

Search for 3 cars packed with explosives in Najaf

Two killed as cleric's bodyguard opens fire

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi authorities are searching for three cars laden with explosives believed to have entered Najaf, where a double car bomb killed a top Shiite religious leader and 82 other people last week, Iraqi police said.

"We received information that three car bombs had entered Najaf and we are searching them," Major Tariq Jamel told the wire service.

The search began as tens of thousands marched through Baghdad in a funeral procession for the revered Muslim Shiite Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer al-Hakim.

Hakim was assassinated in last Friday's bomb massacre at Najaf, 180 kilometres south of the capital, that also left a further 125 people wounded.

Four men, two Iraqis and two Saudis, believed to have links with

the regime of ousted Iraqi president Saddam Hussein and the al-Qaeda terror network are being held over the massacre.

"Two are Iraqis from Basra, who belonged to the former regime, while the other two are Arab Wahhabis," Najaf Governor Haidar Mehdi Matar told AFP. "They confessed to the bombing."

Tens of thousands marched early yesterday through Baghdad in a funeral procession for Baqer al-Hakim.

The procession was led by a coffin carrying the remains of his body.

Hakim's body will be transported to the Shiite holy city of Karbala today for a similar procession, before his corpse is returned to Najaf for burial tomorrow.

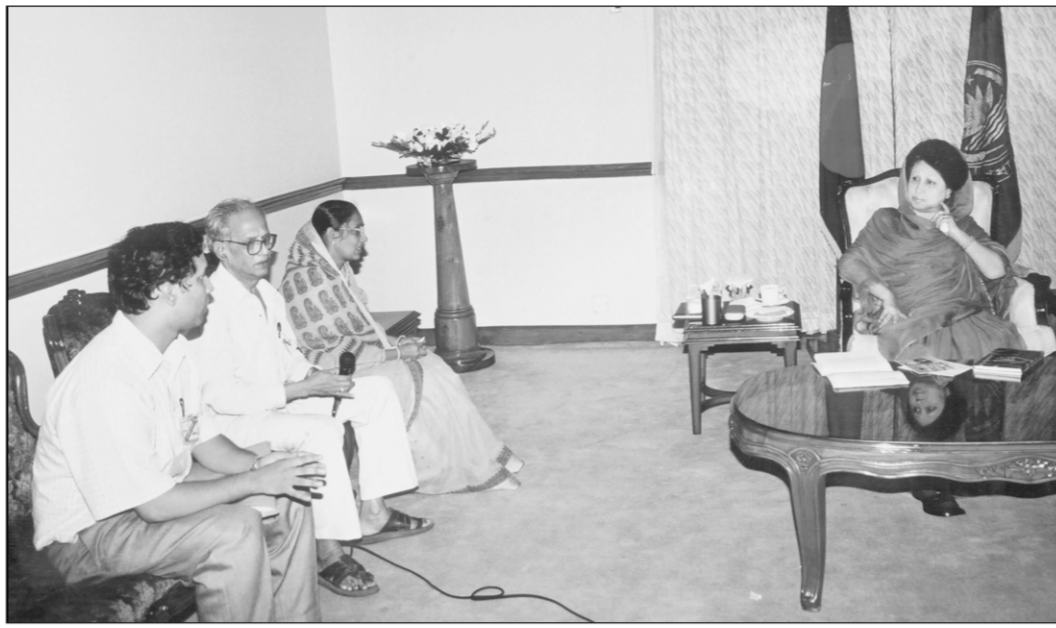
Meanwhile, bodyguards of firebrand Iraqi cleric Moqtada Sadr

opened fire yesterday on a car at a checkpoint in Najaf, killing two people and seriously wounding two others, according to hospital sources and relatives of the dead.

A mother and father were taking their daughter and her husband to a medical clinic near Sadr's home when they hit a checkpoint manned by Sadr's men who opened fire when the car sped forward, the sources said.

"Sadr's people had set up a checkpoint on the road. When the driver saw the roadblock, he thought the bodyguards were thieves and accelerated and the guards opened fire," said Haidar Abbas, in charge of admissions at the city's maternity hospital.

The guards had set up a checkpoint since Saturday around Sadr's house in the aftermath of Friday's double car bombing in Najaf.



Family members of murdered computer engineer Srikanta Rakshit of Chittagong meet Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her Hare Road office yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Govt to fight gas crisis

FROM PAGE 1
"And from then on, we will start to witness complete exhaustion of reserves at the existing gas fields. By 2020, all the proven gas reserves should be exhausted."

To tackle the gas crisis, Petrobangla sought finances on an urgent basis for a number of projects, which includes a Tk 137 crore scheme for 30-inch pipeline

where Jamal could be kept hostage. We are just carrying out the search on the information from various sources," said a frustrated senior police official at Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) yesterday, seeking anonymity.

The police official's admission is however contrary to the claim of Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, who, on August 24, told journalists that the government knew the whereabouts of Jamal and that he would be rescued 'soon' by the joint forces.

The abduction case was meanwhile handed over to the Detective Branch of the CMP on Saturday to start the investigation afresh.

Mesbauddin was the Investigation Officer of the case and Officer-in-charge of Chandgao Police Station before his transfer from the CMP during a recent reshuffle in the police administration to bolster the rescue efforts.

A team of secret agencies from Dhaka is now in Chittagong, trying to trace Jamal if he is still alive and establish a connection with the kidnapers.

Sources said the government is even willing to arrange payments for the abductors against Jamal's release.

The meeting was also said Petrobangla has requested US company Unocal and Shell to augment gas supplies from the Jalalabad and Sangu fields.

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addition to its 170mmcf from December.

Talking to the BBC, State Minister for Energy Mosharraf Hossain meanwhile said the issue of gas export might be discussed later.

"The prime minister was concerned at the on-going gas crisis and power load shedding," he said.

"We only discussed the present problems. We talked about exploration of new gas fields. To deal with the gas crisis, we will be able to increase 30mmcf gas from Sangu in December," he said.

During this period the government, if needed, will keep two fertiliser factories shut for maintenance to let the situation improve, the minister said.

He also said the meeting approved a price policy for gas, power and petroleum. Prices of gas and petroleum will be reviewed every six months in light of international fuel price. Gas price will be adjusted if fuel price goes up by 10 per cent and petroleum prices will be modified if fuel price spirals by 5 per cent.

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5 held for link to Mumbai blasts

AFP, Mumbai

Indian police have arrested five people and questioned many more in their probe of twin car bombings in Mumbai that killed 52 and injured more than 150, a minister said yesterday.

"Five people whom we believe are involved in the bomb attacks have been arrested from various parts of the state and even outside Maharashtra," said Kripashankar Singh, home minister of Maharashtra province of which Mumbai is the capital.

Life under the coalition rule has become miserable because of widespread corruption and violence sponsored by the ruling party men, she alleged.

Referring to the recent killings of Khulna city AL chief Monzurul Imam and some other opposition leaders, Hasina asked the government to stop such 'killings, persecution and harassment'.

"About 24,000 leaders and workers of the Awami League have so far been killed under the alliance rule."

She said abduction of businessmen and schoolchildren emerged as a regular feature, exposing a serious control of the situation.

AL supporters also alleged that on Saturday night, supporters of the four-party alliance threatened voters including minorities of Badda, Jamshing Rajashon and Kamapada villages with revenge unless they voted for the four-party alliance candidate.

Aminur Rahman, newly elected ward commissioner of ward No. 6, alleged that a large number of fake votes were cast in the Kamapada centre, confirming the AL allegation about the centre.

Meanwhile, about 40 fake voters were reportedly arrested from different polling centres including Islamia Senior Madrasah, Savar Residential School, Rajshon Government Primary School and Imandipur Government Primary School.

Most of the female voters registered with these centres could not cast their votes due to fake voting.

"My vote had already been cast," said Nazma Akhtar, a voter of Radio Colony under ward No. 7, adding that many other women of her ward had the same experience.

AL candidate Imu said fake votes were cast throughout the electoral area, adding that the situation could have been prevented had the authorities deployed the army as requested by the Election Commission.

However, Mahfuza Akhter, election officer of Dhaka district, said, "The election was held in a free and fair manner without any untoward situation."

Members of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), police and ansars, and 70 magistrates patrolled the area during the polls.

Most offices, establishments, shops and farms in Savar remained closed throughout the day while cell phones were disconnected.

Hasina: Gas export

FROM PAGE 1
tion of the verdict on the Bangabandhu assassination case, she said the export would lead to corruption by the ruling alliance.

The AL called a country-wide dawn-to-dusk hartal for September 25 for the ouster of the government for what it said its failure to run the government. The AL will also march in the city on September 15.

"When the country's industries are suffering from acute gas crisis, the present government is conspiring to sell gas abroad as it came to power signing a bond to this end," she alleged.

"Through proper utilisation of natural gas resources, we can eradicate poverty."

Hasina urged all pro-liberation forces to join hands against the 'misrule and misdeeds' of the government and build a strong movement for its immediate ouster.

The former prime minister accused the government of patronising communal militants to eliminate the forces who believe in Bangladesh's independence, especially the AL leaders and adherents.

Hasina was critical of the role of Jamaat-e-Islami ministers in the cabinet, saying: "A Jamaat minister, who had ruined the country's agriculture sector, now heads the industries ministry to destroy it."

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3 Jama'atul members sent to jail

BSS, Khetlal, Joypurhat

A court here yesterday sent three suspected 'area chiefs' of outlawed Jama'atul Mujahidin to jail after a 10-day interrogation by the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) in Dhaka.

Police said Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of CID Police Abdul Mannan and Special Superintendent of Police (SSP) of CID Akhter Ali from Dhaka yesterday visited Uttar Moheshpur village under Khetlal upazila of Joypurhat where a 45-minute fierce gunbattle between members of Jama'atul Mujahidin and police took place on August 15.

Six policemen were injured while three shotguns, ammunition and a wireless set belonging to police were snatched by the militants during the incident.

Police said that, 38 suspected militants were arrested, and two foreign-made revolvers, one shutter gun, eight bullets and a huge quantity of explosives seized in different places of the village. But the looted arms and ammunition are yet to be recovered.

Police are yet to trace suspected Mujahidin commander Montezar Rahman and his family members who are still absconding.

Three constables were suspended, and five police officials and nine constables served with showcause notices after the incident.

Kelly's widow

FROM PAGE 12
and stockpile such weapons for both military and terrorist use," Kelly wrote.

He added: "Perhaps the real threat from Iraq today comes from covert use of such weapons against troops or by terrorists against civilian targets worldwide..."

"The long-term threat, however, remains Iraq's development to military maturity of weapons of mass destruction — something that only regime change will avert."

Documents released by the inquiry over the weekend revealed that Britain's internal security service MI5 carried out a secret analysis of BBC reports on the government's September dossier to find out who its source was.

MI5 reported back on July 1: "The source appears to be an expert on current and recent past Iraq weapons capability, sufficiently well informed to give a statistical figure on the capability."

By that stage, Kelly had come forward to confirm to his superiors that he had met Andrew Gilligan, a BBC radio defence correspondent, a few days before Gilligan first aired the "sexed up" allegations on May 29.

Besides Kelly's widow, the inquiry will hear this week from his daughter, his sister, several of his friends, and police who searched for, then found his body July 18 with a slit wrist in woodland near his Oxfordshire home.

Once the last witness is heard Thursday, Hutton is expected to adjourn hearings until September 15 when some witnesses will be recalled. Observers expect his final report will not be out before the end of October.

Another flop

FROM PAGE 1
strating yet another futile exercise since the rescue operation began 38 days back.

"We really don't have any idea where Jamal could be kept hostage. We are just carrying out the search on the information from various sources," said a frustrated senior police official at Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) yesterday, seeking anonymity.

The police official's admission is however contrary to the claim of Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, who, on August 24, told journalists that the government knew the whereabouts of Jamal and that he would be rescued 'soon' by the joint forces.

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Shazneen case

FROM PAGE 1
the Gulshan Police Station the following day accusing Shahidul alias Shahid, a domestic help at his house.

Mojibur Rahman, assistant superintendent of CID (Criminal Investigation Department), filed a rape case with the Gulshan Police Station on September 4, 1998, accusing Shahid, Hasan, Badal, Shaniram, Humayun (now dead), Minu and Parvin.

Mojibur, who was also investigation officer of the rape case, submitted a chargesheet against Shahid and five others on December 12, 1998, showing 74 people as prosecution witnesses.

The tribunal framed charges against the six chargesheeted accused on April 13, 1999.

After the charges were framed, defence lawyers filed a criminal appeal with the High Court (HC) Division seeking stay on charge framing.

After hearing, the HC Division stayed proceedings of the case on August 25, 1999. Later, the HC Division vacated the stay order on November 1, 1999, and directed the tribunal to frame charges against the accused.

Subsequently, charges were framed on May 28, 2000.

The HC Division also stayed the proceedings of the Shazneen murder case, pending with the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, till disposal of the Shazneen rape case.

The death of Shazneen sent a wave of shocks across the country. Various human rights groups and civil society members are eagerly awaiting the verdict of the case.

NGO director

FROM PAGE 12
his ignorance of the incident to The Daily Star.

But Executive Director Nazrul Islam in a statement said the NGO authorities were trying to pay back its clients as soon as possible.

About the dishonoured cheques, he said the situation arose when all clients, pressed by a certain circle, demanded their money back at a time.

The statement also claimed that the other branches of the NGO were running smoothly and termed the problem of the head office 'temporary'.

400 fake tickets

FROM PAGE 12
a check, the officials found 400 of the 2,000 tickets fake.

The director in an instant order suspended ticket sellers Abdul Mannan and Mofazzal Hossain Khan and Office Assistant Nuruzzaman, who supply the tickets every morning to the ticket counter.

A general diary (GD) was also lodged with Ramna Police Station against them.

Meanwhile, a four-member committee with Prof. FM Siddique of the Department of Medicine as its head was formed to probe the incident. Other members of the committee are Dr Saifullah, Dr Khwaja Habib and Dr Mazhar Shaheen.

Sources said the sale of counterfeit tickets from the OPD ticket counter has been going on for a long time. "Some dishonest DMCH employees are carrying out the act in connivance with top officials for over ten years," said a senior DMCH

doctor, seeking anonymity.

After printing at the BG Press at Tejgaon, the tickets are kept at the DMCH store and later at the deputy director's room from where an office assistant takes them to the counter every morning.

DMCH sources said the people involved in the exercise are themselves responsible for the counterfeiting. While selling the tickets, they mix up the counterfeit tickets with the real ones.

More than 1,400 tickets are sold at the OPD counter from 8:00am to 2:30pm a day, and the DMCH gets proceeds from the sale of 800 to 1,200 tickets. The rest of the tickets are fake and the proceeds from their sale do not go to the coffers.

In 2000, five DMCH employees were caught selling counterfeit tickets and a committee was formed to investigate the matter. However, no action was taken against the accused.

Proshika

FROM PAGE 12
to release funds for its 'Towards a Poverty Free Society' project.

According to a government circular, decisions for such applications should be cleared within 14 days, but the bureau did not reply as yet.

The bench comprising Justice Amirul Kabir Chowdhury and Justice Syed AB Mahmud Haque issued the notice.

Dr Kamal Hossain, Dr Shirin Sharmin and Barrister Tania Amir moved the petition, while Deputy Attorney General Adilur Rahman appeared for the state.

Least interest in less interest

FROM PAGE 1
was the Pakistan experience where monetary vigil has pushed down the interest rate to as low as 1.5 per cent, even under inflation rate.

But this apparently did not work because of weak market forces and high spread the banks keep between deposit and lending rates.

Bankers now feel that with the new move to allow private banks to have deposits of government funds, the banks will have access to cheap cash and so, their lending rates will tumble.

Moreover, the BB has planned to make the interest rate on savings instruments tagged to treasury bill rates from December. This will further allow banks to offer lower the deposit rates.

At the end of the day, bankers feel they will be able to cut rates at least by 1 to 1.5 per cent.

With the current spread, banks are making huge profits every year with their cumulative profits in the last six months standing at about Tk 800 crore.

Some commercial banks are making high profits in the form of as much as 50 to 100 per cent return on their capital and with the current market value of shares, most sponsors get about 100 per cent returns a year.

The banks now maintain about 5-6 per cent spread, which many bankers feel should be at around 3-4 per cent in an ideal situation. For example, in the US, the Fed rate is now 1 per cent and the prime lending rate is 4 per cent.

According to a central bank study, the average cost of funds of the nationalised as well as private and foreign banks operating in

Bangladesh is 9 per cent, while the average interest rate on advances is 13.10 per cent.</