

## 95 kids killed in US-Taliban clash Afghan lawmaker says

Ninety-five Afghan children are among the 140 people said to have died in a recent US-Taliban battle in western Afghanistan, according to a list drawn up by Afghan officials, a lawmaker said Wednesday. The US military disputed the claim.

Afghans blame US airstrikes for the deaths and destruction in the villages of Gerani and Ganjabad in Farah province.

Sixty-five of the reported victims on the list were female, either adults or children, said lawmaker Obaidullah Helali, a lawmaker from Farah and a member of the government's investigative team. If the Afghan toll is correct, it would be the largest case of civilian deaths since the 2001 US-led invasion to oust the Taliban.

US military spokesman Col. Greg Julian said "there is no physical proof that can substantiate" the Afghan list of victims. The US has refused to release a number of people it thinks died in the May 4-5 clash in Farah's Bala Baluk district.

Julian said militants are to blame for the deaths because they kept villagers hostage during the fight.

The International Committee of the Red Cross also has said that women and children were among dozens of dead people its teams saw in the two villages, but it did not provide an overall figure.

## AL men clash

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Police said, the clash ensued at around 10.00 am between the two groups over the tender for Tk 2 crore expansion works of eight schools in the upazila.

Sources said, engineer Ansar with the help of UNO Mohi Uddin Khan gave its work order to upazila AL Secretary Abu Bakker Khoka, Joint Secretary Abdullah Pathan and Sonakara union AL President Nurul Islam without following any tendering process though there was a scheduled date to submit the tender documents on Monday.

The officials secretly gave the works to the AL leaders Monday through a negotiation.

In the morning, Jubo League workers rushed to the office and demanded rearrangement of the tendering process immediately but the engineer did not pay heed to their demand.

At one stage, they staged demonstration on the office premises protesting the negotiation and vandalised its furniture and kept confined the engineer to his room for about two hours.

Hearing the news, AL men led by the three leaders attacked the Jubo League men that led to a fierce clash.

Both groups used sharp weapons and hurled bricks during the clash, leaving 10 people injured.

On information, police rushed in, charged batons on them and brought the situation under control.

The injured were admitted to the upazila health complex, district sadar hospital and local clinics where the condition of two of them was stated to be critical, sources said.

Additional police have been deployed in the area to avert further clash.

When contacted, engineer Anser Ali declined to make any comment on the matter. Besides, UNO Mohi Uddin Khan denied the allegation of irregularities in the tendering process.

## Manpower export

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Members of the standing body said the manpower export had dropped significantly in the recent months due to global meltdown.

The standing committee recommendations include looking for new potential labour market and reorganising foreign missions of the country.

Manpower export in January 2008 was 91,999 while the number dropped to 50,632 in the same month of 2009, the ministry officials informed the meeting.

In February 2008 a total of 71,716 people were sent abroad while the number came down to 43,856 in the same month of 2009. In March 2008 the number was 59,183 while it dropped to 42,945 in March 2009.

The meeting, however, observed that decline in manpower export did not affect the flow of remittance rather it has increased about 15 percent in the last three months compared to the corresponding period of the previous year.

The ministry high officials informed the meeting that they had already taken some immediate measures including 'diplomatic and friendly' relations with manpower import countries and holding joint meetings with foreign diplomats in Dhaka to tackle the sharp fall in manpower export.

"We recommended that

## BDR mutineers

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families of deceased army officers, sources said.

Sources said the committee however did not draw any conclusion about whether any one or any quarter patronised or masterminded the mutiny from outside the Pilkhana headquarters.

"There are about 22 lakh Bangladeshi workers in Saudi Arabia against a few officials in our embassy there to look after our workers," Anisul added.

"We have asked the ministries concerned to send capable and expert people as officials in the labour wing so that they can handle the labour issue efficiently," said the chief of the committee.

"The ministry concerned has already sent letters to our foreign missions to look for labour market in East Europe and Africa beyond our conventional labour market," he added.

The ministry officials informed the committee that it had already started sending workers to Korea, Romania, South Africa, Azerbaijan, Algeria and Sudan in the pursuit of new labour market.

Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandoker Musharrif Hossain, committee members Ishak Hossain Talukdar, ABM Abul Kashem, among others, were present at the meeting.

## Lankan war

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"We are unable to treat the people properly because a lot of aides have fled the hospital. We go into bunkers when there is shelling and try to treat them as much as we can when there is a lull," he said by telephone.

More than 1,000 civilians many with amputations or chest wounds were waiting for treatment at the hospital when it was struck, and every 10 minutes or so another one or two died, according to a third hospital official, who spoke only on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized by the government to speak to the media.

Overwhelmed doctors have been reduced to handing out gauze and bandages to the seriously wounded, the official said. More than 100 dead bodies have been left inside the compound because no one will risk burying them amid the constant shelling.

The hospital's admissions ward was hit by a mortar round Tuesday, in an attack that killed 49 patients and bystanders, health officials said.

Rebel spokesman a Seevaratnam Puledevan said shells also hit a home for mentally handicapped women, killing 38 and wounding more than 40. The health officials said they were not able to confirm that attack.

Shelling also killed Red Cross worker Mayuran Sivagurunathan and his mother and prevented a Red Cross ferry off the coast from delivering food aid and evacuating the wounded, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The aid group said it was not sure if its employee was killed in the hospital attack.

"There are many shells falling. I don't know if it was the same attack," Red Cross spokesman Marcel Izard said.

Shelling in the area also killed Red Cross worker Mayuran Sivagurunathan, according to Sarasi Wijeratne, spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross. It also prevented a Red Cross ferry off the coast from delivering food aid and

## 3 robbers

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prevent him from escaping.

Hearing the gunshot, a team of policemen patrolling the area rushed to the spot and caught one of the robbers. The locals caught two of his accomplices and beat them up, he said.

However, the other three robbers managed to escape.

Mohammad Abdul Malek, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, said, "As we reached the spot, the escaping robbers fired three shots and hurled a bomb at us prompting us to fire six shots."

Injured Zahurul and Shahjahan were rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said Kripa Sindhu Bala, sub-inspector of the police station.

## Govt to probe

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the 'politically motivated crossfire'.

Talking to the reporters after a meeting with senior police officials at the ministry's office, Sohail Taj made the comments.

He said politically motivated lists were made during the period and some persons executed the lists. The government will bring those responsible personnel to justice after investigation, Sohail Taj added.

Police personnel should be held accountable for any deterioration of law and order situation in the area under their jurisdiction, he said, adding that the officers must prepare reports marking the reasons behind the deterioration.

"We ordered the law enforcers to work responsibly. If they fail, our law and order situation will deteriorate," he said. "We also ordered police to discharge their duty with transparency."

## Workers' death

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would go for investigation into the death of Bangladeshi workers abroad.

"The recent death rate of Bangladeshi workers in abroad is the same as in previous times," Barrister Anisul Islam Mammad, chairman of the committee told The Daily Star after the meeting at the parliament building.

"We have discussed the issue in the meeting in detail and the committee thinks that the number of Bangladeshi workers who died abroad is not unusual compared to the previous record," Anisul said.

He mentioned that a total of 12,307 Bangladeshi workers died abroad in last seven years from 2002 to March 2009 that means on an average 164 migrant workers die every month.

But the number of deaths of migrant workers abroad has been increasing significantly since 2004. Some 2,237 bodies of Bangladeshi workers were sent home last year while 1,673 in 2007, 1,402 in 2006, 1,248 in 2005 and 788 in 2004.

A total of 904 bodies of migrant workers returned home from abroad in last five months. Of them, 391 died of cardiac arrest, 268 in workplace accidents, 62 in road accidents, 115 of other sicknesses while the remaining died of various reasons, according to the official source at Zia International Airport.

There are about 65 lakh Bangladeshi workers across the world. The highest number of them is, of course, in the Middle East countries.

## Dr Zahid

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graft case

Zahid was sentenced to 13 years' rigorous imprisonment in absentia in the case.

Meanwhile, police charged baton on a group of doctors who marched in procession on the court premises demanding withdrawal of the case against Zahid.

Police picked up doctors Newaz Ahmed Chowdhury and Shahidul Haque from the scene but released them later.

Special Court-6 Judge Tanzina Islam sent Zahid to jail rejecting his bail prayer. The court also directed the jail authorities to provide him with first class division and treatment in prison following a prayer from Zahid's counsel.

Moving the bail petition, Zahid's lawyers told the court that their client could not appear before the court to face trial as he had been suffering from illness for long.

They prayed for Zahid's bail for a week and first class division in prison saying he is still sick.

The prosecution opposed the bail petition and prayed for sending him to jail saying the court had no jurisdiction to grant Zahid bail.

Meanwhile, about 200 doctors brought out a procession at about 11:00am on the court premises demanding withdrawal of the case. Police had to charge baton on them to bring the situation under control.

On May 25 last year, Zahid was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment for amassing wealth illegally and concealing information in the wealth statement submitted to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

He was also fined Tk 10 lakh, in default of which he would have to spend one more year in jail. Zahid's wife Rifat Hossain

was awarded three years' imprisonment for abetting her husband in amassing illegal wealth worth Tk 3.98 crore.

The court also ordered the authorities concerned to confiscate Zahid's ill-gotten wealth.

ACC Assistant Director Nasiruddin Ahmed filed the case with Ramna Police Station on October 3, 2007 on charge of hiding information about their wealth worth over Tk 2.22 crore.

Zahid's name was on the second list of corruption suspects published by the commission.

## Woman killed

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several marks on her throat.

Contacted, Assistant Deputy Commissioner said Khaleda's husband Sumon is an ambulance driver of the civil aviation at Zia International Airport. He has another wife living in Uttara.

Locals said being drunken Sumon often used to torture Khaleda.

Khaleda's brother Abdul Khalek yesterday filed a murder case with Turag Police Station accusing five people including Sumon and his second wife Tuli, said OC Khandaker.

Police arrested Sumon on his surrender, police said.

In another incident, Turag police recovered hanging body of Rahima Akter, 18, wife of Monir Hossain of Ranabhula.

Police said Rahima's body had been dangling from the ceiling throttled with a piece of cloth. Her husband, a garment worker, locked into a quarrel with her the preceding night and has been absconding since, police added.

## Naser Rahman

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his clients of the allegation of extortion, as it was not proved in the court of law.

He also said his clients were earlier released on bail.

Md Nuruzzaman, a contractor, filed the case with Sylhet Kotwali Police Station on February 17, 2007, accusing the three of extorting Tk 2 lakh from him.

On September 18, 2007 a Sylhet court sentenced Naser Rahman to nine years' and the two engineers to five years' imprisonment.

## India

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Front and aligned with BJP-led NDA, a senior leader of Janata Dal (Secular), another regional party which is also a part of Third Front, met Congress President Sonia Gandhi here Tuesday night sparking speculation about fresh political realignment.

Janata Dal (S) leader H D Kumaraswamy had a meeting with Sonia Gandhi at her residence last evening, fuelling speculation of further desertion from Third Front.

However, Kumaraswamy, son of former Indian Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda who heads JD (S), later told the media that it was a "courtesy call" and Sonia Gandhi did not seek the support of his party.

The final phase of polling covered 86 constituencies spread across seven states and two federal territories to decide the electoral fate of 1,432 candidates including Indian Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram, Trinamool Congress Chief Mamata Banerjee, BJP leader Varun Gandhi and his mother Maneka Gandhi.

However, the spotlight of the balloting yesterday was on the 39 seats in Tamil Nadu, considered a key swing state where the outcome has determined to a great extent which party or combination of parties had ruled India since 1996.

PTI, AFP adds: Around 35-40 percent voting was recorded till early afternoon from Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Chandigarh and Puducherry, polling was about 30 percent in Himachal Pradesh and about 16-18 per cent in Jammu and Kashmir.

Neither the ruling alliance led by the Congress party nor the main opposition bloc headed by the Hindu-nationalist BJP is seen as capable of securing an absolute majority.

Saturday's results are therefore expected to trigger a frantic round of political horse-trading as the two main blocs scabble for new partners among a multitude of regional parties—all with their own local agendas.

"Everything will depend on numbers," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh acknowledged at a press briefing this week.

Whatever formation emerges to govern India's 1.1 billion people, observers say it will be an unwieldy coalition that will struggle to present a united front at a time when India is facing a sharp economic downturn and numerous foreign policy challenges.

## Lobby pushes

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Pakistan water and power development board in the name of CMEC and another from Iran energy ministry in the name of CMEC-Shanghai Electric, which are unacceptable," said a source.

The Chinese company offered a gas booster compressor (GBC) from Shanghai Fiorentini, China that has no experience in supplying such equipment.

In order to cover up this shortcoming, Shanghai Electric submitted performance certificate issued by end-users mentioning that Pietro-Fiorentini, Italy, not Shanghai Fiorentini supplied the GBC.

Gas booster was a major issue for the Harbin's Tongi 80MW power plant that tripped many times because of a flawed GBC installed by that company. The plant tripped over 100 times in the first two years of its operation since March 2005.

Besides, Shanghai Electric submitted manufacturer's authorisation in plain papers without any letter-heads and has not provided Peak Load Data of the offered equipment in the guaranteed data sheet as required.

Shanghai Electric's bidding is US\$ 100 million

## Wasa won't

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water from 14 percent to 50 percent in five years," he said.

"Gradually, we'll reach to 100 percent use of surface water as there is no alternative to it," he added.

Underscore the need of coordination among different utilities agencies he said there is no coordination between Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

State Minister for LGED and Cooperatives Jahangir Kabir Nanak said the new system would play as a milestone to make Dhaka a beautiful and clean city.

Lawmaker of Dhaka-8 Rashed Khan Menon said success of the government is fading due to failure of safe drinking water.

He said he got huge complaints from residents of his constituency about lack of drinking water and stinky water supplied by Wasa.

## Pope calls for Palestinian state

AFP, Bethlehem

Pope Benedict XVI called yesterday for a Palestinian homeland and urged youths to resist temptation for "terrorism" in his first trip to the occupied West Bank.

"The Holy See supports the right of your people to a sovereign Palestinian homeland in the land of your forefathers, secure and at peace with its neighbours, within internationally recognised borders," he said at the welcoming ceremony in Bethlehem, the traditional birthplace of Jesus.

The pope spoke after passing through an imposing checkpoint in Israel's controversial eight-metre (25-foot) high wall that surrounds a section of Bethlehem and forms part of a barrier that Israel says is essential to its security but which the Palestinians see as a symbol of an "apartheid" regime.

In the midst of an eight-day Holy Land pilgrimage, the pope reiterated his call for peace to come to a land revered by the world's three main monotheistic faiths that has been torn by decades of violence.

"In particular I call on the international community to bring its influence to bear in favour of a solution."

And he appealed to young people living in the Palestinian territories not to "allow the loss of life and the destruction that you have witnessed to arouse bitterness or resentment in your hearts."

"Have the courage to resist any temptation you may feel to resort to acts of violence or terrorism. Instead, let what you have experienced renew your determination to build peace."

## Slaving for cookware

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Nahar of department of chemistry, Dhaka University.

"Inhaling such particles can cause chronic bronchitis and pneumoconiosis, affecting expandability of the lung and crippling the respiratory system," observes Dr Kazi S Bennoor of BSSMMU.

"Consumption of colouring pigment may cause asthma and lung cancer in the long run," he adds.

According to a survey titled "National Child Labour Survey: 2002-2003", there are around 7.4 million working children including 3.2 million child labourers in the country.

The survey states that 1.3 million of the surveyed children are engaged in hazardous work, defined as working more than 43 hours a week, which is considered to be detrimental to their physical and mental health.

Experts say the number of children engaged in hazardous work would be much higher if the sectors deemed to be hazardous were clearly defined.

Another astonishing matter is that although involvement of children in unhygienic workplaces is evident and widely reported, neither the government nor the NGOs have taken any steps to assess and look after the children suffering from diseases affecting them in the workplaces.

## Date with destiny

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been promoted to a machine operator after two years' performance with Tk 400 a week. Salary at the factory varies on age and normally the smallest kids get the lowest.

Over one-fourth of the workers in nearby factories in Kamrangirchar are children, who operate machines, handle acid, colour balloons, among other things, 13 hours a day.

Like Raju, millions of children across the country are forced into child labour in various forms. They are not only deprived of education but also exposed to life risk and many diseases.

Apart from acid and aluminium these children are involved in work at different factories using colouring pigment, which experts say may cause cancer in the long run.

"I worked as a cleaner for six months in the beginning and then became a helper. Now I am expecting another promotion to a machine operator," says 10-year-old Suman at Shuvo plastic factory.

His mother Reena works at the same factory. She said, "We asked him to continue his studies but he refused. In fact, he realises our financial condition and at this age thinks like an adult."

At the workplace Raju has again proved his merit and