

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 Fadila 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.

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

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-storey 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. Polash was injured during this scuffle.

Yaqub 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.

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 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.

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 pre-sented 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.

Demands 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 meantime 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 Jessor, 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 Hatirpool 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-

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.

But the BNP constitution provides that conviction (regardless of the length of jail term of the convict) disqualifies one as the party's parliamentary poll candidate.

And it does leave any room for a convict to contest the election ever.

Deal signed

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export of manpower will protect the rights of Bangladeshi workers.

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 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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Budget

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10,000 US dollars and 125 tolas of gold ornaments that he kept hidden inside an unused commodity in his residence at Tiktatuli in the capital.

Qwami Madrasa educated Nasir admitted that the money and gold ornaments are looted, Rab officials said.

Later six other teams of Rab-1

started massive raids in Dhaka

and other parts of the city as per

information given by Nasir and

arrested his close associates

Shamim Khan alias Shamim, 28,

Nizam Shikder alias Enayet

Karim alias Nizam, 40, Abdul

Mannan Shikder alias Kalu, 45,

Abdul Malek Talukder, 42,

Sohrab Shikder, 32, Babul Sheikh

alias Gas Babu, 18, who used to

operate gas cutter during robbery,

Mohammad Jewel, 20, Sabuj

Talukder, 40, and Probir

Ghosh alias Babu, 50, a gold

trader who used to buy the looted

ornaments.

The leaders of Bangladesh

Jewellery Association led by its

president MA Wadud Bhuiyan

and Rab Director General Hassan

Mahmood Khan and Karan and

requested him to take necessary

steps so that the arrested robbers

get punishment.

The Rab DG assured them of

taking proper legal action.

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.

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The EC has already drafted

proposals for making political

parties' registration with mandatory, and not allowing unregistered parties to contest parliamentary

elections at any level if he or she is punished for corruption."

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, BNP Standing Committee Member Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman said it is a very significant provision in the party constitution, and it will help clean the party of corrupt people.

"Leaders finally proved guilty

will be automatically sacked from

the party. There is no way for them

to return to the party again. So,

there is a scope to bring reforms in

the party using this provision," he said.

Asked whether this provision

would be amended if the detained

leaders are convicted, Mahbubur

Rahman, also former army chief,

said he does not think so. "If any

such move is taken, party leaders

and supporters will not support it."

Replying to a query, the BNP

leader said the party will have to

follow its constitution as the

Electoral Commission (EC) has

made moves for electoral reforms.

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 communiqué.

"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.

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.

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