

Bomber targets Iraqi PM's party office

Aide to Iraq spiritual leader among 18 killed

AFP, Baghdad

A top aide to Iraq's Shia spiritual leader was among 18 people killed in insurgent attacks across the country yesterday, including a bombing near an office of Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari's party.

The unrest followed the release of figures showing that Iraqi deaths from attacks had fallen in June following one of the bloodiest months since Saddam Hussein was toppled in April 2003, although the

US death toll was higher.

A senior advisor to Shia spiritual leader Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Sheikh Kamaledin al-Ghuraifi, was shot dead with two others in Baghdad on his way to Friday prayers, the defence ministry and Sistani's office said.

A suicide car bomber also blew himself up near an office of Jaafari's Islamic Dawa Party in western Baghdad, killing one and wounding another, a defence ministry source said.

Other attacks in Baghdad and in and around the restive city of Samarra further north killed 14 police and soldiers and wounded at least seven, police and army sources said.

In June, a total of 430 Iraqis were killed and 933 wounded, according to data provided by the Iraqi ministries of defence, health and the interior.

The toll was down by more than one-third from 672 in May, which

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5 Indian troops, 4 rebels killed in Manipur fighting

AFP, Guwahati

Five Indian soldiers and at least four separatist guerrillas have been killed in fighting in India's restive northeastern state of Manipur, police said yesterday.

The deaths occurred when Indian troops Thursday launched a raid on a hideout of the outlawed People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the Thangning hills, about 70km south of Manipur's state capital Imphal, a police spokesman said.

"Five army soldiers and four PLA rebels have so far died in the encounter," the police spokesman said by telephone from Imphal, requesting anonymity.

The PLA is a rebel group fighting for an independent homeland for the majority Meitei community in Manipur, bordering Myanmar.

"The operations are continuing Friday and according to our reports some more militants were killed though we are yet to get details as the location is very remote and inaccessible," army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Santanu Dev Goswami told AFP.

"The militants were involved in a massive extortion drive in the area and hence the military operation."

Goswami said a huge cache of arms and ammunition, including AK-47 assault rifles, rocket launchers, grenades and radio sets were recovered from the slain rebels.

An ongoing military offensive by the Indian army has been under way since October against three frontline militant groups in Manipur, in which some 7,500 army troops are involved.

From sleepy to a bustling village

Grameen Shakti's renewable solar energy systems work wonders in a Phulpur village

AKBAR HOSSAIN, back from Mymensingh

Just a couple of years ago Dadra Bazar in Phulpur of Mymensingh would shut at dusk and the residents would go to bed well before 9:00pm, having no access to electricity and kerosene beyond their easy reach.

People of Dadra Bazar and its outlying areas would retire to their home early in the evening, as most of them had no TV sets or other forms of entertainment.

But it all started to change for the better about two years ago when the initiative of Grameen Shakti (GS) to pull villages out of darkness by electricity produced through renewable solar energy systems began to work wonders. In a short span of time, the project with assistance from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has brought about a big change in lifestyles of the villagers.

"I used to close my shop immediately after dusk, but now

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A shopkeeper stands in front of his shop lit by the electricity from a renewable solar energy device installed on the roof of his shop (inset) at Dadra Bazar in Phulpur, Mymensingh.

'Savar garments factory collapsed due to RCC bond failure'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Not any foundation failure, rather the failure of reinforced concrete cement (RCC) bond to grow properly had contributed to the collapse of Spectrum Sweaters Ltd building in Savar, a report of Institute of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh (IDEB) concluded.

Five floors of the nine-storey garment building were being constructed while different garment machinery were in full operation, the report said adding, "The bond of reinforced concrete could not be developed properly for the vibration of these machinery."

Shafi Uddin Sarkar, chairman of research and study cell of IDEB, presented the report at a roundtable discussion arranged at IDEB Bhaban in the city yesterday.

At least 61 garment workers died in the country's deadliest building collapse in Savar on April 11.

"Examining the rubble of the collapsed factory, we found that cement was not properly attached to rod. And instead of stone, sand was used more, raising the probability of the collapse," Sarkar observed.

Besides, the garment building was overloaded with machinery and other equipment, making it another reason for the building to come down, he added.

The report strongly recommends installing vibration-generating heavy and light machinery on the land under a shade instead of inside the multi-storey factories.

It also suggests not constructing upper floors while production is on in the lower ones, just as it happened in the case of Spectrum Sweaters Ltd.

Prof Emazuddin Ahmed, Dr Serajul Islam Choudhury, Prof

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Final round talks with Tata today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The final round of negotiations between Bangladesh government and Indian corporate giant Tata Group on its proposed \$2.5 billion investment begins in Dhaka today at the finance ministry.

A 15-member Tata team led by Tata Bangladesh chapter head Manzer Hossain has already arrived in the capital to finalise the investment talks, sources said.

A government team headed by Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed is also ready to go into the talks after the prime minister's approval of Bangladesh's strategy on the deal.

Dhaka had earlier sent an invitation to Tata Group for talks from July

2, deferring it from June 19.

"We will try to conclude negotiations this time, instead of prolonging the process," a senior government official said. Government high-ups also gave similar indications, he mentioned.

Three issues have been identified crucial to the negotiations -- fixing the price of gas, guarantee of uninterrupted gas supply to Tata's plants and the method of coal mining, if it is leased out, a top official noted.

Apart from demanding pricing at an 'agreed rate', Tata wants guarantee of uninterrupted gas supply for 30 years while the government is

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US Ambassador to Bangladesh Harry K Thomas Jr leaves Dhaka today ending his two-year assignment in Bangladesh.

He will replace Ambassador Karl Hofmann as executive secretary of the State Department.

During his stay in Dhaka, Thomas publicly spoke about the need for an improvement in human rights conditions highlighting the State Department's annual Country Report on Human Rights Practices as a key tool for moving the dialogue on human rights forward.

Thomas, who assumed his duties in Dhaka on August 11, 2003, would often speak in Bangla and received wide media coverage.

"I am very much thankful to the vibrant media in Bangladesh who gave me a lot of coverage and my mother in the USA is also thankful to you for that," Thomas told journalists recently at a press meet.

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BDNEWS, Dhaka

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Boy drowns, teacher sliced by train in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 12-year-old schoolboy drowned in a pond in Pallabi and an NGO teacher was sliced by a train in Mohakhali in the capital yesterday.

Mohammad Masum, a class-five student of Mohammadiya Kindergarten and son of Abul Kalam, drowned while swimming in a pond near his house in Rupnagar residential area at 11:40am.

His relatives rushed him to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) where doctors pronounced him dead at 12:50pm.

In Mohakhali, Abu Sayem, 27, a teacher of Aparajeyo Bangla at Mirpur-10, was smashed and killed by a train some 100 yards north of the level crossing at 9:05am.

His relatives could not say whether it was an accident or he had committed suicide.

Adulterated petrol, octane damaging car engines

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Widespread adulteration of petrol and octane is causing serious trouble in all vehicles with the level of engine lubricant automatically rising and exposing engines to serious damage, according to automobile engineers at leading workshops.

The automobile engineers said they had noticed the rise in 'oil volumes' in all vehicles about three years ago.

The problem became alarming about a year ago when new cars started to break down due to 'increasing oil in the engines', they said.

When diesel, kerosene or CNG condensate (a by-product of gas fields and CNG filling stations) are unscrupulously mixed with petrol and octane, the fuel fails to properly burn.

The unburnt substance sips into the engine through the piston seals. This increases the lubricant level and also lowers down the viscosity

of the oil, turning it much thinner than needed.

Leading lubricant suppliers had conducted several tests in the wake of complaints by car importers, workshop owners and motorists.

The tests found the level of adulteration was up to 20 percent in petrol and octane sold in the fuel stations.

In most of the cases petrol and octane are adulterated at various levels in the chain of import and distribution to make undue profit.

Automobile experts say fuel adulteration is also causing 'national loss of hundreds of crore of taka' for spare parts, most of which are imported in foreign currency.

They say the vehicles are also emitting additional toxic gas due to adulteration, causing serious air pollution in urban and rural areas.

The level of adulteration is so high outside the capital that thousands of vehicles regularly break down there.

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No trace yet of missing trawlers, fishermen

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A fishing trawler with nine fishermen sank on Wednesday while three others with 18 fishermen remain missing in the Bay of Bengal for the last three days.

A rescue operation conducted from yesterday morning failed to trace any of the missing fishermen or trawlers as at 12 noon.

Some trawlers were returning from the high sea in a fleet when a depression in the Bay on Wednesday forced them to stop their journey and head for safer places.

FB Meghna with its nine crew sank at Mohipur, some 80 kilometres off Kuakata sea-beach.

Because of the turbulent sea, other boats of the fleet could not save or rescue any crew of FB Meghna, sources said, adding that the rest of the trawlers of the fleet reached shore in Meher Ali, Beyddar Khal, Char Aonga, and Haela Pathorghata areas safely.

Three other missing trawlers FB Ma, FB Kheyra and FB Mayer Doya, with 18 crew on board were scheduled to return on Wednesday.

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Santals bring out a colourful procession from TSC on the Dhaka University campus yesterday to mark the 150th anniversary of the Santal revolution.

Santals still fight for rights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Santal community and other indigenous people are fighting for their rights for more than a century but they are yet to get those, and their fight still continues.

Stating this, speakers at various programmes yesterday demanded constitutional provisions guaranteeing rights of the indigenous people, and urged the government to ensure their right to property.

The national committee for celebration of 150th anniversary of the 'Santal Hool' (Santal revolution) organised the programmes.

Even 150 years after the Santal Hool, repression on Santals and other indigenous people is going on, speakers regretted.

During the British rule, two brothers from Santal community -- Sido Murmu and Kanhu Murmu--mobilised Santal people for a movement demanding an end to repression of the colonial rulers and their local operatives, and for social justice. On June 30 in 1855, Sido and Kanhu launched a historic revolution against the British rulers and their local agents with around 10,000 Santals and other oppressed people from around the

Santal parganas.

The Hool was brutally suppressed in 1856 but it brought about a dramatic change in the colonial ruler's policies, and gave birth to a new political consciousness among the indigenous people that still continues to grow.

Yesterday morning, a discussion on the occasion was held at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital. Sardar Fazlul Karim inaugurated it, Anil Marandi was in chair and Champai Soren, a war-injured freedom fighter, was chief guest. Discussants included personalities

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11 killed, 19 hurt in road accidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eleven people were killed and 19 others injured in five road accidents in Sirajganj, Kishoreganj and Bogra districts in last two days.

Eight people were killed and six others were injured in two road accidents in Sirajganj yesterday and Thursday, our Sirajganj correspondent reports.

A Dhaka-bound bus from Rangpur collided head-on with a North Bengal-bound private car from Dhaka in Nalka Morh area near Pashchimanchal gas office on the

Dhaka-Uttaranchal highway at 10:30am yesterday, police and eyewitnesses said.

Six people, including driver of the private car, two children and a woman died on the spot and five others were injured.

The injured were admitted to a local hospital.

Motorbike rider Abdul Motin, 35, and his companion Lokman Hossain of Silonda village in Sadar upazila died on the spot and Rakib Hasan, 25, of Jarila village in the same upazila was injured when a

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