

3,000 feared dead in N Korea rail blast

Government appears to have cut international phone lines to block news of the crash

AGENCIES, Seoul

Up to 3,000 people were killed or injured when two trains loaded with fuel collided and exploded at a North Korean station yesterday, hours after leader Kim Jong-il had passed through, South Korea's YTN television said.

YTN quoted witnesses in its report while South Korea's Yonhap news agency, which spoke of widespread destruction, also said there

were thousands of casualties. Neither Yonhap nor YTN gave a breakdown of deaths and injuries.

Yonhap quoted sources in the Chinese city of Dandong that borders the North as saying the explosion occurred around 1 p.m. (0400 GMT) -- nine hours after Kim's special train was reported to have passed on its way back to Pyongyang after a visit to China.

"The station was destroyed as if hit by a bombardment and debris

flew high into the sky," Yonhap said, quoting the unidentified Chinese sources.

The sources said cargo trains carrying gasoline and liquefied petroleum gas collided at Ryongchon station 50 km south of the border.

Yonhap also quoted a senior Defence Ministry official as saying the South's military -- which eavesdrops on North Korea -- had heard about the blast through "intelligence channels directed against the

North".

There was no immediate suggestion the blast was anything other than an accident. But the explosion came after Kim met China's new leadership during a rare foreign visit to discuss the North's nuclear weapons plans and tentative economic reforms.

In a sign of the accident's magnitude, the North Korean government also cut international phone lines to prevent news of the crash from

leaking across its borders, Yonhap said, citing no sources. The North appears to have declared a type of emergency in the area.

"We have not yet received official information on the accident. We are trying to confirm the report," a Unification Ministry spokesman said in Seoul. Other officials at various government agencies also had no information.

Yonhap said the sources said

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WB promises \$1b credit

IMF assures Saifur to help mitigate trade losses in post-MFA regime

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank has assured Bangladesh of over US\$1 billion in credits this year.

During a meeting in Washington Wednesday, WB high officials informed Finance Minister Saifur Rahman that within the next few weeks the bank would approve over \$600 million in Development Support Credit, Education Sector Adjustment Credit, and Bank Modernisation and Enterprise

Growth Credit for Bangladesh as budget support.

The WB executives led by South Asia Regional Vice President Pratul C Patel also said another five projects in education, water, communications and power sectors involving more than \$400 million were expected to be approved by the bank's board shortly, a foreign ministry press release said.

In another meeting earlier in the day, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) assured Bangladesh of

providing balance of payments support, if needed, to overcome any trade losses in the post Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) situation.

IMF Acting Managing Director Anne O Krueger told Saifur that the support would come through the fund's newly introduced Trade Integration Mechanism facility.

Krueger said Bangladesh was on track regarding the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) programme and the future tranches

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Farm credit thru' women to empower them

CPD dialogue told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A city dialogue yesterday recommended channelling farm credit through women as a measure to further quicken the process of women empowerment in society.

The dialogue on 'Women's Contribution to Rural Economic Activities: Making the Invisible Visible,' was organised by leading policy think-tank the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

It focused on the contribution of women both in farm and non-farm economic activities and urged both the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to formulate an explicit gender strategy targeting rural women as equal stakeholders with men.

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar,

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A plainclothes prison policeman roughs up a person who along with hundreds others flocked to the entrance of Dhaka Central Jail yesterday to get information about his relative arrested in the ongoing drive against AL activists.

PHOTO: STAR



Arrest frenzy continues in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Blanket arrests continued to smother Dhaka yesterday ahead of the Awami League's April 30 deadline for unseating the government, while anxious relatives thronged jail gates with bail documents for the release of the 'victims of mindless political maneuvering'.

Police arrested 500 people in front of the main opposition party's headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue and other places in the same frenzy that saw hundreds of innocent people's arrest and hurried conviction over the last three days.

Rights activists termed the police action and indiscriminate conviction in court, kicked off in the run-up to AL's Hawa Bhaban siege programme, as a gross violation of human rights, the constitution and a High Court ruling that asks law-enforcers to exercise caution to arrest people on suspicion.

Amid a fog of chaos and emotive scenes, Dhaka Central Jail released more than 815 people until yesterday evening.

They said they would release 1,370 such people by

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Raw deal for the innocent

Cops violate HR, constitution to arrest thousands ahead of AL's siege plan

STAR REPORT

Police and the court following the dictum of the power that be swung into unprecedented actions of human rights and constitution violations last week to foil the Awami League's plan to lay siege to Hawa Bhaban.

From Monday to Wednesday, police arrested at least 5,000 people without any charge from the different bus, train and launch terminals on their arrival in the city. They also raided select hotels during the 'crackdown' to thwart concentration of AL activists for the siege programme.

In doing so, police violated the High Court ruling that the infamous Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPc) that empowers the law enforcers to arrest under suspicion should be used judiciously. Even if arrested, the persons must be sent to the court within 24 hours and their relatives be informed about the arrests within that time.

But none of these dictums were followed when police swung into wholesale arrests.

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AL plans tougher programmes

Hartal, siege, sit-ins on cards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) and its left-leaning ally Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) are planning a massive showdown in the capital from tomorrow, the first day of their three-day 'no-confidence' demonstration against the BNP-led coalition government.

The AL will announce its next 'tough' programmes including hartal, siege and road blockade on April 24 and the party policymakers will discuss the issue of resignation from parliament on April 25 or 26 in an attempt to unseat the government by the April 30 deadline, party sources said.

The nature of the 'no-trust' programme has been kept a secret to avert government high-handedness, but the AL policymakers hinted the programme would come in the shape of a sit-in on the strategically important city streets and in front of government offices including the Secretariat.

The AL has directed its activists across the country to pour into Dhaka in their thousands to enforce the programme. It has plans to mobilise workers especially from the outskirts of the capital ahead of the three-day programmes.

The AL has been holding public

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Justice calls for change in bail concept

Attorney general tells women lawyers' congress

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The age-old concept of bail in the judicial system needs to be changed to ensure justice, said Attorney General AF Hassan Arif yesterday.

"After receiving bail, most of the accused try to intimidate witnesses, which blocks the true course of justice," he told the inaugural session of the Fifth Women Lawyers' Congress on Democracy, Good Governance and Empowerment of Women, organised at a city hotel by Khan Foundation, an NGO.

The attorney general said law-enforcement agencies should be reformed to make their

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40pc Iraqi troops missing from job

US general blames intimidation for walk-off; Pakistan ponders sending troops

AP/AFP, Washington/Malaysia

About one in every 10 members of Iraq's security forces "actually worked against" US troops during the recent militia violence in Iraq, and an additional 40 percent walked off the job because of intimidation, the commander of the 1st Armored Division said Wednesday.

In an interview beamed by satellite from Baghdad to news executives attending The Associated Press annual meeting, Maj. Gen. Martin Dempsey said the campaign in Iraq

was at a critical point.

"About 40 percent walked off the job because they were intimidated. And about 10 percent actually worked against us," said Dempsey, describing that group as infiltrators.

"We have to get this latest increase in violence under control," Dempsey said. "We have to take a look at the Iraqi security forces and learn why they walked."

Meanwhile, Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri, speaking on the sidelines of

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Taiwan's top official cancels Dhaka trip

UNB, Dhaka

Chief of the Taiwanese trade-promoting body has cancelled his visit to Bangladesh after the opening ceremony of Taiwan Trade Centre (TTC) in Dhaka was postponed on April 20.

Yuen-Chuan Chao, president of Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA), a major non-profit trade promoter for over 30 years, was to lead the business delegation.

He was also scheduled to preside over the opening ceremony of the TTC at Hotel Sheraton. "Since the function was put off, his planned visit was also cancelled," said a source.

However, a private-sector business delegation, now in India, will be visiting Dhaka and Chittagong April 26-28 to explore trade and investment opportunities, sources said.

BJP out to woo Muslim voters

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Buoyed by exit poll predictions of the first phase of parliamentary elections putting the BJP in the lead, India's ruling party decided to go all out to woo Muslim voters ahead of the second phase of elections to be held in 137 constituencies on April 26.

The main opposition Congress, jolted by the exit polls results, decided to invoke the appeal of

Nehru-Gandhi dynasty in a bigger way by fielding its fifth generation member Rahul Gandhi, son of party chief Sonia Gandhi, in several con-

stituencies of Uttar Pradesh.

The BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) is contesting 77 of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, where Muslims constitute 17 percent of the electorate, and 32 seats will go to poll on April 26. Polling for the remaining 48 is slated for the fourth and fifth phases on May 5 and 10.

Mindful of the Muslim vote bank, the fresh electioneering for the BJP began on Wednesday with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee addressing community leaders and asking them not to nurture the feeling of being left out.

"I need your support not because

of elections but because I have been striving for years to ensure that Hindus and Muslims here live together, foster brotherhood, help each other and make each other secure, so they can take the country forward," he told the Muslim leaders.

Vajpayee's interaction with the Muslim leaders was organised by a group of intellectuals who last month formed "Atal Behari Vajpayee Himayat Committee" to mobilise support for his leadership.

Soon after the prime minister's address, the committee members,

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2 businessmen shot dead at Pallabi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Armed extortionists shot two Jubo Dal activists dead at Block D in Pallabi last night.

The dead are Nasir Shikder, 35, assistant organising secretary of ward No. 2 unit of Jubo Dal, and Tanveer Ahmed Tannu, 34. Both of them were businessmen by profession.

Witnesses said Nasir and Tannu were in conversation in front of the Jubo Dal Club at Pallabi when two groups of assailants sprayed bullets on them. Tannu was hit in the head while Nasir in the chest and hands.

They were rushed to Mirpur Adhunik Hospital and shifted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital as their condition deteriorated. Tannu died at 9:00pm while Nasir at 9:15pm.

Relatives said the killing was a sequel to refusal to pay tolls to a local criminal group.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim



Shazneen Tasnim Rahman

SHAZNEEN'S 6TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY

The day has once again returned to remind us of how a 15-year old vibrant, sprightly, caring, happy-go-lucky, Shazneen was taken away from us in the most barbaric and cruel manner imaginable. It is now six years that we have lived without her cheerful, lovely and loving presence.

We, her parents and family members, have been able to survive this tormentous ordeal because of the love and prayers of relatives, friends and well-wishers whose direct and indirect support gave us strength, energy and the courage to carry on without our dearest Shazneen.

It was also your prayers which resulted in the process of justice coming to its culmination on 2nd September 2003, with all six perpetrators of that horrendous crime being given the death sentence. The case is now in the appeal stage.

On this occasion of her 6th death anniversary, we thank you all most profusely for your constant support and request you to continue your prayers for her eternal peace and for the process of justice to reach its final and just stage.

Relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to join us at a Milad-Mehfil to be held today after Asr (5:30 PM) at House No. NE (J) 4, Road No. 83, Gulshan-2, Dhaka.

April 23, 2004

Latifur Rahman, Shahnaz Rahman and family