

Two killed as bus carrying TV staff bombed in Kabul

At least two people were killed when a bus carrying employees of an Afghan television station was bombed in Kabul yesterday, an official said.

The “sticky bomb” -- a type of homemade device often attached to vehicles with magnets -- went off around 5:30 pm (1300 GMT), interior ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi said.

A “bus carrying the employees of Khurshid TV exploded in the Taimani area”, he said, referring to a bustling neighbourhood in central Kabul.

“As a result, a driver and a passerby were killed, and three more -- including two employees of Khurshid TV -- were injured.”

Pictures on social media showed a small white bus with extensive damage to its front.

Zabiullah Doorandish, a journalist with Khurshid TV, said three of his colleagues had been injured, including one journalist.

“We had received a warning recently by the (security services), that the Taliban may target us,” he told AFP.

No group immediately claimed responsibility.

The Taliban in June threatened any media outlets broadcasting anti-Taliban advertisements.

“They shall become military targets for the mujahideen in the capital, provinces, cities and rural areas and none of their offices, journalists, workers and personnel shall retain any immunity,” the Taliban said in a June 24 statement.

Doorandish said he had not seen any anti-Taliban ads on the channel.

According to its Facebook page, the private Khurshid TV station is dedicating to showing cultural programmes that “preach the main values of journalism, democracy, national unity, creation of understanding & trust among people and help in visualizing and creating a bright future”.

The blast comes at the same time the US is negotiating with the Taliban for a possible peace agreement.

Afghanistan is the world’s deadliest place for journalists, who face many risks covering the conflict and who have sometimes been targeted for doing their job.

Media watchdog group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reported that 2018 was the deadliest year on record for journalists in Afghanistan, with at least 15 media workers killed.



Female Sudanese demonstrators celebrate in Khartoum yesterday, after Sudan’s army rulers and protest leaders signed a hard-won constitutional declaration that paves the way for a transition from August 18 to civilian rule following more than seven months of often deadly street rallies. PHOTO: AFP

Canada resident home after Iran jail escape: family

An Iranian serving a life sentence on a conviction of designing a pornographic website has fled the country while on short-term release from prison and has arrived in Canada, the foreign ministry and his family said.

“Canada welcomes the news that Saeed Malekpour has been reunited with his family in Canada,” a foreign ministry spokesman said in a statement received by AFP.

Man crosses

to land midway for refuelling. The 40-year-old was uninjured in the fall into the sea, and said that he worked “15 to 16 hours a day to rebuild the machine.”

In an interview after he completed his journey across the Channel, Zapata said that for his next challenge he was working on a flying car and had signed contracts, but for now he “was tired” and “wants a vacation,” he told BFMTV.

The inventor captured the world’s imagination when he took to the skies above Paris at Bastille Day parade in July with the board that can reach an altitude of nearly 500 feet -- with the potential to go much higher -- and a speed of 87mph.

Zapata has worked with the US and French militaries, with the French investing \$1.4 million to pay for tests of the board. French special forces are interested in the flying board for several uses, including as a possible assault device, said Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly, according to BFMTV.

Ctg AL leader

the city’s South Nalapara on October 6, 2017.

Police suspected an intra-party feud behind the murder and started arresting the suspects. Some friends of Sudipto also blamed the followers of Masum for the murder.

Following a home ministry order on July 31, Masum surrendered two of his licensed firearms at Khulshi Police Station on Saturday, said Pranab Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of the station.

He was heavily criticised after a photo published in the media showed him opening fire on a gathering of Hefajat-e Islam in the city’s Lalkhan Bazar area on April 7, 2013.

Boy stabbed

General Hospital morgue for autopsy, the OC said, adding locals held Raihan and handed him over to the law enforcers on Saturday evening.

Both Raihan and Saad were resident students of the madrasa, he further added.

The madrasa authorities, however, kept mum and declined to make any comment over the murder.

Three held

Yesterday evening, the victim’s relatives took her to Noakhali General Hospital for treatment as she fell sick, the OC said, adding that the victim informed police about the rape police on her way to the hospital.

Police detained the three following the victim’s complaint and would take necessary steps as per the law, the OC said.

29 dead in 2 US mass shootings

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in which at least four people are wounded or killed in a shooting.

Dayton deputy police chief Lieutenant Colonel Matt Carper said police were working to identify the shooter and the FBI were on the scene.

“Fortunately we had multiple officers in the immediate vicinity when this incident started so there was a very short timeline of violence, for that we’re very fortunate,” he said, praising the swift response by officers.

“As bad as this is, it could have been much, much worse.”

Carper said the attack appeared to be the work of a lone shooter.

The incident came just hours after the mass shooting at a Walmart store in Texas which has reignited debate about the US epidemic of gun violence.

President Donald Trump described the El Paso attack as “an act of cowardice” and police are treating it as a possible hate crime.

One suspect was taken into custody while authorities were studying an extremist manifesto purportedly written by the gunman.

Footage shot with cellphones appeared to show multiple bodies lying on the ground in the store’s parking lot while other footage showed terrified shoppers running out of the store as gunfire echoed.

TWO TO 82 YEARS

Police chief Greg Allen confirmed that in addition to the 20 confirmed fatalities in El Paso, there were 26 wounded.

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said three Mexican citizens were killed and Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard said six others were wounded, reported AFP.

News reports said the ages of victims being treated at hospitals ranged from two to 82 years.

Police said that Walmart was “at capacity” at the time of the shooting, with 1,000-3,000 customers inside.

A 21-year-old from Allen, Texas, was the only person in custody, police confirmed. US media identified him as Patrick Crusius, who is white. He surrendered to police about a block away from the Walmart.

“Right now we have a manifesto from this individual that indicates to some degree, it has a nexus to potential hate crime,” Allen said.

The “manifesto” purportedly written by Crusius that was circulated online includes passages railing against the “Hispanic invasion” of Texas and the author makes clear that he expected to be killed during his attack.

It also expressed for support for the gunman who killed 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New

Zealand, in March, reported Reuters.

Witnesses said the gunman appeared to be shooting at random when he opened fire around 10:30 am.

One woman, who gave her name as Vanessa, said she had just pulled into the Walmart parking lot when the shooting began.

“You could hear the pops, one right after another and at that point as I was turning, I saw a lady, seemed she was coming out of Walmart, headed to her car. She had her groceries in her cart and I saw her just fall,” she told Fox News.

The witness said the gunman wore a black T-shirt, combat trousers and earmuffs.

“He was just shooting randomly. It wasn’t to any particular person. It was any that would cross paths.”

Another shopper described how he managed to avoid being hit by hiding along with his mother between two vending machines just outside the store.

“That’s where the individual tried to shoot at me, which he missed cause I kind of ducked down,” Robert Curado told the El Paso Times.

“He had an AK-47.”

Beto O’Rourke, a former US congressman for El Paso who is now running for president, cut off his campaigning in the wake of the shooting.

Study finds ways to save Halda dolphins

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Protected Area System to Incorporate Aquatic Ecosystem Project’.

According to the findings, there are an estimated 45 dolphins along the 20km stretch of Halda river, ranging from Modunghat to Sattar Ghat, a hotspot for these mammals.

The major threats that were identified include illegal fishing gillnets where dolphins get entangled, a high level of pollution from nearby industries, mechanised boats that ply through the river and diversion or withdrawal of fresh water.

Eighty four percent of the dolphin population are adults, while the rest are juvenile, the study added. However, researchers did not encounter any young dolphin during the study period.

The research team also assumes that the Karnaphuli river contains a good number of these mammals.

A similar study conducted 20 years ago in Sangu and Karnaphuli River found at least 125 dolphins.

The species, Platanista Gangetica, could be conserved in the long run, the lead biologist told The Daily Star.

“But for that to happen, we have to plan not only for Halda but also Karnaphuli River, as the mammal frequently enters Halda from there.”

Halda gets more attention, but the Karnaphuli cannot be ignored as the two water bodies form a unique habitation for these river dolphins, he added.

Monirul recommended that the Halda be declared a sanctuary and initiate smart patrolling at Halda by a team of officials from the wildlife conservation unit and department of fisheries.

Furthermore, he advised the control of mechanised boats plying the waters, reduce local communities’ dependence on the Halda by ensuring

alternative income generation, and develop eco-tourism.

The study underscored the need to form a conservation wing at the Forest Department and Department of Fisheries to protect the species.

Top officials of Forest Department did not want to comment on the study.

Preferring anonymity, top brass of the department with knowledge of the study told The Daily Star that UNDP is yet to submit the study to them.

They will take steps as per the study’s recommendation, the high official added.

Raqibul Amin, country director of IUCN Bangladesh, said the research findings is good news for wildlife conservationists.

“We hope the government will come up with a practical strategy to save the dolphins in Halda and Karnaphuli.”

Berlin condemns Russia protest crackdown

AFP, Berlin

Germany yesterday said a Moscow police crackdown on peaceful protests “violates” Russia’s international obligations and undermines the right to fair elections in the country, a day after hundreds were detained at an opposition rally.

The arrests on Saturday were “out of all proportion to the peaceful nature of the protests against the exclusion of independent candidates” from city elections in Moscow next month, said the German government.

In a statement, Berlin condemned “the repeated interference in the guaranteed right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression” which “violates Russia’s international obligations and strongly questions the right to free and fair elections”.

According to the independent

protest monitor OVD-Info, some 828 people were detained during Saturday’s rally in Moscow.

Police say 1,500 people took part after crowds gathered on the city’s central boulevard in a protest “stroll”.

Authorities also upped the pressure on detained opposition leader Alexei Navalny, a top Kremlin critic, by launching a criminal probe into his anti-graft group on Saturday.

Navalny ally Lyubov Sobol, who is currently three weeks into a hunger strike after being barred from taking part in the election, was dragged from a taxi and detained as she set off for the rally.

Angela Merkel’s government called on Russia to “effectively protect the fundamental rights of its citizens” and demanded “the speedy release of all peaceful demonstrators”.

Syria’s first lady says ‘totally’ cancer free

AFP, Beirut

The wife of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said in an interview aired late Saturday that she was “totally” free of breast cancer after a year of treatment.

“My journey has ended... I totally conquered cancer,” said Asma al-Assad, sporting a stylish short haircut and a long white dress, in an interview broadcast on state television.

The Syrian presidency announced last August that the 44-year-old first lady had begun treatment for breast cancer.

Since then, photos of her, thin and wearing a headscarf, have regularly been shared on the Syrian presidency’s social media accounts.

In January, she underwent an operation at a military hospital in Damascus, according to the presidency.

22,000 complaints

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exercise its jurisdiction.

Indigenous leaders of Chattogram Hill Tracts (CHT), where land disputes remain a hot-button issue, blame the government’s lack of political will for the situation.

The commission was constituted in line with the CHT Accord signed in 1997 between the then Awami League government and regional political party Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS). The treaty brought an end to bloody conflicts in the three hill districts -- Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban.

In 2001, the government enacted the CHT Land Dispute Resolution Commission Act, stating that the judgment by the commission shall be deemed as a decree of a civil court, and appeal or revision cannot be filed with any court or any other authority, nor can questions be raised about the judgment’s validity or accuracy.

The act also has a provision that the government will prepare the rules of business and publish it as a gazette notification within six months.

In the meantime, the commission has kept seeking the rules of business. In January 2017, they even submitted a draft set of rulesto the land ministry.

A year before that, the act was amended incorporating a provision for preparing the rules as early as possible. That too remains only on paper.

Meanwhile, the fate of many people hangs in the balance due to the commission’s inability to settle disputes.

In 1960, when Kaptai Lake was created in Rangamati as part of Karnaphuli hydro-electricity project, 54,000 acres or 40 percent of total cultivable land in the area were submerged, displacing one third of the then population there, according to Parbatya Chattogramer Bhumi Babosthapona O Advaisider Odhikar, a 2019 publication by Kapaeng Foundation.

Between 1979 and 1984-85, some 200,000 to 450,000 Bengali people were rehabilitated in the region, leading to an “ethnic conflict” and internal displacements. During this period, around 100,000 indigenous people had fled to bordering India, but many of them returned to the country in the 1990s, according to a book by Chakma Circle Chief Debashish Roy. The book, first published in 2016, is titled Parbatya Chattogramer Bhumi Ebong Parbatyabasis Odhikar O Oitijjo.

According to media reports, the Task Force on Rehabilitation of the Returnee Refugees and Internally-Displaced Persons has identified 21,900 indigenous families of returnee refugees from India. The major land disputes that the commission is tasked with solving involve those who returned from India; the illegally settled and occupied land; and fringe land of Kaptai Lake. The commission shall settle disputes in line with existing CHT rules, customs and practices, says the 1997 accord.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, Kyaw Shwe Hla, a member of the commission, and also chairman of Bandarban Hill District Council, said the absence of the rules was an obstacle to achieving the commission’s prime goal -- settling land disputes.

He, however, said they had already sorted out the complaints based on priority. “We can start work as soon as the rules are ready.”

Sudatta Chakma, additional secretary (development) of the CHT affairs ministry, said the land ministry is formulating the rules. He asked this correspondent to contact the land ministry to know about the progress.

A few days later, on June 27, CHT Affairs Minister Bir Bahadur Ushwe Sing told a discussion in Dhaka that a draft

set of rules has been finalised recently, and it will come into effect soon.

Contacted, Kamrul Hasan Ferdous, joint secretary of the land ministry, said they were working on the draft rules. Asked about the delay, he refused to give a direct answer, saying he took charge of the task recently.

Kapaeng Foundation, an organisation on indigenous rights, said the land commission cannot hear complaints or start the judicial process without the rules.

The government’s lack of political will is to blame for this situation, said Pallab Chakma, the foundation’s executive director. “Perhaps, they are saying that they are committed. But its reflection is absent in their work.”

Referring to the then Awami League administration, Pallab said the AL government now lacks the spirit and enthusiasm it initially had. The party was still in power for about three and a half years after signing of the peace treaty, he said. “Back then, it worked speedily and showed a lot of commitment. Later, it blamed subsequent BNP-led governments for slowing down the implementation process.”

However, the AL is again in power, now for 10-11 years, he said. “The government may have challenges, but it should not take so many years to give priority to one issue.”

Meanwhile, after a meeting of the land commission in February last year, its chairman Justice Anower-ul Haquehad said, “At first we will start working for the refugee people -- those who returned from India.”

After another meeting of the commission in October last year, its member Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma (Santu Larma) said the commission could not make progress because it has a shortage of manpower and does not have the rules.

“Twenty-two thousand applications have been submitted from three hill districts. We will start hearing them as soon as the government makes the rules,” he said.

After that meeting, Chakma Circle Chief Debashish Roy said the families who filed complaints are yet to get decisions on their lost land. “I hope the commission will work for solving their problems.”

Contacted, CHT Regional Council Member Gautam Kumar Chakma recently said, “Hopefully, the rules will be formulated soon.”

[Our Khagrachhari correspondent Saikat Dewan contributed to this report.]

District hospitals

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Meanwhile, doctors in different districts said most of their patients were infected after traveling to Dhaka. But there are some who did not visit the capital recently.

Nine-month-old baby boy Md Noman Hossain was infected recently and is taking treatment at Bogura Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital.

His father Enamul Haque of Bogura Sadar upazila said, “None of us went to Dhaka in the last six months and none of our relatives came from there, but my son was infected.”

The doctors fear that the disease might spread further during Eid-ul-Azha when holidaymakers from Dhaka would be visiting villages.

Meanwhile, the SBMCH authorities are planning to open a separate ward for dengue patients if necessity arises, said its director Dr Bakir Hossain.

Up till now, 200 dengue patients have been identified in Bogura, 392 in Mymensingh, 279 in Kishoreganj, 466 in six districts of Barishal division, and 648 in 10 districts of Khulna division, report our correspondents.