



Top Baath Party leader held

AFP, As-Saliyah, Qatar

US-led troops in Iraq have captured a top Baath Party official, Samir al-Aziz al-Najim, Brigadier General Vincent Brooks announced here yesterday.

"Special operation forces last night captured another key member of the regime, Samir al-Aziz al-Najim, one of the top 55 members of the regime," Brooks told reporters at the US Central Command war headquarters in Qatar.

Najim's title was regional command chairman for east Baghdad of Saddam Hussein's ruling Baath Party.

The announcement came a day after US forces said they had captured Saddam's half-brother and key aide Barzan al-Tikriti in Baghdad, a major coup in their efforts to round up members of the Iraqi leader's toppled regime.

Schoolgirl suicide case: One held in Paikgachha

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Kabita Rani Sana, 45, one of the three FIR-named accused in schoolgirl Bina Rani Mondol suicide case, was arrested at midnight on Thursday.

Prime accused Sanjoy Kumar Sana and his father Dayal Kumar Sana are still at large. Kabita Rani is mother of Sanjoy Sana.

Bina Rani Mondal, 17, committed suicide to spare herself the indignity of being teased by Sanjoy Sana and his associates.

The tragic incident occurred in Parshemari village of Paikgachha upazila Wednesday noon.

Daughter of Sabuj Kanti Mondol, Bina was a student of class ten at South Kainmari Mondal Girls' High School.

According to FIR lodged with Paikgachha thana by Sabuj Kanti Mondal, Bina took insecticide after returning from school as Sanjoy Sana and his associates made indecent remarks and gestures on her way back. Sanjoy caught hold of Bina's hand and proposed to marry her. As she turned down the proposal, Sanjoy abused her in filthy language.

Bina was rushed to Paikgachha Health Complex where he died in the afternoon.

BSS gives correction

In Thursday's edition, a BSS news item headlined, 'Cantonment road reopened to public for limited hours' misquoted an ISPR release notifying a revised timetable for civilian vehicles using the main cantonment road.

In the second paragraph of the story, it should have been 3:30 pm to 7:30 pm instead of 3:30 pm to 11:00 pm, according to BSS.

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Find out how touts and middlemen prey on passengers at ZIA, relive the past in the Zaminder houses at Tangail with Star Holiday, and know about the Bangladesh Medical Conference 2003 with *Star Health in tomorrow's Star City*.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
April 19		6-22 pm
April 20	5-33 am	
Prayer Timings		
April 19		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-45	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-28	6-35
Esha	7-35	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		

US gives Iraq rebuilding contract to Bechtel

AFP, Washington

The US administration awarded a contract worth up to 680 million dollars to Bechtel Group for major reconstruction of war-scarred Iraq, the government said Thursday.

The initial award was worth 34.6 million dollars, but it provided for funding of up to 680 million dollars over 18 months subject to Congressional approval, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) said.

San Francisco-based Bechtel was given the job of emergency infrastructure repair and rehabilitation.

"Restoration of the country's key infrastructure is a priority of the US government's effort to strengthen Iraq's economy and ensure delivery of essential public services to the Iraqi population," USAID said in a state-

ment.

Under the deal, the largest of eight Iraqi reconstruction contracts, Bechtel is to repair, rehabilitate or reconstruct vital elements of Iraq's infrastructure.

The doling out of contracts to US companies for the rebuilding of Iraq has unleashed an international and domestic furore.

Halliburton, a company once run by US Vice President Dick Cheney, had pulled out of the bidding for the contract amid the controversy, US press reports here said.

The Houston-based oil services company, which Cheney ran for five years until 2000, was one of five US firms invited by the Bush administration to put in a tender for the contract.

Senior Democrats had already cried foul after the US military gave an Iraqi oil well firefighting contract to

Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR) without bidding.

The European Commission also has said it is examining Washington's handout of contracts to rebuild Iraq to see whether the process complies with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules.

Brussels has said there are grounds for concern that companies based in the European Union are being frozen out of the lucrative rebuilding of roads, airports and oil terminals.

USAID unleashed criticism in Britain when it gave one contract worth 4.8 million dollars (4.5 million euros) to rebuild Iraq's only deep-water port at Umm Qasr -- secured and controlled by British troops -- to Stevedoring Services of America.

Under the latest contract, Bechtel is required to assess and

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

South Africa spinner Paul Adams misfields one off his own bowling against India captain Saurav Ganguly in the TVS Cup yesterday.

Move to scrap ordinance Local ship owners disappointed

RAFIQ HASAN, from Chittagong

The government move to scrap Bangladesh Flag (Protection) Ordinance, 1982 has sparked strong resentment among the local ocean going ship owners.

According to sources, the proposal to scrap the ordinance, that gives priority to local flag carrying ships to foreign flag carriers in loading and unloading cargoes, will be placed before the cabinet on Monday.

The sources said the move has been made under the pressure of major chamber and trade bodies, which believe that such protection is not desirable in the context of a free market policy.

But the local ship owners say that the scrapping of the ordinance would totally destroy the local shipping industry.

The mayor of Chittagong, Mohiuddin Chowdhury, said, while talking to journalists, that he would resist any such move for the greater interest of the nation.

He observed that the local ocean going ships should get priority over foreign vessels while loading and unloading cargoes.

"The investment of Tk 400 crore in the shipping sector would be in danger and there would be hardly any investment in the sector in near future," said Sayeed Hossain Chowdhury, chairman of Bangladesh Ocean Going Ship Owners Association (BOGSOA).

He said if the ordinance remains in force, the local shipping sector would be able to bring around one billion US dollars annually to the country by the year 2005. The earn

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Schoolgirl commits suicide after gangrape in Feni

BSS, Feni

A schoolgirl committed suicide after being gangraped at Hasanpur in the district on Thursday night.

Police and hospital sources said Shamsun Nahar, 16, a student of class IX, was packed up by three youths -- Anwar, Jasim and Yasin from her house.

They took her to a lonely place near the house and raped her.

The girl then returned to her house and took poison.

She was rushed to Feni Sadar Hospital yesterday morning where she died.

Before death, the girl narrated her ordeal to doctors.

A case was filed with Feni police accusing the three. They are yet to be arrested.

Iran not worried at being next US target: FM

AFP, Riyadh

Iran is not worried about being attacked by the United States despite the war in Iraq and mounting US accusations against Syria, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi said yesterday.

"We do not have such a concern (about war in Iran) because the situation in Iraq was a total different story," Kharazi said as he arrived in Riyadh for a one-day conference of Iraq's neighbors.

"We are committed to international law, and certainly it must be the basis for any dealings," Kharazi told reporters.

He objected to the confrontational US approach towards Syria, one of Iran's top allies. Washington in recent weeks has accused Syria of possessing chemical weapons, smuggling material into Iraq and providing safe haven to associates of deposed leader Saddam Hussein.

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SA's sweet revenge

SPORTS REPORTER

A fifth-wicket stand between Neil McKenzie and Mark Boucher propelled South Africa to a five-wicket win over tournament favourites India in the last robin league match of the TVS Cup tri-nation series at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The pair added 107 runs as the Proteas, chasing India's total of 215 in 50 overs, survived an early collapse before reaching the target in 48.4 overs.

Man-of-the-match McKenzie scored a patient 80 off 107 deliveries with the help of six boundaries to design India's first defeat in the tournament. The result also avenged South Africa's 153-run loss on April 15.

McKenzie's brilliant knock came to an end with his side needing four runs for a much-needed victory ahead of Sunday's final.

Boucher was unbeaten on 44 off

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'You broke it, you fix it'

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The United States and Britain should help restore Iraq's economy as they had destroyed it through their invasion, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"They know how to destroy Iraq, so they must know how to reconstruct it," he told the official Bernama news agency in an interview.

Malaysia, he said, would not be involved in restoring the Iraqi economy.

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Charge sheet in Farzana case in 10 days: KMP commissioner

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Khulna Metropolitan Police Commissioner ABM Bazlur Rahman told newsmen yesterday that the charge-sheet in college girl Farzana Afrin Rumi suicide case would be submitted to the court within 10 days.

The KMP commissioner said a petition was submitted to the court seeking attachment of property of the accused and transfer of the case to a speedy trial tribunal.

The victim's family alleged that Rony and two other accused in the case were threatening them with severe consequences if they did not withdraw the case.

"We are quite insecure and fearing reprisal from the accused who harried Rumi to commit suicide," said Rumi's brother Engineer

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PHOTO: STAR

Fishermen living on the Sundarbans fringe set nets in a river flowing along the largest mangrove forest. Poor shrimp catch has compounded woes of the fishermen already on the margins of society.

Blues of poor Sundarbans communities

PINAKI ROY, back from Sundarbans

Poor Aman yield and low shrimp fry catch have brought poor farming and fishing communities on the Sundarbans fringe to their knees as well as put serious strains on the world's largest mangrove forest.

Price spiral of essentials and excesses by loan sharks are the last straw to shatter their hopes of overcoming the woes.

Officially 1,28,958 people of 15,25,586 in 17 upazilas around the forest catch shrimp fry and collect honey, nipa leaves (gol pata) and firewood for a living. Unofficially, the figure is much more high.

But the choking grip of poverty is pushing a rising tide of people to resort to illegal logging and poaching, locals say.

"If alternative jobs for the desperate people could not be created, it

would be impossible to save the forest," said a forest official requesting anonymity.

The Aman yield in farming villages took a tumble this year. "We used to harvest 15 to 20 mounds of Aman per bigha. But this year it dropped to 5 to 6 mounds," said Md Saidur Rahaman, a farmer at Chalitabuniya village.

The condition of fishermen in the remotest villages, the pockets of grinding poverty, is the worst. Poor shrimp season on top of hilsa fishing failure has brought unbearable misery to them.

"Shrimp catch fetched me Tk 300 in the last four months and I don't know how I will survive with six mouths to feed," said Md. Nurur Rahman, a resident of Jaymoni village in Mongla thana.

Over the same period last year, he

had earned at least Tk 4,000.

Rahman was forced to go to a local mahajan, who lends rice at over 10 percent interest a month.

Md Khalifa, 65, a fisherman from Bhandariya, repeated the same story. He fishes in Chandpai range of the forest for years, but has never known such a poor season.

"I've earned Tk 450 in the last four months," said Khalifa, the lone breadwinner of an 11-member family.

"I am earning virtually nothing here and don't know how my family is surviving back home," the old man said, breaking down in tears.

Md. Emdadul Haque, divisional forest officer, confirmed poor shrimp catch. "It happens in some years. It's a natural cycle," he added.

The real stone around the village

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RAT member held on extortion charge placed on remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An assistant commissioner of the Rapid Action Team (RAT) of police, who was arrested on Thursday night on charges of extortion, was taken on a one-day remand for interrogation.

The AC, Iqbal Shafiq, was produced before the CMM's Court yesterday afternoon with a five-day remand prayer, but the court granted a day's remand.

Iqbal was arrested by the RAT members from their office and handed over to the Detective Branch (DB) of police Thursday night. A case was filed against him with the Ramna Police Station under the Speedy Trial Act.

It is the first time that RAT members arrested any police officer, since they began operation in the capital from January 23. Earlier, they arrested

police constables, ansar personnel and traffic sergeants while they were found taking bribe in different parts of the city.

Police sources said that the AC demanded Tk 50,000 from a businessman of Sayedabad on April 12. He had earlier arrested the brother-in-law of the businessman. Later, the businessman complained against him to the police.

On April 13, Iqbal went to Mauchak to realise the money and the RAT members tried to arrest him. As per the directives from the RAT top officials, some police personnel had been deployed at the spot. Sensing the presence of police, Iqbal left the place without taking the money.

Though he managed to leave the place, police officials investigated the complaints lodged against him.

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All accused in Jessore jail revolt case acquitted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A special tribunal acquitted all the 15 chargesheeted accused in the Jessore Central Jail revolt case on Thursday.

Convicts and on-trial prisoners of the jail went on a movement on December 17, 1996, for several demands, including improved diet and accommodation. The inmates took control of the jail, driving security personnel out.

On the early morning of December 22, ten platoons of riot police under the deputy inspector general (DIG) of Khulna powered into the jailhouse to defuse the revolt. Fierce armed clashes left at least 11 inmates, both convicts and on trial, dead before the situation was brought under control.

Police recovered two homemade revolvers, two other homemade

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