



Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty to squally wind is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Jessore and Kushtia till 6pm today.

Weather may remain mainly dry elsewhere over the country, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 36.3 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Rajshahi and the lowest 20.7 degree at Srirangol.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:22pm today and rises at 5:33 am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	34.2	26.8	72	69
Chittagong	32.0	22.0	80	66
Rajshahi	36.3	24.5	77	65
Khulna	35.5	27.2	78	70
Barisal	33.0	26.8	89	87
Sylhet	28.5	21.0	78	82
Cox's Bazar	33.3	26.0	82	73

3 killed, 15 hurt in B'baria road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Three persons were killed and 15 others injured in a road accident on the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway yesterday.

The dead were identified as Litu Sarker, 28, Rubel Chandra Sarker, 13, and Joydev, 28. Two of them died on the spot while another on way to hospital. They all hailed from Durgapur under Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj district.

According to witnesses and hospital sources, the accident occurred as the driver of the bus lost control over the vehicle and fell into a roadside ditch at Islampur under Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila at noon. The bus was carrying a bridal party from Raipur in Narsingdi to Madhabpur in Habiganj.

The injured were admitted to Brahmanbaria hospital.

No case was filed in this connection till yesterday evening.

JSD activist shot dead in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

An activist of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) was murdered at village Ujangan in sadar upazila at mid-night on Thursday.

According to police, Sifat Ali, 38, son of Mokkel Ali of village Ranjipur in the same upazila, came under attack by the cadres of Biplobi Communist Party (BCP) while he was returning home from Jhoida riding a motorbike.

The outlaws stopped his motorbike and shot him point blank. He died on the spot.

Police recovered the body yesterday morning and sent it to Kushtia General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Mahathir

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only except for providing aid such as food and medicines, and perhaps some business.

Asked about newspaper reports that the national Petronas oil company president Mohamad Hassan Marican would be asked to help in the rebuilding of Iraq's oil economy, Mahathir said: "Such an offer should only come from the United Nations, failing which we don't want to even think of it."

Mahathir, a veteran Muslim leader who was a strong opponent of the US plans to attack Iraq, said he still believed the war was unwarranted.

"We don't believe that the killing of people would help solve problems," he said.

Questioned on perceived threats by the US against Syria over its alleged pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and support for terrorism, Mahathir said: "They cannot hit at the terrorists so they hit at all these Muslim countries."

RAT member

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One RAT member met Iqbal and assured him of 'negotiations on the matter' and he was taken to the RAT office on Thursday night. The RAT officials arrested Iqbal and handed him over to the DB.

DMP top officials said that there were many complaints against the AC and he was arrested on the basis of the complaints.

In another development, police arrested Javed Parvez, a cousin of Iqbal, from south Goran yesterday morning. Police said Javed used to introduce himself as the private assistant of the AC and play a role in criminal activities that Iqbal was involved in.

US team to look for WMD

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to find them on its own, but will have to offer rewards to Iraqis to draw out information on where to look.

The report was in line with statements earlier by Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at the Pentagon.

"It is not like a treasure hunt," he said. "The (United Nations weapons) inspectors didn't find anything, and I doubt that we will. What we will do is find the people who will tell us."

Chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix said his inspectors could give credibility to any discovery of banned weapons made by US or British troops.

American marines expect to vacate the Iraqi capital no later than April 22 when the US army will move in and secure control of the city, said military sources yesterday.

A 30,000-strong taskforce from the Fourth Infantry Division is expected to flow into Iraq from Kuwait over the coming days.

IRAQ'S NEIGHBOURS MEET

Stunned by the swift US-led takeover of Iraq, neighbouring states gathered in Saudi Arabia yesterday to weigh a response as a diplomatic row brewed between Washington and the United Nations over economic sanctions.

Opening the conference, Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal of host



Garment workers shout slogans in a procession in Dhaka yesterday, demanding May 1 as their holiday.

PHOTO: STAR

CNG stations

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station this month, the Army Welfare Trust has not renewed the lease and closed the station till a further decision is taken in this regard.

The other one -- Southern Automobile Gas Station at Tejacong-- stopped service about 15 days ago. "We will not supply CNG to any four-stroke three-wheelers any more," said its Managing Director Monoranjan Bhakto.

He mentioned that a clash between drivers of CNG-run three wheelers and employees at the station left some equipment damaged a few days ago.

"We have continued our service only for taxi cabs and other CNG vehicles," said Bhakto.

Mosharrif Hossain termed Bhakto's attitude 'very negative' and said, "I hope he would resume service for CNG three-wheelers immediately."

Meanwhile, in the past few days, long queues of vehicles were seen at different CNG stations. Some of the queues were two to three kilometres long.

"I cannot bear such suffering anymore and I cannot survive this way," grumbled Baset Ali, driver of a three-wheeler in a queue at a Banani filling station. "It is already 6 pm now and my entire day's income is only about Tk 350. I have to stop plying the vehicle after an hour and give its owner Tk 450 as daily deposit."

In utter frustration, her said, "I

have to wait five to six hours a day at a CNG filling station every day. I do not see an end to this. What shall I do in such a situation?"

Many other drivers narrated similar plight. And they appealed to the government to increase the number of gas stations without further delay.

Another problem of the drivers is that owners of three-wheelers are allegedly violating the government directive regarding the amount of daily deposit for the vehicles.

"As far as I know, no owner takes less than Tk 400 as daily deposit although the government-fixed amount is Tk 300," said Nurul Islam, a driver.

"We are being compelled to pay the increased amount as the owners threaten us that if we refuse to do so, they would engage other drivers," he said.

The government in a circular had asked the owners to take Tk 300 as daily deposit and warned of stern action if they violated it. Route permit of vehicles will also be cancelled if the order is not complied with, the circular said.

A senior official of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority said, "Although we have asked drivers to lodge complaints against owners violating the government order, we have not received any complaint so far."

Farzana case

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Kamrul Islam

He alleged that the accused tried to abduct his parents from a bus when they were returning to Daulatpur on April 16 night after burying Rumi at their Pirojpur hometown.

Tormented by the accused, Rumi, 19, committed suicide by hanging herself from a ceiling fan in her bedroom on Monday.

On Thursday night, Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina visited the Pabla residence of Farzana Afrin Rumi and demanded exemplary punishment to those who hounded Rumi to commit suicide. Hasina, consoled the parents and other family members of Rumi.

Speaking at a gathering there, she called upon all to join hands against terrorists and build up a movement against the BNP-Jamaat government for what she termed 'its failure to protect the life and property of people'.

Lawmakers Shaikh Helaluddin and Talukdar Abdul Khaleque and Khulna city AL president Advocate Manzurul Imam were with her during the visit.

Meanwhile, Khulna unit of 'Bangladesh Mahila Ainjibi Samity' alleged that the indifference of Daulatpur Police Station encouraged the accused to hound her.

Encroachment on civic space

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food shops, apartments, sari shops, book shops and a couple of drama theatres act as multi-dimensional points of attraction for different types of people with different needs.

Another type of civic space has evolved around national historical events. For example, we may mention Shahid Minar premises, Bangla Academy Book Fair, and the celebration of Pahela Baishakh at Ramna Batamul. They usually exist for a certain period.

Such civic spaces, be they designated or spontaneous, conceive the value and emotion of our urban public. They reflect the image and quality of our life, enhance social interaction and consolidate our cultural and traditional homogeneity. It is felt that the more people find out civic spaces, the more interaction would take place leading to greater exchange of views, values and attitudes.

In this context, we may underscore certain aspects of the city's civic spaces. It may be emphasised that the element of security is an important factor in the environment of civic spaces. Unfortunately, this element is more or

less wanting in some of our civic spaces. For example, in the important civic spaces, such as Shahid Minar, and TSC premises, when there is a heavy concentration of people in observance of any important occasion, acts of lawlessness often take place. Such situations undermine the popularity of those places.

Another important point is that there are tremendous possibilities for developing the lakes like Crescent lake, Ramna lake, Gulshan lake and Dhammondilake.

There is a proposal for shifting the Dhaka Central Jail, now located in a heavily congested area in old Dhaka, to a more spacious site near Shafipur in Gazipur district. As and when that project gets under way, a big area in the heart of the city will be available. It is for the town planners to consider whether, instead of utilising the land released for commercial or residential purposes, which will further add to the existing congestion, the area could be used for a properly designated civic space. This facility, if created, will go a long way in meeting an urgent need of the city populace suffering under the suffocating pressure of the rapidly expanding

population.

Above all, it is felt that in the interest of the city dwellers, the prime need is to ensure adoption of appropriate measures to keep the existing civic spaces free from encroachment of any kind or doings of anti-social elements, requiring exercise of constant vigilance in order that the atmosphere of these areas is not vitiated in any manner.

30 Iraqi fighters

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destroyed eight technical vehicles and captured over 30 enemy prisoners," he said at a news conference.

Technicals are pickup trucks carrying heavy machine-guns.

The division already had exchanged fire with enemy forces near Taji on Thursday, killing several troops and capturing 100 others, Brooks said earlier.

"There are some elements out there that still want to fight and that have the means to fight," pointing out, however, that the fighting was sporadic and "not organized under some overarching command."

Samarra is nearly 120 kilometres north of Baghdad.

thousands detained in the month-old war, a US defence official said yesterday.

Those released were determined to be noncombatants, he said, meaning they did not engage in hostile acts during the war and were not part of a military force.

Taking into account the release, coalition forces now hold 6,850 prisoners who were on the battlefield, he said.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

North of Baghdad, US troops attacked an airfield after an unmanned surveillance plane captured images of paramilitary fighters who appeared to be loading ammunition into pickups, intelligence officers said.

US troops found about 1,500 unmarked graves in the northern city of Kirkuk, but it was not immediately clear whose corpses they held.

Interpol announced yesterday it is sending a special team to Iraq to help recover the stolen antiquities.

The State Department is recruiting police officers to help restore order in Iraq. There are about 150 openings in the short term, but the State Department says 1,000 more slots will open.

Arab TV shows new footage of Saddam

REUTERS, Dubai

Arab television network Abu Dhabi TV broadcast footage yesterday of what it said was Saddam Hussein saluting a throng of chanting supporters in Baghdad on April 9, the day the capital fell to US forces.

The state-run channel said the pictures were taken in the northern Aadhamiya district, and that the tape had been obtained by its Baghdad correspondent from undisclosed sources.

A US intelligence official said the United States would be looking at the tape to determine whether Saddam, the Ace of Spades in a pack of cards depicting most-wanted Iraqis, had indeed survived weeks of relentless bombing of the capital.

"We will be reviewing the tape to determine whether it is authentic or not. At the moment we don't know," said a US intelligence official in Washington, adding that the United States did not know whether Saddam was alive or dead.

Several tapes of the elusive leader, who is reported to have several "doubles," have been produced during the

US-led war, but there have been doubts whether the images are truly Saddam.

The latest pictures, however, corroborated a report from a man who described himself as a former Iraqi army officer. He told Reuters earlier this week he saw Saddam at about that time outside a mosque in the same northern Baghdad district.

London-based Al-Hayat newspaper quoted witnesses on Thursday as saying Saddam had arrived at around noon near the Azamia mosque in a convoy of three cars, accompanied by his younger son Qusay and his bodyguard, Al Amin Abd Hamed Hamoud.

The report mirrored the images depicting most-wanted Iraqis, had delivered a half-hour speech from atop a car, telling the gathering: "I am fighting alongside you in the trenches," Hayat quoted one witness as saying.

Witnesses told Hayat the Iraqi leader and his entourage departed about 12 hours before a US air raid on the area which they said destroyed part of a graveyard behind the mosque.

Local ship owners

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ing would reach around two billion dollars by the year 2008, he claimed.

"The entire shipping business in the country will go under the control of the foreign companies and they will dictate us," said Shah Alam, vice-chairman of BOGSOA.

The foreign companies would also impose various extra charges like congestion surcharge, bunker surcharge on Bangladesh ports on petty grounds as they did in the past, Shah Alam said.

The two implementing authorities of the government, however, gave contradictory views regarding the ordinance.

The officials at the Principal Office of the Mercantile Marine Department (POMMD) observed that trade would not be affected if the ordinance is implemented properly.

On the other hand, the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) officials said that there should not be any protection for anybody in a market economy.

"The ordinance giving priority to local flag carriers is not workable because it would create huge stockpiles of cargo at the port," said a CPA high official.

He said the protection to the local vessels would create stalemate at the port because the local ship owners are not capable of carrying all the containers.

Meanwhile, the latest order by the

department of shipping for distributing the container cargoes between local and foreign flag vessels is not being implemented due to lack of guidelines.

The authorities are still confused as to how they can split the cargoes by 60 per cent for foreign vessels and 40 per cent for the local ones.

The POMMD held a meeting with all stakeholders in the business on Wednesday for evolving a mechanism for sharing cargoes.

But according to sources, the MLOs were not ready to give 40 per cent of cargoes to local ships.

Sundarbans

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ers' neck is the loan they borrowed from loan sharks during the hilsa season. The manajans are desperately realising their money.

"I gave them Tk 500,000 in loans. Now I have captured 200 fishing boats as the borrowers may flee without repaying me," said Lutfar Rahman Sana, a mahajan of Joymuni village.

Besides, the prices of essentials have rose to new heights.

"Low-quality kerosene sells at Tk 30 and soybean oil at Tk 60 per liter and coarse rice at Tk 20 per kg in the regions," said Abu Taher of Chalitabuniya.

"It has made our lives miserable," he said.

Grains import

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criteria in the tender schedules.

Some officials pointed out that these bidders also quoted high prices. The lowest offer for wheat supply was US\$ 179 per tonne. But in state-to-state bilateral negotiations, Bangladesh had earlier received offers as low as 130 US dollars per tonne for wheat.

This time the government is avoiding state-to-state deal fearing political backlash and allegations of corruption, they said.

Meanwhile, quoting an official of the Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Service Corporation (PASSCO), a foreign news agency reported yesterday that Pakistan is likely to sign a deal with Bangladesh shortly for supply of one lakh tonnes of wheat at US\$ 130 per tonne.

"The deal is in progress and hopefully it will be finalised in a week or so," the official said.

PASSCO offered a price to Bangladesh which is even less than it has been offering to local buyers just to tap a new market for Pakistani wheat," he was

quoted as saying.

Meanwhile, in view of the fall in government food stock, efforts are on to make the on gong domestic wheat procurement drive a success.

Aman procurement drive in the last season virtually failed partly due to production shortfall and mainly because of delayed launching of the drive.

Iran not worried

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"I believe it is only through talks and cooperation that difficulties can be solved," Kharazi said.

Iran, Saddam's Iraq and North Korea were last year labeled an "axis of evil" by US President George W Bush.

Late last month, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld accused Tehran of interfering in the Iraq war by allowing hundreds of Iran-based Shiite Muslim opposition fighters to cross the border. Iran denied the allegation.

Bechtel

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repair power generation facilities, electrical grids, municipal water systems and sewage systems.

The deal includes a provision for the rehabilitation or repair of airport facilities, and the dredging, repair and upgrading of the southern Iraq port city of Umm Qasr.

The contract may also involve responsibility for the repair and reconstruction of hospitals, schools, ministry buildings and major irrigation structures, as well as restoration of essential transport links.

Bechtel was expected to work subcontractors on some tasks and to "engage the Iraqi population", USAID said.

"The capital construction contract is part of USAID's planned reconstruction assistance to the Iraqi people, aimed at helping maintain stability, ensure the delivery of essential services, and facilitate economic recovery," the government agency said.

Jail revolt case

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guns, two pipe guns, one shotgun, 16 daggers and some arrows in a search on the jail.

The then officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, CA Halim, filed a case against 18 inmates of armed rebellion under the Arms Act.

Investigation Officer Shahidul Islam of the Jessore Detective Branch submitted a chargesheet against 15 out of 18 on June 17, 1997, with mention of eight people as prosecution witnesses.

Judge Mahmudul Kabir of the tribunal in his verdict said the chargesheeted were acquitted, as the charge against them was not proved beyond doubt.

Six accused were present in the court when the judge handed down the verdict. Nine others were tried in absentia.

The acquitted people include Pagla Selim and Bombay Mithu -- two chargesheeted accused in the Danik Janakantha Journalist Shamsur Rahman murder case.