

Mall blast kills 8 in Manila

AFP, Manila

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

Panicked shoppers ran out of the GloriaTia 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 Balendes 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, and 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 anonymity.

Hannan hails

FROM PAGE 1
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.

Replying 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

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.

31 killed in Indonesian ferry capsizes

AFP, Jakarta

At least 31 people were killed and dozens feared missing after a ferry sank off Indonesia's Sulawesi island in the latest transport accident to hit the archipelago nation, officials said yesterday.

Residents near the town of Bau Bau on southeast Sulawesi heard survivors screaming for help after the Acta 03 capsized at about 9:00 pm on Thursday, Elshinta radio reported.

The 22-metre (7-yard) long boat sank several miles (kilometres) from shore when passengers clambered to the roof seeking a stronger cell signal to make mobile phone calls, transport ministry official Djoni Alghamar said.

"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.

SONO FILTER Time Magazine to honour Prof Hussam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Time Magazine has selected expatriate Bangladeshi scientist Prof Abdul Hussam for its Global Heroes of the Environment 2007 award for his invention of Sono filter, a low-cost technology to free water of arsenic.

The magazine yesterday formally announced the name of Hussam as one of the "global heroes" in scientists and innovators category. The award will be conferred upon him on October 25 in London, said a press release of the Human Development Research Centre in Dhaka.

Hussam, associate professor of chemistry at George Mason University in Virginia, USA, and his younger brother Dr Abul Munir jointly invented the Sono filter, the 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 sores, nerve damage, cancer and, too often, death, it adds.

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 per cent 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.

Train

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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.

NBR to file case

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Tk 87.38 lakh in constructing three buildings in Chandpur and Tk 5.10 lakh in procuring farmland, which he did not mention in his income tax return.

ABUL HASNAT ABDULLAH
Former whip and Awami League leader Abul Hasnat Abdullah allegedly concealed \$39,000 equivalent to Tk 27.3 lakh, which he deposited to his personal locker, Tk 27.71 lakh bank deposit, gold ornament weighing 40 tola, Tk 23.55 lakh, which he invested in constructing a five-storey building, and Tk 5.5 lakh of furniture and agricultural revenue in his income tax return and wealth statement in FY06.

He also allegedly hid investment of Tk 6.19 lakh to procure a private car, procure land worth Tk 6.61 lakh in FY03.

The NBR assessment found that the political leader provided wrong information in his income tax returns and wealth statements from FY03 to FY06.

MUNSHI ANWARUL ISLAM
The NBR found that former chief conservator of forest Munshi Anwarul Islam concealed Tk 91 lakh bank deposit during 11 tax years from 1996-97 to 2006-07.

He also hid Tk 19,500 investment as he procured a private firearm and Tk 1.5 lakh he gained from his daily newspaper "Pathjatar".

Sources said along with the seven, the NBR has so far decided to file cases against 46 people and 31 cases have already been filed.

Of the 31 cases, the court delivered verdict in 21 cases and seven are under process, while the High Court stayed three others.

He also concealed in his wealth statement the income of Tk 15 lakh and farmlands of Tk 14 lakh in FY 2005-06.

He also did not submit any income tax returns from FY03 to FY 07 despite being a member of parliament, the board says.

HABIBUR RAHMAN MOLLAH
Former AL MP Habibur Rahman Mollah concealed income of Tk 1.4 crore which he invested in constructing a four-storey building, Tk 87 lakh house rent, Tk 65.81 lakh bank deposit and a private car worth Tk 97 lakh during his 13 tax years from FY 97 to FY 07, according to NBR.

He also provided wrong information in his income tax returns during the period, the NBR identified.

ARIFUL HAQUE CHOWDHURY
According to an NBR assessment, BNP Sylhet unit leader Ariful

Bhutto's campaign bus decked out with portraits of the ex-prime minister and her father, on which she had been driven through the crowds for more than eight hours.

Interior ministry spokesman Javed Cheema said a grenade was thrown into the crowd seconds before the suicide attacker struck.

"The bomber used things like pellets and nails, which always have a splintering effect," Cheema added.

He said the blast "appears to be the handiwork of militants who have been creating acts of terrorism in the country."

Deputy information minister Tariq Azeem said there had been a prior threat by Baitullah Mehsud, a pro-Taliban warlord linked to a string of attacks since July, to launch suicide attacks against Bhutto.

Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari however blamed the Intelligence Bureau, the country's premier civilian spy agency.

Bhutto had returned from self-imposed exile after Musharraf dropped corruption charges against her in the hope her popularity could shore up his grip on power.

She had mostly worked out a power-sharing deal with him, but his re-election as president earlier this month is now being challenged in the courts.

The United States, which sees Pakistan as a key ally in its "war on terror," led the global outcry following the deadly blasts.

Australia said the attack bore the hallmarks of Al-Qaeda, while UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon denounced the bombing.

Kumari Puja

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11:40am.

Traditionally, a girl aged between six and 12, who symbolises the virgin form of the goddess, is worshipped in front of the idol of Durga.

Kumari Puja was also celebrated at different mandaps in Narayanganj, Barisal, Sylhet, Habiganj, Dinajpur and other parts of the country, especially at all Ramakrishna Mission temples.

Sandhi Puja was celebrated yesterday evening across the country. Thousands of people from all walks of life visited the puja mandaps in the city. Large mandaps including those at the Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University, Ramakrishna Mission, Ramna Kali Mandir, Siddheswari Kali Mandir, Kalabagan, Tantibazar, Shankharibazar, Banglabazar, Mohakhali and Farm Gate, were crowded with visitors.

The biggest celebration of Durga Puja in the country has been organised by the Mallaghat

Haque Chowdhury concealed income of Tk 39.36 lakh bank deposit, \$3,698, investment in procuring a flat worth Tk 22.46 lakh in his income tax return and wealth statement in FY06.

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EU team

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factories in Khulna and Bagerhat districts.

On October 22, they will leave Khulna after visiting Brac shrimp hatchery in Bagerhat, said a BFFEA source.

The EU slapped a ban on shrimp export from Bangladesh in 1997 as processed frozen shrimp carried bacterial germs.

Bombs recovered

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The two bombs were recovered from Rana's possession. Police were interrogating them yesterday.

Flight Lt Sheikh Mortuja Galib of Rab said acting on a tip-off they arrested Rana at his home around 9:00am and recovered the two bombs. He claimed Rana was a notorious criminal of the region.

Criminals kill 2 including outlaw in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Armed criminals killed two people including an activist of an outlawed party in Pabna yesterday and Thursday night.

The dead were identified as Rezaul Karim, 32, of Haripur under Ataikula upazila and Salim Reza, 38, of Paktiabari under Pabna Sadar upazila.

Police said a gang of outlaws hacked Rezaul to death at Ratanpur around 3:00am yesterday. Ataikula police recovered the body and sent it to Pabna General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Rezaul allegedly belonged to Pabna Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) and was a wanted man in connection with several cases.

Police said outlawed party rivals might have killed him.

A gang of criminals beat and hacked Salim Reza to death in front of his home in Paktiabari of the Sadar upazila around 8:00pm Thursday.

Police sent his body to Pabna General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Price hike

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was selling at Tk 55 and Indian variety was selling at Tk 48 a kg.

Price of rice also increased by Tk 1 to 2 per kilogramme.

Potato was selling between Tk 23 and 25 a kilogramme in retail markets of the capital. However, before the Eid potatoes were selling at Tk 22 a kg.

Wholesalers in the city said the price hike in the wholesale markets is yet to impact the retail markets completely. They said retailers who bought rice ahead of Eid and have not run out of stock are selling rice at comparatively lower prices. Since the shortfall in supply came after Eid, retailers who bought rice after Eid are selling it at higher prices.

Different categories of rice including IRRI and Indian variety Swarna are being sold between Tk 24 and 25, which were selling at Tk 22-23 a kg before the Eid.

Varieties of finer rice like Najirshail and Minikat also rose by Tk 2 per kilogramme. Najirshail (regular quality) is selling at Tk 32 while it was only Tk 30 before the Eid.

A retailer in Karwan Bazar said with the price hike of rice after Eid, sale of not-so-fine quality of rice rose considerably.

Ayub Ali, a retailer of Karwan Bazar, said the price hike of rice would affect the city dwellers less. The city dwellers spend less than 15 per cent of their monthly expenditure on rice, he argued. But poor villagers spend most of their income buying food-grains, mostly rice, and that is why they would suffer more, he added.

From Shanir Akhra in the city Nurunnahar, 35, a beggar having four mouths to feed, came to Karwan Bazar yesterday afternoon to buy rice. When retailers told her that rice is now selling at Tk 24 a kg she asked for Najirshail, which is Tk 32 a kg.

When The Daily Star correspondents asked her why she is buying the higher quality rice, she said her family can have the starch of boiled rice and it requires less curries to eat. She said as the price of low quality rice has risen it was not cost effective for her anymore.

Businessmen of Badamtoli, the largest wholesale rice market in Dhaka, claimed the prices of all varieties of rice soared at almost all parts of the country.

In Badamtoli, IRRI was being sold at Tk 20.90 yesterday while it was only 20.16 before Eid. Pajjam, another variety of rice, was selling at Tk 23.84, which was being sold at 23.31 before Eid.

Najirshail was being sold at Tk 30, which was only Tk 26.79 before Eid. Different qualities of Minikat was selling between Tk 28.93 and 30.31 yesterday, which were between Tk 28 and 29.37 before Eid.

Since the import of Indian rice declined recently, a gap was created between the supply and demand, the reason for price of rice to soar, traders argued.

In Karwan Bazar wholesale market, Indian onions were selling between Tk 50 and 52 while the local variety was selling between Tk 54 and 55 a kg yesterday evening.

Onion importers in the city's Shyambazar said due to Eid and Durga Puja holidays, onion import from India plummeted.

In Karwan Bazar wholesale market, potatoes were being sold at Tk 22 a kg, the price was Tk 19 before Eid.

Traders in Karwan Bazar said potatoes are stored at cold storages across the country. But due to shortage of labour during Eid and Durga Puja, its supply suffered.

Besides, price of eggs also soared after Eid. In different retail markets price of per half (four eggs) eggs shot up by at least Tk 2 yesterday. Price of 100 eggs was Tk 370 yesterday. It was only Tk 330 during Ramadan.

More reforms soon

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occupation forces for liberation. It will be very sad if anyone compares the Bangladesh army with the Pakistani one," Moeen said faced with a volley of questions.

He said he wonders why the incumbent government is called an army-backed government. "We [the army] are not governing the country. Like others, we have been only helping the government as part of the government," observed the army chief.

He said the present government is non-partisan and neutral and has been running the country with all-out support and help from the entire nation.

Moeen added that no one could say that the army has been interfering in the running of the country. He said, "Some people sought to insist that we should impose martial law though I've repeatedly moved to make the army's position clear."

"We are not part of the power. We are just doing our duties by helping the government face natural disasters and eliminate corruption," he added.

Moeen said they had always wanted a free and fair election to strengthen democracy, but it is said that has not happened.

He said the government is working towards a free, fair and credible election, and election would be held within the next 14 months. But time must be given for a free and fair election to take place in the country.

He said that the government has already carried out a lot of reforms and more would be done in the coming months. The government is planning to hold the local government elections before the national election.

"The army has been playing a significant role supplementing the government efforts towards free and fair polls," he noted adding that the Election Commission has been preparing the voter list with the help of the army.

Asked when the state of emergency would be lifted, he said the government could say about it.

On allegations of human rights violation in Bangladesh, the army boss said the Bangladesh government is very conscious in this regard.

"Human rights situation has marked a significant improvement in recent times. The government is tough on those involved in human rights violations," Moeen said.

He said there is a need to review the constitution to make it time worthy as it has not been reviewed in the last 34 years. Amendments to the constitution in the past have been made for mere personal interests.

Corruption must be rooted out

Dual citizenship

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in favour of sending the criminals back," he added.

The CID has also sent to Indian authorities a list containing names and photographs of 23 top listed criminals for whose arrest the government had announced bounty on December 27, 2001.

Arrestee criminal Tanvirul Islam Joy, who moved to an Indian court, claimed that he is being wrongly identified by law enforcers and that he is an Indian national, CID sources in Dhaka said.

Indian police are trying to prove before the court that the person is a dreaded fugitive criminal, and he was involved in criminal activities in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh CID is also sending to Indian police newspaper reports and photographs of some top criminals regarding their involvement in various crimes.

Different newspapers reported that Joy and another listed criminal Harris Ahmed alias Harris will be brought back this month in the first phase of bringing back eight such criminals arrested in India recently.

Ten listed criminals about whom the CID sent information and documents are Joy, Piyal, Subrata Bain, Molla Masud, Shadat Hossain, Khorsheed, Shahid, Jissan, Monir and Emon.

The CID also has information that besides the listed ones, around 600/700 criminals or offenders are staying in India now.

It is extracting information about criminals staying in India by interrogating listed criminal Habibur Rahman Taj and two of his accomplices -- Sohel alias Ibrahim and Biplob Rahman alias Lamu Selim. They were sent back from India on October 7.

During quizzing, they gave important information regarding where these criminals preferred to hide in India, their way of living and contact among them. A CID team led by Aref has quizzed these criminals for a week and is likely to seek further remand for them.

FUGITIVE CRIMINALS IN FOREIGN DEN
Earlier in May this year, Calcutta police arrested Joy from a luxurious apartment in Rajarhat and seized two passports -- one Bangladeshi

to save democracy and sincerity is a must to succeed in this regard, he said.

The country under the previous governments had topped the TIB corruption list for five times in a row. But in the last seven months, the level of corruption has come down drastically due to the government's anti-corruption efforts, added the general.

He observed that the prime goal of the government is to rid the country of corruption and restore democracy.

He said it is hard to believe that there is no competent leader among the 15 crore people in the country. "Of course there are honest and competent people, and all we need is to find them out. We must get rid of the corrupt people for a bright future."

He said the remarks he made in London were wrongly quoted by the press. He said there he had only stated that he has no "intention" to become the president.

"My aim is to dedicate myself to ensuring well-being of the orphan and underprivileged children on respectful retirement from the army," he said.

Queried if he would change his decision if the people want, he said, "It's all speculation. None gave me such proposals."

Gen Moeen sought cooperation from the expatriate journalists in tracing the money that had been siphoned out of the country.

Bangladesh Permanent Representative to the UN Ismat Jahan, Consul General Shamsul Islam, Defence Adviser to the Bangladesh embassy Brig Gen Nuruzzaman and Defence Adviser to the UN Brig Gen Ilyas Iftikhar Rasul were present at the press conference.

UN praises

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neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina. He also praised the role of Bangladeshi peacekeepers in Kosovo