

MUMBAI BUS BLAST Indian court acquits eight

AFP, Mumbai

A court in India acquitted eight people yesterday who were blamed for planting a bomb in a bus in the western commercial centre of Mumbai, formerly known as Bombay, in 2002 that killed two and injured 50.

The accused, all Muslims, were acquitted by judge A.P. Bhargave who said the prosecution had failed to prove the charges.

Police had sought to build a case that the accused planned the December 2002 bus blast to avenge the deaths of hundreds of Muslims who died in Hindu-Muslim riots in February 2002 in neighbouring Gujarat state.

The prosecution's case suffered a setback in March when key witnesses failed to identify the accused.

The sprawling commercial centre of Mumbai, which is also famous for its shadowy underworld, has seen several bombings in the past and was rocked in 1993 by a series of blasts which killed some 250 people and injured over 1,000.

The 1993 blasts were termed an act of revenge by Muslim mafia for the demolition of an ancient mosque by Hindu fanatics a few months earlier.

Several top underworld bosses, who fled the country after the attacks, face charges over the blasts.

In August 2003, two huge car bombs — one of them outside the city's famous Gateway of India monument — killed 52 people and injured 150.

Police have blamed Muslim underground figures and Kashmiri militants for most of the blasts.

Japanese minister

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Japanese Senior Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Ichiro Aisawa said at a press conference yesterday evening at Sonargaon Hotel.

"I have expressed Japan's gratitude to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia as she reiterated Bangladesh's support to Japan for our permanent membership in the UNSC," he said lauding Bangladesh's role and contribution in the UN, especially in its peacekeeping missions.

He said he requested both the Bangladesh prime minister (PM) and the foreign minister that Bangladesh play the role of a co-sponsor of Japan in the draft resolution for the UN reforms to increase the UNSC membership from 15 to 25.

Japan along with India, Germany and Brazil will soon submit the draft resolution seeking increase of the current five-member UNSC structure of the permanent membership to 11 by inclusion of six more countries, including Japan, India and four other countries.

According to the draft, the new permanent members will not exercise veto powers until the next UN reforms in 2020. It will need the support of more than two-thirds UN members to adopt the amended resolution.

Asked whether Bangladesh has given any assurance in this regard, he said, "The Bangladesh side said that this matter is to be solely considered and examined in the government," he added.

The Japanese minister said, "We have to bring the reform to the UN to make it more meaningful for the future world," as the world has much changed since the inception of the UN 60 years ago.

Replying to a question about China's position on the UNSC reforms, Aisawa said China belongs to the consensus group and is actively working in the UN. "We like to work together with all countries which share same 'will', including Bangladesh, and make strong diplomatic efforts to get the draft resolution passed by more than 128 out of the 191 UN member states.

Shibir cadre

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after the Juma prayers that day.

After recovering one AK47 rifle, one DBBL gun, and 122 bullets of AK47 from Munna's village at Mondakini, police set out with Munna for another search to recover illegal firearms at Pynedong under neighbouring Fatikhahari upazila.

Munna received bullets in the right leg when police opened fire as the criminal tried to flee, police said.

He is undergoing treatment at Chittagong Medical College and Hospital under police custody.

Munna, accused in eight criminal cases including two for murders, took the leadership of Islami Chhatra Shibir's criminal group Nasir Bahini after Yakub and Hamid were killed in shootout with police last year.

Wealth, lifestyle

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has proposed a new law that unconditionally allows professionals including doctors, engineers, and lawyers, who have got undisclosed income, the scope for whitening black money provided they pay in taxes 7.5 percent of the sum to be whitened.

Earlier, one was allowed to whiten black money without their having to pay taxes and disclose the source of income on condition that they would invest the money in the industries or capital market.

But the NBR official was sceptical about whether the new measure would bring about the desired results. He explained that those who have amassed huge amount of black money through such illegal means as smuggling and drug-peddling are not going to take advantage of this opportunity, as they do not want to expose themselves for obvious reason. They would rather choose the safer route of smuggling their money out to overseas banks.

One conservative estimate puts the amount of black money in the country at about Tk 50,000 crore. But, over the last three years a paltry Tk 1,800 crore in black money was whitened, the NBR official revealed.

"For this reason, we are targeting those professionals who have got undisclosed income but tend to dodge tax or avoid payment altogether due to the hassle of the system," he said.

Bidisha

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arguing that the matters relating to interrogation and bail are now at the discretion of the High Court (HC).

On hearing both the sides, Metropolitan Magistrate Mir Ali fixed June 16 as the next date for hearing on the issue, subject to receipt of the HC order.

ErsHAD filed the case on June 4 accusing Bidisha of theft, rampage, and making threats against him. Gulshan police arrested her the same day. But later she was shown arrested in a passport forgery case.

ErsHAD, also the chairman of Jatiya Party (JP), is now abroad and will return shortly.

The same court yesterday rejected the bail petition of Jasmin Aias Sangma, domestic help of Bidisha, arrested in connection with the theft case. The court ordered the police to send her to the Dhaka Central Jail. Gulshan police produced her before the court on completion of a two-day remand.

Meanwhile, a bail petition on behalf of Bidisha was moved yesterday but the HC asked her counsels to file a bail petition with the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, as the CMM's Court has already rejected the petition twice.

Laws say if a bail petition is rejected in a lower court, it should be moved to the immediate next higher court.

2 outlaws

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shotgun, one hand bomb and 14 bullets.

The PBCP men ambushed the police team on its way back at about 10:30pm prompting the police retaliation that resulted in an hour-long gun battle.

Mizan got shot while trying to flee the police van and died on the spot, police said. A constable named Sohail was also injured during the gunfight.

In the other incident, upon confession statement of NBCP activist Abdul Latif, the Khoksas police in early hours yesterday went to Hizlabot village to arrest regional leader of the outfit Akdil Hossain—a top listed criminal sentenced for life twice, and to recover hidden firearms.

Earlier on Thursday, the Rapid Action Battalion-6 (Rab) had arrested Latif, accused in 10 cases including four for murder, from a house of Nakhalpara area in Dhaka and handed him over to the Khoksas police on Friday.

The police said when they reached Hizlabot, the NBCP cadres led by Akdil ambushed the police team at about 4:00am. The gunfight ensued as police countered the attack.

Trying to escape from the police van, Latif was killed in "crossfire".

The police filed a case against Akdil Hossain and his accomplices for attacking the law enforcers.

Don't raise duty

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cars after 2002 has not been transparent.

"Sometimes it is seen that old or reconditioned cars are better than even new ones," he said.

Many developed countries like New Zealand and Australia are importing Japanese reconditioned vehicles, he said indicating it as a currency saving means for a country.

As the government now allows import of vehicles up to four years old, import and delivery of reconditioned pick-ups and trucks have greatly decreased whereas these vehicles always played a significant role in transporting goods of export-oriented industries as well as the agricultural sector.

He urged the government to allow import of vehicles used up to seven years.

The government can earn Tk 1000 crore as revenue from the sector by reforming import and supplementary duty policy, he added.

Barvinda Vice-president Abdul Hamid, Secretary General Shah Mosharraf Hossain and Vice-president Habibur Rahman were also present at the function.

Budget posture

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On the issue of steps being taken to make the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) effective, he pointed out that the finance minister did not elaborate in the proposed budget whether the government is giving the ACC financial, administrative and legal independence.

Referring to the allocation of Tk 4,600 crore for reducing poverty and creating employment opportunity, the BEA president questioned how the amount will be spent and how many jobs will be created for whom as there are no directions in that regard in the proposed budget.

"We also believe in ambition but it should be based on reality. The government will not be able to increase revenue income substantially within a year as well as improve efficiency of the administration according to the needs," he said.

Kholiqzaman noted it is possible to reduce dependency on foreign aid at the zero level by curbing corruption and reducing wastage and expenditure in the unproductive sectors, but there is no indication for addressing these areas in the proposed budget. Overall loan and aid from donors are declining but their diktats are on the rise, he added.

BEA General Secretary Prof Abul Barkat and other BEA officials were present at the briefing.

Watchdog limps

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Few effective measures are taken to prevent this pervasive adulteration practice even though the national constitution makes the government responsible to ensure food safety and public health.

Section 18 (1) of the constitution, which deals with food, clearly states, "The State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the improvement of public health as moving its primary duties, and in particular shall adopt effective measures to prevent the consumption..."

Over the next few days, The Daily Star will publish a series of articles exploring what we eat - a dimension of everyday life often overlooked, but highly relevant given the harmful elements to which the public is daily exposed.

"Please write down that 99 percent of the food items we get for tests are adulterated and standard. The market is flooded with adulterated food," Dr. Md. Zahurul Islam, head of the Public Health and Drug Testing Laboratory, told The Daily Star.

Food adulteration flourishes because concerned officials, despite knowing about the epidemic of adulterated food, are powerless to stop it, claiming they do not have sufficient authority to rein in the vast and organised groups behind it. Meanwhile, they admit that the tendency of adulterated food is increasing day by day, affecting greater portions of the public, and that thousands of cases they have filed can do little because of weak laws.

The Bangladesh Pure Food Rules of 1967, the law addressing food, is now 38 years old, armed with such weak fines that traders are hardly intimidated by it. The highest penalty for adulterating food is Tk 5,000. But the expenses involved in proving such cases in court and realising the penalties are much higher.

"If we file a case, the defaulter does not even go to a pleader, as the fees of the pleaders are much higher than his penalty," said an official from the health directorate, requesting anonymity.

Food adulteration also flourishes because of deficiencies in government-regulated quality assurance practices. Before going to commercial production, it is mandatory that the producers secure a certificate from the Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institute (BSTI), an agency that ensures the standard of products available in the market. The certificate is supposed to be renewed every year, and BSTI officials are supposed to make inquiries at the factory to test the product on a regular basis. But this rarely, if ever, happens, sources

Wheat importer

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unloading of the goods through lighterage vessels from MV Celtic at the outer anchorage.

The LoI also urged the shipping agent to take release of the goods after completing customs and port formalities, and paying all the duties. The importer promised to bear all the expenses required.

The importer on March 2 sent a letter to the customs authorities informing them of 'No Objection' to unload the wheat, and later paid about Tk 10.4 lakh as 'river dues' in three pay orders to Chittagong Port Authority (CPA), sources said.

Following two letters of guarantee from the shipping agent, the customs authorities gave permission to unload the goods from MV Celtic through 32 lighterage vessels and appointed a customs official to supervise the unloading. Twenty-four ansar personnel were also deployed for security.

"But the importer secretly took six lighterage vessels out of the port area and unloaded about 5,650 tonnes of wheat and later unloaded another 4,500 tonnes from other lighterage vessels. The goods are worth about Tk 11.97 crore," said shipping agent Humayun Kabir.

The importer, owners of lighterage vessels, ansar personnel and

said. Instead, most of the BSTI seals featured on products are fake, leaving the public in the dark about which is a quality product, and which is not.

Among the 143 enlisted products of BSTI, more than 54 food items are entitled to receive the standard certificate. These include fruit and vegetable juice, syrup, squash, jam, jelly, vinegar, honey, tinned and bottled fruits, sauce, marmalade, pickle, tomato paste, chutney, ketchup, milk powder, butter, baby food, butter oil, ghee, biscuit, bread, candy, chocolate, toffee, tea, liquid glucose, soft drink, noodles, iodized salt, mineral water, ice cream, chilli powder, vegetable oil, soyabean oil, mustard oil, coconut oil, palm oil, flour and sugar. Among these products, hundreds in the market are being sold without any standard seals or with fake seals.

A dearth of manpower, evident in several agencies and regulatory bodies, is crippling the government's efforts to check food adulteration. BSTI sources said that, despite performing their routine duties, they are unable to check all the products available in the market. Even they are aware that most of the seals seen in the market are fake.

"The process is so lengthy that we can not check all the items available in the market. We do not have the manpower," said one of the directors working with the BSTI.

BSTI sources added that there are only 13 BSTI field officers for the whole country, five in Dhaka division, for checking seals and conducting mobile courts.

"We need at least two more field officers for every district. We could perform better if we had more manpower," said Luffar Rahman Khan, director, Certification Marks (CM), of BSTI.

The government amended the BSTI Act and fixed Tk one lakh as a fine for fake labeling. The mobile court from Dhaka has meanwhile been conducting seizures in different districts. In the last year, they have realised more than Tk 38 lakh, BSTI sources said. But that is far less than the required seizures, the sources added.

At the upazila level, sanitary inspectors sometimes seize adulterated products and send them to the Mohakhali public health institute laboratory for testing. If reports are negative, indicating adulteration, the inspector can file a case in the court. The health directorate has four hundred such inspectors, but most of them are inactive, concerned sources said.

In Dhaka City, less than 18 inspectors are tasked with ensuring the health safety of more than one crore people living under the city corporation area.

China hotel

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"The incident on June 10 was the most serious fire accident in our province in recent years, this lesson of blood serves as a reminder that we cannot be complacent over work safety issues," Guangdong governor Huang Huahua was quoted by the Nanfang Daily newspaper as saying.

"The fire was put out around 4:00 pm... Many rooms were gutted," said an officer on duty at the Chaonian district fire brigade, who refused to give further details.

Four of the 15 injured, who were taken to Shantou's Central Hospital, were in a serious condition, an earlier report said.

No one at the Huanan Hotel or the hospital was available to comment Saturday.

It is unclear how many people were in the hotel at the time of the fire.

HC asks govt

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capital, for non-payment of Tk 44.48 crore in bills.

The HC also asked the government to inform it within three weeks whether its

order has been complied with or not.

After hearing a writ petition filed by Mohammad Nasim Khan, founder of Stranded

Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC) and its General Secretary M

Shawkat Ali, a High Court bench issued a rule upon the government to show cause

why the order for disconnecting the electricity lines should not be declared illegal.

The rule is returnable within three weeks.

JS resumes

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In the day's programme, the question-answer session will be tabled but call attention notices will not be entertained to accommodate more discussion on the supplementary budget, parliament secretariat sources said.

Discussion on the proposed budget will begin on June 15, and the House will pass the budget on June 30, according to the Bac decision.

The current session of parliament will continue until July 10.

The main opposition lawmakers have been boycotting parliament since the 15th session, citing a number of reasons. The government's reluctance to hold discussion on the killing of former finance minister Shah ASM Kibria by adjourning day's business during the 15th session was one.

Other opposition members in two factions of Jatiya Party, Krishak Sramik Janata League, and independent lawmakers will take part in the budget discussion.

FM flies

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will lead the Bangladesh delegation to the summit, leaves for Qatar on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin left Dhaka yesterday for Doha to attend the senior official-level meeting of the summit.

Hartal

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The GKDAC has been agitating for the last three years demanding infrastructural development of Mongla Port, completion of construction work of Khuna Airport and Abu Nasser Specialised Hospital, installation of a 210-mw power plant, gas supply through a pipeline, a deep sea port at

Akram point and the reopening of all jute mills, Khulna Harboard mill, and Khulna Newsprint Mill.

Highway police

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actively considering to increase the salaries of policemen to a satisfactory level.

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar, Home Secretary Safar Raj Hossain and IGP Abdul Quayyum also spoke at the function.

Khaleda switched on the lights indicating the 72 outposts of the highway police on Bangladesh map. She also offered munajat.

Later, the prime minister inspected the vehicles of the highway police patrol.

Saarc summit

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"We are very happy that all the member countries have reached a consensus on the summit dates and decided to participate in it," he told the news agency.

The foreign minister said Bangladesh, as the next chair of Saarc, is confident of steering the forum ahead to foster economic cooperation through regional integration.

He said the government and the people of Bangladesh are looking for the opportunity to host a very successful summit, which will be the beginning of the third decade of the seven-nation forum that started its journey from Dhaka.

Rift widens over EU contributions

BBC ONLINE

The UK must compromise on its EU rebate so the bloc can reach a deal on its budget, the German chancellor has said amid mounting pressure on London.

Asked if there could be a deal without a UK concession, Gerhard Schroeder said: "That will not be possible".

French president Jacques Chirac has also urged Britain to make a "gesture" on the £3bn (\$5bn; 4.5bn euros) it gets back from the EU budget each year.

The UK says it will not renegotiate without a major review of EU spending.

Schroeder was speaking after talks with his Luxembourg counterpart, Jean-Claude Juncker, who currently holds the EU presidency.

He said he was not without hope that a compromise deal could be reached.

"What is important is that all countries show responsibility for this whole Europe and make a serious attempt to secure the financing," he said.

The chancellor met earlier in Paris with Mr Chirac, who called on Britain to "make an effort", saying there needed to be "greater fairness" in EU contributions.

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair argues that even with the rebate, Britain's net contribution to the EU is much greater than that of France - whose farmers receive generous subsidies from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

The BBC's Caroline Wyatt in Paris says the war of words has set

the scene for a deeply uncomfortable EU summit in Brussels next week.

The UK will be isolated on the rebate, with the 24 other member states arguing that it should be scrapped.

The row erupted on Thursday, when the French president urged Britain to make a "gesture of solidarity" on the rebate, which the UK won in 1984 after tough negotiations by then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Quickly responding, Blair said London would not give it up. On Friday, he added that the topic could only be discussed as part of a general review of the EU budget.

But during his news conference with Schroeder, Chirac made clear that a 2002 agreement that preserves farming subsidies should be implemented.

"I am not willing to compromise" on this issue, he said.

Next week's EU summit is also overshadowed by the rejection of the European constitution by French and Dutch voters in recent referendums.

In Paris, both Schroeder and Chirac reiterated calls for other members states to go ahead with their own ratification procedures.

The UK, however, has suspended its own plans for a referendum.

Ten member states have already ratified the document. It cannot come into force until all 25 EU countries have approved it.

Arman keeps giving

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His (Arman) younger brother Raihan and brother-in-law Khorshed, two other criminals of Moghbazar in the capital, are now allegedly holding his illegal arms. Moreover, a large number of firearms of another top criminal, 'Pichhi' Hannan, who was killed in a 'crossfire', are known to be in Arman's possession.

Sources said police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) are pressing Arman to give a confessional statement about the August 21 grenade attack on the Awami League (AL) rally in Dhaka, implicating some AL leaders.

A top Rab official however said, "They did not provide any information about Arman's involvement in the grenade attack. I do not know how others are getting such information."

Acting on a tip off from Arman, Criminal Investigation Department (CID) meanwhile arrested AL leader Mokhlesur Rahman on Friday and took him on a five-day remand yesterday, showing him arrested in the August 21 grenade attack case.

Some AL leaders of Moghbazar yesterday referred to newspapers reports quoting Rab sources as saying that Arman gave important information about the grenade attack incident.

"Such reports indicate there is plot to implicate AL leaders in the case," one leader said wishing anonymity.

Mokhlesur, a former ward commissioner of Dhaka City Corporation and an uncle of Arman's arch-rival Tikka, was earlier quizzed by Rab soon after Arman's arrest. Tikka, an infamous criminal of Moghbazar, died on way to

hospital after police shot him in Mirpur a few years ago.

A source close to an underworld gang said Arman can help police and Rab arrest many hardened criminals like Kala Jahangir and Imon as he had close links with them before his arrest. And he now continues his criminal activities including firearms smuggling, maintaining contacts with his godfathers and some dishonest policemen.

Arman's seven-day remand expired yesterday and he will be produced before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka, today.

Our court correspondent reports: Investigation Officer (IO) of the August 21 grenade attack case ASP of the CID Abdur Rashid showed Mokhlesur arrested in the case, produced him before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka and prayed for a seven-day remand. The court however granted a five-day remand.

The IO told the court Mokhlesur and his accomplices are learnt to have conspired to carry out the grenade attack.

He said police have to launch special drives in different parts of the country to detect and arrest others involved in the conspiracy, after verifying primary information received from Mokhlesur.

So far 12 people including Saibal Saha Partha were arrested in connection with the case but the probe made little headway.

Baghdad blasts

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people had been detained in connection with the Shula blast.

He said the commando strike had been carried out by a former brigadier member and that the force's chief Major General Mohammed al-Quraishi was the target.

"The terrorists will try to penetrate the security cordon that we have erected around Baghdad and they succeeded in doing that at a late hour on Friday night in Shula," he said.

A doctor said his hospital had received 21 wounded commandos following the strike against the vanguard of those trying to bring peace to the capital.

Apatriotic song regularly broadcast on Iraqi television says that members of the fearless brigade "disarm bombs with their teeth".

The commando unit had come to the capital from