

# Rise of militancy hits tourism sector hard

PINAKI ROY

The recent spate of deadly blasts and continuing threats of the Islamist militants to carry out more have hit hard the tourism sector of the country this year.

So far 32 people have died in 10 major bombing incidents. In last six years, 176 people were killed in 26 major blasts across the country.

The tourism seems to be going through the leanest patch for the recent years due mainly to these ghastly acts of terror. So far a very few sightseers have visited the popular tourist spots of the country including the Sundarbans, Rangamati, Bandarban, Kuakata and Cox's Bazar. Experts fear that the sector is set to lose a huge sum of earning this year.

It should be the peak season for tourism but as the people are scared of blasts, few of them dare to travel. The volume of tourist traffic has plummeted alarmingly. Most of the rooms of Parjatan motels around the country remain empty," said Khalilur Rahman, general manager (commercial) of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation.

Foreign tourists have been even fewer. Every year more than 200,000 foreign tourists visit the country. According to the Special Branch of the government 271,270 tourists visited Bangladesh last year and Tk 3967.56 million was earned from those visits.

But in the current year the situation has been too adverse for the tour operators not to be concerned about their business.

"Whenever a blast takes place, we get a whole lot of e-mails from different countries enquiring about the developments. People are scared to come here," Matiuir Rahman, managing director of Bengal Tours said.

"We deal mostly with the foreigners. They have been cancelling our programmes one after another," he said.

Besides, local people have been cancelling their bookings of hotel rooms. The places that usually swarm with tourists during November-December are hardly having any tourist now.

Lieutenant Colonel Waliullah, who runs a hotel in Cox's Bazar, says the bombings have brought about a total disaster in the business.

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# Imams, devotees across country pray for end to bombing scourge

STAR REPORT

Thousands of devotees and Imams all over the country raised their hands in prayers during Jum'a yesterday to get rid of suicide bombings.

Imams of different mosques, including the Khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque Maulana Obaidul Haque, while conducting khutbas and special munajats, said those who are killing people with bombs, are enemies of Islam and the people.

BDNEWS reports that hundreds of devotees across the country, under the banners of different Islamic parties brought out processions chanting anti-bombing slogans after the prayers.

In Rajshahi, Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (Ahab) also brought out a huge procession protesting coun-

trywide bombings. Ahab's top man Asadullah Al Galib is currently behind bars on suspicion of being one of the high-ranking leaders of militant Islamist organisations in the country.

Baitul Mukarram Khatib Maulana Haq blamed foreign forces for patronising suicide bombings in the country. He also urged the government to find out the sources of funding for the militants.

"Islam can't be established through bombing," the Khatib said while conducting a munajat at the national mosque in Dhaka.

After the prayers hundreds of Muslims took to the street in front of Baitul Mukarram amid tight security. A tense situation was prevailing in the area in apprehension of possible bomb attacks on

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Pilgrims scheduled for the first Hajj flight on December 11 night wait for reporting to the Hajj camp near the Zia International Airport yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

Sammilita Sangskritik Jote brings out a black flag procession on the Dhaka University campus yesterday protesting the December 8 bomb attacks in Netrakona.

# World may miss child dev goal by 30 years: UN

REUTERS, New Delhi

The UN Children's Fund said on Thursday the world would miss by 30 years the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of cutting child deaths by two-thirds unless nations stepped up efforts to reduce mortality.

"The fact is that at current rates of progress the child survival goal will be reached 30 years late," United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) Executive Director Ann Veneman told disease experts at an international conference in New Delhi. "It would not be an overstatement to say that progress on child survival that has been made so far is simply unacceptable."

Veneman said just seven of 60 nations with the highest under-five child mortality rate or the greatest number of child deaths were on target to reach the MDG goal set in 2000 and to be achieved by 2015.

The MDG goal wants nations to reduce child mortality from 93 of every 1,000 children dying before five in 1990 to 31 in 2015.

Unicef says 39 countries, including India, have made insufficient or no progress in reaching the goal and 14 have seen increases in under-five mortality rates, including Botswana, which is facing an Aids crisis.

It says around 1.4 million of the 10.5 million annual deaths of children under five across the world can be prevented by vaccination against diseases like measles and tetanus.

# Declare militants as traitors, take stern action

Cultural personalities demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent cultural personalities yesterday demanded that the government declare the militants traitors and take stern action to curb militancy in the country.

Udichi, one of the leading cultural organisations in the country, yesterday announced a token hunger strike today from 10:00am to 1:00pm at the Central Shaheed Minar to protest the December 8 suicide bomb blasts in Netrakona that claimed eight lives including three Udichi activists.

Expressing solidarity with the Udichi, leaders and activists of different cultural organisations including Sammilita Sangskritik Jote (SSJ), Jatiya Kabita Parishad, Kendrio Khelaghor Ashor, vowed to

combat militancy.

Udichi brought out a procession with black flags that started from the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University (DU), paraded some DU streets and ended at the Central Shaheed Minar where they held a rally amidst tight security.

Hundreds of cultural personalities and people from all walks joined the rally presided over by Udichi Vice-President Golam Mohammad Idu.

Terming the government's initiatives sorrowful, Golam Mohammad Idu said the alliance government did neither take any action against the militants nor declare them traitors though they violated the constitution, killed lawyers and general people of the country.

At the rally, the cultural personali-

ties accused the BNP-Jamaat alliance government of harbouring militancy and said they have no other way but to fight to get rid of militancy.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim said the government has no moral right to remain in power, as they failed to ensure security of the people.

The militants have targeted the administration, spirit of the country's Liberation War and the judiciary to establish Islamic rule, he said.

He urged the countrymen to be united to fight against the militants.

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# Hindu boy 'lured' to join suicide mission arrested

Father, 2 others held

AMANUR AMAN, Kushtia

The banned Islamist militant organisation Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) allegedly trapped a Hindu teenage boy into a plot to send him on a suicide mission after converting him into Islam.

Police recovered from the boy's room some books on Jihad and a diary, an entry in which reads, "We no longer want the green flag in Bangladesh, we want it red".

The police arrested the boy, Sadhan Kumar Debnath, 17, his father Bhabatosh Chandra Debnath and two other suspected JMB members and sent them to jail.

The incident came to light after Bhabatosh on Thursday filed a general diary (GD) with the Bheramara Police Station, seeking rescue of his son.

In the GD, Bhabatosh alleged that one Moulana Ismail Hossain of Khulna lured his son Sadhan into

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# BIMST-EC power ministry officials to meet Dec 19

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Power ministry officials of BIMST-EC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) countries, including Bangladesh, will meet here on December 19 to examine an electricity transmission grid across the region.

The meeting assumes importance as Bangladesh favours buying electricity from Bhutan and Nepal using Indian power grids as one of the conditions for allowing through its territory a trilateral natural gas pipeline from Myanmar to India.

The forthcoming meeting will mainly discuss various technical and operational parameters such as frequency and voltage related to harmonisation of national grids, a senior official of Indian power ministry said.

Energy ministers of BIMSTEC

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# More bombs seized in dists as JMB issues fresh threats

28 suspected militants held

STAR REPORT

Law enforcers recovered 10 bombs from different districts yesterday while banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) threatened to blow up a police station, an upazila health complex, a madrasa and a department of Islamic University.

Besides, police and other law enforcers arrested 28 suspected JMB militants in places across the country.

In Ramu of Cox's Bazar, the banned Islamist outfit threatened to blow up Ramu Upazila Health Complex if in next seven days it does not stop promoting various family-planning methods that the militants described as anti-Shariah, reports UNB.

The militants made the threat in a letter sent to Ramu Upazila Nirbahi

Officer Mohammad Selim Uddin on Thursday. "These anti-Shariah activities would not be allowed in the country," they said in the chit, referring to vasectomy, ligation and use of condoms.

The extremists also threatened to blow up a mosque, Thana Bhaban and Upazila Parishad Bhaban in Ramu.

Our Jhenidah correspondent reports: JMB has sent a letter to the officer-in-charge of Harinakundu Police Station, threatening to blow up the local police office within next seven days if police continue to harass its cadres.

Immediately after receiving the letter on Thursday afternoon, the OC filed a general diary (GD).

Police defused a powerful bomb

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# Suspected JMB man held from Baitul Mukarram mosque

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A suspected militant was arrested from Baitul Mukarram mosque yesterday and two others were detained but later released.

The arrestee, Ebaidullah, is suspected to be a member of the banned Islamist militant outfit JMB.

The other two—Alamgir and Shah Alam—were released as they identified themselves as activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir, student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami, witnesses said.

Devotees at Juma offering prayers at the mosque caught the three at around 12:30pm as one of them started reciting 'Kalema

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# PM returns from Saudi Arabia

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia returned home yesterday after attending the two-day extraordinary summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in the holy city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia.

Ministers, chiefs of the three services, diplomats and senior civil and military officials received the prime minister when she arrived at Zia International Airport at 11:50am by a flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

Khaleda Zia led the Bangladesh delegation at the third extraordi

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PHOTO: STAR

Bomb making materials seized at Tangail (Story on front page)

# Prayer Timing

December 10		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-15	5-50
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-19	5-22
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation



PHOTO: STAR

A person opens his bags for policemen to check, as the latter observe from a "safe distance", before the Jum'a prayers at the Jamiatul Falah mosque in Chittagong yesterday.

# 'Political parties, parliaments, police, judicial systems most corrupt bodies'

AFP, London

Political parties but also parliaments, police and judicial systems are the most corrupt bodies in the world, according to a global study of perceptions of corruption published yesterday.

For the second year running, respondents in 45 out of 69 countries worldwide put political parties at the top of the list for kickbacks and bribes, global campaign group Transparency International said.

They were followed by parliaments or legislatures and the legal system and judiciary, TI's 55,000-person survey "Global Corruption Barometer 2005" found.

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# Rivalry of 2 main parties allows rise of militancy

TIB seminar in city told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While all-pervasive corruption has plagued national life, recent militant activities coupled with political confrontations have added a new dimension to it throwing the people in a state of uncertainty and abysmal insecurity.

Public concern over corruption is mounting not only because Bangladesh is at the top in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of Transparency International for the fifth year but also because major political parties consider corruption as a key issue but do little to combat this vice.

Speakers expressed this view at

a seminar in the city marking the International Anti-corruption Day yesterday, organised by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

Presenting the keynote paper at the seminar, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said lack of security due to bomb blasts causing deaths and injuries across the country has now surpassed all other problems facing the people in various fields.

"The phenomenon (bomb blasts) is essentially a fallout of unprecedented growth of religion-based political parties and their front organisations. Bitter rivalry and confrontations between the two

major political parties have given scope for the growth of militancy," he told the seminar held at the Jatiya Press Club.

The successive governments not only allowed militancy but also did nothing to prevent the recruitment and training of the so-called 'jihadi' cadres and other extremist groups whose links to or patronage by the government are an open secret now, Iftekharuzzaman noted.

"With the crisis looming large and people left in deep insecurity and confusion, the only discernible signal coming from the political leaders is their blame game, which

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