

VHP steps up campaign to replace mosque in Varanasi

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: Hindu extremists are stepping up a campaign to replace a 17th-century mosque in northern India with a Hindu temple, reviving fears of another explosion of Hindu-Muslim passions, reports AFP.

The outlawed Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council) wants to build an elaborate temple dedicated to Shiva, the Hindu God of death, on the site of the imposing Gyanvapi mosque in the Hindu holy city of Varanasi.

The VHP, which led a drive that resulted in the razing of the Babri mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya in December 1992, claims the Gyanvapi mosque was erected by Moghul King Aurangzeb after destroying a Hindu shrine.

Although the Hindu temple was rebuilt nearby in 1777 by a Hindu queen, the VHP wants the mosque built by the Islamic invaders to go.

The Hindu and Muslim places of worship have co-existed peacefully for more than two centuries in Varanasi, a city of great significance to Hindus on the banks of the sacred Ganges river.

"The mosque should be removed and a grand Hindu temple should be built at the site," VHP president Vishnu Hari Dalmia told AFP here. "The mosque is an insult to the Hindu masses."

"Yes, a small temple exists there, but that is not enough," he said.

On Monday, 50,000 Hindu extremists formally launched a movement in Varanasi to "liberate" the Gyanvapi mosque by praying at the Shiva temple which adjoins the Islamic shrine.

Thousands of police officers and paramilitary troops ringed the mosque in a bid to prevent an invasion by the Hindu faithful, some of whom threw earthen pitchers filled with holy water into the mosque premises.

A similar campaign by the VHP against the 16th-century Babri mosque in Ayodhya led to its razing on December 6, 1992 by Hindu fanatics, who quickly built a makeshift temple on the rubble.

The destruction sparked the worst orgy of Hindu-Muslim violence in India since independence, leaving about 2,000 people dead.

Muslims, India's largest religious minority, are worried the movement in Varanasi may take a similar course.

"They are fundamentalists who want to create hatred against Muslims," Ahmed Bukhari, deputy priest of the Jama Masjid, India's largest mosque located here, said of the VHP. "The mosque faces real danger."

The Indian government has not commented on the VHP movement although all religious shrines are protected by 1991 legislation. Varanasi is administered by a socialist-led coalition government.

LCs for rice import

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dollars were opened during the same period.

Earlier last month, a government task force estimated that rice imports during 1994-95 would total 9.32 lakh metric tons to make up for the projected shortfall in production of 5.72 lakh MT because of severe droughts in many parts of the country.

The total foodgrain production is estimated to be around 186 lakh MT during the current fiscal, down from the actual output of 191.71 lakh MT in 1993-94.

The rice production shortfall is being attributed to the droughts in most rice growing regions caused by poor rainfall during the last summer and the resultant shortage in surface and underground water levels over the current dry season.

A drop in the aman and boro crops would mainly result in the shortfall while aus and wheat output is projected to increase slightly, according to Agriculture Ministry figures. Aman production during the current fiscal is estimated to be 90.42 lakh MT and boro 64 lakh MT as against the actual production of 94.19 lakh

MT and 67.72 lakh MT in 1993-94.

Preliminary estimates of early season aus output this fiscal stands at 20 lakh MT while wheat production is expected at 11.58 lakh MT, compared to 18.5 lakh MT and 11.3 lakh MT respectively during the previous fiscal.

The ministry estimates that import of 9.32 lakh MT of rice would be needed to meet the projected shortfall: 5.72 lakh MT for production loss and 3.6 lakh MT to provision for the annual increase in the population.

The shortfall in rice production fuelled a steep rise in prices since late last year, at times even by more than 50 per cent, forcing the government to initiate open market sale (OMS) operations on January 16 in an effort to stabilise the market prices.

Earlier last week, Bangladesh Bank Governor Korshed Alam, at a press briefing, said that the actual settlement of foodgrain imports during the July-December period of the current fiscal stood at 68.1 million dollars compared to 15.8 million dollars during the corresponding period of 1993-94.

Princess Anne due today

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grammes in more than 50 countries in Asia, the Pacific and Caribbean regions.

Princess Anne, 44, will arrive by a regular British Airways flight at 4:05 pm. She will be received at the VIP tarmac of Zia International Airport by Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman and his wife.

The Princess Royal, eighth in line of succession to the throne, will make a courtesy call on President Abdur Rahman Biswas at Bangabhaban shortly after her arrival.

In the evening she will be the guest of honour at a reception to be hosted by the British High Commissioner. Invitees from the local British community and NGO organisations will also attend the reception.

The Princess Royal will be staying at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

The Royal visitor will fly to Saidpur tomorrow by a special British aircraft being flown in for her. At Parbatipur and Saidpur, she will visit a number of community projects including the BRAC's Women Health and Development Programme, Mother and Child Health Care centres, mulberry saplings, silkwood and silk cocoon projects and a BRAC-sponsored non-formal primary education scheme.

Queen Elizabeth's only daughter will also visit the North East Fisheries Extension Project at Parbatipur to see a model fish farm, hatchery and aquaria display.

The projects are run under British aid programmes. She will return to Dhaka in the afternoon and see some Save the Children Fund projects in Gulshan, Baridhara and Tejgaon.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will host a quiet dinner for her tomorrow evening. Incidentally, both Begum Zia and Princess Anne share an August 15 birthday.

On March 8, Princess Anne is due to fly to Jessore and Khulna to see some projects run by the Save the Children Fund.

The Princess will leave

Dhaka on March 9 for Colombo where she is expected to stay for two days.

This is the second visit of Princess Anne to Bangladesh. She was last here in 1984.

Bangladesh is the second largest recipient of British bilateral aid. In 1993, Dhaka received around Taka 330 crore (55 million pound sterling). Since independence Britain has provided Bangladesh with more than Taka 6,200 crore (700 million pounds) in aid. All assistance was in the form of grants, not requiring repayment or entailing any increase in Bangladesh's national debt.

The main thrust of British aid to Bangladesh is on poverty alleviation, public administration reforms, human resources development, health and family planning, education and a greater role for women in the development process.

20 injured in Sirajganj clash

SIRAJGANJ, Mar 5: About 20 people were injured, eight of them seriously, in a clash between two rival groups at a village in Ullapara thana this (Sunday) afternoon, reports UNB.

Police and witnesses said the clash over the lease of a khas pond at village Moitra Barabar erupted among the supporters of one Dabiruddin went to take possession of the pond and the supporters of one Khodabox resisted. Both the group chiefs are said to be local BNP leaders.

Khodabox, enjoying the lease of the pond for the last 20 years, had been resisting Dabiruddin's claim on the pond since last year when the lease went to him.

Both sides fought with lethal weapons. Three dwellings to Khodabox were reportedly set ablaze and three others looted in the melee at around 1 pm.

The seriously injured eight were admitted to Purnimagati Health Complex.

Police and Fire Brigade rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.



The main Eid congregation at the National Eidgah near the High Court on Friday.

— Star photo

Eid celebrated

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Wednesday, the marketplaces remained crammed with last-minute shoppers till late Thursday night.

Shops in Elephant Road, Ghausia and Mouchak markets and other places remained open till the early hours of Friday. The main roads in front of these shopping centres remained jammed Thursday night.

However, most city thoroughfares remained nearly deserted until yesterday.

As part of the Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations, the national flag was hoisted atop public and private buildings and the main thoroughfares were decorated with flags and bunting inscribed with Eid greetings.

Some public buildings were illuminated.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas held two receptions to exchange Eid greetings with people from different walks of life.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia also hosted two receptions at her Hare Road office. These were attended by diplomats, ministers, MPs, political leaders, different professionals, businessmen, civil servants and defence officials.

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina held a reception at the party's Dhanmondi office.

A colourful Eid parade in traditional Dhaka style was inaugurated in the old part of the city by Mayor Mohammad Hanif. The procession began from the Suritola Primary School premises on North-South Road. Horses and horse-drawn carriages, mounted elephants, trucks and other decorated floats formed part of the parade which was joined by hundreds of people and on-lookers. It paraded through Haji Osman Ghani Road, Kazi Alauddin Road and Abul Hasanat Road before ending at the Bahadur Shah Park. The processionists dressed as they liked, some sporting the most outlandish outfits that amused those lined up along the route to watch.

The Sunday Mirror quoted an unnamed friend of Leeson's in high finance as saying "Nick is clear that his losses were nothing like that. He is responsible for around 150 million pounds. The rest is not down to him."

The Sunday Telegraph

meanwhile said the US financial institution Merrill Lynch and Swiss Bank Corporation were considering making of-

Lesson: Tories involved

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said bankers in London 'are insistent' that a total of 800 million pounds was transferred to Singapore. It quoted top financial sources as saying the money had been sent from London to Singapore and special account opened in the Cayman Islands tax haven which covered Leeson's dealings in the Japanese city of Osaka.

The huge transfers to Singapore from Barings head office in London represented more than twice the bank's capital, estimated at around 350 million pounds.

The 1987 Banking Act prohibits banks from putting more than 25 per cent of their money into any single 'basket' without authorization from the Bank of England's supervisory committee.

It appears unlikely that Barings sought such permission because Bank of England Governor Eddie George said at the time of Barings collapse that bank executives told him they had not known they had a problem until Feb. 23.

Investigators in Singapore said Saturday that Barings was warned seven months ago that Leeson held too much power with too little supervision.

They also made public a letter showing Barings was told of the potential problem as far back as 1992. Administrators took over the bank on Feb. 27 after the Bank of England couldn't put together a rescue package. Leeson is believed to have lost at least 625 million pounds by wrongly betting that Tokyo stock prices would rise last month.

The Sunday Mirror quoted an unnamed friend of Leeson's in high finance as saying "Nick is clear that his losses were nothing like that. He is responsible for around 150 million pounds. The rest is not down to him."

The Sunday Telegraph meanwhile said the US financial institution Merrill Lynch and Swiss Bank Corporation were considering making of-

fers to acquire Barings.

The Sunday Times reported that Nat West markets, the investment arm of the national Westminster Bank, could also make known its interest in Barings this week.

Barings administrators Ernst and Young on Saturday confirmed that they were in contact with the Dutch Bank ABN Amro and the US trading firm Smith Barney, who have put together a joint offer.

But Ernst and Young have also said they are still talking with another Dutch institution, the Financial Services Group (ING).

Citing sources close to the negotiators, the Sunday Times said "ABN is thought to be making a more favourable offer than ING," which has offered to acquire Barings for a symbolic pound sterling while assuming all its debts.

The paper added that financial analysts in Britain were pessimistic about the chances of success, for ING.

Zhirinovsky wants to see India as new superpower

NEW DELHI, Mar 5: Even before his arrival today, Russian ultranationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky stirred a potential controversy by suggesting that Moscow give free weapons to India, which he wants to see as a new world superpower, reports AP.

"Look at those fools in Moscow disbanding armies, and destroying so many tanks, fighters, bombers and battle-ships and missiles under American pressure," Zhirinovsky said in an interview published this weekend in the bi-weekly India Today.

"Instead, if they have any sense in their drunken heads, they should send them all to India, free," he was quoted as saying.

Reasons behind food price hike

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the rice was sold through open tender," Mir Shawkat added.

"If there was any malpractice in the matter, it is up to the law enforcing authorities to find out. As far as we are concerned, the sale was completed in accordance with the country's laws."

Some traders in the Krishi Market, Mohammadpur, one of the city's rice wholesale bazars, said that during this time the hoarders took advantage of the government's move and stocked the available rice through cash purchase.

"The cash came from the government itself," said Bashirullah Khan, vice president of the Krishi Market Traders' Committee.

Under a scheme, which abolished the foodgrain licensing system, the godown owners were offered cash incentives to procure foodgrain from farmers.

Traders across the city markets overwhelmingly agreed that in this way the control of the foodgrain price remained within these 'CC parties' (cash credit parties).

"The whole foodgrain business has gone into the hands of influential people, who could manipulate the system to get huge loans from banks," said Shubal Chandra Saha, a rice trader from Naogaon. "In this way the prices remained under their control," he said.

The lack of the government's preparedness with an adequate buffer stock is attributed to a misleading early warning by the Department of Agriculture, according to Food Ministry sources.

In its projection following a drought in the northern zone of the country during the last Aman season, the Ministry of Agriculture had forecast that the foodgrain production deficit in the country would be around four per cent.

"In reality," a highly placed source in the Food Ministry

said, "the deficit ran to nearly 12 per cent."

This took the concerned ministry by surprise and officials became desperate. On January 10 last when Mir Shawkat Ali was moved out from the Food Ministry by an alarmed Prime Minister, the country's foodgrain reserves were at a record low — 1.26 lakh tons.

Faced with a severe drought, the farmers had to dig deep into their pouches for irrigation facilities to produce their crop. In addition, high prices of fertiliser and other agri-inputs forced the country's poor farmers to sell their products at a higher price this year.

Under the current OMS (open market sale) programme, the authorities tried in vain to control the upward trend of food prices. According to the new Minister for Food, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, since March 1, the government has increased the volume of sale in its OMS programme by at least 25 per cent. Mannan Bhuiyan stressed that the volume would further go up, if necessary.

"The quality of the OMS foodgrain is so poor," said Abdul Monem, a presidium member of the Awami League and a former Food Minister (1973-1974), that after adding the grain of small stones and pebbles the 'political price' of Tk 11 per kg no longer stands."

Monem added that while waiting hours together for the OMS delivery for just getting three kg of rice, poor people lose valuable working hours.

Mir Shawkat Ali is, however, of the opinion that the government should not have introduced the open market sale at all.

"This is an open market," he said. "The whole market should be in the hands of the private entrepreneurs; the government has nothing to do," he concluded.

Hillary Clinton to visit Bangladesh this month

WASHINGTON, Mar 5: First Lady Hillary Clinton is to visit South Asia, President Bill Clinton said Friday, adding that the United States had not paid enough attention to the region, reports AFP.

"I believe that the United States has given insufficient attention for some years now to South Asia. India has the biggest middle class in the world, for example," Clinton told a press conference.

He gave no details of the trip, but officials said that Hillary Clinton planned to visit Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka at the end of this month.

The exact dates and schedule have not been finalised, officials said.

Fire kills 4 in Ctg

CHITTAGONG, Mar 5: Four people were roasted alive in a fire at Kalbaria under Mirsarai thana here on Friday last. Fire Service sources said today, reports BSS.

The fire, originating from an oven, destroyed three houses and killed the four persons who were identified as Aridashi Chakroborty, 70, Minakshi, 24, Bappi, 3, and Papi, 1.

The bodies were sent to Chittagong General Hospital for autopsy.

UNB adds: A devastating fire broke out in Ahmad Jute Mills Limited at S S Road in Bondor thana in Narayanganj on Friday, the Eid-ul-Fitr day.

According to the Fire Brigade, the fire originating from a short circuit at noon soon engulfed the factory and damaged jute, jute-products and some machineries.

The extent of damage could not be estimated immediately. After four hours of frantic efforts, the firemen of the Narayanganj Fire Brigade brought the fire under control.

JCD activist shot dead in Khulna

KHULNA, Mar 5: An activist of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) was killed by some assailants at Tetulata area of Baghmara in the town on Saturday night, reports UNB.

Police said, Gautomi, 28, was shot at by the miscreants while he was taking rest in front of his house after having his meal.

He was later rushed to the Sadar hospital, where the attending doctors declared him dead.

The incident occurred after the killing of JCD leader Abul Kalam Azad by the assailants six days back.

A case has been lodged with the Sadar thana.

Poor attendance in offices

By Staff Correspondent

Most government offices and private firms were a deserted look, with poor attendance, yesterday, the first working day after the three-day Eid holiday.

Banks and other financial institutions made negligible transactions.

Most shops, hotels and restaurants remained closed till yesterday.

3 die in incidents

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morgue for autopsy. An unnatural death (UD) case was registered with the Lalbagh police station.

In another incident, a housewife, Kohinor Begum, 20, reportedly committed suicide by taking poison at her residence at Malibagh Chowdhury Para on Eid day morning.

Police sent the body to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.

March 7

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ing will be held at the Awami League central office at Bangabandhu Avenue on the significance of March 7.

The AL programmes also include the playing of the recorded March 7 speech in all city wards.

Karachi

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with gunfire and residents stayed home.

Gunmen shot dead a policeman in the new Karachi area as he returned home on Friday. In a separate incident, a middle-aged man was killed outside his house in the Baldia area.

Ambulance service officials said at least six people had been wounded in various attacks around the city.

Karachi, where the army ended a 29-month deployment in November, is a hotbed of ethnic and sectarian unrest, which claimed 164 lives in February and more than 800 last year.

The Midnight File

Quake kills 8 in Colombia

BOGOTA, Mar 5: Authorities on Sunday said the death toll has risen to eight in a 5.2 magnitude earthquake that struck southern Colombia. Hundreds of residents of Pasto, a city near the epicenter and located 350 miles south of the capital, slept in parks or makeshift shelters, as aftershocks of Saturday's quake kept jolting the area. About 50 buildings were destroyed or damaged, the government's disaster office reported, reports AP.

32 killed in accidents

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injured when a minibus ran over her at Mirpur Section No. 11 on Saturday noon. She died after admission at the DMCH.

Another unidentified youth died on the spot when a long-distance passenger coach hit his bicycle from behind near the Engineers' Institution in the city Friday morning. Ramna police detained the coach and arrested its driver.

Our Correspondent from Narayanganj says, six children, all boys, of a family were killed when a speeding private car carrying them rammed into a roadside tree at Malibagh in Bandar thana on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at 2.30 pm Saturday.

The deceased were identified as Sohul, 6, and Irfan, 12, sons of Samir Ali Munshi, a BNP leader of Siddhirganj thana and their cousins — Nasir, 10, Jewel, 8, Ripon, 10, and Rana, 10. Sohul and Irfan died on the spot while the rest on their way to hospital.

The boys were returning home at Siddhirganj after visiting the Sonargaon Folk Museum. The driver of the car survived the accident and fled away.

A UNB report says, a Dhaka-bound bus ran over two pedestrians killing them on the spot at Panchabati in Fatullah on the Dhaka-Narayanganj highway Saturday night. None of the victims could be identified immediately. Police, however, managed to arrest the bus driver named Sanjib from the scene.

UNB adds: Two people were killed and about a dozen others injured, five seriously, when a bus skidded off the Dhaka-Chittagong highway and turned turtle yesterday.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred at around 3:30 pm near Kashed Jute Mills in Sitakunda thana owing to brake failure of the Chittagong-bound bus from Noakhali.

The bodies were sent to Chittagong General Hospital for autopsy. The seriously injured five were admitted to Sitakund Health Complex.

The driver of the bus fled the scene. A case was filed with Sitakund thana.

Three people were killed and 45 others injured, 15 of them seriously, when a Rajbari-bound coach from Dhaka plunged into a roadside ditch in Manikganj on Saturday.

Local people and Fire Brigade sources said the bus fell into the ditch at Banajuri of Ghor thana, 15 kilometres off the town, breaking railing of a bridge on the Dhaka-Aricha Highway.

Supervisor of the coach Chanchal, 28, of Rajbari died on the spot. Abul Hossain, 20, of Daulatpur in Manikganj suc-

cumbed to his injuries at Sadar Hospital while another passenger, Mojahar Ali, 35, of Rajbari, died on his way to Dhaka.

The bodies were sent to the Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Of the injured, 12 were admitted to Sadar Hospital, two to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, one to Pangu Hospital, 23 to sadar hospital and Shiblalaya Thana Health Complex. Seven others were released after being given first aid.

Two bus passengers were killed and ten others wounded in a road-mishap at Ramrampur, a few kilometres from Sherpur Thursday.

Brickfield workers-Solaiman, 40, and Akhtar, 35, who were going to Kamalpur on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr on Friday, died on the spot. The injured were given first-aid at local clinics.

The incident occurred when driver of the Kamalpur-bound bus numbered Dhaka-Cha-4487, lost his control over the vehicle and fell into a wayside ditch on the Sherpur-Kamalpur road on Thursday noon, the day before Eid.

The bus was seized but the driver managed to escape police arrest.

Our DMCH Correspondent adds, one Shaheer, 8, of Monairkhandi village of Gojaria thana of Munshiganj district was crushed under the wheels of a bus at about 1 pm Friday. Besides, one Ataur was run over by a bus at Singair area of Manikganj district on Thursday. Details of the accidents could not be gathered.

Our Staff Correspondent from Sylhet writes: Three persons were killed and 32 others injured in three road accidents on Thursday, yesterday and today in greater Sylhet region.

Janu Miah, 12, and Kutubuddin, 28, were crushed under the wheels of a speeding passenger bus at Madhabpur on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway yesterday. Police said, the Dhaka-bound bus (Dhaka-Ja 4298) met the accident as the driver lost his control over it. Ten persons were injured.

One Akbar Hossain, 17, died and 15 others were injured when a minibus turned turtle on the Hobiganj-Lakhal road on Thursday.

In Rangpur four people were killed and 18 injured when a truck crashed into a shop near Jagrhat bus stand in Mithapukur thana on Thursday.

The deceased are Akramul Haque, 45, Shahidul Islam, 38, Abdul Hakim, 35, and Abdul Hamid, 40.

Police and hospital sources said the mishap occurred as driver of the Rangpur-bound truck lost control over the vehicle which smashed into a roadside shop where people were busy with Eid shopping.

MRK CONSULTANTS Executive Search

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