

Blasts rock Delhi: 49 die

Red alert declared; shopping malls shut down; militant links suspected

AGENCIES/NDTV, New Delhi

Three powerful blasts ripped through crowded neighbourhoods in New Delhi yesterday, killing at least 49 people, many of them out shopping ahead of the country's biggest Hindu and Muslim festivals, officials said.

The blasts occurred minutes of each other, two of them in major shopping districts, packed with people out on a fine Saturday evening.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh urged people to remain calm and said in a statement that "India will win the

battle against terrorism." The statement was read on CNN by one of his top advisers, Sanjaya Baru, who said the explosions were the work of terrorists, but did not say who the government thought was behind them.

Initially, New Delhi's Chief Fire Officer, RC Sharma, told Reuters that at least 39 people were feared killed and scores were injured.

"There have been deaths, there have been injuries and three separate blasts have occurred and these are



definitely not an accident... someone has done it but who has done it we will investigate," Home Minister Shivraj Patil told reporters.

As many as 20 people have been killed in an explosion in Sarojini Nagar market and dozen others have reportedly been killed in Paharganj, according to an NDTV report.

The markets were filled with shoppers doing their last-minute purchases for Diwali -- the Hindu festival of lights and Eid-ul-Fitr.

The first blast occurred at

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Dhaka shocked, condemns serial blasts

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan has strongly condemned the serial bomb blasts that left at least 50 people killed in New Delhi yesterday evening.

"This is heinous and cowardice act. The people of South Asia will unitedly fight against such act of terrorism," Khan told the news agency last night.

A series of explosions rocked the Indian capital, leaving at least 50 people killed and scores injured.

Morshed expressed his shock at the loss of lives and prayed for the peace of the departed souls.

He also expressed his sympathy for those injured in the blasts.

SIRAJGANJ POWER PLANT

Powerful lobby out to get in inferior bidders

Influencing govt to relax bid criteria

SHARIER KHAN

The already problem plagued 450 megawatt Sirajganj power project is heading to a deeper crisis as a business lobby is influencing the government to relax the bid criteria in five areas to accommodate lower quality offers, competent sources said.

The Sirajganj project stumbled in January 2004 when the government arbitrarily cancelled a bid of Bangladeshi Summit power when it

was at its final stage. Afterward, the Power Cell of the power ministry floated a tender once and cancelled it recently under pressure from the business lobby, which wants to bag the deal.

The business lobby had earlier succeeded in having removed the director general and technical director of the Power Cell who were reputed to be highly qualified and experienced in successful implementations of private

power projects.

The lobby has had placed an ex-official of a private power company, Westmont, as the new technical director, and has had him spearhead the Sirajganj bid entirely.

Now under a directive of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the Power Cell has proposed changes of six criteria to pre-select competent power companies. Five of

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Hajj flights uncertain on Biman's aircraft shortage

Other airlines not interested for 'low fare'; Biman can carry only 4,000 out of 50,000 intending pilgrims

REAZ AHMAD

Uncertainty looms large over performing of Hajj by many of the intending pilgrims from Bangladesh as Biman Bangladesh Airlines is unable to operate enough flights for them because of aircraft shortage and other airlines are unwilling to operate Hajj flights at the cabinet-approved fare of \$950 per pilgrim.

The religious affairs ministry estimates that 4,000 ballotee (under government management) and over

50,000 non-ballotee pilgrims are willing to perform Hajj in January next year. But Biman says it will not be able to fly more than 4,000 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia due to shortage of aircraft.

The national flag carrier has to go by the cabinet-approved fare of \$950 per pilgrim although it will incur a loss of Tk 20 crore from the Hajj flights this time. But other private and foreign airlines, at two meetings with the civil aviation ministry on October 23 and 24, made it clear they would not bear

losses by operating Hajj flights at such a poor fare rate.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin told The Daily Star recently that low fare would cause Biman a loss of Tk 71 lakh per Hajj flight this time.

Last year, Biman ferried over 23,000 Hajj pilgrims to Saudi Arabia at a fare of \$950 each and incurred a loss of Tk 21 crore. But Biman fears it would suffer almost the same amount of losses this time

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Biman official held for 'carjacking'

3 stolen cars recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police on Friday night arrested a Bangladesh Biman official in Dhaka for his alleged involvement in carjacking and seized three stolen vehicles he kept at some garages.

According to the police, Golam Nasser Azmir alias Parvez, 42, junior ground service officer of Biman, has been involved in carjacking in the capital for quite a long time.

Acting on a tip-off, Ramna police arrested Quddus Ali, 25, an accomplice of Parvez, at his Ulan Road house in Khilgaon at about 9:00pm on Friday. Following Ali's

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A visually impaired mother with her child on her lap at a seminar marking the World White Cane Day 2005 at Shishu Academy auditorium in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Criminals in Lobi's Iftar party

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Lawmaker Ali Asgar Lobi, convenor of the newly formed convening committee of Khulna city BNP, hosted an Iftar party yesterday which two listed criminals of the Khulna Metropolitan Police joined.

Ashrafuddin Chowdhury alias Hathkata Bulu and Amin Molla alias Boeing Molla were present at the Iftar party hosted by the BNP lawmaker.

Both the criminals were also seen on Thursday afternoon garlanding Lobi at a reception organised by his loyalists at the BNP office on KD Ghose road.

The right arm of Bulu was blown off in 2002 as the bomb he was

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Ambassador Rezaul Karim passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladeshi Ambassador to Egypt MM Rezaul Karim died of a heart attack yesterday in Cairo. He was 70.

A career diplomat and advisor to

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Dhaka, Delhi agree on consular access to arrested citizens

Home secys for quick deals to fight drugs

REZAUL KARIM

Bangladesh and India have agreed to provide consular access to their nationals arrested by either side and swap information about activities of the insurgents.

After the two-day 6TH home secretary-level talks, which went on until the

small hours yesterday in New Delhi, Bangladesh's Home Secretary Sarfaraj Hossain and his Indian counterpart VK Duggal signed off on the minutes of the marathon session of talks covering areas of bilateral security concerns and border management.

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FOUR YEARS OF JAMIRUDDIN SIRCAR Putting party before parliament

SHAKHAWAT LITON

In running the parliament during the last four years, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar has virtually proved his undoubted loyalty to the treasury bench rather than to the House itself.

He never initiated any significant step to uphold the dignity of the House and often remained silent against contravention of the parliamentary affairs to some extent.

Being the head of a state organ, Jatiya Sangsad (JS), Sircar seems to have failed to play his role effectively

in upholding the significance of his position as the speaker, a widely viewed symbol of power and authority of the House.

Sircar's frequent rulings, indifference towards the main opposition, reluctance to protect the lawmakers' right in some cases, imposing ban on electronic media inside the parliament complex, put the speaker's integrity into question.

He was also accused of violating the constitution by none other than his deputy. Even the ruling BNP

lawmakers, who had elected him speaker, were irked by his fragile role in protecting their rights and accused him of making the parliamentary body "dysfunctional". They dubbed him a "messenger" for carrying out the orders of the executive.

When the law, justice and parliamentary affairs minister on February 3 this year issued a letter, reining in the ruling party lawmakers' right to place private members' bills in parliament, the speaker blatantly passed the letter

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Over 100 die as train derails in Andhra

AFP, REUTERS, Nalgonda

More than 100 people were killed yesterday and another 30 to 40 are feared to have been washed away when a passenger train derailed and toppled into swirling floodwaters in southern India, a senior official said.

"While over 100 bodies have been recovered from the site, 20 to 30 passengers are feared to have been washed away," home minister of Andhra Pradesh state, K. Jana Reddy, told reporters.

Rescue workers feared the death toll could rise to 150.

Seven coaches of a passenger train skidded off the tracks at Velugonda, about 30 km south of Hyderabad at around 4.20 a.m.

The accident occurred after a small bridge collapsed due to the force of water which burst out of a nearby irrigation tank after torrential rains, said P. Krishnaiah, chief public relations officer of southcentral railways.

Many irrigation tanks have

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