

Mortar shell hits Iraqi parliament

7 killed in Iraq minibus attack

AFP, Baghdad

A mortar shell struck the roof of Iraq's parliament inside Baghdad's heavily protected Green Zone yesterday, shaking the building but causing no casualties.

"The rocket landed on the roof of the parliament right above the speaker's office," said Sheikh Sabah Saadi, an MP from the Shia Fadhlila Party. "There are no casualties but there is slight damage to the office."

The elected body was not in session and few lawmakers were in the building, but after the attack employees were prevented from leaving.

The Green Zone, the seat of the Iraqi government and home of the US and British embassies, has been a regular target of mortar strikes over the past month.

Two people were killed and another eight wounded when 10 mortars slammed into the area last week, and another four Asian contractors were killed in a similar attack at the beginning of the month.

Meanwhile, gunmen opened fire on a minibus northeast of Baghdad on Monday, killing seven people before setting the vehicle on fire and incinerating the bodies, a local hospital official said.

"The minibus was carrying 11 passengers when it was attacked and then set on fire," said Mohammed Abdullah, an official in the main hospital in Baquba, capital of the violent province of Diyala.

"When the ambulances arrived at the scene they found seven bodies and four wounded people," he said, adding that one of the dead was a child and all four of the wounded were women.

A few hours later two more were killed and 15 were wounded when three mortars crashed outside a bank where people

were lined up to collect their salaries, according to police Lieutenant Ahmed Ali.

In the past weeks, the mixed province of Diyala has seen some worst violence in the country with Sunni insurgents targeting the local Shia population as well as fighting pitched battles with US and Iraqi forces.

In a separate attack, a roadside bomb blast killed three Iraqi soldiers and wounded another two as they patrolled a west Baghdad suburb, according to two security sources.

Attacks against Iraqi security forces have intensified in recent weeks as the US military and the Shia-led Iraqi government have flooded the capital with soldiers and police in an effort to quell the daily bloodshed.

Earlier US forces freed five Iraqi hostages showing signs of torture in a raid in western Baghdad on Monday, the military said.

US forces discovered the hostages when they opened a padlocked room in a building they were searching in Karmah, a restive town north of Fallujah in the western Al-Anbar province, the military said in a statement.

"Inside were four men and a boy who had been kidnapped and severely beaten with chains, cables and hoses," the statement said, adding that the hostages bore the marks of torture.

"The boy stated the terrorists had hooked electrical wires to his tongue and shocked him," it said.

After being treated for their injuries and returned to their families the hostages told US forces that they believed their captors were foreign Arabs, judging by their accents.

Across Anbar, tribes and villagers who once supported the anti-US insurgency are increasingly turning against al-Qaeda in Iraq, which US forces say terrorises the populace with kidnappings and assassinations.

3 wounded

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hotel, and Kawsar Bhuiyan, 28, a visitor.

Four armed youths opened fire at the reception counter on the first floor of six-storied hotel around 4:00pm. They fired six to seven shots during the sudden attack when Kawsar was hit, one of the victims told The Daily Star.

Two staffs at the reception caught hold of two of the shooters soon after they opened fire prompting the other two criminals to fire at them. Polish was injured during this scuffle.

Yaquab was bullet-hit when he got in the way of the criminals' escape route on the ground floor of the hotel.

Police in a press release yesterday evening said SI Abu Sadek of Paltan Police Station captured Amin while he was running away holding his firearm in the air. He later captured Sumon with the help of locals at the Nightingale intersection.

"The four attackers reached the reception and suddenly started firing indiscriminately. As I ran for cover a bullet hit me in my abdomen," said Kawsar, who had gone there to visit his brother Nazimuddin, a hotel staff.

Police suspect the attack might be the result of non-payment of toll demanded by the criminals.

AL reform

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reforms on recommendations from the top leaders as AL President Sheikh Hasina and General Secretary Abdul Jalil recently told reporters that they would bring reforms in the party.

Sensing the possible action, some of the leaders accused of making attempt to corner Hasina in the party have already changed their stance and are saying that without Hasina there would be no reforms in the AL.

However, some others, worried about their fate in party politics, think their move has been presented before the party chief in a 'highly exaggerated' manner.

"We have information that they [the high-ups] are planning to take punitive measures against us as we spoke about reforms," said a senior AL leader preferring anonymity.

Deal signed

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export of manpower will protect the rights of Bangladeshi workforce.

The CA requested the minister to encourage his country's investors to invest in Bangladesh in infrastructure, IT and power sectors, availing of the advantage of prevailing ideal climate.

The UAE minister appreciated the caretaker government's performance and reform works.

The chief adviser conveyed best wishes to the UAE president.

ACC seeks

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installed on rental basis.

But the present caretaker government cancelled all the three projects along with some other ones on charges of massive irregularities and corruption.

Official sources said this is the first time the ACC sought files from the Power Division to investigate irregularities.

Nearly two months ago, a special taskforce on the power ministry, headed by Major General Abdul Wadud, took the three files to investigate the alleged corruption and irregularities, but the files were not given back to the Power Division.

A senior official of the Power Division told the news agency that either they will send the original files to the ACC if they get back those from the taskforce or will send the duplicate ones to the anti-graft body.

Budget

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Economic Council or the International Conference Centre at the Chief Adviser's Office as the prospective venue, they added.

"We are discussing the prospective date, venue and other procedures regarding the budget placement," said a high official of the ministry. He said the decisions will be finalised after Mirza Aziz returns from a visit abroad on May 24.

He added that the officials are now busy preparing the adviser's budget speech.

During the tenure of the caretaker government in 1996, Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud had come up with a financial plan for three months and that was passed through an ordinance.

"But this time the interim administration will place a budget for the entire fiscal and have it approved through an ordinance," said a finance ministry source.

The adviser's speech will be broadcast live on radio and television while other materials and books concerning the budget will be posted on the government website.

"The finance ministry will compile suggestions on the proposed budget from economists, business bodies and different professional groups, and in the light of those the advisory council will bring necessary changes at the end of the month," the source added.

No let-up in price hike

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percent, 25 to 30 percent, and 25 percent respectively.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) recently conducted a study on the current price hike of essentials.

When asked about the reason for the price hike, CPD Research Director Mustafizur Rahman pointed out the increase in domestic production cost due to rising fuel and fertilizer prices, and a price hike in the international market. He also mentioned the present government's initial move against hoarders as a reason for the current spree of price hikes.

Several middlemen's profit adds to the cost of transporting products from the fields to the consumers increasing the retail prices, Dr Mustafizur Rahman said.

In retail markets coarse rice are currently being sold for Tk 20, miniket for Tk 28 to Tk 30, pajiam for Tk 25 to Tk 27; prices which are Tk 1 or Tk 2 per kilogram lower in wholesale markets.

The government intended to bring stability to the market with the influx of boro rice, which already started to arrive in the market. But due to the high cost and reduced production, the government had to buy boro for Tk 18 per kilogram this year, but it had to pay Tk 16 for a kilogram of the rice last year.

Demand for lentil in Bangladesh is 3,25,000 metric ton, but it is producing only 1,25,000 metric ton, while in the international market, the price of lentil increased rapidly. In 2002-03 the price was 300 dollars per metric ton, which now is 700 dollars.

"India already prohibited export of lentil to meet its internal demand, contributing to the price hike of lentils here," said Dr Mustafizur Rahman.

Sources said due to the government's drive against hoarders, food importers refrained from importing lentil on time, although they have had news that its price was about to go up. In the mean time the price in the international market went up by 100 dollars.

Prices of edible oils also increased. In retail markets 37.5kg (1maund) soybean is being sold for Tk 2,470, and palm oil and palm super are being sold for Tk 2,300. Last year, the price of soybean was Tk 1,610 while palm oil and palm super were sold for Tk 1,470 and Tk 1,490 respectively.

Vegetables have become very expensive. Price differences between rural and urban markets are also huge. Consumers in urban areas are paying three to four times more than the rural consumers.

In wholesale markets of Jessore, aubergines are selling for Tk 6 per kilogram but those aubergines are Tk 12 per kilogram in Dhaka wholesale markets, the prices of which shoots to Tk 18 to Tk 20 per kilogram in different retail markets of the city.

Bitter gourds are being sold in Karwanbazar, Kanthalbagan and Hatirpoul retail markets for Tk 20 to Tk 22 per kilogram. But reports broadcast on a TV channel said bitter gourds are being sold for Tk 8 per kilogram in a village wholesale market in Narsinghdi.

BDR managed 22 open markets in the capital are selling the same vegetable for Tk 3 to Tk 4 per kilogram.

When asked, how BDR is managing to sell the vegetable for a reduced price, Col Md Mojibul Hoque, chief of Operation Dal-

Bhaat 2006 and a task force commander, said complete mismanagement has a chokehold on the wholesale markets and the distribution system, the government really does not have any control on them.

"Several middlemen and extortionists are eating up the cream," said Col Mojibul.

Terming Karwanbazar wholesale market as the centre of mismanagement and extortion, Mojib suggested setting up four wholesale markets on the outskirts of the capital where farmers' cooperatives could directly sell their products.

"If the government follow this system, prices of vegetables will come down at least by Tk 4 to Tk 5 per kilogram," he said.

He however said there is no doubt that the present government is quite serious about curbing the current price hike of essentials.

The government took several initiatives to control prices, said Abu Bakkar Siddique Mollah, deputy secretary to the commerce ministry.

"The government has taken an initiative to import several food items including lentil, onion, chic pea, and edible oils through TCB," he said.

"Besides we have been regularly monitoring the market, and we think soon the prices will be controlled," he added.

The government has been examining the CPD recommendations for encouraging new importers to import different goods as only a small number of importers are currently controlling the market, Molla said.

CG now considers

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Law and Information Adviser Mainul Hossain said yesterday.

Earlier, the CG had sought the Law Commission's opinion in this regard, and it ruled out increasing the number of advisers since that won't be in conformity with constitutional provisions, he said.

Talking to journalists at his secretariat office, the adviser further said the government has decided to give autonomy to the state-owned Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar.

A circular would be issued very soon for implementing this decision.

Explaining the move to expand the council, Mainul said it was intended to reduce workload on the existing advisers.

He claimed that though the number of advisers in the CG is very small, its pace of work is very high as there is no political influence on officials.

The past governments had a large number of ministers but officials could not work properly because of political interference, he added.

On radio and TV, the adviser mentioned that two separate laws for their autonomy were formulated in 2001 but those could not be implemented.

The present government would implement those laws with some amendments and additions, he said. It would be able to complete the process of giving autonomy to the two public sector electronic media, he hoped.

Mainul said a committee comprising journalists, artists and civil society members would be formed to monitor performances of the government-owned media after they get autonomy.

Aminul Haque

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Talora UP chairman Mofizuddin.

One Golam Mostafa of Belgharia village of Chanduria union filed the case.

In his complaint, Mostafa said that Shis and Mofiz took Tk 1.5 lakh from him on September 29, 2004 on behalf of the ex-post and telecommunications minister promising him a job. But the accused neither got him a job nor returned the money, he alleged adding that he took so long to file the case as he feared for his security.

With this, a total of six cases have been filed against the ex-minister. He had already faced charges of helping the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) militants to commit brutalities in the northern districts in two cases.

Aminul and Shis are in hiding since the charges were made against them in these cases while Mofiz was arrested last month. Meanwhile, former MP of Rajbari-2 constituency and BNP leader Nasirul Huq Sabu and five others were sued on charge of extortion, UNB reports.

Police said a businessman of Pangsha upazila Paritosh Pal filed the case with a cognisance court on Sunday.

The other accused in the case are -- Sabu's younger brother

Bird flu

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long-term strategic campaign against highly pathogenic avian influenza in order to get the spreading H5N1 virus under control," the Rome-based UN agency said in a communique.

"Bangladesh has a real chance to get the virus under control, if it commits itself to a full-scale comprehensive national control campaign," said Joseph Domenech, the FAO's chief veterinary officer.

"FAO is ready to continue its assistance, and further international aid will be essential to support the country in this huge challenge," he added.

Since February, when a first outbreak of H5N1 was officially announced in the impoverished country, the virus has spread to nearly one-fifth of the country, FAO said, adding that Bangladesh is the second country in South Asia to be affected this year.

While Bangladesh is already implementing control and containment measures, "there is an urgent need for vigorously stepping up and extending current H5N1 control campaigns in order to prevent the virus becoming widely entrenched," FAO said.

The FAO recommended continued culling "at full scale in affected areas," strict controls of the movement of people, animals and goods and "basic biosecurity measures" such as disinfection and protective clothing.

"In addition to existing rehabilitation packages already offered to farmers," FAO suggested that Bangladesh develop a comprehensive scheme to encourage reporting, facilitate disease control and minimise impact of disease control on large and small poultry producers," the statement said.

"Public awareness campaigns are necessary to inform poultry producers and consumers about how to reduce virus spread and how to protect themselves," it added.

Bangladesh has about 220 million chickens and 37 million ducks in an industry that employs five million people directly, while millions of households rely on poultry production for income and food, FAO said.

The country is among the world's most densely populated, with nearly 1,000 people per square kilometre (2,600 per square mile).

Experts fear the deadly H5N1 strain could mutate and develop the ability to pass from human to human.

So far there have been no reports of human infection in Bangladesh.

Bird flu has hit poultry flocks across the world and killed more than 175 people since late 2003, most of them in Southeast Asia, according to the World Health Organisation.

Wild migratory birds have been blamed for the global spread of the disease.

EU encourages

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team that visited the country before the now cancelled January 22 election also came up for discussion.

The EU ambassador in Dhaka observed that some problems have already been solved while the commission has initiated steps to work out the others.

The EC briefed the delegation about the measures aimed at electoral reforms and the commission's determination to ensure a free and fair election.

Meanwhile, sources said the EC Secretariat will soon direct the district election officers to update the list of assistant registration officers (ARO) across the country.

Currently, 6,273 AROs, mostly government officials of different cadres at district and upazila levels, are appointed for voter-listing.

"The district election officers might be asked to send the updated list of AROs within May 30," said a source at the Secretariat.

The EC will meet today to discuss preparation of the voter list. The field level work is scheduled to begin in August.

CA wants

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reports published yesterday drew the chief adviser's attention that some HSC examinees could not reach examination centers in the capital in time Sunday morning for traffic jams reportedly for the chief adviser's motorcade movement.

The CA asked the authorities to make his office going and other schedules of motorcade movement adjusting with time of examination or other important matters for public interest.

He asked for doing this to avoid any suffering stemming from movement of his convoy, according to the CA's Office.

Egyptian tomb

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Henu's mummy wrapped in linen in a large wooden coffin and a sarcophagus decorated with hieroglyphic texts addressed to the gods Anubis and Osiris.

The tomb contained well-preserved painted wooden statues of workers making bricks, women making beer and pounding cereal, and a model of a boat with rowers, Egyptian media said.

Harris jailed for 3 years

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The judge also issued a warrant for his arrest.

Prosecution lawyer AFM Gholam Fatah told The Daily Star that Harris will get 30 days' time to appeal the verdict at the High Court. But before that, he has to surrender to the trial court or get arrested.

If he does not file his appeal within 30 days, the judgment will stand final.

"However, a higher court still has jurisdiction to consider an appeal after 30 days," he added.

The judgment might mean Harris will not be able to contest any election.

According to the rules of Emergency Power Ordinance (EPO), any person, convicted of corruption by a trial court, will be disqualified from contesting any election until adjudication of his or her appeal against the verdict and no convicted person shall ever be considered qualified for any post in the government, semi-government organisations, statutory bodies, or in any organisation that has government affiliation.

The constitution says, "A person shall be disqualified for election as, or for being, a member of parliament who has been, on conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude, sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than two years unless a period of five years has elapsed since his release."

HARRIS' WEALTH Harris Chowdhury became a millionaire almost like the way Mossadeg Ali Fahu did, indicates an ACC investigation that is set to translate into a case within 15 days.

"He used to stay at a rented house in Shantinagar in 2001. His lifestyle changed drastically after he had been assigned to the Hawa Bhaban, the BNP chairperson's Banani office. Soon he moved to the DOHS and started amassing wealth," said an intelligence source.

"So far we have gathered that he owns more than five houses in Dhaka under different names. He has at least one house and a shopping mall in London also under a different person's name," it added.

Harris owns huge shares in different companies that are worth crores of taka. He has shares in National Tea Company, Mutual Trust Bank and Ocean BD Ltd, just to name a few.

"His shares in Ocean BD Ltd alone are valued over Tk 10 crore," said the source.

He also has around Tk 10 crore in fixed deposits with the banks.

Most of the properties are in the names of his wife, children, brothers-in-law and personal staff. He has only a few in his own name.

A task force source said, "We have unearthed the whereabouts of most of his property. We are sure of what we've found. Now we are gathering hard evidence to prove in the court that those really belong to Harris."

An ACC official said that the case will be filed under section 27 of the ACC act that relates to secretly acquiring property disproportionate to one's known source of income.

GRAFT CASES AGAINST EX-STATE MINISTERS

ACC Deputy Director Syed Iqbal Hossain in his capacity as the investigation officer yesterday submitted a supplementary charge sheet against former state minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir.

The counsel for Alamgir opposed the submission as they argued that [supplementary charge sheet] was not placed in accordance with the time and procedure permitted by the law.

They also contended that the defendant was not given any chance to explain his circumstances to the ACC.

Syed Rezaur Rahman was among the counsel for the detained AL leader.

The case against Alamgir mentions inconsistency between his statement and actual wealth. The anti-graft body found that the accused did not declare in his wealth statement Tk 1.17 crore that he has in fixed deposits.

After the supplementary charge sheet, his undisclosed and under-estimated assets now stand at Tk 2.10 crore.

The ACC deputy director told the press that Alamgir did not disclose that he owns two houses in Katchua valued at more than Tk 57 lakh, an under-construction market estimated to be worth around Tk 29 lakh and a filling station Tk 24 lakh. He also has three motor cycles valued over Tk 1.41 lakh. According to the Katchua registry office report, he owns lands worth around Tk 7.93 lakh.

The investigation officer added that Alamgir showed his Banani residence valued at Tk 8.25 lakh while the PWD sets its current value to be Tk 87 lakh. Similarly, his Tk 10 lakh asset in Comilla has been re-assessed at Tk 20 lakh.

Alamgir showed his bank balance to be Tk 90,000, whereas investigations found that he has Tk 2.45 lakh in accounts with different banks.

Meanwhile, two other special courts yesterday recorded statements of six prosecution witnesses in two graft cases against detained former state ministers Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin and Aman Ullah Aman.

After recording statements, the courts fixed today for the next hearing.

Nasir's son Mir Mohammad Helaluddin and Aman's wife Sabera Aman are also among the accused. They were present during the hearing yesterday.

Judge Firoz Alam of the First Special Court recorded statements of three prosecution witnesses including the complainant of the case against Aman and his wife Sabera for amassing huge wealth through illegal means.

Sabera Aman was taken to the court in an ambulance. She was on a stretcher while her husband stood in the dock during the proceedings.

Judge AK Roy of the Second Special Court recorded statements of three prosecution witnesses in the case filed against Mir Nasir and his son Mir Helal for earning huge wealth through illegal means.

During the hearing, Mir Nasir was lying inside the dock. Earlier, he was given a pillow and a blanket.

Kader Siddiqui

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in person to ACC Secretary Delwar Hossain at about 12:30pm, which shows that he owns moveable and immovable properties worth about Tk 1 crore.

Besides, Shamsur Rahman Khan Shahjahan, president of Tangail district Awami League and Shahidul Islam, a chairman of Madhupourasava also submitted their wealth statements to ACC yesterday.

On May 14, the Tangail district ACC office issued notices to 11 individuals including Kader Siddiqui, his two brothers and former state minister Lutfor Rahman Khan Azad, to submit their wealth statements to ACC secretary, Dhaka within seven days.

Although Siddiqui mentioned about his properties in detail in his wealth statement, he did not mention prices of many things.

In the statement, Siddiqui said that he and his family possess moveable assets worth about Tk 50 lakh, which include cash, savings schemes, shares in different companies, a Mercedes-Benz jeep, two trucks, one Toyota jeep, two speedboats, 50 bhoris of gold, two guns and one revolver.

His immovable properties worth about Tk 60 lakh include -- five houses, (four in Tangail and one in Mohammadpur, Dhaka), ponds, seven pieces of land in Mirpur, Dhaka and vast agricultural lands in Sakhipur, Basail, Ghatail and Kalihati in Tangail.

Siddiqui also showed that he has a house at Kandapara in Tangail, worth Tk 20,000, which he got as the life-term president of Shaheed Jahangir Smriti Sangho, who previously owned the house.

Talking to the reporters after submitting his wealth statement, Siddiqui said that the government should have the accounts of wealth of each citizen of the country.

Issuing notices to people to submit wealth statements does not necessarily mean that they are corrupt, he observed.

Lebanon troops