

Woman bomber kills 32 Shia pilgrims in Iraq

AFP, Hilla

A woman suicide bomber dressed in a black abaya blew herself up in a crowd of Shia pilgrims south of the Iraqi capital yesterday, killing 32 worshippers, mostly women and children, officials said.

The interior ministry said 32 people were killed and 65 wounded in the attack in the town of Iskandariyah as pilgrims flocked on foot to the holy city of Karbala for a major religious ceremony.

Captain Mohammed al-Awadi of the police force for Babil province, of which Hilla is the capital, said the suicide bomber had hidden her explosives under an abaya, the traditional Muslim head-to-toe black garment for women.

She blew herself up among a crowd of women and children just after midday (0900 GMT), he said, adding that most of the casualties were women and children.

It was the third straight day of killings that have targeted Shias heading to Karbala.

The pilgrims had been eating near a tent set up for refreshments along the road south to Karbala when the bomber struck, the interior ministry said.

A doctor at nearby Hilla General Hospital, where tens of ambulances ferried the casualties, said most of the survivors had head and chest wounds.

Iskandariyah lies within what used to be known as "the triangle of death" where Sunni fighters from al-Qaeda, concealed in date tree groves, would launch deadly attacks on Shias who ventured into the mainly farming area.

Last February, a suicide bomber in Iskandariyah, which lies 40 kilometres (25 miles) south of Baghdad, killed 43 Shia pilgrims and wounded more than 60.

Millions of pilgrims are travelling to Karbala for Arbaeen, a ceremony to mark 40 days after the Ashura anniversary of the killing of Imam Hussein by Sunni caliph Yazid's armies in AD 680.

Textbooks

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Tk 30 lakh from Farazi Printers, a publishing house at Bangla Bazar. It also seized huge quantity of low quality newsprint kept there for printing secondary school textbooks.

Meanwhile, nine special committees of NCTB yesterday began visiting book markets in six divisional cities to measure the actual demand for secondary school textbooks.

They will submit reports to the NCTB and the education ministry on Sunday after their two-day visit to book markets, said NCTB sources.

The committees were formed on Thursday night to help NCTB find out how many more textbooks need to be printed in addition to 2.62 crore textbooks.

Following their recommendations, NCTB might take initiative to float tender for printing more books to solve the prevailing crisis of secondary school textbooks.

The publishers failed to hoard 24 types of textbooks in the third phase of book supply following strict monitoring by the taskforce.

However, the taskforce is yet to make headway in ensuring supply of 14 other textbooks in the first phase and 38 textbooks in the second phase to the market.

Publishers said the textbook crisis will not end even after ensuring supply of 2.62 crore textbooks as the actual demand for textbooks is over five crore.

The NCTB formed the special committees following demands from the publishers.



Thousands of people throng the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela yesterday, which was a weekend, celebrating the arrival of spring.

Probe graft

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during the rule of immediate past caretaker government and the previous BNP-led four-party alliance.

Talking to journalists at his residence in the city, Anwar said the present government should not take any move as the caretaker government had launched against politicians in the name of anti-corruption drive.

The prime minister's announcement on White Papers on corruption only indicates that the government intends to persecute particular political party men.

Meanwhile, the BNP-Jamaat alliance government formed after the 1991 election had prepared a White Paper on the previous Ershad regime. The alliance that came to power again in 1996 prepared a White Paper on Awami League (AL) rule from 1996 to 2001. But none of these White Papers was made public officially.

Replying to query, the BNP leader said his party is eager to join parliament proceedings.

"We are against parliament boycott, and want to join the House as soon as the row over seats is resolved. What the prime minister said about seating arrangements saddened us," Anwar said.

He claimed that AL members were given more seats in front row in the last parliament (when BNP was in power).

The BNP legislators have been abstaining from parliament session since January 29 to press for more front-row seats in keeping with what outgoing speaker Jamiruddin Sircar had allocated them. Later, Speaker Abdul Hamid rearranged that giving the opposition four seats in front row.

Criminals kill

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from his office. The gang shot Atiq in his abdomen and took away his motorbike.

Critically injured Atiq was taken to a nearby hospital and then shifted to the DMCH.

Earlier, a gang of criminals snatched a microbus from the same area by shooting its driver last week.

Police recovered beheaded bodies of two youths from a bush beside Dhaka-Aricha Highway near the dairy farm at Savar Cantonment at about 10:00am.

Locals noticed the bodies in the morning and informed the police.

The bodies bore numerous injury marks, said sources.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (Circle) Jahangir Alam said the deceased aged between 25 and 30 could not be identified and none has contacted them to take the bodies.

Gaziul better

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Sujata requested all to pray for early recovery of her father.

Leaders of Bangladesh Sangskritik Jote greeted Gaziul Haque on his 82nd birthday and visited him at Square Hospital. They also arranged a doa mahfil in front of the hospital and prayed for his early recovery.

Haque, who has been suffering from diabetes, heart disease and old age complications, was hospitalised on Wednesday morning as his condition deteriorated.

Born on February 13, 1929, Haque played a leading role in the 1952 Language Movement. He was also a valiant freedom fighter and fought bravely in the Bogra frontlines.

Haque, a member of the advisory committee of the AL, also took part in the mass upsurge of 1969 and anti-autocratic movement in 1990.

US plane crash

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scene, but despite what one local official called "heroic" efforts, were unable to get to the passengers and crew trapped in the inferno.

The Bombardier Dash 8 Q400 plane, operated for Continental Airlines, came down about five minutes before it was due to land in Buffalo after a flight from Newark, New Jersey.

New York state governor David Paterson said "44 passengers were killed along with four crew members and at least one person on the ground."

An Erie County official said Continental Airlines flight 3407 crashed at 10:20 pm (0320 GMT) in Clarence Centre, New York as it neared the runway.

Air traffic controllers desperately tried to make contact with the pilot as the plane, run by Colgan Air for Continental, approached Buffalo.

One controller asks another plane to look for it, according to a conversation aired by local television station WGRZ. He then asks someone to contact police on the ground.

"This aircraft was five miles out and now all of the sudden we have no response from this aircraft," he said.

The Buffalo News newspaper reported 12 homes were evacuated due to the risk from the burning jet fuel.

County Emergency Coordinator David Bissonette told reporters the plane has landed right on the house.

"The fuselage of the plane lies directly on the footprint of the house," Bissonette said. "It basically dove right into the top of the house... clearly a direct hit."

"It's remarkable that it only took one house, as devastating as that was. It could have easily wiped out that entire neighbourhood in a streaking run type of thing," he said. Nearby homes suffered only minimal damage.

Erie County Executive Chris Collins told CNN television the plane was carrying 5,800

pounds of jet fuel and turned into a fireball on impact.

Bissonette said the only recognizable part of the plane remaining is the tail.

The smouldering wreckage was too hot for investigators to approach and FBI agent Laurie Bennett said the collection of evidence would not begin until the scene was deemed safe.

She said there was no way of knowing what caused the crash. One witness, who gave his name only as Tony, told a local television station that the plane flew right over his car, "nose down."

"Left wing was slightly down, pitched sideways, if you will," he said. "It was on a direct line down."

David Luce, who lives near the crash scene, told the Buffalo News he heard a huge explosion and saw flames up to 50 feet (18 meters) in the air.

"It sounded quite loud, and then the sound stopped," Luce said. "Then one or two seconds later, there was a thunderous explosion. I thought something hit our house. It shook our whole house."

"There was the initial boom, and then these cannon shots... these loud secondary explosions, and they went on for about 10 minutes."

After a few minutes, Luce said he walked out to take a look at the wreckage and saw the house was destroyed.

"The house was already flattened. There was no house, just a pile of rubble and still burning," he said.

There was snow and sleet in the area at the time of the crash, which is not unusual for the area this time of year.

Continental Airlines pledged its full support to Colgan Air, "so that together we can provide as much support as possible for all concerned."

"Our thoughts and prayers are with all of the family members and loved ones of those involved in the flight 3407 tragedy," the airline's chief executive, Larry Kellner, said in a statement.

Ctg bus crash

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Priyashi Mutsuddy, daughter of Temiyo Mutsuddy, is missing.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Bandarban Moudud AK Quyum Chowdhury yesterday said no more bodies or injured could be rescued yesterday and the bus could not be pulled out due to lack of equipment.

He said a toe-truck of Roads and Highways Department has been summoned from Chittagong.

The dead students were identified as Muhammad Solaiman, Farzana Ali, daughter of Mohammad Ali of Raazan, Papri Mallik, daughter of Ratan Kumar Mallik of Raazan, Shanta Chakrabarti, daughter of Soumit Chakrabarti of Khulshi, Kapil Barua Sunny, son of Chadan Kanti Barua of Chandanaish upazila and Mahmudul Hasan of Sonagazi in Feni. Two guardians Siddique Hossain Chowdhury and his wife Delwara Begum were also among the dead, college authorities said.

Most of the dead and injured were third-year honours students of the economics department of the college.

Hundreds of students from different colleges of the port city thronged the casualty, orthopaedics and neurosurgery wards of Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) to see the injured students and to donate blood.

Sources alleged that the accident occurred due to the driver's lack of experience on hilly roads.

Chittagong Government College Principal Md Abu Jafar also said the bus driver was not familiar with the hilly road. He said all the five buses hired for the picnic usually ply on Chittagong-Cox's Bazar route.

Taiwanese reluctant to marry amid slowdown

AFP, Taipei

An overwhelming 82 percent of Taiwanese people who are in relationships do not plan to get married this year, mainly because of lack of money and the economic downturn, a poll showed yesterday.

Nearly half of respondents reluctant to tie the knot cited financial woes while 31.77 percent of them said their relationships were unsteady and 23.1 percent wanted to focus on work first, the poll by online job bank 1111 found.

"Money is the biggest challenge when it comes to marriage in the recession... The traditional concept of starting a family before building the career has been reversed," the survey said.

In addition, 37.19 percent of the 1,489 people surveyed between late January and early February said they would not celebrate Valentine's Day this year because of the economic crisis.

Of those who did have celebration plans, 48 percent said they would economise this year while 71 percent intended to spend no more than 2,000 Taiwan dollars (59 US) on gifts and meals.

Taiwan has been hit hard by the global downturn, with jobless rates reaching an all-time high as export figures suffered a record plunge in recent months.

CCTV cameras

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the police control room management helping it detect the locations of on-duty police vehicles.

A special device will be installed in police vehicles for the AVLS.

The DMP Commissioner said C3S would be capable of monitoring the performance of on-duty police teams at the places of occurrences.

Drivers can easily come to know about the conditions of traffic movements on the roads they are plying their vehicles with the help of messages on the display boards and have necessary guidelines.

Police sources said messages on the boards will be provided from the police control room and on-duty police men will be able to handle the traffic gridlock effectively with the help of the message.

Assistant Inspector General (AIG) Telecom of Police Mohammad Abdul Alim Mahmud said the AVLS would be very effective as the control room with its help can easily find the location of police vehicles and send them to the spot of occurrence immediately.

He said DMP is also going to introduce digital mapping of the city for the smooth and effective operation of those modern sophisticated devices and instruments.

Separate building for C3S, motor transport, mail police barrack and female police barrack will also be constructed, DMP sources said.

It also said the works of installing CCTVs, message display boards and construction of new buildings began in July 2007.

Festive mood

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enforcers to open extra gates at the fair venue to handle the huge crowd.

Despite the rush, the book lovers, mostly young, waited in queues with their friends and family members with great enthusiasm.

Security measures were strengthened at the fair venue to avert any untoward incident.

A good number of writers visited the fair and participated in book launching programmes. A total of 19 new books were unveiled at the fair yesterday.

Booksellers of various publishing houses said they made the highest sale of books yesterday at the fair since it began on February 1.

A huge number of book lovers thronged the bookstalls of the publishing houses that brought out new books of popular writers.

A total of 159 new books arrived at the fair yesterday which include 'Bonkusumpur Rahasya' by Al Imam, 'Sheikh Mujib Bangladesher Anek Nam' by Dr Atiur Rahman, 'Koyekjon ET', by Dhruvo Esh, 'Kar Jokes', by Ahsan Habib, 'Jahur Bari' and 'Desh-Bidesh' by Rahat Khan, 'Nattokalar Bhumika' by Golam Sarwar, 'Apni Ki Janten' by Utpal Shuuro, 'London Ticket' by Mostafa Mamun, 'Antu and Aquarium' by Faridur Reza Sagar and 'Last War on the Mars' by Shafig Saffi.

The gates at the fair venue were opened at 11:00am, four hours earlier than usual, for weekly holiday yesterday. The gates will be opened at the same time today.

Rohingya migrants

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towing them out into the open ocean.

"And if I can have the evidence as to exactly who did this I will certainly bring them to account," he said.

Hundreds of Rohingya have been rescued in Indian and Indonesian waters in recent weeks, some covered with welts. They have said they were detained and beaten before being set adrift with few supplies by Thai security forces.

Rights groups fear scores may have perished. A photograph apparently showing the Thai army towing refugees out to sea has been published in the media and similar images were shown by CNN on Friday.

Abhisit however dismissed the Rohingya's claims that they are fleeing poverty and repression in military-ruled Myanmar, insisting that they were economic migrants who were posing a strain on Thailand.

"I believe that at times when there is... a lot of pressure in terms of the numbers of these people coming in, there are attempts to try to let these people drift to other shores," Abhisit said.

"The one thing that is clear is that when these procedures do occur it is done on the

understanding that there is enough food and water supplied," he added.

Many of the migrants have told of being set adrift with minimal supplies to eat and drink.

Thailand has previously denied all allegations of cruelty but the issue has caused embarrassment for its fledgling government.

It is set to be discussed at an Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit in Thailand later this month.

Abhisit later said that in the CNN interview he was only referring to Thai authorities letting migrant vessels drift elsewhere.

"I have not admitted that Thai authorities have pushed these people out," he told reporters. "I told them that there was a case of a Rohingya boat set adrift to allow it to wash ashore."

He said Thailand was working with countries in the region and with the United Nations refugee agency to solve the Rohingya issue.

"We want to reaffirm with the international community and international media that, whether boats were set adrift or pushed out, from investigations there was no violation of human rights," he said.

Banani BNP Palli

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property in the capital are not eligible to get Rajuk plots. But some of the allottees own land property in the capital.

Though applications were sought through an open announcement for the plots in 2004 and around 3,000 people applied, only influential BNP ministers, state ministers, lawmakers and BNP-leaning intellectuals got those at the fag-end of BNP rule.

Former mayors of Rajshahi and Barisal Mizanur Rahman Minu and Mojibur Rahman Sarwar, MP will be the next-door neighbours in Banani. Houses of former BNP state ministers Alamgir Kabir and Prof Rezaul Karim of Narayanganj are also next to each other.

Besides, former state ministers Fazlur Rahman Patal, Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu, former lawmaker Md Alauddin, and former DU vice-chancellor Prof Maniruzzaman Miah have already raised six-storey houses on their land.

Their caretakers are taking care of the under construction buildings.

Most of the allottees started the construction even before registration or paying the instalments. Some of them are behind bars but have managed to have the land registered in their names.

Among the allottees, Lutfozzaman Babar and Salauddin of Demra did not take their plots, Rajuk sources say. They add former housing minister Mirza Abbas influenced the authorities to allot a plot for his brother's wife Masuda Akram.

The Daily Star had run a report on the matter during the four-party rule in which the then Rajuk chairman said, "Applying for allotment of the Gulshan-Banani land is open to all. But it is natural that we have to give priority to ministers, lawmakers and judges. And the number of plots is verily limited."

Of the 50 plots, Rajuk allotted five to ministers, 10 to state ministers, two to mayors, 24 to BNP lawmakers and two to Awami League and Jatiya Party lawmakers.

Besides, a former vice-chancellor, a former adviser to the foreign ministry, son of the

president, sister-in-law of Mirza Abbas, and three businessmen known to be close to Hawa Bhaban also got plots.

The former state ministers are Alamgir Kabir, Fazlur Rahman Patal, Barkatullah Bulu, Lutfur Rahman Khan Azad, Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin, ANM Ehsanul Haq Milon, Lutfozzaman Babar, Selima Rahman, Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu, and Asadul Habib Dulu.

Imtiaz Ahmed, son of former president Iajuddin Ahmed, Mofikul Hasan Tripty, BNP's central office secretary who is known as very close to Hawa Bhaban, Ahsan Habib from Narsingdi, Hasan Reza, a businessman, and Reza Rahman, former adviser to the foreign ministry, also got plots in 'Banani BNP Palli' [BNP Village].

Former BNP lawmakers who got plots are M Naser Rahman, son of former finance minister Saifur Rahman, Major (ret'd) Sayeed Eskander, brother of former prime minister and BNP chief Khaleida Zia, Shahidul Islam, Moshir Rahman, Shahidul Alam Talukder, Shajahan Chowdhury, Mojibur Rahman Monzu, Md Hafiz Ibrahim, Nazim Uddin Alam, M Ilias Ali, Fazlul Haq Milon, Moazzem Hossain Alal, Abdul Hossain Khan, Abdul Hai, Abul Khayer Bhuiyan, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Annie, Alamgir Haider Khan, Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, Salauddin Ahmed, Kabir Hossain, Nadim Mostafa, Khairul Kabir Khokon, late Shamsuddin Ahmed Eshak, and Habibul Islam Habib.

Former lawmakers Hafizuddin Ahmed of Thakurgaon from Jatiya Party and Hamida Banu Shova of Nilphamari from Awami League also got plots.

The caretaker government on February 26, 2007 suspended allotment of 50 plots in Banani, 50 plots in Uttara, 48 plots in Tongi Industrial Area, three institutional plots in Uttara Residential Area, 534 plots in Badda rehabilitation project and one institutional plot in Nikunja Residential Area, Rajuk sources say.

The government on January 29 last year conditionally lifted the suspension on 338 plots.

India, US tighten

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Dennis Blair said the best way forward was for Islamabad to clamp down seriously on Islamic militants.

The best Indian-Pakistani efforts to improve relations "could unravel unless Islamabad takes sustained, concrete, meaningful steps to ally Indian concerns about Islamabad's support to anti-Indian militant groups," Blair said.

Otherwise, he warned, India could feel compelled to ignite a wider conflict in a region which Washington considers a frontline in the war on al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Pakistan's intelligence agency, with US support, bankrolled jihad groups fighting Soviet troops in Afghanistan in the 1980s, convinced that shoring up a western support base would counter the perceived threat from India.

In 2002, then military ruler Pervez Musharraf banned the LeT and other groups fighting against Indian rule in Kashmir, under pressure from the United States, after an attack on the Indian parliament.

But the extremist presence has mushroomed in Pakistan, with an expanding network of thousands of madrassas believed to be recruiting for militants, and Taliban and al-

Qaeda fighters who fled the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

Pakistan has come under massive Western pressure to rein in al-Qaeda militants along the border with Afghanistan, where its under-equipped military has waged multiple offensives against Taliban fighters but with no imminent sign of success.

Some commentators drew a link between the announcement about the arrests and this week's regional tour by US envoy Richard Holbrooke as Washington seeks to bind Islamabad into a new strategy to turn around the war against militants.

"It is obviously linked with Holbrooke's visit and the registration of cases was made public before he reached New Delhi," Islamabad-based analyst Anam Jilani said.

There was genuine surprise in New Delhi at what some saw as an unprecedented U-turn by Islamabad.

"Fak blinks, finally" ran the front page banner headline in the Times of India.