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Tougher law against land grabbers on cards

Secretaries demand change of office timing at meeting with PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday identified land grabbing as a national problem and decided to make tougher laws against such acts.

A meeting of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia with all secretaries at Bangladesh Secretariat yesterday took the decision.

A high-powered secretarial committee headed by Cabinet Secretary Dr Saadat Husain will make recommendations on the issue on the basis of which a national committee would be formed.

Briefing reporters, the cabinet secretary said the issue of land grabbing by a section of real estate companies and unscrupulous gangsters prominently figured in the discussion as the situation has taken a serious turn.

"Tougher actions have to be taken against the law breakers, obstructers of governance, tax and

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia speaks at a meeting with secretaries led by Cabinet Secretary Dr Saadat Husain at the Secretariat yesterday.

Police fail to rescue doctor, Jamal's fate still unknown

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police failed to rescue till yesterday evening the physician abducted from Satkania on the Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway.

The law enforcers said the drive was on to rescue local physician Dr Anil Chandra Shusil. He was kidnapped by armed men at 9:00pm on Thursday night while he was returning home in an auto-rickshaw from his chamber at Keranirhat in Satkania upazila.

Police arrested three suspects, including a woman, in connection with the abduction of Anil and started quizzing them to get clues.

The abduction of the physician is the 15th of its kind at Chittagong in the last 72 days, since the kidnapping of business magnate and BNP leader Jamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury.

The fate of Jamal is still not known, though law enforcers claim that they are trying to rescue him.

Police also said the hunt was on to arrest the prime accused, Abul Kasem, a UP chairman of Fatikchhari upazila.

Police believe Kasem crossed over to Tripura in India but he sometimes returns to Fatikchhari secretly.

When contacted, Arman Reja Rana, the second son of Jamal Uddin, said the family came to know from newspaper reports that he was held hostage by indigenous outlaws

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18 killed as suicide bomber strikes Israeli restaurant

AP/REUTERS, Jerusalem

A Palestinian attacker shot dead a security guard then blew himself up inside a packed beach restaurant yesterday, killing at least 18 people and wounding dozens, according to Israeli police.

It was one of the bloodiest attacks in the past three years of fighting. The deadline of the attack -- on the Sabbath before the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur -- raised the possibility that Israel could take action against Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Following the last suicide attack, nearly a month ago, the Israeli cabinet threatened to expel Arafat.

Police said a suicide bomber shot dead the security guard before entering the restaurant, a first in more than 100 suicide bombings in the past three years. In some past attacks, guards have succeeded in

stopping suicide bombers or in preventing them from reaching crowded areas, limiting casualties from the explosions.

The bomber then entered the restaurant and detonated explosives strapped to his body. Police said 18 were killed, including the guard who was shot, and a television report said five of the dead were children.

But a spokesman for the Magen David Adom ambulance service said, "There are 51 injured and about 18 dead."

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, which rescue officials attributed to a suicide bomber.

"There was a very big explosion, which blew out the windows. It was horrible," a witness, identified only as Eliad, told Channel One television.

After the blast, television images

showed bullet holes in the restaurant windows. A person dressed in the reflective vest commonly worn by security guards outside of restaurants and public places was seen lying face down on the front steps.

On Friday, the Islamic militant group Hamas said a barrier Israel is building in the West Bank would not prevent attacks on Israelis and doomed the U.S.-backed peace "road map" to failure.

The Hamas statement intensified a Palestinian campaign against the barrier, which Israel decided on Wednesday to extend deeper into Palestinian territory to enclose some big Jewish settlements.

"Israeli citizens were once again struck by Palestinian terrorists," said David Baker, an official in Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office.

UN rebuffs US over Iraq plans

BBC ONLINE

United Nations officials have underlined their intention to play no role in Iraq's political future unless the US revises its plans for the country.

A senior UN official told journalists that Washington would have to undertake a radical revision of the draft resolution on Iraq submitted to the Security Council.

The remarks echo unusual criticism expressed by the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan.

France, Russia and Germany have also expressed their concern, with Paris calling for a stronger role for the UN in Iraq.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said America was looking for "specific suggestions" on improving the resolution, ahead of Monday's meeting of the Security Council.

Annan made it clear at a private lunch with the 15 Security Council ambassadors that the UN was not prepared to risk its staff for the limited political role proposed by the US, a senior UN official said on Friday.

The BBC's UN correspondent Greg Barrow says it is rare for the UN to voice such candid opposition to plans put forward by one of its member states -- not least the most powerful.

But such is the level of concern about the situation in Iraq that Annan and his officials appear to have decided that the time has come to speak plainly.

Annan believes the US proposals would expose UN staff to added risk after two bombings at the UN's headquarters in Baghdad which

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CPA meet opens, efforts on to persuade Hasina

Headquarters officials to meet AL president today, 15 African observers stay off

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 49th CPA conference opened in Dhaka yesterday amid boycott by the main opposition, but the top officials of the association will try again to bring the Awami League to the meet at talks with its chief Sheikh Hasina today.

The launch of the Common-

wealth Parliamentary Association conference which will run until October 12 was also marked by the non-participation of 15 African observers and mismanagement in preparation.

A five-member CPA committee will hold talks with Hasina at 5pm at her Sudhasadan residence in Dhanmondi in its last bid to per-

suade her party lawmakers into the conference.

The AL skipped the conference in a break with the CPA tradition of host nation's opposition chief's speech to the meet launch, remaining unbending on its earlier decision in protest against what it said was 'the government's arrogant attitude

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Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's working party meeting gets underway after Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar's speech at the Sonargaon Hotel yesterday.

5 more Liakot associates arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Team (RAT) of police arrested five more associates of top criminal Liakot Hossain from Ramna area yesterday.

Police said RAT members arrested the five men from several places in Ramna following information provided by Liakot, his bodyguard and driver -- all now on police remand.

The arrested are Mehadul Islam, Mizanur Rahman Mizan, Abdul Majid, Monir Hossain and Russel Ahmed.

RAT sources quoting confessional statement of Liakot said two other top criminals Arman and Mollah Masud are now in Kolkata where Liakot had also been hiding in self-exile.

Liakot reportedly said he could help Kolkata Police arrest Arman and Mollah Masud.

The RAT on Wednesday arrested Liakot, one of the top 23 listed criminals of the city, along with two of his associates from Dhanmondi while he was going to collect extortion money from a businessman in the area. The following day, he was taken on a four-day police remand while each of the two others on a three-day remand.

Expert doubts Kay's claim of Iraq plan to revive nukes

'His report filled with belief, may, could have, statements, opinions'

REUTERS, Vienna

An expert close to the UN nuclear watchdog Friday cast doubt on new US claims that Saddam Hussein's Iraq had been planning to revive its atomic weapons programme until the US invasion in March.

Speaking to Reuters on condition of anonymity, the expert close to the International Atomic Energy Agency said David Kay's report was largely based on "statements and opinions

by scientists and officials with no apparent supporting evidence."

Kay, head of the US-led team which has been searching for evidence of Saddam's chemical, biological and nuclear weapons in postwar Iraq, said Thursday his team had found no stocks of such arms. But he said there was "evidence of Saddam's continued ambition to acquire nuclear weapons."

"The testimony we have obtained from Iraqi scientists and

senior government officials should clear up any doubts about whether Saddam still wanted to obtain nuclear weapons," Kay said of the interim report his team supplied to the US Congress.

"They (said) Saddam Hussein remained firmly committed to acquiring nuclear weapons."

The allegation that Saddam Hussein had revived his nuclear, chemical and biological weapons with applications for Tk 23 crore

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Six to die in two murder cases in Sylhet

UNB, Sylhet

A court here yesterday sentenced six people to death and one to life imprisonment in two separate murder cases.

The Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court awarded death sentence to Dhunu Mia, Ahmed Ali, Abdus Salam and Teramia and life imprisonment to Alamgir Hosain for killing one Asia Begum.

According to the prosecution, the convicts abducted Asia Begum of village Vapara in Bishwanath upazila on March 9, 1995 over a land dispute. Her beheaded body was found at Nilgaon village in Sadar upazila and head at Umairgaon village on March 15 the same year.

The judge acquitted 18 others as charges brought against them were not proved.

The same court, in another murder case, awarded death sentence to two persons for killing a man.

The convicts are Nooruddin and Sabul Mia of village Daudpur under South Surma Police Station.

According to the prosecution the convicts beat up Moktadir of the village near a local graveyard on November 12, 2000 as a sequel to previous enmity over a land dispute. Moktadir was rushed to Osmani Medical College Hospital where he died soon after admission.

The judge pronounced the judgement against the two, acquitting three others.

Record applications for Bank Asia IPOs

STAR REPORT

The initial public offering (IPO) of Bank Asia has set a new record by getting an overwhelming 5,500 percent response.

Against a public offer of Tk 20 crore, the bank received applications for a whopping Tk 1,100 crore, reflecting the huge interest of general and institutional investors in banks.

Eighty percent of the oversubscribed amount comes from institutional investors who constitute only 5 percent of the total number of applicants. The rest is from retail investors.

Stock market sources said the response exceeded all previous records in IPO subscription.

Non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) showed tremendous interest with applications for Tk 23 crore

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River-link project Delhi to consult Dhaka after taskforce report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi has assured Dhaka of consulting the mega river-link project with it after receiving the report of a taskforce headed by former Indian power minister Suresh Prabhu, Water Resources Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed told newsmen in Dhaka yesterday.

He was briefing newsmen at the water resources ministry on the outcome of the minister-level Indo-Bangla Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) meeting a day after his return from the Indian capital.

"We've succeeded in incorporating the issue (river-link project) into the official agenda and expressed our deep concern at its obvious fallout on Bangladesh's ecology."

Apart from the river-link issue, India also promised Bangladesh at the September 29-30 meeting that it would refrain from building embankment along the two-km non-demarcated Indo-Bangla border on the common Muhuri river and setting up any water diversion structure at Tipaimukh point in Tripura without consulting Bangladesh.

It also agreed to provide Bangladesh with 72-hour advance reports instead of the current 48-hour on river water flows in the upstream. India will also provide arsenic mitigation kits.

The JRC meeting resolved that the Indo-Bangla Joint Experts

Committee (JEC) headed by water resources secretaries of the two neighbouring countries would finalise a draft interim agreement on the Teesta water sharing by December this year for presentation



Hafizuddin Ahmed

at the January meeting in Dhaka. Sharing of waters of six other common rivers -- the Dharla, Dudhkumar, Monu, Muhuri, Khwai and Gumi -- still remained at study level, Hafizuddin said.

The JEC has been asked to carry out a joint survey and prepare a joint workplan in the earliest to enable both the nations to effectively handle devastating flood like the one in 2000 that caused serious damage to crops and livestock in the western region of Bangladesh.

Giving details of talks on the \$200

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Frigate case Hearing on charge-framing against Hasina on Oct 20

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka Court yesterday set October 20 as the date for the charge-framing hearing in the frigate purchase case against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and five other defendants.

Mohammad Azizul Haq, judge of the Special Court for Dhaka Division, adjourned the hearing following a time petition submitted by the defence lawyers of Sheikh Hasina.

The five other accused--FBCCI President Abdul Awal Mintoo, former chief of staff of Bangladesh Navy, Rear Admiral (ret'd) Nurul Islam, former assistant chief of staff (operations) of

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Bijoya Dashami today

BSS, Dhaka

Bijoya Dashami will be observed today to bid farewell to Goddess Durga with due religious fervour.

Today is the day when Durga sets out for Kailash, her husband's abode.

Starting from the day of Mahalaya, following a series of rituals on the days of Saptami, Ashtami and Nabami, the Durga Puja will be ended with Bijoya Dashami.

Hindus will immerse the image of the goddess in the river.

Bijoya Dashami is the special ritual to reaffirm peace and good relations among people. Families will exchange sweets and greetings with each other.

US anti-money laundering proposal under BB lens

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh is considering a US proposal on checking money laundering and transaction of black money by international terrorist groups in and out of the country.

As per a government decision yesterday, the American proposal will be scrutinised by the central bank before further action is taken in this regard.

The issue was discussed at a finance ministry meeting with the Bangladesh Bank and nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), with Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan in the chair.

They discussed the report of a US Government Financial System Assessment Team that visited Dhaka in May and submitted the proposal following interaction with various government agencies.

The report recommended formation of an independent financial

intelligence unit to monitor money laundering and dubious money transactions.

The US team felt that the Money Laundering Act in Bangladesh could not be enforced properly due to lack of an appropriate system.

Formation of the intelligence

unit will help plug the institutional loopholes and pave the way for enforcement of the act.

It also recommended creation of a new law enforcing agency or a strike force to exclusively deal with money laundering cases.

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