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Kabul mosque blast kills 21

33 injured; UN voices concern over 'deteriorating' security in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A blast that ripped through a mosque packed with worshippers in the Afghan capital killed at least 21 people and wounded more than two dozen others, police said yesterday.

The number of bombings across Afghanistan has declined since the Taliban returned to power last year, but several attacks – some targeting minority communities – have rocked the country in recent months, including those claimed by the jihadist Islamic State (IS) group.

No group has claimed responsibility for Wednesday evening's blast at Kabul's Sediqia Mosque, which has an adjoining madrasa.

Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadran said 21 people were killed and 33 others wounded.

Italian non-governmental organisation Emergency, which operates a hospital in Kabul, said it had received 35 patients, including three who died.

"Most of the injuries were caused by shrapnel and burns. Our surgeons were operating throughout the night. There

were nine children among the victims that we received," country director Stefano Sozza said in a statement yesterday.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan yesterday said security was "deteriorating" in the country.

"We deplore yesterday's attack in a Kabul mosque, the latest in a disturbing series of bombings which have killed & injured more than 250 people in recent weeks, the highest monthly number of civilian casualties over the last year," said a statement released on Twitter.

Taliban officials insist they have full control of security and frequently deny or play down incidents reported on Afghanistan's vibrant social media.

They have also taken recently to preventing local and foreign media from covering the aftermath of attacks – sometimes using violence – and yesterday armed Taliban fighters blocked journalists from reaching the latest blast site.

Wednesday's explosion comes nearly a week after a suicide bomber killed top Taliban cleric Rahimullah Haqqani, along with his brother, at his madrasa in Kabul.

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MISCHIEF MANAGED ... An Indian palm squirrel stretching his back after doing some hard work of hiding nuts in a small hollow of a tree in Khulna city's Mujgunni area. This considerably cute rodent is widespread and widely liked, despite a knack for mischief. It is found mainly in India and its neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Mystery shrouds couple's death in Gazipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Mystery shrouds over the death of a couple found motionless inside their car after being missing for almost 11 hours in Tongi.

School teachers Ziaur Rahman Mamun, 51, and his wife Jolly Akhter, 35, started for home after work around 6:30pm on Wednesday. They had called Mamun's son Tousifur Rahman Miraj from the vehicle to let him know.

Miraj started worrying as the couple was taking a long time to return to their home in Tongi's Kamarjuri area. It usually takes them 30 minutes to an hour to come home.

They could not be reached over the phones which were found switched off, said Miraj.

"We, the family members and relatives, searched for my parents the whole night. Around 5:30am today [Thursday],

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Consider independent means to probe allegations

Experts urge govt about UN rights chief's recommendation over extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances

PORIMOL PALMA

The government should seriously consider Michelle Bachelet's recommendation of an independent mechanism to investigate alleged extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, experts said following the UN human rights chief's visit.

Legal and human rights analysts said the UN human rights commissioner's four-day visit, which ended on Wednesday, bears immense significance in light of widespread allegations of human rights violations by law enforcement agencies and the US sanctions on Rab and seven of its current and former officials.

"We have no scope to deny the allegations of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. We should seriously consider the proposal of an independent mechanism to investigate the allegations," Nur Khan, member of Ain O Salish Kendra, told this

correspondent yesterday.

He said the state is responsible for solving every case of enforced disappearance. But even when there were numerous serious allegations of enforced disappearances, some policymakers made light of them, saying those said to have disappeared actually went into hiding.

During Bachelet's visit, some ministers she met told her that people reported to have gone missing had actually fled after committing crimes, family disputes or going bankrupt. The ministers generally denied that there were cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

"Recently, survivors are giving detailed descriptions of disappearances. So, there is no scope to deny these," Nur Khan said.

Despite demands for independent investigations, authorities have not taken effective

initiatives for several years. "If perpetrators are not punished, they will become monsters and the society will be full of ills."

He said Bangladesh generally has strong engagement with the UN in terms of economic, gender, peace, humanitarian and development aspects. It is actively supporting Bangladesh on the Rohingya cause. Also, Bangladesh is the largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions.

"Our unwillingness to investigate serious human rights allegations can affect the relationship in other areas of engagement, and we don't want that to happen," the rights activist said.

Prof Mizanur Rahman, former chairman of National Human Rights Commission, said he fully supports Bachelet's proposal of independent investigation into the gross rights violations, but wants the National Human

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BNP seeks probe under UN watch

The party on extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

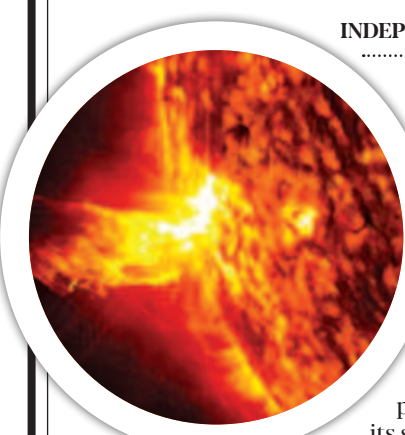
The BNP yesterday demanded UN supervised independent investigation into enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Bangladesh.

"UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has suggested forming a separate commission to investigate enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. We have been saying this for a long time. We want an independent investigation under the United Nations and punishment of the culprits," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir.

Speaking at a press conference at the party chairperson's Gulshan office, he alleged that

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'Cannibal' solar storm headed for Earth



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A series of explosions on the Sun could lead to a "cannibal" solar storm headed for the Earth.

In recent days, the Sun experienced two coronal mass ejections, or CMEs, during which particles burst out of its surface.

They are now headed for the Earth, where they could cause disruption to satellites and other important systems, space weather experts have warned.

And as they head towards us, together, they could cannibalise each other so that they become one even more powerful blast. Such cannibalism happens when one CME is thrown out of the Sun and then followed by a more energetic and faster blast, which then consumes it.

The pair were expected to arrive on Earth yesterday or today.

There is some chance they will result in a G3 class geomagnetic storm, which is described as a "strong" storm. Such events are categorised

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Women carefully separating jute fibre from retted stalks. Inset, freshly harvested jute stalks being carried for the process of water retting. In this step, the bundles are soaked in water to swell the inner cells and burst the outermost layer. This makes the process of separating the fibre from the stalk easier. The photos were taken from different areas in Narail yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

3 BCL men arrested for harassing college girl

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rab yesterday arrested three BCL men in Rajshahi's Meherchandi and adjacent areas for harassing a college girl, demanding extortion money from her mother, and beating up her father.

Borsa Rani Saha, a student of Rajshahi Government Women's College, filed a case with General Railway Police Station on Wednesday against eight BCL men.

The arrestees are Irfan Khan Meraj, 23, deputy publication secretary of Rajshahi City BCL, Benazir Farhad, 27, joint secretary of a ward unit BCL, and Akher Ali, 32, an activist of the student front.

According to the case statement, Rajshahi City BCL Vice-President Ruhul Amin Sarker Prince and some others had been harassing Borsha for the last five months.

The accused demanded extortion money from the

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