

## 62 drown as boat collides with cargo vessel in Surma

IQBAL SIDDIQUIE, Sylhet

At least 62 people drowned and 20 are missing as a mechanised boat sank in the Surma river near Mallikpur village about six kilometres off the Chhatak upazila headquarters on Friday night.

The tragedy befell at about 7:40 pm when the boat collided with a cargo vessel --MV Sigma-1-- which was going to Chhatak from Dhaka to carry stone.

The boat, starting from Gowainghat, was carrying over 150 people, mostly poor stone quarry labourers and their families. They were returning home in different areas like Kalmakanda in Netrokona and Tahirpur, Jamalganj, and Madhyanagar upazilas in Sunamganj district.

Bodies of 39 children, 20 women and a man have been recovered so far. Of these, the body of a one-year boy remained unidentified, officials said.

Some of the male persons who were on the roof of the boat managed to swim ashore. Most of the women drowned as they tried to save their children, said some of the survivors.

As the bodies were brought on the premises of Chhatak police station, a heart-rending scene was created with survivors and relatives of the victims wailing



PHOTO: STAR

A woman grieves over the death of her child, one of the 62 people who drowned in a boat capsized in the Surma river in Sunamganj Friday night.

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# Final push in fog

Reporters see no sign of US claim to enter central Baghdad; Fedayees patrol city; Iraq claims to have killed 100s in airport battle; US claims 1000 Iraqi troops dead

STAR DESK

The push for Baghdad has entered a foggy phase with the US troops claiming to have penetrated into the centre of the capital without much resistance, but journalists said they have not seen any invading forces.

Both Reuters correspondent and BBC's Ragh Omar said they saw no American troops in the centre of Baghdad.

The Red Cross said fighting has erupted as the Anglo-American forces are advancing and several hundred wounded civilians have been admitted to hospitals.

The mood in the capital is grim. People are panicky as they brace for intense urban combat. Many of them are fleeing the city that Iraq still says is firmly under its control and that "everything is okay".

Iraqi Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf said even Saddam International Airport is under Iraqi control and the invading forces have been chased off. But TV pictures showed US army searching through an airport building.

CLAIMS, COUNTERCLAIMS

Iraq also claimed that "hundreds" of US troops were killed in the airport fight. The US said 1,000 Iraqi troops were killed in fierce fighting on Baghdad streets.

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PHOTO: AFP

Iraqi tanks roll through Baghdad, heading to the front yesterday. US forces brought the war onto the streets of Baghdad, battling with Iraqi troops in front of shocked residents as they made their first ground thrust inside President Saddam Hussein's capital.

## Hundreds of human remains found in warehouse

AGENCIES, London

Hundreds of human remains were discovered yesterday in a "makeshift morgue" by British soldiers in southern Iraq.

The skulls, bundles of bone in strips of military uniform, were dumped in plastic bags and unsealed hardboard coffins in an abandoned Iraqi military base on the outskirts of Al Zubayr, said Britain's domestic Press Association news agency.

It was impossible to say how long the remains had lain there but the grim discovery will now be investigated by forensic specialists as possible evidence of atrocities perpetrated by the Iraqi regime.

The coffins were stacked five deep in a warehouse, and a neighbouring building contained apparent cells and catalogues of photographs of the dead, most of whom had died from gunshot wounds to the head, the agency said in a dispatch from chief reporter Vanessa Allen in southern Iraq.

Others were mutilated beyond recognition, their faces burned and swollen in the faded black and white photographs.

Outside stood what one soldier described as "a purpose-built shooting gallery".

A tiled foot-high plinth stood in a

courtyard, with the brickwork behind it riddled with bullets. Behind that lay a drainage ditch.

Inside the warehouse, one of the bags and coffins contained an identity card written in Arabic, while military webbing and boot soles were visible in others.

Human skulls, their teeth broken and missing, looked out from other bags, bundled into the coffins.

Inside the cells in the other building were a picture of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, what were believed to be prayer stones and, most ominously, what appeared to be metal hooks on racks hanging from the ceiling.

The discovery was made early yesterday by officers from the 3rd Regiment of the Royal Horse Artillery, who moved their AS90 guns to the location Friday night.

Captain Jack Kemp, who was the first man into the building, said he believed there were more than 200 coffins, with as many more plastic bags filled with the remains.

He went into the building as part of a security check to make sure the area was safe for his troops.

"The first thing I was greeted by was approximately 200 makeshift coffins. They contain bags, each

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## Suicide bomber attacks US unit at Baghdad airport

REUTERS, Near Baghdad

A suicide bomber has attacked US army soldiers at Baghdad international airport, a US marine gunnery sergeant said yesterday.

The sergeant told Reuters correspondent Matt Green, who was travelling with the US marine southeast of Baghdad, about the attack, but there was no immediate word on casualties.

US Central Command in Qatar had no immediate comment on the report of a news suicide attack.

Iraqi Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf threatened on Friday a "non-conventional" act against US-led forces who have seized Baghdad airport, and hinted at suicide attacks while ruling out the use of weapons of mass destruction.

"We will commit a non-conventional act on them, not necessarily military," Sahaf said on Friday. "We will conduct a kind of martyrdom operation."

Sahaf said US forces were on an "isolated island" at the airport. "It is difficult for the US forces that are

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### Announcement

Today's Star City comes out with Star Holiday and Star Health.

## Iraq war fallout

# Islamist parties eye common platform

NAZRUL ISLAM

With the commencement of Iraq war, fragmented Islamist organisations greatly increased their activities in Dhaka and they have called upon each other to unite under a common platform against the non-Islamic Western forces.

"We are hopeful about formation of the new platform, narrowing the existing gap among the Islamic organisations," Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini, an MP of the ruling coalition and leader of the Islami Oikya Jote, told The Daily Star.

He said the Khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, Moulana Obaidul Haq, has been requested to initiate the move to form United Islamic Front. Moulana Nurul Islam of Ahle Hadith Andolon made the request to the Khatib recently.

Obaidul Haq, when contacted on Thursday night, said he would consult his colleagues and discuss the issue at a National Shariah Council meeting on April 7. "I'm still thinking about the method of unification of Islamist parties," he said.

Over six dozen Islamic organisa-

tions exist in Bangladesh, a few are in the ruling coalition. According to their respective constitutions, the aim of all these parties is to establish Shariah law in Bangladesh. Capitalising on the anti-war sentiment in the country, these parties have become active and are gaining a new legitimacy and public support.

After formation of the proposed front, it would announce fresh programmes, according to insiders of the Islamist parties.

The organisations which are

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## FFs threaten to join Iraq war

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thousands of people, including freedom fighters, demonstrated against Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in Dhaka and elsewhere yesterday when the war veterans threatened to stand by the Iraqi people as guerrilla fighters.

The demonstrators who included pensioners to schoolchildren and political activists to painters, staged anti-war rallies, processions, human chains and cultural shows to heap scorn on brash Anglo-American jingoism and killing of innocent non-combatants in Iraq.

Demanding an immediate end to the war, Bangladesh Freedom Fighters' Union (BFFU) at a rally said otherwise about 10,000 freedom fighters would go to Iraq to fight a guerrilla war against

foreign occupiers.

They also brought out a procession shouting slogans such as 'Freedom Fighters will go to Iraq'. The procession paraded through different city streets before terminating at Central Shaheed Minar where BFFU Chairman Abdul Ahad Chowdhury said the war was not only against Iraq, but also against Islam.

The processionists burnt the effigies of US President George Bush at the end of the rally.

Hundreds of students, teachers and staff of the Business Studies Faculty (BSF) of Dhaka University brought out a procession protesting the Anglo-American aggression.

The protesters led by Prof. Sirajul Islam, dean of BSF, demanded the

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