

Car bomb blast kills 23 in Iraq

Interim PM offers amnesty to insurgents

AGENCIES, Hilla/London

Shocked residents of this busy town south of Baghdad laboured yesterday to clear the wreckage left by a massive car bomb blast in a shopping district that killed 23 people and wounded 58, many of them children.

The explosion late Saturday ripped through the area near to a new democracy centre and religious university funded by the US-led coalition in Hilla, a mainly Shiite Muslim city 100km south of the capital.

The blast site was nowhere near Iraqi police or coalition military posts that are favoured targets of a bloody insurgency that US and Iraqi officials have warned will increase as the hand-over of sovereignty from the

coalition to an Iraqi government on Wednesday nears.

The attacks was condemned by US overseer in Iraq Paul Bremer, who said it was carried out by "enemies of Iraq" when he visited the scene on Sunday.

"There were 23 people killed and 58 injured, some seriously, meaning the number of dead could rise," said hospital director Mohammad Dia Bayram.

The coalition, which earlier estimated that up to 40 people may have been killed in the attack, confirmed the latest toll figure, as did the health ministry.

wreckage as hundreds of locals gathered around to watch.

Witnesses said the force of the blast, which went off at about 8:45pm (1645 GMT), caused severe destruction.

OLIVE BRANCH

Iraq's interim prime minister yesterday offered the olive branch of amnesty to his countrymen who have resisted the US occupation out of a sense of indignation not destabilisation.

Iyad Allawi said his administration would have understanding for fellow Iraqis who had risen up against the occupation out of a sense of desperation but would draw the line at those who had joined the foreign conspiracy to destabilise the country.

"We are drawing up plans to provide amnesty to Iraqis who supported the so-called resistance without committing crimes, while isolating the hardcore elements of terrorists and criminals," he wrote in the Independent on Sunday

Israel should talk about its nukes

Says UN watchdog chief

REUTERS, Moscow

Israel should start talking seriously about ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons, whether it admits to having them or not, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog said yesterday.

Speaking to reporters at an official visit to the Russian capital, Mohamed ElBaradei -- director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) -- said this would be a main topic of his visit to Israel in early July.

"We need ... to rid the Middle East of all weapons of mass destruction," he said.

"Israel agrees with that, but they say it has to be ... after peace agreements," ElBaradei said. "My proposal is maybe we need to start to have a parallel dialogue on security at the same time when we're working on the peace process."

He said that a dialogue would help reduce widespread frustration in the Middle East "about what is seen to be a security imbalance." He said talks on nuclear disarmament



A dangerously overloaded truck with sharp bamboo ends hanging precariously in the rear manoeuvres through Amin Bazar in Dhaka, posing grave threats of accidents.



DOWN WITH DEBACLE: Dutch goalkeeper Edwin Van Der Sar catches the ball at the Algarve Stadium in Faro, Portugal early yesterday during the Euro 2004 quarter-final encounter against Sweden.

Dutch fourth time lucky



AFP, Faro

Captain Frank De Boer's delight in seeing the Netherlands finally overcome their penalty jitters to clinch a semi-final date with Portugal was tempered by the harsh realisation that his role in Euro 2004 may have come to an untimely end.

De Boer limped off in the 36th minute of the Dutch's gripping quarter-final against Sweden on Saturday, which the 1988 champions won 5-4 on penalties, following a challenge on Freddie Ljungberg.

"I stubbed my foot in the grass. I'll be going to the hospital for

SEMIFINALS

JUNE 30
Portugal v Netherlands (Lisbon)

JULY 01
Greece v winner of Czech Rep. v Denmark (Oporto)

Opposition terms budget impractical

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The opposition lawmakers at the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) yesterday rejected the proposed budget for the next fiscal year terming it impractical. But the ruling alliance MPs claimed it would help generate dynamism in the national economy.

Taking part in the discussion, AL lawmaker Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim termed the new budget ambitious. He urged the government to prepare a budget based on domestic resources rather than expected foreign and local borrowings. He also asked to expand the tax-net towards this end.

Labelling the finance minister's promise to create about nine lakh new jobs as a fraud, Selim said there is no directive in the budget how the government will create employment for such a huge num-

ber of people.

Jatiya Party (Manju) Chairman Anwar Hossain Manju said national budgets so far have failed to benefit the poor mainly due to giving to the pressures from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other United Nations agencies.

Placing a statistics, the JP leader said the common people are not interested in the budget, as it has repeatedly failed to improve their condition. He urged for a political commitment of the government to improve the socio-economic status of the masses.

GM Kader of the JP (Ershad) focused his deliberations on strengthening the local government bodies in order to facilitate participation of the grassroots people in budget planning. Otherwise, he said, the government's development efforts would not reach the poor.

He said this is the 10th time Finance Minister Saifur Rahman has placed the national budget, but each time the sufferings of the people only increased.

AL MP Shahjahan Khan while giving the budget speech accused the finance minister's son of tender snatching and extortion.

BNP lawmakers Sardar Shakhawat Hossain Bakul, Salauddin Ahmed, AKM Selim Reza Habib, Habibul Islam Habib, GM Fazlul Haq, Fazlul Haq Milon, Abu Hena, Ilen Bhutto, Khadiza Amin and Jamaat lawmaker Delwar Hossain Saydee also took part in the debate.

From the opposition, AL lawmakers Kazi Zafar Ullah and Syed Abul Hossain also spoke.

Yesterday's discussion on the budget, like earlier ones, was dominated by political and extra-budgetary issues including law and order.

Moulvibazar floods improve

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Communications in Moulvibazar got back to normal yesterday as flash floods ceased off and water levels of rivers receded, though not enough to significantly change the condition of nearly 1.25 lakh people marooned in three upazilas of the district.

Low-lying areas in and around Sirajganj and some parts of Bogra might be inundated due to gradual increase in water levels of Brahmaputra-Jamuna and Ganges-Padma basins, sources in the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) of the Bangladesh Water Development Board (WDB) said.

The inundation of those areas, however, is likely to be slow as those are not prone to flash floods because of the large rivers where water levels do not change that fast, said the FFWC official.

Officials at the Meteorology department told The Daily Star last night that rainfall in the northern region is likely to lose its intensity and reduce chances of floods downstream. Rain that has been forecast in the middle of the country

Balu's killers will be punished

Bhuiyan tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday said the killers of Humayun Kabir Balu, editor of Khulna-based daily Janmabhum, would be arrested and punished.

Responding to a point of order raised by Awami League (AL) lawmaker Talukder Abdul Khaleque at the Jatiya Sangsad (JS), he said, "Whoever responsible for the tragic incident would be brought to book and punished."

Bhuiyan told the House that Khulna police were hunting for the culprits.

Child dies after vaccination in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A nine-month-old baby girl in Paikgachha upazila of Khulna district died on Thursday morning after vaccination at a public immunisation camp.

Our Khulna correspondent said Shahanara of Gopalpur village, was taken for diphtheria, tetanus and

pertussis (DTP) jab to the camp under Extended Programme of Immunisation (EPI).

The vaccine, under routine EPI programme, was the child's second dose in last three months, and seventh dose from the same vial of the vaccine that has also been put into six other children at the camp.

Indo-Pak talks off to a positive start

AFP, New Delhi

The first talks in three years between nuclear rivals Indian and Pakistan over disputed Kashmir got off to a "positive" start yesterday, officials from both sides said.

"Ideas and proposals were exchanged to take the (peace) process further. Discussions were held in a positive and constructive atmosphere," Indian foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told reporters at the end of a first round of negotiations in New Delhi between senior diplomats from both sides.

The talks, between Indian Foreign Secretary Shashank, who uses only one name, and his Pakistani counterpart Riaz Khokhar, will continue into a final day today, Sarna said.

The discussions are being held against a backdrop of surging violence in Kashmir and the surprise resignation of Pakistani prime minister Zafarullah Jamali on Saturday.

Sarna said the proposals exchanged yesterday were aimed at "creating mutual trust and better understanding" between the two



Ruling coalition runner for Dhaka-10 by-polls Mosaddak Ali Falu holds a campaign rally blocking traffic near Karwan Bazar kitchen market yesterday.

Prayer Timing		
June 28		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-05	4-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-54	6-57
Esha	8-17	8-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		