

Death toll rises to 68 in Baghdad bombings

AP, Baghdad

Funerals were held Friday for many of the victims of a twin bombing in a crowded Baghdad shopping district that killed at least 68 people and wounded 120 - a stark reminder that Iraq's violence may have slackened but has not fully abated.

The funerals were held in the primarily Shiite, middle-class Baghdad neighborhood of Karradah, the area where the back-to-back bombings took place.

There were no immediate claims of responsibility for the attack Thursday, but the method is designed to maximize death. It has since 2006 been the hallmark al-Qaida in Iraq, which is responsible for killing thousands of people with such attacks.

Like in previous such attacks, the tactic seeks to draw in the people with the first blast - especially security, medical workers and other first responders - before a second bomb detonates.

Iraqis were enjoying a pleasant spring evening when a roadside bomb hidden under a vendor stall detonated in Karradah. Five minutes later, a suicide bomber wearing an explosives belt detonated, Mohammed al-Rubaie, the head of the Karradah municipality, told the state-run Al-Iraqiya TV.

Interior Ministry officials said Friday 68 people were killed and 120 injured after several people died from their injuries overnight. An Associated Press count from

officials at five hospitals shows at least 67 dead and 119 injured. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to media.

Many of the victims were teens or young adults, and four were women, police and officials at three hospitals said.

Hassan Abdullah, who owns a clothing shop in the area, said he was walking to the site of the first blast to see what happened when the second bomb went off.

"I saw a leg and a hand falling near me as I was walking. The whole place was a mess. Wounded people were crying for help, and people started to run away," said Abdullah, 25. "The aim of such attacks is the random killing of as many people as possible in order to terrorize Iraqi people."

A police officer said the blasts also damaged seven shops and four parked cars. Like the rest of those who provided information, he spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to release information.

Violence has dropped substantially in Baghdad over the last half-year with the boost in U.S. troops, a cease-fire by a powerful Shiite militia, and many Sunni fighters turning against al-Qaida in Iraq. But multiple killings are still a daily occurrence.

OC at Satkhira

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had an altercation during which her husband Kazi Mizanur Rahman beat her up causing serious head injuries, they said.

Following the incident Mizanur called in physician Madhusudan Mandal who advised her to be sent to the Khulna hospital as her condition was deteriorating.

Madhusudan said the condition of the victim was deteriorating when he examined her. He said she was apparently hit by something blunter on the head.

Sabiha was taken to Khulna Surgical Hospital that night and as her condition continued to worsen the doctors there advised she be taken to Dhaka.

Meanwhile, OC Mizanur left for Dhaka on a three-day leave on the plea of giving statement to a Dhaka court as a prosecution witness, police sources said.

Superintendent of Police (SP) of Satkhira Mirza Abdullal Baki yesterday told The Daily Star that the OC called the police station and informed the station about his wife's death. He said he made a request to Dhaka Metropolitan Police to inform him about what had happened.

He said he has initiated an investigation into the matter even though no cases were filed in this connection.

Sources in the Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday said they were trying to secure the body but could not do so as of 10:00pm.

Sabiha who hails from Habiganj was the second wife of Mizanur of Mirpur, Dhaka.

MDG challenges

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According to draft Labour Force Survey 2005-06 of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, unemployment rose by one lakh or 5 percent between 2002-03 and 2005-06.

"The challenge is clearly to create employment opportunities at a much faster pace," reads the report on the MDG campaign.

Dr Zaid Bakht, research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said the government should provide policy support and fiscal incentive for the labour-intensive industries to overcome the growing unemployment.

Ensuring that all boys and girls complete primary school remains a difficult task. A remarkable success has been achieved in increasing primary school enrolment, but that is under threat from problems in preventing dropouts, the report adds.

The country requires continued support and assistance from its development partners to beat off the hurdles getting in its way of meeting the MDGs.

It may not be able to generate required resources from domestic sources and so will need sustained support from the donors, notes the Planning Commission study.

Besides, it continues, the developed countries failed to contribute 0.7 percent of gross national income (GNI) that they have pledged for the developing countries seeking to achieve MDGs.

Moreover, official development assistance (ODA) to Bangladesh has been falling over the years. Given by the 30-country grouping named Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

(OECD), the development aid to the country was \$1,240 million in 1990, but it plummeted to \$110 million in 2006.

Bangladesh is behind schedule in achieving gender parity in tertiary education, reducing maternal mortality and fully containing the spread of communicable diseases and reducing the proportion of population without safe drinking water.

"The targets that we are struggling to reach would be given emphasis in the next poverty reduction strategy papers, now being drafted," said a senior official of the Planning Commission.

However, it's not all gloomy. Bangladesh achieved gender parity in primary and secondary schooling in 2005. Besides, it is well on course to halve the proportion of population below national poverty line and minimum level of energy consumption as well as gain universal access to primary education and reduce the under-five child mortality and infant mortality rates.

Benapole

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A delegation from United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific during a visit to Benapole land port in April last year recommended that the Jessore-Benapole highway should be included in the proposed Asian Highway.

Once the Asian Highway is implemented, travel distance between Dhaka and Benapole would be reduced by around 100 kilometres, said RHD officials.

Dr Kamal

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"Our expectation is an effective parliament constituted through a fair election and I hope the government fulfils its commitment to hold a free and fair election by the end of this year," he said.

Referring to the historic March 7, 1971, he stressed the importance of national unity to face national challenges saying the present mass awareness will take the people of the country to the desired elections.

He hoped the government makes a decision on the trial of war criminals soon as the Sector Commanders Forum has huge support across the country for the cause.

Ganatantra Party President Nurul Islam said politicians, the Election Commission and the government have to decide how the elections are held in the country. He said all bars to indoor politics must be withdrawn.

Making suggestion on keeping politics free from "those who trade on religion", he said questions would be raised against our independence if war criminals were not brought to book.

Gono Forum leaders Pankaj Bhattacharya, Subrata Chowdhury and Mozilul Islam Kamal and Ganatantra Party leaders Bhupendra Bhownik Dulan, Monir Ahmed and Enamul Hoque Mollah were present among others.

CA on polls

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On a long-term rehabilitation project in the Sidr-hit southern coastal belt, he said work on preparing the project has started and after its implementation the region will have a new look.

The CA directed the officials concerned to do what the government can do for extending cooperation to the farmers in proper time. This will make it possible to launch an agricultural or green revolution in this region, he said.

He said there is no alternative to raising agricultural production to keep prices of commodities at tolerable level overcoming the adverse influence of prices in the international market.

Fakhrudin said the government is also trying to keep the prices of commodities at tolerable level through various measures.

The objective of the government, he said, is to increase as quickly as possible the agricultural production along with increased production of fish and milk.

He said a programme of Tk 600 crore agriculture loan has been launched under which Krishi Bank and four nationalised banks have already started disbursement of loan.

Responding to the various demands of the local people, he assured them of solving those on priority basis and informed that many demands like Kalapara-Kuakara road communication remain in the long-term rehabilitation project.

The CA, however, said the decision for operating a ferry service over Galachipa River will be taken.

Regarding setting up of fish and agricultural products processing industries in the region having immense potential, he said the government will give all necessary support to the private sector in this regard.

Ali gets bail

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of Moulvibazar advocate Ebadur Rahman Choudhury became Ali's lawyer.

On February 25, a High Court division bench comprising Justice Md Mujammel Hussain and Justice Syed AB Mahmudul Haque granted a three-month interim bail to Ali.

When Ali emerged through the jail gate, his wife, son and members of the legal-aid committee received him. The atmosphere turned heavy when his 15-year-old son Didar called him Abba. Didar was born a few months after Ali's arrest.

After Ali's release the DC said he was trying to do something for Ali within the legal framework.

Superintendent of Moulvibazar District Jail Md Shahjahan said the release of Ali was a victory for humanitarianism.

Sabbir Ahmed Choudhury, a member of the legal aid committee, said he was happy to be able to do something for Ali.

Musharraf

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only if all of them demonstrate peace," Musharraf said.

The new federal and provincial governments should sustain the process of development and fight the scourge of extremism and terrorism, he said.

Pakistan has been combating an Islamist insurgency led by Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters since Musharraf joined the US-led "war on terror" in 2001.

The violence has soared recently. Around 600 people have died since the start of this year in suicide attacks, roadside bombings and clashes, mostly in northwestern Pakistan on the Afghan border.

With Washington and other allies pressing for stability in Pakistan, the PPP party has not yet indicated whether it is ready for a full showdown with Musharraf.

The coalition is expected to get support of some independent MPs to secure the two-thirds majority with which it could theoretically launch impeachment proceedings against Musharraf.

Gunman kills 8 inside library in Jerusalem

BBC ONLINE

The killing of eight people at a Jewish religious college by a Palestinian gunman will not derail peace talks, the Israeli government has said.

The gunman was shot dead after opening fire with an assault rifle inside a crowded library at the Mercaz Harav seminary in West Jerusalem.

Israeli police said the attacker was a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem.

Some Israelis have called for peace talks with the Palestinians to end but Israel has said they will continue.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas condemned the attack, forshalling the attack.

Hamas described the shooting as a "natural reaction" to Israeli military actions in the Gaza Strip last week that left more than 120 Palestinians dead.

In the attack yesterday, a gunman entered the library at the Mercaz Harav seminary on Thursday evening, where about 80 students were gathered, and fired an AK-47 rifle for several minutes, witnesses say.

Students scrambled to flee the scene, jumping out of windows, witnesses said. Most of those killed were reported to be teenagers. At least nine people were injured.

A student reportedly shot the gunman twice before an off-duty

Goods train derails in Comilla

UNB, Comilla

Train service on the Dhaka-Chittagong route remained suspended for two and a half hours as a goods train derailed in Comilla yesterday.

One bogie of a Chittagong-bound goods train coming from the Dhaka went out of the track at a place between Gunabati and Hasanpur railway stations at 1:00pm, disrupting communications on the Dhaka-Chittagong rail route.

Later, trains remained stranded at different points causing sufferings to the passengers.

Railway sources said the train service resumed at about 3:30pm after a relief train from Laksam put the derailed bogie back on track.

Poultry farmer

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Dr M Sajedul Islam, civil surgeon of Rajshahi, said, "It would take only seven days for him to be cured if it is established that he's caught the avian influenza virus," he said.

Nearly 500 bird-flu infected chickens were culled at Ashraf's farm on February 23.

Israeli army officer killed him. The head of the Zaka rescue service described a scene of carnage at the seminary.

A previously unknown group called the Jail Freedom Battalions - the Martyrs of Imad Mughniyeh and Gaza claims to have carried it out, according to Lebanese Hezbollah media.

The Palestinian leadership has been split between Mr Abbas's Fatah faction, in control of the West Bank, and Hamas, who have ruled Gaza since forcing out Fatah last year.

The Palestinians - without Hamas - have been engaged in a US-launched peace process with the Israelis since late last year.

While UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon condemned the attack, the Security Council failed to agree on a statement on Thursday night.

The Libyan representative said his country and several others wanted the council to couple any condemnation of the Jerusalem shootings with one against Israel for killing large numbers of civilians, including children, in Gaza.

Bullion traders

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Sources said Bangladesh Jewellers' Samity, Bangladesh Poddar Samity and Dhaka Goldsmith Association held a joint meeting at Tantibazar yesterday afternoon.

Bangladesh Jewellers' Samity President MA Wadud Khan, General Secretary Dildar Ahmed, Poddar Samity President Kaisar Ahmed and leaders from Dhaka Goldsmith Association were present at the meeting.

Talking to The Daily Star Wadud said, "The meeting condemned Rab-10 activities and formed a 15-member action committee comprising five leaders from the three organisations."

"The committee would meet the home adviser, inspector general of police (IGP) and the director general of Rab and file complaints against the Rab-10 drivers with them," he said, adding, "We would request them to let us know how we could continue our business without harassment."

Sub-inspector Mizanur Rahman of Kotwali Police Station, also the investigation officer (IO) of two of the five cases, said, "The gold traders in the area do not maintain required papers and stock records." He said he was not sure why Rab raided only five shops.

Abdul Hannan, officer-in-charge of the police station, said, "The traders have licences but most of them do not obey the rules and directives of the deputy commissioner's office."

The arrested traders are Dulal Ghosh of KC Bullion Store, Mohammad Harun and Mohammad Nazrul Islam of Harun Bullion Store, Narayan Ghosh Titul of Maa Gold House, Alok Das of Ajoy Bullion Store, Suranjit Sur, Sagar Ghosh and Sukumar Nandi of Tanmay Jewellers. Flight Lt Humayun Kabir of Rab-10, who led the drive, said they arrested the traders as they could not show the required papers.

Chicken, egg prices

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government organisations regarding bird flu have worked behind the increase in sales of eggs and chickens, said traders at different city markets.

They, however, predicted a shortage of supply in near future.

Meanwhile, the increase in sales has also seen a hike in the price of poultry chicken.

Salesmen of Swadhin Broiler House at Nimtoli Anandabazar under Shahbagh Police Station said they used to sell 200 kilograms of poultry chicken daily before the bird flu outbreak. The sale plummeted to 20kg to 30kg last month.

"But, the sale increased significantly in the last four days. We sold 140kg poultry chickens yesterday," said Jamal Uddin, a salesman of the farm.

A trader at Palashi Bazar said the demand of local chicken has come to normal in the last four days and the prices of both the poultry and local chickens have also increased.

He said the price of poultry chicken rose by Tk 10-15 per kg, jumping to Tk 75-80. They sold at Tk 60-65 per kg a week ago. The price of a medium-sized local chicken also increased by Tk 25, he said.

Abu Hanif, a supplier at Karwan Bazar, said, "We used to supply poultry and local chickens to hotels and picnickers and on occasions like marriage during December-February. But the business came down by 90 percent only in the last two months due to bird flu."

The business started to get normal again in the last few days as they are getting orders from most city hotels and people for different occasions, he said.

The chicken markets in the city looked busy with customers purchasing chickens and eggs yesterday.

Rahima Begum, a customer from Begun Bari, said, "We stopped eating chicken and eggs for a few weeks now. But, since there were no reports of death or people falling ill anywhere in the country and the government gave assurance about safety through the media and mobile phone operators, we have started purchasing chickens and eggs again."

Another customer argued the prices of eggs and chickens are quite reasonable compared to other essentials and they are also nutritious.

Wholesalers at the city's Kaptan Bazar chicken market said about 70 percent business was restored in the last couple of days.

Fazul Haq, a leader of Mahanagari Hash Murgi Arat at Teigaon, told The Daily Star that they used to sell 30,000-40,000 birds every day on an average before the bird flu outbreak and the sale came down to 5,000 last month.

Another leader of the wholesale market said although the sale took a turn for the better, suppliers and traders at different levels are still being harassed while carrying chickens to different places.

A shortage of chickens may occur within a few weeks as most poultry farms stopped hatching of chicks fearing bird flu. Many traders even stopped investing in the sector, the wholesale leaders said, adding that culling of domestic fowls across the country and closure of many farms will also cause the shortage.

Minimum wage

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some of the workers to be engaged in criminal activities for additional income or be engaged in multiple jobs -- a violation of laws of the Middle Eastern country.

The meeting also decided that all the Saudi Arabia-bound workers -- either with individual or group visas -- must undergo an orientation session before their departure.

A spokesperson at the expatriates' welfare ministry said 616 Bangladeshis were found to be detained in a deportation facility in Riyadh for various reasons and 286 Bangladeshis were detained for criminal offences.

As of February 9, a total of 348 Bangladeshis were in the facility awaiting deportation, the spokesperson added.

Some of the Bangladeshis were detained as they violated rules by switching jobs or did not have valid work permits or their visas expired, he said.

"It may be mentioned that many Bangladeshis wishing to save the money for their trip back home destroy their valid documents and surrender to Saudi police. According to the Saudi rules, the Saudi authorities pay for the airfare of the deportees," he added.

Even a number of middlemen are encouraging legal Bangladeshis workers that they could save money if they returned home through the deportation centres, he said.

"No legal Bangladeshi worker has been deported to Bangladesh as yet," said the spokesperson.

Non-stop price hike

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hike of soybean oil.

The prices of pulses increased by Tk 8-12 per kg over the last week at both retail and wholesale markets.

Pulses of different varieties were selling between Tk 68 and Tk 95 per kg at the retail markets of the country yesterday.

Sumon, a trader at Nimtoli Anandabazar under Shahbagh Police Station, said he sold pulses between Tk 58 and Tk 84 last week depending on their variety.

Traders at Karwan Bazar and in Old Dhaka said the price of pulses increased by Tk 8-10 per kg in the retail market. They cited end of the season and shortage of supply as the main reasons for the hike.

The price of sugar climbed up by Tk 10 per kg in the last two weeks. Sugar was selling between Tk 40-42 yesterday.

A wholesale trader at Karwan Bazar said they are selling sugar at Tk 40.5 per kg, but the price was Tk 27 a month ago.

The price of flour increased by Tk 4 per kg last week and a 1kg pack of flour was selling at Tk 43-48 at the retail markets yesterday, depending on brands.

The prices of onions--both the local-variety and Indian variety--are hovering around Tk 17-20 per kg. They sold at Tk 12-15 per kg a week ago.

The price of poultry chicken shot up Tk 10-15 per kg and stood at

Tk 75-80. Chicken was sold at Tk 60-65 a week ago. The price of local chicken also increased by Tk 100 per hali (four pieces), climbing to Tk 500-550 from Tk 400-450.

The price of eggs rose by Tk 3-6 per dozen; eggs were selling at Tk 48-54 per dozen at different retail markets.

The prices of powdered milk of different brands, including Dano and Fresh, saw a sharp rise.

A 400gm pack of Dano powdered milk rose to Tk 212 from last week's Tk 201 while a 400gm pack of Fresh powdered milk leapt to Tk 200 from Tk 195.

Meanwhile, most vegetables also became dearer after quite a long time. Traders blamed the increase of vegetables prices on end of season for some vegetables and start of season for others.

Prices of rice of different varieties increased by Tk 20-40 per maund at the wholesale market in the last week. The prices at almost all retail markets rose by Tk 1 per kg.

The prices of all types of fish also increased by Tk 10-50 at the markets in the capital over the last two weeks.

Abdur Rahim, a fourth class employee of Dhaka Medical College Hospital who came to Palashi kitchen market yesterday, said a month ago he could manage his family's daily kitchen expenses within Tk 200, but now he has to spend Tk 250 to buy the daily essentials.

Power projects

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June for testing and commissioning purpose. Initially, about 10 mmcfcd gas at a pressure of 80-90psi will be consumed by the plant," said a source, adding, "But due to gas crisis, the whole scheme has become uncertain."

This gas crisis was triggered by declining gas production of the offshore Sangu rig and lack of gas pipeline capacity that could supply larger volume of gas to Chittagong from Titus gas field or the gas fields in Sylhet. According to Petrobangla, there is no project in hand that could resolve the gas crisis within a couple of years. The government is considering a Tk 1200 crore pipeline project that could end this problem but it will take a few years to complete.

"One way to tackle this situation on a short term basis is to divert some gas supplies from the two 210MW Raizan and the 60MW Sibakbaha plants in Chittagong and supply 10 mmcfcd gas to the Chittagong EPZ. These three plants presently consume 120 mmcfcd gas. The machines of these plants are not very efficient and it is a good idea to utilise a part of the gas for more efficient production of power," noted a source.

Another idea is to install the plant in Dhaka EPZ, instead of Chittagong EPZ and dedicate the power to Chittagong EPZ. "Dhaka, for now, does not have the problems being faced by Chittagong," he added.

This means, the Korean EPZ power project also remains uncertain. Korean EPZ sources told The Daily Star that it was eager to invest for 1,000MW power plant at the EPZ site if the government could ensure gas supplies.

"If we cannot have gas facility, we shall ask the investors to set up the plants with dual-fuel facility so that they can generate power using

petroleum oil if necessary," said a Beppza official.

"We cannot just sit idle when investors have become fed up with load-shedding. Thousands of people are working at the EPZs and the nation is earning valuable foreign currency. This is why the Beppza devised the plan to have its own plants. If there is gas crisis, we will do it in some other way," he added.

"Power is the lifeline of modern development," said an investor, "But we do not see enough moves from the government that encourage us to invest more."

The country is set to have more than 1000MW power shortage this summer.

The power investors themselves were assigned to ensure their gas supplies. Sources said that MHL had initially obtained assurance from the Bakhrabad Gas Field Company of Chittagong of enough gas supplies for a 10MW plant at the Chittagong EPZ and it had made preparations accordingly. But the government later asked MHL to build a 40MW plant.

Petrobangla sources said the country will continue to face at least 200 mmcfcd gas supply shortfall this year and the situation will continue to worsen.

However, the crisis in Chittagong could have been tackled easily if the government approved a small pipeline project, costing between Tk 40 crore and Tk 50 crore, to transmit high pressure gas from the Titus gas field to the Ashuganj-Bakhrabad (AB) pipeline. The 14 kilometre 20 inch pipeline could transmit 200 mmcfcd from the field to the AB pipeline at a high pressure of 1000psi. The work would take just one winter to complete. This Petrobangla proposal, however, did not get due attention of the government.

Women's Day today

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the scourge is completely eliminated.