

Suicide attacks kill 12 ahead of Afghan polls

AFP, Kabul

Attacks battered Afghanistan yesterday as suicide bombers killed 12 people and a rocket slammed into the presidential compound two days before elections that the Taliban have threatened to disrupt.

Millions of Afghans vote for a president tomorrow for only the second time in history but preparations have been overshadowed by Taliban threats to attack polling stations across the country, which could keep voters away in droves.

A suicide car bomb killed seven people, including soldiers serving in the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force, officials said.

Two Afghan UN staff were killed and a third wounded in a suicide bombing in the Afghan capital on Tuesday.

Officials said earlier that seven Afghan civilians were killed in the attack, which targeted a Nato military convoy. It was not immediately clear if that toll included the UN staffers.

Some Nato soldiers were also killed but the force did not immediately release a figure or give their nationalities.

The attack wounded another 50, targeting foreign troops on a busy road used frequently by US and Nato soldiers who are deployed in Afghanistan to fight Taliban insurgents, they said.

The Isaf was unable to give a breakdown of numbers or nationalities of the military casualties.

The bomb detonated near a bustling market. Most of the victims were civilians. Children were among the wounded and casualties were blackened by burn injuries and bloodied from shrapnel, witnesses said.

"It was a suicide attack... targeting a supply convoy of foreign forces," said Kabul criminal investigation police chief Sayed Abdul Ghafar Sayedzada.

The Taliban earlier fired volleys of rockets into the capital and the eastern city of Jalalabad, wounding at least 10 people, mostly women and children.

A spokesman for President Hamid Karzai, who is the frontrunner widely expected to win Thursday's elections, confirmed that one rocket hit the outer perimeter of the presidential compound.

Thousands of US and Nato troops pushed into militant strongholds months before polling day but at least eight districts remain outside state control and up to 12 percent of polling centres may not open, authorities said.

In southern Afghanistan, the Taliban's main powerbase, a suicide bomber walked up to an Afghan military checkpoint and blew himself up killing three soldiers and two civilians in Uruzgan province on Tuesday, police said.

"All Mujahideen must conduct their plans against the enemy, based on the programme previously assigned to them, to make this plot by the enemies of Islam and the country fail," the Taliban said in a statement emailed to AFP.

Although Karzai has been tipped to hold on to power, an energetic campaign by former finance minister Abdullah Abdullah has boosted the chance of a runoff amid fears that charges of irregularities may lead to protests.

The Nato-led force announced it would suspend all offensive operations and now focus on protecting the civilian population on election day.

US President Barack Obama called for patience overnight, saying defeating the insurgency "will not be quick. This will not be easy."

American defence officials have said the commander of US and Nato forces in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, is weighing cutting back desk jobs and other support staff to free up more soldiers for combat.

The Taliban were overthrown by the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan but have orchestrated a deadly insurgency against the Western-backed administra-

tion and foreign troops, with violence now at record highs.

About 300,000 Afghan and foreign troops -- every man available, officials say -- will be deployed to guard between 6,200 and nearly 7,000 polling centres, with the final figure depending on security risks, authorities say.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) raised concern Tuesday that the polls could be compromised by low turnout, violence, fraud and intimidation.

Between April 25 and August 1, there were at least 13 politically motivated killings and at least 10 abductions of electoral officials, candidates and campaign workers, the New York-based watchdog said.

A provincial council candidate in the northern province of Jowzjan was killed in a Taliban ambush late Monday, police said.

"Violence, plans to use irregular security forces at polling stations, unequal access of candidates to state media, and conditions affecting women are of particular concern," said Brad Adams, Asia director at HRW.

Afghanistan's foreign allies are footing the bill for the 223-million-dollar election and have mobilised massive resources to make the ballot a success.

"No one is under any illusion that we won't have irregularities here but we have international standards in place and a robust tallying process," said Margie Cook, chief electoral advisor for UNDP/Elect.

About 17 million people have registered to vote. Despite fears low turnout could undermine the election's credibility, many are eager to take part.

"If people die then I might die, but I'll still vote knowing the risks," said Amina, a 35-year-old widow in the southern city of Kandahar.

Progress has been made since the collapse of the five-year Taliban regime, but many people are frustrated. Despite billions of dollars of Western aid, most lack electricity, roads are bad, jobs are scarce and corruption rife.

Loan defaulters

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unless the huge amount of defaulted loans is recovered. Defaulted loans are always considered bad for the economy and the government should prevent its increase, Finance Minister AMA Muhith said at a programme on July 9.

On July 5, Muhith revealed a list of 2,196 loan defaulters who have dodged loans of Tk 15,451 crore. He told parliament that the government has initiated steps to recover the amount.

The list updated up to March 2009 by Bangladesh Bank's Credit Information Bureau includes only those who defaulted on loans of Tk 1 crore and above each.

Among the defaulters are apparel units, different government organisations including a ministry, media houses, private aviation companies, real estate companies, leather and tannery units, and even educational institutions.

On July 9, Muhith said the government would publish an updated list soon. He also said the government may allow wholesale rescheduling of loan payments so the volume of defaulted loans does not swell at this time of global recession.

On sick industries, Oli Ahmed yesterday said some industries become sick because of over invoicing. "But the fact is that the owners of these sick industries build houses and buy cars and show their industries sick to get advantage from the government," he said.

The parliamentary body criticised officials of Water Development Board for not repairing and maintaining dams and embankments after they are built.

It asked the WDB to create mechanism so that strong waves of rivers lose strength 20-30 metres ahead before hitting the dams or embankments. The committee also asked them to end construction of roads and embankments before the rainy season.

BDR trial

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The apex court may also fix a date tomorrow for holding hearing on the reference, Attorney General (AG) Mahbubey Alam and SC Registrar Shawkat Hossain told reporters at their respective offices yesterday.

The apex court may also assign amicus curiae (friend of court) tomorrow for hearing their expert opinions on the reference.

Mahbubey Alam told newsmen that he got a letter from the chief justice regarding the president's reference to the SC.

"The letter asked me to appear before the Appellate Division tomorrow morning for determining the way on how the matter regarding the president's reference can be disposed of," he said.

"All the eleven judges of the Appellate Division will hear the submissions of the amicus curiae on the matter," the AG added.

The amicus curiae would verbally or in black and white place their arguments and submissions before the apex court, he said.

The court would dispose of the matter after holding hearing on the submissions and opinions of the amicus curiae and then sent the opinion to the president.

Replying to a query, Mahbubey Alam said if any judge of the Appellate Division remained absent due to any unavoidable reason, the other judges would hold the hearing and disposed of the matter.

There is no scope for anybody to become an additional party in this matter, he said.

SC Registrar Shawkat Hossain told The Daily Star that the matter regarding the president's reference has been enlisted on the cause list of the Appellate Division for tomorrow.

The attorney general has also been notified about this issue, the SC registrar said.

IO closed

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Shourav, Tohurul Kazi and Masud Khan -- who are accused in the rape case, Tohurul fell sick and was admitted to Faridpur Medical College Hospital on Monday night.

A Faridpur court sent the three arrestees back to jail after they were produced before it on completion of their two-day remand.

Meanwhile, police are yet to not arrest the FIR named accused of the gang rape case Kalam Khan and Tushar Khan.

The police have also not been to recover any copies of the CDs of the rape.

New lease

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three hill districts, is also going on, Karim said.

Former chairman of standing committee Promod Mankin MP, Chairman of CHT Regional Council Santu Larma, State Minister for CHT Affairs Ministry Dipankar Talukder, Chairman of CHT Refugee Affairs Taskforce Jatindra Lal Tripura, Ethin Rakhaine, Gias Uddin Ahmed MP and Secretary of CHT Affairs Ministry Mozammel Haque Khan attended the meeting.

"Gradually, our government will implement the peace accord as it has already taken several initiatives in this regard," said Fazle Karim.

Replying to a query, Santu Larma, chairman of CHT regional council and president of Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sangahti Samity, said the government is very sincere to implement the CHT peace accord.

He said the peace accord was signed for the interest of the country and it would be good for the country's development if treaty is implemented fully.

On protest by certain quarters against pulling out of army, Dipankar Talukder, MP, said a vested quarter is trying to create disturbance in the hills opposing army pull out. He ruled out any security problem in the aftermath of troops withdrawal.

A meeting of the National Committee for Implementation of CHT Peace Accord will also be held at the conference room of CHT Development Board here today.

Deputy Leader of parliament Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury who is also chairperson of the committee and its members Santu Larma, Jatindra Lal Tripura and Raja Barrister Devasish Roy are expected to attend the meeting.

Tigers wrap it up 4-1

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series victory in the previous game, Shakib Al Hasan's men showed no mercy to the home team in the dead rubber to make it 4-1.

After three high-scoring matches, right-arm paceman Dollar Mahmud, who flew in as a backup of injured bowler Rubel Hossain and played the match in place of Mahbubul Alam, made sure of a low-scoring affair in the last game as he got movement from the surface to tear down the Zimbabwean top order.

The 20-year old right-arm pacer's career-best bowling saw the home team bundled out for 209 runs in 46.4 overs. At one stage the home side were reduced to a precarious 69 for 6 in the 15th over but Brendan Taylor (61) and Ray Price (46) salvaged the innings.

Mushfiqur then took the spotlight as the wicketkeeper-batsman capitalised on the opportunity of opening the innings in reply to a modest target, but unfortunately missed out on his deserved maiden hundred.

The right-hander charged out of the crease against left-arm spinner Price to loft it over the bowler's head but missed the ball and keeper Coventry made no mistake to clip the balls.

The Bangladesh vice-captain smashed eleven fours during his 121-ball 98 while captain Shakib added 30 off 40 balls as Bangladesh coasted to the target of 212 runs in 47.5 overs with five wickets to spare.

In their brief history at the highest level of the game, the

Tigers had never experienced such an incredible run of success as they returned home on the back of a Test and two consecutive one-day series wins.

The Tigers went into the Lions den with high expectations after their historic Test and one-day series wins in the Caribbean and they tremendously carried on their form on way to the comfortable series victory against the bottom-ranked side in spite of getting a jolt in the third match suffering a 69-run defeat.

Bangladesh lost their regular skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza at the very early stage of the tour but they hardly felt his absence thanks to Shakib who did the business brilliantly to enhance his reputation and bring back the smile to the faces of millions of cricket fans after the heart-breaking performance in the ICC World T20 in England.

It was a rare occasion as three Bangladesh batsmen scored hundreds in a series as former Bangladesh skipper Mohammad Ashraful, current skipper Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal, who hit the highest ODI score of 154 for Bangladesh, reached three digit figures in the five-match series.

Bangladesh also had a record-breaking chase when they overhauled the Zimbabwean total 312 in the fourth game to confirm the series win.

The Tigers' next assignment is against the same opponents as Zimbabwe will arrive in Dhaka on October 23 to play five one-day internationals.

Aug 21 attack

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Meantime, the Ramna Batamul blast cases were shifted to two separate speedy trial tribunals for quick disposal.

Judge Masdar Hossain of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 of Dhaka passed the orders on apprehension that the trials might not be completed within 135 workdays.

The judge in his orders said that on August 3 he directed inspector general of police to submit further probe report by two months. As the deadline for the disposal of the cases will be ended by this time, the cases were sent back to the previous courts.

Earlier on August 12, the same court granted bail to two detained Harkatul Jihad members including brother of Huji chief Mufti Abdul Hannan triggering mixed reaction among the lawyers, litigants and other people.

The grisly grenade attack was carried out on an Awami League rally on Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004 that left 23 people dead and 300 injured.

A day after the grenade attack, police filed two cases--one for murder and the other under the Explosive Substances Act--with Motijheel Police Station.

The murder case was sent back to the Second Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court while the case filed under the Explosive Substances Act to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's

Swine flu

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health screening programme is ongoing at 16 entry points of the country," he said.

"But this is a warning for us," he told The Daily Star, adding that the swine flu situation in the country is now at level-2 as several cases have been detected in the community (cluster identification).

The government officials said members of Pandemic Influenza Management Committee had been already trained at five hospitals in the capital. These hospitals are Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital, Suhrawardi Hospital, National Institute of Diseases of Chest and Hospital and Infectious Diseases Hospital. Patients with flu symptoms would be treated there.

Health professionals of 95 urban primary health care centres would also receive training starting from today and it would be later extended to seven more private hospitals.

"People now need to maintain personal hygiene and inform health professionals if they suffer from flu," said Prof Ruhul Haque, adding that the government would strengthen media campaign to make people aware.

He also said he had already informed the prime minister about the swine flu situation in the country.

Court.

Earlier on September 4 last year, the home ministry following an order shifted the cases to the speedy trial tribunal-1 for their disposal in 135 workdays.

The tribunal then recorded statements of 61 prosecution witnesses including complainant of the cases.

On June 11 last year, Criminal Investigation Department (CID) pressed charges against 22 people including former deputy minister and BNP leader Abdus Salam Pintu and Huji chief Hannan.

RAMNA BATAMUL BLAST CASES

The home ministry yesterday in an order shifted the Ramna Batamul blast cases to two separate speedy trial tribunals for disposal.

The cases were pending with the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka.

The murder case was sent to the Speedy Trial Tribunal-3 of Dhaka while the case filed under Explosive Substances Act was shifted to Speedy Trial Tribunal-1.

The cases were filed for carrying out bomb attacks during the celebration of Pehela Baishakh on April 14, 2001 that left 10 people dead and a number of people injured.

Baby girl

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Her father and neighbours, however, were able to catch Shahjahan, the alleged molester, red handed, and beat him so severely that he too had to be admitted to DMCH. Shahjahan is a garment factory employee.

"Shahjahan took my granddaughter to his room around 9:30am while her mother was cooking. All of a sudden we heard her scream with all her strength. As we rushed to the room, we found the baby bloodied. She was crying, pointing her finger at Shahjahan," the victim's grandmother told The Daily Star adding, "Shahjahan took her to his room like he always does, so we didn't worry about it."

Hailing from Narsinghdi, Shahjahan has been working for Moni Embroidery and has been the victim's neighbour in Natunpara of Hemayetpur for several years.

The victim's father said they could not inform the police yet in the evening, as they were busy with arranging his daughter's treatment.

Later when The Daily Star contacted Officer-in-charge (OC) of Savar police station, AKM Nasir Ullah, he said they got a phone call from the victim's father who reported the incident to them, and he told the father to go to the police station to file a complaint.

DMCH sources said the victim was admitted to the 'One Stop Crisis Centre' where she was out of danger last night.

Iraqi PM meets Syrian president

AFP, Damascus

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for security talks in Damascus yesterday, after the top US commander in Iraq said Damascus's role in allowing fighters across the border remained a concern.

Maliki, who first met Syrian Prime Minister Mohammed Naji Otri, traveled to Syria just days after a senior US military delegation was in Damascus to discuss regional security issues, reportedly including Iraq.

No details were provided on the talks, which Maliki aide Ali Musawi said on Sunday were to focus on "security, politics, economics, borders, water and regional cooperation."

Maliki was accompanied by Oil Minister Hussein al-Shahristani and Water Minister Latif Rashid as well as top security officials.

On Monday, General Ray Odierno said that while the "flow of foreign fighters in Iraq has decreased significantly... we're still a little bit concerned with Syria's role in this."

In recent months, Iraqi officials had hailed an improvement in security at the Syrian border.

Ahead of a US troop pullback from Iraqi towns and cities at the end of June, interior ministry operations director Major General Abdul Karim Khalaf said it was now well secured and Iraqi troops should soon be able to take over patrols.

Iraq responded negatively to reports that the US military delegation which visited Syria last Monday discussed Iraqi security.

"Baghdad doesn't care for any of these meetings about Iraq without its presence," Deputy Foreign Minister Labid Alawi was quoted as saying on Sunday.

Maliki's talks in Syria were also to focus on water resources, amid frequent complaints from Baghdad that the flow on the Euphrates River, which runs from Turkey through Syria to Iraq, is insufficient for Iraq's agricultural needs.

The Iraqi water minister accused Turkey last week of breaking a promise to increase the flow of water.

In July, Baghdad called for talks with Ankara and Damascus over the issue.

The talks were also likely to focus on the implementation of an agreement to reopen a closed oil pipeline from Iraq to Syria's Mediterranean coast.

In talks with Maliki in Baghdad in April, Otri agreed a plan to repair the pipeline.

An initial agreement to reopen the pipeline, which runs from Iraq's northern oilfields to the Syrian port of Baniyas, had been reached in August 2007 but both governments said technical problems had prevented it being carried out.

Initially shut off in 1982, the pipeline reopened in 2000 but was shut off again in 2003 following the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Before March 2003, Syria received around 200,000 barrels of oil a day from Iraq at preferential prices, enabling it to profit from sales on the international market.

Govt moves

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Communist Party (PBCP-ML), its two factions Janajuddho and Lal Pataka, Gono Bahini and Gono Mukti Fouz.

Kushtia tops the list of killings with 63 murders followed by 46 in Jhenaidah, 41 in Jessore, 28 in Khulna, 16 in Chuadanga, 10 in Meherpur, eight in Satkhira, seven in Bagerhat, five in Narail and four in Magura.

Rival party men killed at least 52 outlaws during the period. The deaths included 15 businessmen who had refused to pay tolls. Those killed also included at least 17 local politicians--four belonging to ruling Awami League, eight to BNP and rest to other smaller parties.

The latest killing took place Saturday night when criminals sprayed bullets on several ruling Awami League leaders and activists in Bheramara upazila. College teacher Banda Fattah Mohon, also an activist of AL, was killed in the incident and several others including Bheramara upazila AL joint-secretary Meherul Alam were injured.

Besides, six severed heads, all claimed to have fallen prey to outlaws, were found in Kushtia over the last two weeks sending a chill in the region.

Earlier, several special drives were conducted in the southwestern region to nab the outlaws but there has been no letup of their activities. At least 10 special drives including Operation Clean Heart, Operation Spider Web were launched in last several years. Incidents of 'crossfire' also could not tame the outlaws in the long run. According to data of police records and newspapers reports, a total of 566 crossfire deaths took place in the region since June 2004.

Ahmadinejad facing objections to his new cabinet

AFP, Tehran

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose disputed re-election plunged the nation into its worst crisis since the Islamic revolution, unveils his cabinet today facing a dogged opposition and challenges from within his own hardline support base.

Ahmadinejad already announced six names on Sunday and said he planned to have at least three women ministers in his 21-member government, which would be a first in the 30-year existence of the Islamic republic.

But some of his proposed appointments have already run into objections from MPs, who have complained that Ahmadinejad needs to consult them more and ensure his ministers have the right experience and credentials.

"From the six people named, we can assume the cabinet will not have the calibre required for an efficient government and this is not a good sign," influential conservative MP Ahmad Tavakoli was quoted as saying by the ISNA news agency.

"In this list there are people who have never recorded a day of executive work," he charged.

Ahmadinejad's position has already been shaken by the massive opposition protests over his June re-election and a dispute with some hardliners over his political choices which has exposed rifts among the ruling elite.

During his first tenure, he also came under fire for frequently reshuffling the cabinet, sacking 10 ministers and retaining inexperienced ministers.

His new four-year term is also expected to see Iran remain on a collision course with the West, particularly over its nuclear drive and its crack-down against the opposition in the post-election tumult.

Among the top jobs, Ahmadinejad said he will name Heydar Moslehi, a former representative of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the volunteer Basij militia, as intelligence minister.

Manouchehr Mottaki is expected to stay at the foreign ministry, the Mehr news agency reported, quoting "unnamed informed sources."

Interior Minister Sadeq Mahsouli, a former Revolutionary Guard commander, will move to the defence ministry in a swap with Mostafa Mohammad Najjar, it said.

Ahmadinejad on Sunday

said the main criteria for his new team were "morality and commitment, efficiency as well as convergence and spirit of cooperation."

He has pledged that his new government will work to improve the economy, promote social justice and crack down on corruption.

His line-up will be put to a confidence vote before the 290-member parliament on August 30, but it may not be smooth sailing.

Among the women, his choice of Fatemeh Ajorlou for welfare and social security is likely to stir controversy because of her alleged support for Abbas Palizdar, who was jailed for accusing several senior clerics, including former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and their children of corruption.

Ashraf expects

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Referring to the chief election commissioner's statement, Ashraf said the EC could itself hold an impartial election even under a political government.

He said allegations are there against some of the advisers of the last caretaker government and many top army officials. "Many more things will come out if investigation is carried out to this end," said Ashraf.

Minus-one formula was carried out to remove Prime Minister and AL President Sheikh Hasina from politics, said the AL leader adding, "It was a minus-one formula, not minus-two that many say."

He said conspiracies are still going on to assassinate Sheikh Hasina and even conspiracies are there at different levels to erase the spirit of the liberation war.

Directing the party leaders and workers to change themselves for building a new Bangladesh, the AL general secretary said, "Your behavior will have to be changed by giving up the past habits. It is not acceptable that you behave like BNP."

The AL leader said, "We want to change the Awami League in a bid to change the country and for this new leadership has been brought in the party through its national council."

He urged Jubo League leaders to prefer new leadership in their committees in their upcoming council.

AL Organising Secretaries Jahangir Kabir Nanak and AFM Bahauddin Nasim, Mirza Azam, Abed Khan, Syed Shamsul Haque, Zinat Huda Wahid, among others, also spoke at the discussion, chaired by Omar Faruk Chowdhury, acting chairman of Jubo League.

Implement

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finance minister, cultural affairs minister and the CHT affairs minister.

The commission members at the press conference said during their visit they talked to army personnel, police, local authorities and the people, both Bangalees and indigenous people who saw no security risks in the army pull out.

They praised setting up of the National Committee for Implementation of the CHT Accord, re-establishment of the Land Commission, the Taskforce for CHT Refugee Rehabilitation Affairs, cancellation of leased out land for plantation and the withdrawal of temporary military camps.

"This has generated a sense of momentum," said Lord Avebury.