

# 51 killed in a wave of Kabul blasts

Hundreds wounded in major attacks on forces since Taliban power transition

AFP, Kabul

Fifteen more fatalities were confirmed yesterday from a barrage of bombings in Kabul, taking the toll to 51 in the deadliest day in the Afghan capital since the Nato combat mission ended in December.

The explosions on Friday, which devastated buildings and overwhelmed hospitals with hundreds of casualties, were the first major militant assaults on Kabul since the announcement of Taliban leader Mullah Omar's death.

The attacks underscored the volatile security situation in Afghanistan amid a faltering peace process and the potency of the Taliban insurgency despite being driven by growing internal divisions.

In the first attack, a powerful truck bomb tore through the centre of Kabul just after midnight on Friday, killing 15 civilians and wounding 240 others.

Less than 24 hours later, 27 cadets and civilians were killed when a suicide bomber dressed in police uniform blew himself up at the entrance of Kabul Police Academy.

Explosions and gunfire also erupted when Camp Integrity, a US special forces base in Kabul, came under attack late Friday, killing nine people, including a NATO service member.

The Taliban distanced themselves from the truck bombing which struck near a Kabul military base -- as they usually do in attacks that result in mass civilian casualties.

But they claimed responsibility for both other attacks, which marked a serious breach of security at a premier training institute for Afghan forces and a foreign coalition facility.

The carnage highlighted the risk of a bloodier insurgency under a new Taliban leadership as Afghan forces face their first summer fighting season without full Nato support.

Friday's bombings were the first major attacks since Mullah Akhtar Mansour was named as the new Taliban chief last week in an acrimonious power transition after the insurgents confirmed the death of longtime leader Mullah Omar.

Experts say the escalating violence demonstrates Mullah Mansour's attempt to boost his image among Taliban cadres and drive attention away from internal rifts over his leadership.

"The new wave of attacks is a tactic by the Taliban's new leadership to show they are capable, potent and operational," said security analyst Abdul Hadi Khaled.

"The demise of Mullah Omar divided the movement and affected the morale of their ground fighters. Hitting Kabul with a wave of powerful attacks is a way of showcasing their strength."

Mansour is seen as a pragmatist and a proponent of peace talks, but he also has powerful rivals within the Taliban who are strongly opposed to negotiations with the Afghan government.

# Resist "Thought Prisons"

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On the contrary, the killers can be seen to have grown bolder. Earlier the killings took place on the streets. But in Niladri's case the killers entered, in broad daylight, a fifth storey flat, barged into the bedroom and killed their target. They did not bother about the cover of darkness, the open streets for quicker escape or the house to be empty. They killed as they wished. Such is there power and confidence.

In contrast, here's what police did to help the victim. Niladri along with his friend Rudro, went to two police stations- Khilgaon and Shajahanpur- on

been the type of mass demonstration that we needed to register our collective condemnation of such acts.

There appears to be an obvious lack of political will on the part of the government to confront the situation. There is no sign of any comprehensive thinking and planning in this regard. There has not been any discussion in the parliament nor in any AL party forum. The government and the party appear to be quite happy to leave the handling of the killings totally to police, RAB and other law enforcement agencies. So weak is the government's stance in this matter that it is not even

Stain blogger Niloy's mother breaks down in tears after her son's body was taken to his village home in Chalisha of Pirojpur Sadar upazila last night.

14th and 15th May respectively, and in both cases his complaint was not recorded. One officer told Niladri privately that recording a complaint of 'personal threat' imposes a special responsibility on the officer 'accepting' it and if something really happens to that person then the said police officer gets into trouble for his failure to protect him. So it is better 'not to record' such a complaint. Another private advice to Niladri was to leave the country as fast as he could. (We think if the complainant was from the ruling party or any of its affiliated bodies it would have been recorded in both the stations. Such is the state of everyone's 'access to justice' and 'equality before law').

Police is now claiming that Niladri never sought its help. The dead cannot speak but his Facebook posting dated 15th May-two and half months before his murder- gives detailed account of his visits to the two police stations. Then there is Rudro, the victim's friend, who states that they went together to the police stations. He also showed us a draft of the General Diary (GD) that Niladri had prepared to submit to the police.

Regrettably, the home minister has added his voice to the police denial. Shouldn't he have examined the evidence or at least talked with Rudro before siding with the police?

The intellectuals, civil society and the media together failed the nation by not really doing enough to raise public awareness about the dangers lurking behind these blogger murders and motivating the public in confronting the rising spectre of religious extremism. There should have been public demonstration and mass mobilisation against blogger killings. We should have worked together to make massive demonstrations against it. Except for statements and occasional articles in the pages of newspapers, there has not

willing to hold these agencies accountable for their performance or the lack of it. The home minister's parroting the police denial convinces us of that.

It appears that we are in denial and it has thoroughly affected our thoughts and actions. We are brushing aside these killings as some isolated actions of some criminal groups operating under the guise of religion. We are 'refusing' to see the bigger picture of the all encompassing social threat that has total 'thought control' as its ultimate goal.

Follow this transition in extremist polemics and everything will be clear. The earlier claims of responsibilities for such brutal killings talked of 'insulting our Prophet and the Holy Koran'. Then it was to be an 'atheist'. Now it has moved to condemning 'extremism' and 'freethinking', all in the span of a year and few months.

The ultimate target of this group of killers and those who are sponsoring, motivating, aiding and funding them is to stop 'free thinking', the precondition for all creativity, which lies at the core of everything that human civilization has achieved. It is the most precious of our Creator's gifts to us. To lose this would be to lose the very essence of our existence.

The blogger killings in Bangladesh are part of a global attempt to revive the "medieval thought-prisons", which enslaved humanity for millennia. Mankind has fought countless battles, sacrificed millions of lives over several centuries to free itself from it. We in Bangladesh must reject this attempt for "thought control" in the most vigorous, persistent and pervasive manner possible. For this, let our intellectuals, academics, civil society, poets, writers and all educated people of the country come together.

"Thought prisons" must not be tolerated even for a moment.



SOME LAW ENFORCER! ... He has no helmet. He is riding a motorbike which is not even registered. All it has is "CMP 87" written on the plate. The photo of this policeman, talking on the mobile phone as he controls his bike with one hand, was taken at Dampara of Chittagong yesterday.

# 14 wounds

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He died on the spot due to excessive blood loss from the wounds, said Prof Habibuzzaman Chowdhury, head of the forensic department at DMC.

Hours after the gruesome attack, a group identifying itself as Ansar Al Islam claimed responsibility for the murder.

A Gonojagoron Mancha activist, Niladri is the fourth blogger hacked to death this year. Earlier this year, suspected militants killed three secular bloggers and writers -- Avijit Roy in February, Oyasiqur Rahman in March and Ananta Bijoy Das in May. However, unlike Niladri, the others were attacked outside their homes.

Niladri's wife Asha Moni said that he had tried to lodge a general diary to the nearest police station a couple of months ago after sensing that he had been followed by some men. She alleged Khilgaon police refused to file any complaint, passing the buck to Shahjahanpur Police.

Investigating the gruesome killing, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) yesterday said they would probe the allegation immediately.

"We will probe the allegation over police refusal to file a GD about his security," Muntasirul Islam, deputy commissioner (media) of DMP, told reporters yesterday.

The DMP has formed a three-member committee, headed by Additional Deputy Commissioner Tareque bin Rashid of DMP's Motijheel division, to look into the allegation.

However, Zia Md Mostafiz Bhuiyan, officer-in-charge of Khilgaon Police Station, said he was unaware that anybody had wanted to file a GD.

Talking about the progress of the investigation, he said the evidence collected from the crime scene was sent to the DMC for a DNA test.

Police, however, are yet to arrest anyone in connection with the killing, said the OC.

Niladri's wife Asha Moni filed a case with Khilgaon police on Friday night, accusing four unnamed persons. While leaving, they took away Niladri's laptop and mobile phone, Asha mentioned in the case statement.

A TEN-MINUTE MISSION

Talking to this correspondent, Asha said the murderers took about 10 minutes to complete their mission to kill Niladri.

First a thin man, posing as someone looking to rent a place, entered the flat. Instead of taking a look around, he was occupied with his mobile phone. In five minutes, three more youths entered the flat and hacked Niladri indiscriminately with cleavers for around three minutes. Then they fled down the stairs.

"I saw them push him into the bedroom and attack him there," she said.

HE WANTED TO LIVE

Niladri's uncle Bimol Chattopadhyay, who received the body from DMC morgue yesterday, said Niladri had shared his feeling of insecurity with family members back home.

Asha said Niladri had gone to his village home in Pirojpur and come back to the capital on July 25. Then he started looking for an opportunity to go abroad. He was supposed to meet a friend today regarding the matter.

"Niladri wanted to live," she lamented. "If there was justice in this

country, then so many killings [of freethinkers] would not take place and the killers [of Niladri] could not escape so easily in broad daylight."

The insecurity that gripped her following Niladri's death forced her to leave the flat, where they had lived for the last two years. She took shelter at a relative's house yesterday.

DB'S CLAIM

Detectives have yet to arrest any of the masterminds behind the gruesome killings of bloggers and freethinkers.

Asked about the progress into the investigations of those cases, DC Muntasirul claimed success in the murder probes of the bloggers.

"We successfully arrested the killers of Ahmed Rajib Haider and submitted charge sheet against them. Two of the accused in Oyasiqur's killing were arrested and we are trying to nab the others. We also identified seven persons involved in Avijit's murder," he said.

FBI ASSISTANCE

Meanwhile, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) of the US Government has shown interest to help probe the Niladri murder case, said DC Muntasirul.

"A team of FBI will soon hold a meeting with the DMP here in Dhaka," he said.

Asked about the result of FBI's DNA test of the evidence collected from Avijit's murder scene, he said the FBI has made some headway but they didn't send the report yet.

NILADRI'S FUNERAL

Niladri's body was sent to his village home around 10:15pm yesterday. He was cremated around 12:15 am today, family sources said.

Which religion

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Bangladesh are Muslims, and there were so many attempts to unleash terrorism and militant activities in the country.

"But Bangladesh is a non-communal country. This is how Father of the Nation had brought independence to the country ... we're building the country by following that path and we want to continue with it."

Expressing sorrow over the suicide bomb attack on a mosque after Juma' prayers in Saudi Arabia on Friday, the PM questioned, "Are they Muslims? How those people who commit suicide and kill other Muslims can be Muslims? Which religion are they protecting?"

The al-Qaeda claimed that they had been killing bloggers here, said Hasina. "So where's the answer to this conflict? Muslims are killing Muslims by carrying out suicide attacks. Also they are killing people and bloggers for writing against religion. Then which one is true? Which particular path people should follow?"

She also questioned in whose interest the bloodletting has been going on.

Terming Islam the religion of peace, she said those who are polluting Islam do not believe in any religion.

Chaired by State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Meher Afroz Chumki, the function was addressed, among others, by Rebeca Momen, chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women and Children Affairs Ministry; Shamsuzzaman Khan, director general of Bangla Academy; Momtaj Begum, chairman of Jatiya Mahila Sangstha; and Selina Hossain, chairperson of Bangladesh Shishu Academy.

# Govt initiative made to fail?

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the B2B system. Interestingly, the moment the agreement was reached, Malaysia announced it would recruit 1.5 million Bangladeshis within the next three years.

So, how did the private sector businesses pull it off?

"Soon after the G2G was signed in November 2012, manpower agents in Malaysia sat together and decided to lobby against it," said a broker, who claimed to have been present at the meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

The signing of the G2G came as a huge shock to the agents and sub-agents of both the countries simply because this would deprive them of millions of taka and ringgit that they were making through the B2B system.

"With the G2G signing, all the agents and sub-agents in Malaysia -- Bangladeshi, Malay, Chinese and Indian -- got united and protested it," a Bangladeshi sub-agent told this correspondent during the latter's recent visit to Malaysia.

"The government has issued licenses to the recruiting agents for manpower business, but they are sitting idle. Why? If you recruit workers through the G2G, what will the agents do? Will they wash the licenses and drink that water ...?" said another sub-agent, with clear signs of desperation in his voice.

The employers in Malaysia too preferred hiring workers through the agents as "this way both the companies and the agents make profits," he said.

So, following strong lobbying by the agents, who are well-connected with those in Bangladesh, and "with help from some [Malaysian] government officials," the G2G was made ineffective, he added.

there. They were sometimes given short-term jobs but were paid either less than the usual or nothing at all.

Thousands of workers crowded the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur and had to spend nights under the open sky. Many had to return home empty-handed and sick.

Amid this situation, Malaysia in early 2009 cancelled 55,000 visas and imposed a freeze on recruitment from Bangladesh.

After a series of negotiations, Bangladesh and Malaysia in November 2012 signed the G2G agreement, aimed at reducing migration cost and avoiding agents' involvement.

A worker now would have to pay only Tk 40,000 to go there, whereas they had to pay, according to a 2007 study by Malaysia-based rights body Tanaganita, between Tk 1.6 lakh and 2.5 lakh under the B2B system. A large portion of the money went to the pockets of agents and brokers.

Under the G2G, Malaysia was supposed to initially recruit 30,000 Bangladeshis in the plantation sector and then gradually extend the sectors. However, barely one-third of the promised number of workers was hired in almost three years.

Apart from the middlemen, the employing companies preferred the B2B system. They have to pay levy to the government from their own pockets for recruiting workers under the G2G, but they could realise the levy money from workers while hiring through private sectors, according to the brokers.

"This is a huge benefit for the employers. But in the G2G, they are deprived of this. So, why should they go for the G2G?" said a broker. Around 90 percent Malaysian companies don't want to pay levy themselves and want

## B2B COSTS IN 2007-08 IN BANGLADESH

FEES	AMOUNT (IN TK)
Govt fees, other tips, air ticket	40,000
Village broker	10,000 – 20000
City broker	10,000 – 20000
Broker attached to recruiting agency	10,000 – 20000
Recruiting agency	20,000 – 30000
TOTAL	90,000 – 130,000

## IN MALAYSIA

FEES	AMOUNT (IN RM)
Marketing fees for agent	200 – 500
Malaysian home ministry fees	1500 – 2000
Levy	360 – 1800
Calling Visa	300 – 500
Lobbyist fees	1000 – 1200
Bank guarantee	30 – 30
Attestation, other fees	50 – 55
TOTAL	3,440 – 6,085 (Tk 68,800 - Tk 121,700)

SOURCE: TENAGANITA

to pass it on to the workers, he claimed.

When employers and labour agents are united, the Malaysian government cannot do much, said the broker who has been in Malaysia for a decade now.

"Also, you never know if a section of officials and powerful quarters within the Malaysian government are benefitted from labour recruitment through the private sector," he said, hinting at the collusion between manpower agents and government staff in turning the G2G a failure.

A high official of the expatriates' welfare ministry in Bangladesh said they too were somewhat shocked to see little response, or none at all, from Malaysian employers after the G2G deal was signed.

"We heard powerful lobbies were active in both Bangladesh and Malaysia in proving the G2G ineffective," he said, wishing anonymity.

Ali Haider Chowdhury, senior vice-president of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies, said if manpower agents played any role against the G2G, it was from the Malaysian end only.

"However, it's now proved that the government is not efficient in handling the business," he claimed.

Executive Director Dato Shamsuddin Bardan of Malaysian Employers Federation, however, said they were surprised by Malaysia's decision to shift from the G2G to the B2B.

"We preferred the G2G initiative and thought it would be the future mode of recruitment [from Bangladesh]," he told The Daily Star.

He said the reason behind the shift was unknown to him but they had requested the government to review the decision.