

Hitlist of Bangladesh bloggers out

THE 'POISON-PEN LETTERS'

Dhaka

Bangladesh police were yesterday investigating apparent death threats against six secular writers, days after the murder of a fourth blogger in six months.

The six, who include poets, bloggers and a journalist, all live in the southern city of Barisal and went to police after their photographs appeared late Tuesday on a new Facebook page registered under the name Ansar-BD.

"There are three anti-Islamic poets and three organisers of bloggers. They are the enemy of Islam. We should do whatever it takes," read the post.

Police said they did not know who was behind the threat but were taking it seriously, and the country's elite security force was investigating. "We've increased surveillance and patrols near their homes and workplaces," Barisal city police chief Shakhawat Hossain said.

The apparent hit list was published less than a week after blogger Niloy Chakrabarti was hacked to death at his home in the capital Dhaka by an unknown attacker.

He was the fourth atheist blogger to have been killed since



Bangladeshi secular activists take part in a procession to protest against the killing of blogger Niloy Chakrabarti

February when Bangladeshi-born US citizen Avijit Roy, a writer and moderator of a blog site, was hacked to death in Dhaka.

The Bangladesh branch of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, Ansar Al Islam, claimed the murder of Chakrabarti and warned of more to come, according to monitoring group SITE.

Another Islamist militant group, Ansarullah Bangla Team, took responsibility for several killings of secular bloggers and was outlawed by Bangladesh in May.

Journalist Nazrul Biswas was among those threatened. He

said he was not against Islam and refused to be intimidated.

The list was published as New York-based rights group Human Rights Watch urged Bangladesh authorities to unequivocally declare their commitment to free speech instead of proposing self-censorship.

"It's shocking that Bangladesh authorities not only failed to protect the bloggers despite complaints to the police about threats against them, but instead are proposing self-censorship," said Brad Adams, Asia director at HRW. up to 14 years in jail for hurting religious sentiments.

THE WALLS HAVE EYES: KABUL'S GRAFFITI



Under a soldier's watchful gaze, a group of artists paint a blast wall outside Kabul's presidential palace with a huge pair of eyes in bright, almost psychedelic colours. Alongside the eyes, a slogan reads, "Corruption cannot be hidden from God or from the people". The project is not some guerilla graffiti campaign but comes with the blessing of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani -- bringing colour to the sometimes drab Kabul streets while pushing an anti-corruption message in a country where graft is rife.

India seeks \$100m from Nestle

New Delhi

India's government is seeking damages of nearly \$100 million from Nestle for "unfair trade practices" after the food safety watchdog banned its hugely popular Maggi noodles brand.

The government said yesterday that it had filed a suit with the country's top consumer court for 6,400 million rupees (\$98.6 million) in damages from the Indian arm of the Swiss food giant.

India's food safety watchdog in June banned Nestle from making or selling noodles in the country after tests by

some states found lead levels exceeded statutory limits.

Nestle has withdrawn the product in India but continues to sell it elsewhere, and has always denied the charge. "We filed the complaint with the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) yesterday and have sought around 6,400 million rupees in damages," G, Gurcharan, Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Consumer Affairs said.

"Our complaint is over their unfair trade practices and the court will now issue them notices to hear their response,"



The Maggi noodles

Gurcharan added.

A Nestle India spokesman said that the company had not yet received official notice about the complaint with the NCDRC, a semi-judicial body that has the power to fine companies.

Pakistan foils Independence Day bomb plot

Islamabad

Pakistani security forces said yesterday that they had foiled a plot to bomb Independence Day celebrations in Karachi after arresting a Taliban gang in the city.

Militants had been planning to detonate a van loaded with explosives in the country's largest city during Friday's celebrations marking independence from

Britain in 1947, a statement from the military said.

"In an intelligence-based operation security forces have... foiled a terrorist bid planned to sabotage 14 August celebrations in Karachi," the statement said. The military released photos showing four men detained in the operation along with the van, a motorbike and bomb-making equipment.

Police and government paramilitary forces have been mounting an operation against militants and criminals in Karachi since September 2013.

The city of 20 million people, Pakistan's economic capital, has been racked in recent years by criminal, ethnic, political and religious violence.

In June last year the military

launched a major operation against Taliban strongholds in Pakistan's tribal northwest aimed at ending the bloody insurgency that has plagued the country for more than a decade.

The offensive intensified after December last year when Taliban militants attacked a school in Peshawar and killed over 150 people -- mostly children.

Six injured in US military chopper accident

Tokyo

Six people were injured when a US military helicopter failed to land properly on an American ship during an exercise off Japan's Okinawa Island on yesterday, the US military said.

A US Army H-60 helicopter was "damaged during a hard deck landing" aboard the vehicle cargo ship USNS Red Cloud 20 miles (32 kilometres) east of the island, US Forces Japan said in a statement. "The helicopter was conducting a local training mission," the brief statement said, adding that the cause of the accident is under investigation.

He's 'all ears' Australian artist to connect 'ear' on arm to web



Sydney

An Australian artist and academic plans to connect an ear which he has been growing for years on his arm to the Internet so people can hear and track his movements.

The project by a professor from Curtin University in Western Australia, known as Stelarc, is his latest in a series of artworks exploring the boundaries of blending robotics, prosthetics and the human body.

"Increasingly now, people

are becoming Internet portals of experience... imagine if I could hear with the ears of someone in New York, imagine if I at the same time, could see with the eyes of someone in London," he told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

A miniature microphone with wireless Internet connection will be inserted into the "ear", while people will be able to track it through a GPS device placed on the body part.

"There won't be an on-off switch," he said of the microphone. If I'm not in a wi-fi hotspot or I

switch off my home modem, then perhaps I'll be offline, but the idea actually is to try to keep the ear online all the time."

Stelarc, the director of Alternate Anatomies Lab at Curtin, has previously created an exoskeleton, inserted a sculpture into his stomach and used a third, robotic, arm for writing.

He said the idea of having an ear implanted and grown on his arm first emerged in 1996. "In previous performances I've used a third hand, an extended arm, a six-

legged robot. Having an extra ear was sort of a natural progression," Stelarc told commercial broadcaster Channel Nine Wednesday.

Stelarc said the ear was "partly surgically constructed and partly cell-grown".

"A biopolymer scaffold was inserted into my arm, skin was suctioned over it and then over a period of six months that encourages your cells to grow into the scaffold. It grows its own blood supply so this ear becomes not only fixed, but a part of your body," he said.