

## Siege after Mumbai massacre

Commandos move to free hostages; death toll crosses 125; PM blames 'outsiders'; 100 still trapped in hotels; world shocked

AFP, AP, PTI, NDTV, Mumbai

Indian commandos fought to end a multiple hostage crisis yesterday in Mumbai, battling Islamist gunmen holding foreign guests in two luxury hotels after attacks across the city left over 125 dead.

"Over 125 people have died from the hostage crisis," Hassan Gafoor, Mumbai's police chief told AFP. Up to 287 other people were also reported wounded.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said the militants had come from "outside the country" -- a thinly-veiled reference to arch-rival Pakistan.

Police officials said troops were conducting floor-by-floor sweeps of the Taj Mahal and the Oberoi/Trident hotels, nearly 24 hours after gunmen armed with assault rifles and grenades stormed the buildings.

Gunfire continued to be heard from both hotels, where scores of guests remained trapped in their rooms -- too terrified to move.

Police said the Taj had been cleared of hostages, and Mumbai police chief Hassan Gafoor told AFP that more than 40 hostages had been rescued from the

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## Who are the Deccan terrorists?

DAILY TELEGRAPH

The Deccan Mujahedeen, which has claimed responsibility for the terrorist attacks across Mumbai in India (formerly known as Bombay), appears to be the latest

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## Dhaka slates attacks, on alert

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed have condemned the acts of terror, which were unleashed on the city of Mumbai on Wednesday night.

They also expressed deep shock at the loss of lives in terrible terror strikes in the Indian business capital.

In a message of condolence to his counterpart Mrs Pratibha Patil yesterday, the president said, "Bangladesh

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## BNP list finalised, yet aspirants interviewed

Confide party insiders

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN and RASHIDUL HASAN

Interviewing BNP ticket aspirants yesterday was merely a formality as the party had already chosen its candidates for the next parliamentary election ignoring the traditional system of interviewing nomination hopefuls.

Insiders said the party last night started sending letters to candidates confirming nomination.

Shamsul Alam of Chittagong-8, who joined the BNP yesterday evening, showed reporters his letter of

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BNP chief Khaleda Zia and party's parliamentary board interview aspirant candidates from Brahmanbaria at her Gulshan office in the capital yesterday.



Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, left, catches fire yesterday morning following explosions inside as militants held guests hostage. One of the armed militants, inset, caught on camera. Indian policemen walk through the blood-stained and devastated Chhatrapati Shivaji Railway Station, right, which was one of the places the militants attacked.

## BNP constitution, RPO choked

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Finally, BNP appears to have violated electoral laws and its own constitution to pick contenders in the upcoming parliamentary polls by not allowing grassroots level leaders of the party to make preliminary selection of candidates.

Keeping the grassroots party committees in the dark, BNP Parliamentary Board (BNPPB) last night almost finalised party nominees by interviewing those who submitted applications seeking nomination on Tuesday and Wednesday.

But the Representation of People Order (RPO) does not allow political parties to nominate parliamentary candidates without having grassroots committees' recommendations in this regard.

As per the RPO, members of ward, union, thana, upazila and district committees of BNP were supposed to jointly prepare panels of prospective candidates for the constituencies

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## Aman freed on HC bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After about 22 months' imprisonment, former BNP state minister for labour and employment Amanullah Aman was released on High Court (HC) bail last night from the prison cell at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) Hospital.

Arrested on February 5 last year, Aman is sentenced to 20 years rigorous imprisonment (RI) in two separate cases.

He however obtained bail from the HC on November 26.

Jail officials said Aman was

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## Graft eats into RHD

Tk 154cr embezzled through road maintenance in 6 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Between 2000 and 2006, all road maintenance jobs of Roads and Highways Department (RHD) were awarded to contractors at a higher cost than the projected cost causing losses of around Tk 154 crore to the state.

In these six years, periodic maintenance jobs were always done at a higher price than projected through collaboration between RHD officials and contractors, an Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) investigation revealed.

Of the amount, the government incurred Tk 149 crore loss as the jobs were done at higher costs than projected while irregularities in implementing the projects cost the state another Tk 4.71 crore.

Interestingly enough, a total of 32 RHD maintenance jobs were awarded after the state of emergency was promulgated and during the anti-corruption campaign and all these jobs were done at lower cost than projected. This saved the state Tk 63 crore.

An ACC probe, carried out as part of

measures against institutional corruption, found out that RHD staffs concerned and contractors in mutual collaboration had the maintenance jobs approved at a higher cost than projected through "negotiations".

ACC Director General (admin) Col Hanif Iqbal during a routine press briefing yesterday at the ACC headquarters informed the press about their findings.

The ACC probe found that all 261 packages, launched as part of Periodic Maintenance Programme (PMP) financed by JVIC and DFID in the six years, were awarded without floating open tenders.

Quoting audit reports, prepared by Ernst & Young, an audit firm employed by DFID, the ACC probe mentioned a number of irregularities in implementing the projects.

Irregularities include paying the contractors even though no maintenance work was done, paying additional bills to contractors, paying additional bills against substandard maintenance work, and carrying out unnecessary maintenance work.

Out of 261 packages, eight were done in 2000 at 8.07 percent higher cost than projected while 14, 16, 79, 15, and 129 projects were completed in 2001, 2002, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 at 8.27, 9.36, 10.93, 12.64 and 16.00 percent higher cost than projected, the ACC probe found.

The ACC investigators also found that instead of floating open tender for the maintenance jobs, the RHD invited bids from 219 institutions listed with the department through letters. The investigation also revealed that the same contractor in collusion with RHD officials submitted supplementary bids in different packages to get the job at a higher cost.

During 2006-2007, in contrast with earlier projects, 15 of the 32 maintenance works carried out, after the state of emergency was promulgated, were completed at 15.64 percent lower cost than projected

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## EC ignores CrPC, kicks up a row

Prefers executive magistrates to try poll offences

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday decided to authorise executive magistrates to hold trial for electoral offences to ensure holding of the next national polls in a free and fair manner although they do not have the jurisdiction to do the task.

As per the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), only judicial magistrates are authorised to hold trial for electoral offences that are grave in nature and award the offenders punishment, which involves both imprisonment and fine.

An individual could be imprisoned for two to seven years, and also fined for committing electoral offences on the polling day, according to the Representation of People Order (RPO).

But executive magistrates, who are authorised by the mobile court ordinance to ensure law and order, have not got the authority to award imprisonment for any offences.

As per the Mobile Court Ordinance 2007, the executive magistrates have the authority only to fine individuals for offences.

Legal experts said the EC's action to ensure holding of a free and fair election by curbing electoral offences might face difficulties.

The EC's decision and activities of the executive magistrates might also be challenged on legal grounds, said the legal experts.

When contacted, Election Commissioner Muhammed Sobul Hussain told The Daily Star last night, "We shall write to the Supreme Court through the establishment ministry for empowering executive magistrates with the authority of judicial

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## Talking polls and beyond

Parties preoccupied with past, not future

Says Akbar Ali Khan

SHAMIM ASHRAF and WASIM BIN HABIB

Former caretaker government adviser Dr Akbar Ali Khan says the country's political parties are preoccupied with the past and do not talk about their future plans to address political, economic and global issues.

"We are about to face a big economic crisis and the political parties are not at all telling their plans to solve that crisis and what their role would be to counter the effect of globalisation," Dr Akbar said in an interview with The Daily Star.

The chairman of the Regulatory Reforms Commission said there should be public debates on the issues of politics and economy where political parties should speak about the changes they will bring in future.

The former adviser considers the local government reform as an achievement of this caretaker government. He said the government should make it the avowed policy of the political parties to implement those reforms if the date of upazila elections is shifted.

He also does not think there is any need for section 91(E) of the Representation of the People Order because, he believes, the Election Commission's power to cancel candidature is "not realistic and has some legal weaknesses".

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Find details of the interview on page 11

## Indigenous Cultural Festival 2008



Weave Our Hearts Together  
With A Thousand Colourful Threads



Indigenous Handicrafts  
Exhibition & Sale  
30 Nov (12 pm to 8 pm)  
1 & 2 Dec (10 am to 8 pm)

Indigenous Cultural Show  
30 Nov & 2 Dec  
(6:30 pm to 8:30 pm)  
Hall of Fame, BCFCC



Venue: Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre  
Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207



Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility  
A project funded by the European Union

