

Kabul attacks show Nato intel failure: Karzai

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said yesterday that a coordinated Taliban attack showed a "failure" by Afghan intelligence and especially by Nato, as heavy street fighting between insurgents and security forces came to an end after 18 hours.

Battles which broke out at midday on Sunday gripped the city's central districts through the night, with large explosions and gunfire lighting up alleys and streets.

"The fact terrorists were able to enter Kabul and other provinces was an intelligence failure for us and especially for Nato," Karzai's office said in a statement, which also strongly condemned the attack.

Though the death toll was relatively low considering the scale of the assault, it high-

lighted the ability of militants to strike at high-profile targets in the heart of the city even after more than 10 years of war.

Karzai echoed his Western backers by praising Afghan security forces, saying they had proven their ability to defend their country - a task which will increasingly fall to them as foreign armies reduce their troop numbers in Afghanistan.

His office said 36 insurgents were killed in the attacks which paralyzed Kabul's government district, and which targeted three other provinces in what the Taliban called the start of a spring offensive. One fighter was captured.

Eleven members of the Afghan security forces and four civilians were killed in the well-planned attacks in Kabul and the eastern Nangarhar, Logar and Paktia provinces, it said.



An Afghan police officer moves the door of a car used in Sunday's suicide attack in Kabul yesterday.

"In only a short time we managed to cut short their devilish plans," said Defence Ministry Chief of Operations Afzal Aman. "They carried suicide vests, but managed to do nothing except be killed."

The attacks were also another election-year setback in Afghanistan for US President Barack Obama,

who wants to present the campaign against the Taliban as a success before the departure of most foreign combat troops by the end of 2014.

Insurgents were killed attacking the Afghan parliament, and in a multi-storey building under construction that they had occupied to fire rocket-propelled grenades

and rifles down on the heavily fortified diplomatic enclave.

More were killed in Kabul's east, and while attacking a Nato base in the eastern city of Jalalabad.

Fighting in the capital only ended with special forces assaults which were mounted as dawn broke.

Assisting physically for the first time in the attack, Nato helicopters launched strafing attacks on gunmen in the building site, which overlooked the Nato headquarters and several embassies, including the British and German missions.

Elite Afghan soldiers scaled scaffolding to outflank the insurgents, who took up defensive positions on the upper floor of the half-built structure. Bullets ricocheted off walls, sending up puffs of brick dust.

Syria must allow observers full access: UN chief

AP, Beirut



UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said yesterday it is the Syrian government's responsibility to guarantee freedom of movement within the country for UN observers monitoring the nation's 5-day cease-fire.

The cease-fire appeared to be rapidly unravelling as regime forces pounded the opposition stronghold of Homs with artillery shells and mortars, activists said.

Even though the overall level of violence across Syria has dropped significantly since the truce took effect, government attacks over the weekend raised fresh doubts about President Bashar Assad's commitment to special envoy Kofi Annan's plan to end 13 months of violence and launch talks on the country's political future.

An advance team of six observers arrived in Damascus and was negotiating the mission's ground rules with Syrian authorities.

Ban, speaking to reporters in Brussels, called on the Assad regime to ensure the observers are not impeded in anyway in their mission.

"It is the Syrian government's responsibility to guarantee freedom of access, free-

dom of movement within the country," he said. "They should be allowed to freely move to any places where they will be able to observe this cessation of violence."

Ban called the cease-fire "very fragile," but said it was essential that it hold so that an "inclusive political dialogue can continue." He said opposition forces "should also fully cooperate."

He added that the UN plans to increase the advance team to 30 people, all of them unarmed, and that the UN Security Council is expected to authorise a formal monitoring team of about 250 people later this week.

Annan's spokesman, Ahmad Fawzi, said the advance team, led by Moroccan Col Ahmed Himmiche, met yesterday with Syrian Foreign Ministry officials to discuss ground rules, including what freedom of movement the observers would have.

The Security Council demanded full access for the UN team, but the regime could try to create obstacles. The failure of an Arab League observer mission earlier this year was blamed in part on regime restrictions imposed on the monitors, including having to travel with government minders.

NEWS IN brief

Malaysian PM pledges further civil liberties reforms

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak yesterday pledged to review the country's tough sedition law that critics say has been used to silence dissent as part of reforms to claw back votes.

Parliament was also expected to pass a new law to replace the controversial Internal Security Act (ISA) that allowed for indefinite detention without trial of terror suspects and dissidents.

The slew of reforms follows Najib's pledge last September to improve civil liberties in a country long known for authoritarian rule ahead of elections expected to be called soon.

"The government will continue to carry out these political reforms. As such, I would like to announce that the government will comprehensively review the Sedition Act," he said in an address to lawmakers.

Pope turns 85, oldest pontiff in a century

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Benedict XVI celebrated his 85th birthday yesterday with visitors from his native state of Bavaria in Germany and is now the oldest pope since Leo XIII, who died in 1903 aged 93.

The pope began his birthday with mass in the frescoed Pauline Chapel in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace along with his 88-year-old brother Georg Ratzinger, himself a bishop and the pope's closest surviving relative.

The German pontiff has told his closest aides that he wants "no major celebrations" and prefers "a family celebration," the pope's personal secretary Georg Gaenswein said.

Breivik defiant as massacre trial opens

AFP, Oslo

Anders Behring Breivik pleaded not guilty for his massacre of 77 people in Norway, making a defiant far-right salute as his trial began yesterday before being confronted by dramatic recordings of the slaughter.

Prosecutors told the courtroom in Oslo that Breivik was responsible for the bloodiest chapter of modern Norwegian history as they read a roll call of his victims, showed footage of his bombing of government buildings, and played an emergency call from a young woman dodging bullets on the Utøya island.



Centre, states must fight terror together

Says Indian prime minister

THE HINDU ONLINE

Reaching out to states opposed to the National Counter Terrorism Centre, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday favoured joint and coordinated efforts to deal with challenges of terrorism whatever its origin, whether internal or external.

"There is no question that the burden of the fight against terrorism falls largely on the states' machinery. The Centre is ready to work with the states to put in place strong and effective institutional mechanisms to tackle this problem," he said.

The prime minister, who inaugurated the annual conference of Chief Ministers on internal security, did not dwell on the proposed NCTC, saying it will be discussed on May 5 in a separate meeting as suggested by some chief ministers.

Non-Congress Chief Ministers, as also UP ally Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, have raised objections to the provisions in the NCTC, contending that it will



upset the federal structure and encroach on the powers of the states.

The Prime Minister warned that threats from terrorism, left wing extremism, religious fundamentalism and ethnic violence persist in the country.

"These challenges demand constant vigilance on our part.

They need to be tackled firmly but with sensitivity. The forces behind them must not only be contained but should also be effectively rolled back," he said.

"Like other internal security matter, we need joint and coordinated efforts to deal with the challenge of terrorism, whatever be its origin, whether internal or external, and whatever its motivation," Singh said.

Seeking a "holistic" approach in tackling the problem, he said, "This is a struggle in which we cannot relax. When we see turbulence in the region and growing factors of instability around us, we must strengthen our defences against terrorism."

Cabinet sees debate on financing

FROM PAGE 1 financing, meeting sources told The Daily Star.

The finance minister opined that the government still had hope to negotiate with the WB for the construction of the bridge as the loan agreement with it had not been cancelled by either side. He said he would be able to manage the WB.

The debate started as the communications minister informed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the MoU and assured of a ground breaking development in the project next month, the sources added.

Responding to this, the finance minister said he did not believe that Malaysia would be able to construct the bridge at the end of the day.

The debate got momentum when the prime minister joined in and said no

matter who was funding she wanted to start the bridge construction at any cost, as the Padma bridge was her party's electoral pledge.

"We will allow anyone who is able to fund the Padma bridge project," said a cabinet minister quoting the prime minister as saying.

According to the sources, Hasina directed the finance minister to keep his effort to manage the WB on and it would also be appreciated even if the WB-proposed fund was transferred to other development projects.

Communications Minister Obaidul Quader told the meeting that no one should say anything on the Padma bridge funding which may hamper bilateral relations with others, including the donor agencies and countries interested to fund the project.

Agreeing to it, the council

of ministers observed that the WB had suspended funds for the project not for the corruption allegation rather for political reasons.

The prime minister then said she would not cancel the Padma bridge project. "We do not want to make anyone unhappy over the funding and at the same time we cannot afford to lose time on anyone's obstinacy."

She told the finance minister that if the WB comes forward with financing the bridge, it would be welcomed. Even if the WB cannot come forward on any grounds, any of its agencies can approach and it would be accepted, the premier added.

She also said the government would go for the construction of the second Padma bridge if any country like Japan or China came forward for the project.

Sudan brands South's govt 'enemy'

AFP, Khartoum

Sudan parliament voted unanimously yesterday to brand the government of South Sudan an enemy, after southern troops invaded the north's main oilfield.

"The government of South Sudan is an enemy and all Sudanese state agencies have to treat her accordingly," the parliament's resolution said.

After the vote, parliamentary speaker Ahmed Ibrahim El-Tahir called in the legislature for the overthrow of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) which rules the South.

"We announce that we will clash with SPLM until we end her government of South Sudan," he said.

World powers have urged restraint after heavy fighting began with waves of aerial bombardment hitting the South.

Sea-win frenzy

FROM PAGE 20 in full swing inside the venue.

The stage has been laid on the 10-crore taka athletic track in front of the VIP stand. Numerous holes have been dug and bamboos posted on the carefully-maintained pitch to make seating arrangement for the guests.

Such is the extent of damage on the pitch that there is a high possibility that the rescheduled matches may not be held according to the new fixture.

Notational Sports Council sources said the regulatory body approved allotment of the stadium for a day.

The activities inside the arena are just a tip of the frenzy going around the capital.

Billboards, archways, banners and posters with the photos of a triumphant prime minister along with sporting dolphins on a sea in the backdrop capture the attention of the commuters, as one travels through the city streets.

Those also contain photos and names of those flatterers, seeking some political favour, with extravagant words like 'conqueror of the sea' dedicated to the prime minister.

Sadly, their acts without authorisation have only spoiled the city's look. In some instances, taking impunity as 'ruling party activists' they have even invaded the authorised billboards.

Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury, a noted social analyst, said felicitation for the prime minister in this fashion is solely aimed at personal publicity of those who have done it. "Their names appear bigger than the other objects in the posters and signboards."

It is not even for the party, but to draw attention of the government and the people to their presence and influ-

ence, he said. But ironically, they seek public support this way ignoring public comfort.

"The government gets discredited due to its inaction in this regard and consequently, draws adverse public opinion," said Prof Chowdhury.

As per advertisement and beautification control law of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), anyone willing to erect signboards in the city has to obtain permission of the DCC; otherwise, the authority is supposed to remove those and realise the expense from the person or institution concerned.

But in this case, DCC insiders, requesting anonymity, said the authorities remained silent, as the ruling party men did it involving the prime minister's name.

"There are laws but it is not always possible to enforce those," said a DCC high official, who asked not to be named.

Sultanul Islam Chowdhury, chief executive officer of the DCC (south), said they have started demolishing the illegal archways. "But we could not move to remove the posters and banners," he said.

None of those involved with the said posters and billboards appealed for permission, said Captain Bipan Kumar Saha, chief waste management officer of the DCC (north and south).

He said they remove illegal signs as a routine work.

ABM Amzad Hossain, central office secretary of Bangladesh Awami Jubo League, said all these are in place to express jubilation, adding that opposition BNP too did similarly ahead of its March 12 grand rally.

"Rain will wash away the signs automatically after the April-18 reception," said Amzad.

Joy of Living...

| SALEABLE PROJECTS (IN DHAKA CITY) | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| Dhanmondi ANZ Square Commercial 1100-3600sft | Banani ANZ Hugs Commercial 3800-4100 sft | North Gulshan Fatemaz 3650-3850 sft | Gulshan Park Shore 2500-2700 sft | Niketan Moon Island 1400 sft | Banani ANZ Abedin Habitat 1600-2500 sft | Uttara Lumiere 1800 sft | Shahidbagh Spring Dale 1075-1150 sft | Middle Badda Penzance 1200-1700 sft | |
| Dhanmondi Alicia 2200 sft | West Malibagh Azzaro 1300 sft | Elephant Rd. ANZ Sea Shells 1600 sft | Nazimuddin Rd. Crystal Plaza Shops & Commercial | Bashundhara ANZ Emerald 2000 sft | Bashundhara ANZ Molla Azelia 2100 sft | Uttara ANZ Jahan Belinea Up Coming | Baridhara ANZ Sadeque Orchid Up Coming | Shahjahan Road ANZ Cello De Hamidullah Up Coming | |
| SALEABLE PROJECTS (IN CHITTAGONG CITY) | | | | | | | | | |
| Panchlaish R/A Ibrahim Winstone READY APARTMENT 1534 sft | Nasirabad H/S Forest Rain READY APARTMENT 1370-1466 sft | Nasirabad H/S Winter Sun READY APARTMENT 1506-1943 sft | Holishohar H/E Block : K Green Bay 1403 sft | Nasirabad H/S Ever Green Splendor 2749-2921 sft | Panchlaish R/A J.S Summer Vale 1450-2170 sft | South Khulshi Amazon Sprinkle 1413 sft | Panchlaish R/A Kazi Enclave Up coming | | |

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