

## 47 killed in explosion at China house

AFP, Beijing

At least 47 people were killed and 20 injured in a northern Chinese coal mining town yesterday after a crowd gathered to watch a burning house which then exploded, residents and state press reports said.

Privately stored explosives were responsible for the blast around 6:30 am (2230 GMT Thursday) at a home in Dongzhai village, Shanxi province, Xinhua news agency said. Xinhua and residents said the death toll was so high because people had gathered around to watch events after the house caught fire, while others rushed to help put out the blaze, and then the explosion occurred.

"The house first caught fire so a lot of villagers were standing around watching when it suddenly exploded," a villager who identified himself only as Li told AFP by telephone.

Another resident gave a similar account. "A lot of people were standing around the home to watch the fire and then it exploded," said the resident, who did not want to give her name.

Xinhua, citing local police, said preliminary investigations showed the fire had indeed triggered the explosion, resulting in at least 47 people dead and more than 20 others injured.

Villagers described the house as an ordinary one-storey home, which they suspected had been an illegal storage site for explosives to be used in coal mining.

"There are a lot of people in Xinzhou prefecture who are running private mines and storing up explosives," a third resident, who also did not want to identify herself, told AFP.

## Israel presses

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Nablus, where radicals have threatened to unleash untold violence should Israel move further into Gaza.

Two 16-year-old Palestinians also died from Israeli fire during an incursion into the similarly volatile northern West Bank town of Jenin on Thursday.

But in the biggest escalation of the crisis since the soldier was abducted, Israel on Thursday sent troops deep into the northern Gaza Strip, effectively creating a buffer zone in a territory it withdrew from in September last year.

Israel has vowed to use everything in its power to increase the pressure on the embattled Hamas-led government to free 19-year-old corporal Gilad Shalit and to stop rocket attacks.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas charged the offensive had unleashed "new crimes against humanity", in comments carried by the official WAFANews agency.

Abbas, whose repeated calls for militants to stop launching rockets have gone unheeded, urged the international community and UN Security Council to put pressure Israel into ending "this destructive policy immediately".

Inspecting troops based near Gaza, Israel's chief of staff Dan Halutz warned that militants had and would "pay a heavy price" if they continue their attacks, maintaining that "40 terrorists" had been killed in the offensive.

The return of troops to Gaza has evoked memories of the army's disastrous 1982 invasion of Lebanon where soldiers similarly sought to create a security zone but became bogged down in a deadly quagmire before pulling out in 2000.

"Israel is not willing to sink into a swamp in Gaza, and the IDF is operating in the field in order not to sink into Gaza," said Defence Minister Amir Peretz, who has been publicly criticised for his handling of the crisis.

But Palestinians have continued their rocket attacks unchecked, firing three towards Israel on Friday, bringing to 12 the number of such crudely manufactured projectiles launched since the army's latest offensive began.

Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniya, whose offices were the target of an Israeli missile strike on Sunday, demanded international intervention to stop Israel's largest military operation since its pullout from Gaza.

His government -- boycotted both financially and politically by Israel and the West -- has put its security forces on high alert and urged all Palestinians to take up arms against the Israeli military.

Aid groups have expressed concern about the difficulties of providing assistance to 1.4 million people living in impoverished Gaza following months of financial crisis and the suspension of direct Western aid to the government.

"Public institutions and non-government organizations working in the West Bank and Gaza are struggling to provide water, sanitation, food, health and social assistance in the Gaza Strip," CARE International warned.

Hundreds of mourners perspiring in the oppressive heat attended the

"I don't know if the home belonged to a mine owner, but a lot of people work in mines here."

Shanxi province is China's biggest coal mining production area and a region where accidental explosions of illegally stored explosives have occurred previously.

In April at least 34 people were killed when illegally stored explosives owned by a private mine operator blew up in a hospital compound in Shanxi.

At least 10 people were killed and 18 injured in a blast at a local government leader's house in neighbouring Shaanxi province last month that was also linked to mining explosives.

In July 2 last year in another mining tragedy for Ningwu county, where Friday's incident occurred, a gas explosion at a coal mine killed 36 people and injured 11.

That explosion made headlines as the mine owner hid the bodies of 17 dead workers to evade punishment.

Ningwu county police said that an investigation was ongoing into Friday's blast and refused to rule out that illegally stored explosives may have been the cause of the tragedy.

China's public security ministry last month announced a crackdown on the sale and storage of illegal explosives, amid a rising demand from illegal coal mines seeking to cash in on China's thirst for energy.

"There is a large demand for illegally made and trafficked explosives," said Xu Hui, a leading police official.

"A lot of criminals are seeking big profits and they are ignoring risks and brazenly engaging in the illegal activities of making and trafficking explosives."

## Police refuse

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of you. Three are still left to be eaten," said Badsha quoting Montu, who made threatening call to Zaman, one of the accused in the abduction case.

"I don't know how I should act now. Please do something for me as I have nobody to turn up to," Badsha said over phone from his hideout as police were looking for him.

Montu Miah, elder brother of Faruq Hossain, a BNP leader of the area, has close connection with local BNP activists who are threatening the victim's family with dire consequences if they move forward.

Chairmen of Birulia and Bangram Mahmud Hasan Alal and Anwar Hossain are trying to settle the issue on 'mutual understanding' on the instructions from local BNP lawmaker Salauddin Babu, locals and family members said.

"Police seem more active in dealing with the abduction case, rather than the murder incident. Police mounted drive regarding abduction case only to pressurise us not to move further with the murder case. We will file the case with a court in Dhaka," said Foysal, son of Badsha Miah.

## Pro-AL teachers

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non-government institutions will now be on strike to press home their demands that include payment of 100 per cent basic salary from the public exchequer.

Kazi Faruque, chief coordinator and convenor of the Front, said raising their salaries by 10 per cent is an election pledge of the BNP-led ruling alliance but the government is yet to implement it. This has compelled them to go for an indefinite strike.

He also asked the striking teachers and employees to call telephone number 9129806 in case of any untoward incidents during the strike.

Oikya Jote Chief Coordinator Selim Bhuiyan has asked the striking teachers and employees to stay for an hour each day at their workplaces to know the views of guardians of the students, local political leaders and journalists regarding the strike.

He also urged them to stage demonstrations at upazila level to make the government accept their demands.

The teachers and employees belonging to different platforms have been staging demonstrations, holding rallies and bringing out processions since June 9 to realise their demands. They gave a deadline for this -- June 29 -- the day the budget for the current fiscal year was passed.

Their demands include increase in house rent, medical allowance and implementation of various Unesco and ILO recommendations.

## Heroin smuggling

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ministry emphasising the necessity of the visit.

A member of the probe team said evidence of the seized heroin has to be placed before the court and persons who made the seizure list have to give their statements before the court to ensure punishment of those involved in the smuggling of the illicit drugs.

Sources in the home ministry said the ministry would request the UK government to ask the officials who prepared the seizure list to give their statements before the court in Bangladesh.

The probe committee proposed names of all the five members and two investigation officers to the home ministry for the trip to UK. However, the home ministry will finalise whether the seven men would go to the UK. The home ministry will bear all expenses for their visit.

The CID-led investigation team started the probe on a home ministry directive after a National Board of Revenue (NBR) inquiry found five Bangladeshi business firms' involvement in heroin smuggling to the UK.

The NBR launched the inquiry last year as the UK customs in a message through the British mission in Mumbai, India accused BD Foods Ltd, Emdad Traders, Jamil International, MM Enterprise, and Green Heaven Enterprise of smuggling 75.5kg heroin to the UK.

On May 14, police arrested Badruddoza Momen following the confessions of his two accomplices -- Nazmul Haider Buyiyar Bulbul, a former official of BD Foods Limited, and his cohort Mokhlesur Rahman Nayan, a cargo handler -- to have smuggled 22.5kg heroin to the UK on Momen's orders.

Badruddoza, who is now in jail, admitted to the interrogators that he had smuggled illegal goods to the UK a few days before his arrest.

Kazi Zafar Reza, proprietor of Rainbow Enterprise, and Abul Bashar, owner of Green Haven Enterprise, had also confessed to a magistrate that they smuggled 54kg heroin to the same country.

The manager of BD Foods Mohammad Mainuddin also gave a confessional statement before a magistrate in connection with the heroin smuggling.

## Rajuk staff cash in

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money charging up to Tk 50,000 for approval of each building plan.

In an announcement, the government first deferred implementation of the new rules up to June 30. Later, a notification dated July 2 issued by the housing and public works ministry and signed by a senior assistant secretary further deferred it until December 31.

According to sources in the ministry and Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab), the government took the decision in the face of pressure from some sections of commercial and private builders and small plot owners.

"The government is also reluctant to enforce the new rules fearing loss of public support at a time it is preparing for the next general elections," said a top official of the ministry, requesting anonymity.

Minister for Housing and Public Works Mirza Abbas told The Daily Star that the new construction rules were made over a period of three years with participation from all stakeholders in the sector.

"I blame corrupt officials of Rajuk for spreading misleading information about the new rules. We need to tell people that they would be benefited more if they follow the new rules," Abbas said.

Abdul Awar, president of Rehab, said vested quarters have convinced the present rulers to take such a decision, arguing that implementation of the new rules will have a negative impact on them in the coming general election. But this is ridiculous.

The Rehab president said he would organise public discussions to inform all stakeholders and the

common people that they should accept the rules for their own good.

The new rules have an in-built mechanism to make them effective, and they provide for rigorous punishment of those who flout them. Under the new rules, a total of 17 agencies under One Window Service Cell will approve development plan and construction design within 45 days.

An urban development committee will also have authority to hold public hearings on allegations of irregularities in construction work. Professional architects and engineers will supervise and conduct any construction work and be liable for their decisions. They will deal with the authorities in obtaining approval for different phases of land development and building construction. An intending builder has to seek plan approval in phases -- first for foundation development and then for structural construction.

Once engineers issue completion certificate endorsing that a building has been constructed as per the approved plan, the building owner has to obtain occupancy certificate to use the building. Certificate has to be renewed every five years to ensure that a building is used for authorised purposes.

Architect Iqbal Habib said landowners in the capital would benefit more with the enforcement of the new rules.

The Institute of Architects, Bangladesh, is offering a service for those interested to know the new rules in detail, he said.

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that the coincidence is significant. The three Ahab leaders along with Galib were arrested on February 23 last year from their Nawdapara den in Rajshahi over allegations of their involvement with international militant outfits and receiving foreign funds to fuel militancy in the country.

Later, they were charged with bomb attacks and robbery at different NGO offices. Sources said although the law enforcement agencies seized important documents proving their militant activities from Nawdapara Salafia Madrasa and Galib's house, the documents were not produced in the cases.

**GOPALGANJ BAIL**  
First class Magistrate Moshir Rahman granted the three militants bail in the Kotalipara case.

During the hearing, the petitioners said they have been in jail for one and a half years but the investigators could not show any charges against them.

They also argued that the police could not produce any illegal documents seized from them.

The court inspector, however, pleaded that seven other militants-- Selim Uddin, Masum Mia, Abdullah, Abdun Nur Sayeedi, Isarat Ali, Shawkat Ali and Tarikul Islam--all arrested in the case mentioned the names of the accused having links to the attack.

Selim said in his judicial statement that they are followers of

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aimed at winning the World Cup final in Berlin on Sunday.

Domenech said he had no worries that his ageing team would be fit and raring to go for Sunday's match which, given the stinginess of both defences, could well stretch into strength-sapping extra-time.

"It's true that we were exhausted, but being tired after a semifinal is normal and we will recover in time," he said at the French training camp near Hanover.

"As far as I am concerned my guys are not old. At 30 or 35 you still follow a preparation and then it's faith that makes the difference."

"Over six months you can expect players of that age to have problems, but not over a period of a month and seven matches."

Lippi, in tune with his players, has saluted the magnificent form shown at the World Cup by 34-year-old French skipper Zinedine Zidane saying that the midfielder was "probably the best player there has been in the past 20 years."

"France are back with a top-form Zidane and they have improved as the tournament has gone on. Beating Portugal confirmed that they are back to their best," he said.

But Alessandro Del Piero, a former teammate of Zidane at Juventus said it would be a mistake for Italy to concentrate solely on nullifying Zidane's threat in Sunday's final.

"He has performed magnificently so far and I hope that ends on Sunday," Del Piero said of the Real Madrid midfield maestro who will retire from football after the Berlin showpiece.

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## 3 Ahab leaders

Ahab and underground for the Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

**INVESTIGATION**  
Investigators seized documents that Galib and Samad Salafi arranged visits for militant leaders Akramuzzaman and Entaj Zakaria to Kuwait through the RIHS before 1995.

Akramuazzaman and Zakaria stayed in Kuwait and supervised Ahab's "invitation and jihad" programme.

Samad Salafi, a rich and influential man from Godagari in Rajshahi, had close ties with Indian Abdul Matin Salafi who was expelled from the country in 1988 for militant links. But he continued to play role through Galib and Samad Salafi.

Javed and Khaled, two Kashmir mujahids caught in Nepal in 1998, named Galib and Samad Salafi as their Bangladeshi links.

In 1997, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in Rajshahi caught four other Kashmir mujahids from the Godagari border.

Later, the BDR also picked Samad Salafi from Nawdapara. But 12 hours later, a BDR vehicle dropped all of them at Salafia Madrasa.

The Kashmir mujahids stayed in the country without passports and engaged in training the Rohingyas in Chittagong.

## Clash for third place

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## Twins die

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"The pair had some bleeding through the anus on Wednesday. As we treated, the bleeding stopped around two hours later," Prof Kabirul said, adding that they also injected one bag of blood into the body on Thursday but they died.

Physicians said they might have died due to infections as many people gathered around the hospital bed where they were kept and touched them.

Besides, parents were reluctant to take care of the twins, they added. Doctors said they received a similar case in 2004 and managed to separate the twins, but they did not survive.

## BNP move

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The party has finalised a pre-election campaign strategy. As part of it, Tarique already visited a number of constituencies including those in Barisal, Mymensingh, Feni, Laxmipur, Kushtia, Meherpur, Noakhali and Chandpur districts.

The strategy gave more importance to areas where large-scale development work has taken place, party lawmakers have a strong footing and BNP's coalition partners have significant public support, a Hawa Bahban source said.

## Udichi

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The national committee and district committees will also perform cultural programmes on July 27 and hold rallies in the capital and all districts on August 6 where tougher agitation will be announced.

As part of the protest programme of the national committee, cultural activists and members of civil society yesterday held a grand rally at the Central Shaheed Minar, where speakers urged the government to reinvestigate the Udichi murder case for identifying the real culprits.

They also called upon the government to look into the involvement of Islamist militants Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman who recently confessed to their involvement in the bomb blast at the Udichi programme.

Nasir Uddin Yusuf, convenor of the national committee of the Movement for the Reinvestigation and Trial of Udichi Murder Case, presided over the rally where cultural activist Ramendu Majumder, former president of Dhaka University Teachers Association AAMS Arefin Siddique, General Secretary Akhtaruzzaman, Workers Party General Secretary Bimal Biswas, Udichi President Prof Batin Sarkar and Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists President Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul also addressed.

## Hasina

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possible to ensure a better chance of AL candidates at the polls. They also asked her to notify the candidates at least three months ahead of the polls so that AL can enjoy victory beyond doubt.

The local leaders said the long-standing intra-party conflicts influenced the results in all the five constituencies in the district in 2001 general elections. They urged her to take stern organisational action against those who went against the party in the last elections. The leaders asked Hasina to nominate people who are popular, who can reach mass people, and who are active in AL politics to ensure victory in the next elections.

In reply, Hasina assured them that they would nominate candidates after examining the grassroots leaders' views of the nomination aspirants.

The local leaders earlier in a question-answer form put four names forward with their views about the politics and popularity of the prospective candidates.

The AL chief said the government has finalised all conspiracy to rig the next general elections as they know people would not vote for them.

Urging people to be aware of malpractices, Hasina said BNP-Jamaat men who have looted huge amount of public money would not hesitate to use it and take administrative favours to buy votes in the polls.

General Secretary Abdul Mannan of AL Dinajpur town unit told The Daily Star after the meeting that there are intra-party feuds in Dinajpur AL. He said there are a number of candidates racing to get AL tickets. "We informed our party chief about these problems and requested her to take effective measures in this regard to ensure victory in the next election," he added.

Hasina assured them of taking necessary action to deal with the problems. She also urged the grassroots leaders to initiate groundwork for the next elections alongside the ongoing movement.

Grassroots leaders of Rajshahi district are to meet the AL chief today.

## BNP men

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completed satisfactorily. Development projects were also undertaken in the names of Janata Club at Godarpura and Ekata Club at Chhoto Kumira under sadar upazilla, and Mahila Ekata Club in Katnarpara area in the town.

## Iran govt keeps world guessing on answer

### EU hails 'good start' of talks with Tehran

REUTERS, Brussels

Iran kept a frustrated world guessing about its response to proposals aimed at defusing a standoff over its nuclear programme Thursday when Tehran's chief negotiator met the European Union's foreign policy chief.

Ali Larjani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, told reporters he would give a preliminary response next week to a package of economic, technological and political incentives designed to entice Iran to halt uranium enrichment.

"We are serious about continuing negotiations and will start next Tuesday with talks," he told reporters on meeting EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana in Brussels. The two men are due to meet again next week.

Pressed to say if he had brought with him an initial answer to the major powers' package, which Solana delivered to Tehran on June 6, Larjani said: "We will talk about it Tuesday."

A US official later told State Department reporters in an email that Larjani did not respond to the proposal during his meeting with Solana.

The European Union said talks with Iran late on Thursday on a package of incentives to end a nuclear standoff were constructive and laid the basis for a fuller response by Tehran at a second meeting due next week.

"It's a good start for what we expect will be a positive meeting on July 11," Cristina Gallach, spokeswoman for EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said on Friday of his two-hour meeting with Iran chief nuclear negotiator Ali Larjani.

"We expect on Tuesday that they will be able to give us a substantial response," she said of a long-awaited reply to a package of technology, trade and other incentives for Iran to halt

## People in hill dists

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society representatives of the district took part in the dialogue held as part of a series of dialogues on 'National Election 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development'.

Chairman of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Regional Council and President of Parbatyia Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) Jyotindra Boddhipriya Lama was the chief guest while Executive Director of the CPD Debapriya Bhattacharya was the moderator.

Former chairman of Rangamati Local Government Council and president of CHT Land Rights and Protection Committee Gautam Dewan chaired the discussion and Deputy Minister for CHT Affairs Moni Swapan Dewan and Chingkew Roaza were present as the special guests.

Chakma Circle Chief Barrister Devashish Roy and renowned scientist and Chittagong University teacher Jamal Nazrul Islam, members of the 'Nagorik Committee 2006' were present at the four-hour meeting to receive public feedback.

Editor of the Prothom Alo Motiur Rahman spoke on behalf of the organisers.

"We see military interference in every single activity in the hill districts," said Shaktipada Tripura, a member of Rangamati Headmen's Association. He demanded immediate withdrawal of the army after an operation.

Suresh Kumar Chakma, a UP chairman, demanded a separate ministry for the indigenous people. He also demanded constitutional recognition.

Sabbir's family had earlier said someone called him over telephone on Tuesday night and the following morning informed that Sabbir died after falling from the rooftop of the building. Asif claimed Sabbir had no reason to commit suicide.

Police took the GD as a regular case as none of Sabbir's family filed any case until yesterday.

"There is no point in filing any murder case," Asif told The Daily Star. "I filed the GD which the police can use to probe the incident," he added.

Ali, however, expressed his disappointment saying neither Bashundhara Group nor the family members of Sabbir were cooperating with him properly in investigating the matter.

He however said he would talk to Sabbir's colleagues and borrow his diary to find out clues.

Meanwhile, the residents and security guards of the building said, "Posh cars, belonging to non-residents of the flat, used to come here around midnight and