

Four killed in Iraq attacks

AFP, Baquba

A bombing and a shooting against a police patrol and a city council member in Iraq killed four people and wounded four others yesterday, security and medical officials said.

"Three policemen were killed and two others wounded by a bomb targeting their patrol in Al-Muqadiyah this morning," said a police lieutenant colonel in the town, which lies in restive Diyala province.

And just outside the city of Haditha, in Anbar province northwest of the capital, city councilman Nabil Shaaker was killed and two of his brothers wounded when gunmen fired on their car, according to a police lieutenant colonel and doctor Dr Omar Adil at the city's hospital.

Huda floats

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On May 23, former communications minister Huda declared that he would quit BNP if party chairman Khaleida Zia did not invite Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to a dialogue on the caretaker government issue by June 5.

On the day of his resignation, he ruled out the possibility of floating a new political party. "BNP is my first and last destination," Huda, convener of the new party, had said then.

But yesterday he said he would not return to BNP even if it called him back. "I will now work to establish my party on a solid base. I did not fail as a minister and will be successful in the new journey," he added.

He also said he would not try to split BNP but would welcome the leaders who might want to join him. He claimed that many BNP leaders were with him but declined to reveal any names.

It would be BNP's fault if it failed to hold its leaders back, he added.

Asked whether his party would take part in the election under the present Awami League government, Huda said, "We will if there is transparency and accountability in voter-list updating, vote count and declaration of election results, as my party believe that election is the medium of handing over power."

BNP gave back Huda the primary membership in April 2011 after he had been expelled from the party in November 2010 for violating party discipline.

Lightning

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around 12:10am today.

The deceased were identified as imam of the mosque Keramat Ali, and locals Nurul Islam, Nazrul Islam, Abdul Gafur, Abdus Salam, Manik Miah, Badsha Miah, Hazrat Ali, Muslemun and Ripon, the OC told The Daily Star.

Of them, the bodies of Nazrul, Manik and Ripon were brought to Dharmapasha Upazila Health Complex at 12:30am while others were on the way, he said.

The injured were also sent to the upazila health complex.

Bordering village Saraswatipur is a remote locality in the vast haor area, the OC said, adding that boats were the only means of communications with Dharmapasha Sadar Upazila.

Two ladies

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He said he was "sure" that hartal, arson, killing and conflict would escalate after Eid.

"I see clearly that hartal, arson, killing and conflict will surely take place after Eid. I am doubtful about the next polls and therefore people are looking for a third alternative force," he said.

"I have 200 prospective candidates [to contest in the next election] to go to power as the third force and I have already started work to give nomination for all 300 seats from my party alone."

Former military ruler turned politician Ershad said he wished to go to power once again before he took his last breath.

Titled Amader Protidin, the newspaper would be published from Rangpur and Anisul Islam Mandal, a JPM from Rangpur-2, would act as its editor and publisher.

Tickets vanish

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managers and staff could get tickets yesterday, a claim which the authorities refuted outright.

A staff of Parabat-11 (Dhaka-Barisal) route asked Tk 2,000 for a single cabin and Tk 4,000 for a double one when the correspondents, posing as passengers, asked for tickets.

"All the cabins are booked. However, I can manage a staff cabin for you of August 15. But it will cost you Tk 2,000," a staff of Sundarban-8, plying Dhaka-Barisal route, said.

A staff of Surovi-8 launch (Dhaka-Barisal) suggested that finding a mediator to reach the launch owner or manager might work.

The government-set fare is Tk 820 for a single cabin and Tk 1,640 for double to travel to Barisal.

Usually around 50 to 60 launches ply everyday from Dhaka to different southern locations. The number shoots up at 70 to 80 a week ahead of Eid, and 115 to 120 in the last three days.

"We have the capacity of arranging for around 2,200 cabins per day. But the demand rises to 8,000 to 10,000 during the Eid festivals," said Shahabuddin Milton, vice-president of Bangladesh Inland Waterways (Passenger Carriers) Association (BIWPCA), an organisation of the launch owners.

A large launch generally has 60-65 cabins while it is around 25 in small ones.

Another senior official of the BIWPCA said they would arrange for around 12 special launches just before the Eid when passengers would be able to buy cabin tickets on the spot.

There are six government-run steamers to ply towards southern districts, two of which are currently out of order.

Launch owners sell tickets of the cabins only, not of the deck. The deck tickets are sold just before the launch sets sail or while enroute. Thousands of passengers travel on

launch deck collecting tickets on first-come-first-served basis, said Milton.

TICKETS GONE?

Influential people like parliament members, political leaders, bureaucrats, police and army officials, who enjoy quota privileges, have secured most of the tickets of the cabins at least three weeks before Eid, said a number of launch owners.

Many passengers claimed that a syndicate of local political leaders and transport workers were involved with the cabin ticket business. They booked cabin and would sell those at much higher prices just two or three days ahead of Eid.

Denying the allegation, Badiuzzaman Badal, senior vice-president of BIWPCA, said 60 to 70 percent cabin tickets were sold over the phone before yesterday. But he claimed that rest of the tickets were sold to the passengers in due process yesterday.

About taking action for charging extra money by some launches, Badal said, "According to an agreement with the BIWTA, we will suspend the launch's trip for one week."

Chairman of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) Shamsuddoha Khondkar said they would take immediate action if they got any complaint of taking high fare.

In response to specific allegations against some launch staff asking high prices, he side stepped the question, and mentioned that there was a monitoring team working at the terminal to look into the issue. "They will obviously take action if [the allegation is] proved," the BIWTA chief added.

Rafiqul Islam, senior deputy director (port) and also a member of the monitoring team, claimed that no launch owner was found to be involved in charging high for tickets. Some staff could be involved in such activity, he added.

High prices

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the first two weeks of Ramadan, but they are still lower than the last year," said Bellal Hossain, owner of Nandinee Fashion at Bashundhara Shopping Mall.

Aminul Islam Rubel, a sales manager of Suraiya Fashion in Mouchak Market, said compared to the last Ramadan, sales are not encouraging.

He sold over 100 pieces of ladies garment a day in the holy month last year but it has come down to 60 to 70 pieces.

Rubel said the prices had soared by Tk 200 to Tk 300 for a piece of salwar-kamiz.

Also, Helma Mahmuda, in charge of Rang, a boutique on Bailey Road, agrees that the prices had increased by 20 to 30 percent.

According to the shop owners, the prices are higher because of the rise in production cost. Some even blame the troubled stockmarket for their low sales, saying a majority of the investors in the bourses are small investors.

Selina Rita, a sales executive of Tangail Sari Kutir in the area, said the sales are not as good as the last year, even if their store had made extensive preparation for Eid and brought in new designs.

Hossain of Nandinee Fashion said the number of customers had not come down but the quantity of purchase by them had lowered. "If one customer bought three items last year, he is buying one item this year."

"The sales have halved from the last year because of a tough economic condition," he said.

Subrata Saha, assistant manager of Banglar Mela, said, "Many people are going home early, making a negative impact on our

sales."

"We hope people staying back in Dhaka will come to markets in the last couple of days before Eid," he added.

AHRC slams

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an industry of producing victims of torture and fabrication of criminal charges against civilians and political opponents since long.

The AHRC said the police had been serving as "hired thugs" during all regimes.

"To keep the police subservient to the ruling elite, the government has kept the salary of police force very low. This opens the floodgates and serves as incentive for police officers to demand and accept bribes," it said.

The statement said in return for the impunity provided to the police force for their wrongdoings, the police do cleanup work most often dealing with political opponents for the ruling elite.

"People pay bribes to the police for registering general diary entries, prevent officer from torturing or ill-treating or including or excluding a person's name from the lists of accused or witnesses," AHRC said, adding that people pay police for arresting a suspect while the same suspect pays the police to obtain a release from custody.

The statement said in cases of unnatural deaths, if a body was to be recovered and sent to a public hospital for an autopsy, the relatives have to bribe police for transporting the body.

"Unfortunately, the government is least bothered about this plight of the people," said the AHRC.

It concluded by saying that the country must end this entrenched institutional wilt and treat the problem as the matter of highest priority. Unless Bangladesh reforms its policing system, there would be no hope for the people, it said.

135 fishermen abducted in Bay

STAR REPORT

Robbers early yesterday abducted about 135 fishermen and hijacked three trawlers in the coastal areas of the Bay of Bengal in Patuakhali and Bagerhat.

In Patuakhali, a gang of around 20 masked robbers on two trawlers attacked several fishing boats around 12:30am.

They abducted around 100 fishermen and the boat drivers, said Shah Alam, a fisherman who managed to escape.

The goons also looted hilsa, fuel and cash from the trawlers in the Bay, some 20 to 25 kilometres off the coast in Kuakata, he added.

Among the abductees are Jalal Mia, 55, Anwar Hossain, 32, Kalam Mia, 55, Badol Mia, 55, Faruq Majhi, 40, Khorshed Majhi, 45, Kuddus Majhi, 35, Abdul Bareq, 35, Moti Majhi, 30, Harun Majhi, 45, and Alamgir Hossain, 40, reports our Patuakhali correspondent.

The gang identified themselves as members of "Sagor Bahini" and provided a mobile phone number (01763566040) to other fellow fishermen to communicate with their leader.

Lt Dipankar, staff officer of Bangladesh Coast Guard (south), said they were informed about the incident and already begun an operation to rescue the abductees.

Our Bagerhat correspondent adds: Armed robbers swooped on three trawlers and kidnapped about 35 fishermen near Fairway Buoy in the Bay of Bengal in Sharankhola upazila early yesterday.

They hijacked the trawlers and took the fishermen into the deep forest of the Sundarbans. Later they looted hilsa and fishing nets from the boats.

The robbers also demanded Tk 12 lakh as ransom from the owners of the trawlers, said Sheikh Idris Ali, general secretary of Bagerhat Coastal Matsyajibi Samity.

The gang beat up five fishermen as they tried to resist, he added.

Over 200 fishermen have been kidnapped by robbers for ransom from the Sundarbans and its adjoining coastal areas in the last three months.

Endless woes

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They said the road was built in 2007 but for the last two years it has gone bad.

Mohammad Asif, a fruit trader, said he lost apples worth Tk 2,000 when the rickshaw-van carrying them turned turtle in a pothole.

He said he now uses auto-rickshaws to carry goods to his shops which add Tk 200-250 to the carrying cost.

Rickshaws and rickshaw-van that used to charge Tk 60 to Tk 70 earlier are now charging Tk 150 to Tk 200 and three-wheelers do not use meters anymore and charge Tk 400 to go there from Badamtali.

Mohammad Arzu Islam, a rickshaw-van puller, said his vehicle turned upside down four to five times in the last one and half months after falling into potholes.

Wholesale flour shop owner Monir Hossain said his business plummeted as the road went bad. He said he used to make sales worth Tk 3 to Tk 4 lakh a day but now it is Tk 1 lakh to Tk 1.50 lakh.

He said people do not want to go to the area to buy things anymore.

Communications Minister Obidul Quader visited the road on July 30 and being unhappy with what he saw he asked Dhaka South City Corporation to have the road fixed within three days.

Things, however, did not change.

Jahangir Alam, chief engineer of Dhaka South City Corporation, said there was no way to drain the rain water off the street and it was causing them problems to repair the road.

He said they would repair the road as soon as they figure out a way to drain the water.

Project goes to fridge

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ministry, has been made chief of a taskforce formed to ensure smooth travelling of this year's hajj pilgrims.

The four locations for the airport selected by the cell were Keyain in Munshiganj, Char Bilashpur and Char Latubdi of Dohar upazila of Dhaka, and Char Nanajat under Shibchar upazila in Madaripur.

The cell had earlier selected Trishal in Mymensingh, Baghiar Beel in Madaripur-Gopalganj and Bhanga in Faridpur.

Another location, Ariel Beel in Munshiganj -- which the government was very interested in -- was cancelled following protests by locals.

RENOVATION IS THE OPTION NOW

Aviation experts say that the demand for airport amenities for the next 25 years in the country could be met by upgrading the capacity of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport with only one fifth of the Tk 50,000 crore that would be

needed for the new airport.

They say almost 60 percent capacity of Shahjalal airport is still unutilised, and there is not only scope for 100 percent utilisation, but this capacity could be doubled by making another runway.

Currently, the Shahjalal airport handles around 40 lakh flights a year.

Faruk Khan said a plan for renovation of Shahjalal airport was taken and that it would ensure smooth handling of air traffic management and aviation activities for the next 10 years.

Under the plan, costing around Tk 435 crore, the airport's taxiway and lighting would be improved while resurfacing of the existing 10,500-foot-runway has already started.

The work would enhance the main airport's standard, hope officials of the ministry, as the runway and the taxiways would be sturdier -- enough to handle heavy-weight and wide-bodied modern aircraft.

Earlier, the government

finalised the vast swamp of Ariel Beel, without any feasibility study, to build a new airport and the satellite city in line with the election manifesto of the Awami League.

But it had to backtrack on its stance in the face of violent protests by locals and clashes with law enforcers that left a policeman dead and many locals and law enforcers injured.

Following this, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in February last year announced that no airport would be built at Ariel Beel "if people do not want". At that time, she said possibly a new site would be chosen "on the other [south] side of river Padma".

Operational activities were shifted from the old airport at Tejgaon to the present location in 1980. It was named Zia International Airport in 1983 and renamed in 2010 as Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, according to the website of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh.

Unelected people

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come up with specific proposal which does not clash with the constitution.

"There is no scope for handing over power to an unelected government to conduct the parliamentary elections," said AL acting general secretary Mahbulul Alam Hanif.

He said they could never accept such proposal from BNP as AL did not believe in the concept of unelected government.

Only the elected people, who have been given people's mandate, could be in an interim government as earlier made clear by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, said Hanif, also the PM's special assistant.

He said discussions could be held with BNP but only on the PM's proposal and strengthening of Election Commission to hold the next election in a free, fair and credible manner.

AL's key ally Jatiya Party (JP) has termed the idea of a

caretaker government "old wine in a new bottle".

"There is no scope for holding a discussion on it," JP presidium member Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu told The Daily Star. He also termed BNP's idea "narrow" as it did not go with multi-party democracy.

Bablu said JP was strongly against the non-elected caretaker government and would not accept such provision again after the 15th amendment to the constitution that had scrapped the provision of caretaker government.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said let BNP place its formal proposal and discussion could be held then.

Menon, also an AL lawmaker, said it would not be possible to form an interim government comprised of unelected elements under the present constitutional framework.

He said the opposition would have to move forward

accepting the Supreme Court verdict on the constitution. Besides, no elections held under a non-party unelected government since 1991 had been acceptable to the opposition parties, he added.

Menon said the constitution would need to be amended further to restore the caretaker government system but it would not be possible under the present context.

Dilip Barua, general secretary of Samyabadi Dal, said they owned the concept of interim government, which was being practised in India and other parliamentary democracies in the world.

"It is logical to hold the next election under an interim government," he said. On BNP's stance, Dilip, also the minister for industries, said as a political party the opposition had the right to make any demand and time would make their stance clear.

'Donation' frenzy

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Following her statement in the House, people from all walks of life, including expatriate Bangladeshis, expressed intent to contribute to the Padma bridge funds, prime minister's aides said.

On Wednesday, Bangladesh Bank directed all banks to open two accounts -- one for local and the other for foreign currency -- for receiving donations for the bridge project.

The central bank circular came in line with a decision taken at a cabinet meeting on July 16.

At that meeting, ministers said they would each give a month's salary to the fund. Each of the 38 ministries would make separate contributions.

Also on July 16, some cabinet members told the prime minister that government officials and employees wanted to give a month's salary to the fund. In reply, Hasina said it would be a burden on the families of the public servants. If they still wanted to contribute, they could give a day's salary every month for 30 months.

Meeting at the Cabinet Division on July 18, the secretaries decided they would donate a festival bonus, equivalent to a month's salary, for the Padma bridge project.

Meanwhile, over-enthusiasm about fund-raising has got the better of some government officials, as confusion reigns among the ranks in the absence of guidelines about who would donate how much.

Secretariat sources said the collection might begin anytime this month.

Several ministries are still undecided about the donation amount. "We sat a couple of times last month, but could not decide whether the officials would pay a day's or five days' salary," said a joint secretary of the communications ministry.

The education ministry

has decided that all the officials of its boards, institutes, directorates and departments, and teachers and employees of MPO-listed schools and colleges will donate one day's salary.

An education ministry official said, "In the past we gave one day's salary voluntarily to help flood victims, but this time many officials are trying to impose it on us ... Everyone in the ministry will have to pay, although many are not in a position to donate money."

Talking to The Daily Star, some mid-level and junior officials have expressed displeasure at the way they are being approached for donations.

A section of officials pursuing their own vested interests are acting too enthused, complained an official at the science and technology ministry. "We can't pay any money without clear-cut instructions."

Officials at Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR), a department of the ministry, said the authorities had asked them to donate salary of one to five days in keeping with their seniority.

In a circular, BCSIR directors have been asked to collect the funds. The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the circular, which bears the instructions but no official signature.

The instructions sheet includes a table showing the names of officials and employees; one day's basic salary of each; and the amounts of donation.

Class-II officials and class-III employees have been asked to donate a day's salary. However, donating is optional for class-IV employees, according to the instructions.

Talking to this newspaper, several BCSIR officials said they would not donate any money, as there is no official signature on the instructions sheet.

The directors have allegedly threatened to send their

names to the ICT secretary if they failed to contribute to Padma fund.

Contacted, State Minister for Science and Technology Yeafesh Osman ruled out making the donation mandatory. "Only those willing will contribute to this fund. There is no compulsion for this."

Public Administration Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder said public servants may contribute voluntarily, but nothing has been finalised regarding the amount. "There is no question of fixing the amount. It's up to the officials and employees."

The heads of various ministries and departments have been asked to discuss the matter with other officials to reach a decision, he added. "They will place the decisions before the public administration ministry. They can't fix the amount at will."

It has not been finalised yet, added Sobhan, whether the government employees will donate a day's or a week's salary.

Things are not that different elsewhere.

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) have pledged to donate Tk 10 crore and Tk 65 lakh respectively for the project.

BOU Vice-Chancellor Aminur Rashid announced this at a press conference in the capital last month, which drew flak from the teachers, officials and employees of the university.

The VC asked all to arrange the money at any cost, but many opposed the plan, as there is no provision in the BOU act to gather such a huge amount as donation.

"We can't give the money since no gazette notification was issued in this regard," said a professor of the university.

Later, a syndicate meeting held up the VC's decision and decided to seek approval from the UGC on the donation.

Work hard

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yesterday hastily withdrew the offer he made a day earlier during a meeting with government employees which was also attended by journalists.

Yadav is an uncle to the state chief minister Akhilesh Yadav, whose Samajwadi Party stormed into power on an anti-graft platform in elections held in graft-ridden Uttar Pradesh in March.

"If you work hard, you can steal a little, but don't behave like bandits," the Press Trust of India quoted Yadav as saying at the meeting in Etah town, about 200 kilometres (124 miles) from capital Lucknow.

The comments drew flak from political opponents, prompting Yadav to retract his offer and accuse journalists of sneaking into the gathering.

"I have taken back those words," he told reporters in Lucknow on Friday. "Why are you raking it up? I don't know why the media is targeting me," he said.

The offer came a month after his nephew warned about corruption in the overwhelming poor and under-developed state of nearly 200 million people, a population larger than Brazil's.

Corruption has been the biggest political issues in India over the last two years, with a string of scandals hitting the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and sparking popular protest movements.

Activist Anna Hazare, who models himself on independence hero Mahatma Gandhi, and famous TV yoga guru Baba Ramdev have led hundreds of thousands in protests against endemic bribe-taking and corruption in India.

Historic US

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The parcel of land is also situated on the site of the legendary 1876 battle of Little Big Horn, in which US troops led by General George Armstrong Custer were routed by Native American tribes, including the Cheyenne and the Sioux.

The historic defeat, in which Custer was killed, has inspired books and a number of films, including "Little Big Man" (1970), with actor Dustin Hoffman.

The bid for the little