

Iraqis bury dozens of bombing victims

AP, Baghdad

Weeping relatives loaded simple wood coffins atop minivans yesterday in Baghdad as the city buried dozens of victims of the deadliest bombings since the US flooded the capital with extra troops last spring.

Iraqi officials raised the death toll of Friday's attacks to at least 99 -- including 62 people killed at the central al-Ghazl market and 37 others killed about 20 minutes later across town, at the New Baghdad area pigeon market. The Iraqi police, hospital and Interior Ministry officials all spoke on customary condition of anonymity.

At least 88 people were wounded in al-Ghazl, and 56 others in the second blast, they said.

Two mentally disabled women strapped with remote-control explosives and possibly used as unwitting suicide bombers brought carnage to the two pet bazaars, in attacks Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said sought to "turn Baghdad back to the pre-September 11."

The American troop buildup brought some 30,000 reinforcements to the Iraqi capital and its surrounding belts, helping reduce violence dramatically. Friday's pet market bombings were the city's largest attacks since the buildup began.

"These two suicide vest attacks represent the worst of human nature," said Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Hammond, the top US commander in Baghdad. He said American forces would continue their targeted operations that have succeeded in decreasing attacks.

"We will not give back any terrain here in Baghdad," he told reporters at a U.S. patrol base south of the capital.

Onlookers gathered at the New Baghdad pigeon market Saturday, peering through twisted metal into the charred remains of stalls and shops. Vendors sifted through ruined wares. One man held up a tattered piece of clothing, ripped apart by Friday's blast or in the frenzied panic that followed.

"Every place in Baghdad is exposed to terrorist attacks," said survivor Badir Sami, 42. "I demand tighter security measures at popular markets like this, where many people gather especially on Fridays."

Another pigeon dealer, Ali Mansour, said he was packing up his shop after surviving three attacks in the al-Ghazl market.

"This is the third time I have escaped death, by a miracle," the 26-year-old said. "So I have decided to stop working here. From now on I will stay at my second shop in Habibiyyah," Mansour said. Habibiyyah is another predominantly Shiite area, near Sadr City.

Meanwhile, Iraqi forces raided two villages north of the capital on Saturday, killing seven suspected militants and arresting four others, police said. The U.S. military also said its forces killed one suspected militant and detained 13 in two days of raids across northern and central Iraq.

Near Samarra, Iraqi police killed four men and captured a senior aide to an al-Qaida in Iraq leader, police said.

And near Tal Afar, Iraqi commandos killed three wanted men and arrested three others, said Brig. Gen. Ibrahim al-Jibouri, commander of Tal Afar police. Among those captured was a top al-Qaida in Iraq figure, accused of organizing militant operations in the western area of Mosul, al-Jibouri said.

Mosul Iraq's third-largest city has become the next likely showdown with Sunni insurgents, who have shifted to northern Iraq to escape U.S.-led offensives in and around Baghdad and in Diyala province, northeast of the capital. Al-Qaida in Iraq is believed to have a strong presence in Mosul.

Iraqi police and military units have been dispatched to the Mosul area, and al-Maliki has suggested they are gathering for a "decisive" attack on militants. The Iraqi prime minister arrived in Mosul on Saturday to meet with field commanders, his adviser Yassin Majeed said.

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U.S. commanders in northern Iraq have said the battle to oust al-Qaida in Iraq from its last urban stronghold will not be a swift strike as al-Maliki suggested, but rather a grinding campaign that will require more firepower from both the Pentagon and Iraqi allies.

Committee formed

FROM PAGE 16 demanding abolition of the quota system in which recruitment to 55 percent posts is not based on merit.

They will form a human chain in front of Aparajeyo Bangla on the campus and submit memorandums to the president, chief adviser, army chief, PSC chairman and establishment secretary today to press home their demand.

Following the committee report, the PSC will discuss it with experts, top officials of the caretaker government, students and journalists, PSC sources said.

The committee will get World Bank assistance in its operation.

Meanwhile, leaders of Fair BCS Movement at a press conference yesterday at DU Journalists Association office urged the government to abolish quota system immediately.

Bangladesh Chhatra Union demanded steps for curtailing or reforming the existing non-merit quota.

But Bangladesh Chhatra League demanded retaining the present quota system.

Forty-five percent of public servants are selected on the basis of merit in the existing system. And the others -- both for cadre and non-cadre jobs -- include 30 percent from the quota for freedom fighters or their offspring, 10 percent from women's quota, 10 percent from that for residents of certain districts and five percent from the quota for indigenous people.

Plaintiff

FROM PAGE 1 paying instalments as per the agreement.

Investigation officer of the case Sub-inspector Ezaz Shafi told The Daily Star they have started gathering evidence and would soon start operation to arrest Tajul.

The complainant mentioned in the case that Tajul took a loan of over Tk 1.4 crore on March 14 in 2003 from BFIC and purchased two vehicles -- a BMW at Tk 64 lakh and a Honda Civic at Tk 28.5 lakh.

The case statement says BFIC was the legal owner of the vehicles as both the vehicles were registered in his name. Tajul was supposed to pay the loan with interest in instalments in 36 months. But he paid the instalment of February 2007 in June and since then he did not pay any instalment.

The complainant also mentioned that Tajul did not pay heed to pay instalments though his company informed him. Rather, he sold out one of the two vehicles in an bid to embezzle it.

He told The Daily Star though Tajul was supposed to pay back Tk 1.35 crore, he has so far paid only Tk 41 lakh.

Police said one of the two vehicles was recovered from Buet quarters on the campus on January 11 and a general diary was lodged in this connection.

Chairman of Westmont Power Company, Tajul has become a known figure after he filed the extortion case against Hasina with Tejjano Police Station on April 9 last year.

Biman flight delay

FROM PAGE 16 The other flight, Jeddah-bound BG 037, supposed to depart at 9:00pm on Friday with 107 passengers, is still in limbo as it was rescheduled two times due to non-availability of aircraft.

Till filing of this report at 4:30pm yesterday, the passengers of BG 037 had to endure agonising shuttling back and forth between their hotels and the airport as the flight was first rescheduled for 8:45am and later for 1:00pm yesterday.

The flight might depart Chittagong some time around midnight yesterday, said sources at the airport.

Bazur Kabir Solaimani, assistant station manager of Biman, told reporters, "We have been facing recurring flight disruptions due to problematic old aircraft and aircraft shortage."

Flight schedule of the national flag carrier from Chittagong to different cities, especially to the cities in the Middle East, has been riddled with frequent disruptions in recent times.

Earlier on January 29, flight disruptions of Biman caused 250 Abu Dhabi-bound passengers to be stranded in Chittagong for nearly two days. Prior to that, over 500 Dubai and Jeddah bound passengers were stuck for 21 hours at the airport for the same reason.

21 EU MPs

FROM PAGE 1 The signatories to the statement include Michael Gahler (Germany), member of the Subcommittee on Human Rights and vice-chairman of the committee on Foreign Affairs, Johan Van Parke (Belgium), Dr Charles Pannock (UK), Eija-Riika Konhola (Finland), Baroness Sarah Lubford (UK), Sajjad M Karim (UK), Ignasi Guardans Cambó (Spain), Dan Mulder (Netherlands), Toina Manders (Netherlands), Irena Belochorska (Slovakia), Thierry Cornillet (France), Luisa Morgantini (Italy) and Maroo Cappato (Italy).

They said the Bangladesh caretaker government has declared to have taken several measures to fight corruption, restore law and order and reform institutions.

However, they noted recent reports on "systematic oppression and implication of party leaders under the Emergency Rules have caused serious concern."

"We have learnt that the human rights situation in Bangladesh is deteriorating day by day. We believe the government can make progress through negotiations and dialogue with all the political actors," they observed.

They said, "Furthermore, we are faced with alarming reports on the physical condition of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who has been in jail for several months, even though she is advised by specialists to get medical treatment aboard. We, therefore, emphasise the need for additional measures to address shortcomings in the implementation of justice."

Election officer

FROM PAGE 1 Kutub Uddin, 48, and M Mahubb, 30.

Acting on a tip off, members of Rab-5 raided Banshabaria area and arrested them while they were selling cocaine at about 10:00pm.

They seized the cocaine worth around Tk 80 lakh from them, said Rab in a press release.

Sources said the arrestees provided the law enforcers with important information about drug smugglers in the area.

Meanwhile, Rab members arrested Saiful Islam, 52, with 9500 kgs of cannabis at Mohipur of Rangpur and Enamul Haque, 32, with 1750s kg of cannabis at Kalupara in Naogaon yesterday.

EC trails behind

FROM PAGE 1

The EC has also failed to deliver on its promises on some issues because of shifting its stances. At the end of last year it said on several occasions that it would ask the government in January to lift the state of emergency at divisional headquarters for holding the due polls to five city corporations.

But the commission is yet to make any such move. It now wants to hold the polls in April-May.

The commission has not also decided yet when it will ask the government to lift the state of emergency. It now says it will ask the government either to lift or relax the state of emergency one and a half months before holding the city corporations polls.

The present EC, which was reconstituted on last February 4 under the leadership of Shamsul Huda, initiated massive tasks for electoral reforms.

On April 5 last year, the EC announced that no polls would be held in the next 18 months since it is the minimum required timeframe for preparing the voter list with photographs and completion of other preparations.

On July 16, it said it would begin holding due polls to the local government bodies from January this year, but elections to a large number of local government bodies have remained due.

It seemed that the EC did not get required assistance on some issues from the caretaker government in the last one year although the government is constitutionally bound to extend all-out support to the EC for its functioning.

CEC Huda met the then law adviser on April 4 and asked the government to lift the restrictions on indoor politics so that the EC can hold talks on the proposed electoral reforms with the political parties.

At a press conference on April 5, Huda disclosed a set of proposals for electoral reforms with the hope that the government would soon create an atmosphere for the talks. The government, however, did not respond to the call.

As a result, the EC could not complete the tasks for electoral law reforms within August last year as per its promises.

The government finally relaxed the restrictions on indoor politics only in the capital from September 10. But, the commission could not complete the talks with parties within November because of complexities that arose over inviting the BNP to the talks.

The issue ultimately drove the reconstituted EC into controversy for the first time and its neutrality was questioned.

As of yesterday, it was not clear when the EC will be able to hold talks with the BNP and take next steps on the electoral reforms.

The CEC himself is now saying it would be done by March.

Before announcing the roadmap, the EC had held talks only with civil society personalities and the media.

Meanwhile, the political parties cannot also begin their internal reforms as they are waiting for the completion of the electoral law reforms, which would guide the parties in amending their constitutions to register with the EC by

June.

However, the EC successfully began the field level task for preparing the voter list with photographs from August last year. A total 3.07 crore voters have been registered in the electoral rolls as of January 29.

According to the EC roadmap, the remaining task of registering around six crore voters will have to be completed by June this year.

The EC also did not begin the tasks for printing, posting and correcting the draft voter list which were supposed to have begun in last October, two months after the field level tasks had begun.

According to the roadmap, the printing and distribution of the final voter list will have to be done in between August and October this year so that the elections could be held by the end of this year.

Another significant component of the electoral roadmap is demarcation of the electoral constituencies to bring balance among parliamentary seats on the basis of number of voters. The EC announced its plan last month for delimiting the parliamentary seats and the tasks are supposed to be done by this June.

The most significant components of the roadmap are holding polls to different local government bodies and announcing the schedule for the parliamentary elections.

The EC had announced that it would start holding the local government elections from January in areas where the voter listing has been done.

It had announced the polls to Rajshahi City Corporation to be held in January. The tasks for preparing the voter list started here last August. But the EC later shifted its stance, saying it wanted to hold the due polls to five city corporations in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet in April-May.

Polls to around 50 municipalities have also been due by this time.

Moreover, polls to over 4,000 union parishads have now become due as their tenures started expiring in this January. All the tenures will expire by March and as per the laws, elections to these local government bodies have to be held within 180 days before their tenures expire.

But, the EC is now saying it will not think about the "massive" task of holding the due polls to union parishads as it may hamper its main responsibility of holding the parliamentary polls.

As per the roadmap, the long due polls to upazila parishads are supposed to be held in between November and December this year.

Legal and institutional reforms were supposed to have been completed last year while major issues like separation of the EC Secretariat and formulating rules for recruiting its staffs are yet to be completed.

In a significant move, the caretaker government has recently approved a proposal to return to the EC the power of announcing the schedule of upazila parishad polls.

The government has also approved proposals to free the EC Secretariat from the control of the Prime Minister's Office, now the office of the chief adviser, in a bid to strengthen the EC.

25,000 chickens

FROM PAGE 16 Local Veterinary Hospital sources said two officials of the hospital examined the samples

of some dead chickens of the poultry farm belonging to M Abu Hossain of Thanapara area on Friday night and detected avian influenza.

Later, the livestock officials with the help of the law enforcers conducted a drive on 208 homesteads of the area in the early hours yesterday.

During the drive, some 762 chickens, 524 pigeons and 316 ducks were culled then buried.

Meanwhile, Jhenidah district administration yesterday decided to cull some 7,000 chickens to the affected people. Our party leaders and workers both at home and abroad have come forward in aid of the Sidr victims," Zillur said.

AL Relief Committee Chairman Abdur Razzak presented various statistics on cash and other relief materials.

Razzak informed the journalists that a total of Tk 1,78,61,170 was deposited in the relief fund until January 31 and the whole amount has been distributed as aid among the Sidr victims of 10 districts. A big amount was also spent on agricultural rehabilitation programmes in the cyclone-hit areas, Razzak added.

He said medicines were also provided for thousands of people under the supervision of the relief committee.

Razzak said AL stood by the people during any kind of disaster and will continue its efforts to establish peace in society and ensure welfare of the people in the future too.

AL presidium members Motia Chowdhury, Suranjit Sengupta, Tofail Ahmed, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and Acting General Secretary Syed Ashraf Hossain were present at the press conference.

Govt unveils plans

FROM PAGE 1 would continue the works taken by the present government, he hoped that the future government would continue the good works initiated by this government.

Giving details of the meeting, the chief adviser informed that a committee, headed by Education and Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman, has been formed for taking quick and coordinated steps for multidimensional solutions to Monga problem. "Involving all concerned, this committee will formulate an effective strategy," he added.

He said his secretary has been entrusted with the responsibility to create skilled manpower by coordinating training programmes initiated by different ministries.

Asked when a full-fledged university would be set up in Rangpur, the chief adviser said it's a time-consuming matter but the directive has been given to undertake a project in this regard.

He said proposals have been received from Bangladeshi expatriates to operate services in Syedpur, Ishwardi and Takurgaon airports. "Subject to implementation of the proposal, these airports will be activated," he said.

Under the development programme, the chief adviser said Begum Rokeya Memorial Centre has been brought under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

Huji carried out

FROM PAGE 1 meeting, had escaped unhurt.

The CID official said Mufti Hannan admitted that he supplied grenades to his followers for carrying out the attack on the Sylhet city mayor.

On completion of their three-day remand, Mufti Hannan and Ovi were produced before the court that sent them to jail yesterday.

Bombs hurled

FROM PAGE 16 The former Duta president told Daily Star that one bomb exploded with a loud bang on his porch at around 7:25 pm. The unexploded bomb was discovered inside his compound, near the entrance to his house.

Prof Arefin said that he has no idea who could have carried out the malicious attack.

Dhaka University teachers have condemned the incident. Prof Muhammad Akhtaruzzaman, former general secretary of Duta, said a "certain" quarter might have carried out the attack.

"The incident comes at a time when the DU campus situation appears to have become stable after months of tension. Those who carried out the attack might have wanted to destabilise the situation again," he said.

He requested the government to look into the matter immediately.

Meanwhile teachers and students of the DU department of mass communications will bring out a silent procession on the campus to protest the attack on Dr Arefin's house at 11 in the morning today.

Prof Arefin has been the target of frequent violence and threats in the past. He received repeated death threats from unidentified men after the BNP-Jamaat alliance assumed power while Arefin was president of Duta. He served as Duta president for three consecutive terms.

On September 9 of 2004, cadres of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JGD) allegedly ransacked his office at the DU. A probe was ordered into the incident at the time, but the committee never submitted a report on their findings.

Gas supply

FROM PAGE 1 Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company and Bakhrabad Gas Company are jointly conducting the repair work on the gas transmission line.

Titas gas officials said Dhaka city gets gas supply from four transmission sources: Demra, Joydevpur, Ashulia and Elenga.

Titas Managing Director M Abullah told the UNB that they are trying to arrange alternative system to keep the supply normal in the city.

"Since this is a major repair work, so we have already alerted people about the non-supply of gas for 48 hours," he said.

Prime suspect's

FROM PAGE 1 Rab at the time detained Shiplu's father Abul Hossain, a handicraft businessman, and searched his shop at DCC Market in Gulshan, but failed to arrest the son. Hossain visited India dozens of times.

The Indian request to arrest and send Singh back to India came as Bangladesh is pushing for the handover of three top criminals -- Tanveerul Islam Joy, Sanjidul Islam Emon and Harisuddin Harres alias Hasan, now in the custody of West Bengal police.

CID official Aref said they will put Shiplu on thorough interrogation during the remand to know about the location of Ibin Singh and the stolen medal.

Carjackers thrive

FROM PAGE 16

CNG run auto-rickshaws, and motorcycles were either hijacked or stolen, police said.

During the same period a DB team recovered 77 stolen vehicles including motorcycles while police recovered another 50.

TOP BOSSES SKIM THE CREAM Expensive cars like Toyota Allion, Toyota Premio F, Corolla G, and Corolla X are the favourite targets of the carjackers. They wander on city roads mainly in taxi cabs in search of targets and as opportunity comes they hijack the cars from the drivers, sometimes at gunpoint. The hijackers do not even hesitate to kill the drivers if they pose any threat.

For hijacking an expensive car, a team of street level carjacking unit comprised of five to six members gets only Tk 75,000 to Tk 1,00,000 from their immediate boss, meaning Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000 for each of the team members, while the supervisor gets Tk 50,000 to Tk 1,00,000 a car.

"We hand over the hijacked cars to top leaders of the syndicate as quickly as possible in fear of police actions to follow," Shamim, who runs a street level gang of carjackers, told The Daily Star. Police detectives arrested him a few days ago.

Minutes after snatching a car or microbus, the carjackers call their supervisor over mobile phones and the boss then start contacting his bosses, who finally take the stolen vehicle into his custody.

After preparing documents for a stolen car, the gang leaders sell a Premio F for Tk 12 lakh to Tk 15 lakh, while a stolen Corolla G, Corolla X, or an Allion is sold for Tk 10 lakh to Tk 12 lakh, said the DB officials. The carjackers approach potential buyers offering prices much lesser than market prices saying they are selling the car due to their urgent need for money.

When the buyers cross check the documents with BRTA they usually find them to be genuine and they buy the cars, the DB officials added.

"Once the papers are ready with a new registration number for a stolen car, it is almost impossible to detect that the car is a hijacked one," said a top DB official.

He said only in cases when they get specific information, they may detect such a stolen car.

HOW THE PAPERS ARE MADE A few days into hijacking or stealing a car or a microbus, the carjackers first take it to a specific auto workshop where mechanics erase one or two digits of the chassis and engine numbers, and engrave different digits in place of the original ones.

Investigations revealed that only two to three persons in the city have the expertise to do the job flawlessly. It is done so perfectly that BRTA inspectors or traffic sergeants also can hardly detect the forgery.

Then other members of the gang, who maintain an unholy nexus with a section of corrupt BRTA employees, collect photocopies of original documents of the stolen vehicle from the authority.

The thieves then forge letters of credit, customs invoices, bills of entry, customs clearance certificates and importers' documents relating to the stolen vehicle. They also collect showroom documents from a section of car showrooms, with whom also they maintain good relations.

They then forge all necessary signatures and seals of officials concerned on the papers and apply for registration to BRTA.

According to the rules, BRTA officials send the submitted forged

documents to the customs, National Board of Revenue and to other authorities concerned for counter checking, but the hands of the carjackers reach so far that before those documents could even reach the authorities for counter checking they are hijacked on the way by the carjackers and brought back to BRTA, completely furnished with proper clearances from those authorities.

Police said one of the most infamous carjacking gang leaders, Dada Firoz, is a master of forging documents. Firoz is dubbed 'dada' by his fellow gang members with reverence for his expertise. Police officials said although he has a master's degree, he prefers the illegal profession.

BRTA OFFICIALS, EMPLOYEES UNDER SURVEILLANCE Recently, police detectives found at least 14 officials and employees of BRTA who are involved in carjacking syndicates. They work in the Mirpur office and in Ikuria, Keraniganj office of the agency.

The detectives came to know about the involvement of the BRTA staff after they had arrested ring-leaders of several carjacking gangs last year and had started a thorough investigation of the gangs' activities.

DB officials said some BRTA officials and employees have long been involved in illegal activities in exchange for large sums of money. Their activities however are now under surveillance.

The officials also said soon a drive will be launched to arrest the corrupt staff of BRTA after cases are filed against them.

The detectives said the number of carjacking incidents will drop significantly if dishonest BRTA officials and employees are brought to book.

Police investigations also revealed that after having new registrations, some stolen cars are even sold at some legitimate car showrooms.

Saifur falls sick

FROM PAGE 1 On Friday, acting office secretary Rizvi Ahmed met Saifur Rahman to discuss how to go about reconciliation.

Delwar sent Rizvi to Saifur in response to the former finance minister's proposal for discussion on how to settle the disputes.

Meanwhile, leaders loyal to the former prime minister yesterday met to discuss the latest developments. They talked about Khaleda Zia's endorsing that the committee led by Delwar is indeed hers.

The detained BNP chief communicated the message through her lawyer Mahbub Uddin Khokon Friday.

According to the lawyer, she has called on everyone to work for the unity and said the party must stay united for the sake of the country, its independence and sovereignty.

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Bus bombing

FROM PAGE 16 treated at Dambulla hospital while 26 had been transferred to two better-equipped facilities in the region, the spokesman said. No foreigners were among the casualties.

The privately owned bus was taking Buddhist pilgrims from the central town of Kandy to north central Anuradhapura town. Police cordoned off the blast site and an investigation was underway, a police officer said by telephone.

Initial reports suggested the blast originated inside the bus when it was parked at the station -- a key transit point for people travelling in the region, he said.

Dambulla is a historic town known for a Buddhist rock temple as well as an upmarket tourist resort with boutique hotels.

Tamil Tiger rebels set off a powerful suicide truck bomb in the same area in October 2006, killing at least 116 navy sailors heading home on leave.

Police increased already tight security in the capital Saturday and carried out an intensive search along the main road to the island's international airport and found two "suicide jackets," which are usually worn by LTTE bombers.

A government minister was killed on the same highway last month when rebels set off a roadside bomb.