and identify the culprits."

The most high-profile victim, the popular head of the Awami League's women's wing, Ivy Rahman, died early today. "Ivy Rahman's death intensified the countrywide protest," Abdul Jalil, general secretary of the party, said. The League later said the strike would end early — at noon tomorrow — to allow people to attend Rahman's funeral.



Police arrest an Awami League activist in Dhaka. (AFP)

The secular party, which helped lead Bangladesh to independence from Pakistan in 1971, blamed Islamic fundamentalist partners in the four-party ruling coalition for the violence and demanded Prime Minister Khaleda Zia resign.

The government has rejected the accusations and blamed the attack on groups that want to destabilise Bangladesh.

The image of Bangladesh as a role model Muslim-majority democracy had taken a short-term hit, foreign minis-

ter Khan said.

"This image has taken a temporary hit," he said. "In a matter of months Bangladesh will be again resilient and, Inshallah (God willing), we hope we will be able to take the culprits to task."

Dhaka was open to the idea of foreign help to investigate the blasts but at a later stage and if required, he said.

Several countries, alarmed at the attack on a former Prime Minister, have offered to help. They include the US, India and Britain.

# Hasina refuses to meet Khaleda, Dhaka edgy

*T-3*  
*29/8*  
**Dhaka, Aug. 23** (Agencies): Awami League president Sheikh Hasina Wajed, whose rally was attacked on Saturday killing 19 of her supporters, today refused to meet Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and instead called for the resignation of the four-party alliance.

Khaleda's office had contacted Hasina's aides to convey the Prime Minister's intention to meet the Awami chief.

However, Hasina's political adviser Saber Hossain Chowdhury criticised the Khaleda government's stand after the attack and said there was "no reason" for the Prime Minister to meet their leader.

"We don't see any reason for the Prime Minister to come and see the leader (Sheikh Hasina) at a time when we are being blamed for Saturday's grenade attacks as well as the government's refusal to give the bodies of our leaders and workers for mass prayers yesterday," Chowdhury said.

"The government should resign immediately as it has failed to provide security to the people," Hasina said and blamed the ruling party for Saturday's attack.

Thousands of Opposition activists holding banners reading: "Why the bombings,



Awami League activists protest in Dhaka. (AFP)

why the bloodshed?" protested today against the attack as extra armed police stood by to quell violence.

In Dhaka, more than 3,000 Awami League supporters staged a peaceful but noisy protest over the attack.

"We want answers" and "Down with (Prime Minister) Khaleda Zia's government, long live Bangladesh," shouted the protesters, some holding black flags. Police armed with tear gas, riot shields and automatic rifles looked on.

Mostly peaceful protests also took place in the north-eastern town of Sylhet, the port city of Chittagong and other towns. But in Sherpur, a

town 250 km northwest of Dhaka, a crude bomb was thrown at an Awami League protest, injuring one.

Yesterday, Awami supporters ransacked a railway station and set fire to a train in protest. At least 50 people were injured in clashes across the country as Awami members accused the government of inaction after the attack.

A two-day national strike to protest over the grenade attacks starts tomorrow. The capital was edgy today, with many schools and colleges closed and offices reporting low attendance because of the fear of violence. The normally jammed streets were easy to

negotiate. International concern at the situation in Bangladesh was rising. US secretary of state Colin Powell said in a statement issued in Washington: "The perpetrators of this heinous act clearly intend to undermine democracy in Bangladesh."

# Mob sets train on fire to protest Hasina attack

Associated Press  
Dhaka, August 22

A MOB set fire to a passenger train and protesters clashed with police across Bangladesh on Sunday, leaving dozens of people injured, as violence spread a day after a grenade attack on an opposition rally killed 19 people and wounded hundreds.

The train was attacked as it was entering a station in the town of Bhairab, 80 km east of its destination Dhaka, said Mostafa-e-Jamail, a spokesman for state-run Bangladesh Railways.

About 20 people were injured, most passengers trying to flee while protesters angered by Saturday's attack doused at least 15 of about 25 train cars with gas and ignited them, police said. Police fired tear gas to disperse the crowd.

In the capital, nearly 25,000 people turned up at a mass funeral prayer for the dead before marching through the streets.

Police used batons when some of the mourners turned angry and threw stones at them, witnesses said. No injuries were reported.

The attack on Saturday occurred as the country's main opposition leader, Sheikh Hasina, addressed supporters outside her Awami League party's headquarters in Dhaka.

She escaped injury when about a dozen bombs exploded as she addressed supporters outside the party's headquarters in Dhaka. Speaking to reporters for the first time since the attack Hasina blamed Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government for it. "Of course, the government is involved in it. It wants to destroy secular politics," she said in an allegation rejected by the government.

Hasina said two Islamic fundamentalist parties are partners in Zia's four-party coalition government. "There is no truth in the allegation of the opposition leader," Abdul-Mannan Bhuiyan, Secretary General of Zia's ruling Bangladesh Nationalist



AP

Bangladesh Opposition activists set a tea stall on fire in Dhaka on Sunday.

Party said. Bhuiyan said the government has appointed High Court judge Jaynul Abedin to in-

vestigate the blasts and submit his report in the next three weeks. Meanwhile, Hasina has been advised to take a week of rest after she suffered "internal bleed-

ing in one of her ears" because of the loud explosions, said her physician Pran Gopal Krishna.

Doctors were overwhelmed and appealed for blood. Many people were critically wounded in the blasts and the number of dead could rise, they said. In the capital, police recovered two unexploded bombs from inside Dhaka Central Jail and at a market outside it, an official said.

Traffic was light on the city's streets as many schools and shops were closed for fear of more violence.

No one claimed responsibility, but Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jailil said Hasina was the target. The rally was called to protest a series of explosions early this month that killed two people, including an opposition supporter, in the northeastern city of Sylhet.

There were 13 explosions in all, witnesses and media reports said, and two unexploded grenades were found at the scene. Police gave few details, but Hasina aide Saber Hossain

Chowdhury said the first blast was followed by numerous gunshot, and the jeep that carried Hasina away had several bullet marks in the rear glass. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia condemned the "dastardly attack" and said her government will try to find those responsible.

On Sunday, violence also spread to about a dozen other cities and towns, where protesters smashed vehicles and attacked shops, witnesses said. Security was stepped up across the country, authorities said, with paramilitary troops and police patrolling the capital to full force. The Awami League called for nationwide general strikes on Tuesday and Wednesday to protest the bombings.

It has accused Zia's government of corruption, bribery and harassment of political opponents. It has asked Zia to step down and call early polls. Zia's government rejects the allegations and has vowed to remain in power until its five-year term ends in 2006.

# Hasina blames govt amid backlash

**FARID HOSSAIN  
& AGENCIES**

**Dhaka, Aug. 22:** Protesters clashed with police and torched a passenger train, leaving dozens of people injured today, a day after a grenade attack on an Opposition Awami League rally in Dhaka killed 19 people.

Thousands of people attended a mass funeral prayer for the dead in the capital and marched through the streets in mourning.

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, who escaped yesterday's grenade attack outside her party's headquarters, blamed the violence on the government. Hasina escaped with minor cuts to her hand, but her hearing was impaired by the blasts, doctors and party officials said.

"Of course the government is totally involved," Hasina said at her residence in her first remarks after the attack. She also called for an international investigation into the blasts.

Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, secretary general of ruling BNP, denied the allegation and said the government is doing its best to nab the culprits.

Yesterday, Hasina just fin-

ished her speech from atop a truck when the first of the 13 blasts occurred at the rally of about 15,000 people.

The blast left hundreds wounded, including senior Awami League leaders Abdur Razzak, Suranjit Sen Gupta and Ivy Rahman. Rahman, the party's women's affairs secretary, lost both her legs and was said to be critical at the Combined Military Hospital.

An angry mob of Awami League supporters stopped a train coming to Dhaka from southeastern Chittagong and set several bogies ablaze after forcing passengers to alight. At least 20 passengers were hurt as they tried to flee the mob.

Violence also spread to the southeastern port city of Chittagong, where police detained 205 people on charges of rioting. Clashes between police and Opposition activists were reported in a number of places including in Gopalganj, Hasina's hometown 250 km southwest of Dhaka, the coastal town of Cox's Bazar and the industrial city of Khulna. At least 30 people were injured in the violence across the nation, officials and witnesses said.

More protests were

planned for tomorrow, with the Awami League calling a two-day national strike starting on Tuesday. The party's student wing announced an indefinite nationwide strike in all educational institutions.

Indian High Commissioner Veena Sikri met Hasina at her residence to express sympathy over the attack. "This is a heinous attack and we are shocked," she said after the meeting. US Ambassador Harry K. Thomas hoped "those responsible for the bomb attack are brought to justice."

The Bangladesh government said it has appointed High Court judge Joynul Abedin to probe the blasts and submit his report within three weeks.

However, a red alert has been sounded across the country after two more unexploded grenades were found inside Dhaka's central jail and a market outside it. By late afternoon, the capital's streets were emptying as office workers headed home early on what is a working day in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has a history of political turmoil including several coups since it won independence in 1971 from Pakistan.



Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina speaks to reporters at her house in Dhaka on Sunday. (AFP)

# The day after, widespread protests in Bangladesh

*Handwritten notes:*  
 11-11-04  
 8/26/04  
 11-11-04

By Haroon Habib

so clashed with law-enforcers and damaged or burnt innumerable vehicles and shops. An indefinite strike in educational institutions has also been enforced.

Hundreds of armed police and paramilitary BDR were deployed in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi and other towns fearing a backlash. Reports of violence were reported from many district headquarters.

The Minister for Home, Lutfuzzaman Babar, said today that they were yet to find any 'clue' to the attack. The Government constituted a judicial commission to go into the attacks and report back to it within three weeks.

In Chittagong all shops, business houses will remain shut during this week.

## Hasina demands probe

Sheikh Hasina, who resides at

her husband's Shudha Sadan residence in Dhaka, today spoke briefly to the media demanding an "international probe" into the brutal killings. "There is no security of life and property. None is safe under the present Government," she said and accused the BNP-Jammat Government of patronising terrorists and imparting training to them.

Security was stepped up in Dhaka and across the country with paramilitary troops and police patrolling the cities in full force. Fresh panic gripped the country with the recovery of several grenades from the Dhaka central jail compound and from near the meeting venue where Saturday's blasts had occurred.

The Awami League and the Left-leaning 11-party Alliance demanded the immediate resignation of the "oppressive BNP-Jammat coalition government" and announced combined ac-

tion to press their demand. They called a two-day 6 a.m.-6 p.m. hartal for August 24 and 25 across the country.

## Manmohan's concern

The Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, made a phone call to Sheikh Hasina and expressed his sympathy for the bereaved families. He expressed concern over the attack on her and said the Indian people and the Government "stand beside the people of Bangladesh at this critical hour." "It's a serious attack and we are shocked," Dr. Singh was quoted by an Opposition leader as saying.

The U.S. Ambassador, Harry K Thomas, and the Indian High Commissioner, Veena Sikri, also visited Sheikh Hasina and expressed their 'shock' at the incidents.

Meanwhile, experts said the grenades used on Saturday were made in Australia.



The Bangladesh Opposition leader speaks to her daughter over phone at her residence in Dhaka on Sunday. — AP

# Hasina escapes bid on life

● 13 killed, 300 injured as bombs go off

By Haroon Habib

*Bangladesh*  
*10/1*

**DHAKA, AUG. 21.** A former Prime Minister and the main Opposition leader of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina escaped unhurt when unidentified attackers hurled grenades and bombs at a rally she had just addressed here this afternoon. At least 13 persons were killed and around 300 injured in the rash of attacks at the rally.

Seven to eight bombs and grenades exploded one after the other in the packed Bangabandhu Avenue, in front of the Awami League central office, as soon as Sheikh Hasina ended her speech. Two unexploded grenades were later found in front of the Awami League office by the security forces. Hospital sources confirmed 13 deaths, but the Government put the death toll at 11.

As the first blast went off party leaders and workers threw a security cordon around Sheikh Hasina, who had addressed the rally from a truck.

Party leaders, including the secretary general, Abdul Jalil, said the blasts targeted Sheikh Hasina, who has been leading a

strong national campaign against the Government's "misrule and sponsoring of religious terrorists." Recently powerful bombs were unearthed from a venue of a meeting she was to address. The dead were all workers of the Awami League and the seriously injured included senior party leaders, former Ministers and reporters and cameramen of TV channels. The toll could increase as dozens of those injured are in a critical condition. No one claimed responsibility for the blasts.

## Shots fired

The Awami League organising secretary, Saber Hossain later claimed that shots were fired at Ms. Hasina as she sped away in a bullet-proof car.

Talking to the media, Ms. Hasina demanded the immediate resignation of the Khaleda Zia Government accusing it of patronising 'terrorists, including religious fundamentalists'.

The blasts sparked country-wide protests. In Dhaka police fired teargas to disperse mobs which went on the rampage, smashing and burning dozens of vehicles.

# SERIAL BLASTS KILL 10 AT HASINA'S RALLY

Hundreds hurt, toll may rise

22/8  
Bangladesh  
16-13

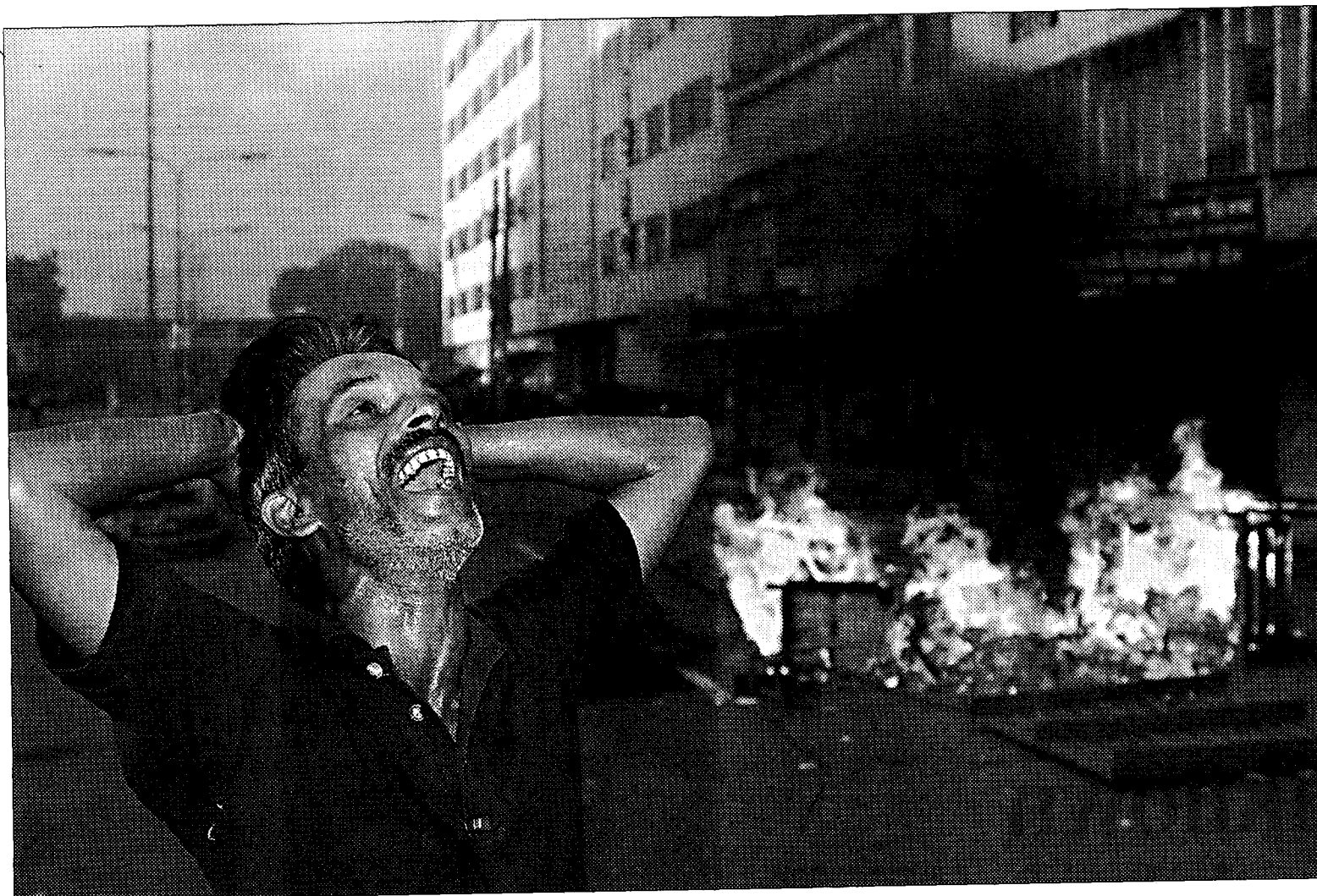


Agencies  
Dhaka, August 21

A SERIES of explosions ripped through an Opposition rally addressed by former Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina Wajed here today, killing at least 10 people, including three women, and injuring about 300 others. It was unclear if the bombs were hurled or planted there.

No one claimed responsibility for the blasts. The rally was called to protest a series of bomb blasts early this month that killed two people, including an opposition supporter, in the northeastern city of Sylhet.

The explosions took place soon after Sheikh Hasina finished addressing the rally organised by the main Opposition Awami League to protest recent bombings in northeastern shrine city of Sylhet, reporters working for the local press and covering



the rally said.

"Sheikh Hasina has been slightly injured in the legs although she is completely out of danger," senior party official Razia Mostafa said. Immediately after the incident, Hasina was taken to a safe place. "We don't know where Sheikh Hasina is now," said another party leader.

A central leader of the party, Ivy Rahman, the wife of former Awami League general secretary Zillur Rahman,

was critically injured as her legs were severed in the explosion, officials at Dhaka Medical College Hospital said.

Earlier reports had suggested that Sheikh Hasina was injured while Ivy Rahman had been killed.

At least 10 people, including three women, were killed and some 300 injured in the explosions, private ATN Bangla television channel reported, adding the injured

included the party's members of parliament.

The channel showed the footage of three dead men at the Dhaka Medical College hospital where total chaos prevailed and two unexploded grenades near the venue of the rally in down town Dhaka.

"The leader (Sheikh Hasina) might be injured as leaders around her were mostly injured," Awami League MP, Col. (Retd) Faruq Khan, who

was also slightly hurt told the channel. Central leaders of the Awami League also said the injured included the party top brass.

There was blood and sandals strewn across the street in front of the main office of the Awami League in downtown Dhaka, the venue of the meeting, a reporter at the scene said.

Witnesses said many people were rushed to hospitals. Among the injured was a reporter of the ATN television network.

Soon after the blast, Awami League supporters went on the rampage, setting fire to vehicles and shops in adjoining areas. Police chased the frenzied mob, firing hundreds of teargas shells, and troopers of the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles were deployed to bring the situation under control.

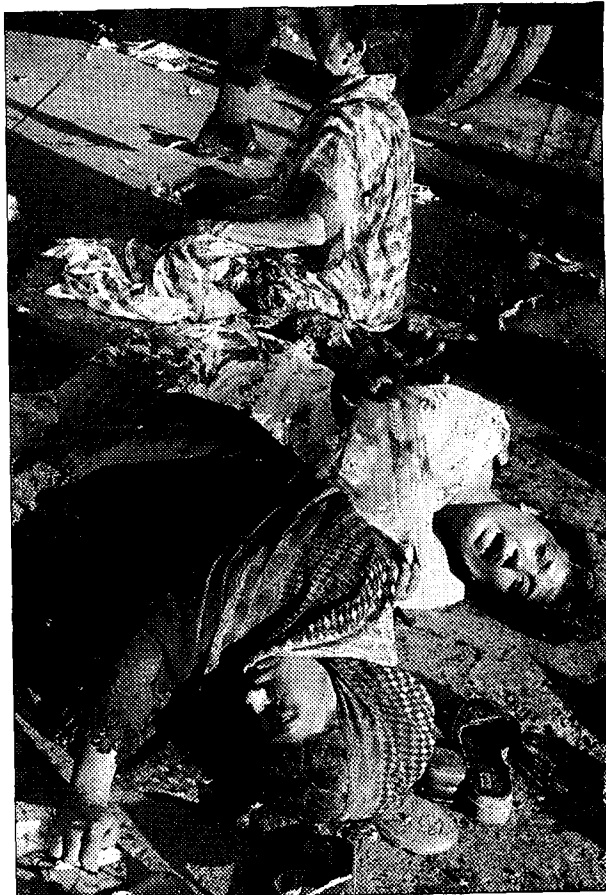
Paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles troops have been deployed across the capital Dhaka along with police and elite Rapid Action Battalion.

A blast earlier this month in Sylhet outside a hotel where a meeting of the Awami League was being held left one politician dead and 40 others injured.

The Awami League has staged a series of general strikes since January. The stoppages at the start of the year were part of the Awami League's stepped-up campaign to oust the government, a four-party Islamist-allied coalition led by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

The Opposition accused the government of failing to crack down on corruption and crime, while the government said it was working to remedy a difficult situation inherited from the previous ruling Awami League administration.

The Opposition accused the government of failing to crack down on corruption and crime, while the government said it was working to remedy a difficult situation inherited from the previous ruling Awami League administration.



AP/REUTERS

An Awami League activist (left) cries after blasts at former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's public rally in Dhaka on Saturday. (Top) Wounded women lie outside the Awami League headquarters. (Far left) Sheikh Hasina speaking at the rally, just minutes before the blasts.

# Minority cleansing

Khaleeda's image attracts global tarnish

The latest report published by Hindu, Bouddha, Christian Oikya Parishad, an apex body of Bangladeshi minorities, on their growing persecution, makes disquietening reading. This is because the persecution is the work of activists of Begum Khaldea Zia's ruling coalition who have targeted all minorities, not only for personal gain by dispossessing them of properties but to achieve the political goal of denying the Awami League and Left parties the bulk of minority votes which have been good for the country. The fact that 226 cases of "serious persecution", involving murder, rape, looting and arson have been reported this year underscores the growing insecurity of minorities. According to the report, not only Hindus, Buddhists and Christians but also adivasis including Santhals, Manipuris and Garos have been subjected to harassment and torture. The most disturbing report is that 20 men of these communities were murdered and 22 of their women raped. Also reported were 181 cases of looting and forcible occupation of properties. Worse is the attempts to burn alive 38 families to grab their properties. Minorities are so subjected to extortion that many engaged in small business have downed their shutters. Over 52 adivasi families were forced to flee their homes in Dinajpur because of threats.

The tenor and content of the report are very much in line with those of Amnesty International and the US State Department on plight of Bangladeshi minorities. The sad part is that Begum Zia refuses to acknowledge that minorities are being persecuted by her coalition partners and by her government. On the contrary her government's information apparatus has launched a massive disinformation campaign of Goebbelsian proportions whose purpose is minimise the damage caused to the government's "Islamic" image overseas. Rape victims are "interviewed" by government media to say they have "not been violated" and family members of those who have been murdered are made to say "they are living happily and peacefully in Bangladesh and have no plans to seek refuge in India". Ironically some key officials of the Indian mission in Bangladesh and MEA's south block have fallen prey to this campaign and taken an ambivalent stance on this issue. This is most unfortunate. Under the Nehru-Liaquat pact Delhi can't turn a blind eye to the plight of minorities in Bangladesh. This for Delhi is the bottom line.



# TERRORIST MENACE-I

Ubiquitous, All-Pervasive And Multi-Dimensional In Bangladesh

By BIBHUTI BHUSAN NANDY

Terrorism is a ubiquitous, all-pervasive and multi-dimensional phenomenon in Bangladesh. All known forms of terrorism, ranging from criminal terrorism, to revolutionary terrorism to state terrorism prevail in varying degrees subjecting the people, individually and collectively, to the trauma of constant threat to life and property.

Criminal terrorism — “the systematic use of terror for ends of material gain” — is rampant and rising in Bangladesh. Reflecting how deeply dysfunctional the state machinery in Bangladesh is, it manifests itself as kidnapping, extortion, highway robbery and gangland assassinations. Numerous criminal gangs operate in the country, each having carved out a specific area for operation. Inability or refusal to meet its demand leads to brutal torture and killing. Each gang has a political godfather — sometimes more than one — to provide protection against police action and assure the muscle-power that is needed to upstage rivals in the field.

## Revolutionary terrorists

According to the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights, as many as 1,219 people were murdered and 6,890 injured in criminal terrorist operations between October 2001 and February 2002. In March 2002 alone, 238 murders and 119 rapes occurred. To arrest the rapidly declining law and order situation, the BNP-Jamaat government launched Operation Clean Heart in October 2002 and Operation Spider Web in July 2003. Jointly carried out by the army, police and the BDR, these high-profile exercises achieved hardly any success. Sensing trouble, the real culprits had gone underground and action was directed against the political opponents of the ruling coalition. No fewer than 40 innocent people died in army custody.

Revolutionary terrorism, also called agitational terrorism, or terror from below, is a form of political terrorism that aims at destabilising the incumbent regime and replacing it with a political apparatus acceptable to the revolutionaries. Prior to liberation in 1971, Left-wing political terrorism, like the Naxalite movement in West Bengal, had struck roots in parts of rural East Pakistan, with pro-Chinese communist factions spearheading a campaign for annihilation of “class enemies”. In the unsettled situation in the immediate post-liberation era, Left extremism thrived for some time. But lack of public support, internecine conflicts and sustained police action soon marginalised the

*The author is former Additional Secretary, Research and Analysis Wing*

movement.

Remnants of Left extremist factions, such as East Pakistan Communist Party and Sarbahara Party, still survive in the south-west and northern districts bordering India, particularly in the Khulna and Rajshahi divisions. Criminal motives, and not any ideology, now animate these groups. Right-radical BNP and

Islamic terrorist base in Bangladesh.

Against this backdrop, since 1992, Islamic terrorist organisations have mushroomed in the country. Currently in different phases of development, they operate under different names, but their common goal is to establish a Talibanised transnational Islamic state compris-



Jamaat-e-Islami elements often use these degenerate militants as mercenaries to settle scores with their intra-party and inter-party rivals. The Jamaat has been hiring them in the Khulna-Satkhira-Bagerhat belt to eliminate local secular leaders and professionals like lawyers, doctors, teachers and journalists. Among their recent sensational operations were the assassination of two secular journalists at Khulna — Manik Saha and Humayun Kabir Balu. A number of policemen have also been killed. Powerful explosives are their preferred weapons of offence, although use of firearms is not infrequent. After each hit and run guerrilla operation, the miscreants flee to the Indo-Bangla border belts that provide safe havens.

## Islamist groups

At the other end of the spectrum is the proliferating Islamic terrorism. The growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the wake of de-secularisation of the country's constitution and declaration of Islam as the state religion in the post-Mujib era fuelled militancy among sections of Muslims in the country. Later, participation by Bangladeshi mujahideens in the jihad first against the Soviet occupation army in Afghanistan and later in Bosnia and Kashmir sparked off Islamic terrorism in Bangladesh. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda attacks of 11 September and the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq have further inflamed the Muslim sentiments and strengthened the

ing Bangladesh, Assam, Tripura, Muslim majority districts of West Bengal and the Rohingya Muslim-inhabited Arakan Hills of Myanmar. Inclusion of the Jamaat-e-Islami in the Khaleda Zia government, and infiltration of the administration, police and the armed forces by the Jamaat have created ideal conditions for entrenching the fledgling Islamic terrorism in the country.

Organised in the late seventies by the Jamaat-e-Islami with state support, the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation provides arms training to Arakanese Muslim youths in camps in the Ukhia area of Chittagong district. The RSO is from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Lately, international media have reported presence of Taliban and Al Qaeda fugitives from Afghanistan in these camps.

The Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islam (HuJI) was founded in 1992 by leading mujahideens who had fought in Afghanistan. It has 15,000 activists. Its cadres are trained in the jungles of Chittagong and Sylhet districts. HuJI cadres participated in the unprecedented post-1971-election Hindu-cleansing operations and attacks on Awami Leaguers, unleashed by BNP and Jamaat activists. Large-scale destruction and desecration of Hindu deities and temples and mass rape of Hindu women occurred. Houses were looted and burned and many Hindus were forced to leave the country. Christian villages were attacked and devastating damage done to them.

The Jamat-ul-Mujahideen (JuM) is believed to be the youth

wing of the HuJI. It first surfaced when powerful bombs exploded in a house in Dinajpur in February 13, 2003. Since then the police have arrested groups of JuM cadres with incriminatory documents, arms and ammunition, and bomb-making materials in Dinajpur, Bogra, Chapai Nababganj and Joypurhat districts. In one case, a small quantity of enriched uranium was seized at the Indo-Bangladesh border from JuM cadres, raising the fear that the terrorists might be engaged in a project to fabricate dirty bombs.

The Sahadat Al Hikma (SAH) was formed on 8 February 2003 in Rajshahi. It was funded by Pakistan-based mafia don Daud Ibrahim. SAH convener Kawsar Hossain Siddique claimed that it was a “political party” with 10,000 “commandos” and 25,000 “fighters” working for Islamic revolution in the country. According to him, Moudud Ahmed, minister of law, justice and parliamentary affairs had helped the SAH. The government proscribed the organization immediately after its formation was announced.

## Assaults and threats

The Jagrata Muslim Janata (JMJ) was founded in Dhaka in 1998. With an estimated 10,000-strong cadre, it has extended its terror network to around 50 of the country's 64 districts. In the name of eliminating Left extremist elements in Rajshahi and other northern districts the have targeted Awami League activists and Hindus and killed no fewer than 12 people in Rajshahi district since April this year. Supported by the police, operates openly. Siddiqui Rehmaan alias Bangla Bhai, an Abdur Rehman are the operation commander, and the Amir of the JMJ.

The Hizbul Tauhid (HT) active in Barisal district. It engaged in propagation of Islamic revolution focused on the Koran and Shariat.

Last month, two hitherto unknown organisations, Nast Murtad Pratirodh Committee and Muslim Millat Shariat Council sent letters threatening death to three professors of the Dhaka University, namely, Muntaz Mamun, Humayun Ahmed and MM Akash who are known for their staunch commitment to secular values. Unidentified Islamists had grievously hurt Humayun Ahmed in a murder attack at a book fair a few months back. Badruddin Ahmed, Khawaja Nazimuddin, leader and member of Sylhet, received two similar threat mails from the so-called Tiger Killing Force. Also, a anonymous telephone calls threatening assassination of Sheikh Hasina have been received.

*(To be concluded)*

# TERRORIST MENACE-II

## Need For Effective Pro-Active Action From India

By BIBHUTI BHUSAN NANDY

The Al Qaeda trained the leaders of the terrorist organisations in Bangladesh when they were in Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden inspired them to launch a terrorist movement in the country in order to establish an Islamic state. He funded the Islamist groups through an organisation called Servants of Suffering Humanity, Dhaka. Islamist organisations receive financial assistance from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia through such NGOs as Adarsha Kutir, Al Farooq Islamic Foundation and Hataddin. The Al Fatah, a Dhaka-based NGO, financed the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen.

The recently banned Saudi Arabian Al Harmeine Islamic Institute, which had a large presence in Bangladesh, funded the training programmes of Islamic terrorist groups. Absconding HuJI leader Mufti Hannan, wanted in connection with the bomb blast at Sheikh Hasina's public meeting at Kotalipara in 2001, regularly received money for running a number of terrorist training centres in Sylhet and Maulavi Bazaar districts from this organisation. Abdur Rehman, the JMJ Ameer set up a mosque and a madrasa with the financial support received from the Saudi Arabian charity organization Rabeta-e-Islami.

### Terror-friendly regime

All top Islamist leaders and most of their grassroots workers are members of the Jamaat-e-Islami or its student wing, the Islami Chhatra Shibir. The terrorist outfits draw their cadres from the alumni of the Jamaat-run qomi madrasas. Some of these madrasas are used as training centres and many madrasa teachers act as co-coordinators and facilitators. Significantly, madrasas were the breeding ground of the Taliban and Pakistani terrorists.

The Jagrata Muslim Janata follows the Jaish-e-Muhammed of Pakistan and Jaish-e-Hind. Its leader Ameer Abdur Rehman is in contact with Islamist leaders abroad and visits India, Pakistan and Afghanistan in that connection. Raiding recently a mosque in Barguna district, where JMJ cadres were receiving training, the police seized, among other things, terrorist training manuals authored by the Pakistani terrorist leaders Maulana Azhar Masud.

During the Awami League regime, between 1999 and 2001, 71 people were killed in bomb blasts at secular cultural functions and public meetings, and offices of the Awami League and other centre-left parties, and at churches and tombs. In seven major bomb blast incidents at public places since the coming to power of the BNP-Jamaat coalition government in October 2001, 37 people have been killed and 150 injured.

The handling of terrorist depredations by the incumbent government carries the imprints of a terror-friendly regime. Disclaiming the existence of Islamic terror of any kind in the country,

the Khaleda government characterised the international media focus on the problem as a politically motivated smear campaign, and incarcerated local and foreign journalists and human rights activists on charges of high treason and sedition. Instead of carrying out objective investigation, the government has used the cases of terrorist attack as an instrument of repression of political opponents. Though the police nabbed a good many

the north-eastern region. The rise of the Ulfa gave a renewed thrust to tribal insurgency, with the Kachin rebels in Burma providing safe havens and base and training facilities in areas under their control. In 1990, when the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) sent the Ulfa, NSCN and PLA contingents back to India, the Ershad government in Bangladesh gave shelter and training facilities to them in Dhaka and in the Sylhet and Maulavi



Jihadis belonging to such outfits as the HuJI, SAH and the JUM at different places with evidence of involvement in terrorist activities, they have escaped prosecution and punishment, thanks to the police reluctance to proceed against them.

### Cynical denial

State terrorism has both internal and external manifestations. Internal state terrorism has two purposes: (1) to repress the people, making them apolitical or politically malleable, and/or (2) to destroy the population's willingness to support revolutionary or other anti-government movements. External state terrorism is the use of lethal force by a government against a foreign government, usually through surrogate terrorist forces having clandestine ties to the supporting state. The killing of people in army custody during Operation Clean Heart and elimination of Awami League activists and Hindus through police-supported JMJ operations illustrate repressive, internal state terrorism in Bangladesh. Arrest and detention of opposition leaders, journalists and intellectuals on false charges of sedition also fall in the repressive state terror category.

The state-sponsored terrorism against India dates back to the Pakistan era. Not reconciled to the inclusion of Assam and Tripura in the Indian Union, Pakistan supported Naga and Mizo insurgencies since mid-1950s and mid-1960s respectively by providing logistics, training and base facilities in East Pakistan. The liberation of Bangladesh and redrawing of the political map of the north-east in its wake, notably the creation of six full-fledged new states, significantly reduced the steam of ethnic insurgency in

Bazaar border districts. Subsequently, other insurgent groups like the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF) and National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) also availed the hospitality of the Bangladesh government.

The first Khaleda Zia regime (1991-96) followed Ershad's policy of supporting the north-east insurgents. Begum Zia is on record having described them as "freedom fighters". Under her dispensation, the ISI joined hands with its Bangladesh counterpart, the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) to stoke ethnic insurgency in the vulnerable northeast region with the goal of keeping India internally engaged. In the early 1990s, batches of Ulfa cadres went to Pakistan for training in guerrilla warfare via Dhaka on Bangladeshi travel documents. The Ulfa and NSCN (I/M) imported several consignments of arms from South-east Asia by sea through the Cox's Bazaar coastal belt and thence transported them to their operational bases in India through the Chittagong Hill Tracts with the logistic support given by the DGFI.

Paresh Baruah, Ulfa army chief and a number of other Ulfa leaders have been living in Dhaka since the early 1990s and have made large investments in business ventures in Bangladesh. Anup Chetia, the convicted Ulfa general secretary guides from his jail in Dhaka terrorist operations in Assam over the telephone. The Bangladesh government has turned a deaf ear to New Delhi's repeated request to extradite him to India. The ATTF and NLFT have been operating inside Tripura from their bases in Bangladesh, frequently killing or kid-

napping Bengalis with active support of the DGFI. Request from the government of India to demantle the insurgent camps has met with the stock cynical reply that there is no Indian insurgent presence in Bangladesh.

Three recent inter-related developments have nailed the propagandised by the Khaleda Zia government that Bangladesh has no link to Al Qaeda or any other international Islamic terrorist outfits and that it does not support insurgency in India: (1) Depredations by the Jagrata Muslim Janata have prompted an inquiry by the US State Department and, the US embassy in Dhaka has demanded action against the JMJ. (2) Investigation of the seizure of a huge quantity of sophisticated arms and ammunition at Chittagong port has revealed that the weapons were smuggled from abroad in a ship owned by Salauddin Qader Chaudhury, BNP MP and parliamentary affairs adviser to the prime minister for supply both to the north-east insurgents and homeland Islamist groups. (3) A grenade attack on the British High Commissioner in Bangladesh at the historic Shah Jalal mosque at Sylhet has exposed the international ramifications of Islamist activities in Bangladesh.

### Threat to India

Clearly, Bangladesh is steadily moving towards becoming an intolerant monolithic Islamic state with the inspiration and support from the Jamaat-e-Islami at home and the Al Qaeda-led Islamic terrorist movement abroad. The BNP's ambition to perpetuate its hold on power with the support of the Jamaat-e-Islami has forced the party to turn a blind eye to the rising Islamic militancy in the country. On account of our geographical contiguity with Bangladesh and presence of 20 million illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in our border states, the rise of Islamic terrorism in our eastern neighbourhood poses a serious threat to India's long-term national security and territorial integrity. The threat is compounded by the continuing insurgency in the north-east under the aegis of the ISI and the DGFI. Significantly, Ulfa and the Minorities United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) have already joined the Islamic Manch, an umbrella organisation of the Islamic terrorist outfits floated in May 2002, to coordinate inter-organizational activities geared to establishing a transnational Islamic state in the region with Bangladesh at its core.

Only effective pro-active action using all our political, economic, and diplomatic leverage in relation to Bangladesh can protect our eastern peripheries from the machinations of the Islamists. Is our intelligence-security establishment, currently solely focused on Pakistan, adequately prepared to meet the growing challenge from the east?

(Concluded)

# ইরাকে সেনা চাইতে ঢাকায় রামসফেল্ড

রহমান জাহাঙ্গির ● ঢাকা

৫ জুন: আফগানিস্তান অথবা ইরাকে শান্তিবাহিনীতে বাংলাদেশি সেনা পাঠানোর প্রস্তাব নিয়ে আজ এখানে এসেছেন মার্কিন প্রতিনিধিত্ব সচিব ডোনাল্ড রামসফেল্ড।

একটি বিশেষ বিমানে চড়ে আজ পৌনে পাঁচটা নাগাদ ঢাকার জিয়া আন্তর্জাতিক বিমানবন্দরে অবতরণ করেন রামসফেল্ড। তাঁকে অভ্যর্থনা জানাতে উপস্থিত ছিলেন বাংলাদেশের বিদেশমন্ত্রী এম মোর্শেদ খান। মোর্শেদ খানের সঙ্গে বিভিন্ন দ্বিপাক্ষিক ও আন্তর্জাতিক বিষয় নিয়ে বৈঠকের কথা থাকলেও রামসফেল্ডের ঢাকায় আসার মূল কারণ আফগানিস্তান অথবা ইরাকে মার্কিন লেজেন্ডারি জোটবাহিনীতে বাংলাদেশকেও শরিক করা। প্রধানমন্ত্রী বেগম খালেদা জিয়ার সঙ্গেও বৈঠক করবেন তিনি।

এ দিকে, ভারত থেকে ফিরেই বিদেশে সেনা পাঠানোর ব্যাপারে নিজেদের অবস্থান পরিষ্কার করে দিয়েছেন মোর্শেদ খান। তাঁর বক্তব্য, একমাত্র রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের অধীনেই অন্য দেশে সেনা পাঠাবে বাংলাদেশ, তা-ও যদি সেই দেশের মানুষ তাঁদের স্বাগত জানান তবেই। বিদেশের মাটিতে কাউকে মারতে বা নিজেদের সেনাদের প্রাণ সংশয় ঘটিয়ে সেনা পাঠাতে মোটেই রাজি নন তাঁরা। মোর্শেদ বলেন, “আমরা বারবার বলেছি, এ প্রক্ষে আমাদের অবস্থান একেবারে পরিষ্কার। এমন কোনও শান্তিবাহিনীর আমরা শরিক হব না, যাতে আমাদের নামে কারওর বিরুদ্ধে বা কারওর পক্ষে লড়ার তকমা পড়বে।”

ইরাকে অন্তর্বর্তী সরকারের হাতে

ক্ষমতা হস্তান্তর প্রসঙ্গে মোর্শেদ বলেন, “আমরা এক চোখ দিয়ে বিষয়টিকে যাচাই করতে চাই না। আমরা রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের মাধ্যমে বিষয়টিকে বিচার করতে চাই। আমরা এখন অপেক্ষা করছি বিশ্বের প্রধান দেশগুলির নেতারা ইরাকের উপর আনা নতুন প্রস্তাব নিয়ে কী রায় দেন তার জন্য। রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের বিরুদ্ধে কোনও ভাবেই তাঁরা যে যেতে চান না তা পরিষ্কার আজ জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন মোর্শেদ খান। রামসফেল্ড বাংলাদেশকে সেনা পাঠাতে অনুরোধ করেছেন কি না, জানতে চাওয়া হলে মোর্শেদ খান বলেন, এ ব্যাপারে কোনও আলোচনা হয়নি। এ দিন ঢাকায় সাংবাদিক বৈঠক করার কথা থাকলেও শেষ মুহুর্তে তা বাতিল করেন রামসফেল্ড। তাঁর বদলে আসেন বাংলাদেশে মার্কিন রাষ্ট্রদূত হ্যারি টমাস। তিনিও জানান, সেনা পাঠানোর বিষয়টি নিয়ে কথা হয়নি।

রামসফেল্ডের বাংলাদেশের সফরকে কেন্দ্র করে ঢাকা বিমানবন্দরে কড়া নিরাপত্তার ব্যবস্থা করা হয়েছিল। বিরোধী দল আওয়ামী লিগ এ দিন বাংলাদেশে ২৪ ঘণ্টার বন্ধ ডাকলেও রামসফেল্ডের সফরের জন্য তা কমিয়ে ১২ ঘণ্টার বন্ধ পালন করা হয়। আওয়ামী লিগের পক্ষ থেকে জানানো হয়েছে, রামসফেল্ডের খাতিরেই তাঁদের এই পদক্ষেপ।

এই নিয়ে এক বছরে দ্বিতীয় বার আমেরিকার উচ্চপর্যায়ের প্রতিনিধিরা বাংলাদেশে এলেন। গত বছরের জুনে মার্কিন বিদেশসচিব কলিন পাওয়েলও সংক্ষিপ্ত সফরে বাংলাদেশে এসেছিলেন। কালই বাংলাদেশ থেকে রওনা দেবেন আমেরিকার প্রতিনিধিত্ব সচিব।

6 JUN 2001

# Attack on British envoy

ms Khaleda pampers Islamists

The grenade attack on the British High Commissioner in Dhaka, Anwar Chowdhury, at Sylhet's Hazrat Shah Jalal mausoleum said to be Bangladesh's holiest of holy shrines, where three persons were killed, underscores the worsening law and order position in the country. A week earlier he presented his credentials describing the appointment as "homecoming". His father migrated to Britain when Anwar was only eight. He was attacked not only in his home town but in the mausoleum where he went to invoke blessings from the country's most revered saint.

The incident has shocked Whitehall, which always eulogised Bangladesh as a "moderate Muslim state" under Begum Zia- led BNP- Jamat-i-Islam rule. On 12 January last the mausoleum was targetted, a bomb attack in which six people were killed. The attack followed a *fatwa* by an influential Jamat MP, also a religious preacher, declaring the mausoleum and the *Urs* festivities there as "anti Islamic". Soon thereafter the mausoleum's fish stock was poisoned. There have been bomb attacks on other mausoleums as well.

The fundamentalist Jamat has made it known that it would not tolerate the "un-Islamic" *Majar* and the *Urs* culture although for Bangladeshi Muslims, it has been an integral part of their life. It has also declared a *jihād* against the country's small Ahmadiya community which it has already declared non-Muslim and whose mosques have been forcibly occupied and publications banned. The murderous attempt on the Dhaka University's noted Professor Humayun Azad was also the result of inflammatory statements by the same Jamat MP, who demanded his punishment for writing against those who had collaborated with the Pakistanis during the liberation war.

The Sylhet attack is too serious to be ignored which is why the British government has sent its sleuths to investigate. It had no other alternative since Begum Zia has been letting off all the Islamic terrorists involved in a dozen bombing incidents killing over 100 people in the last four years. For instance, six charge-sheeted Islamic terrorists responsible for the Dinajpur bombing have been released.

Also Mufti Niamatullah, son-in-law of the leader of another Islamic party which is a partner in Begum Zia's alliance, was released although he was charged with "high treason" and leading an Islamic *jihadi* group. In fact, Begum Zia is treating Islamists with kid gloves because of her political alliance with them. This has tarnished her government's image globally and helped brand Bangladesh as the breeding ground of Muslim fundamentalists and terrorists. Many in her party have warned that pampering them might one day be her undoing. But she is in no mood to listen.

# UK High Commissioner injured in Bangla blast

Press Trust of India  
Dhaka, May 21

BRITISH HIGH Commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar A. Chowdhury was injured on Friday in a bomb blast at a Muslim shrine in the northeast of the country, which also left at least two persons dead and over 50 wounded. The blast occurred at the shrine of saint Hazrat Shahjalal in Sylhet town. Bangladesh-born Chowdhury, 43, had gone to visit the shrine just days after taking over as the High Commissioner to Dhaka. Chowdhury, his bodyguard and Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Sylhet were among over 50 people injured in the blast, which also left two persons dead.

In London, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said he was "deeply shocked by the news of this bomb and extend my sympathies to all the victims and their families". "Details of exactly what happened and the nature of injuries are not clear", he said in a statement.

<sup>KGR's</sup>  
"We're grateful for the support we're receiving from the Bangladesh authorities".

The British envoy was admitted to Osmani Medical College hospital in Sylhet, while the Deputy Commissioner is being treated at a private clinic. Paramilitary BDR forces had been deployed in the divisional town to beef up security, reports said.



AFP

UK's High Commissioner to Bangladesh, A. Choudhury, at a Press meet in Dhaka earlier this week.

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## বাংলাদেশে বিকল্প ফ্রন্ট গড়ার জোয়ার, এক্য দূর অন্ত

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, ঢাকা, ১৪ মার্চ—  
ক্ষমতাসীন বিএনপি এবং বিরোধী দল  
আওয়ামী লিগ, উভয়ের কার্যকলাপে  
বীতশ্রদ্ধ হয়ে একটি বিকল্প তৃতীয় ফ্রন্ট  
গড়তে একজোট হচ্ছেন বাংলাদেশের  
কয়েক জন রাজনীতিক। তাঁরা মনে  
করছেন, বিএনপি সরকার সম্ভ্রাসবাদের  
প্রসার রুখতে ব্যর্থ, এই সরকার অপশাসন  
ছাড়া কিছু দিতে পারেনি। অন্য দিকে,  
আওয়ামী লিগও পারেনি হিংসার রাজনীতি  
ছেড়ে বেরিয়ে আসতে। কিন্তু এই বিকল্প  
রাজনীতির ভবিষ্যৎ কতটা উজ্জ্বল হবে  
তাও এখনই বলা যাচ্ছে না। এখনই তৈরি  
হয়ে গিয়েছে তিন-তিনটি দল। বলা যায়,  
বিকল্প ফ্রন্ট গড়ার ইঁদুর দৌড়ে আক্রান্ত  
এখন বাংলাদেশের রাজনীতি।

বৃহস্পতিবার প্রাক্তন প্রেসিডেন্ট এ  
কিউ এম বদরুদ্দোজা চৌধুরির নেতৃত্বে  
এক 'বিকল্প' ফ্রন্টের উদ্বোধন হয়। সে  
অনুষ্ঠান ছিল বিএনপির যুবসমর্থকদের  
হামলায় আক্রান্ত। কিন্তু অনেকেই এই  
ফ্রন্টটির ভবিষ্যৎ নিয়ে সন্দেহান। কারণ,  
এর ১২ জনের আনুমানিক কমিটির মধ্যে  
আক্ষরিক অর্থে রাজনীতিক বলতে তেমন  
কেউ নেই। ফলে, এ এস এম আব্দুর রোব-  
এর নেতৃত্বে সামাজিক পদমর্যাদাসম্পন্ন  
ব্যক্তি এবং রাজনীতিবিদদের মধ্য থেকে  
১১ জন আলাদা ভাবে চাইছেন আরও  
একটি বিকল্প জোট তৈরি করতে। এক  
যৌথ বিবৃতিতে তাঁরা আবেদন  
জানিয়েছেন, গোষ্ঠীঘন্ডের রাজনীতি থেকে  
দেশবাসী ও গণতন্ত্রকে বাঁচাতে জাতীয়  
এক্য গড়ে তোলার জন্য। বিবৃতিতে সই  
করেছেন জাতীয় সমাজতান্ত্রিক দলের  
নেতা আব্দুর রোব, প্রাক্তন মন্ত্রী নূরুদ্দিন  
খান ও শফিকুল গনি স্বপন, আবুল হাসান  
চৌধুরি কায়সার, গণস্বাস্থ্য প্রধান ডক্টর  
জাফরুল্লা চৌধুরি, কবি ফজল সাহাবুদ্দিন,

অভিনেত্রী কবরী সারওয়ার, বিজ্ঞানী  
আব্দুল খালেক প্রমুখ।

আন্দোলনের নেতা আব্দুর রোব  
বলেন, "আড়াই বছর চূপ করেছিলাম।"  
নয়।" যদিও রোব-এর রাজনীতি দ্বি-  
টিরদিনই সুবিধাবাদী। এরশাদ জমানায়  
নিষ্ঠাভরে বিরোধী নেতার দায়িত্ব পালনের  
পরই, মন্ত্রিসভায় জায়গা নিয়েছিলেন শেখ  
হাসিনার আমলে। তৃতীয় দল, 'এক্য  
প্রচেষ্টা' গঠিত হয়েছে প্রাক্তন বিদেশমন্ত্রী  
কামাল হোসেনের নেতৃত্বে। আজই পল্টন  
ময়দানে এক জনসমাবেশে উদ্বোধন  
হওয়ার কথা। মঞ্চে শাসক গোষ্ঠীর কোনও  
দলকে ডাকা হচ্ছে না। তবে, আশা করা  
হচ্ছে বাংলাদেশের বিভিন্ন বামপন্থী, কৃষক-  
শ্রমিক সংগঠনগুলি যোগ দিতে পারে।

## ভাল আছেন আজাদ-

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, ঢাকা, ১৪ মার্চ—  
বিশিষ্ট সাহিত্যিক হুমায়ূন আজাদের  
শারীরিক অবস্থার কিছুটা উন্নতি হওয়ায়  
চিকিৎসকেরা তাঁকে ঢাকার সেনা  
হাসপাতালের ইনটেনসিভ কেয়ার ইউনিট  
থেকে ডি আই পি কেবিনে সরিয়ে  
এনেছেন। ২৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি বাংলা অকাদেমি  
প্রাক্তনে তিনি আক্রান্ত হয়েছিলেন। তাঁর  
মাথায়, চোয়ালে ও কাঁধে প্রচণ্ড চোট  
লেগেছিল। তাঁর স্ত্রী লতিফা কোহিনুর  
জানিয়েছেন, এখনও হাঁটা চলা করতে তাঁর  
সাহায্যের দরকার হয়। তবে তাঁর কথা  
আগের থেকে অনেক পরিষ্কার হয়েছে।  
তাঁর চোয়ালের পেশি এখনও অবশ্য  
সন্দেহ করা হচ্ছে আজাদের চোখেও কিছু  
সমস্যা হচ্ছে। তাঁর পরিবারের লোকজন  
সরকারের কাছে উন্নত মানের চিকিৎসার  
জন্য তাঁকে বিদেশে পাঠাতে অনুরোধ  
করেছেন।

# Muzzling Press

3/16 Khaleda refuses lessons of history 15/3

**B**egum Khaleda Zia's BNP-Jamat-I-Islam-led coalition government is suffering from a denial syndrome going by frivolous attempts to deny reports of reputed world media bodies that Bangladesh has become the "riskiest place for journalists in Asia". Not only has the Brussels-based Reporters Sans Frontier placed Bangladesh in "dangerous" category, but a noted US-based media watchdog — the Committee to Protect Journalists — has also dubbed it as "highly unsafe" for reporters. The rebuttal that Begum Zia's government has issued has made leading Bangladeshi journalists cry foul. They hold observations are factual, as three journalists have been killed and 65 others seriously injured in the last 28 months of Begum Zia's rule. The three killed were known for their bold and investigative reporting and were targeted by criminals enjoying the patronage of the ruling coalition. Supporters of her own party have savagely attacked journalists and ransacked Press Clubs "for reporting negative things about our party." Over a hundred journalists in districts have been forced to flee their homes as the goons of the ruling coalition have sent shrouds as presents to be ready for death.

The attack on the fourth estate is no surprise. A large section of the Bangladesh Press has played a very responsible role in exposing the planned attack on religious and ethnic minorities and also the Opposition by the ruling coalition. With the country's judiciary under a cloud and Parliament not functioning effectively, the Press is the only institution which is boldly highlighting the plight of the oppressed and persecuted. Begum Zia, however, has been issuing veiled threats not to write or show things which mar her government's and the country's image. She has even suggested that the media should not publish or show gory scenes of killings as this scares people. She wants the Press to fall in line. Already her coalition has blacklisted leading dailies highly critical of its misrule, specially its failure to arrest the worsening law and order situation, a creation of its patronisation of the underworld. Not only is the government denying them advertisements but corporate houses too are being told not to advertise in "unfriendly" papers. In contrast, dailies preaching religious fundamentalism and demanding that the country be converted into a theocratic state are getting the bulk of government ads. Doesn't Begum Zia realise that both Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujib were banished from power for muzzling the Press? What makes her think she is so different?

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# দুই সাংসদের ইস্তফা, সফটে বিএনপি

শ্রেয়সহ ৩৮

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, ঢাকা, ১১ মার্চ: বাংলাদেশে বিরোধী নেত্রী শেখ হাসিনার সুসময় চলছে বলা যায়। হুমায়ূন আজাদের উপর আক্রমণের ঘটনায় সারা দেশের বৃদ্ধিজীবী মহল ক্ষুব্ধ। দুর্ভৃতারা এখনও ধরা পড়েনি। সেই নিয়ে বিক্ষোভ ধুমায়িত হচ্ছে। এরই মাঝে ক্ষমতাসীন বিএনপি থেকে দু'জন সাংসদ ইস্তফা দেওয়ার পর রীতিমতো সফটে বেগম খালেদা জিয়ার সরকার। ৩০০ সদস্যের সংসদে এই মুহূর্তে বিএনপির ১৯৫ জন সাংসদ রয়েছেন। বিএনপির জোটসঙ্গী জামাত-এ-ইসলামির ১৭ জন সাংসদ রয়েছেন। ইসলামি একা জোট এবং জাতীয় পার্টির অংশ এবং নিরপেক্ষদের মিলিত সাংসদের সংখ্যা মোট ১৪ জন। বিএনপির সাধারণ সচিব আব্দুল মান্নান ভূইঞা অবশ্য পরিষ্কার জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, এক-দু'জন সাংসদের ইস্তফা সরকারে কোনও প্রভাব ফেলবে না। তাঁর মতে, সারা দেশে বিএনপির প্রসার এতটাই অসংখ্য নেতা-কর্মী-সমর্থক এই দলের সঙ্গে আছে।

কলিই সেনা মেজর আব্দুল মান্নান এবং মাহি বি চৌধুরী বিএনপি ছেড়ে প্রাক্তন শ্রেয়সহ ৩৮ বদরুদোজ্জা চৌধুরীর দলে যোগ

দিয়েছেন। বিএনপি সূত্রে খবর, সমান্তরাল একটি দল গড়ার লক্ষ্যে আব্দুল মান্নান বেশ কয়েক দিন ধরেই বদরুদোজ্জা চৌধুরীর সঙ্গে আতাত রেখে চলেছেন। এ ব্যাপারে তাঁকে আগেও বারবার সতর্ক করা হয়েছে। ওই দু'জন ছাড়া আরও কয়েক জন সাংসদ দল ছাড়তে পারেন বলে ইঙ্গিত দিয়েছে শাসক দল। তবে যারা দল ছাড়তে চান, তাঁদের উপর কোনও চাপ সৃষ্টি করবে না বলে বিএনপি সূত্রে জানানো হয়েছে।

বিরোধী দল আওয়ামী লিগ অবশ্য এই ঘটনায় যথেষ্ট আশাবাদী। দলের সাধারণ সচিব আব্দুল জলিল জানিয়েছেন, “খালেদা জিয়ার সরকারের পতন যে আসন্ন, এই ঘটনা তারই প্রমাণ।”

অন্য দিকে, পিটিআইয়ের খবর, হুমায়ূন আজাদের বিদেশে চিকিৎসার যাবতীয় ব্যয়ভার নিতে চেয়েছিল আওয়ামী লিগ। আজাদের পরিবার এই প্রস্তাব খিরিয়ে দিয়েছে। তাঁদের বক্তব্য, বাংলাদেশ সরকার কিংবা ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় শিক্ষক সংগঠনের সাহায্যই নেবেন তাঁরা, কোনও রাজনৈতিক দলের নয়।



## হুমায়ূনের উপর হামলার প্রতিবাদে

সাধারণ ধর্মঘট ৬ মার্চ

৩৬ নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, ঢাকা, ২ মার্চ: গত শুক্রবার বাংলাদেশের বিশিষ্ট সাংবাদিক হুমায়ূন আজাদের উপর আক্রমণের প্রতিবাদে ৬ মার্চ সাধারণ ধর্মঘটের ডাক দিয়েছে আওয়ামী লিগ-সহ বিরোধী দলগুলি। সোমবার বি এন পি-জামাত জোট সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে এই প্রথম দেশজোড়া হরতালের ডাক বিরোধীদের।

আওয়ামী লিগ প্রধান আব্দুল জলিল বলেছেন, এই ধর্মঘটের পেছনে হুমায়ূন আজাদের উপর আক্রমণ ছাড়াও শেখ হাসিনার বিরুদ্ধে মিথ্যা মামলা পেশ, নির্বিচার রাজনৈতিক হত্যা, মূল্যবৃদ্ধি এবং বিরোধী দলের রাজনৈতিক প্রতিবাদের মধ্যে বাধা দেওয়ার মতো বিষয়ও রয়েছে। পাশাপাশি, ঢাকায় আওয়ামী লিগের প্রধান কার্যালয়ের বাইরে বিস্ফোভ, ভাঙচুর এবং ঘেরাওয়ার অভিযোগে অন্তত ১০০ জন দলীয় কর্মীকে গ্রেফতার করেছে পুলিশ।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

3 MAR 2008

# Awami League plans fresh agitation

By Haroon Habib

**DHAKA, FEB. 21.** The Bangladesh Opposition leader and president of the Awami League, Sheikh Hasina, has demanded holding of immediate national elections and threatened to step up her party's anti-Government agitation.

Ms. Hasina ruled out any dialogue with the Khaleda Zia regime to resolve the prevailing political impasse in the country caused by the anti-Government programme and indiscriminate police action against the agitators. More than

400 Awami activists have been jailed, party sources claimed, stating that nearly 300 middle level leaders and workers had been detained in Dhaka alone.

Expressing her anger over the "police brutalities", Ms. Hasina announced a new set of anti-Government programmes including another countrywide shutdown on February 28.

The programmes include demonstrations in the capital and elsewhere next week. "People do not want us to sit with Khaleda Zia whose hands are stained with

blood," Ms. Hasina told a news conference. In another headline decision, the party decided not to return to the Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) although a section of her party lawmakers wanted the anti-Government movement to be carried on both in and outside Parliament.

Ms. Hasina said her party legislators would resign from Parliament but did not specify when they would do so. Awami League leaders at a meeting, with Ms. Hasina in the chair, held a lengthy discussion on their strategy for the agitation.

Most lawmakers at the meeting preferred strengthening the street agitation as the Government had been "oppressing" Opposition activists.

"We are at a point of no return, and there is no alternative but to unseat the BNP-Jamaat Government," the deputy leader of Opposition, Abdul Hamid, told mediapersons after the meeting.

Ms. Hasina also hinted at an alliance with "like-minded" parties. "We are open to forming a government of consensus," she said.

# Lawless Bangladesh

5.8 9/2 ✓  
Khaleda's recipe for disaster

Is Bangladesh slowly but steadily sliding into chaos and anarchy? The events of last month have made many Bangladeshis wonder aloud whether civil society has collapsed and the law of the jungle prevails in the country.

This is because of the recent spate of violence and brutality that has left the nation shell shocked. The bomb attack that killed six pilgrims at the 700 year-old *mazhar* of Hazrat Shah Jalal in Sylhet, considered to be the holiest of holy shrines by the country's majority community, has left the nation stunned as it underscored the point that even Muslim shrines were no longer safe from religious and political zealotry. The *mutwallis* of the *mazhar* have blamed one of the fundamentalist parties of Begum Khaleda Zia's ruling coalition — the Jamat-i-Islami — for the attack since its leaders consider the practice of observing *Urs* at *mazhars* wholly un-Islamic". The Jamat has led attacks on Ahmadiyahs and their places of worship demanding that they be declared non-Muslims and also been instrumental in imposing a ban on Ahmadiya publications.

Three years ago the fundamentalists as part of their crusade against religious minorities, bombed a village church in Faridpur killing 14 Christians. But what has sent shock waves not only in Bangladesh but outside as well is the recent killing of one of the country's leading journalists, Manik Saha, in broad daylight in Khulna in a bomb attack which severed his head from the body. His crime? He wrote against powerful *bheri* owners, mostly ruling party leaders, engaged in lucrative prawn cultivation on encroached land. They are also the kingpins of crime syndicates.

Saha was the third journalist murdered in Khulna during the last 27 months of Begum Zia's rule. Nine senior journalists of neighbouring Saatkheria have received shrouds as death threats. Consequently Brussels-based Reporters Sans Frontieres has listed Bangladesh as among the "most dangerous countries" for journalists to work in. Not only Begum Zia's ministers but even her son Tareq, her party's senior secretary general, has told journalists to "behave".

This lawlessness is the result of Begum Zia's avowed policy of sheltering criminals in her coalition and dropping cases of murder, rape, arson and looting that have been filed against them. Even those who had been convicted of these charges and were serving jail terms have been released and their number exceeds 65,000. One of her senior party leaders, charge-sheeted for his involvement in the murder of a leading journalist, has, ironically, been rewarded with the information ministry.

The "political protection" that her coalition is providing has demoralised the police so much that they fight shy of nabbing criminals who have killed 39 people and injured 400 others in five major bomb blasts during her rule. Also Begum Zia's government has done nothing to bring to justice those who killed almost 100 people in six major bomb blasts during Sheikh Hasina's rule. Sadly, Begum Zia appears not to realise that the monster she is creating may one be the cause of her undoing.

# Banning Ahmadiya

19/1/04 51-8  
Khaleda showing growing religious intolerance

The recent ban imposed by the ruling BNP-Jamat-I-Islam coalition on all publications of Ahmadiyas, a minority Muslim sect, is a clear indication that Bangladesh is no longer the "moderate Muslim state" that prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia had proclaimed it to be when she rode back to power in 2001. The decision is a clear expression of her intent to take her country slowly but steadily towards the fundamentalist path as is being demanded by the staunch Islamist section within her party and also by her two alliance partners — Jamat-I-Islam and Islami Oikya Jote which are pronouncedly fundamentalist outfits. Already human rights groups have challenged the order in the High Court as, according to them, it violates the Constitutional right to preach and practise their religion. The ban is a result of the intense pressure that both the fundamentalist parties had mounted on Begum Zia demanding that the Ahmadiyas be declared non-Muslims. *Banned sh*

The two parties, which have close ties with Pakistani fundamentalists, had cited the slain Pakistani president Zia-ul-Haq's "boldness" in banning the Ahmadiyas. Many view Begum Zia's decision as a prelude to imposing a total ban on this Muslim minority sect with less than 200,000 members. Prior to the publication ban, armed Jamat and IOJ cadres had attacked an Ahmadiya mosque in Dhaka in a bid to "forcibly take it over" and had brutally murdered an Ahmadiya maulana in Jessore. Another mosque of the sect had been bombed in Khulna earlier. Ahmadiyas living in districts too have been attacked for not following the Saudi brand of *Wahibi* religious extremism which the Jamat openly preaches and promotes in Bangladesh. There are other manifestations of religious intolerance that Begum Zia has sought to promote ever since her coming to power. For the last two years she has allowed her party and the Jamat cadres to loot and plunder properties of minority communities and also encouraged the rape of their women by not booking culprits. In the past month, 19 members of two Hindu families, one in Chittagong and the other in Natore, have been burnt alive and several of their women gang raped.

Buddhists, Christians and tribals including Chakmas, Santhals and Garos too have been attacked and their women violated. Minorities are being openly told that "Muslim Bengal" has no place for them and that they should "migrate to secular India". No amount of criticism by international human rights groups and even those belonging to the Bangladesh caucus in the US Congress has been able to dissuade Begum Zia from treading the path of religious intolerance.

What is causing serious concern to the small secular section in Begum Zia's BNP is the growing Pakistani and Islamic tilt that she has given to her party which ideologically makes BNP indistinguishable from both Jamat and the IOJ. Senior ministers of her party have publicly lauded Jamat's "total Opposition" to 1971 liberation war and collaborating with Islamabad in maintaining Pakistan's unity and integrity.

They see no wrong in Jamat's stance as "Islamic nationalism" binds the two parties together. The irony is that even a secular party like Awami League has of late been saying nothing critical of Jamat for fear of "hurting and alienating" the majority community. This has emboldened Jamat to become more reckless and combative. For Bangladesh all these are ominous developments.

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