



Afghan men weep for their relative following a suicide attack targeting a school in Kabul yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Violence kills 92 in Afghanistan

FROM PAGE 16
One witness, another student named Ali Ahmad, said as many as 100 students may have been inside when the bomber struck, but officials have not yet confirmed the figure.

The attacks, which came as the central city of Ghazni struggles to recover from five days of intense fighting, underlined how hard the insurgents have been pressuring badly stretched local security forces.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the Kabul blast but the attack bore the hallmark of Islamic State, which has conducted many previous attacks on Shia targets. The Taliban issued a statement denying it was involved.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan called for the fighting to stop, saying up to 150 civilians are estimated to have been killed in Ghazni, where the public hospital was overwhelmed and water and electricity supplies cut.

"The extreme human suffering caused by the fighting in Ghazni highlights the urgent need for the war in Afghanistan to end," the top UN official said.

6th-grader

FROM PAGE 1
tin-roofed house in Sirajpur village around 8:30pm. The children's father, a carpenter by profession, was away from home.

Hearing the wailing mother, locals rushed to the spot. But the criminals had left the house by then.

The schoolgirl's bloodstained and unconscious body was rescued from the first floor. She was rushed to Kuakata Hospital where doctors declared her dead.

Talking to The Daily Star, victim's uncle said, "Four people with their faces covered by cloth entered my brother's house and sexually tortured my niece." The criminals also sexually abused her mother, he alleged.

An aunt of the schoolgirl said the criminals taped the baby boys' mouths. Arifur Rahman, medical officer at Kuakata Hospital, said the girl had passed away before she was taken to the hospital.

Her body bore several marks of torture. The cause of her death would be confirmed by forensic tests, he added.

Abdus Salam, headmaster of Mohipur Cooperative High School, demanded exemplary punishment for the killers.

Mizanur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Mohipur Police Station, said they detained the victim's mother for interrogation.

He said the schoolgirl's father filed a murder case with the police station yesterday accusing unidentified people.

Police said the victim's body was handed over to her family members after an autopsy was carried out on it at Patuakhali General Hospital morgue.

Halt

FROM PAGE 2
curbing free speech. Instead, Bangladesh authorities have done just that."

Thousands of students took to the streets after a speeding bus killed two students on July 29. The protesters called for safer roads, accountable governance, and the upholding of the rule of law but were met with teargas and rubber bullets from security forces and violent attacks by supporters of the ruling Awami League, read the HRW statement.

After police stood by while government supporters beat up the student protesters, the authorities moved quickly to stifle any condemnation of the violence. Dhaka police have been conducting block raids in the city's residential areas where many university students live, it added.

Students told HRW that police have been going door-to-door, raiding houses, and checking phones for communications related to the protests.

cial in Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, said in a statement.

The Taliban, who launched their Ghazni assault last Friday and battled Afghan forces backed by US air strikes in the middle of the city for days, said their fighters were pulled out to prevent further harm to the city's population.

"They were facing severe shortages of food and drinking water as the power supply was also suspended two days ago," a Taliban commander, who declined to be identified, said by telephone.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said it was providing dressing packages and oral and intravenous medicine to treat the wounded, along with electricity generators and fresh water for about 18,000 people.

The Ghazni attack, one of the Taliban's most devastating in years, has clouded hopes for peace talks that had been prompted by an unprecedented ceasefire during the Eid celebration in June and a meeting last month between Taliban officials and a senior US diplomat.

Two senior Taliban leaders told Reuters this week the group was considering announcing a ceasefire for the feast of Eid-al Adha, which begins next week, but the future of any peace process remained uncertain.

With parliamentary elections due on October 20, the government had been bracing for more attacks in Kabul and other cities, but even so, the scale of the violence has come as a shock to a government facing bitter criticism over its handling of the war.

In the southern province of Zabul, Taliban insurgents clashed with soldiers on Tuesday, forcing the government to send reinforcements from neighbouring provinces to retain control of two checkpoints.

The clashes killed 11 soldiers and one policeman, with three soldiers wounded, said Haji Atta Jan Haqbayan, a Zabul provincial council member.

Separately, six girls younger than 10 were killed when an unexploded mortar they picked up to play with suddenly exploded yesterday, officials in the eastern province of Laghman said.

Indian bank

FROM PAGE 16
hackers stole information of the bank's VISA and Rupay card customers through malware attack on its ATM (switch) server and siphoned Rs 80 crore through 14,849 transactions.

"Of these, 12,000 transactions were made through VISA cards and Rs 78 crore were transferred out of the country while Rs 2 crore were transferred through Rupay card within the country with 2,849 transactions," said an officer from Chatusrunji police.

The officer said, "On August 13, the hackers transferred Rs 13.94 crore to an account in a Hong Kong-based bank by initiating swift transaction system of the Cosmos Bank. The bank has lost Rs 94 crore within two days. We have registered the offence under the Information and Technology Act and are investigating."

Hackers cloned several thousand cards of different account holders of the Cosmos Bank and shaved off the reported amount.

According to a bank official, preliminary probe shows that the hacking activity seems to have originated from Canada.

"We have filed a complaint and are also taking help from the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and the RBI to see what can be done," said Krishnakumar Goyal, a director of the co-operative bank.

He added that no customers were affected and the bank has been put to a loss because the money was withdrawn from a pool account.

He said the hackers designed a "parallel system," to the NPCI system and self-applied those transactions. According to him, the bank has shut down the servers and put a block on its internet banking transactions.

Goyal added that most of these customer accounts did not even have the requisite balance that was withdrawn from each account.

New effort

FROM PAGE 16
greenhouse gas emissions, experts broadly agree that technologies that suck CO2 from the air will be an essential tool to curtail global warming.

Magnesite is a naturally occurring rock used in jewellery and for various industrial processes, and its carbon-storing capacity was already known to scientists.

Every tonne of magnesite is capable of removing around half a tonne of CO2 from the atmosphere.

However, while previous studies have explored the potential of storing polluting gases in underground rock formations, the potential of these activities is hampered by the time it takes for new minerals to form.

"This is a process which takes hundreds to thousands of years in nature at Earth's surface," explained Professor Ian Power, who led the new research at Trent University.

To overcome this issue, Professor Power and his team identified the processes that form magnesite naturally at low temperatures, and then used this knowledge to dramatically accelerate its crystallisation.

Using polystyrene microspheres as a catalyst to speed up the reactions that form this rock, they reduced its creation time to 72 days.

The whole process takes place at room temperature, making it extremely energy efficient.

"For now, we recognise that this is an experimental process, and will need to be scaled up before we can be sure that magnesite can be used in carbon sequestration (taking CO2 from the atmosphere and permanently storing it as magnesite)," said Professor Power.

"This depends on several variables, including the price of carbon and the refinement of the sequestration technology, but we now know that the science makes it doable."

These results were presented by the scientists at the Goldschmidt geochemistry conference in Boston.

SC rules against earth filling

FROM PAGE 16
compliance with a 2014 High Court order and a letter from the deputy commissioner himself.

The apex court also ordered the DC to submit a compliance report to it by October 8.

The DC, Rabbi Miah, in an October 2016 letter asked the local Upazila Nirbahi Officer to halt the work and remove whatever was dumped. He also asked to take legal action against the offender in keeping with the HC's ban order.

The Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain passed the order after hearing a petition seeking necessary orders to the authorities concerned to stop the filling of land, said a Bela press release.

According to documents of various government authorities, Unique Group, of which Sonargaon Economic Zone is a concern, repeatedly filled with earth and soil high-yield agricultural lands, wetlands and a portion of the Meghna river, despite the HC ban.

The business conglomerate has filled-up agricultural lands and wetlands in Pirojpur, Jainpur, Chhoyhissa, Charbhobonathpur, Batibandha and Ratanpur moujas in Sonargaon upazila --- first in the name of a resort city and later a private economic zone, according to government documents.

The last time it embarked on dumping sand on agricultural land was on July 16, said local villagers.

On March 2, 2014, following a writ petition filed by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), the HC ordered a real estate developer Unique Property Development Ltd, a concern of Unique Group, to stop the filling up of land and remove soil that had already been dumped in the areas mentioned.

On October 25 in 2016, following a petition by Unique Properties Development Ltd, the HC modified its March 2, 2014 order and allowed the company to go ahead with the job.

On November 3, 2016, the Appellate

Division stayed the HC order of October 25, upheld its (HC) March 2, 2014 order and asked the HC to hear and dispose of its March 2, 2014 rule.

Bela filed a contempt of court petition with the HC on January 16, 2017 as Unique Property Development Ltd started doing the work in the areas for establishing an Economic Zone in violation of the HC directives.

During a hearing of the contempt of court petition, the deputy commissioner of Narayanganj appeared before the HC and promised that he would take steps to stop it in the said areas, the Bela press release said.

On July 31 this year, Bela filed a petition with the HC seeking necessary order to stop the earth and sand filling. The HC kept the petition in the record without passing any order. Bela recently filed the petition with the SC for necessary order.

After hearing of the petition, the SC issued the order.

Barrister Fida M Kamal, Advocate AM Aminuddin, Advocate Syeda Rizwana Hasan and Advocate Sayeed Ahmed Kabir appeared for Bela.

Vajpayee

FROM PAGE 16
tract infections and low urine output, doctors, attending him at the hospital, said in a statement.

The AIIMS statement was issued hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Vajpayee yesterday evening to enquire about his condition. Modi spent there around 50 minutes.

The statement said, "Vajpayee has been admitted to the AIIMS for the last nine weeks. His condition is critical and he is on life support."

Vajpayee was elected the prime minister of India thrice between 1996 and 1999 and is the only non-Congress PM to have completed full term of five years in office from 1999 to 2004.

As his health failed, he became a total recluse and was seldom seen outside his residence for years.

Protect right

FROM PAGE 16
statement yesterday.

She said it was deeply concerning that following student protests seeking better road safety in Dhaka after the deaths of two teenagers on a street in the capital on July 29, there have been violent clashes leading to many fatalities.

Police arrested over 50 people, including students, on charges of vandalism and spreading rumours. However, many others, including alleged ruling party men, who attacked students or journalists have not been brought to book.

The two MPs also expressed concern over the safety and wellbeing of globally-acclaimed photojournalist Shahidul Alam, urging fair treatment and his immediate release.

Shahidul was picked up by plainclothes men on August 5 hours after he gave an interview to a foreign news agency supporting the protests. After a seven-day remand in a case filed against him under Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, he was sent to jail on August 12.

While Rushanara said she welcomes Bangladesh government's recognition of the need to improve road safety, she, however, was worried over the arrest of Shahidul, who is well-known in the wider British Bangladeshi community for his photography, having held numerous exhibitions in the UK.

"We are very concerned about his safety and wellbeing, and we urge the government of Bangladesh to recognise his right to free speech and fair treatment," she said.

Rupa Huq, another British Labour Party MP, has written to the Bangladesh High Commission and UK Foreign Office, urging Bangladesh authorities to drop the case against Shahidul.

"Shahidul Alam is the latest victim in a long series of extreme dubious

arrests made in Bangladesh, and his family members are terrified about what will happen to him next," she said.

Alam's treatment is clearly a breach of human rights and denial of the country's constitutional right to freedom of expression, she wrote in the letter posted on her Twitter account.

"Of most concern, to his family friends, fellow protesters in Bangladesh and abroad, and myself, is the state in which he appeared in the courtroom. Alam had evidently been beaten severely and could hardly walk. He is currently in jail and in all probability being treated no better.

"Please exercise the power you wield to urge the authorities in Bangladesh to drop the case against him," she further wrote, adding, "please also push for him to be allowed access to medical treatment and legal representation, which he has thus far not had at a magistrate's court but needs as he approaches the high court hearing."

KL may move

FROM PAGE 16
caused a "monopolistic situation" with some of its members charging as high as RM 20,000 (Tk 4 lakh) from each job seeker, Malaysian newspaper The Star reported on Tuesday.

The agents were "merely fly-by-night companies" created solely to rake in money by playing middleman between the workers and their prospective employers in Malaysia.

"So, we want to open up to all agents there to allow competition," Mahathir told journalists at a press conference after chairing a meeting on foreign workers at the parliament.

Currently, the number of Bangladeshi recruitment agents authorised by Malaysia is about 1,200.

The new plan comes amid a crackdown on undocumented foreign workers in Malaysia, home to some one million Bangladeshis, half of whom are undocumented. Several thousand Bangladeshis and other foreign workers have been arrested.

Mahathir said the government was facing problems with undocumented foreign workers and had decided to set up a "common system".

"Bangladesh, Nepal and others, they will use the same system," he told journalists.

The government would establish a single system to hire foreign workers without differentiating between source countries, he said.

Mahathir noted that the government would form an independent committee chaired by either a top government official, a former judge or a secretary-general, to be handled under the Institute of Labour Market Information and Analysis.

"This is to have an overview on the policies and management of foreign workers.

"We need to address these problems. We need the committee to address the issues," he said.

A ministerial joint committee between the home ministry and the human resource ministry would be set up in this regard, added Mahathir.