

Four EU states to set up multinational forces' headquarters

REUTERS, Brussels

Four European Union countries that opposed the US-led war in Iraq said yesterday they had agreed to create a multinational force headquarters for European operations where NATO was not involved.

They also said in a joint statement they had agreed to develop a European rapid reaction force capability open to other EU member states.

The announcements came after a two-hour mini-summit of the leaders of Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg, criticised by EU partners Britain, Spain and Italy, which were not invited.

"With a view to improving command and control capabilities available to the

European Union as well as to NATO, our four defence ministers will take the necessary steps to establish, not later than 2004, a multinational deployable force headquarters for joint operations," the joint statement said.

On the rapid reaction force, which is already under construction with the involvement of Britain and other EU states, the statement said the four would create a "nucleus capability" based around a French-German brigade that could also involve Belgian commandos and Luxembourg reconnaissance.

"This European rapid reaction force can be reinforced by troops from other European states," the statement said, adding that it would be available for NATO operations, as well as for operations by the EU under the auspices of the

United Nations.

The decision fell short of a European military headquarters separate from NATO which Belgium originally had proposed, but it could nevertheless annoy London and Washington, which have warned against duplication with the Western military alliance.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said before the Brussels announcement: "What is important is that nothing is done that in any shape or form undermines the NATO relationship."

Blair, speaking to reporters accompanying him on a trip to Moscow, said he believed most other EU states shared his view.

"The only basis on which European defence can go forward is

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PRELUDE TO STORM... City roads clear off traffic as ominous black clouds swirl over the city before a nor'wester lashed yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Two outlaws gunned down in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Two cadres of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) were gunned down by armed assailants at village Goalgram in Daulatpur upazila on Monday night.

The dead were identified as Lipton Biswas, 25, son of Alam Biswas and Alauddin alias Ali, 32, son of Nayeab Ali. They hailed from village Betbaria in Gangni upazila of Meherpur district.

Police quoted witnesses as saying an armed gang of 15 swooped on the two when they were sitting at a tea stall at Gangni Bazar at about 8 pm.

The killers took the two to village Goalgram in Daulatpur upazila of Kushtia and killed them.

Police said the PBCP cadres might have been killed by the activists of outlawed Biplobi Communist Party (BCP).

Daulatpur police recovered the bodies yesterday and sent them to Kushtia General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

A case was filed with Daulatpur Police Station in this connection.

SHAZNEEN CASE

Hasan planned to kill Shazneen, maids confided

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Sufia Begum, 12th prosecution witness in the Shazneen case and a maid of the victim's elder sister, gave her deposition before the court yesterday.

Later, she was cross-examined by lawyers of all the six accused in the case.

The hearing took place in the Second Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka yesterday for about three and a half hours.

After the cross-examination, Judge Kazi Rahamat Ullah adjourned the hearing till today.

In her deposition, Sufia told the court that five months before the death of Shazneen, she was appointed a maid of Simeen Hossain, eldest daughter of Latifur Rahman.

"I used to look after the children of Simeen Hossain at Latifur Rahman's Gulshan residence when Simeen remained at her office."

"I went to Latifur Rahman's Gulshan residence some days before

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Cabinet rejects bid to amend flag rule

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet has rejected the proposal to bring amendments to the Bangladesh Flag (protection) Ordinance 1982 after discussions at its two subsequent meetings.

The cabinet meeting on Monday night observed that the law should be enforced as it is giving protection to the national flag carriers.

The cabinet also observed that the ordinance should not be changed as it would then contradict the recent High Court division verdict, according to sources.

The High Court earlier asked the Department of Shipping to act according to the law and declared illegal a general waiver to foreign vessels.

At least half a dozen ministers at the last meeting spoke in favour of keeping the ordinance intact, while two ministers opposed it suggesting a revocation of the law.

Those opposing it observed that the ordinance would make normal trade difficult and lengthy, while the others felt it would help shipping business flourish.

The local ocean going ship owners welcomed the government's decision wholeheartedly.

"We are happy the government understood our position and was not misled by the propaganda of foreign company agents," said Sayeed Hossain Chowdhury, chair

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Principal confined for saving 'sexual abuser'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Hundreds of female students of Rajshahi Teachers' Training College yesterday confined the principal inside his office and locked his office room at least for six hours as he allegedly tried to save a teacher facing charges of sexual harassment.

They also observed a day-long sit-in in front of the principal's office demanding immediate removal of the accused professor, Golam Mustafa, and the superintendent of the women's hostel, Assistant Professor Abdus Samad Mondol.

A heavy contingent of police was deployed to avoid any untoward incidents as chaos surrounded the campus following the students' agitation.

On April 15, 81 students of the women's hostel in a petition to the

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Accused throws shoes at judge

COURT CORRESPONDENT

An accused in an arms case yesterday threw shoes at the metropolitan sessions judge, Dhaka, after his bail prayer was rejected.

Judge Mohammad Motiur Rahman later told court reporters he was 'feeling insecure'.

He urged the authorities concerned to deploy at least two platoons of police on the court premises to avert such incidents.

Trial of the case against the accused, Mohammad Selim, was scheduled to be held yesterday. As no witnesses appeared, the court fixed May 28 for the next hearing.

Selim, who was in the dock, then made oral submission for granting him bail. The prosecution opposed it.

After hearing both sides, the judge rejected the bail prayer. The accused then threw his shoes at the judge and lunged forward to attack him.

However, the lone police constable on duty in the court and others present stopped him.

Tejgaon police had arrested Selim in the city's Tejknipara in April 2001 and recovered a home-made pipe gun and three bullets of shot gun from him.

An arms case was filed against him and chargesheet was submitted later.

Bangabandhu murder SC recalls order for execution of Bazlul Huda

BSS, Dhaka

The Supreme Court yesterday recalled the order for execution of major (dismissed) Bazlul Huda in the Bangabandhu Murder Case.

"The letter issued by the High Court Division is recalled," the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury in an order said.

According to the order, the High Court order was recalled as a criminal leave petition against the death sentences of Huda and three other convicts

was now pending with the Appellate Division for hearing.

The Appellate Division order came upon a defence petition two days after the jail authorities received the execution order from the High Court. A petition of Huda was earlier rejected by the Appellate Division due to non-appearance of his lawyer for hearing.

During the death reference hearing of the case in a single-bench court of Justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim, Huda's lawyer in a petition sought fresh hearing of the entire

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Dhaka-Paris ties to suffer, says AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bilateral relations between Bangladesh and France will suffer for the BNP-led alliance government's 'disgraceful behaviour' with the French state minister for foreign affairs, said an Awami League (AL) frontline leader yesterday.

Sudden cancellation of a scheduled meeting between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and French Minister Renaud Muselier is against diplomatic norms. AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told a press conference at the AL central office.

"Such an act may create an economic problem, as Bangladesh has strong economical ties with France," he said with a reminder that France is a prime development partner of Bangladesh.

Renaud Muselier, who was on a three-day visit to Bangladesh from last Saturday, was scheduled to meet with Khaleda and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina on Sunday.

Khaleda cancelled the meeting on personal grounds just ahead of schedule, the French minister told reporters before he left Dhaka. As a result, he skirted his meeting with Hasina.

Bangladesh is losing friends abroad for the government's erroneous foreign policy, says Jalil. "An evil force is at work to destroy the friendly bond between the two countries, developed during the AL rule," Jalil said.

AL Organising Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury, International Affairs Secretary Syed Abul Hossain, joint secretaries Abdull Kader and Mukul Bose and Deputy Publicity Secretary Ashim Kumar Ukil also attended the press conference.

The AL leaders rejected a government statement issued on Monday that there has been no schedule for a meeting.

"Clarification from the foreign ministry on cancellation of the meeting is not acceptable to Awami League and countrymen, as it is not true," Jalil said.

France played a greater role in the European Union for aid to Bangladesh and 18 per cent of the EU aid comes from France, he said.

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PHOTO: STAR

Dancers stage a colourful procession at Shahbagh in the city to celebrate the World Dance Day yesterday.

SAARC maps SARS strategy

AFP, Male

South Asian health ministers meeting in the Maldives agreed yesterday to a 10-point plan to share expertise and exchange information to prevent the spread of the SARS virus in their region.

Ministers of the seven-member South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) signed a three-page declaration setting out urgent measures, including the pooling of their resources.

"The meeting decided to adopt comprehensive preventive measures, including screening at all entry points, transfer of possible SARS patients to

quarantine and to ensure effective contact tracing," Maldivian health minister Ahmed Abdullah said.

He said Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom inaugurated the one-day meeting here urging a SAARC partnership in preventing the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) spreading in their region, which is home to a fifth of humanity.

SAARC ministers agreed to set up a system of information-sharing among each other on measures to screen passengers at all entry and exit points in the region.

"The Maldives called for the meeting due to the global threat posed by the SARS epidemic and because of the importance of a collective endeavour by SAARC member countries to combat the epidemic in order to safeguard the region," Gayoom's office said in a statement sent here.

SAARC groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The Indian ocean atoll nation of the Maldives depends heavily on tourist dollars, and stands to lose more than most as the threat of SARS

cripples Southeast Asia's tourism industry.

Six-point ASEAN plan

Reuters adds: In Bangkok, China's premier said on yesterday the deadly SARS virus was going to be a long-term problem, as Asian leaders hammered out plans to fight outbreaks that have killed hundreds and threatened economic growth.

China, harshly criticised for covering up the disease initially, reported nine more deaths and 202 new cases yesterday, most of them in the capital Beijing, as the virus raged

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Another held for Srikanta murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Raozan BCL general secretary Jahangir Alam, accused of Srikanta Rakkhit murder case, was placed on a five-day remand here yesterday.

Detective Branch police arrested him from Sitakunda thana while he was trying to flee to Dhaka via Feni by local bus on Monday afternoon.

Jahangir also confessed that he talked with alleged mastermind of the murder Mahmudya over phone even before his arrest on Monday.

Srikanta was abducted from his Hazari Lane residence and killed on April 19.

Two held with brand new AK-47 in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two criminals, reportedly Bangladesh Chhattr League (BCL) cadres, were arrested with a Chinese AK-47 assault rifle on Monday night.

The arrested, identified as Md Morshed, 25, and Md Noor Mostafa Titu, have been placed on a six-day remand.

A team of detectives arrested them from Golepaharer Mor under Kotwali thana at around 10:00pm. One magazine and two bullets of the brand new AK-47 were also recovered from them.

The criminals were reportedly returning from Chawk Bazaar where they went to sell the rifle. Police intercepted their three-wheeler and arrested them after exchange of fire.

The criminal told police that they were hired to carry the weapon that belonged to one Israfil alias Saiful, a cousin of former BCL leader of the MES College and listed criminal Mohim Uddin. They were arrested a few yards off Mohim's residence.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
April 30	4-30	6-27 pm
May 1	5-27 am	

Prayer Timings		
April 30		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-30	5-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-32	6-35
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation