

Iraqi cops ask US troops to get out of Fallujah

REUTERS, Fallujah

Iraqi police in Fallujah threatened to resign yesterday unless the US forces that trained them left town, saying the presence of American troops endangered their lives.

More than 100 members of the new US-backed force protested in the town about 50 km west of Baghdad after their police station and a municipality building came under attack overnight by guerrillas firing rocket-propelled grenades.

There were no reported casualties.

"We have the ability to protect these sites," said Riyadh Abdel-Latif, the town's police chief. "The presence of Americans endangers us. We asked the Americans more than a month and a half ago to leave Fallujah."

The protesters handed a petition to the mayor and US commander in the town, saying they would resign in 48 hours if American troops did not leave.

Fallujah is a hotbed of anti-American sentiment. US officials say they are facing organized resistance from mixed groups of Islamic militants, Saddam Hussein loyalists, armed gangs and Iraqis seeking revenge for the deaths of

50 injured as villagers clash in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

At least 50 people were injured, ten of them seriously, in a clash between two group of villagers at Gognobipur in sadar upazila yesterday morning.

The clash was a sequel to a previous enmity between two local influentials, Korban Ali and Haran Ali.

Police quoted local people as saying that the clash began at about 9pm as a village arbitration failed to reach settlement to end a dispute between the rival groups over control of the village.

The feuding groups used lethal weapons during the clash that continued for an hour leaving 50 people of both sides injured.

The seriously injured Farid Mondol, 50, Sahin, 23, Montu, 30, Sahadat, 50, Alimuddin, 30, Belal 20, Mafid Mondol, 40, Alek, 50, and Mohon, 30, were admitted to the Kushtia General Hospital.

Two separate cases were filed with Sadar Police Station.

B'baria boat capsizes: Body of schoolgirl recovered

UNB, Brahmanbaria

The body of a schoolgirl, who went missing after a boat capsized in Chargoshaipur Beel in Nabinagar upazila Wednesday, was recovered yesterday

The victim was identified as Ruma Akhter, 13, a student of class VI of Krishnanagar Abdul Zabbar High School.

The mechanised boat, carrying some 100 students of the school, sank in the beel due to strong current.

After the accident, villagers rushed to the spot in boats and rescued all other students.

Killer car

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soon find the address of the car driver.

Record shows the car was registered with Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) on April 28, 1989.

BRTA officials think the car did not have an appropriate fitness certificate to ply the roads. It has fitness clearance till December 31, 1999.

Hit by the car in front of Sobhanbag mosque, Dr Shajahan Ali, medical officer of Orthopaedic Hospital, was dragged on the road as his leg got tangled in the car's bumper. Instead of stopping the car and saving the doctor, the driver sped away to Samarita Hospital where he got down from the car and fled.

Insurance plan

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insurance is yet to be decided.

Earlier in 2000, the government had proposed to amend the Insurance Act, 1938 to bring marine passengers under mandatory life insurance coverage. The act covers road transport passengers.

Meanwhile, entry fee at Sadargah launch terminal in the city has been increased to Tk 4 a person from Tk 3 earlier. The additional Tk 1 will go to the welfare fund.

About Tk 50 to 60 lakh will be raised for the fund, sources said.

Entry fee at other terminals across the country might also be raised in phases to collect money for the fund.

A senior government official said the government had earlier announced compensation for victims of two launch accidents on April 21 this year. The amount was Tk 20,000 each for the victims in the capsizing of MV Mitali and Tk 10,000 each in the case of MV Majlisshpur.

MV Mitali sank in the Buriganga with 131 passengers and MV Majlisshpur in a river in Brahmanbaria with 51 passengers.

BIWTA officials of said as per the government decision, the welfare fund will compensate victims of launch misahps after April 21 this year.

Jamuna devours

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water.

"I sold the machines to buy a piece of land and now work under another handloom industrialist at a rate of Tk 70 per day," said a sobbing Quader.

The Randhuniabari Government Primary School is also close to succumbing to erosion. Despite repeated appeals by the school authorities for the past two years, no action has been taken, said Abdul Kuddus, a teacher of the school.

Meanwhile, fresh areas in 48 unions of Kajipur, Chowhali, Belkuchi, Shahjadpur and Ullapara upazila were inundated in past 24 hours as the Jamuna flooded 20 centimetres above danger level.

Fifty tons of rice and Tk 50,000 were allocated for nearly one lakh affected people of the district. The district administration has so far distributed 40 tonnes of rice.

NEWS

Tragedy drives Jamal crazy

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of passengers and goods and severe current and turbulence in the channel where MV Nasrin-1 sank were the main causes of the accident.

The launch was supposed to enter the Dakatia River through the channel with an angle of 180 degree, but it did not follow the rule.

The primary investigation that carried out by the three-member committee headed by Md. Shafiqul Islam (Engineer and Ship Surveyor), Department of Shipping however said that the capsized launch had the fitness certificate.

The launch has the capacity to carry 294 passengers at night and 429 in daytime, but it reportedly carried nearly 750 people on the night of accident.

The diesel-run motor vessel was 80.46 metres long, 7.31 metres wide and 2.10 metres deep.

The launch was loaded with 400 sacks of pulse (dal), 40 sacks of potato, three tons of iron rods and 28 sacks of onion.

Fazlur Rahman, magistrate of the Department of Shipping, and a member of the investigation committee, said the passenger launches have no permission to carry any goods commercially.

"Only the essential baggage and belongings of passengers can be carried," he said.

MV Nasrin-1, having registration No. 4745, started operation in 2000. The owner Mamun Khan, son of Abdus Sattar Khan, is a resident of 17, Laxmi Bazar, Dhaka.

MEETING AT DC OFFICE

A meeting yesterday decided to send a proposal to the higher authority urging to shift the existing launch terminal to Madrasah Road terminal for at least three months June, July and August.

The purpose to shift the terminal has been taken as to reach the existing Chandpur Launch Terminal, launches have to cross the confluence of three rivers the Pdma, Meghna and Dakatia which turns violent during these three months.

If the launch terminal is shifted to Madrasah Road, the launches will not have to cross the dangerous channel. The proposal is to be submitted within one week.

The meeting also decided to check the passenger launches at Chandpur point through a mobile court every month and by investigators every week.

The meeting was told that overloading and fitness problems

were the main causes of launch accident and urged the launch owners to follow the safety rules and regulations strictly.

Chaired by Deputy Commissioner of Chandpur Abdul Rob Talukder, the meeting was also attended by top government officials and local dignitaries.

Vietnamese FM due July 16

BSS, Dhaka

Foreign Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Nguyen Dy Nien will arrive in Dhaka on a three-day visit on July 16, diplomatic sources said.

He will call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on July 17.

Nien will hold talks with Foreign Minister M Moirshed Khan and also meet some other important government leaders during the visit.

Besides, he is scheduled to attend a function marking the opening of the Vietnamese Chancery here in the evening of July 17, the sources said.

Bodies float downstream

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Tuesday night, three bodies were recovered -- two from the scene and one from Ilisha in Barisal, over 100 kilometres downstream.

There was no official word on how many passengers were on board the launch which was going to Lalmo hon from Dhaka, but survivors said it was carrying at least 750 people.

Officials at the search site said 220 people were rescued or swam ashore following the sinking in the confluence where converging currents trigger eddies, especially during monsoon when the rain-swollen rivers are in spate.

Deputy Commissioner of Chandpur Abdul Rob Hawlader said: "Now I can't give you the exact figure of the people who were on board the sunken launch. But, I think the casualty would be the highest ever."

The accident rekindles the horror of May 3, 2002 when 450 people drowned after MV Salahuddin-2 sank, also in the Meghna, being caught up in a twister.

Crowds of grieving relatives lined the Meghna banks yesterday with their hopes running low of finding survivors.

"I doubt they are going to find my son alive," said day-labourer Hannan.

Rescue operation

Bangladesh Navy divers yesterday failed to reach the ferry, which is believed to be 200 feet underwater and might have been dragged downstream by strong currents.

Divers were scanning the riverbed, but locals said the search could not get off to a full start because of raging currents and swirling waters.

Along with the navy, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) and Fire Brigade and Civil Defence teams were carrying out search operations.

Navy officials said their divers could dive to only 30 feet deep. "We've the expertise to dive up to 300 feet underwater if there are no natural hindrances like severe current and turbulence," said an officer.

Lieutenant Commander Mahbubur Rashid, who is leading the divers, said his men could dive in maximum currents speed of up to two nautical miles an hour, but speed in the confluence is six nautical miles an hour.

A naval ship, Shaibal with sonar

technology started from Chittagong yesterday for the accident scene and was expected to reach this morning.

Rescue vessel Hamza arrived at Chandpur at about 5:00am yesterday.

Hamza along with Rustam, that arrived earlier, is jointly capable to salvage the sunken launch weighing about 300 tonnes.

BNS Barkat, BIWTA ship Turag, tug vessels Agrapathik and Agradut, CGS Patuakhali of the Coast Guard and some small boats are in operation at the accident site.

Doubts rule

Locals and some experts expressed scepticism about the salvage of the ship. "I don't think they are going to lift the vessel from the riverbed," an expert said, requesting anonymity.

His comments evoke the memory of another launch, MV Dinar, that went down in the same estuary on August 20, 1994 with over 400 passengers on board and was never found again.

But Lieutenant Commander Mahbubur Rashid hoped that his men would be able to pull MV Nasrin-1 from the river bottom.

Schoolgirl raped, killed in Laxmipur

UNB, Laxmipur

A schoolgirl was killed after being raped at Khandakarpur village in Sadar Upazila on Wednesday.

Family sources said the victim, Munni, 14, daughter of Aminullah and a student of class ten, was intercepted by her neighbour Abdul Hannan, 35, son of Golam Mostafa, while she was returning home with a jar of water from a nearby pond at around 5am.

Hannan forcibly took the girl to his room, raped and strangled her.

The rapist fled the scene after the gruesome murder. On information, police recovered the body and sent it to hospital morgue for autopsy.

As he refused

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The doctors at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) allegedly did not examine him well and that's why his relatives took him out to a clinic.

However, Motijheel police said they could not find the victim in any of the city clinics.

No complaint was filed till yesterday.

Rumsfeld

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and develop a good deal of conviction about it.

"We're dealing with closed societies; we're dealing with countries that very skillfully use our advanced technologies."

In Pretoria, Bush deflected a question on whether he regretted highlighting the allegation in his State of the Union address in January.

"There is no doubt in my mind that Saddam Hussein was a threat to the world peace and there is no doubt in my mind the United States along with our allies and friends did the right thing in removing him from power," Bush said.

But the leader of Democrats in the Senate, Tom Daschle, again said the issue underscores the need for a full congressional investigation on US intelligence leading up to the war in Iraq.

"History hasn't been written yet. In fact, it's being written as we speak. And I think as we write history, we want to make sure we have the facts," the South Dakota senator said.

"The most important thing we can do in acquiring the facts is to get the best information. That's why I have said from the beginning, having a good, bipartisan investigation so that we know exactly what the facts are is critical to understanding and writing history the way it should be."

Anti-graft body

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six choices to be made by a selection committee.

The selection committee will be composed of the finance minister, the law minister, two judges each from the Appellate Division and the High Court Division of the Supreme Court as nominated by the chief justice, the comptroller and auditor general and the chairman of the Public Service Commission.

While introducing the bill in the House, the law minister termed it as a rare instance in the fight against corruption. "The commission (proposed) will be able to probe and take actions against all of us."

But the main opposition party, the Awami League (AL), expressed scepticism over the objectives of the bill.

At a news briefing at his Sangsad Bhaban office last night, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid Advocate raised objections about the six-member selection committee.

With ministers sitting on the selection committee, the commission will not be neutral and able to fulfil its objectives, he said.

Hamid proposed amendment to the bill so that the selection committee could comprise the chief justice and other judges. The AL will welcome the initiative provided such an amendment is incorporated, he added.

The commissioners of the proposed commission will be drawn from among people having at least 20 years' experience in the fields of law, education, administration, judiciary or disciplined forces.

They will be appointed on a four-year term. The commission, to be headquartered in Dhaka, will be able to open its branches at any other places, if needed.

The bill also proposed abolition of the Bureau of Anti-corruption (BAC) from the day the new law comes into effect. The BAC staff could be absorbed in the commission if the commission finds them fit.

The proposed bill observed that BAC was failing to deliver its responsibilities due to some practical and legal problems.

Identifying the menace of corruption as a serious problem in the civil

administration and in society at large, the bill said formation of an independent anti-corruption commission was an election pledge of the government.

The proposed commission will investigate graft charges, lodge and conduct cases, recommend the president on relevant legal issues, carry out research on curbing corruption and build awareness against corruption.

In probing graft cases, the proposed commission will be empowered to ask for copies of any public records from any court or office and issue warrants for quizzing witnesses. If one deliberately disobeys directives of the commission, they could be penalised with up to three years of imprisonment.

After introduction of the Anti Corruption Commission Bill, 2003, it was sent to the parliamentary standing committee concerned for scrutiny within 10 days.

Oriental Bank

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ments against 100 per cent margin.

It has been asked to cut down administrative costs that include paid foreign travels and its operational cost is to be brought down by 10 per cent.

The bank has also been asked to recover default loans of about Tk 45 crore by next December and file cases in the Money Loan Court against top defaulters.

Oriental Bank was identified as a 'problem bank' along with six others in 1995. Last year, its earnings stood at Tk 92 crore, while the expenditure was Tk 152 crore.

The bank came into being in 1987 as Al Baraka Bank but changed its name earlier this year, reportedly to rebuild its image.

In December 2002, the bank had a total outstanding loan of Tk 1,166 crore. Of this, Tk 325 crore was classified. As per rule, the bank should have had provisions worth Tk 224.81 crore but had only Tk 6.54 crore causing a deficit of Tk 218.27 crore.

It also had a capital shortfall of Tk 58.84 crore.

In the same year, the bank had Tk 1,583 crore in deposit and Tk 1,170 crore in advance and credit.

Watery grave

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dangerous because of raging currents fed by rains.

The latest vessel disaster -- the most deadly in Bangladesh -- killed 530 people, but only 16 dead bodies were found floating downstream until yesterday.

On August 20, 1994, MV Dinar heading to Shariatpur went down in the turbulent waters of the confluence and more than 200 passengers met watery graves, officials said. Despite a weeklong intensive search, the vessel could not be traced underwater and the salvage efforts were abandoned.

A motor boat sank in the same confluence on September 2, 1994 upon a collision with a Shariatpur-bound launch, in which 10 people were killed. Another motor boat tipped over, killing eight people on March 30, 2000.

On December 29, 2000, 300 passengers were killed when a passenger launch bound for Shariatpur sank at the same point in a smash with another craft.

The May 3, 2002 accident claimed 450 lives in the second deadly launch capsizing in 10 years: MV Salahuddin-2 went down in the Meghna after being caught up in a twister. A small launch sank on February 13 this year, leaving 11

people dead.

But the number of casualties cannot be precisely known, as launches rarely maintain passenger lists or issue tickets.

The river accident frequency is often blamed on overloading, faulty construction and disregard for safety measures.

This April, following protests by launch operators, officials of the shipping ministry withdrew a ban on night travels by launch, which was imposed after a series of accidents.

Girl raped in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A 10-year-old girl was raped allegedly by Kalam, 30, last Wednesday evening at Matiyakola village in Santhia upazila of Pabna.

Kamal, a neighbour, reportedly took the minor to a sugarcane field and left her bleeding profusely.

Her father filed a case that evening with the Santhia Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act against Kalam, who was later arrested.

Shazneen case

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(Masum's) telephonic conversation with Hasan's wife on the night of the incident. The court, however, granted the petition and fixed yesterday for appearance of the witness.

Judge Kazi Rahamat Ullah recorded the deposition. Later, the witness was cross-examined by lawyer for the accused Hasan.

In his deposition, Masum told the court that after the tragic murder of Shazneen he talked to his maternal aunt, wife of Hasan, over telephone at 11pm on April 23, 1998 and at 3:39am on April 24, 1998 and requested her to inform Hasan about Shazneen's death.

"I talked to her over my mobile phone bearing number 011-850309, distributed by the Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Ltd on behalf of the Transcom Distribution Company Ltd. On July 29, 1998, I sent a letter seeking detailed call report of April, 1998, those of The Pacific Ltd. supplied it along with Hasan's phone bearing number 507294, on August 6, 1998," Masum said.

Replying to a question Masum said he telephoned twice after the tragic death of the victim and talked to his aunt.

The prosecution lawyers yesterday submitted the documents relating to telephonic conversation to the court for information and to prove its reality.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, the youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, Chairman of Transcom Ltd, was raped and murdered at

their Gulshan residence on April 23, 1998.

Special Public Prosecutors ABM Sharifuddin Khan Mukul, Mahbub Ahmed and Arfan Uddin Khan appeared for the state. Advocates Mosharraf Hossain Kajol and Mizanur Rahman defended the accused.

The court had earlier fixed July 13 for cross-examination of Maksudul Rahman Patwari, a metropolitan magistrate. He gave his deposition on Tuesday.

SAARC summit

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ward in the area of economic cooperation."

SAARC, which includes one-fifth of the world's population, was formed in 1985 to promote trade between member nations. Founders hoped it would help fight the region's chronic poverty.

However, progress has been held up due to the tensions in Jammu and Kashmir. SAARC missed deadlines in 2001 and 2002 for a proposed free trade treaty, and the January 2002 summit was held three years late.

On Wednesday, Sibal pressed Pakistan to do more to stop terrorists who cross from Pakistani territory into Jammu and Kashmir.

"We expect that more concrete and credible steps can be taken on the issue of infiltration and the infrastructure of terrorism, and that will open doors to a dialogue," Sibal said. Islamabad denies India's claims that it provides material support to terrorists operating in Jammu and Kashmir.

JEC agenda

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Besides, a few influential ministers in the cabinet were also known to be against such move fearing adverse reaction in the political front.

Earlier, the finance ministry opposed a commerce ministry decision in allowing movement of Indian goods from one State to another through Bangladesh territory.

The commerce ministry gave permission to a private firm to re-export Indian goods, which had also been stopped due to the opposite stance of the two ministries, sources said.

As far as FTA is concerned, Bangladesh's response will be positive at the upcoming meeting which is likely to set specific timeframe to initiate dialogue on a bilateral trade pact between Dhaka and New Delhi.

"Dhaka might opt for study and assessment to reach a consensus on transshipment, transit and gas export to India during the JEC meeting," a high official in the economic relations division (ERD) said.

On the issue of non-tariff barriers, often imposed on Bangladesh export items to Indian market, Dhaka would seek duty-free entry of all Bangladeshi items to India to

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They said the government will push ahead with its decision to promote officials of the two batches to additional secretaries even if it means it has to 'relax' the promotion policy. Sources added that a total of 173 officials of the 1977 and 1979 batches were made joint secretaries against only 46 vacancies before. The latest spell of promotion came on June 13, 2002, with 173 officials upgraded to joint secretary.

Since then, 49 joint secretaries have retired, two have taken voluntary retirement, three have been forced to retire and five promoted to additional secretaries. Moreover, 41 more joint secretaries will retire by year-end.

Still, the government is unnecessarily holding off filling a vacuum of 59 joint secretary posts in the administration, said sources.