



PHOTO: STAR
Vice-chancellor of Dhaka University Professor SMA Faiz leads a procession of teachers and students on the campus to demonstrate against the US-led attack on Iraq.

DU teachers, students protest attack on Iraq

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thousands of students of Dhaka University and their teachers led by Vice-chancellor Prof SMA Faiz came on campus streets yesterday protesting the US invasion of Iraq and chanted slogans for peace.

With slogans like "No War for Oil" and "Stop Killing in Iraq" written on bare chests of many of them, the protesters carrying anti-US placards converged on the Central Shaheed Minar premises and burned at least seven effigies of President Bush. The Vice-chancellor (VC) addressed the rally.

Sponsored by the DU authorities and different student bodies, the protest march began at 11 am from the Aparajeo Bangla at the Arts Faculty. Chanting various slogans against the Bush administration, they crossed the TSC area, Doel crossing and Cirzon Hall and assembled at the Shaheed Minar.

Police said the crowd was between 8,000 and 10,000 while the organisers estimated it at about 15,000.

Classes and examinations were postponed yesterday due to the half-day hartal called by left parties protesting the invasion.

Addressing the rally, the Vice Chancellor said students, teachers and officials of Dhaka University came on streets to protest the invasion and to express their solidarity with the innocent people of Iraq.

4 killed, 30 hurt in Magura road mishap

UNB, Magura

Four people were killed and 30 others injured when a Khulna bound bus from Dhaka rammed a roadside house early yesterday.

The injured passengers and hospital sources said the night coach of Ruma Paribahan met with the accident at Bagat on Dhaka-Magura road.

The driver lost control over the steering while giving passage to a truck coming from the opposite direction. Identity of the victims could not be known. Twelve of the injured were admitted to Magura Sadar Hospital. The condition of four was treated to be critical.

The truck driver managed to flee the scene soon after the accident. A case was filed with police.

World snubs US

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Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov meanwhile said on Friday that Moscow would refuse any US demands to expel Iraqi diplomats, but that it had yet to receive an official request.

Malaysia also rejected the US demands on Friday while Thailand's foreign ministry, yet to receive a request, questioned whether such actions would be legal.

"How can assets of the embassy of Iraq be seized? It's not legal, we have relations," said a foreign ministry spokesman.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell on Friday dismissed the resistance to Washington's request.

"That is their choice," Powell told reporters when asked about the refusal of at least seven nations to accede to the US call.

"We believe that, as we watch this regime come to an end, it would be appropriate to let all of our friends know that it was time to cease the activity of the Iraqi missions in their countries," he said.

Several countries that have broadly supported the US-led campaign to wage war against Iraq held firm in the face of Washington's requests.

Portugal, a strong backer of US policy on Iraq, said on Friday that it would not expel Iraqi diplomats as requested by Washington.

"We do not intend to close

our doors to anyone who is not a friend of the United States," said Prime Minister Jose Manuel Durao Barroso said at a meeting of EU leaders in Brussels.

The Netherlands, which also backs the United States over Iraq, rejected the request as groundless, while Poland rejected it on Thursday as "unjustified".

"Embassies represent not only the leaders of these countries but also the nations, and Iraqi nationals also live in Poland," said Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski.

Algeria, Kenya and Sweden also turned down the US demands while Jordan said it had yet to receive a formal request.

In Australia, however, all Iraqi diplomats were told to pack their bags and leave the country before the end of the week.

Iraq has a diplomatic presence in 63 countries, via 56 embassies, six special interests sections and one consulate, and is also represented at the United Nations.

A number of countries, including France, that took part in the 1990-1991 Gulf War have since had no official diplomatic ties with Iraq.

But despite prolonged UN economic sanctions against Iraq, many governments have resumed normal relations with Baghdad over the past decade, typically handled via special interests sections.

Customs officials yesterday seized over 3,000 illegally imported VCD players worth about Tk 1 crore from a container at the Inland Container Depot at Kamalapur in the city.

On information, they broke open a container and found the VCDs packed in 851 cartons, imported from China by Ashraf International, 1/Chak Circular Road, Dhaka in the name of tennis balls.

Police last night said that they were looking for officials of the company, but none could be nabbed.

Woman raped, murdered in Bagerhat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A woman was raped and killed allegedly by BNP activists at Mollahat upazila of Bagerhat district following her abduction on Wednesday, sources said.

The victim was identified as Majeda Begum, a divorcee and the daughter of Hekmat Ali of Ghoshgati village. Police recovered her body from a ditch at Rajpat village under Mollahat thana on Friday.

This is the second such incident in Mollahat upazila in about a week's time after the rape and murder of a schoolgirl there on March 12.

Police and local people said five men abducted Majeda from her father's house on Wednesday night and raped and killed her before

dumping her body in the ditch.

Sources in the police said Majeda's killers are activists of Mollahat thana unit of BNP who had also raped and killed Sufia Khatoon, a schoolgirl of the same upazila earlier on March 12. Sufia's body was recovered from a fish enclosure at the same village on March 14.

Autopsy of Majeda's body was carried out yesterday. An unnatural death case was filed with the Mollahat police station. None was arrested till filing of this report last night.

Meanwhile, Afzal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Mollahat thana, was closed to Bagerhat police lines on Friday for his failure to arrest the killers of Sufia and Majeda.

Programmes to lay siege to US embassy March 25, 29

UNB, Dhaka

A number of organisations yesterday announced that they would lay siege to the US embassy to protest the US invasion of Iraq defying the strong security measures that are in place in and around the capital's diplomatic enclave.

The Civil Society Against War said it will lay siege to the US Embassy on March 25 while Islamic Shashanttra Andolon announced a similar programme on March 29.

Left-leaning 11-party alliance and some other organisations have extended their support to the siege programme and urged people to join.

Sources said left-leaning parties and pro-Islamic groups are adamant to make the programme a success saying it is the moral responsibility of people from all walks of life to protest the US-led war on Iraq.

Young man murdered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A young man was beaten to death at Madhabpur of Digholia upazila in Khulna district on Friday.

The victim was identified as Hemayet Mollah, 35.

According to police and witnesses, Hemayet came under attack by some unidentified men while he was returning home at around 9:30 pm. He was taken to Khulna Medical College Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries at about 11 pm.

4 JCD activists expelled

BSS, Dhaka

Four activists of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) unit of Jaitiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) were expelled for their alleged involvement in anti-organisational activities.

A press release, signed by assistant office secretary of JCD central committee Wahid Bin Imtiaz Bakul, said the expelled members are Muniruzzaman Khan Imran, Azadur Rahman Azad, Osman Goni Tuhin and Mohammad Hasanuzzaman Hasan.

Rocca: Voice of moderation

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Rocca emphasised that it is in the interest of the United States to keep Bangladesh firmly in the moderate, democratic camp and to help its economy prosper.

She informed the Subcommittee that Bangladesh is a valued partner in the war on terrorism, and underscored US commitment to strengthen Bangladesh's democratic institutions, help its economic development and improve living standards of its population.

Rocca expressed satisfaction at the economic progress so far achieved by Bangladesh and underscored the need for diversification of exports and strengthening of its infrastructure.

Referring to the political situation in Bangladesh, she emphasised the importance of better understanding between the two major political parties so that they can work together to solve the problems facing the nation.

Rocca termed Bangladesh's role in war against terrorism as "excellent".

Rejecting recent media reports suggesting al-Qaeda presence in Bangladesh, she made it clear that

State Department does not have any information that may give credence to such allegations. She emphasised on the need for the US to reach out to Muslim nations.

From among the members of the Committee, Congressmen Joseph Crowley, Robert Wexler, Steve Chabot and Gary Ackerman spoke highlighting Bangladesh's positive role as a moderate, democratic Muslim nation that has been contributing to the regional and international peace and security and thereby helping the United States.

Crowley noted that Bangladesh is making progress in the path of democracy both through governmental actions as well as activities of a strong and vibrant civil society.

He said the proposed Asian University for women to be located in Bangladesh would make tremendous impact in the whole Muslim world. He recognised USAID's commitment to donate \$ 1 million for this project and urged Assistant Secretary Rocca for more assistance to sustain the project.

Crowley voiced strong resentment over Bangladesh's inclusion in the NSEERS list and expressed unhappiness at the way Bangladesh as a friendly country of the US has



PHOTO: STAR
Performers synchronise dance movements at a programme of the Jatiya Rabindra Sangeet Conference at the Shawkat Osman Auditorium in Dhaka yesterday.

New Colony

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"If there is any provision in the environmental laws to save open spaces, the government will go through it," Siraj added.

During his visit the environmentalists and local people protested and demanded the immediate cancellation of the project to keep the area liveable.

The residents informed the ministers that the contractors and the officials of the Department of Housing (DoH) were threatening the protesters to file cases against them for their 'anti-state activities'.

Activists of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA), Dhanmondi Paribesh Unnayan Jote, SEBA and local residents vowed to save the playground and open spaces in the city.

Referring to the open space protection act, 2000 they urged the government "to act following legal provisions".

Professor Abdullah Abu Saeed of the BAPA thanked the minister for his visit.

"We have no space to walk, no air to breathe in the city. As such we cannot allow the criminals to destroy the environment," Professor Saeed added.

Fuel crisis

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one and a half lakh tonnes of refined petroleum products from Singapore.

The country's lone oil refinery -- Eastern Refinery Ltd. at Patenga -- requires 4,500 tonnes of crude per day. The annual import of crude for it stood at 13 lakh tonnes, mostly from Middle East countries including Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia, BPC sources said.

The BPC signs contract after every six months for import of 12 lakh tonnes of refined fuel from Singapore. Contracts for different consignments of fuel -- both refined and crude -- were signed in February this year and it is getting the supply accordingly.

PM: Hartal

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that the organisation, besides carrying out research on the works and philosophy of Shaheed Ziaur Rahman, will act as a think-tank for the government.

She asked members of the Zia Parishad to build awareness among the people through their works to help the government's development programmes successful.

In this context, she mentioned the government's efforts to expand education in general and women's education in particular, empower women, restore congenial atmosphere in educational institutions, develop the health sector and improve the environment.

Presided over by chairman of Zia Parishad Kabir Mural, the meeting was also addressed by its secretary Iqbal Hasan Mahmud, Dhaka City Unit president Mahabubul Alam, DU unit president Qamrul Ahsan Chowdhury, Mahmudul Amin and Foyez Mohammad Siraj.

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan was special guest at the meeting which was also attended by Political Secretary to the Prime Minister Haris Chowdhury and Mosaddek Ali.

Adnan Sami

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Daily Star to inquire about the concert.

Makfubar Rahman Sweet, Second Officer at Gulshan thana, said the home ministry issued an order yesterday morning to stop the concert until further order. Other sources said the order followed initiatives by the cultural affairs ministry to stop it.

The concert was first scheduled for Friday but the organiser -- Antar Showbiz Limited -- postponed it for 24 hours in view of planned public protests on that day against the US invasion of Iraq.

The organiser could be contacted yesterday despite repeated attempts. Earlier, Islami Oikya Jote, Khelafat Majlish, Islami Shashanttra Andolon, Lekhak Shibir and Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) urged the government to stop the concert as it was planned at a time when "the Muslim Ummah is facing an attack".

Protests

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The whole world is in favour of peace and against war. Only a few persons are responsible for the attack on Iraq, were some of the slogans at the procession.

Several activists partially damaged two passenger buses near the Muktangan at about noon.

Addressing rallies at Paltan crossing and on the northern side of Baitul Mukarram mosque, leaders of the alliance and the right wing andolan expressed solidarity with the Iraqi people and sympathy especially for women and children.

They called for immediate UN intervention to 'save' the mankind in such a situation.

Our Staff Correspondent in Chittagong adds: Hartal was observed in the port city peacefully.

Normal life was partially disrupted. Movement of inter-district buses and trucks was less than usual.

Leaders and activists of 11-party brought out a procession from Darul Fazal Market area. The participants chanted anti-war and anti-Bush slogans.

Our correspondents in different districts reported that the eight-hour hartal passed off peacefully.

Demonstrators brought out anti-war processions and chanted slogans in favour of peace.

Iraq to respect rights of POWs, says Saddam

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has issued a statement pledging to respect the rights of prisoners of war, Iraqi television said yesterday.

"Iraq, out of respect for itself and its humanity... will respect the prisoners of war of the enemy whom we capture," said the statement read on Iraqi television.

"We will respect their rights according to the Geneva Convention."

PBCP cadre murdered in Rupsha

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Kalu Shaikh, 25, an armed cadre of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) was murdered by unidentified people near Naihaty High School under Rupsha police station yesterday.

According to police, a group of five swooped on the outlaw and stabbed him. He died on the spot.

Kalu Shaikh might have been killed by his rivals in the party, police said.

His body was sent to hospital for autopsy.

Baghdad lies ravaged

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hugely complicate the American military strategy in Iraq.

In Baghdad, thick plumes of smoke cast shadow over the city. In between air raid sirens, people came out in search of food and relatives. People were seen picking through rubble and they waved pictures of Saddam at television crews.

People were trying to get out of Baghdad as air attacks became more intense with B-52 bombers joining the sorties. Saddam's palace ripped through by Tomahawks Friday night stood forlorn with gaping holes.

As dusk falls, Baghdad braces for another ferocious night with jets rumbling overhead at 9:45pm Baghdad time.

The UN in its latest humanitarian situation report said an estimated 300,000 to 450,000 people have fled their homes in northern

Worse ever UP polls death this time, says Odhikar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of deaths in violence over this year's Union Parishad (UP) election is much higher than the number in the 1997 polls.

The number of the injured is around 20 times the 1997 figure, said Masud Alam Ragib Ahsan, director of Odhikar at a press conference yesterday.

Odhikar and the Liberal Forum, human-rights organisations, based the finds on their monitoring of over 500 polling centres in ten districts and newspaper reports.

This year, 80 people were killed and around 10,000 injured during the 51-day UP polls. On the other hand, violence over the 1997 election left 31 people killed and over 500 injured in 31 days, he said.

Hindu voters were attacked and intimidated in some unions including Shuvo Rara and Baghatia in Jessore and Chandra Mohan in Barisal, said the Odhikar director.

"Our observers didn't find agents of most candidates at 54 centres including 28 in Munshiganj," he said.

Presiding officers, magistrates and police did not allow observers to enter 27 booths in different areas including Beldah in Tangail; South Hijailta, Charapantia, Khandakhal, Roypara and Durgapur in Barisal; Nityanandapur and Singnar in Jhenidah; and Jugindha, Shaghat, Tapa and Dhankhola in Meherpur.

Activists of the ruling alliance and supporters of influential candidates captured many polling centres, including all but one in the unions of Munshiganj. They also snatched ballot papers and boxes, he said.

"Fake votes were cast at 30 centres and voters alleged doctoring of voters' lists at 80 centres," he said.

90 more back

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Migrants (IOM), a UN body, is ready to help repatriate Bangladesh workers if necessary. He however said many returnees came to spend time with their families.

He said the returnees may come in great numbers if the war escalates beyond Iraq. The state minister said in that event the government is ready to face any situation.

Two medical teams are working round the clock at Zia International Airport to provide emergency treatment to the expatriates.

The secretary in charge of the expatriate welfare ministry and director general of Bureau of Manpower Export and Training were also present.

Dhaka wants end

FROM PAGE 1 are against war and will remain so," Khan said.

"We urge the UN to bring all the parties to a table, put all the heads together and find a peaceful solution to the (Iraq) crisis,"

He said double standard in implementing United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions is not acceptable.

"This is not acceptable to us that UNSC resolution is applicable for some parties, while it is not enforced on others," Morshed Khan said.

Territorial integrity of Iraq should be ensured and no party should bring any other issue, Khan said when his attention was drawn to Turkey's position in the current situation.

Asked whether the Iraqi embassy here would be closed and its diplomats asked to leave the country, Khan said, "Why should we, and why this question is coming?"

He was reminded that the US government gave instruction to its embassies to request host governments to shut down Iraqi embassies and expel its diplomats.

The foreign minister said, "We have not received any such request. Even if there is any request, Bangladesh will act on its own as a sovereign and independent country."

On the comment made by the Iraqi foreign minister that Baghdad was an "agent of US president George Bush", he said,

"This is unfortunate and we reject this comment."

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said so far he did not see any disruption to the economy or to Bangladesh's exports due to the war.

"Obviously, concern is there and war has many effects," Khosru said.

Pope on war

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The Pope, in a speech to employees of Catholic television station Telepace, added: Violence and weapons can never resolve the problems of man."

The Pope led the Vatican in a diplomatic campaign to avert war, putting the Holy See on a collision course with Washington and its backers in the Iraq campaign.

Before war broke out, the 82-year-old Roman Catholic leader dispatched senior cardinals to both Iraq and the US.

The Vatican also pleaded with Saddam to comply with UN resolutions demanding disarmament and made it clear from the start that any action against Baghdad had to come under the auspices of the United Nations.

After the war erupted on Thursday morning, the Vatican lashed out at the United States, saying if "Deployed" the interruption of diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict peacefully.