

Al-Qaeda trial opens in Belgium

BBC ONLINE

The trial of 23 alleged Islamic militants began yesterday amid intense security in Brussels.

The accused face a range of charges including involvement in the murder of the Afghan opposition leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud, and planning attacks on American targets in Europe.

It is only the third trial of alleged al-Qaeda supporters since the 11 September attacks.

It comes amid fresh concern over international terrorism sparked by a series of bombings and the broadcast of an alleged al-Qaeda leader's call to arms.

Police barricades around Brussels's Palais de Justice have been reinforced with armoured vehicles in a huge operation to ensure security around the courthouse.

Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda network is believed to have been behind last week's suicide attacks in Saudi Arabia, in which dozens of people were killed.

Last Friday's bombings in Casablanca - in which 29 people died - have also been linked to the terror network.

Saudi nets four Al-Qaeda men

Saudi authorities, on alert after suicide blasts in Riyadh last week, have arrested four men on suspicion of belonging to the al-Qaeda network, a diplomat said Thursday.

"They arrested four Tuesday on suspicion of connections with al-Qaeda," the Western diplomat in Riyadh said, adding that Saudi police

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the post, he said.

The foreign secretary requested envoys of the OIC member states in Dhaka on May 21 to inform their governments about Bangladesh's candidature for the polls in December 2004.

Moroccan national Abdul Wahid Belkazi, who was elected OIC secretary general in June 2000, completes his four-year term next year. The top office of the Jeddah-based organisation had been held by another Moroccan for four years until June 2000.

Bangladesh nominated the then speaker of the House Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury for OIC secretary general in the 2000 polls but backed out just ahead of the election.

Bangladesh's candidature may also come up for discussion on the sidelines of a May 28 conference of the foreign ministers of OIC states in Tehran.

About Iraq's representation to the Tehran conference, Chowdhury described the question of Iraqi representation as pointless, as Iraq has no government for now.

He hoped many problems arising from the Iraq war would be resolved, with the adoption of a new resolution on Iraq at the UN Security Council in a few days.

The shipment of the first consignment of relief from Bangladesh, which includes medicine, will begin by May-end, Chowdhury said.

On Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri's expected visit to Bangladesh next month, the foreign secretary said the schedule of her visit was being worked out.

About the May 31-June 2 ministerial-level meeting of 39 least developed countries (LDCs), Chowdhury said the Dhaka meeting would lay out strategies for the LDCs in the build-up to next September's WTO meeting in Cancun, Mexico.

He also spoke on a newspaper report quoting the finance minister that Bangladesh proposed free trade to India and said that India made the proposal and Bangladesh was examining it.

The work on the Bangladesh-Myanmar road communication is going on, he told the reporters. The Myanmar government is keen to complete the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh soon, said the foreign secretary.

Tangail

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ing to BSS.

According to Police Super and Civil Surgeon, Commander of Bangladesh Navy B K Saha was going to Dhaka from Khulna along with his wife, two sons, a maid and a driver.

The Civil Surgeon told the news agency that B K Saha was driving the microbus.

Saha's wife, younger son and their maid died on the spot. The elder son received serious injuries in the head. The driver also received minor injury. B K Saha escaped unhurt.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has expressed her deep shock at the death of 15 people in Tangail road accident.

In a condolence message yesterday, she conveyed her sympathy to the members of the victims' families and prayed for peace of the departed souls.

Reshuffle sheds 7 ministers

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with rank and status of state minister.

According to the reshuffle, MK Anwar, who was the industries minister, was awarded the agriculture portfolio and Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Matiur Rahman Nizami was sent from the agriculture ministry to the industries ministry. Hafizuddin Ahmed was removed from the jute ministry to the water resources portfolio.

State Minister Lutfur Rahman Khan Azad was transferred to the jute portfolio from labour and manpower. Amanullah Aman, who was state minister for health, took charge of labour and manpower, and State Minister Rezaul Karim was sent to the liberation war affairs portfolio from industries.

Ukil Abdus Sattar Bhuiyan, who was state minister for land, took charge of the fisheries and livestock portfolio, and State Minister Mizanur Rahman Sinha was transferred to the health and family welfare ministry from textile.

Deputy Minister Asadul Habib (Dulu) was sent to the disaster management and relief ministry from communications, Deputy Minister Ruhul Quddus Talukder (Dulu) to the land ministry from LGRD and cooperatives and Deputy Minister Abdus Salam Pintu to the industries ministry from education.

Yesterday's reshuffle came as a near-surprise, said sources. The prime minister, who had been in her Bangladesh Secretariat office yesterday, asked the cabinet secretary almost off-guard to prepare the notification and papers for reshuffle.

All the six died in house collapse. About 2000 dwelling houses were damaged in the storm.

Schools, colleges, madrassahs, mosques and shops in the two upazilas were badly affected. Many trees and crops were also damaged.

Officials from the two district headquarters visited the affected areas and sanctioned relief for the storm-hit people.

Wheat supply

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officials to procure wheat from non-farmers has raised some questions.

The press reported last year that taking advantage of regulatory loopholes, some traders having strong political backing sold out low-grade Indian wheat to the government silos in connivance with a section of food officials.

As many as eight government officials, including the then secretary of the food ministry and the director general of the food directorate, were made officers on special duty (OSD). Three of them were eventually sent to forced retirement for the irregularities in wheat procurement involving Tk 90 crore. The prime minister admonished one of her party lawmakers for his alleged involvement in the scam.

Amid growing public uproar, two separate official probe bodies, formed at the directives of the prime minister and the food ministry, investigated the scam and submitted their reports to the government. But the findings of the probe bodies have not been revealed by the government.

Food Minister Abdullah Al Noman told The Daily Star yesterday, "As there is no wheat stock left with the farmers now, we're allowing procurement from traders."

The minister, however, brushed aside any possibility of irregularities in procuring wheat from non-farmers. "We'll pursue the same policy in procuring wheat from traders as we did in case of procurement from farmers, that is, no trader will be allowed to sell more than 5

The changes ended all speculations of leaders and workers of the ruling BNP about reshuffle. There was also tremendous pressure from donors and the party as well to downsize the jumbo cabinet.

Many frontline leaders say that the council of ministers should have been downsized more and that it should not have more than 40 to 45 members.

Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka apart, six others were dropped from the council largely because of their inefficiency, said the BNP insiders. Khoka wanted to resign from the cabinet before the 2002 mayoral polls.

Sources inside the government said although the prime minister had taken resignation letters from around 16 ministers and state ministers in the middle of last year, finally seven of them have been dropped. The others survived because of strong lobbying on their behalf within the BNP.

Several BNP leaders and leaders from two other components of the alliance - BJP and IO - who were ready to take oath felt frustrated that none of them was inducted into the council of ministers.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, one of the seven dropped from the council of minister said actually he has been 'politically buried'. It would now be too difficult for him to do politics in his constituency and district because his rivals might campaign that he was removed due to corruption.

"I don't know why I was made a minister and on which ground I have been removed. I am now politically dead in my area. I never tried to be a minister and even did not know anything about making me a minister till the formation of the government," he added.

Some ministers and state ministers, whose portfolios were been

changed, are also unhappy that they have not got 'important' ones. Jamaat chief Matiur Rahman Nizami is known to be among them.

Jamaat sources said in these days of market economy, industries ministry is 'less important'. However, BNP insiders said Nizami was removed from agriculture ministry as he did not perform well.

Sources close to Amanullah Aman (who was state minister for health) said although he has been given charge of the labour and manpower ministry, this ministry does not have any important function since the formation of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment.

Deputy Minister Ruhul Quddus Talukder is also not happy to get the portfolio of land and to share authority with the incumbent land minister. He was happy with his previous position in the LGRD ministry because Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan had given him enough authority in the ministry, sources mentioned.

Although Abdus Salam Pintu has been removed from the position of deputy minister for education, he is happy that despite being on the removal list he has not been dropped.

Cabinet ministers Major (Retd) Hafizuddin Ahmed and MK Anwar, state ministers Lutfur Rahman Khan Azad, Rezaul Karim, Abdus Sattar Bhuiyan, Mizanur Rahman Sinha and deputy ministers Ahsan Habib are quite happy with their new portfolios.

PM

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The prime minister was addressing the foundation laying ceremony of the Judicial Administrative Training Institute Complex (JATIC) at College Road near Curzon Hall in the city yesterday afternoon.

She said: "Only a small section of the society commits crimes. So the judges have to play the leading role in establishing a just society."

Chief Justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Barrister Moudud Ahmed, State Minister Barrister M Shahjahan Omar, World Bank Country Director Frederick T Temple and Secretary in-charge of the Ministry for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs M Asaduzzaman also addressed the function.

Ministers, MPs, judges, lawyers, diplomats and senior officials were present at the foundation laying ceremony of the seven storied building to be built on a 93000-sq land at a cost of Tk 110.47 crore.

The World Bank, Canada and Denmark are providing financial assistance to construct the complex under the 'Legal and Judicial Capacity Building Project' of the Ministry for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs.

The Prime Minister in her address hoped that the new infrastructure would help improve the efficiency of the judicial system.

She listed the measures taken by the alliance government and the previous BNP government to ensure justice to all as recognised by the Constitution.

The prime minister mentioned that her government launched the Legal Aid System to ensure justice to the poor, established Legal Commission during 1991-96 period and formulated the Women and Children Oppression Act in 1995.

Referring to the introduction of arbitration system, the prime minister said it would help maintain a cordial relation between the plaintiffs and the accused and ensure social discipline and security.

She said the Speedy Trial Tribunal Act (STTA) introduced by the present government will ensure quick justice and said adding that the tough law was enacted to check serious crimes like acid attack.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia offers prayer after laying the foundation of the Judicial Administrative Training Institute Complex (JATIC) at College Road near Curzon Hall yesterday.

Teenage trader found dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Decomposed body of a vegetable trader, Aqib, 16, was recovered from Khilgaon area in the city on Wednesday night.

Police said the victim was strangled and stabbed somewhere else and dumped on a field at west Nandipara.

Local people discovered a decomposed leg of the victim at about 8:15 p.m. on Wednesday night and informed the Khilgaon police who later recovered the body.

The boy was in trousers and a vest. A rope was tied round his neck and there were marks of stabs in his back, police said. "He is missing for six days. He might have been killed by his friends," said Aqib's elder brother Moniruzzaman, residing near Goran tempo-stand.

Police sent the body to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Khilgaon police filed a murder case. None was arrested till last evening.

13 more wholesale agri markets to be set up

BSS, Dhaka

Agriculture Marketing Directorate will set up 13 more wholesale markets for agricultural products at different places in the country to ensure fair prices to the farmers for their products.

These markets will be similar to already built six agri-markets.

This was informed at a review meeting on progress in implementation of agriculture ministry's projects under Annual Development Programme (ADP) in the conference room of the ministry yesterday.

State Minister for Agriculture Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir also attended the meeting. Secretary of the ministry Ayub Kadri, head of various departments under the ministry, project directors and senior officials of the ministry were present, a press release said.

Iraq sanctions

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struction and humanitarian needs at the direction of the occupying powers.

The resolution also calls on the US and British forces to help set up an interim Iraqi-run administration until "an internationally recognised, representative government is established by the people of Iraq."

"We have decided to vote for this resolution and to work to find a consensus within the Security Council," de Villepin said. "Even if this text is not perfect, it takes into account our concerns."

In a further sign that the traditional allies want to heal the rifts left by the war on Iraq, US Secretary of State Colin Powell arrived in Paris for a two-day meeting of G8 foreign ministers.

Powell said France's change of heart on the UN resolution was a good move towards mending US-French relations, badly bruised by the Iraq war.

"I think it's a step in the right direction of moving forward together," Powell told a briefing organised by the French-American Press Club.

France, Germany and Russia had strongly opposed the US-led war and then insisted the United Nations play a "central role" in its rebuilding.

De Villepin on Thursday hailed the fourth draft of the resolution as signalling the return of the world body after fears that it would be sidelined and rendered irrelevant by Washington's unilateral action in launching the war.

"We can consider that the UN is back, and at bottom that is now the key issue: to make sure that the UN can resume its place" in handling the crisis, he told France-Inter radio.

Seminar for making registration must for political parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Registration of parties should be made a must to ensure accountability in politics.

Reforms of political parties are also essential to infuse practice of intra-party democracy, speakers at a seminar on 'Registration and Reforms of Political Parties in Bangladesh' observed in the city yesterday.

Unless the political parties are democratic in nature and strong organisationally they hardly can contribute to the institutionalisation of democracy, speakers of the seminar, organised by the Legislative Support Service Project (LSSP) of Manabik Sahajya Sangstha (MSS), said.

They also urged parties to democratise their nomination process, initiate politics free of violence and criminals and provide political education and training for party stalwarts.

They felt the civil society should play an organised role, forcing the parties to go ahead with intra-party reforms.

Former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Abu Hena chaired the seminar while MSS president Feroz M Hassan delivered introductory speech.

Among the speakers, former CEC Justice Abdur Rouf said that the existing problems in political parties would not be resolved until they are brought under compulsory registration system and transparent fund-raising mechanism, he added.

Prof. Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, Department of the Government and Politics of Jahangirnagar University, in his key-note paper advocated for a comprehensive approach to regulate the performance of the political parties and an enactment of law that will make the registration of parties with the Election Commission a must.

Abu Hena said people's dream for a congenial political atmosphere will come true only when reforms of political parties take place.

Chief Whip of Awami League Abdus Shafeed said those who get party nomination but are without proper background can hardly play the due role of a parliamentarian and end up polluting politics.

He said he has invited Vajpayee to visit Bangladesh and the Indian premier said he would consider it.

Free trade

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bilateral trade gap, regional economic prospect and other issues of mutual interest. He also met Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee yesterday.

BSS reports that Saifur and Vajpayee discussed increased bilateral cooperation and exchanged ideas on politics.

The finance minister said rail transit came up for discussion and he told the Indian premier that it could be implemented after rehabilitating the railway in Bangladesh.

Talking to journalists at Zia International Airport, Saifur said the Indian finance minister has proposed formation of a joint working group to sort out transportation and infrastructure problems at borders to facilitate trade.

"I believe free trade should be introduced between us to cope with the global trend," said Saifur. "India wants to give some trade concessions to Bangladesh because it feels that without such benefits, it would be difficult for them to sell their products here."

He said his trip was aimed at improving ties between the two countries and termed it "successful".

"We had been facing some hitches for quite some time. All misgivings have been removed now and if good relations exist at the leadership level, all smaller irritants

Local Government and Rural Development Minister Abdul Manan meanwhile revealed that he did submit a proposal as 'bill' in parliament in 1999, but that is yet to be considered.

Member of Parliament from Jatiya Party, Begum Rawshan Ershad said all parties would have to reach a consensus to resolve the problems.

Prof. Shahudul Islam MP, Farruk Khan MP, Sheikh Shahidul Islam, general secretary of Jatiya Party (Monju), Munir Khan, vice chairperson of Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA), Jamaat-e-Islami leader M Quamruzzaman, Prof. Dalim Chandra Barman, Dr Ataur Rahman, Dr Sawkat Ara and Prof. Dilara Chowdhury also spoke.

Gram Sarkar

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sion in this regard would destroy democracy and establish rule of 'muscle men and criminals' backed by the party in power at the grass-roots level, it felt.

The meeting, chaired by acting AL president Zillur Rahman, said if Gram Sarkar is formed this way, Union Parishad would not be able to perform their duties independently.

Referring to the Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting held in the city recently, the AL presidium said the donors took note of 'absolute failure' of the present government at this meeting.

They identified widespread corruption, deteriorated law and order, deaths in police custody and during the joint forces drive and many such misdeeds of the present government as major factors retarding development of the country.

For this, the donors did not promise any aid for this year, it noted.

The AL presidium said in such a situation, the ruling alliance has no right to cling to power any more and should quit.

The meeting expressed shock at the 'killing' of Dr Maruf Ahmed, brother of former home minister M o h a m m a d N a s i m and demanded exemplary punishment of the killers.

It decided to hold a public meeting at Paltan Maidan in the city on June 7.

can be easily resolved," Saifur said.

"I have found a genuine desire among the Indian top businessmen and politicians to maintain good relations with Bangladesh. I think our people should be steered toward a similar sentiment. This trip has helped us overcome our historical mindset," said Saifur.

He said he has invited Vajpayee to visit Bangladesh and the Indian premier said he would consider it.

Tremor kills

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coach, a weightlifter and a cook.

Road builders used their equipment to hunt for survivors. "We left our job to come and help. We're human after all," said Sid Alki.

France dispatched 120 rescuers with sniffer dogs and equipment to its former colony. Germany sent 22 technicians, also with dogs and high-tech sound and imaging equipment.

Most of Algeria's 32 million people live in the north, away from the Sahara desert. Algiers, on the coast, is home to at least 2.6 million people.

End to protectionism

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open the meeting at China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre.

The draft declaration has already been sent to the LDCs from the Bangladesh mission in Geneva.

Bangladesh, coordinator of the 49-member LDC grouping, is the initiator of the upcoming trade ministers' meeting ahead of the 5th World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting.

The WTO meeting is slated for September in Cancun in Mexico.

"The meeting of the trade ministers is expected to forge a common position of LDCs on the WTO issues and international trades," Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said to The Daily Star.

Representatives of 38 LDCs including 23 trade ministers have already confirmed their participation in the upcoming meeting and many others are likely to do so soon.

Secretary General of the United Nations on Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Rubens Ricuperro, Trade Commissioner of the European Commission (EC) Pascal Lamy and Director General of the WTO Dr Supachai Panitchpakdi are expected to attend the meeting.

Both developed and developing countries often impose protection-

ist measures like labour standards, environmental requirements and workplace environment during imports from the LDCs.

The forthcoming WTO meeting is likely to make these measures mandatory for all of its 146 members states.

Since the LDCs are lagging behind in the implementation of the tough conditions, their exports could be hit hard once further stringent measures on the pretext of environment is imposed, apprehends the draft declaration.

On the issue of movement of natural persons, the draft demands withdrawal of restrictions on both semi-skilled and unskilled manpower.

"LDCs demand that developed countries must ensure mutual recognition of professionals. The restriction of entry by the natural person in the guise of economic need test (ENT) must be removed," the draft says.

"The social security charges must be withdrawn for the temporary natural persons as they do not receive social security support against those."

The draft also demands implementation of the special and differential treatment on the products of the LDCs as pledged by different ministerial meetings of the WTO.

"The LDCs are concerned with the fact that the modalities for