

Prominent labour leader bombed to death in Mongla

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A prominent labour leader was bombed to death in southwestern Mongla town last night in a drive-by attack, sparking angry protests and political backlash, police and witnesses said.

Assailants with apparent ties to an outlawed outfit smashed the head of Mohammad Abdul Baten, 50, president of Bagerhat district Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal and former chairman of Mongla Pourasabha near his Madrasa Road house at about 8:00pm.

Witnesses said the attackers hurled a potent bomb at his head from a running motorcycle when he was returning home from Mongla BNP office alone. They fled the scene shouting slogans in favour of the

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All govt vehicles to go CNG by Dec

Gas price needs to be increased by Tk 1 per unit, says Mosharraf

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain yesterday said all public transports including government vehicles would be converted into CNG-run ones by the year-end to improve Dhaka's air quality.

"Ban on two strokes engines and conversion of those vehicles into CNG-run ones have proved effective though there were some initial problems due to lack of

adequate CNG filling stations," the state minister told a seminar on Using Greenburn Diesel Fuel Technology for a Cleaner Environment, organised by Ethyl Corporation, a US-based fuel company.

"The selling price of a unit of CNG needs to be increased at least Tk 1 to benefit those who have spent no less than Tk 1 crore for the setting up of one such station," the minister added.

"The CNG-driven vehicles will still be able to save 79 percent cost compared with petrol-run ones even after the Tk 1 price rise per unit," the minister told the seminar. He added Petrobangla has suggested an increase in the CNG price from Tk 7.45 to Tk 8.5 for each cubic metre and the Energy Division has sought prime ministerial nod to the proposal.

As the diesel-driven vehicles cannot be converted into CNG-run

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Mother, uncle to die for killing children

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A court in Dhaka yesterday sentenced a housewife and her brother-in-law to death for killing her two children three years ago with the motive for hiding their extramarital affairs.

Ayesha Akhter and her husband's brother Shahidul Islam were present in the court when Judge Mohammad Shamsul Alam Khan of the Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, read out the verdict in a crowded courtroom.

The court that recorded the statements of 13 of 22 prosecution witnesses also fined them Tk 20,000 each and gave them seven days to appeal against the judgement to the High Court in seven days.

"I suspect the killers were making love before they killed my sons for

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PHOTO: STAR

A brick kiln seen on an aerial photograph funnels smoke into the sky, polluting the air in the neighbourhood. Hundreds of brick-fields ring Dhaka encroaching on agricultural land and polluting the environment.



PHOTO: STAR

The fountain at Shahbagh, one of the iconic landmarks of the capital, now stands in ruins as Dhaka Transport Coordination Board follows up a drive to remove roundabouts to streamline traffic.

al-Qaeda threatens to attack 6 nations

"American lackeys" Japan, Italy, Britain, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Pakistan on list

AFP, Dubai

A statement attributed to al-Qaeda has threatened "America's lackeys" with attacks similar to those in Madrid last week, singling out Japan, Italy, Britain, Saudi Arabia, Australia and Pakistan, an Arab daily reported in its yesterday edition.

"To America's lackeys we say: a lackey of America has destroyed his future by allying himself with the tyrant of the century," said the text signed by Abu-Hafs al-Masri/al-Qaeda Brigades received by Al-Qods Al-Arabi newspaper.

"Jose Marie Aznar will be chucked into the dustbin of history," said the statement, referring to the Spanish prime minister who was swept out of power in general elections last Sunday.

"Learn your lesson, you lackeys of America, the brigades of death are at your gates," it warned.

"We will strike you with an iron fist, at the appropriate place and time," said the statement, condemning "Arab and Muslim lackeys like (Pakistani President Pervez) Musharraf and the Al-Saud" family which rules Saudi Arabia.

"Our brigades are now preparing for a fresh strike. Will it be the turn of Japan, America, Italy, Britain, the Al-Sauds, Australia...?" it warned.

The authenticity of the statement, which followed last week's train bombings in Madrid that killed 201 people and were claimed by the same group, could not be confirmed.

Meanwhile, a statement

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GP plans call rate cut next week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

GrameenPhone (GP) Limited yesterday said it plans to cut call charges for pre-paid and post-paid subscribers by next week.

The GP will introduce the reduced call rate after every two minutes for prepaid subscribers on March 26, the Independence and National Day which coincides with its launch anniversary, Mehboob Chowdhury, director, Sales and Marketing of the GP, told The Daily Star.

"As per our campaign 'one phone one nation' we would not charge additional tariff for inter-zonal calls, which is currently Tk 8 and Tk 7 per minute in peak and off-peak hours," Mehboob said.

GP Regular and GP National subscribers will be able to make inter-zonal calls at Tk 4 and Tk 3 a minute during peak and off-peak hours.

GP has already introduced reduced call rates for GP Regular subscribers at Tk 1.5 per minute for three numbers under 'friends and family package', he said, adding

that high tax on telecoms equipment and handsets has been an impediment to lowering the call tariff.

"We expect that the government will lower duty on telecoms equipment in the coming budget and we would be able to lower call charges for pre-paid users," he said.

He disagreed with the general contention that the call tariff the Bangladeshi operators charge is high compared with many regional operators. Instead, it is at par with many of them, said Mehboob, also chairman of South Asia GSM Operators Association.

He said the import duty on telecoms equipment is 'exorbitant' and in some cases it is as high as 64 percent. He, however, added that for some equipment it is 7.5 percent. "GP can even cut down further on the start-up cost from the current Tk 5,600 if the government waives the import duty on handset," he said.

"We presume that if government

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3 GIs, 3 journos killed in Iraq

AP, Baghdad

Insurgents fired mortar rounds at two US military bases in Iraq on Wednesday, killing three American soldiers and wounding nine others, the military said hours after a massive suicide bombing of a hotel in Baghdad killed scores of people.

Rescue crews yesterday called off their search for survivors of the bombing of Mount Lebanon Hotel that came just days before the anniversary of the start of the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

The deaths in the attacks on the US military bases northwest of Baghdad brought to 567 the number of US troops killed in Iraq since the start of hostilities last year, according to US Department of Defence figures.

Elsewhere, gunmen opened fire on a minibus, killing three Iraqi

journalists and wounding nine other employees of a coalition-funded TV station in northeastern Iraq, police said.

The journalists were killed in the city of Bagouba, 35 miles north-east of Baghdad, when attackers in a car opened fire on the minibus they were riding in, said Sanaa al-Daghistani, information director of Diyala TV.

Rebels often target Iraqis perceived as collaborators with the Americans and the attacks underlined the continued vulnerability of Iraqi civilians nearly a year after Saddam Hussein was ousted.

At least 45 people were wounded in Wednesday's car bomb attack on the Mount Lebanon Hotel. One Briton was killed and another was

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Ahmadiyyas in fear as Barguna bigots threaten action today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A state of panic has gripped over 1,000 Ahmadiyyas of Kukua union in Barguna's Amtoli upazila as anti-Ahmadiyya zealots prepare to carry out their programme, scheduled at noon today, to evict the Ahmadiyyas and capture three mosques belonging to the community.

Meanwhile, the threatened Ahmadiyya families have submitted memorandum to the inspector general of police, local lawmakers, deputy commissioner, and rights

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Prayer Timings		
March 19		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-00	5-35
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-14	6-18
Esha	7-45	8-15
Source: Islamic Foundation		

DEFAULT LOANS

Agrani Bank also sets its task

36 officials to recover Tk 2,641 crore

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Agrani Bank has assigned 36 high officials to recover its Tk 2,641 crore default loans.

Of these, 20 top defaulters possess Tk 565 crore. Three State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) and a cooperative society guaranteed by the government, are responsible for 41 percent of the amount.

The 36 officials, comprising Assistant General Managers and Deputy General Managers of the bank, have been instructed to exclusively devote seven days each month on recovering these default loans.

The four government sector top defaulters are: BTMC (Tk 160 crore), Paruma Eastern (Tk 28 crore), Forat Kamaphuli Carpet Factory (Tk 27 crore) and Bangladesh Autorickshaw Samabay Samity (Tk

18 crore). The bank is still negotiating with BTMC for repayment, while it has sued the other three.

Among the private sector defaulters are Dhaka Jute Mills (Tk 59 crore), Dhaka Match Factory (Tk 49 crore), East Asia Tannery (Tk 41 crore), Javed Steel Mills (Tk 40 crore), Vanguard Steel Mills (Tk 26 crore), Taj Tubes (Tk 25 crore), Kohinoor Battery Manufacturing Ltd (Tk 24 crore), Bagdad Dhaka Carpet Factory (Tk 23 crore), SKM Jute Mills (Tk 22 crore), S Rahman Steel Mills Ltd (Tk 22 crore) and Afsar Cotton Mills (Tk 23 crore).

Apart from these, there are five more defaulters who have rescheduled their loans in the last few weeks. "Due to the tougher new Money Loan Court act, these defaulters chose to pay back their loans," said an Agrani Bank official,

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