



Iraqi firemen extinguish a fire, started apparently by a loud blast, in two central Baghdad buildings that claimed the life of a man and wounded eight others on Thursday.

# US troops, Saddam followers clash: Blast rocks mayor's office

**AP, Baghdad**

American troops clashed with rioters carrying Saddam Hussein's picture in a Baghdad suburb yesterday, and heavy smoke billowed from the mayor's office in a city west of the capital following a big explosion.

In northern Iraq, American troops sealed off the village where Saddam was born and began issuing identity cards to the villagers to determine who can move in and out.

There were conflicting claims about what triggered the clash at Abu Ghraib, a suburb on the western side of the capital. Iraqis said it broke out when US troops tried to clear market stalls from a main road. But US officers at the scene said it began with a grenade attack against American soldiers that left two of them wounded.

Youths began throwing stones at troops and Iraqi police and set tires ablaze. Protesters carried Saddam's picture and shouted "Allahu Akbar," or "God is great."

After a three-hour interlude, gunfire erupted again as US armored vehicles moved into the area. Ten explosions were heard, and fleeing civilians said the US troops had "come under attack." Within a half hour the gunshots subsided.

Later, mortars fell on an Iraqi police station near the market. The Americans said they arrested two Iraqis carrying a mortar firing tube.

In Fallujah, a center of Sunni Muslim resistance 40 miles west of the capital, a strong explosion rocked the center of the city at midday. Heavy, black smoke could be seen billowing from the mayor's office.

Police said that following the explosion, residents shouted at the authorities that their neighborhood had become a target because the US-appointed mayor and other officials worked there. Civil defense officer Ahmed Khalil said police shot and killed a resident during the ensuing argument.

Later, residents angered by the police action broke into the smoldering building and looted the mayor's office. They eventually dispersed when US Humvees arrived with helicopters patrolling overhead.

An upsurge of attacks this week, coinciding with the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, has killed scores of people, most of them Iraqis in a series of vehicle bombings in Baghdad on Monday. The upsurge prompted the international Red Cross and the United Nations to remove foreign staff

## Govt using Speedy Trial Tribunals to repress political rivals: AL

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League (AL) yesterday urged the government "to shun political vengeance", accusing it of misusing Speedy Trial Tribunal to "repress political rivals."

Addressing a press conference at the party central office at Bangabandhu Avenue, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil MP condemned the filing of "false cases" against leaders and workers of the AL and its front organisations including Jubo League General Secretary Mirza Azam MP.

"Government's policy to repress the opposition in the name of curbing violence and improving law and order would not bring any good for the country," he said, and demanded immediate withdrawal of all "false cases".

The Awami League organised the press conference to protest "misuse of Speedy Trial Tribunal" against its leaders and workers.

Jalil said they apprehended from the beginning that the government

## Prices hit a new high, poor unnerved

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prices of most essentials, which marked a slight fall on Thursday, shot up again yesterday proving the government steps to tackle the crisis ineffective and sparking protests by socio-political organisations.

Sellers said prices rode on a wave of customers on Friday, but shoppers blamed 'dishonest' traders for their miseries, saying they put price tags on most items at will.

"Bare necessities are spinning out of our affordability," said Ekram Hossain, a shopper. "It's unnerving for the poor."

The kitchen markets in Dhaka were caught in a 'blame game' yesterday when retailers held wholesalers responsible for the price spiral while wholesalers shifted the blame onto extortion on inter-district transport routes.

"We are not charging high prices from customers mindlessly. Extortion of illegal toll by criminals from each truck ferrying goods to facilities is forcing prices up," a

Sehri, Iftar timings			
Ramadan	Nov	Sehri	Iftar
5	1		5-23
6	2	4-44	5-22

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Nov 01		5-19 pm
Nov 02	6-05 am	

Prayer Timings		
November 1		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	4-43	4-50
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-23	5-30
Esha	7-30	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		

# Safta to feature high at 12th Saarc summit

**RAFIQ HASAN**

The initiative to turn the South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement (Sapta) into the South Asia Free Trade Area (Safta) will dominate discussion at the 12th Saarc summit level conference to be held in Islamabad January 4-6 next year.

According to sources in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the other topics that will predominate are an agreement on the Saarc social charter and adoption of an Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA).

The seven member states of Saarc are now negotiating among themselves to reach a consensus on the issues.

All heads of government from the seven member countries are expected to participate in the conference.

Three high-level pre-summit meetings will also be held in Islamabad to settle the agenda for the summit.

The Saarc programme committee meeting will be held on December 29-30, the Saarc standing committee meeting on December 31-January 1 and the council of



Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon holds a rally at Shahbabbh in Dhaka yesterday demanding an end to widespread use of harmful colours and preservatives in food items, including iftar delicacies.

# Foolproof software to cut passport fraud

**MUSTAK HOSSAIN**

A team of students and teachers of computer science at North South University (NSU) has developed new software and integrated hardware to locally produce foolproof machine-readable passports (MRPs).

The MRPs will help combat the rising passport forgery and save foreign currency now spent on import of about 10 lakh passports a year, team sources said.

The programme combines fingerprint and digital picture in passports. Fingerprint remains as a unique feature because it cannot be duplicated by any means, said Dr Abdul Awal, a faculty member of computer science, who supervised the project.

The team members are three students Karim Khan, Sabit Anjum Sayeed and Sadrul Habib Chowdhury and faculty member Dr Rokonzaman.

Under the new system, no-one will be able to have more than one passport even if one uses a different name, parents' name, date of birth and address, as the central database, which will have a register of fingerprints, will detect the person, Awal told The Daily Star.

Wahedul Haq, director general of the Directorate of Passport and Immigration, said they have examined the new software. "It is a tremendous effort and so far we have found it foolproof and applicable," he added.

Awal said there can be a central database connected with all passport offices and whenever a request for a passport is processed, the requested data will tally with available records and notify accordingly. In the process, passport officials will record fingerprint of thumb and take a digital picture of the passport seeker.

"All we need is a computer, a fingerprint detector and a digital camera along with the software," he said.

"We need not go for international bidding to prepare MRPs, as we will be able to prepare them

# BTV modernisation plan stalls for lack of tender expertise

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Lack of initiatives and expertise in preparing tenders and red tape have stalled the move to modernise the state-owned Bangladesh Television (BTV).

Officials said foreign firms are reluctant to bid for the job since the authorities had cancelled tenders. Moreover, the bidding preconditions set by the BTV authorities are discouraging reputed international companies from bidding.

A senior official at the Ministry of Information told The Daily Star that the BTV authorities are killing time to prepare the tender documents. They are taking a lot of time to scrutinise each tender despite repeated instructions to expedite the move.

The official, who wished not to be named, said the government made adequate budgetary allocation for the purchase of an array of equipment and install a satellite earth station to bolster its overseas transmission.

Sources said the news studio, sound recording studio and three transmitters in Khulna, Sylhet and Natore have long been in run-down condition and run the risk of collapse. Even after their expiry long ago, the machines are still in operation.

Officials said Information Minister Tariqul Islam soon after taking office took steps to modernise the BTV and got additional funds for replacement of old equipment, purchase of latest ones and installation of satellite to improve the quality of BTV programmes.

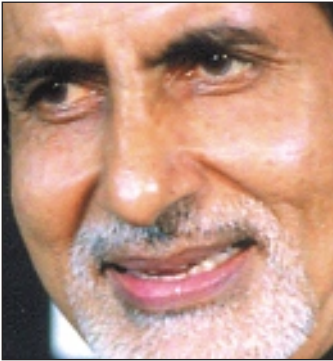
The BTV director general at a press conference on June 26 in presence of the information minister announced a series of modernisation projects and hoped to complete most programmes by this year. Some projects including installation of satellite stations were due this month, but none of them is in sight.

The authorities initiated the process to replace the 10 transmitters across the country to improve the terrestrial transmission in phases. A tender was floated to procure three VHF (very high frequency) Band 3 Solid State Transmitters in the first phase.

But the transmitters in Khulna, Sylhet and Natore are still to be procured due to the tender complexity. The transmitters could not be purchased although bids were invited three times but the BTV 'experts' are still scrutinising the tender documents.

A high official of the ministry said the seven other transmitters also need replacements. Besides, the process to gather SNG unit to telecast news and programmes live is yet to start.

Referring to a tender published in newspapers on October 22, inviting bids for purchase of equipment for a news studio, a drama studio, a



## Bachchan new UN goodwill ambassador

AFP, Ned Delhi

Bollywood's biggest star Amitabh Bachchan has been appointed Unicef's goodwill ambassador to promote the rights of children in India and around the world, a Unicef statement said yesterday.

"I am extremely pleased to accept this responsibility," Bachchan said.

"I hope that by adding my voice to the cause of children it will make a difference in the lives of boys and girls here at home and across the region," he added.

Bachchan will speak on issues critical to the lives of children such as HIV/AIDS, polio eradication and the need for all girls to have an opportunity to go to school, the statement said.

"Bachchan's tremendous appeal to young people makes him an ideal goodwill ambassador. When he speaks, people from all walks of life, from the youngest to oldest, listen