



Two Iraqi men, left, advance under US marines custody after giving themselves up voluntarily at a bridge over the Euphrates River on the outskirts of the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriyah yesterday. A video image grabbed from Sky News shows a US soldier, middle, detained by colleagues, after he threw grenades into tents at Camp Pennsylvania on March 22 killing one soldier and injuring 15. Sudanese refugees, right, gather in a Red Crescent camp set up in Ruweished in northeastern Jordan. Third-country nationals fleeing Iraq continue to pour into the Red Crescent camp set up 60km from the Jordan-Iraq border.



Police intercept an anti-war demonstration of the Sammilita Nari Samaj, a women's organisation, in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Boro bodes not so well

REAZ AHMAD, back from Bogra

Late planting, increased irrigation cost and scarcity of pesticides threaten to frustrate the prospects of a good boro harvest this year.

Farmers in Bogra, Rangpur and Dinajpur who got meagre yields of aman predicted a loss of boro crop.

The seedbeds were largely damaged by a prolonged foggy winter from December 19 to January 25 and the farmers in the northern region, known for hefty boro output, were late in planting seeds.

The appropriate time for boro planting is late December to January. But Mohammad Mantu Mia, a marginal farmer, purchased seeds from Chandmahal Bazaar in Gokul, Bogra, on March 17.

"Winter damaged seedbeds this year. And as the price of seeds was as high as Tk 100 per 70 sheaves, I was waiting for a low price."

Although the price went down to Tk 70, it is too late for him to plant the seeds in March.

Late planting is commonplace farther north in Rangpur and Dinajpur and will create a one-month delay in harvesting.

The low use of urea in January manifests that boro has been planted late this year. According to sources in the Bangladesh Fertiliser Association (BFA), the demand for urea peaked in late February, unlike previous years.

Agriculture Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami claimed last Thursday that despite damage to seedbeds Bangladesh would reap 130 lakh metric tons of boro, as targeted by the government.

The farmers complained of a rise in power tariff and diesel price in the last one year.

Md Zakir Hossain, a young farmer of Fatehjanpur in Chirir Bandar, Dinajpur, says he has to bear the extra diesel cost of irrigation. "I have to spend Tk 200 more

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SHAZNEEN CASE

7th prosecution witness cross-examined

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Cross-examination of Atiqur Rahman alias Masum, seventh prosecution witness in the Shazneen rape case and paternal uncle of the victim, by the lawyers of five of the six accused ended yesterday.

Earlier, lawyers of the principal accused had cross-examined him.

The cross-examination took place at the Second Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka for about three and a half hours yesterday.

Judge Kazi Rahamat Ullah then adjourned the hearing till today.

The hearing yesterday began at 2:30 pm following time petition by the defence lawyers.

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Fate of New Colony playground hangs by thread

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

to find out a reasonable solution.

No decision was reached at an inter-ministerial meeting on the fate of the construction works at New Colony in Asad Gate yesterday as Housing Minister Mirza Abbas was determined to continue with the works, said meeting sources.

The meeting was held at the environment ministry with Minister Shajahan Siraj in the chair.

At the meeting local member of the parliament Khondoker Mahbubuddin Ahmed protested and demanded the immediate cancellation of the works. The environment minister also expressed his concern as environmental laws do not permit construction in open spaces and playground.

Spurred by the demonstration of environmentalists and the local people, the environment and forest ministry had arranged the meeting with the housing minister and other departments concerned

Sources said representatives of the housing department and the agency implementing the project, tried to justify the construction saying that it had been undertaken to meet the accommodation problem of government officials.

Finally representatives of local residents and environmentalists at the meeting invited the housing minister to visit the project site to see the actual condition.

Recently the High Court had issued a stay order to postpone the construction and asked the government to show cause following a project that the housing department had undertaken to build 500 flats at the open spaces and playground at New Colony.

"We will continue our protests until the government cancels the project," said Abu Naser Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA).

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Independence Day programme cut short

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has cut short the Independence and National Day programmes this year in view of the US invasion of Iraq.

But the day will be celebrated with due splendour.

"We had a plan to celebrate the Independence Day in a bigger way, but the war in Iraq has forced the government to cut short the programmes," said a minister who wanted not to be named.

The scheduled reception at the Bangabhaban on March 26 in the afternoon has been cancelled due to "unavoidable circumstances", an announcement from there said. The authorities regretted the inconvenience caused to the invitees.

Several other programmes, receptions and cultural functions usually organised on the occasion have also been cancelled due to "unavoidable circumstances", highly placed officials sources said.

However, the day will be celebrated at national and local levels as well as Bangladesh missions abroad through elaborate programmes.

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Hoarding pushes kerosene price up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Price rise of kerosene in many areas of the country is simply due to 'artificial scarcity' created by dishonest wholesalers to take advantage of the US invasion of Iraq.

"We have enough stock of kerosene in the country and there is no reason for any increase in its price," State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources A K M Mosharrar Hossain said yesterday.

The government yesterday decided to form monitoring committee in each district, headed by the deputy commissioner (DC), to deal with the situation effectively, the state minister told reporters.

He warned that stern action would be taken against those stockpiling fuel.

Each of the eight-member monitoring committee would include the superintendent of police (SP), representatives of local trade bodies and oil marketing companies, energy ministry officials said.

Local MPs have been made advisers to the committees concerned.

Such monitoring bodies will also be formed at upazila level.

The committees will assess

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48 more return from Kuwait

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another 48 expatriate Bangladeshis yesterday came back from Kuwait, raising the number of returnees to 1,494 since the start of the US invasion into Iraq.

The Bangladeshis came by Gulf Air, Qatar Airways and Emirates, according to government sources. A source at the control room set up by the expatriates welfare and overseas employment ministry also said they expect arrival of more people by the late night flights.

The returnees have been provided with all sorts of assistance for reaching their homes, the source

added.

Meanwhile, Biman flights between Dhaka and Kuwait City remained suspended since Thursday. The authorities took a move to resume one flight yesterday, but decided against it since the war is escalating.

The situation is still far from conducive to resuming flights on this route, said a Biman high official last night.

Earlier, Biman operated four flights a week between Dhaka and the Kuwaiti capital. Biman however did not suspend any other flights to the Middle East, the source said.

11 SPs promoted

UNB, Dhaka

Eleven superintendents of police (SP) have been promoted as additional Deputy Inspector General (DIG) and two senior police officers given new posting.

Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner (RMP) Abdul Mannan was posted to Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and DIG (Dhaka Range) Mozammel Haq to Mirpur Staff College.

Newly promoted additional DIGs were posted to new places - Delwar Hossain to Rajshahi Range, Mustafizur Rahman to PTC, Khulna, Kazi Bazlur Rahman to PTC, Tangail, Sabir Ahmed to RMP, Farrukh Ahmed to Chitagong Range, Amzad Hossain to Chitagong Metropolitan

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144 customs officials transferred

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) in a single order yesterday transferred more 144 customs officials.

They have been asked to join their new offices by March 31.

All of them are inspector-level officials. Eighty per cent of them have been transferred from Benapole customs house to Khulna, and Jessore; and the rest from other customs houses to Dhaka, Chitagong and Mongla.

This is the second en masse transfer of customs officials in about four months. In November last year, 570 officials were transferred in a single order.

More 300 officials will be transferred to Dhaka and Chitagong soon, NBR sources said.

14 development projects okayed

BSS, Dhaka

The Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) yesterday approved 14 development projects worth Tk 2209.15 crore including Tk 1283.06 crore for project assistance.

The projects were approved at an ECNEC meeting held at the NEC conference room here with Prime Minister and NEC chairperson Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The projects are: Work-order for the 7th well of Sylhet under Energy

and Mineral Resources Division, rural electrification through solar energy under Power Division, expansion of sericulture and development of silk industry under Textile Ministry, 100-bed Zia Heart Foundation Hospital and Research Centre under Social Welfare Ministry (first phase -- 50 beds), project for building chancery complex at Bangladesh Embassy in New Delhi under Foreign Ministry (amended) and BMRE project for Bangladesh Film Development

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Pakistan won't expel Iraqi diplomats

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday ruled out expelling Iraqi diplomats despite Washington's worldwide request to sever diplomatic ties with the present Iraqi government ahead of a promised regime change.

Foreign Office spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan said that Islamabad did not consider it necessary to take such a move against Iraq, a fellow Muslim state.

"We have not seen any such reason," he said, insisting that the United States had not contacted Pakistan to close the Iraqi embassy in Islamabad or sever diplomatic ties.

Tannery being built defying HC order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new tannery industry is being built in Hazaribagh in defiance of a High Court order asking the government to relocate tannery units to some suitable place.

It also asked the government to explain why it should not be directed to shift the industries from the area within 18 months.

The new industry is springing up just opposite to the Shikdar Medical College inside the embankment in Hazaribagh. Half of the construction is already complete with the owner dredging out the river and filling up the low land.

Nurul Alam is the owner of the new industry named 'Millat Tannery' and he is well aware of the High Court order.

"I know about the order and the government's relocation proce-

dure. But it will take time. So I am investing on this. I will also shift my industry when others will shift theirs," Nurul Alam said.

He believes nothing will happen in two to three years, as the government's project regarding relocation of the tannery industry has not been approved as yet at the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council meeting.

Meanwhile, the water of Buriganga river has become black and mucky due to continuous inflow of untreated tannery effluents. The tannery units release nearly 22,000 cubic metres of untreated toxic waste everyday to the Buriganga. According to the local people, the condition of the river is the worst.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association took up the legal initiative to have the tannery industry relocated.



Cowhides are piled on the floor of a tannery in Hazaribagh. Untreated toxic waste from tanneries flows into the nearby Buriganga river round the clock, causing severe pollution.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 25		6-11 pm
Mar 26	5-57 am	

Prayer Timings		
Mar 25		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-00	5-30
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-15
Maghrib	6-17	6-22
Esha	7-35	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation