

19 killed in Somalia car bombings

AFP, Mogadishu

Nineteen people have been killed in twin car bombings in central Somalia claimed by Al-Shabaab, a local militia commander in the Hirsh region said.

Two cars packed with explosives were simultaneously detonated in Mahas, a town in Hirsh where a major offensive was launched last year against the al-Qaeda-linked militant group.

The attack was claimed by Al-Shabaab, which has been waging a years-long insurgency against the fragile central government, according to the SITE monitoring group.

"Nineteen people, including members of the security forces and civilians, died in the blasts," said Mohamed Moalim Adan, a leader of a community militia allied with the government in Mahas.

52 people were wounded in the blasts.

Security officials and local leaders said two military bases were targeted in Mahas in retaliation for operations against the militants.

Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility in a statement issued by its media unit, saying fighters had detonated explosives at military bases in Mahas and also attacked another base in Dadan 'Ad, about 17 kilometres (10 miles) away, according to SITE.

Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has declared "all-out war" against Al-Shabaab, which has been waging a bloody insurgency against the frail internationally-backed federal government for 15 years.



Family members wait for prisoners to be released from Insein Prison in Yangon, yesterday. Myanmar's military junta -- which regularly marks holidays with prisoner amnesties -- marked the country's independence day with the announcement that 7,012 prisoners would be freed, without specifying whether the amnesty would include those jailed as part of its crackdown on dissent.

PHOTO: AFP

ELECTION OF US HOUSE SPEAKER

GOP split as Trump backs McCarthy

AFP, Washington



Donald Trump yesterday called for far-right Republicans to end their blocking of the party's candidate to become US House speaker, after a damaging split prevented Kevin McCarthy from securing the key role. Congress was thrown into disarray on Tuesday by the rebels' move to derail McCarthy's candidacy, with the House of Representatives failing to elect a speaker for the first time in a century. Rather than celebrating their new control of the lower chamber, the Republican Party has instead been pitched into a drawn out public fight that put McCarthy's political career on the line.

"It's now time for all of our great Republican House Members to vote for Kevin, close the deal and take victory," Trump posted on social media.

"Republicans, do not turn a great triumph

into a giant and embarrassing defeat."

McCarthy needed 218 votes in the House, which flipped to a narrow 222-212 Republican majority after last year's midterm elections.

But he failed to bring into line the party rebels, including several high-profile allies of former president Trump, and he was rocked by 19 "no" votes from his own side in each of the first two rounds, rising to

The House was adjourned on Tuesday and

was expected to hold further ballots yesterday until someone emerges with a majority -- and it is not out of the question that a new candidate could come to the fore.

One roadblock to McCarthy's anointment was the perception by some on his party's right wing that he is insufficiently loyal to Trump, who is running for the White House again after losing to Joe Biden in 2020.

The last time it took more than one round of voting to pick a speaker at the start of a new Congress was a century ago, in 1923. Another historic speaker selection process that began in December 1855 took 133 rounds of voting over two months.

"It's time to celebrate, you deserve it," Trump said. "Kevin McCarthy will do a good job, and maybe even a great job -- just watch!"

The Speaker wields huge influence in Washington by presiding over House business and is second in line to the presidency, after the vice president.

Fakhrul, Abbas will have to wait longer

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of bail, to its full bench for further hearing on January 8.

Fakhrul and Abbas cannot be freed from jail until January 8 following the apex court chamber judge's order. Additional Attorney General Mohammad Mehedi Hassan Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

Attorney General AM Amin Uddin appeared for the state while senior lawyer Zainul Abedin argued for the BNP leaders.

On January 3, the HC granted six months ad-interim bail to Fakhrul and Abbas and issued a rule asking the state to explain why they should not be granted permanent bail in this case filed over the December 7 clashes between police and BNP men in the capital's Nayapaltan area.

The BNP leaders had earlier been denied bail four times by the lower courts in the case.

The case was filed with Paltan Model Police Station on December 8, a day after the clash broke out in front of the BNP's Nayapaltan office. The clash left one person killed and many others injured.

Fakhrul and Abbas were picked up from their homes around 3:00am on December 9, a day before their Dhaka divisional mass rally, and were sent to jail after Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Jashim rejected their bail petitions.

They were shown arrested on charges of provoking party activists to attack police.

LAW MINISTER ABOUT BAIL

Meanwhile, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said the government did not interfere in the court proceedings regarding the bail of Fakhrul and Abbas.

"Granting bail or not to any

accused is the court's discretion. The law ministry, even any other ministry, does not interfere in the court functions. There are instances that a lower court has denied bail to an accused, but the High Court has granted the bail. On the other hand, the lower court granted bail, but the High Court halted the order. This is not anything new in Bangladesh."

"Those who are now raising question about the bail have perhaps neither seen the activities of the BNP and Jatiya Party governments nor want to tell those experiences now," he said.

The law minister was talking to reporters after attending as the chief guest of the inauguration of a workshop for lower court judges titled "Learning in Partnership: Bespoke Judge-craft Workshop" at the Judicial Administration Training Institute in the capital.

and the UK, met her at her office.

Urging the expatriate leaders to make investments in Bangladesh, Hasina said, "We have taken joint measures for attracting investments in Bangladesh. We're currently establishing 100 economic zones across the country. Those who have interest can invest in the economic zones. It will be better to invest with a partner. The more you invest, the more the country will benefit."

Expressing satisfaction over the incoming investments, she said the inflow of foreign investment in the country is good as the countries are showing their keenness to this end.

The PM recalled the contribution of the expatriates during troubled times and disasters in the country.

said they want to install a gas pipeline from India to Khulna. "We have finalised the negotiations with Indian company H Energy. We will sign an agreement soon."

Bangladesh is now importing 1,160MW of electricity a day from India. And Adani Group will start delivering around 1,496MW coal-fired power a day within this year.

"We need India's cooperation in the renewable energy sector, especially solar. They have vast land (to install solar project) which we don't. The Indian side will try to help us import hydropower from Bhutan and Nepal. Discussions were held

about trilateral agreements to invest in Nepal to expand their renewable sector."

Power Secretary Habibur Rahman, Bangladesh Power Development Board Chairman Mahbubur Rahman,

Respect rule of law

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"Here we see election centric noises one year ahead of the election. This is very sad."

There is an "independent Election Commission with transparent arrangements" to hold fair elections, he added.

Foreign observers

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She also urged British entrepreneurs to invest in the 100 economic zones across Bangladesh.

"We will welcome the UK's investment there," she said.

The British MPs lauded the unprecedented infrastructural development of Bangladesh, and praised Hasina for her role in making it possible, said Ihsanul.

"They highly appreciated the development in connectivity, including the Metro Rail, Padma Bridge and Bangabandhu Tunnel."

They also discussed Bangladesh's next general elections, he added.

The PM appreciated the UK's support for Bangladesh in tackling climate change.

We want better energy ties with Delhi

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import low-cost fuel, like India is doing from Russia.

Asked about it, Nasrul told The Daily Star yesterday, "India imports most of its fuel through the private sector, and recently their demand has risen by 12 percent. That's why it will be tough, but the Numaligarh pipeline will help us to get cheaper fuel from India."

"India has lots of refineries and they import crude oil from different countries and is able to get cheaper fuel. We want to take the opportunity."

At the briefing, the state minister

INTERNATIONAL

GREEN HYDROGEN INDUSTRY

India OKs \$2b incentive plan

REUTERS, New Delhi

India has approved an incentive plan of 174.9 billion rupees (\$2.1 billion) to promote green hydrogen in a bid to cut emissions and become a major exporter in the field, the information minister said yesterday. The move is targeted to help India, one of the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitters, achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2070. The country aims for annual production of 5 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2030, cutting about 50 million tonnes of carbon emissions and saving one trillion rupees on fossil fuel imports, the minister, Anurag Thakur, told reporters. Hydrogen, made by splitting water with an electrical process called electrolysis, can be used as a fuel. If the devices that do that, electrolyzers, are powered by renewable energy, the product is called green hydrogen.

Myanmar will hold 'free, fair' polls: junta

AFP, Naypyidaw

Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said it would hold "free and fair" multiparty elections as it marked Independence Day yesterday, days after increasing Aung San Suu Kyi's jail term to 33 years. The junta is preparing for fresh elections later this year that the United States has said would be a "sham". The junta-imposed state of emergency is due to expire at the end of January, after which the constitution states authorities must set in motion plans to hold fresh elections. The junta chief gave no timetable for any election.

Lanka to hold first polls since crisis

AFP, Colombo

Crisis-hit Sri Lanka yesterday announced its first nationwide elections since its president fled and resigned in the face of widespread protests, in what will be a test of popularity for his successor. Local government polls will be held before the end of February, officials said, after they were delayed by a year due to the pandemic. Months of acute shortages of food, fuel and electricity since late 2021 led to mass agitation against then president Rajapaksa's administration which defaulted on the country's \$46 billion external debt in April.

No one to listen until we make ourselves

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UGC, said 45 out of 53 public and 71 of 109 private universities have established anti-sexual harassment cells.

"Universities are supposed to submit reports of their activities every six months. However, very few send these reports. And those who do keep the reports mostly vague, without proper numbers or details of the incidents. Most of these complaints were lodged five to seven years ago."

"Some universities reached out to us saying they don't have enough funds to run the cells and the investigations. We then sent letters to all universities saying we will provide funds to the complaint committee but they are yet to respond."

The reasons for not filing a complaint varied.

However, 68.5 percent of the students The Daily Star talked to mentioned they did not file a complaint for fear of judgement and character assassination.

Around 27.4 percent of them did not file complaints because the perpetrator was influential, while 17.8 percent did not complain as the offenders were involved with the ruling party.

Meanwhile, a staggering 31.5 percent of the students interviewed said they did not even know where to file the complaints. Asked if they know of any such cell where sexual harassment complaints are registered, 77.4 percent responded in the negative.

Asked if the universities arrange seminars, workshops or any other awareness campaigns on where and how to register such complaints as per the HC directive, 59.1 percent of the respondents said they have not noticed any such activities.

At the beginning of this year, this newspaper published a report on Jahangirnagar University's sexual harassment prevention cell, which was the first of its kind at any public university in Bangladesh.

Our JU correspondent talked to over 50 students from January 21 to 23. At least 20 of them said they don't even know of any such cell on campus. The rest said they heard about it, but did not notice any activities.

There is also a lack of faith in the authorities -- due to their inaction in most cases -- that discourages students from filing complaints.

Most of those (interviewed by this newspaper) who filed complaints mentioned that in most cases, no action was taken against the perpetrators.

Around 66.1 percent of the respondents said they have no faith in the competence of any such cell or other authoritative bodies when it

comes to sexual harassment.

"I saw a classmate of mine being harassed for days by another classmate. When a complaint was filed to the department faculties with all the evidence, they chose to do nothing about it on the grounds that a suspension could ruin the life of the perpetrator," said Samantha (not her real name), a student of Dhaka University.

"So, when I was harassed by another classmate, I chose not to file a complaint. I did not know about the anti sexual harassment cell, but I also think they would not be of much help either after seeing teachers from my own department not cooperating with a victim."

Arunima Tahsin, a senior year student of DU and an ex-Ducusu member of the Shamsunnahar Hall caucuses, said, "Until now, I did not know that such a cell exists at the university."

"I was told that a few students of Shamsunnahar Hall complained to the authorities about being harassed in front of the food carts that stand on the opposite side of the hall entrance. In response, the authorities said they cannot take responsibility for events occurring outside the areas that fall under CCTV surveillance. This is how complaints are treated..."

Contacted, Prof Zeenat Huda of DU's sociology department and head of the anti-sexual harassment cell, said, "I'm a newcomer to the committee so I cannot comment on the previous activities. But as per my knowledge, the cell is active."

Prof Nazia Chowdhury, head of the physics department at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology and former head of Sust anti-sexual harassment cell, said "We provide information regarding the cell during orientations and have put up billboards at the cafeteria."

"Our year-long activities also include protest programmes against cases of violence from across the country. We have a four-member complaint committee and we do proper investigation for every case. Students have always relied on us and our judgement."

She added, "Universities should let the students know of the cell's activities at orientations, department handbooks and on the university website. We also need a dedicated committee to deal with such issues [raising awareness]."

Ashrafi Nitu, a recent graduate from Chittagong University, said a cell was formed in CU back in 2010 and has remained inactive until recently.

"After a harassment incident that took place on our campus on July 17 this year, we demanded the formation of a new cell and decisions on all 6

Forex market

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So delicate is the situation that some banks are buying dollars for the open market to settle their letters of credit, said Mansur, also the chairman of Brac Bank. "Exporters are complaining that they have to buy dollars at a higher rate than the one they have sold their export proceeds for. As a result, exporters are holding on to their proceeds and not cashing out. So the situation is actually worsening."

Some banks are unable to open LCs, which is affecting the domestic supply of goods.

"It is difficult to overcome the current crisis over the next six months," said Mansur, also a former economist of the International Monetary Fund.

While the pressure on banks has eased, it is not possible to say in which direction the situation is heading before March, said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director and chief executive officer of Mutual Trust Bank.

"It is good that the trade deficit and current account deficit have narrowed and remittance has increased slightly. But the question is for how long would the trend continue."

Ramadan is coming up, so the imports have already started ticking up, said Rahman, chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh, a platform of banks' MDs.

How prehistoric

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years ago, people in northern Europe were able to survive in winter thanks in part to warm bear skins," Tubingen researchers Ivo Verheijen explained.