

# Iraqi cleric Al-Sadr unharmed in mortar attack

AP, Baghdad

A mortar round slammed to earth near Muqtada al-Sadr's home yesterday in the Shia holy city of Najaf, but the popular anti-American cleric was not hurt, an aide said.

A child and at least one guard were wounded in the attack, which hit some 165 feet from al-Sadr's home, according to police and al-Sadr aide Sheikh Sahib al-Amiri. The aide said al-Sadr was home but was not injured.

Iraqi troops sealed the area and the cleric's Mahdi Army militia surrounded the home after the attack, al-Amiri said. Al-Sadr lives near the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf, about 90 miles south of Baghdad.

Shortly after the attack, the cleric issued a statement calling for calm.

"I call upon all brothers to stay calm, and I call upon Iraqi army to protect the pilgrims as the Nawasib (militants) are aiming to attack Shiites everyday," he said ahead of Wednesday's commemoration marking the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

Najaf police chief called the assault a "cowardly attack" by those still loyal to Saddam Hussein aimed at dividing the Iraqi people.

"But this will not happen," Maj Gen Abbas Mi'adal told reporters near al-Sadr's home. "We are ready to confront any terrorist schemes and protect the pilgrims."

At least 10 Iraqis were killed in violence elsewhere, including a 13-year-old boy killed by a bomb as he walked to school in the southern city of Basra. Police also found 11 handcuffed and bullet-riddled bodies dumped in Baghdad and two in the city of Baqouba.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, meanwhile, said the U.S.

could withdraw a significant number of troops from Iraq this year if Iraqi forces are able to assume greater control of the country's security.

"I think it's entirely probable that we will see a significant drawdown of American forces over the next year. ... It's all dependent on events on the ground," the chief American diplomat said Sunday, echoing military commanders.

Just this past week, Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld declined to predict when US forces would be out of Iraq. President Bush has said that decision would be up to a future US president and a future Iraqi government.

Rice, on NBC's "Meet the Press," noted that Gen. George Casey, the top commander in Iraq, "has talked about a significant reduction of American forces over the next year. And that significant reduction is because Iraqi forces are taking and holding territory now."

There were conflicting reports about Sunday's attack in Najaf, which came a day after the cleric's Mahdi Army militia forces battled with Sunni insurgents near Mahmoudiya, about 20 miles south of the capital. Seven people — most civilians killed in their homes by mortar fire — died in the gunbattle and several others were wounded.

Al-Sadr's aide said two mortar rounds fell near the home Sunday, wounding two guards and the child, while the police chief said it was just one mortar round that wounded one guard and the child.

Al-Sadr, who routinely blames the United States for the violence that has beset the country, said American troops were trying to drag Iraqis into "sectarian wars."

"I call upon my brothers not to be trapped by the Westerners' plots,"

he said.

Al-Sadr is a major force among Shiites, especially in Baghdad's Sadr City slum. His powerful militia is accused of carrying out sectarian revenge killings against Sunnis after the Feb. 22 bombing of an important Shiite shrine in Samarra.

The cleric, who was on a regional tour when the Samarra attack on the shrine took place, cut short his visit and came back "in order for the country not to be pulled to street battles. I wanted to salvage the Iraqi people from these problems."

Al-Sadr has close ties to Iran. His militia launched two uprisings against U.S. troops in 2004.

The bomb that killed the teenage boy was placed in front of his school in Basra, near the Iranian border southeast of Baghdad. It went off in the morning as children were arriving for classes, police said. The school week begins Sunday and runs through Thursday in Iraq, where Friday is the day of prayer for Muslims.

The attack was the latest in a startling increase of violence targeting regular Iraqi citizens.

A bomb also exploded in front of a house in central Baghdad, killing one woman and wounding two of her sisters and a man next door. And a truck driver was gunned down in west Baghdad, police said.

Drive-by shooters killed three teenagers and wounded another standing outside a house in south Baghdad's Dora district, police said.

# Nation celebrates

FROM PAGE 1

Main opposition Awami League brought out a colourful procession in the capital marking the day.

A combined parade of Bangladesh Army, Air Force, Navy, Bangladesh Rifles, police, Bangladesh National Cadet Corps and freedom fighters was held at the National Parade Square in the morning. President Iajuddin Ahmed viewed the parade and took salute at the march past.

The state-owned radio and television, and private television channels put up special programmes and newspapers brought out special supplements highlighting the significance of the day.

Special diet was served at hospitals, prisons, orphanages and vagrant homes.

The day was a public holiday. All government and important private buildings were illuminated with kaleidoscopic lights at night. Streets in the capital were decorated with national flag, banners and festoons.

Major political, social and cultural organisations observed the day through elaborate programmes.

The president, prime minister and leader of the opposition also gave messages on the eve of the Independence Day.

**AL PROCESSION**  
Thousands of people at an Independence Day procession organised by the main opposition AL in the capital vowed to resist Rajakars (collaborators of Pakistani occupation forces) and militant elements in the government.

Hundreds of enthusiastic people carrying national and party flags, portraits of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and party chief Sheikh Hasina, banners, placards and festoons began parading from in front of the historic Racecourse Maidan (Suhrawardy Udyan) and ended in front of Bangabandhu Bhavan at Dhanmondi road 32.

The enthusiastic AL workers chanted historic 'Joy Bangla' slogans and different anti-government slogans seeking immediate resignation of the BNP-Jamaat alliance government.

Mimicking the freedom fighters with several dummy armoured tanks, rifles, machineguns and other arms and ammunition, the processionists attracted attention of pedestrians. People on the left side of the road from Suhrawardy Udyan to Dhanmondi hailed the AL workers clapping.

With a big band group, around 50 trucks and other types of motor vehicles also took part in the rally that played national anthem and the historic speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

AL senior leaders Abdul Jalil, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Saranjit Sengupta, Matia Chowdhury, Oraunid Quader, Mukul Bose, Abdur Rahman, Prof Abuz Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Mofazzul Sayeed, Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, Yeafees Osman, Shahara Khatun, Nurul Islam Nahid, Kamal Majumder, HBM Iqbal, Mokbul Hossain, Habibur Rahman Siraj attended the rally.

**OTHER PROGRAMMES**  
Liberation War Museum organised a programme to amuse the children on its premises at 10:00am as part of a weeklong Independence Day programme.

Veteran artists took part in a painting programme where Mostafa Monwar, Quyum Chowdhury and many others took part.

Communist Party of Bangladesh

(CPB) leaders placed wreaths at the National Mausoleum at Savar in the morning led by its General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim.

Muktijoddha Oikya Parishad held a discussion and a cultural programme on 'Shikha Chirantan' premises from 8:01am to 11:01am.

Workers Party of Bangladesh held a discussion at Savar at 10:00am where party chief Rashed Khan Menon and some other central leaders addressed.

Jatiya Party (Manju) hoisted national flag at its party office at 6:30am and placed wreaths at the National Memorial in Savar at 7:30am.

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy held a discussion and cultural programme at its auditorium at 6:30pm. Journalist Gias Kamal Chowdhury and educationist Prof Abul Kashem Fazlul Haq attended.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu) placed wreaths at National Memorial at 8:00am. General Secretary Jafar Sazzad was present.

Other organisations including Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Jatiya Oikya Mancha, Dhaka Reporters Unity, Bangladesh Chhatra League, Jatayatabadi Chhatra Dal, Chhatra League (JSD), Samajtantrik Chhatra Front, Bangladesh Chhatra Maitree, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Swadhinata Rally Udyapan Committee, Nazrul Academy, Liberal Party Bangladesh, Freedom Fighters Peoples Council and Bangladesh Christian Association also observed the day and held separate programmes.

# Govt's successes

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Besides, a full-page picture of Ziaur Rahman on the inner cover was captioned 'the Proclaimer of Independence'.

Another page of the souvenir bore a photograph of the mausoleum of Ziaur Rahman.

Photographs of Dr Iajuddin Ahmed and Khaleda Zia appeared on the second and third pages as the president and supreme commander of the armed forces and as the prime minister and defence minister.

In the preface, Ziaur Rahman's role in the Liberation War was lauded as the proclaimer of independence while noting about any other leaders even Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was mentioned.

The brutal atrocities of the Pakistan Army on the fateful night of 25th March 1971 left the peace-loving people of the country shell-shocked, with no one around them to guide and lead the way. At this critical juncture, with his proclamation of independence on March 26, the then Major Ziaur Rahman helped the Bangalees overcome the initial shock and stand united against the military junta, the pre-amble reads.

Achievements of 34 ministries and divisions over the last four and a half years were also highlighted in the publication.

# Probe returns first Mars pictures

BBC ONLINE

Nasa is studying the first pictures taken of the surface of the Red Planet by the high-resolution cameras aboard the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO).

The spacecraft arrived at the planet two weeks ago with a mission to map the world in unprecedented detail.

The test images released by the US space agency (Nasa) on Friday show a swathe of land in the planet's mid-latitude southern highlands.

The probe is currently correcting its orbit and commissioning instruments.

Three cameras were used to take the crisp black and white images.

They captured the pictures while the spacecraft was flying about 2,490km above Mars' surface, about nine times the range planned for the orbiter's primary science mission.

Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory said the smallest objects that could be made out were about 7.6m across, but that once the orbiter descended to the lower mapping orbit the cameras would be able to pick out objects just under 1m across.

"These high-resolution images of Mars are thrilling, and unique given the early morning time of day. The final orbit of Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter will be over Mars in the mid-afternoon, like Mars Global Surveyor and Mars Odyssey," said Alfredo McEwen, University of Arizona, Tucson, principal investigator for the orbiter's High Resolution Imaging Science Experiment camera.

"These images provide the first opportunity to test camera settings and the spacecraft's ability to point the camera with Mars filling the instruments' field of view," said Steve Saunders, the mission's programme scientist at Nasa Headquarters.

Over a period of months, MRO's orbit will be changed from a highly elongated one to a near circle. It will also dip lower and lower until it reaches an altitude of 254km (158 miles).

# Garment safety

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might lead to a disaster. Even a shutdown in production for a few days will jumble up shipment schedules, leading to severe financial loss," he added.

He said the garment owners, in many cases, made long-term agreements with the building owners, paying them huge amount of money advance.

He also resented the Department of Fire Service and Civil Defence's initiative to launch mobile courts against the non-compliant garment factories.

Before taking such initiatives the owners should have been given some time to upgrade the required safety measures, he pointed out.

"We have asked the CDA and would call upon others including fire service, Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments to sit together and work out a way to improve the situation," he added.

Meanwhile, BGMETA leaders observed the recent fire incidents particularly the KTS one served a nasty blow to this sector. They said it had already got the image and reputation of this sector seriously damaged at home and abroad.

The BGMETA is making a serious effort to overcome the situation, they said.

# Low tariff

FROM PAGE 1

Tk 9.4 crore a month on average after the 2003 introduction of economy ISD rate from some Tk 8.27 crore earlier.

Encouraged, the board in January this year placed a proposal to the telecom ministry to expand the economy rate also for the new 15 countries. The proposal was then forwarded to the finance ministry, and Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman approved it recently and notified the decision to the post and telecommunications ministry. Illegal internet telephony or Voice-over Internet Protocol (VoIP) now drains out nearly Tk 1,000 crore business of BTTB a year.

"We're looking for ways to increase our income as VoIP has badly hit our revenue, which is still on the decline. A reduced rate will help us increase the income, as roughly 40 per cent of BTTB's revenue comes from international calls," a highly placed BTTB source explained.

The BTTB currently charges Tk 24 and Tk 18 per minute respectively during the peak and off-peak hours for calling to China, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Brunei, and Tk 27 and Tk 21 during the peak and off-peak hours for the rest of the proposed 15 countries.

From April 1 the NWD telephone users will be able to make ISD calls to these countries at the economy rate through direct dialling by using a new code '012'. A subscriber will also can make calls to those countries by using the existing '00' code but for existing charges.

The board, however, proposed a Tk 18 charge per minute for making calls to mobile phones in 11 of the 15 countries excluding China, South Korea, Thailand and Brunei.

The government first decided to legalise VoIP in June 2002 and a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia cleared the decision on November 10, 2003. However, the decision is yet to be implemented.

# Scientists say

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The implication is that Greenland would eventually melt by as much in response to present warming.

The findings come from two studies published in Science by Dr Jonathan Overpeck, of the University of Arizona in Tucson, and colleagues.

Their computer models show that, in addition to widespread melting of the Greenland ice sheet, this rate of warming could also lead to the collapse of about half of the West Antarctic ice sheet in 500 years.

Dr Overpeck's team used computer models to simulate the climate 130,000 years ago. Because Earth was tilted slightly more than today on its axis, more solar radiation hit the northern latitudes, driving warming there.

The researchers found that melting of the Greenland ice sheet could have raised sea levels by 2-3.5m. But they also concluded that the rest could have come from the West Antarctic ice sheet.

It was not as warm here, but much of the ice sheet remains below sea level. This, they believe, allowed warming ocean waters along with rising sea levels to destabilise it.

"The simulated climate warming agreed well with the observed climate warming," Dr Overpeck told the BBC News website. "So, we had a firm estimate of how much warmth was necessary to cause that much sea level rise."

The researchers then compared this with simulations of future warming to learn how much sea level rise would be expected in future.

They estimate peak rates of sea level rise exceeding 1m per century.

"These processes of rapid ice sheet retreat are already happening. It just takes a while to get metres of sea level rise. But our study says that if we warm the Earth by more than two times the equivalent of pre-industrial carbon dioxide levels, we could be entering the danger zone," said Dr Overpeck.

"The ice sheet retreat and sea level rise on the order of what happened 130,000 years ago is inevitable and irreversible."

Geoscientist Michael Oppenheimer of Princeton University, who is not an author on the new paper, told Science: "Palaeoclimate always has a large amount of uncertainty, [but] we should take this as a serious warning sign. You could lock in a dangerous warming during this century."

Other work in the journal Science shows "earthquakes" caused by sudden movement of Greenland's glaciers are rising.

Some of Greenland's glaciers, which are as large as Manhattan and as tall as the Empire State Building, can move 10m in less than a minute, according to Harvard University scientists. This jolt is sufficient to generate seismic

waves. Not only has the frequency of these events increased, but they appear to occur more frequently in late summer than other parts of the year.

When water accumulates at a glacier's base, it acts as a lubricant causing large blocks to lurch down valleys.

"Greenland's glaciers deliver large quantities of fresh water to the oceans, so the implications for climate change are serious. We believe further warming of the climate is likely to accelerate the behaviour we've documented," said co-author Meredith Nettles at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory in New York, US.

# Congress asks

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powerful Reliance group, was an MP and at the same time has been on a state development council.

The Indian constitution prohibits MPs from holding another office of profit, and the issue has come into sharp focus in the past month, with some 60 lawmakers facing scrutiny.

"It is my firm view that in public life one must uphold the highest standards of transparency, propriety and ethics," said Ambani, an independent who held a seat in India's upper house, the Press Trust of India reported.

Sonia on Thursday resigned from her lower house seat after the opposition charged she had wrongfully held another salaried public post.

The 59-year-old Sonia Gandhi also quit as chairwoman of the National Advisory Council (NAC), set up to implement her government's electoral pledges.

Right-wing opponents had charged that Italian-born Sonia was breaking regulations by holding both posts and that the Congress adjoined parliament so it could push through a cabinet ordinance to save her.

Several other elected politicians who hold secondary posts have resigned as well, while some have insisted that the law on the issue needs to be re-examined.

Ambani, who ran with the support of the Samajwadi party based in northern Uttar Pradesh state, is the latest politician to step down over the snowballing conflict-of-interest issue.

The industrialist took charge of the telecom and power companies created after he and his older brother agreed to split Reliance Industries, India's largest private business, to end the feud that erupted after their father's death in 2002. (PTI, AFP)

# Bird flu jump

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virus attaches itself to cells deep down in the human airways.

The University of Wisconsin research is published in the journal Nature.

This may at least in part explain why H5N1 is inefficient at transmitting person to person, although I doubt that it is the complete answer.

The H5N1 strain of bird flu has spread across Europe, Africa and parts of Asia, and has killed more than 100 people worldwide and infected about 180 since it re-emerged in 2003.

But it still cannot jump easily from human to human.

Scientists fear that if it mutates and gains that ability, it could result in a human flu pandemic, with millions of deaths worldwide.

The Wisconsin team investigated why the virus could not spread easily between humans despite the fact that it could replicate efficiently in human lungs.

Flu viruses infecting humans and birds are known to home in on slightly different versions of the same molecule, found on the surface of cells which line the respiratory tract.

The latest study found the version of the molecule targeted by human viruses was more prevalent on cells higher up in the airway.

The molecule targeted by bird viruses, on the other hand, tended to be found on cells deep within the lungs, in structures called alveoli.

Thus the bird flu virus tended to be buried so deep in the lungs that it was unlikely to be spread by coughing or sneezing.

If the virus was to acquire the ability to infect cells higher up in the airway, it could take a crucial step towards causing a human pandemic, researchers believe.

Professor Ian Jones, of the University of Reading, UK, said the study provided some explanation of why people, particularly children, had caught the virus and died and yet it had remained "bird flu".

"It seems they were just really unlucky and transmitted enough virus to their mouths for it to gain access to the lower lung, a distance shorter in children than adults."

"Casual contact with the virus may therefore not be as dangerous as initially thought."

However, Professor Jones said it was possible that the virus could mutate to gain the potential to attach to cells in the upper airway.

# Chandpur power plant

FROM PAGE 1

Harbin was selected as the lowest bidder in the Chandpur project tender in June last year although it did not submit the technical bid. Following a complaint by another Chinese bidder, a government review panel declared PDB's selection of Harbin unacceptable. But some officials of the PMO, power ministry and the PDB ignored the panel's decision saying that it does not have the authority to impose a decision, and pushed the bid to the final phase in January.

Although the deal was given the go-ahead by the cabinet two months ago, the officials and policymakers narrowed down their focus on revising the PPR before signing the agreement with Harbin fearing future legal confrontations, sources said. Accordingly they pressurised the Implementation Monitoring Evaluation Division (IMED) of the planning ministry to amend the provisions of the regulation.

The revised PPR has now turned into the proposed Public Procurement Law (PPL), 2006 and it will be enacted at the next parliament session. The PPL slashed the power of the Independent Review Panel that had declared Harbin's bid void last year. The PPL has vested the power to make the final decision in the government, even if there is a dispute. The donors led by the World Bank, who had been vocal about transparency in public sector procurement, have already expressed their disapproval of the revised PPR 2006 to the government.

Harbin is so far the only company to strike any power deal with the present government. It has previously signed deals for the 80mw Tongji plant and the 90mw Fenchuganj plant.

# HOW ANOMALIES OVERLOOKED

To approve the project against the IMED's review panel's decision, the cabinet's purchase committee had to undermine a number of issues of the PPR, 2003. The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the January 2 summary of the CPC decision on the Chandpur project. Analysis of the summary reveals how various provisions of PPR, 2003 have been violated to favour Harbin.

The CPC overlooked how the PDB under the guise of 'clarification' actually sought the revised technical bid from Harbin on July 9, 2005 — 11 days after the bid closing. "The use of the word 'clarification' here was a trick to allow an illegal act in violation of Regulation 29 of PPR 2003 which prohibits receiving any tender after expiry of the deadline for submission," said an industry insider.

The CPC also overlooked the fact that by asking Harbin to submit the technical proposal on July 9, the PDB actually admitted that the company had not submitted the proposal as required.

At the same time, the CPC opined that it is not necessary to seek revised technical proposals with the financial bids at the second stage from bidders who were techni-

cally qualified at the first stage. But the CPC overlooked why then the PDB sought a revised technical proposal from Harbin 11 days after expiry of the bid submission date. The CPC also did not inquire from the PDB, out of the two technical offers of Harbin which one was used for evaluating the Chinese company's proposal.

The CPC went on to say that the PDB and Power Division should not have sent the report of the Independent Review Panel to PDB's legal adviser and the Ministry of Law for opinion. The CPC did not question under what jurisdiction could PDB use its own legal adviser for seeking opinion against a decision made against itself by an independent body.

The CPC endorsed the view of the Power Division that the decision of the review panel violated PPR 2003, but did not clarify on what ground it opined so. Interestingly the finance minister had earlier approved and signed a summary by the IMED upholding the decision of the review panel.

The CPC questioned the acceptability of former Law Secretary Mohammad Asaduzzaman as the chairman of the review panel without mentioning any reason. Asaduzzaman was chosen by the IMED after rounds of internal screening to select competent people for the formation of such review panels. The planning ministry approved his nomination. Again, the PDB argued that another member of the review panel, CJ Kabir, former chief engineer of PDB, is the owner director of one of the bidders, Shourav Trading. But sources said Kabir is an employee of Shourav Trading that only bought tender documents but did not submit a bid. He had no stake in the tender.

The CPC opined that the review panel can only make recommendations and cannot issue any executive order and by doing so the panel issued decisions in violation of their scope of work. The CPC, however, admitted that as per PPR 2003, the decision of the review panel is final, but claimed that this particular decision is 'illegal' and hence not enforceable. In reality, Regulation 53, Clause 6 (b) of PPR 2003 empowers the review panel to, "State the rules or principles that govern the subject matter of the complaint and advise both parties to accede accordingly", and Clause (7) goes further by stating, "The Review Panel shall issue written decision of its findings to the Tenderer stating the reasons for the Decision and stating suggested remedies."

Clause (8) under the same Regulation 53 states, "The Decision of the Review Panel shall be final and a Procuring Entity shall act upon such findings."

The CPC justified its action by stating that the price difference between the non-compliant bidder Harbin and compliant bidder CMEC is about Taka 86 crore, without explaining the omission of prices of major items of spare parts by the lowest bidder Harbin, which has been stated in the report of the

Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC) of PDB. Clause 5(C) of TEC's report stated, "There are some anomalies in some essential spare parts and consumables in respect of items, quantity, price, etc against tender requirements. Moreover some items of essential spare parts are not quoted or quoted as substitutes or equivalents, so it is cumbersome to compare among bidders. Harbin Power Engineering has quoted some major items in a lesser quantity and did not quote some consumables like filters... and it is evident that the price quoted by Harbin is less due to a lesser quantity."

# Rice talks

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top reporters at the Pentagon. He said he had not yet received a recommendation from Gen. George Casey, the top commander in Iraq, on whether or when to reduce the size of the force.

There are now about 133,000 American troops in Iraq. Military officials have expressed hope they can reduce the number below 100,000 by year's end.

Rice, on NBC's "Meet the Press," noted that Casey "has talked about a significant reduction of American forces over the next year. And that significant reduction is because Iraqi forces are taking and holding territory now."

Rumsfeld said last week he did anticipate a drawdown of US troops this year "because we think the government will be formed, it will meet with reasonable acceptance," and Iraqi security forces will perform well.

The military is carrying out plans announced by Rumsfeld in December to cut troop levels this year by up to 7,000 soldiers by cancelling the planned deployment of two Army brigades. Further cuts are being debated.

Military leaders have said a drawdown of US troops cannot be done until Iraqi soldiers display enough mettle to take on insurgents — as well as loyalty to a civilian government that represents Iraq's major groups: Sunni Arabs, Shias and Kurds.

# US to query

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