



World enraged

AFP, Jerusalem

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice led international condemnation yesterday of bombings in the popular Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh that killed at least 83 people, including foreign tourists.

Expressions of outrage flooded in from around the globe, ranging from UN chief Kofi Annan to Russian President Vladimir Putin and France's Jacques Chirac as well as from Japan. "At this difficult time of testing, the United States stands with our friend and ally Egypt. Together we will confront and defeat this scourge that knows no boundary and respects no creed," Rice said during

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Dhaka slates suicide blasts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka has strongly condemned the blasts at the Egyptian Red Sea resort that killed at least 88 people, terming those responsible for such attacks around the globe enemies of humanity.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in a message to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak condemned the bomb attack, according to UNB.

She expressed profound sorrow on behalf of the people and the government of Bangladesh at the loss of lives in the blasts.

"Bangladesh condemns this heinous act of terrorism in the

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88 killed in Egypt car bombs

9 foreign tourists among dead, Qaeda-linked group claims attacks

AFP, Sharm el-Sheikh

At least 88 people, including nine foreign tourists, were killed early yesterday in a string of bombings in Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, medical and police sources said.

More than 110 people were wounded in the attacks, some of them seriously, the sources said, sparking fears that the death toll could rise further. The bombings are the deadliest ever attack targeting foreigners in Egypt.

The attacks on the popular Sinai town at the peak of the tourist season were the deadliest in Egypt, topping the 62 people, most of them tourists, killed in Luxor eight years ago, and drew swift condemnation from across the globe.

At least three bomb blasts ripped through a luxury hotel, a nearby car park and a busy market minutes apart shortly after 1:00 am (2200 GMT Friday), sending panicked holidaymakers rushing out of bars and clubs on the glitzy Naama Bay strip.

In the most devastating of the strikes, a suicide bomber rammed his car through the security barrier and into the lobby of the luxury Ghazala Garden hotel, sending

chunks of debris flying and killing at

least 30, mostly Egyptian staff.

"The explosion was so strong that it shook the building I was in at the other end of the road, almost a kilometre (half a mile) away from the Ghazala," said taxi driver Naguy Teema.

Medics said 83 people had been killed and about 110 wounded. Police said at least eight foreigners were among the dead, including two Britons, two Italians, one Ukrainian, one Russian, one Dutch citizen and one Israeli of Arab descent.

President Hosni Mubarak, who has played host to numerous world leaders in the Red Sea reverie resort, toured the devastated bomb sites where anti-terrorist units were also scouring for evidence.

Interior Minister Habib al-Adly said Egypt already had some leads which appeared to show a connection with October bombings that killed 34 people further north in the Sinai peninsula, including several Israelis.

"We have indications that could lead security services to those responsible for these terrorist operations," he told the official MENA news agency. "These elements suggest that the bombings may be linked to those that took place in Taba."

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Debris of a hotel in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, which was destroyed in a bomb attack yesterday. Locations of the blasts, inset, that killed at least 88 people.

BRTA accused of corruption frenzy

Ministry for introducing special police force; 8 mobile teams to enforce transport rule

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rampant corruption, irregularities and mismanagement in the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) has deprived the government of more than Tk 250 crore as revenue from the transport sector in last fiscal year, a high-level meeting at the Ministry of Communications yesterday observed.

The BRTA collected Tk 245 crore as license fees, road and transport taxes in the fiscal year 2004-05. But the amount could be over Tk 500 crore, had there been no corruption and mismanagement, the meeting said.

The meeting decided to send a proposal to the cabinet for introducing BRTA special police force for controlling irregularities and mismanagement in the transport sector. The amended version of Bangladesh Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1939 will also be sent to the cabinet for approval.

Eight mobile teams led by first class magistrates will start operation in the capital to enforce traffic rules

and nab violators, meeting sources said.

The team will also seize the black smoke emitting vehicles. The meeting decided that all the cabs going outside Dhaka from the Zia International Airport must be in green colour.

Admitting massive corruption in the BRTA, newly appointed BRTA Chairman M A Momen blamed a section of police personnel for collecting tolls from old vehicles.

The police department requested him to keep 2,000-3,000 registration numbers reserved for the police, the BRTA chairman said, adding that the government will probably not get any revenue from those vehicles.

The meeting was told that the postal department that collects license fees and vehicle taxes was also involved in corruption and tax evasion.

At least 12 cases of money embezzlement by the postal department were detected and five cases of pocketing money collected as transport tax by the postal department

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Independent EC secretariat first need for fair polls

Says EC Mohammad Ali

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An independent secretariat free from government control is the first need for the Election Commission (EC) to hold a free and fair election, Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali said yesterday.

"Other electoral law reform concepts can be proceeded if an independent Election Commission Secretariat was in action," Ali said in an interview with The Daily Star.

"An independent secretariat is also needed to exercise the authority to cancel candidature and initiate contempt proceedings against violation of the Election Commission directives," he argued.

Ali said the EC had earlier failed to take stern actions against several irregularities, as it lacks

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VOTER LIST

99 parties, alliances invited for talks

AL rejects EC invitation, questions motive behind big gathering

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission's (EC) unprecedented initiative to hold a series of dialogues on the voter list with as many as 99 political parties and alliances in three days may end up in chaos, fear the EC officials.

The main opposition Awami League (AL) has already rejected the invitation and questioned the sincerity of the EC initiative. AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday said there must be an 'ill political motive' in the commission's arranging the dialogue with so many political parties to be held in only three days.

The EC yesterday completed inviting the political parties. The discussions on the voter list have been staggered over eight sessions, each to last for two hours.

The commission will hold talks with the leaders of 65 political parties on July 26 and with those of AL, Jatiya Party, 11-Party alliance and 27 other parties on July 27. The ruling BNP and its three coalition partners have been invited to take part in the dialogue on July 28, sources said.

Such a huge gathering in such a short period of time may turn out to be producing no results and leaving serious disagreement between the

EC and the political parties over the voter list, officials of the EC secretariat observed.

Except AL, BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, three fractions of Jatiya Party, Islami Oikya Jote, Krishak Samik Janata League, and Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, the other parties invited have no representation in parliament. Together they have failed even to poll one percent of votes or win a seat.

Eighty-one political parties participated in the seventh parliamentary election in 1996. But except AL, BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, most of them could not field

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SULTAN TORTURE Rab asks police, BDR to take back 3 members

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday recommended the police and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) authorities to take back three of their men--now with the Rab--for torturing a garment factory owner on July 15.

Action against the rest 10 Rab men, who along with the three were found responsible by a Rab probe committee for the torture, is yet to be determined. The Rab authorities said they are still scrutinising the probe committee report on them. "We sent letters to the mother organisations of the three recommending to cancel the deputation at Rab," Rab Director General (DG) Abdul Aziz Sarkar told The Daily Star last evening.

"The Rab does not have the jurisdiction to punish any of its members for any offence, nor does it have the authority to send back the

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VoIP not legalised 20 months after nod

MONJUR MAHMUD

Legalising Internet telephony is still hanging in the balance even after more than 20 months of the cabinet decision to authorise it.

Internet telephony, technically termed the voice over Internet protocol (VoIP), is widely used illegally in the country, depriving the government of crores of taka in revenue.

The government first decided to legalise VoIP in June 2002 and a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia cleared the decision on November 10, 2003. However, the decision is yet to be implemented.

"The government has been incurring a loss of around Tk 400-500 crore annually due to the illegal use of VoIP," said Md Akhtaruzzaman Manju, president of the Internet Service Providers' Association of Bangladesh.

The private sector stakeholders

in the executive committee of the ICT taskforce, which is responsible for implementing the government decision, preferred VoIP legalisation to take off with flat call charges and bring in changes when needed.

"But the delay in implementing the decision on VoIP is costing the government crores in revenue as illegal operators closely linked with the government are doing a brisk business in call termination," said a chief executive of an Internet Service Provider (ISP) company.

ISPs are no more interested in VoIP due to the unabated illegal use of the technology by telephone operators, he said adding that the government should take steps to stop the illegal use of VoIP.

After spending a long time and having debated the crucial aspects in the ICT taskforce committee, Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) is now getting down to the nitty-gritty

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Manhunt on for London bombers

Second man detained

AFP, London

British police have arrested a second man as a massive manhunt for four would-be suicide bombers gained pace yesterday and new security scares kept Londoners on nervous alert.

"I can confirm a second man has been arrested, it was yesterday (Friday) night," a spokesman for London's Metropolitan Police told AFP.

The arrest took place in the same area of south London, Stockwell, as a first suspect was apprehended earlier Friday and a third man was shot dead by police in front of terrified onlookers.

British newspapers Saturday published grainy security camera stills showing four wanted men at or near the sites of Thursday's seemingly botched suicide attacks, as police urged the public to come

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