

Bomb blast at CPB rally kills 4, injures 50

By Staff Correspondent

Four persons were killed and at least 50 injured, 15 of them seriously, in a powerful bomb explosion at a rally of the Communist Party of Bangladesh at Paltan Maidan in the city yesterday afternoon.

Several persons with their limbs blown off were seen lying in the middle of the Maidan where the bomb exploded at about five pm, witnesses said.

The dead were identified as Abul Hashem, 45, a worker of Latif Bawani Jute Mills at Demra; Mukhtar Hossain, 40, a carpenter from Demra; Himangshu Mondol, 30, a CPB leader from Batiaghata in Khulna and Badal Biswas, 35, also from Khulna.

They all died on the spot. The bodies were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue for autopsy.

The death toll may rise, hospital sources said when the report was filed at 11 pm.

Twenty-eight of the injured were admitted to DMCH. They are Swapan, Milon, Shukumar, Ahsan, Badal, Bipradas, Sunil, Mizan, Rafiq, Dibakar, Salimullah, Dipak, Aslam, Mashur, Bishwajit, Shakti Pada Roy, Abdul Karim, Latif, Laskhan, Nitai Gain, Palash, Nayan, Razzak, Naren Ganguli, Abdul Aziz, Mahadev Sarkar,

Mrittunjay Roy and Jahangir.

The other injured were treated at various clinics.

The bomb went off when CPB Presidium Member Morshed Ali was addressing the 'grand rally' prior to a planned 'Red Flag Procession'.

The Maidan was thronged by several thousand CPB workers from different parts of the country.

Within minutes, the venue looked deserted while CPB leaders on the dais were calling for police help to take the bomb victims to hospitals.

As police did not respond, party men took them to DMCH.

People attending the rally told this correspondent that they heard an explosion at the middle of the field and saw a column of black smoke billowing.

Some witnesses suspected that the bomb was kept inside a polythene bag while others said it might have been planted under the ground beforehand.

After the incident, agitated CPB workers resorted to violence and damaged vehicles in Zero Point, Purana Paltan and Topkhana areas. They also hurled sticks at police, who then charged batons and fired.

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PM talks to CPB Gen Secy, expresses deep shock

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina contacted the CPB office over telephone after the bomb blast at its rally yesterday and expressed her deep shock at the killing of four people, reports UNB.

Hasina talked to CPB general secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim around 7 pm and inquired about the incident.

During the telephonic talks, Selim requested the Prime Minister to immediately set up an inquiry committee, identify the culprits and punish them.

Talking to UNB over phone, CPB president Manjurul Ahsan Khan said yesterday's bomb blast at Paltan Maidan had similarity with the explosion at Udichi function at Jessore where 10 people were killed on March 6, 1999.

Khan would not say precisely

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Zohra Tajuddin, wife of late Tajuddin Ahmed, addresses the Paltan Maidan rally of Communist Party of Bangladesh (top) minutes before a powerful explosion sent leaders and activists running for safety (middle). The explosion killed at least four people and injured more than 50 (bottom) yesterday. -- Star photo

Khaleda, others condemn bomb attack

By Staff Correspondent

Opposition Leader and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has strongly condemned the bomb attack on the CPB rally at Paltan Maidan, leaving four people killed and over 50 injured and held the government responsible for it.

In a statement yesterday, Khaleda said the Awami League government plotted the incident after sensing its defeat in the coming election.

The country has become a place of anarchy and misrule due to total failure of the government.

"There is no security of people under this government," she said.

The BNP chairperson prayed

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8-hr hartal in city today

By Staff Correspondent

The left leaning 11-party alliance has called an eight hour hartal in the city from 6am today protesting bomb attack on a rally of the Communist Party, Bangladesh (CPB), at Paltan Maidan yesterday evening.

CPB general secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim gave the hartal call at a protest rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club immediately after the incident.

Meanwhile, the BNP-led four-party opposition alliance has extended its support to the hartal.

The BNP-led four party alliance has also called a country wide dawn-to-dusk hartal on Monday demanding immediate resignation of the government and repeal the Public Safety Act.

The bomb was thrown into the crowd?

By Staff Correspondent

The powerful bomb that exploded at the rally of the Communist Party of Bangladesh yesterday might have been thrown into the crowd, a bomb expert who defused bombs after the 1990 Gulf War told The Daily Star yesterday.

The impact suggests that the bomb was made by wrapping explosives with barbed wire, small nails and pieces of corru

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Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (C, grey suit) takes oath as the new Philippine president from Supreme Court Chief Justice Hilario Davide at the EDSA Shrine (left) while deposed president Joseph Estrada leaves the Malacanang Palace in Manila yesterday. --AFP photo

Bomb blast kills 2 near AL office in city

By Staff Correspondent

Two persons were killed when a bomb exploded near the Awami League office in the city yesterday afternoon.

The incident took place only a few yards away from the CPB meeting venue at Paltan Maidan where, just half an hour before, a powerful bomb explosion killed at least four people and injured 50 others.

Witnesses said police posted nearby rushed to the spot and found two people lying in a pool of blood. Both of them died on the spot.

Hands and legs of both the victims were blown up. Identity of the victims could not be known immediately.

Police later recovered the bodies from near the Hawkers' Kalyan Samity office at 27 Bangabandhu Avenue and sent it to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Some sources said the explosion occurred when they were making bombs. But police said the victims were perhaps carrying the bombs and those might have exploded accidentally.

Estrada forced out, Arroyo takes oath

MANILA, Jan 20: President Joseph Estrada quit today and Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo replaced him in a wild finish to the Philippines' worst political crisis in more than a decade with tens of thousands marching on the presidential palace and the Supreme Court saying a power vacuum left no one in charge, reports AP.

The sudden shift in power came a day after Estrada's government collapsed and just minutes after protesters pushed through police lines and marched close to the presidential palace. They were demanding the removal of the former action-film star whose political career was ruined by a corruption scandal and an unprecedented impeachment trial.

"It is now, as the good book says, a time to heal and a time to build," Macapagal-Arroyo told masses of screaming supporters after taking the oath of office at the monument to the 1986 "people power" revolution that toppled late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Anti-Estrada demonstrators cheered wildly and waved flags after officials announced Estrada was out. Macapagal-Arroyo had been calling herself the "new commander-in-chief" since Estrada's military leaders and most of the Cabinet deserted him Friday.

Estrada issued a statement saying he had "strong and serious doubts about the legality and constitutionality of her proclamation as president" but that he would give up his office to avoid being an obstacle to the nation's healing process.

Estrada called on his supporters "to join me in the promotion of a constructive national spirit of reconciliation and solidarity."

Trying to hide their sadness by smiling and waving to a group of reporters and cameramen, Estrada and his family later left the Malacanang palace, shaking hands with the remaining members of his Cabinet and other palace employees.

They boarded a boat to cross the river to the headquarters of the Presidential Security Group, where they boarded a silver van.

Although Estrada had vowed earlier to "live and die in our country," a diplomatic source said he was believed to be preparing to go to Australia.

Macapagal-Arroyo has offered few hints about how she would govern, though she said tackling endemic poverty and building consensus on how to proceed would be priorities. She said in a television interview Saturday that top soldiers and police officers who abandoned Estrada would likely get their jobs back, adding she would not be prejudiced against others from the old administration as she selects a Cabinet.

Estrada spent a turbulent morning barricaded inside Malacanang, apparently seeking last-minute concessions for the only thing he had left to offer: his resignation.

An air force fighter jet buzzed past the palace in the late morning and four military helicopters hovered overhead reminders to Estrada that he lost the military's support.

The nation has been suffering through political turmoil that exploded in October with allegations Estrada took gambling kickbacks and skimmed money from provincial tobacco taxes.

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| | Sun Rises | Sun Sets |
|--------|-----------|----------|
| Jan 21 | | 5.37 pm |
| Jan 22 | 6-43 am | |

| Prayer Timings | | |
|----------------------------|-------|--------|
| January 21 | | |
| | Azan | Jamaat |
| Fajr | 5-30 | 6-10 |
| Zuhr | 12-45 | 1-20 |
| Asr | 4-05 | 4-20 |
| Maghrib | 5-40 | 5-45 |
| Esha | 7-15 | 7-35 |
| Source: Islamic Foundation | | |

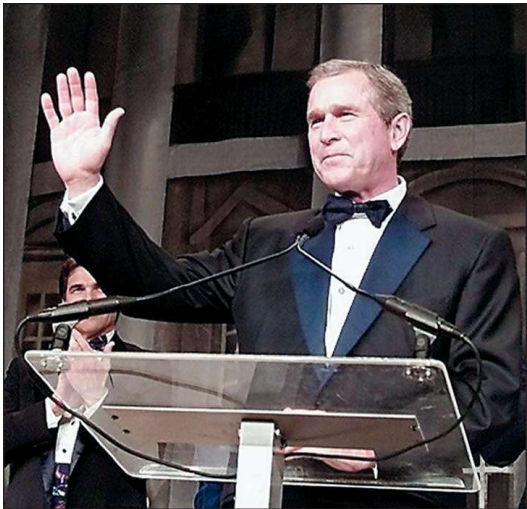
Bush to 'live and lead' by firm principles

A melancholy thank-you

WASHINGTON, Jan 20: President Bill Clinton offered a melancholy thank-you to the American people today in his final radio broadcast from the White House. He said he proudly turns "the reins of a nation renewed" over to George W Bush, reports AP.

The taped address was airing just before Clinton and first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton were to great Bush and his wife, Laura, for coffee in the White House Blue Room. The two couples then were traveling to the Capitol together for Bush's inauguration.

"I pledged that I would work until the last hour of the last day. Well, here we are," Clinton said.



George W Bush, 43rd president of the United States of America.

WASHINGTON, Jan 20: George Walker Bush becomes 43rd president of the United States today with an inaugural promise to live and lead with "civility, courage, compassion and character," reports AP.

In the high-noon pageantry of the transfer of power, George Herbert Walker Bush stands proud witness to his son's inauguration 12 years after his own. And Bill Clinton, who defeated the elder Bush, stands aside, spared the prospect of post-presidential prosecution by surrendering his law license and admitting false statements in a last-day deal over the sex scandal that led to his impeachment.

A scant two hours before he left office, Clinton issued more than 100 pardons to clear the records of convicted Americans including his former Whitewater business partner, newspaper heiress Patty Hearst, the president's brother Roger, on a drug conviction, and a former Cabinet member.

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