

Hannan, 13 other Huji men indicted for Ramna blasts

CHAITANYA CHANDRA HALDER

Eight years into the Ramna Batamul blast, a Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against 14 operatives of outlawed Islamist outfit Harkatul Jihad al Islami (Huji) including its chief Mufti Abdul Hannan in two cases filed in connection with the incident.

Metropolitan Sessions Judge ANM Bashir Ullah rejected the discharge petitions submitted by the counsels for Hannan and five others and framed charges against all 14 accused.

Ten people were killed and scores injured in the blast at Ramna Batamul during Pahela Baishakh celebrations on April 14, 2001.

Following the carnage, two cases -- one for murder and the other for possession and use of explosive substances --

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Harkatul Jihad leaders Maulana Abu Taher and Mufti Hannan being taken to a Dhaka court under heavy security yesterday for charge-framing in the Ramna Batamul case.

PHOTO: STAR

Another BDR jawan dies in custody Authorities say 'heart attack'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Yet another BDR jawan died in custody yesterday.

Havilder Kazi Saidur Rahman, 46, of 13 Battalion, arrested in connection with the February 25-26 BDR carnage, was the 13th jawan to die in custody.

Meanwhile, 73 BDR men, 48 from Kushitia and 25 from Netrakona, were taken to the BDR headquarters yesterday for quizzing in connection with the carnage that left 75 people dead.

Besides, 20 more BDR men were placed on a seven-day remand each while one BDR

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India goes to polls, 18 killed in violence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The first phase of Indian parliamentary elections yesterday was marred by Naxalite violence in four states killing 18 people, including five polling officials and 10 security personnel, and it witnessed a voter turnout of 60 percent.

A landmine set up by Naxals destroyed a bus carrying Border Security Force personnel in Jharkhand state killing seven of them and two civilians.

The Naxals blew up a vehicle carrying polling officials in Chattisgarh state killing five of them and traded bullets with security forces killing two Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawans.

Polling booths were set on fire and a gun battle between Naxals and security forces in a separate incident in Chattisgarh that left two CRPFs jawans dead. Two security personnel were shot dead in Bihar.

The opening phase of polls will see voters exercising their franchise in 124 of the 543 Lok

Sabha constituencies spread across 16 states and federally-administered territories. As many as 1,715 candidates are in fray in the first phase for which 14.31 crore voters are eligible to cast their votes.

Nine lakh polling staff, assisted by paramilitary personnel and armed police will be conducting the polling today with the help of 3,166 electronic voting machines.

Opinion polls projected that neither of the country's two main contenders--ruling Congress and opposition BJP--will get majority on its own and an array of regional parties are expected to secure nearly 50 percent of the parliamentary seats.

The final phase of polling is scheduled for May 13 and results are expected three days later amidst projections of a hung parliament that could trigger an intense period of political haggling and realignment of forces as the main parties scramble to cobble a coalition.

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Alert on coasts as cyclonic storm Bijli roaring over Bay

Cautionary signal 4 in maritime ports

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bijli, the season's first cyclonic storm formed over the Bay of Bengal early yesterday, was heading north towards the coastline, prompting the meteorological department to raise the cautionary signal to four.

Port authorities and administration were taking preparations in anticipation of a cyclone strike.

Correspondents from coastal districts said the sea was very rough as waves up to five feet higher than usual ones were buffeting the shore.

A few thousand fishing trawlers were sailing back to the coast.

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Changes brighten hope for more functional JS

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The ninth parliament which set out its journey on January 25 shows signs of changes in parliamentary culture with the formation of all standing committees and the opposition's active presence in the inaugural session.

Appointment of the ruling party's senior leaders to the helm of the committees and giving seven chairs of the parliamentary bodies to other parties' lawmakers might demonstrate the ruling party's sincerity in making

parliament functional.

No previous parliaments could complete formation of the committees in the first session. Besides, all the ruling parties had taken at least one and a half years to form the bodies with none giving a chairman post to other parties.

But nothing is fully completed yet; a lot of things must be done to get the signs of changes implemented to make the House able to work for changes.

In that case, the government will have to

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EC plans dialogue with parties

Wants more changes in RPO

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) will initiate steps for further amendments to the Representation of the People Order (RPO), and will hold dialogue with the political parties in this regard, an election commissioner said yesterday.

"We will invite registered political parties to the talks at appropriate time," Election

Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain told journalists at his office.

The EC will propose inclusion of some new provisions in the RPO, and changes in some existing ones, he said without elaborating.

The dialogue might start prior to the budget session of parliament, the election commissioner said in reply to a question.

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9th Bangladesh Business Awards ceremony tonight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ninth Bangladesh Business Awards ceremony will be held tonight at Sonargaon Hotel in the capital.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Salehuddin Ahmed will be the chief guest and Sir David Bell, chairman of the Financial Times Group, will attend the function as a special guest.

Sir David Bell, who is coming to Dhaka at the invitation of The Daily Star, will give a

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