

Four killed in Saudi hostage standoff

Three gunmen and a Saudi security man died yesterday in a shootout at a hospital in the south of the kingdom, an interior ministry spokesman said after residents and staff reported hostages had been taken.

Four more policemen were lightly wounded while two militants surrendered, the ministry spokesman said in a statement carried by the Saudi Press Agency.

He hinted the operation was still underway, saying, "We will later announce developments."

"The terrorists opened fire on the security forces, killing a policeman and lightly wounding four others," the spokesman said. "Two of the terrorists then surrendered while three others were killed."



PHOTO: STAR
Demonstrators of Projonmer Chetona protest the recent attacks on the indigenous people at Mahalchhari in Khagrachhari and demand justice for the deaths of children, in front of the National Museum in Dhaka yesterday.

Unfit launches still on the loose

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 50 "risky and unfit" launches are still being allowed to ferry passengers despite the prime minister's directive to clamp down on such unworthy passenger vessels, the likes of which have capsized in a series of recent accidents claiming hundreds of lives.

Official sources said 57 passenger vessels recently identified by the shipping ministry as risky and unfit for operation are still carrying passengers on different routes.

Only four of those launches reportedly corrected their faults recently but the rest are still carrying on with their "risky business" as usual, said the sources.

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday that the "risky and unfit" launches have been given three to six months to remove structural faults through repair and incorporating safety mechanisms.

"These launches will lose their route permits unless the faults are corrected within the stipulated time," Akbar said.

He said the shipping ministry has assigned four categories to some 2,100 passenger vessels -- category A (good), B (passable), C (needs repair) and D (risky and unfit for operation).

All vessels regardless of their category have been instructed to meet design and safety specifications to avoid cancellation of licence and route permit or fine, he added.

The minister said all-out measures have been taken to avert any accidents while magistrates, law enforcers and ministry officials are actively overseeing launch operations both at the terminals and on river routes.

He said the government has finalised a decision to build three big passenger vessels at a cost of Tk 15 crore. Local tenders for the project have already been floated and several domestic dockyards have responded to the bidding.

Ctg Port accident Containers yet to be salvaged

BSS, Ctg

Six containers -- five from MV Bangabiraj and one from Panama flag carrier MV Eagle Strength -- that fell into the Chittagong Port channel after the two ships collided head on Sunday evening are yet to be retrieved.

The containers fell off the ships when the collision occurred near the BNS Isha Kha installation, port sources said.

Eighteen BNS ships were also damaged in the incident. Stevedoring agents of the MV Bangabiraj told BSS yesterday that the ship was sailing off for Singapore on Sunday evening with 194 containers of export items like garment, leather, jute and tea worth about Tk 30 crore as well as 286 empty containers.

Technical training centres to be set up in 444 UZs in phases: Khaleda

UNB, Kushtia

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday announced that technical training centres would be set up in phases in 444 upazilas of the country.

Inaugurating the Kushtia Technical Training Centre, she hoped that the training centre would produce skilled manpower in line with requirements at home and abroad.

"Percentage of overseas employment has increased due to our

A particular party conspiring against country, says PM

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said here yesterday that a particular political party is conspiring against the country.

She appealed to the people to remain alert against the conspiracy.

In an oblique reference to the main opposition Awami League (AL), she said this party was killing people and blaming others to create lawlessness in the country.

The BNP chairperson was addressing a rally at Kushtia Government University College ground yesterday afternoon. Earlier, Khaleda inaugurated the newly-constructed Kushtia Technical Training Centre at Chourash in the town at 1:00pm.

Khaleda said, "There is no terrorist in the country but the AL is engaged in terrorist activities across the country." She claimed that the AL is trying to create lawlessness when the BNP is leading the country towards development.

Khaleda said the AL does not see anything beyond its own interests. "It

Powell calls US 'Judeo-Christian,' then amends

REUTERS, United Nations

US Secretary of State Colin Powell called the United States a Judeo-Christian country on Monday but quickly amended that to "a country of many faiths."

The first amendment to the US constitution prohibits the establishment of any state religion -- a provision usually interpreted as requiring strict separation of church and state, though Christian activists dispute that.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman requested the investments in a written

WB-IMF annual meeting Saifur seeks investment from dev partners

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh sought more investments from all multilateral and bilateral development partners in social and physical infrastructures, as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) sat for fixing their lending strategy.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman requested the investments in a written statement presented at the joint annual meeting of the two Bretton Woods institutions that began in Dubai yesterday.

In the statement, faxed here yesterday, Bangladesh detailed its successes in financial reforms, achieving 5.3 per cent GDP growth in 2002-03, containing inflation to around 5 per cent, doubling foreign-exchange reserves in last two years and curtailing fiscal deficits.

"The benefits of these reforms cannot be reaped fully unless investment in physical and social infrastructures are accelerated," says the presentation made by the Bangladesh delegation on behalf of the finance minister.

Saifur went to Dubai on September 18 to join the meeting

Hasina for unchanged WB dev policies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Leader and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina in her first meeting yesterday with the newly-appointed World Bank (WB) Country Director Christine Wallich emphasised the need for continuing national development programmes even after changes of government.

Wallich agreed to Sheikh Hasina's proposal for balanced development in all the 300 constituencies of Bangladesh, without discrimination on political considerations.

The meeting was held at Hasina's Sudha Sadan residence in the city.

"The government may change but that does not mean that development policies will have to be changed," political secretary to the AL chief, Saber Hossain Chowdhury,

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Sept 24		5-53 pm
Sept 25	5-48 am	

Prayer Timings		
September 24		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	4-45	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-20
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-00	6-05
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya banned from reporting for two weeks

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's US-installed Governing Council on Tuesday banned the Arab satellite TV stations Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya from covering government activities here for two weeks, a statement said. It said the action was taken as a warning to them and other broadcasters for allegedly inciting anti-US violence, but stopped short of closing their bureaus here as announced earlier by a government spokesman.

"Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya will temporarily be excluded from any coverage of Governing Council activities or official press conferences, and correspondents of the two channels will not be allowed to enter ministries or government offices for two weeks," it said.

The statement made no mention of coverage of US military activities

3 UP members abducted in Khagrachhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Criminals yesterday set a shop and three houses on fire at Perachra village and abducted three union parishad (UP) members from a nearby village.

Sources in the security forces said a gang of 15 to 20 criminals attacked the village at around 5:00am and set the shop and houses alight by spraying kerosene. They also beat up three persons.

The criminals also abducted Sanjit Tripura, Josna Kanti Tripura and Khokon Lal Tripura, all UP members, from Tolachhara village while fleeing the scene.

"The criminals in camouflage dresses backed by the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) are responsible for the attacks," said Nihar Bindu Chakma, owner of the shop.

On information, the security forces rushed to the spot. But they are yet to nab any.

The United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) blamed the PCJSS for the incident and said goods worth about Tk 5 lakh were burnt including Tk 80,000 in cash.



PHOTO: STAR
Preparations for Durga Puja near completion as an artisan puts the last touches on the figures to accompany Durga, at the Ram Sita Temple in Narayanganj yesterday.

Angry job seekers block Old Airport Road

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly 200 applicants, who are yet to get admit cards to appear in the written test on Friday for the post of Sub-Register, blocked the Old Airport Road in front of the Public Service Commission (PSC) for about an hour yesterday.

The young job seekers got furious as they did not get admit cards four days before the test.

The applicants, who went to the PSC, turned unruly failing to get admit cards four days before the test and blocked the road from 12 noon to 1:00pm creating a huge traffic gridlock.

A member of the PSC requesting anonymity said the PSC usually approves a second admit card if there is any disruption in the postal services. The applicants will be issued admit cards if their application forms are not incomplete, he added.

Criminals buzz on hospital phones

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Criminals allegedly aided by a section of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) employees frequently make international calls from telephones at hospitals and clinics in Moghbazar area of the city, causing a huge financial burden on them in phone bills.

Most calls are made to other members of the criminal gangs, who are hiding abroad, especially in Kolkata, sources said.

"I suspected the mischief when I received telephone bills for July," said the owner of a hospital at Moghbazar. "I checked out with the owners and staff of some other hospitals in the area about their phone bills and learnt that they too got ghost bills," he said.

"Some local criminals make calls from our numbers, threatening our staff with dire consequences if they do not keep it a secret," the hospital owner said.

A telephone operator at another hospital said, "The gang members come in the morning, afternoon and at night and shout at us if we refuse to let them use our phones," he said, seeking anonymity.

"We don't understand what they say as they take the phone set a little away and make calls," the operator said.

Surprisingly, the BTTB staff promptly connect the gang members' desired numbers abroad although others have to wait for long, sometimes several hours, to get the numbers, he said. "Certainly there is a nexus between these criminals and the BTTB men, who