

Mall blast kills 8 in Manila

AFP, Manila

A huge bomb ripped through a shopping mall in the Philippines' capital's financial district yesterday, killing eight people and wounding 70, police and rescue workers said.

Panic-stricken shoppers ran out of the Glorietta mall in the Makati district of Manila as smoke billowed out of the building shortly after noon.

Manila police chief Geary Barias said the blast killed eight people and wounded at least 70 others.

"There may be more people inside," he told reporters.

Bomb debris carpeted a 200 square metre (2,100 square foot) area, he added.

"The ceilings are damaged and may collapse," Barias said.

National police chief Avelino Razon said: "This was a bomb. But beyond that we can't say anything else yet because we are still investigating."

Makati City councillor Junjun Binay said the explosion left an eight-metre (26-foot) wide crater on the ground floor and blew a hole through the roof on the second floor.

"From what I have seen it was a significant explosion and that most of the dead and injured were all employees," he said.

Witnesses said part of a ceiling collapsed while a concrete wall was blown out.

Two cars and two delivery vans were buried under wooden planks and concrete debris outside the mall.

"It was so powerful," clothing store clerk Jeric Blalendes told AFP on the scene, as rescuers treated his cuts and bruises.

"The roof just collapsed on us. I could hear my three co-workers screaming. I got out through a small hole. I don't know if they got out."

Police stepped up security across the Manila area, a sprawling city of 12 million people.

Govt framing rules

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manpower, business, middlemen both at home and in manpower importing countries including Malaysia and some in the Middle East gobble up a major portion of the money that the poor job seekers pay for migrating to a foreign land.

Many of the workers who sell lands, cows, other belongings and even borrow from money lenders at high rates of interest to go abroad for jobs cannot ultimately benefit because of paying big amounts of money as cost of getting the jobs, or poor wages.

An official of the expatriates' welfare ministry said there is a database at the BMET but job seekers' names are now entered there only when recruiting agencies (who have different layers of middlemen both in rural and urban areas) convince them about sending those people abroad.

We have now decided that names and other information of overseas job seekers must be preserved in the database. When recruiting agencies come up with employment opportunities, BMET will provide them with information regarding required number of job seekers. And the agencies will then select them through interviews," the official said requesting ano-

nymity.

The ministry has already asked Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology to prepare a user-friendly software for this purpose, he mentioned.

The government will also set a mechanism to ensure that recruiting agencies select job seekers also from districts that have fewer people working abroad. The ministry has already issued instructions to the agencies in this regard.

Zia ul-Haq

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had no doubt that members of the former Zia regime were responsible for the attack late Thursday on her homecoming parade.

Zia overthrew Bhutto's father, prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in 1977 and had him hanged two years later. He died in a plane crash in 1988.

Bhutto said there were those who had served with Zia who remained extremely powerful and saw her return to Pakistan and her pledge to restore democracy as a threat to their influence.

While acknowledging that Islamist extremists were likely responsible for the attack itself, she stressed that such groups were unable to operate without logistical support from people in positions of power.

Hannan hails

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Talking to the reporters at his Mohakhali residence, Hannan said he believes the CEC's comments would discourage those who have been out to create confusion regarding who the real BNP are.

"Now it is proved who leads the mainline," he said adding that the party's door however is still open for those who want to return to the fold admitting their mistakes.

Replies to a query, he said they would finalise the strategy and stance for the talks through discussions at the party forum. But first, they would have to know the dialogue agenda.

Meanwhile, Ashraf Hossain, expelled joint secretary general of BNP, yesterday said EC's electoral roadmap would fall flat on its face if the commission decides to invite anyone other than them (pro-Bhuiyan faction).

Talking to reporters at his NAM flat, he also said, "It is not clear yet what the CEC has in fact said. We still hope we will be invited since we represent the main BNP."

He claimed that most of the members of the central executive committee are with them and said the EC should consider the matter before deciding on who to invite.

It would be like holding talks with a bunch of corrupt people if the commission sits with them, he said in an oblique reference to the rival faction.

Referring to Khaleda's decision to dismiss him and Bhuiyan from

SONO FILTER Time Magazine to honour Prof Hussam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President Gloria Arroyo is deeply saddened by this incident and extends her sympathies to the families of the casualties," her spokesman Ignacio Bunye told reporters.

Arroyo had ordered the police "to get to the bottom of things and to leave no stone unturned," Bunye added.

The United States and Australia both offered technical help in investigating the blast, and Australian experts were understood to be helping Filipino police on the scene.

Bomb squad teams sifted through the debris looking for clues, while extra police were drafted in to divert traffic and seal off the surrounding area -- one of the busiest shopping districts of Manila.

Hussam, associate professor of chemistry at George Mason University in Virginia, USA, and his younger brother Dr Abdul Munir jointly invented the Sono filter, a simple, life-saving way of purifying poisoned water after a decade of research.

The brothers hail from Kushtia.

Another brother of Hussam, Prof Abul Barakat of Dhaka University, has also contributed to the research on the socio-economic implications of arsenic-afflicted people and ways to make the Sono filter cheap for the last 10 years.

Hussam's device also won the inaugural Grainger Challenge Prize from the US National Academy of Engineering this year. Most of the \$1 million prize-money went to a Bangladeshi non-profit organisation that produces and distributes the filter.

"Arsenic poisoning was no abstract issue for Hussam. As a graduate student in the US, his work on electro-analytical chemistry led him to discover dangerous levels of arsenic in the groundwater in his home district of Kushtia in Bangladesh," an article in Time says on Hussam.

The Sono filter could save countless lives among the estimated 137 million people around the world whose water supply is contaminated with high levels of the colourless, odourless and tasteless metal, which accumulates in the body to cause serious, nerve damage, cancer and, too often, death, it adds.

The ship lost its balance and capsized," he told AFP.

Though only 60 names had been on the ship's manifest, Indonesian ferries frequently carry far more passengers than the number officially registered.

Bush set to widen

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responded to the calls of the international community."

It was not immediately clear exactly what kinds of sanctions Bush would announce, but an administration official said he would broaden the existing financial measures targeting "individuals and entities."

The move came as Myanmar's leaders said they were taking another step on the "road map" to democracy by drafting a new charter, and accused the United States of training the monks who led the protests.

The junta named 54 people to a committee tasked with writing a new constitution, following more than a decade of talks on the guidelines for the charter, the official New Light of Myanmar paper said.

The administration's moves came as US lawmakers weighed new sanctions that would pressure US energy giant Chevron to pull its money from Myanmar, amid charges from rights activists that the investments prop up the junta.

Under the strategy, similar to one used against US companies during the anti-apartheid campaign in South Africa, the legislation introduced this week would end tax write-offs enjoyed by Chevron on revenues earned from its natural gas project in Myanmar.

Chevron will also be barred from making any payments to the junta from its joint venture with French oil giant Total, Thailand's PTT Exploration and Production, and Myanmar's Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise operating the lucrative Yadana gas fields, congressional aides said.

The proposal was introduced by Tom Lantos, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

"It is not mandating Chevron to pull out of Burma, but the provisions are tough enough to make them rethink their operations in that country," a congressional aide told AFP, referring to Myanmar by its former name.

Chevron is one of biggest Western companies in Myanmar, holding a 28 percent minority share in the Yadana natural gas project following its acquisition of another US energy giant, Unocal, in 2005.

The United States has already imposed substantial trade, investment and diplomatic sanctions on Myanmar, but Chevron's operations predate an enhanced 2003 US trade embargo.

Other measures unveiled in the sanctions package were aimed at stopping the US import of gemstones from Myanmar through third countries, and tightening a freeze on the assets of the country's political and military leaders.

He said he did not make any such comments to reporters. The decision regarding the BNP would be taken at a full-fledged meeting of the EC after scrutinising the party constitution, he added.

The CEC said there is still enough time ahead of the scheduled date for dialogue with the BNP. The EC might meet at the end of this month or in the first week of next month.

"We can't invite both the groups. After examining what the BNP constitution has to say regarding the expulsions, we will invite one group," he said.

Replies to another query, Huda said the commission would send the invitation letter and working papers 15 days before the meeting date.

Chittagong and Dhaka had to stop at different stations.

A relief train from Akhaura Railway Junction reached the spot and opened the lines for trains around 5:30pm. Train communications were fully restored a about 6:00pm.

Referring to Khaleda's decision to dismiss him and Bhuiyan from

the Malibagh

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