

Afghan MP survives suicide attack, three dead: officials

AFP, Kabul

A prominent Afghan MP escaped a suicide attack Sunday that killed three people including a child and left seven others wounded, officials said, just days after Washington announced it would slow the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

President Barack Obama last Tuesday reversed plans to withdraw around 5,000 US troops from Afghanistan this year, an overture to the country's new reform-minded leader, President Ashraf Ghani.

The Taliban, waging a deadly insurgency since they were ousted from power in late 2001, warned that the announcement would damage any prospects of peace talks as they vowed to continue fighting.

The suicide bomber detonated himself on Sunday evening as Gul Pacha Majidi, a lawmaker from eastern Paktia province, was leaving a meeting of Afghan elders in central Kabul. He escaped with shrapnel wounds to his leg.

"Majidi was attending a jirga (assembly of elders)... and as he was exiting the premises, a suicide attacker on foot detonated himself," the city's police chief Abdul Rahman Rahimi told AFP.

"Three people were killed and seven others (excluding the MP) were wounded."

A squad of yellow helmeted firefighters used high-pressure water hoses to douse the smouldering facade of the building as the area was sealed off by Afghan security forces.

In a statement, the interior ministry strongly condemned the suicide attack and confirmed the casualties, adding that a child was among those killed.

21 charged

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The blast left two people -- Sakil Gazi, a Bangladeshi national who is the mastermind of a bomb-making module of the JMB, and his associate Karim Sheikh -- dead, said the charge sheet.

The charge sheet said the JMB, a banned terrorist organisation in Bangladesh, was involved in a conspiracy "to overthrow the existing democratic government in Bangladesh through violent terrorist acts and replace it with a hard-line Sharia-based Islamic rule."

The conspiracy came to light after the "accidental" blast in Burdwan.

The probe into the Burdwan blast was transferred to the NIA a week after the incident and the investigation by the NIA has "revealed that the JMB has established its network in India primarily in the states of West Bengal, Assam and Jharkhand."

"Its activities in India primarily included recruitment, radicalisation and training of vulnerable youths in a systematic and organised manner. In pursuance of the conspiracy, they had established organisational bases at certain districts of West Bengal viz Nadia, Burdwan, Murshidabad and Birbhum as well as in Sahebganj district of Jharkhand. These bases were used for organising radicalisation programmes, organisational meetings, fund collection drives, hideouts for cadres and their families, etc."

"A network of terrorist training camps at selected Madrasas and other hideouts was found to be in operation where selected youths were indoctrinated into the violent jihadi ideology as well as trained for violent action by using explosives and firearms," said the charge sheet.

"The above effort of recruitment, radicalisation and training of vulnerable Indian youths was undertaken by members of the JMB" in order to "utilise them for the movement to overthrow the existing democratic government in Bangladesh," it said.

The NIA said during the course of its investigation conducted till date, it questioned more than 250 witnesses and conducted around 100 searches in a large number of places across the states of West Bengal, Assam and Jharkhand, leading to seizures of huge volumes of documents, computers, explosives, chemicals, arms and ammunition and other incriminating materials.

The accused persons have been individually charged for various criminal offences under the stringent anti-terror law Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, Indian Penal Code, the Arms Act, Explosive Substances Act, Passports Act and Foreigners Act, according to the charge sheet.

These offences include offence of being member of a terrorist gang, commission of terrorist acts and conspiracy for terrorist acts, recruitment, funding of terrorist gang, organising terrorist training camps, possession of arms, ammunition and explosive substances, committing forgery and possessing/using false documents and violations under the Foreigners Act and Passport Act, said the charge sheet.

Anger in Pakistan over Karachi police 'executions'

AFP, Karachi

Sohaib Ahmed was picked up last December by a bunch of burly men outside his local mosque in Karachi and shoved into an SUV. It was the last time his family saw him alive.

A month later his body was found on a football field, bearing marks of severe torture.

Ahmed's relatives and officials from the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) political party, to which he belonged, believe his death fits a pattern of extra-judicial killings carried out by security forces as part of a "clean-up" operation aimed at driving down crime and militancy.

"They were agencies from our country. Is this not terrorism? To pick someone up, torture and kill them?" asked his sister Humaira Iffkhar, tearfully.

Karachi, a sprawling port city of 18 million people, has been wracked by criminal, ethnic and political violence since the 1990s. In recent years it has also become a home to Islamist militants.

The MQM, the dominant political force in the city, stands accused by critics of running a violent mafia-like organisation, but the party strongly denies this and presents itself as a voice of political moderation and secularism.

Some of those who have lost their lives in encounters with security forces on Karachi's streets are believed to have been suspected of involvement in the party's armed wing, or to have links with the Taliban or Al-Qaeda.

An operation by police and paramilitary forces launched in 2013 has brought murders down from a rate of seven or eight a day to two or three, along with a 23 percent fall in street crime.

The campaign took a fresh turn two

weeks ago when paramilitary Rangers raided the MQM headquarters, seizing weapons and arresting activists, including one accused of murdering a journalist.

But critics say the crackdown has involved an unacceptable disregard for the judicial process, with security personnel effectively "executing" suspects in staged clashes known locally as "encounter killings".

The police deny that such killings take place. Ghulam Haider Jamali, chief of the province's police force, instead extols what he calls effective police action.

"Karachi was having extraordinary challenges. Karachi has terrorist infested areas. They come from across the country, they were killing police personnel, they were targeting Shias and innocent citizens of the city, the Ulema (religious leaders), members of the civil society," he said.

"The situation demanded we should go for strong action against the criminals and militants. We have been able to control the situation and bring the crime down."

According to police figures, since July 2014 at least 895 criminals and militants were killed in gun fights.

On the streets, residents say they feel safer and are able to go to previously dangerous areas like the Taliban-infested Sohrab Goth district, where the Rangers have conducted several raids.

"You couldn't go out at night," said Haji Abdullah Shah Bokhari, a local preacher. "If you did, you would not expect to go home alive. Now we feel much safer."

But rights activists and medical examiners who have followed the killings closely privately voice grave doubts.

Surcharge imposed

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Once the law is passed in parliament, the subscribers, whose number currently stands at 12.18 crore, will see deduction of one taka from every Tk 100 use of any kind.

The government would spend the money to be collected as surcharge for development in education and health sectors, said Cabinet Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan after approval of the draft law at a weekly meeting.

The new surcharge is going to put extra pressure on cellphone users, who already pay 15 percent value added tax on their bills.

Due to the VAT, a user actually gets talk time of Tk 85 against a top-up of Tk 100 as Tk 15 is deducted by the operators. The surcharge after imposition will leave the users with Tk 84 talk time.

Some mobile phone users have supported the move saying many people would be benefited if the surcharge was properly used for public health and education.

On the other side, others said it would put extra pressure on low-income group such as small farmers, industrial workers and day labourers who recharge very small amount of money.

"It is a good cause that the government will use the money for health and education purpose. It will benefit many poor people," said Mohammad Motaleb, a farmer from Kaunia, Rangpur, over the phone.

"But the present VAT rate is too high. The government should reduce the VAT

on mobile phone use," he said, adding that the VAT rate cut would be helpful in the face of rising electricity tariff and transport costs.

Md Shihab Uddin, who works at a private firm in Dhaka, was sceptical about the use of the surcharge money. "We suffer from load-shedding even after several hikes in electricity tariff," he observed.

"Instead of slapping surcharge on everyone, the government could impose it on those who spent higher on mobile phones," he said, adding that imposition of surcharge in slabs would give respite to those subscribers, who spent Tk 100-150 a month.

Cabinet Secretary Bhuiyan said the government could collect Tk 140 crore a year through the surcharge on mobile phone use.

The proposed surcharge on Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) or Removable User Identity Module (RUIM) cards would be collected from the mobile phone operators, he added.

The cabinet secretary further said mobile users would not have to pay much. If any customer paid Tk 1,000 as call charge, they would have to pay only Tk 10 as surcharge, he argued.

He also said the amount to be paid as surcharge was very nominal compared to the revenue the government earned from the mobile operators at present.

The move to impose surcharge on

Nigeria on edge as first vote results unveiled

AFP, Abuja

First results trickled in from Nigeria's closely fought general election yesterday, with protests over the conduct of the vote and a warning of manipulation of the count adding to fears of violence.

The presidential election pitting President Goodluck Jonathan against former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari is the closest in Nigeria's history, and the first with a credible opposition challenge.

International election observers gave broadly positive reactions to the conduct of the vote, despite late delivery of election materials and technical glitches with new voter authentication devices.

Nigeria's Transition Monitoring Group, which had observers across the country, said: "These issues did not systematically disadvantage any candidate or party."

The first nine results were announced in Abuja. Buhari and his All Progressives Congress (APC) won five states while Jonathan of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) took three plus the Federal Capital Territory, which includes Abuja.

But the PDP was marginally ahead on the overall number of votes won so far. More results will be announced from 1900 GMT.

The PDP and the APC on Sunday traded allegations of rigging and other irregularities, which raises the possibility of a legal challenge to the results.

Violence has often flared in previous Nigerian votes after the winner is announced and the United States and Britain warned of any rigging in the count.

Mintoo

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Hazi Saifuddin Ahmed Milon is not accused in any case. Businesses and rents from houses, apartments and shops are the main sources of his income.

He has over Tk 1.35 lakh in cash, over Tk 34 lakh in insurance and others, a car worth Tk 17 lakh and furniture worth over Tk 1 lakh.

Mirza Abbas, convener of Dhaka city BNP, is facing 60 cases while Mintoo is accused in 16.

Mintoo earns over Tk 35 crore from his agriculture farms.

Another BNP leader MA Salam, a DSCC mayor hopeful, is facing three cases. Party insiders said he will be backed by the BNP if Abbas is declared disqualified by the EC.

BNP leader Asaduzzaman Ripon, international affairs secretary of the party, is not accused in any case. A mayor aspirant in DSCC, his annual income is over Tk 5.5 lakh which he earns as publisher of magazines.

EC notice

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M Manju Alam Manju and Jatiya Party-backed candidate M Solaiman Alam Seth.

Returning officer Abdul Baten issued the notices yesterday evening, sources at Chittagong Election Commission office told The Daily Star.

The mayor aspirants were asked to reply within seven days, they added.

Shafiqur Rahman, assistant returning officer, said, "We have received complains against the mayoral candidates and that's why show cause notices were served."

Manju was served with the notice for inaugurating his election office at Dewanhat on March 26 while Nasir was issued the notice for carrying out his electoral campaign by renting community halls and pasting his posters several times.

Solaiman was also served with the notice for pasting posters on city walls.

Robber leader

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Sundarbans, police said. T M Rokunuzzaman, OC of Khulna district Detective Branch (DB) of police, said acting on a tip off, a joint team of DB and Koyra police arrested Al Amin from Chandkhali in Koyra around 10:15 pm on Sunday.

After glancing information from Al Amin, police raided Jhaphjhopiarchar area, which is adjacent to the Sundarbans, in search of his den and arms.

The law enforcers took him along with them at that time.

Sensing the presence of law enforcers, other gang members in the area opened fire on police, triggering a gunfight that lasted for almost an hour.

Al Amin was found dead when the shooting ended. However, his cohorts managed to escape, Rokunuzzaman said.

Seven firearms and 141 bullets were recovered from the spot, the DB OC added.

Al Amin is wanted in five cases, Koyra Police Station OC Horendra Nath said.

His body was sent to Khulna Medical College Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Busy days

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the first Test. They will return to Dhaka to play the second and final Test.

As per the earlier statements from the Pakistan Cricket Board, a security representative arrived here yesterday to inspect the venues for the series. However this inspection is expected to be a mere formality. The PCB representative travels to Khulna tomorrow to visit the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium and is expected to visit the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium later this week.

While Shakib will be busy with the IPL, his teammates will be kept occupied with a newly-formed one day tournament expected to begin on April 5. It is expected to be a four-team competition. The sides that took part in the Bangladesh Cricket League, a domestic four-day competition, will be featuring in the tournament. The national players are

expected to take part in this 50-over competition.

"This competition will be a good preparatory contest for our players ahead of the Pakistan series," said Jalal.

Of the 32 encounters between the two sides, Bangladesh have lost 31 with their lone victory coming in the 1999 World Cup in England. The Tigers did come close on a number of occasions in the recent past, but unfortunately failed to cross the final line.

However, this time Pakistan around will be without their most experienced players -- Misbahul Haq and Shahid Afridi -- who announced their retirement after the World Cup. They will be led by Azhar Ali, a batsman who hasn't played international cricket for two years now.

And the Tigers, buoyed by their good performances in the World Cup, will hope for a different result this time around.

HSC exams must go on

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This year, the number of examinees has decreased by 67,490. More than 2.10 lakh students are not sitting for the exams as they did not fill in the forms despite registering as regular students of Class XI.

Sources in the education boards said many students who did not fill in the forms might drop out. Financial inability and poor results in test examinations are the main reasons behind this, they observed.

The minister also admitted that a number of students, particularly the irregular ones, do not continue their education and rather join different occupations to help their family financially.

"The drop-out rate among students remains a big challenge for us," he said.

At the briefing, he disclosed that a total of 5,70,993 boys and 5,02,891 girls from 8,305 institutions will appear in the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and equivalent exams from 2,419 centres under 10 education boards.

The exams will also be held in seven overseas centres in Doha, Abu Dhabi, Jeddah, Riyadh, Tripoli, Dubai and Bahrain for 241 candidates.

Of the total examinees, some 8,86,933 students will sit for the HSC exams under eight general education boards while 84,360 will appear in Alim tests under Madrasa Board and 98,247 will take Business Management exams under Technical Board.

Besides, 4,344 students of Diploma

in Business Studies will take the exams under Dhaka Board, according to the data provided by the education ministry.

This year, about 2.03 lakh students are irregular who either failed in one or more subjects, while some 3,972 will take the improvement examinations.

The theoretical exams would end on June 11 with the practical exams beginning on June 13.

The minister said 25 papers will be held in creative question method introduced at HSC level in 2012.

He also said hantals or blockades were neither effective in the past nor now.

"If they [BNP-led alliance] can withdraw the hantals for a day for cricket, why don't they take the exams into their consideration?" he said, urging the alliance once again not to call shutdown during exams.

Nahid said it was not possible to conduct the HSC exams the way the SSC tests were taken.

"If we take the exams [HSC] in another way [on weekends], our students will fall behind by a year... we cannot take the risk."

Besides, he said he talked to the guardians and other people and they told him that they wanted the exams to take place on schedule.

Moreover, the law enforcement agencies were told to provide all-out security to the examinees during the blockade and shutdowns.

The minister also sought cooperation from all so that the examinees could take the tests safely and uninterruptedly.

Dhaka backs Saudi efforts

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territorial integrity of Yemen, it added.

Dhaka also urged resumption of political process guided by the commitment made by the parties within the Gulf Cooperation Council Framework, the National Dialogue Conference outcomes and relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain joined the Saudi Arabia-led coalition against the Houthis, according to international media reports.

BANGLADESHI STRANDED

Two Bangladeshi engineers have been stranded in two hotels in Saana for five days as there is no flight from the Yemeni capital to Dhaka.

In an e-mail to The Daily Star, civil engineer Golam Mostafa yesterday said, "I am in the hotel. There is no arrangement to leave the hotel in near future. I am ill both mentally and physically."

On Thursday, he along with another engineer Sirajul Haque checked in separate hotels in Saana and planned to leave for Dhaka by the next day.

Earlier, they had made an appeal to the government to rescue them imme-

diately. As there is no Bangladesh mission in Yemen, the Bangladesh foreign ministry instructed its embassy in Kuwait to look into the matter.

The embassy in Kuwait has introduced a hotline (00965-94934363) for helping the Bangladeshis in Yemen.

Many foreign missions in Yemen and the United Nations evacuated their staff from the Arab country in the face of the attack of the Houthi rebels.

SM Mahabubul Alam, counsellor at the Bangladesh embassy in Kuwait, said, "It's really difficult to make an assumption about the number of the Bangladeshis in Yemen. But we think it's somewhere between 150 and 200."

The expatriates are safe and the mission is in contact with the Bangladesh honorary consul general in Saana, he told this newspaper yesterday over the phone.

On any probable evacuation of Bangladeshis, Alam said they would take necessary measures as per directives of the foreign ministry.

"Most of the Bangladeshis don't want to return home. Rather, they consider taking refuge in Oman or Saudi Arabia."

Traders feast

FROM PAGE 16

Daily Star ran a report on the issue. The district administration conducted drives in the area to free the confluence of the Jamuna and the New Dhaleswari from the clutches of traders.

WHO IS TO BLAME?

Sand traders claimed they had verbal permission from the BBA site office and Tangail deputy commissioner's office to extract sand from the riverbed. The two offices, however, denied their claim.

One of the traders said dredgers of two local Awami League leaders were set up in an area under the BBA after paying Tk 6 lakh to Engr Abul Kalam Azad at the BBA site office.

Engr Azad, who has been working there for the last 17 years, denied taking money from the traders. "We've allowed the traders only to unload sand-laden trawlers from other districts there and carry the sand by trucks," he said.

Six more dredgers were set up on private land after taking verbal permission from the Tangail district adminis-

tration, the traders claimed.

Mahbub Hossain, DC of Tangail, said the BBA authorities leased out its land to sand traders despite opposition from his office.

The illegal extraction of sand has been going on as the bridge authorities gave the traders the opportunity, he added.

Last year, a mobile court led by the district executive magistrate demolished the roads built by sand traders across the New Dhaleswari. It also put up a fence around the Thana Balu Ghat near the bridge, which was removed by unidentified people a few months ago, said the DC.

Mozammel Haque, chief engineer of the Bangladesh-China joint venture firm, said they can't remove the dredgers from the area, but have already stated an objection to the BBA against the operation of the machines.

Asked for comment, Golam Mortuza, executive engineer at BBA Dhaka office, said he would talk to the officials at the site office about the issue.