

Bomb blasts in last 2 yrs

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Since the Udchi incident there have been five other incidents— all taking place in the capital city—in which ‘sophisticated bombs’ were recovered from Ahmadiya Mosque at Bakshi Bazaar, the Daily Janakantha office, a mosque at Mirpur, a madrasah at Mohammadpur and from under the car of a DCC ward commissioner at Mohammadpur, according to the police.

Despite overwhelming evidences, the investigators simply could not trace or book the culprits.

The latest incident at Baniarchar village under Maksudpur thana in Gopalganj, claiming 10 lives and injuring 26, took place just 49 days after the sensational Ramna Batumul blast.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) was assigned to probe the three previous incidents, while the inquiry into the Ramna Batumul incident was vested upon the Detective Branch (DB).

In most of the cases, the CID failed to press charges against any ‘real culprits’ of the bomb attacks, except in one instance. They arrested innocent people, which did not lead to any headway in the probes, either.

In the Ramna incident, the DB failed to make any breakthrough and the real culprits are yet to be brought to book. DB sources said the officials are not going to submit charge sheet anytime soon. They said although the DB had initially made some progress in the investigation, they mysteriously stopped proceeding further.

Some sources blamed the government and the opposition for making ‘sweeping comments’ about the culprits and seriously

hindering the investigations.

“A government minister or someone else should not ask the investigation officer to frame charges against a particular group in any such case. This is a matter of national interest and we should expose the criminals as soon as possible, no matter who they are,” observed one source.

People are now scared of attending public functions as the law-enforcement agencies could do little about the explosions, before and after, that might have allayed their fears, let alone arresting the deteriorating law and order situation, the sources added.

After every incident of bomb explosion, the authorities came up with statements about arresting the real culprits. But, in reality, nothing concrete was done to restore the people’s confidence.

In all incidents, the police actions were identical. The army team of bomb experts arrived on the scene, took away the bombs and kept mum about the whole thing. The people were kept in the dark, thus deprived of their rights to know, sources said.

Besides, two powerful bombs were recovered on July 20 and July 24 last year at Kotlipara in Gopalganj, where the prime minister was scheduled to address a publically.

The CID is investigating all the cases but has so far submitted charge sheet in only the two cases filed in connection with the Kotlipara incidents.

Police claimed that the bombs were planted to kill the prime minister, but the CID failed to arrest Mufti Hannan, a leader of a fundamentalist group and the prime accused in the cases.

India extends support

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work closely with India, given the historic, geographical and religious proximity between the two countries through centuries. This, they believe, will not be affected by Nepal’s occasional move to perform a balancing act between India and its western neighbour China.

India finds itself in a delicate situation following the developments in Nepal. New Delhi, quite understandably, does not want to be seen as intrusive in the kingdom’s internal affairs. But it is at the same time watching closely the pace and nature of events following the massacre at the palace.

There is concern in India that the violence in Nepal may lead to a

situation where political extreme factions would get the upper hand and negatively impact the Indo-Nepal ties.

India is also worried that anarchy in Nepal could undermine its fledgling democracy, introduced in 1990. India has high regard for King Birendra who gave up absolutist monarchy in favour of democracy.

India, officials say, has always ensured that its praise for the monarch is properly nuanced so that it sends the right signals to democratic forces and political parties in Nepal who have enjoyed the people’s mandate in the last decade or so. And that explains the tone and tenor of Vajpayee’s letter of condolence to Koirala.

Historic June 7 today

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separate messages yesterday paid homage to the martyrs of June 7.

The President said Bangabandhu along with other national leaders was arrested amid countrywide movement and mass contact to mobilise public opinion in favour of the six-point demand.

A countrywide hartal was called on this day in 1966 demanding release of the leaders and realisation of the 6-point demand, he said.

The President added that the movement soon spread to other parts of the country and Awami League on the basis of the six-point demand got people’s mandate by majority votes in the 1970 election. He termed the day ‘very important in the history of independent Bangladesh.’

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said Awami League, imbued with the spirit of the independence and the historic June 7, was determined

to continue efforts for the country’s development.

She urged the countrymen to help materialise the dreams of the martyrs of June 7 through building a developed and prosperous Bangladesh.

Awami League, its front organisations and a number of socio-cultural bodies have chalked out programmes to observe the day.

Awami League programmes include hoisting of national and party flags atop Bangabandhu Bhaban, party’s central office and all unit offices of the party at 6 in the morning.

Awami League leaders and workers will place wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu at Bangabandhu Museum in the morning.

Besides, all thana and district units of Awami League will observe the day through discussions and other programmes.

Flash floods in 6 districts

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Doba Barrage on the Teesta in Jalpaiguri across Nilphamari border caused swelling of the Teesta.

The rivers were flowing over their respective danger levels, causing the flash floods, reports received in Dhaka said.

The Surma at Kanaighat, Kushia at Amalshid, Monu at Maulvibazar and Khawai at Habiganj were above their red marks, overflowing their banks and submerging many areas. Thousands of people were affected due to sudden inundation of their houses. The Gumti at Comilla was also rising rapidly, the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) said.

UNB reported from Nilphamari that heavy rainfall coupled with onrush of waters from across the border led to swelling of the Teesta and erosion of large chunks of its banks.

The agency said the flash flood was caused as Indian authorities opened all the gates of Gojal Doba Barrage following heavy rains. Water Development Board officials said they were trying to check erosion by opening all the gates of Teesta Barrage.

People in several villages along the river moved away to nearby villages after their houses were inundated.

The rains which continued since the early hours of Tuesday dis-

rupted normal life and caused all the rivers in the country to rise, FFWC and Meteorological Department said.

The situation worsened as the monsoon spread all over the country ‘a little earlier than schedule’, Met officials said.

“The monsoon was active all over the country yesterday causing the heavy showers”, Director of Meteorological Department Anwarul Kabir said.

It was scheduled to cover the entire country by Sunday next. But its ‘advance elements’ reached the central region of the country on Monday, triggering the showers since Tuesday.

Bangladesh Railway in a press release said that heavy rains and onrush of water from the hills across the border washed away a railway bridge between Akhaura and Gangasagar stations in Brahmanbaria district, snapping the train services between Chittagong and Dhaka yesterday morning.

Railway officials and engineers from Chittagong reached the spot with necessary equipment. But they could not start repair of the bridge due to strong currents and were waiting for the rains to stop, the press release said.

Met Office forecast that heavy rainfall is likely to continue today in Sylhet and Rajshahi divisions.

The FFWC said this would worsen the flash floods in the north-

eastern region and in the Meghna basin.

“Due to continuous heavy rainfall in the Meghna basin flash flood is likely to continue. Continuous rainfall in the Brahmaputra and Ganges basins is likely to cause all major rivers to register further rise. Therefore, the low-lying areas in these basins may be further inundated and crops damaged. Local drainage system is to be kept open and cross bars on drainage system are to be removed for quick drainage of the areas that are affected by accumulation of water. Drainage structures at the out falls are to be operated carefully”, the FFWC said in a bulletin.

The Met Office said that besides the downpour in Sylhet Rajshahi divisions today, light to moderate rains/thundershowers accompanied by gusty/squally winds are likely elsewhere in the country. The situation is unlikely to change much in 48 hours from 6 pm today.

But the weather will improve with rainfall declining during the next five days from Saturday.

The highest amount of 271 mm of rainfall from Tuesday till yesterday noon was recorded in Sylhet, followed by 207 mm in Srimangal. The capital experienced 84 mm of showers, Met Office said.

UK goes to polls today

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the landslide in 1997.

Despite a strong showing in opinion polls, Labour headquarters is still nervous because of the variation in poll results (12 to 23 per cent difference) and also because results of recent European Union and local elections were not very encouraging.

Apparently conceding defeat, the Tories are now saying that a huge majority in parliament is not good for democracy. The latest attempt by Tory might also be damaging for Labour as people might not bother to vote as they already anticipate Labour’s landslide or some might vote Conservative to reduce the predicted Labour majority.

The parties are targeting 90 most vulnerable seats where candidates are separated by a mere double digit to several hundred votes. The total number of voters is 44.2 million.

Unlike in Bangladesh, the atmosphere here is hardly indicative of a major imminent election except on television or radio.

Not even a single graffiti is seen anywhere or party slogans heard. Supporters usually display small campaign posters through the car window.

CID to investigate bomb blast at church

BSS, Dhaka

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police will investigate the Sunday’s bomb blast at Baniarchar Catholic Church.

CID took up the case from Gopalganj district police yesterday. Ten people were killed and many injured in the blast on Sunday morning when a morning prayer was going on.

Hanif, a sub-contractor, was accused in five criminal cases including a murder case. He was released on bail from Khulna district jail recently, police said.

An alleged armed cadre of Jubo League, Hanif was attacked when he was going to his work place at Bagmara. The assailants also belong to Jubo League sprayed bullets on him. He died on the spot.

The murder is a sequel to intra-party rivalry, Khulna thana OC Kamrul Islam said.

Victim’s wife Parveen Akhter filed a case with Khulna thana on Tuesday night accusing nine Jubo League activists.

31st budget since independence

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parliament building office of chief martial law administrator (CMLA) Ershad and four at the Bangabhaban. Another budget was placed at 30 Hare Road by Prof. Wahiduddin Mahmud, the finance adviser to the caretaker government of 1996.

All but two of those who have so far presented the national budget were either ministers or advisers from technocrat quota. Ziaur Rahman was the lone military ruler to announce a budget, while Tajuddin Ahmed and Dr. A. R. Malik were the only members of parliament.

Finance and Planning Minister in the Bangabandhu government, Tajuddin Ahmed presented the first budget of independent Bangladesh on June 30, 1972. He announced the budget for 1972-73 through a radio-TV broadcast. He also announced a revised budget for the period from December 16, 1971 to

June 30, 1972.

M. Saifur Rahman, who served three BNP governments, alone presented seven budgets. He is followed by incumbent Finance Minister Kibria who is going to present today the sixth budget.

M. Syeduzzaman, finance minister of the Ershad government, had the opportunity of presenting four budgets. Tajuddin Ahmed and Ziaur Rahman, who later became president, announced three budgets each.

Two more finance ministers during the Ershad regime, A. M. A. Muhiit and M. A. Munaim presented two budgets each.

Dr. A. R. Malik of the BKSAL government, Dr. Mirza Nurul Huda of Zia’s BNP government and Dr. Wahidul Haque of the Jatiya Party government presented one budget each.

Known as fiscal policies of a government, the national budget

4 PBCP cadres

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feud. All the dead were wanted in several murder cases filed with Kushtia and Daulatpur thanas, police said.

Two separate murder cases were filed with Kushtia Sadar thana on Tuesday afternoon.

Police quoting people of Shwastipur said the attackers chanted slogans in favour of PBCP during the incident.

Rule of law

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even feel ashamed of their misdeeds now, rather they feel proud of what they are doing.

Fayez Ahmed said killing and attack on journalists as well as attempt to influence their writings have been closely linked with politics in the country.

Enayetullah Khan said when rule of law depends on the whim of the ruling party, journalists have no option other than bowing to undue pressure from politicians.

Mahfuz Anam said criminalisation of politics has become a threat to democracy as well as freedom of press in the country. The press has been playing a key role in bringing about the degree of democracy the people are now enjoying.

Sahfiq Rehman observed that earlier the press became victim of state terrorism while criminals are now attacking journalists.

The participants also criticised the role of a section of top government officials for protecting criminals, rather than taking steps against them.

Khaleda

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official residence of the prime minister, should not be given to a former prime minister.

Although Ershad came to Sangsad Bhaban, he did not enter the House as confusion about his membership has not yet been cleared. He said after receiving the certified copy of the High Court judgement about his membership, the Speaker would send it to the Election Commission for its opinion. The EC will settle his membership issue after hearing him and issue a gazette notification.

About the JP election symbol “plough”, Ershad referred to yesterday’s ruling by the speaker that mentioned that 19 out of 31 MPs elected Rowshan Ershad leader of JP parliamentary party. He said they would send this ruling to the EC to claim their symbol.

Asked about the merger of JP (Ershad) with JP (M-M), he said the two factions would reunite shortly, and hold a public meeting at Paltan Maidan.

Ershad again turned down the possibility of returning to the four-party alliance. “It’s absurd,” he said, adding “Once we left the alliance, the question of going back cannot arise. JP will go alone.”

About the possibility of a new alliance, he said it might take a shape after the caretaker government takes over.

Hedayet Ahmed

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The Qulkhwan of Hedayet Ahmed will be held on the officers club premises after Asr prayers on Friday.

Ahmed, a 1957-batch CSP officer, was in coma at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the hospital since Sunday night.

He was suffering from multiple-Myeloma cancer for long.

Hedayet Ahmed, who was also the chairman of the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh, retired as education secretary in 1990.

Meanwhile, Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury yesterday expressed his deep shock at the death of former secretary Hedayet Ahmed.

“Hedayet Ahmed was a dedicated and sincere civil servant,” he said in a message of condolence.

The Speaker conveyed his sympathy to the members of the bereaved family and prayed for peace of the departed soul.

Khaleda seeks vote

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who the Hindu community would speak about their problems before general election.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Mirza Abbas, Sadek Hossain Khoka, Gayeswar Chandra Roy, Golam Morshed Khan, Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and Suranjana Ghosh, among others, also spoke on the occasion.

She assured that her party would stand beside them if any threat and attack came upon the minorities from the Awami League.

The former prime minister addressed a discussion meeting attended by the community members and leaders at the Dhakeswari National Temple on the occasion of the 20th death anniversary of Ziaur Rahman.

She said the good relationship between them and her party once weakened has been restored through this function and the amity would be strengthened in the days ahead.

“On this occasion, recitation from the Geeta is undoubtedly a good sign of friendship, said Khaleda whose speech was punctuated with ‘ulu dhan’ by the female devotees.

“Hindus have been repressed most during the AL rule. BNP is respectful to all religions. If anybody attacks, we will protest. If they (AL) unleash threat and attack, inform us and we’ll stand beside and protect

you as brothers and friends,” Khaleda Zia told the members of the Hindu community amidst claps and slogans.

The former prime minister assured that if her party is voted to power, the institutions of the Hindus would be more developed and steps taken so that people of all faiths, including the Hindus, could perform their rituals fairlyways.

The Hindu community leaders, including President of Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad Dr Lalit Mohan Nath and Dhaka City Puja Udjapan Parishad President Nim Chandra Bhoumic welcomed Khaleda Zia at the entrance of the national temple.

Convener of the prayer committee for observing the 20th death anniversary Ronobi Roy Chowdhury received Khaleda Zia with a bouquet. Other Hindu leaders and devotees of the Mandir, including Kartik Thakur, Mihi Ranjan Dulal, Jhama Roy and Pronit Das, also presented her flower bouquets.

The meeting went off to a formal start with recitation from the Geeta. Khaleda Zia distributed clothes among ten priests of the Mandir, including Azit Kumar Chatterjee, Prodig Chatterjee, Ramproshad Chatterjee, Amit Chatterjee and Badal Chatterjee.

SQ Chy, Anwar Zahid

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A mid-ranking BNP leader who maintains contact with the expelled leaders told The Daily Star yesterday that the two leaders and their supporters have also talked to some diplomats of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, asking for their support and influence to find a way for their return to BNP.

He said those diplomats may already have discussed the matter with BNP policymakers.

But most policymakers categorically denied receiving or hearing about any such request from any diplomat.

A standing committee member said the question of request by diplomats for withdrawal of the expulsion order couldn’t even arise, as it is purely an internal matter of the party.

He said BNP suffered a lot due to anti-party activities of the two expelled leaders. “From now on we will check the background of those interested in joining BNP. We have already rejected many people because of their dubious political background,” the leader added.

Another top BNP leader said the decision to expel SQ Chowdhury and Anwar Zahid was unanimous and not a single member of the standing committee made any comment in their favour.

The expulsion order is totally irrelevant to diplomacy or international relations, so the question of lobbying by foreign diplomats cannot arise at all, he said, adding that any such lobbying would definitely be in violation of diplomatic norms and convention.

JP factions join JS

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bills, the House is also expected to take up urgent issues for discussion,” Chowdhury told the House.

Both factions of the Jatiya Party attended the opening session, while the BNP-led opposition continued boycotting the proceedings as usual.

The current session is scheduled to continue until the last working day of the seventh parliament, which is going to complete its five-year term on July 13.

The session began at 10 a.m. sharp. An obituary reference on the killings of Nepalese King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and others in the royal family on Friday was adopted.

The House also adopted a condolence motion on the death of five former MPs and the persons killed in the Ramna Batmul bomb explosion on Pehela Baishakh, trawler capsized in Sandwip channel and bomb attack on a village church in Gopalganj.

The attendance of treasury bench members was maximum.

JP Presidium Member Raushan Ershad guided the Ershad-led faction into the House. She was nominated Jatiya Party Parliamentary Party (JPPP) leader at its meeting on April 18.

Immediately after the JP faction entered the House, T I M Fazle Rabbi, a member loyal to Ershad, took floor and informed the Speaker of the nomination of a new group leader.

In response, the Speaker said he was given a copy of the minutes of the JPPP meeting held April 18 that

determined Raushan as its leader. “I have noted it and reorganised her seating arrangement in the House,” the Speaker added.

“The nomination of the leader of such a small group in the parliament is its own matter, as the Rules of Procedure does not have such provision to nominate parliamentary leader for such parties unlike the ruling and the mainstream opposition,” Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury told the House.

The House yesterday nominated a panel of five chairmen to run the House in the absence of Speaker and the Deputy Speaker. They are Prof. Ali Ashraf, Advocate Abdul Latif Mirza, Abul Kalam Azad, Monnujan Sufian and Sabita Begum.

Two bills -- the Artist Welfare Trust Bill 2001 and the Acquisition and Requisition of Immovable Property (Amendment) Bill 2001 -- were introduced in the House. The two bills were sent to the standing committees concerned for vetting.

Advocate Fazole Rabbi of JP termed the Acquisition and Requisition of Immovable Property Bill contradictory to the constitution, while State Minister for Land Rashed Mosharrar who piloted the bill defended. However, the bill was introduced after voice vote.

Education Minister ASHK Sadique Hossain placed the Annual Report 2000 on the Public Service Commission (PSC).

Finance Minister S A M S Kibria will place the national budget for 2001-2002 fiscal before the House at 3 p.m. today.

Serenading on thin ice

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will fall on the next government. And when a new government comes into power, it will basically have the first two years to carry out the reforms, to execute the harsh decisions.”

So, if the FY02 budget tends to be too soft and too election-oriented, the nation as a whole will suffer.

“The government should not make any new commitment to burden fiscal balance and it should allocate funds to ongoing social and infrastructure projects so that the new government can readjust them according to its priorities,” said Syeduzzaman. “Fiscal balance would be very important for further initiative by the next government. If it is weakened further, then the new government will find it difficult to move ahead.”

“But given the emerging macro-economic stresses in the economy, some creative handling of the situation is now needed,” said Bhattacharya. “At the same time, more measures have to be kept handy so that the next government can get the launching pad to trigger sectoral reforms. It remains equally true even if the present government gets re-elected.”

This is true for many urgently needed steps like privatisation of the state-owned enterprises, financial sector reforms, public administration reform and so on for which budgetary support is a must, he

said.

“What we actually need at this moment is a routine low-key budget with lots of flexibility, a core budget with minimum expenditure commitments, and no unapproved ADP projects, leaving scopes for further amendment by the next elected government.”

Reforms aside, the budget also calls for a prudent management because of the current threat to internal and external balance.

On the internal side, the major stress now relates to widening fiscal deficit, expenditure overrun, and monetary overhang due to high government borrowing.

“While the early trends in macro-economic indicators during the current fiscal year appeared very promising, the recent setback in exports in the recent months has made continuation of the trend rather doubtful,” said Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud.

Predictions based on the average performance of the current fiscal year will, therefore, be difficult since it will depend on the assumptions regarding whether the recent setback is temporary or not, he pointed out.

“Industrial recovery which is driven exclusively by textile production at the end of the year will not be as good as initially predicted. What can be said generally about growth performance in 1990s is that the

industrial sector showed some dynamism in the first half while agriculture production got a boost in the latter half.”

Successive good agriculture harvests have helped macro-economic stabilisation greatly by keeping inflation low and requiring less imports of commercial food grains, Dr Mahmud said.

“Structural problems of the fiscal side has increased and fiscal deficit has been increasing and the declining foreign financing of the deficit has been compensated by increasing domestic borrowing,” he added.

Against a Tk 3514 crore projected government borrowing from the banking system this fiscal, the borrowing is now expected to reach Tk 3,700 crore, almost a Tk 200 crore increase. The government’s borrowing from the sales of savings instruments also surpassed the target by about 20 per cent.

Projection of government revenue is related to domestic industrial production and growth in trade, both of which are strongly related to performance in RMG exports. This has made the budget exercise for the next fiscal highly tentative.

“It will be an extraordinary achievement if fiscal deficit remains within the target in spite of the improvement in revenue collection,” said Dr Bhattacharya.

This is mainly because of the

expenditure spree in the last year of the government ahead of the election. The ADP has been increased quite unrealistically from an ambitious Tk 17,500 crore to an even more ambitious Tk 18,200 crore. Revenue expenditure including domestic borrowing induced interest is also on the rise. It is now estimated that more than 20 per cent of the revenue will go to service such borrowing. With an election to be completed and an already inflated development expenditure plan, the next finance minister will find it an uphill task to tackle the budget deficit.