

Harassment fire

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down buildings -- that is also believed to have been a training school for the Al-Quds militia.

He dismissed it as "harassment fire," adding: "All they're doing is wasting ammunition."

He complained that it was sometimes hard to hit the Iraqis because they often hid behind civilians and protected sites, like cemeteries.

US troops are under orders to refrain from opening fire near such sites unless they are acting in self-defence and even then must use "appropriate force."

In the broader battle to secure the Najaf region, US officers reported their troops have killed at least 1,000 Iraqis -- mainly Baath Party, Al-Quds and Fedayeen militiamen -- while losing only one US soldier.

Many of the bullet-riddled bodies still lay Thursday on a bridge over the Euphrates River and on its east bank, according to reports provided by another group of journalists under an army-brokered "pooling" or sharing arrangement.

Officers voiced surprise at how Iraqi forces seemed to run blindly into their gunsites.

Major General Buford Blount, the

One killed, 6 hurt in blast while making bombs in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

One person died and at least six others were seriously injured while they were engaged in making bombs at Charkalekha union in Muladi upazila under Barisal district, according to local sources.

While they were making bombs at the house of one Jalal Molla, a large explosion occurred at about 12.00 noon (March 28), police sources said.

Local people rushed to the spot to rescue the injured and found the dead body of Sharfuddin Kabir, 35. Among the injured, Nizamuddin, 22, and Shahabuddin, 25, were sent to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in critical condition by Muladi police. Abul, 30, Rezaul, 25, and Nasir were admitted to Muladi Health Centre.

The victims claimed that while they were playing cards, they came under bomb attack of their rivals. Local people said they were cadres of Charkalekha UP chairman Abdu Sabur Sardar.

Medicines worth Tk 1 cr seized at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday seized illegally imported medicines worth about Tk one crore.

The medicines include those similar to Viagra, Neo-robin ampoules and tablets, and Methergine, Pushkapan, Kelan and Wyeth Ativan tablets.

Those were contained in five suitcases and a carton, brought in Emirates flight No. Ek-0582 from Dubai via Karachi yesterday morning.

Suspicion grew among customs officials as no passenger took those from the conveyer belt for several hours. They opened the suitcases and the carton and found the banned medicines.

The medicines were stored at the customs warehouse and a case was filed, sources at ZIA said.

Perle resigns

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donated to the families of US troops killed or injured in Iraq.

Perle, a former assistant secretary of defense, was one of best known and most forceful proponents of military action to overthrow the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

"Richard Perle has a deep understanding of our national security process and an abiding interest in preserving America's strength and freedom," Rumsfeld said. "He has been an excellent chairman and has led the Defense Policy Board during an important time in our history."

Rumsfeld said he had known Perle for many years "and know him to be a man of integrity and honor."



Customs officials at Zia International Airport yesterday seized illegally imported medicines worth Tk 1 crore.

Border confce begins in Sylhet today

UNB, Dhaka

A 3-day conference between the border forces of Bangladesh and India begins in Sylhet today.

Issues like firing by BSF and Indian citizens on the unarmed Bangladeshis in border areas, killing, intrusion, construction of revetment on frontier rivers, and smuggling of arms, drugs and other contrabands will be discussed at the conference, an official announcement said in Dhaka yesterday.

Other border-related issues will also come up for discussion at the BDR-BSF conference.

Brigadier General Muhammad Ibrahim Khalil, Deputy Director General of Bangladesh Rifles, will lead an 8-member team at the talks while Indian Border Security Force IG Sree BK Dey lead a 10-member BSF delegation.

Restaurant looted in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Miscreants looted cash and valuables worth about Tk 56 lakh from a Chinese restaurant in the city's Dhanmondi area on Wednesday night.

A gang of miscreants numbering about 20/25 entered the restaurant breaking the main entrance at about 1.00am on Wednesday night, said Rafiya Abedin of Chunking restaurant.

They tied up the restaurant employees and looted valuables, including seven freezers, six air-conditioners, 280 chairs, 50 tables, two televisions, one computer, four telephone sets and Tk 21,000.

"They also told the employees not to disclose the incident to the police," Rafiya alleged in a case filed with the Dhanmondi Police Station on Thursday.

Police are investigating the incident.

Divine protection

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In 1863, during the American Civil War, president Abraham Lincoln urged the nation "to humble itself before God in repentance for its national sins."

Politicians in the United States make frequent religious references, often ending speeches with the phrase "God bless America."

President George W Bush, a born-again Christian, said early this month that he prays daily for peace.

Surf Excel Painting Carnival held in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It was an exciting carnival for the children.

Kids of the city along with their parents yesterday got an opportunity to portray their imagination through brushstrokes.

"I have drawn a picture where a small boy carries our national flag while the other one carries a flower stick in the backdrop of trees, birds and sky," said Syeda Hritika Mahmud, a six-year old child who became champion in Group A.

"I have drawn the picture of a tiger as I like it," said Reshad Mansur, a nine-year old boy who emerged as Group-B champion.

A total of 170 children took part in the Surf Excel Painting Carnival organised by Asiatic Mindshare Limited with the slogan 'Dag Neito Shekha Nei (No painting, no learning)."

The competition was held at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

It was organised in such a way that the children along with their parents could paint on the canvas. But some of the children drew at their own will.

Of the total participants, 20 children were selected for the second round of the competition in two groups. Out of them, three children were selected from each group for third and final round of the competition.

Earlier, 170 children were selected from 2,500 participants who submitted their paintings to the organiser from February 16 to March 12 in response to their invitation.

Each participant got a certificate, a drawing set and a T-shirt. In addition, 20 children of each group received medals while the two champions got two computers.

Prof Dr Muhammad Jafar Iqbal, Dr Nafisa Jahan, Chairman of Adcom Geeteera Safiya Chowdhury and Brand Development Director of Lever Brothers Bangladesh Ltd Sreenivas Nagappa were present at the prize giving ceremony.

The next competition will be held for the children of Khulna on April 11, for Chittagong on April 18 and for Rajshahi on April 25.

Later, a grand display of all the paintings will be arranged, said the organisers.



Children parade city streets yesterday with placards in hand calling for peace, not war.

120,000 US troops

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and corrugated metal.

Iraq's satellite television channel was cutting in and out after the strikes. The US forces had hoped to knock out Iraqi television and radio.

Iraqi Information Minister Mohammed al Sahhaf said the overnight air strikes had killed seven people in Baghdad and wounded 92.

US-led forces would manage to encircle Baghdad in five to ten days but they have to face fierce street-to-street fighting, said the Iraqi defence minister. But British defence source said coalition lacks the "overwhelming force" needed to wage warfare in Baghdad streets.

US troops used tanks, artillery and helicopters in a clash with an Iraqi force of about 1,500 men overnight near the town of Najaf in central Iraq. Iraq said cluster bombing by US-led forces had killed 26 civilians and wounded 60 in Najaf.

Iraqi forces killed four soldiers of the US-British coalition and took prisoners in heavy fighting in Al-Muthanna province of southern Iraq. AFP quoted Mohammed al-Sahhaf as saying.

He said the clashes pitted Saddam's Fedayeen militiamen and fighters of the ruling Baath

Party against the US and British invading forces.

US columns moving toward Baghdad from the south appeared to pause yesterday to regroup and consolidate supply lines that have come under repeated attacks by Iraqi paramilitaries.

US troops were also building up about 80km south of Baghdad, preparing for what could be a critical battle with Republican Guards near the Shi'ite holy city of Karbala.

Earlier, US warplanes hammered Iraqi positions southeast of Baghdad, dropping 1,000 pound bombs on an area believed to be held by a crack armoured division of the republican Guard.

Yesterday morning, Iraqi citizens were seen celebrating the crash of an unmanned allied drone which descended over the city by parachute. It was unclear whether the plane had been shot down.

Civilians trying to leave Basra came under fire from Iraqi paramilitaries yesterday, British military commanders said.

The US army's senior ground commander in Iraq has admitted that stretched supply lines and stiff Iraqi resistance has stalled the drive towards the capital.

Women, Children Repression Prevention Act to be amended soon: Moudud

BSS, Dhaka

Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Barrister Moudud Ahmed yesterday said the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000 will be amended soon to make the law more effective.

"It has become urgent to change some clauses of the law to ensure rights of the repression victims, punish the criminals and protect innocent people," he told a discussion on Women and Children Repression Act, 2000 at Hotel Sheraton in the city.

Bangladesh Jatiya Mahila Ainjibi Samity organised the programme with its President Sigma Huda in the chair.

The discussion was also addressed by Additional Attorney General Advocate Abdur Razzak Khan, Samity leader Advocate Salma Ali and a number of public prosecutors and judges.

Moudud said a bill would be tabled in the next session of the Jatiya Sangsad for amending the law.

Iraqi imam urges

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awaiting you," he charged, as many worshippers cried loudly with their open palms in the air.

"We are not making the call because we are weak -- we are in a position of strength. But we want to give you the honor of participating in order to show the enemy the strength of Islam," he said.

The imam later led the prayers with his rifle placed before his forehead.

He urged worshippers to ensure "the enemies do not think that if they target a Muslim country, Muslims around the world would remain silent."

He said the week-old offensive led by US President George W. Bush aimed at toppling Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was "no different from the wars fought against the Prophet Mohamed" in the seventh century.

"Here is Bush who wants to return the world to the era of arrogance, crime and inhumanity with this illegitimate war ... just because he has an evil spirit and is blood-thirsty."

"He just wants to show the power of his army," Qaissi said. "But here is his army failing ... and his sophisticated weapons are being shot down by our simple weapons."

"God is greater than their prayers," said the sheikh, adding that Iraqis were "fighting with their faith."

Iraqi authorities on Monday claimed a rifle-toting peasant

brought down two Apache helicopters near Kerbala, a Shiite Muslim pilgrimage city 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of Baghdad.

Qaissi called on Iraqi fighters facing the US and British troops advancing toward the capital Baghdad to "remain steadfast ... because your patience is a victory."

At the end of the sermon, the imam called on "all people to demonstrate after Friday prayers to say 'no' to these evil criminals and to express solidarity with Iraq."

3 awarded life term for murder in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

One person and his two associates have been given life term for killing his wife and daughter for dowry.

The three convicts are Zahidul Islam and his associates Zahir and Abul. Zahir and Abul are absconding.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Sajadul Karim pronounced the verdict on Thursday.

Zahidul Islam slaughtered his wife Kohinur, 23 and 14 month-old daughter Shumi while they were asleep at their house at Gazipur village on the night of December 16, 1999. Zahir and Abul helped Zahidul in committing the murders.

Police caught Zahidul with the help of neighbours after a case was filed with Terokhedha thana.

In the court, Zahid confessed killing his wife and daughter failing to get dowry from his father-in-law. Sixteen prosecution witnesses gave depositions in the court during the trial.

Major

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election victory in 1997, has committed 45,000 troops to the US-led war.

Major said yesterday that a Western-style democracy in Iraq would entail a predominance of Shia Muslims in a future government, leading to the possibility of Iraq and neighbouring Iran collaborating and "look at the future together".

He said such a collaboration would most likely be viewed with suspicion by neighbours such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, both of which have turbulent Shia minorities.

Major said assuming that a Shia-dominated Iraq located next to a mostly Shia Iran would lead to a moderating influence across the Middle East was a "reckless way to proceed."

3 killed, 30 hurt in B'baria road mishaps

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Three people were killed and 30 others injured, six of their seriously, in two road accidents in the district yesterday.

According to police and witnesses, a Brahmanbaria-bound bus from Ashuganj skidded off the road and fell into a roadside ditch at Milahata on the Dhaka-Brahmanbaria Highway at 6 pm, leaving two persons dead.

The dead were identified as Alauddin, 45, and Dilip, 35. Both died on the spot.

The seriously injured bus passengers were admitted to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital.

In another mishap at Aminpur under Brahmanbaria pourasava, a 12-year old boy, Babu, son of Musten Mia, was killed when a tractor hit him from behind at noon.

Police arrested the tractor driver, Shafi Mia, soon after the incident.

\$2b in Iraq aid

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der the burden because the need was great.

"I urge member states to respond swiftly and generously, and not to do so at the expense of victims of other emergencies in other parts of the world, which may be less newsworthy but are no less devastating for the people caught up in them," UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the Security Council on Wednesday.

"I fear that the humanitarian effort required in the coming weeks and months is going to be very costly," he said.

UN officials said the money was urgently required as the average Iraqi family will have exhausted its current food ration in four to six weeks.

Before the war, more than 80 per cent of Iraqis were solely dependent for their food supplies on the UN oil-for-food humanitarian programme, which since 1996 has allowed Iraq to sell oil and use the proceeds to buy food, medicine and other civilian goods under UN supervision.

The programme was suspended last week when the United Nations pulled its foreign staff out of Iraq ahead of the US-led invasion. But UN officials said they could revive it as soon as Annan determined it was safe to send the staff back in.

Purchase of some \$8.9 billion of food, medicine and other civilian

goods had already been approved under oil-for-food but not yet delivered when war broke out, and the United Nations is now revising the programme to adapt it to current circumstances.

But UN officials said that of that total, only \$270 million of food was likely to be available for rapid shipment to the region.

Should more than that become available, the World Food Programme would scale back its funding request, the officials said.

Disaster

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"the humanitarian crisis" that threatens the 25-million population, and by the high numbers of expected civilian casualties.

"Whatever the result, the Iraqis are the focus of Arab admiration," said Seale, referring to the stiff resistance shown in the face of the US-led force, despite 12 years of "harsh international sanctions."

He said the war has led to "a dangerously widening gap between Gulf governments that are loyal to the United States and the broader Islamic and Arab nationalist current."

"The governments in Egypt and Jordan, torn between their loyalty to the United States and the anger of their public opinion against war, have started to fear."

Seale changed the United States with "deceitful propaganda" to justify the war, saying Washington has not proved its accusations that Baghdad was developing weapons of mass destruction and had links to terrorist groups.

"The real target of the war is to make US supremacy prevail on a strategic oil-rich region, and to protect Israel's regional superiority and its monopoly over weapons of mass destruction" in the Middle East, he alleged.

Seale, known for his biography of the late Syrian president Hafez al-Assad, criticised British Prime Minister Tony Blair who, despite his full backing for United States, has not been able to get Washington to agree on a prominent role for the United Nations in reconstructing Iraq.

"Blair tried to build a bridge between Europe and the United States. The bridge crumbled when buildings in Baghdad collapsed. It is the worst diplomatic defeat for British diplomacy in modern history," he said.



Winners of a Surf Excel painting contest pose for photograph at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka yesterday.

Congress grills Rumsfeld

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Appearing before the Senate and House of Representatives Appropriations Committees, Rumsfeld defended President George W. Bush's call for a quick \$75 billion for the military campaign in Iraq.

Top Republicans who control the committees said they would start moving the bill next week, and will try to deliver the money Bush wants before Congress breaks in mid-April for its Easter recess.

But some Democrats said they will press for more congressional oversight of how the money is used, complaining Bush was seeking complete discretion over huge sums.

Rep. David Obey of Wisconsin, top Democrat on the House committee, said the request showed the White House's "ability to turn the Constitution into a pretzel" by limiting Congress' role of controlling the budget.

Unprecedented authority

Some Republicans were concerned as well, with Rep. Jim Kolbe of Arizona, chairman of the House subcommittee on foreign aid,

saying the White House plan would give Bush "unprecedented authority to override current law and to allocate funds without any role for Congress."

Bush's \$75 billion emergency request includes \$63 billion for the Pentagon; about \$5 billion in bilateral foreign aid to Middle East allies -- Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey; \$3.5 billion as a down payment on Iraq's reconstruction and for humanitarian relief; and \$4 billion to bolster security in the United States against terrorism.

Democrats on the House committee said they would push to add \$8.2 billion to increase protections against terrorism in the United States, which they have complained Bush has slighted.

Rumsfeld said the Pentagon must have flexibility to shift money around among the various services to replenish accounts and respond quickly to needs.

He also did not rule out the possibility of coming back to Congress for more money and said it "remains unclear precisely how long it will take" to conclude the war.

Appearing before the House

panel, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage strongly defended the White House bid to provide up to \$8.5 billion in direct loans or loan guarantees to Turkey, despite the rift with Ankara over American troop deployments for the Iraq war.

"It would be the greatest of ironies if we spent all this time and energy, blood and treasure, and were successful in Iraq only to turn around and see our long-time ally Turkey to go bottoms-up because of economic weakness," Armitage said.

Rep. Bill Young, a Florida Republican who chairs the House committee, said he would back the aid to help cushion Turkey's economy from the war with neighbouring Iraq. But other committee members hinted they might try to link the aid to first receiving assurances that Turkey is cooperating with the United States on the war.

Armitage noted Turkey was granting overflight rights, and was in discussions with Washington to try to stem possible friction with Kurds in northern Iraq.