

Suicide attack on Afghan mosque kills 23

AFP, AP, Jalalabad

A suicide attack killed 23 people, including 18 civilians and four government officials, outside a mosque in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, the provincial governor said.

Among the four officials killed was the deputy head of Afghanistan's intelligence service, Lutfullah Mashal told a news conference in Mazar-i-Sharif, capital of the relatively peaceful Laghman province.

The head of the provincial council, the provincial chief executive and the former head of religious affairs in the provincial government were also killed.

"Eighteen civilians were killed. Three were women," Mashal said.

The bomber wounded dozens of

people, detonating his explosives in a crowd of people outside the main mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif, the provincial capital of eastern Laghman province, where senior government officials were gathered.

It was the second high-profile bombing in Afghanistan since landmark presidential and provincial council elections were held on August 20 under a cloud of Taliban intimidation and attacks.

The insurgent militia claimed responsibility for the attack. A spokesman said that Afghanistan's deputy intelligence chief Abdullah was the target and that he had been killed.

"There was a suicide attack outside Mazar-i-Sharif mosque. There are a big number of civilian deaths. A number of government officials have also been killed,"

interior ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashayri said.

He declined to give further details on the identities of the casualties, but confirmed that Laghman's provincial governor and police chief were unhurt.

An official at the Afghan health ministry said at least 23 bodies had been brought into hospitals with 36 people wounded.

"But as the dead and wounded were taken to the mosque, other clinics and shops, the number of dead and wounded will increase," spokesman Doctor Ahmad Farid Raad told AFP in the Afghan capital Kabul.

Sayed Ahmad Safi, spokesman for the Laghman provincial government, said around 20 people were killed and even more wounded.

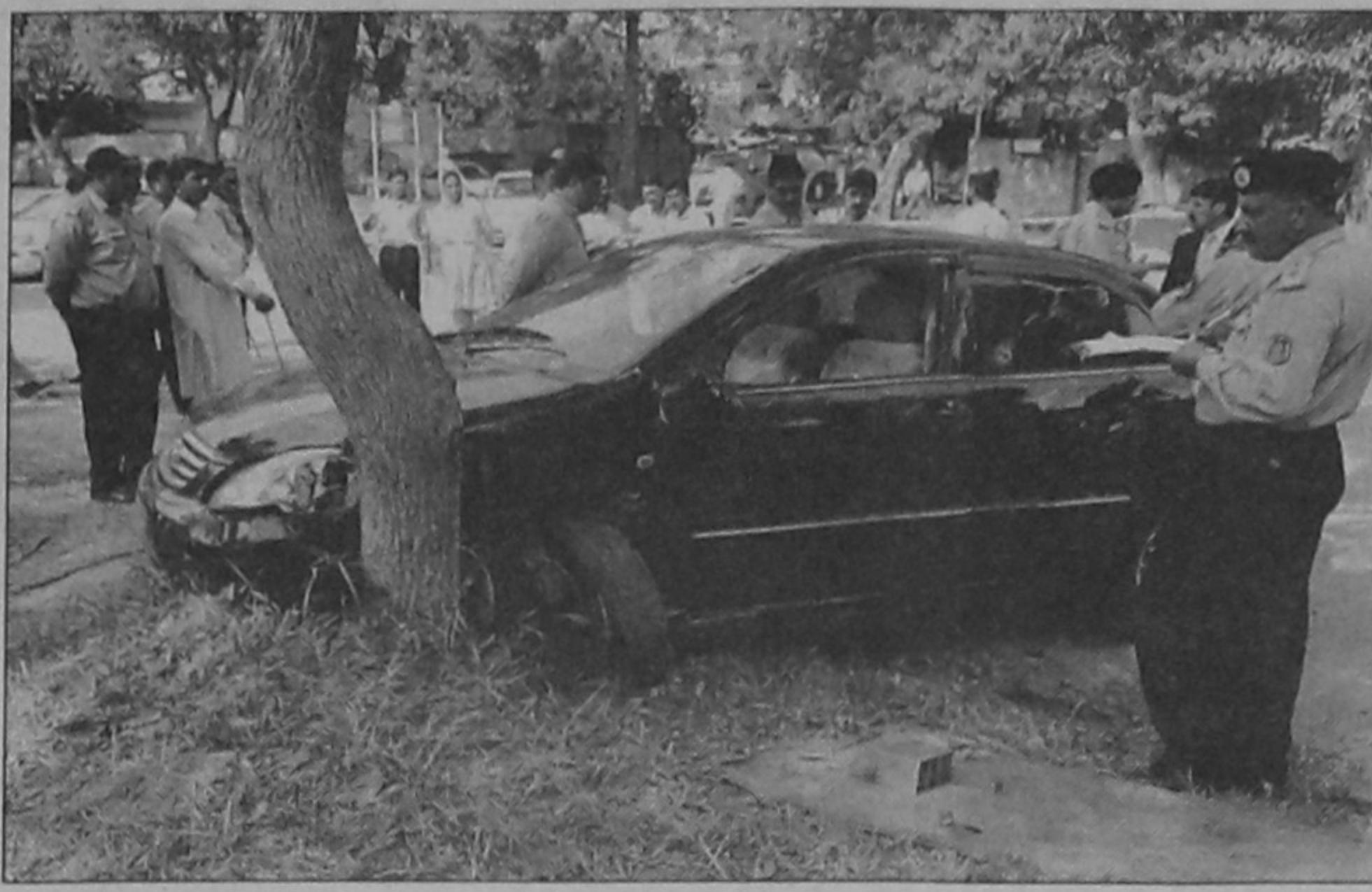


PHOTO: AFP
Pakistani police cordon off the area around the bullet-ridden car of Religious Affairs Minister Hamid Saeed Kazmi after a drive-by shooting in Islamabad yesterday. Kazmi was wounded and his driver killed in the shooting in the capital on Wednesday.



PHOTO: AFP
Picture shows damaged buildings along a street in the West Java town of Sukabumi yesterday after a 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck off Indonesia's Java Island killing at least 15 people.

Is Hakimullah Mehsud dead?

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Pakistani security forces believe that new Taliban commander Hakimullah Mehsud is dead, a media report said Wednesday.

A Pakistani TV news channel quoted intelligence sources as saying that the man died some time back and it was Hakimullah's look-alike brother who spoke to news channels recently.

The brother was summoned from Afghanistan to temporarily head the banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Online news agency reported.

The channel said that security forces were preparing to launch a big offensive against the Taliban in South Waziristan, close to the border with Afghanistan.

Saudi Arabia not in favour of Musharraf's trial

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, ANI, Jeddah

Saudi Arabia Tuesday said it is not in favour of a trial against former Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf which could further deteriorate the volatile political situation in that country, the Online news agency reported.

Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Tuesday urged the Pakistani leadership to abide by the agreement reached at the time of Musharraf's resignation that no action would be taken against the former president.

Abdullah, who played a key role in that agreement, Tuesday conveyed the message to visiting Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik during his nearly one-hour meeting with him.

He said any violation of the deal would badly affect the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia relations.

There is already a political confrontation between various political parties in Pakistan and any step against Musharraf could further deteriorate the situation, the Saudi king noted.

Meanwhile the 'royal' treatment being given to former Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf during his Saudi Arabia visit has his opponents worried.

The special treatment has sparked speculations that Riyadh is trying to use its influence to ask the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to shun its demand for Musharraf's trial under the Article Six of the Constitution.

Sources said King Abdullah sent his special airplane to London to fetch Musharraf.

Reports regarding Saudi Arabia cracking its whip on the PML-N and other anti-Musharraf parties has probably forced PML-N to come out with clarifications.

PML-N spokesman denied reports regarding Saudi putting pressure on PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif.

"There has been no official message from the Saudi family to Mian Nawaz Sharif in this regard," The Dawn quoted a PML-N spokesperson, as saying.

Arctic warming may affect 25pc of world population thru' flooding: WWF report

AFP, Geneva

Global warming in the Arctic could affect a quarter of the world's population through flooding and amplify the wider impact of climate change, a report by environmental group WWF said yesterday.

Air temperatures in the region have risen by almost twice the global average over the past few decades, according to extracts released by WWF.

"What this report says is that a warming Arctic is much more than a local problem, it's a global problem," said Martin Sommerkorn, senior climate change advisor on the WWF's Arctic Programme.

"Simply put, if we do not keep the Arctic cold enough, people across the world will suffer the effects," he warned in a statement.

The combination of thawing Arctic sea ice and melting ice sheets in Greenland and West Antarctica was likely to raise global sea levels by about 1.2 metres (four feet) by 2100, more than previously thought, according to scientists commissioned by the WWF for the report.

"The associated flooding of coastal regions will affect more than a quarter of the world's population," the WWF said.

The report concluded that melting sea ice and the release of pockets of greenhouse gases -- carbon dioxide from thawing permafrost and methane seeping from the depths of the warming Arctic Ocean -- would also fuel disruption to atmospheric and ocean currents much further afield.

The most immediately felt change would be on temperature and rainfall in Europe and North America.

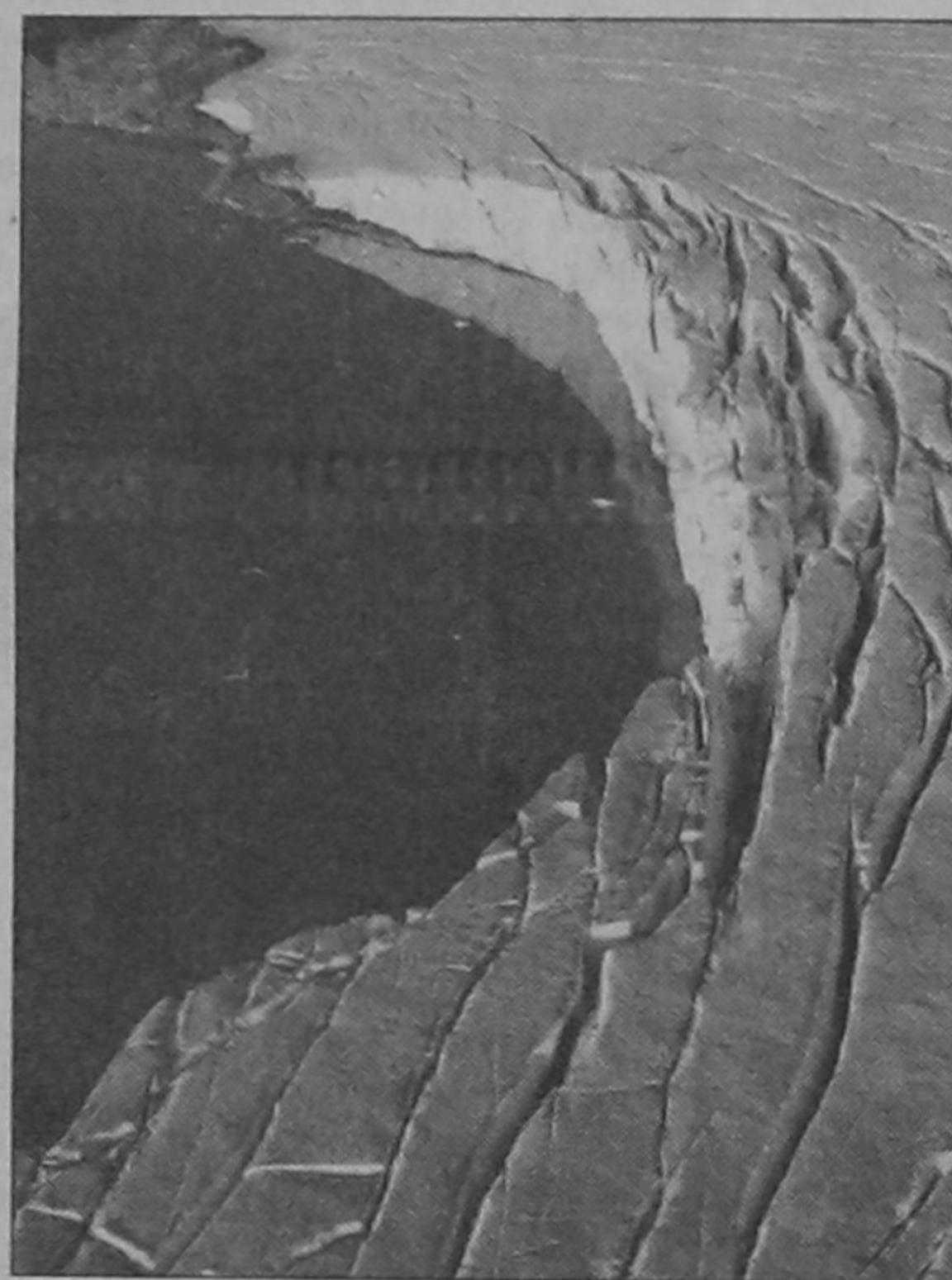


PHOTO: AFP
This photo taken on August 21 shows an aerial view of a small melt-lake on the side of Helheim glacier in south-east Greenland. According to Greenpeace, Greenland's ice sheet has more than doubled its contribution to sea-level rise in the last seven years due to a rapid and unpredictable loss of ice.

Japan's incoming govt faces weak mandate

AP, Tokyo

Japan's new government will have a shaky mandate when it takes office later this month, a poll indicated yesterday, as party leaders acknowledged they must get to work immediately to deal with the country's severe economic problems.

Most Japanese voters chose the opposition in historic weekend elections because they were fed up with a half century of rule by the governing conservatives, not because they were enthused by what the opposition had to offer, according to the poll in the Asahi, a major national newspaper.

The poll found most voters remain sceptical about whether the victorious Democratic Party of Japan can make good on its promises to bring the world's second-largest economy out of its worst slowdown since World War II, rein in the powerful bureaucracy and restore Japan's international credibility after a succession of three prime ministers in three years.

Planters trapped

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followed by an assistant conservator of forest (ACF) and a DFO.

"The size of trees [eligible for permit] varies due to huge time gaps between these officials making their visits. Hence, issuance of permit becomes a cumbersome process," Avoy Prakash explains.

He demands bringing in necessary amendments to the existing CHT Forest Transit Rule, 1973 so that the permit issue could be resolved in a hassle-free manner.

Planters allege a DFO takes Tk 10 per CFT and one-time "speed money" of Tk 15,000, while his official staffs take Tk 5 per CFT for office expenditures. ACF realises Tk 5 per CFT more for verification of jute plus extra Tk 15,000 for speed boat fare and the range officer takes Tk 20-30 per CFT from a permit applicant.

Besides, Tk 3 per CFT is taken by the range office for stopping at "Saw Mill", Tk 3,000 for loading timber on trucks and issuing of TP (transit pass) and Tk 500 for staffs, the planters add.

Asked, DFO of CHT South Forest Division Amir Hossain Chowdhury denied the bribery allegations. He said, "We don't take any money from anyone. As we don't get sufficient fuel from the government, they just sometimes arrange speedboats and bear the expenses for fuel."

Sources say during the caretaker government rule several meetings were held at different level regarding amendment to the existing CHT Forest Transit Rule, 1973 to minimise sufferings of the hill people.

Now the file is gathering dust at the CHT Regional Council for its recommendations.

Contacted, Chakma Circle Chief Raja barrister Devasish Roy acknowledged the immediate need for changes in the concerned laws.

"Now the DFOs are the only authorised persons to issue permit. I think this power should be delegated to lower-level officers as the DFOs cannot provide time due to their higher positions for resolving the lengthy process of permit issuance," Raja Devasish observed.

"In the past, the USF [unclassified forest division] was used to issue 'Royalty Permit' to the indigenous people considering our customs. But I don't know why that process is stalled now," he added.

Contacted, Sana Ullah Patowary, DFO of USF, said he could not explain what prompted the government in 1992-93 to stop the 'Royalty Permit' method.

Obama praises Islam at iftar party

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama on Tuesday praised Islam as an integral part of America, as he feted prominent US Muslims at an iftar party marking the holy fasting month of Ramadan.

"For well over a billion Muslims, Ramadan is a time of intense devotion and reflection," Obama said, in remarks welcoming his guests in the State Dining Room of the White House.

"Tonight's iftar is a ritual

that is being carried out this Ramadan at kitchen tables and mosques in all 50 states," Obama said.

"Islam as we know is part of America. Like the broader American citizenry, the American Muslim community is one of extraordinary dynamism and diversity."

"On this occasion, we celebrate the holy month of Ramadan and we also celebrate how much Muslims have enriched America and its culture in ways both large and small," the president said.

Most hospitals

FROM PAGE 1

remained ineffective. The health ministry held several meetings with the information ministry regarding the campaign, but it is yet to get a boost.

No banner with awareness messages was found at the DMCH outdoor department while counselling service was completely absent.

Except Dhaka Shishu Hospital, none of the hospitals the government declared to be providing treatment to patients with swine flu or flu-like illness put up such banners.

The health minister yesterday told The Daily Star that the government has completed a process to start massive awareness campaign, which will be carried out within a day or two.

Meanwhile, health professionals at DMCH complained that they are yet to get enough antiviral drugs for treating patients and N95 masks for their own protection.

Hospitals like BSMMU, NIDCH and BIRDEM are yet to

set up separate corners at their outdoor departments, which poses the risk of rapid spread of the infection in the hospitals themselves.

A dengue patient at BSMMU complained that patients with flu-like illness were seen without any mask buying tickets along with others.

Many relatives said from newspapers they came to learn that certain hospitals are providing treatment for swine flu but employees of those medical centres denied it.

They also expressed dissatisfaction with the government's management system of the deadly disease, which has already taken a pandemic turn claiming lives of more than a thousand people across the globe.

The government should be more advanced in tackling the infection as the virus entered the country more than two months ago, said an aggrieved relative of a patient who had a bitter experience at several hospitals while seeking treatment.

For successful implementation, we invite applications for the following positions:

1. Project Coordinator (Full-time contract for two years / No. of vacancy: 1)

Major Responsibilities:

- Plan and implement BYLC's month-long youth leadership program
- Maintain liaison with all key stakeholders, including schools and madrassas, community partners, and media
- Supervise and monitor the work of program facilitators, interns and volunteers
- Organize logistics and venue for opening, graduation, and other relevant ceremonies
- Organize and facilitate community service work of BYLC's program participants
- Assist management in planning, preparing and completing necessary documentation

2. Facilitator (Full-time contract for two months, November & December 2009 / No. of vacancy: 7)

Major Responsibilities:

- Assist in planning and designing curriculum for BYLC's month-long youth leadership program
- Prepare guidelines and schedule for leadership sessions, activities, and small group discussions
- Plan and arrange field trips for program participants
- Supervise and monitor the work and performance of students during the training program
- Facilitate community service projects in a local slum
- Ensure documentation of all training related activities

Requirements:

- High academic standing in all board exams
- Candidates for project coordinator position must have completed their undergraduate degree from a recognized university in Bangladesh or abroad. Candidates with graduate degree in social sciences will be given preference
- Recent graduates or students currently in their final semester of undergraduate studies may apply for the facilitator position
- No full-time job experience required for the positions but preference will be given to candidates with previous community service involvement
- Strong communication skills in both English and Bengali
- Ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines

Salary Range:

Competitive with housing, health and travel allowances for project coordinator / negotiable for facilitators

Other Benefits: In-house executive training on leadership, communication and community organizing

How to Apply:

- E-mail your resume and cover letter to hr@bylc.org with the position applied for in the subject line
- Your resume should include complete details of academic performance, extracurricular activities, and names and contact details of two referees
- Your one-page cover letter should outline your motivation for joining BYLC and how you feel our organization can benefit from your skills and experience. Please visit www.bylc.org for more information on our work
- Deadline for application: September 25, 2009. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted for interview.

News in Brief

Bomb hits Athens stock exchange
AFP, Athens

A powerful van bomb caused major damage Wednesday to the Athens stock exchange and injured a woman in one of two attacks suspected to have been carried out by far-left militants.

The explosion destroyed six cars, tore through windows on the side of the stock exchange building and caused widespread damage inside but the Athex bourse opened for business after a hurried cleanup operation.

23 die in Indian bus plunge
AFP, New Delhi

At least 23 people have been killed after a bus fell into a deep gorge on a mountainous highway in northern India, officials said Wednesday.

The bus was carrying 40 people when it rolled into the gorge while negotiating a bend in the road in the district of Mandi in Himachal Pradesh state on Tuesday.

Obama approval rating dips
ANI, Washington

US President Barack Obama's overall approval rating has only dipped a couple of percentage points in August.

In the latest CBS News poll released Tuesday night, the president's overall approval rating is 56 percent, which is down two points from the last poll taken at the end of July.