

Bomb spree a conspiracy against spiritual songs

Fakirs, saints, bauls demand an end to it

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Government indifference fuels the repeat of bomb blasts, an organisation of spiritual singers said yesterday.

Bangladesh Torikote Ahley Bayet held a rally and cultural programme at the Central Shaheed Minar to demand a stop to the bomb blasts and protest what it said was conspiracy against spiritual songs.

Leaders of the organisation alleged fanatics blasted bombs without resistance in shrines, including Hazrat Shahjalal Shrine in Sylhet and blamed the explosion frequency on government inactivity.

They threatened to launch a tough demonstration through rallies and processions and file cases against the government if it fails to control law and order downslide and ensure security of spiritual singers popularly known as bauls.

Fakirs, saints and bauls have become the target of bomb blasts and receive death threats from fundamentalists as the government played down the rise of fanaticism, the leaders said.

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PHOTO: STAR

Abdul Latif Bayati sings baul songs at a cultural programme at the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka yesterday, organised to protest a series of bomb blasts at shrines and death threats to spiritual singers.

BCIC FERTILISER

Gas price hike raises cost by Tk 52 crore

REAZ AHMAD

The latest rise in gas price has burdened Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) with an additional Tk 52 crore to the current extra cost a year for producing chemical fertiliser and selling it at a subsidised rate.

After the latest rise in gas price last month, BCIC that owns six state-run gas-fired urea fertiliser factories in the country, can ill afford the additional gas bill as it already defaults on Tk150 crore of arrears, said official sources yesterday.

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Over the last seven years, governments hiked commercial gas prices on five occasions without adjusting the ever-widening gap between the urea production cost per unit and the subsidised selling price of the urea to the fertiliser dealers. As a result, BCIC has been incurring losses in terms of bearing increased gas price.

The government has increased gas price for commercial uses from Tk 2.12 to Tk 2.19 a cubic metre with effect from July this year. But there was no rise in selling price of the urea.

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Bigots rally against Prothom Alo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thousands of angry teachers and students of Kowmi Madrasas demanded cancellation of the declaration of the Daily Prothom Alo from a rally in Dhaka yesterday amid concerns of journalists.

Accusing the newspaper of a hate campaign against unregistered religious schools, the protesters threatened to hem in and burn down the daily's headquarters and call a hartal if the editor and the publisher were not arrested in the next 24 hours.

"No conspiracy against Kowmi Madrasas and Islam will be tolerated," said Islamic Oikya Jote Chairman Fazlul Haq Amini at the rally in front of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque staged by Befakul Madaresil Arabia, the Kowmi Madrasa Board.

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Floating homes in flood-risk areas

Mulls UN body

AFP, Dhaka

The United Nations Development Programme is considering building floating homes in Bangladesh following the worst flooding in years, a spokeswoman said yesterday.

Inspired by the floating dwellings of Vietnam, the houses would float permanently on a foundation raft made of bamboo, reducing the impact of floods that regularly hit Bangladesh.

The proposal is one of eight by French architects Patrick Coulobel and Christian Coombes, commissioned by the UN body to come up with simple cost-effective solutions to flood-proof homes.

The country was devastated by flooding that last month also hit India

and Nepal, washing away homes, destroying crops and livelihoods and killing more than 1,950 people across South Asia, including at least 726 in Bangladesh.

"The architects have come up with some interesting ideas and we are currently considering them," UNDP spokeswoman Lisa Hiller told the news agency.

If adopted, the proposals would form part of a post-flood rehabilitation programme funded by money raised from a \$210 million appeal launched last week by the United Nations.

Other solutions suggested by the architects, who are representatives of the organisation Emergency Architects, include building homes

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Iran to strike on US forces if attacked

Says defence minister

AFP, Tehran

In a marked escalation of a war of words between Iran and its arch-enemies Israel and the US, Tehran has for the first time threatened a preemptive strike against US troops in the region.

"We will not sit (with arms folded) to wait for what others will do to us," Iran's defence minister, Rear-Admiral Ali Shamkhani told Al-Jazeera TV on Wednesday when asked if Iran would respond to a US attack on its nuclear facilities.

"Some military commanders in Iran are convinced that preventive operations which the Americans talk about are not their monopoly.

"America is not the only one present in the region. We are also present, from Khost to Kandahar in Afghanistan; we are present in the Gulf and we can be present in Iraq," said Shamkhani.

An exchange of threats between Israel and Iran in recent weeks has led to speculation of a repeat of Israel's strike against Iraqi nuclear facilities at

Osirakin 1981.

But analysts say such an attack is unlikely because of sensitivity to the US position in Iraq and the fact that Iran's nuclear facilities are scattered around the country.

Asked about the possibility of an American or Israeli strike against Iran's atomic power plant being built in Bushehr, Shamkhani added: "We will consider any strike against our nuclear installations as an attack on Iran as a whole, and we will retaliate with all our strength.

"Where Israel is concerned, we have no doubt that it is an evil entity, and it will not be able to launch any military operation without an American green light. You cannot separate the two."

"The US military presence (in Iraq) will not become an element of strength (for Washington) at our expense. The opposite is true, because their forces would turn into a hostage" in Iranian hands in the event of an attack, he said.

Earlier in the week, a commander of

Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards was quoted as saying that Tehran would strike the Israeli reactor at Dimona if Israel attacks the Islamic republic's own burgeoning nuclear facilities.

"If Israel fires one missile at Bushehr atomic power plant, it should permanently forget about Dimona nuclear center, where it produces and keeps its nuclear weapons, and Israel would be responsible for the terrifying consequence of this move," General Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr warned.

Iran's controversial bid to generate nuclear power at Bushehr is seen by arch-enemies Israel and the United States as a cover for nuclear weapons development.

Iran insists that its nuclear intentions are peaceful, while pointing at its enemy's alleged nuclear arsenal, which Israel neither confirms nor denies possessing.

Shamkhani also warned that Iran

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PHOTO: STAR

A demonstrator takes away a billboard of Prothom Alo-The Daily Star-GrameenPhone news service yesterday, as thousands of religious schoolteachers and students protested in Dhaka what they said was a hate campaign of the Bangla daily against non-registered madrasas.

Bangla Bhai set to strike again

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Bangla Bhai, the self-styled commander of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), in hiding at a village between the Rajshahi-Naogaon stretch, is preparing to strike again, JMJB sources said.

Hemayet Hossain Himu, second-in-command of Atrai-Raninagar unit of JMJB, during a visit to Naogaon town on August 11 briefed the party operatives on the latest move of their leader. Bangla Bhai is very much active in party activities. He is determined to carry on the secret killing from his hideout in a village between Baghmara upazila of Rajshahi and Atrai of Naogaon, said sources close to the JMJB.

Goutam Shilal, chairman of Baragachha union of Raninagar upazila and an alleged outlaw, tops the list of people who will soon be hit, the sources added.

A police official said top brass of the local administration at a law and order meeting at Baragachha village recently instructed the villagers to kill local Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Goutam Shilal.

Goutam, once close to some ministers, had gone into hiding with his family

members in the wake of the latest developments.

The JMJB, that claims itself to be a vigilante outfit, in its so-called drive against underground outlaws known as Sarbaharas, in Rajshahi, Natore, Naogaon and Bogra reportedly killed 15 people, kidnapped over 50 and mimed several hundred since April 1.

Three youths, Gazi, 10, Babu, 17, and Shamsul, 18, were the latest to be killed by the JMJB men. Shredded bodies of those three were found spread over the railway tracks at Naldanga in Natore on July 24.

Bangla Bhai and his henchmen went underground after Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in response to sharp media reports instructed the police to arrest him. But the JMJB, still not wavered, continued the killings spree in secret.

In June, beheaded body of an unidentified man was recovered from a sewer at Arji Nagoan Mohallah in Naogaon town. Sources said police seemed reluctant to probe the killing though the incident bore all the hallmarks of a JMJB attack.



STAR FILE PHOTO

An Anopheles mosquito sucks blood

New drug boosts malaria fight

AFP, Paris

Tests on a new antimalarial drug suggest it could be the biggest breakthrough in treatment of the disease for a generation, the British scientific review Nature says in its yesterday edition.

Codenamed OZ, the drug is synthetic and works in the same way as the most effective antimalarial treatment, a Chinese herbal medicine called artemisinin.

"The drug could be the biggest breakthrough in malarial treatment of our generation and could become the most potent weapon against drug-resistant malaria," according to the Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV).

"Initial clinical studies in humans have found the drug to be safe and well-tolerated.

"The synthetic drug could be a much cheaper and more effective alternative to the current malaria cures."

"Because OZ is a synthetic drug and does not require the natural plant, like artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs), its costs can be significantly reduced and the production of the drug can be easier and quicker to meet the demand," MMV says.

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World oil prices hit new high

AFP, London

World oil prices set new records yesterday as hopes of an easing of tensions in Iraq faded and Iraqi forces prepared for a new assault on the forces of Shia militia leader Moqtada Sadr.

New York's main oil contract, light sweet crude for September delivery, climbed 53 cents to a new all-time peak of 47.80 dollars per barrel in pre-opening electronic trading.

The contract closed Wednesday at record settlement of 47.27 dollars.

In London Brent North Sea crude

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Regional media meet begins today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A three-day regional conference organised by the South Asian Free Media Association (Safma) begins today in Dhaka in a bid to foster greater understanding and collaboration among South Asian media.

More than 150 journalists from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal are expected to take part in the conference styled "Cooperation in South Asia" to be held in Hotel Sheraton, said a press release.

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Prayer Timing		
August 20		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-25	5-00
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-38	6-41
Esha	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		