

Outlaws slaughter four cops in Naogaon

Bullet-hit Jubo Dal leader dies, retaliation for killing of 11 in Aug 17 shootout in Pabna suspected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Underground operatives yesterday shot and slaughtered four policemen at a market in Naogaon and looted arms and ammunition.

The killings are believed to have been in retaliation for several incidents including the death of a top PBCP (Lal Pataka) leader in "crossfire" with Rab last month and 11 other outlaws in a police raid in Pabna on August 17.

During the attack, a Jubo Dal leader died and 30 others were injured.

The attackers looted three rifles, pistol and ammunition of the law enforcers and blasted a number of crackers and opened fire after committing the murders at Chowbaria Hat, a cattle market.

The slain were identified as Assistant Sub-Inspector Feroz, constables Aslam, Babul and Farid of Manda Police Station, and organising secretary of Manda Jubo Dal Nazir Ali.

The on-duty policemen were sitting at a tea stall at the market, some 50-km northwest of Rajshahi city, at around 6:30pm when a band of 30 outlaws swooped on them.

Witnesses said the attackers entered the market blasting bombs and opening gunfire to scare away the people.

The policemen died on the spot as they were slaughtered right in front of hundreds of locals after being shot at point-blank.

Nazar Ali received bullet wounds as he was sitting with the policemen and died on the way to

hospital. The outlaws left the scene, chanting slogans in favour of PBCP (Lal Pataka), said the witnesses.

Of the injured, 12 were admitted to Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital (RMCH), eight to Tanore Upazila Health Complex, while the rest took treatment at local clinics.

Although the outlaws killed in Pabna were said to have been belonging to PBCP Janajuddho faction, yesterday's killers chanted slogans for rival Red Flag (Lal Potaka) faction, said a witness.

Police forces from Rajshahi and Naogaon rushed to the scene and recovered the bodies lying in a pool of blood.

Manda upazila nirbahi officer and assistant superintendent of

police reached the scene at 8:30pm. No other senior officials however visited the spot as of filing of this report at 9:00pm.

The Lal Pataka sources said they carried out the attack to take revenge for the killings of their leader Kamrul Master and 11 others in last two months.

PBCP Lal Pataka chief adviser Kamrul Islam alias Kamrul Master, 55, and operations commander Md Abdul Latif alias Jhunu Maker, 40, were killed in "crossfire" in Pabna on November 14, 2005.

Eleven outlaws were shot dead and five policemen injured during a gunfight between police and the PBCP operatives at Sarir Bhitra-Nakharaj village in Sujanagar upazila in the district on August 17.

BDR, BSF trade fresh gunfire

STAR REPORT

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) traded gunfire at Gazipur border area under Sadar upazila in Satkhira on Thursday night.

Our Satkhira correspondent reported that BSF personnel of Pakirdanga camp under Basirhat police station in North 24 Pargana of West Bengal, across the Gazipur border at Sadar upazila, fired two to four rounds of bullets at the BDR camp around 2:00am, forcing the Bangladesh border security force to retaliate with five to six shots. No casualty was reported.

After the incident, BSF was put on alert along the border, its strength at border outposts was reinforced, and the number of patrols was increased.

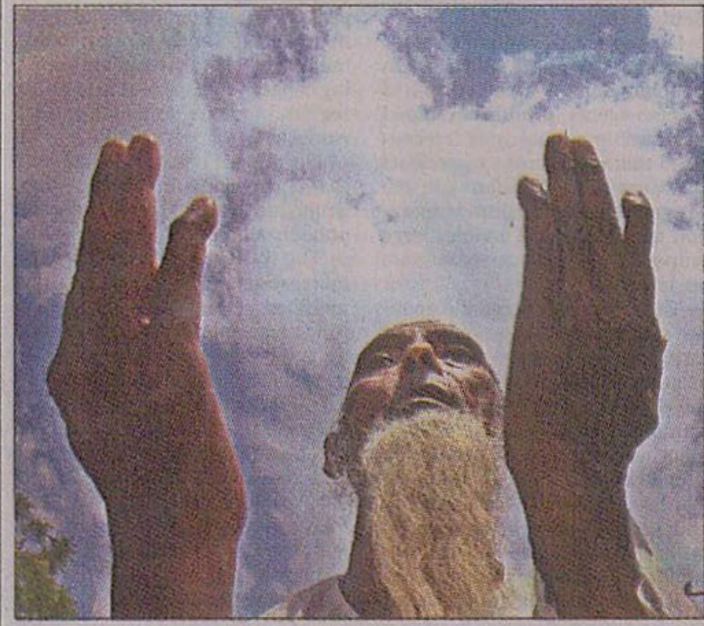
BDR was also put on alert to avoid any untoward incident, sources among the Bangladesh border guards said.

Panic gripped residents of the border area who fear that a skirmish might start at any moment between the two border security forces.

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Drought fear looms

Rivers flow at lowest level, 25pc less rainfall in monsoon



MORSHED ALI KHAN

With all major rivers flowing at the lowest recorded level in 25 years and with 25 per cent less rainfall recorded during the peak monsoon season this year, experts fear that a severe drought might grip various parts of the country in the coming months.

"Our recorded history of river water levels during June, July and August since 1980 reveals that this year we have the lowest level of water in the rivers than ever before during this period," said Selim Bhuiyan, executive engineer and also in charge of Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC).

Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) sources said throughout the country average rainfall during June, July and August this year has been 25 per cent less than the usual average during the monsoon. The worst hit are Rajshahi and Chittagong regions where it rained 40 per cent

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An elderly person seeks divine blessing after Jum'a prayers at Baitul Mukarram mosque yesterday for rain in the drought-affected northern districts.

23 DAYS INTO ARREST FROM BHALUKA MADRASA

No charges yet against 27 militants



Abdur Rouf (front, second from right) among the 27 militants arrested by Rab on August 2 at Jibontala Qawami Madrasa in Bhaluka under Mymensingh district.

BISHAWJIT DAS

The government has yet to bring any specific charges against the 27 militants arrested during a training session at a Qawami madrasa-cum-militant den in Mymensingh on August 2.

Legal experts fear the militants may soon get bail from court, as the police did not even file a General Diary (GD) against them.

So far they have only taken 11 arrestees on remand for quizzing under Section 54.

Earlier on different occasions a good number of militants including the top brass had been released on bail as they were produced before the courts under the same section.

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) captured the 27 militants and recovered bomb-making materials and training equipment from a remote Jamia Islamia Nurul Ulum Qawami Madrasa at Jibontala village of Bhaluka upazila in Mymensingh.

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Tk 3,000 minimum wage for RMG sector suggested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of workers organisations, political parties and economists yesterday suggested immediate announcement of a minimum wage of Tk 3,000 for garment workers for resumption of a healthy atmosphere in garment industry.

They however feared implementation of minimum wage for the workers will not be possible unless a truly democratic government is established through the next general election.

Addressing a workers' convention in the capital, they said the BNP-led four-party alliance government has not taken effective initiative for implementation of the tripartite agreement among representatives of the government, owners of garments factories and workers signed in May in the wake of unrest in garment factories.

Blasting the ruling coalition for this, the speakers said this

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KHALEDA TO CHAIR TODAY'S BNP NEC MEET

JP, internal feud likely to figure prominently

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson also Prime Minister (PM) Khaleda Zia is expected to collect authentic information about the field level standings of her party's key ally Jamaat and probable partner Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad), from the party's grassroots level leaders during its National Executive Committee meeting today.

Sources said later she will consider the opinions of the grassroots level leaders while making her mind about expanding the ruling alliance.

But internal feuds and the JP issue are likely to be the focal points for the grassroots level leaders as about 40 organisational

districts have been with expired committees and more than one candidate are seeking nominations in most of the constituencies where the incumbent lawmakers are from BNP.

However, BNP high ups already directed the grassroots level leaders informally not to talk about internal feuds or embarrassing issues like price hike of essentials, sources said.

BNP's National Executive Committee (NEC) will sit today

after about ten years and about 385 leaders from across the country have been invited to attend the meeting to be held in Prodanmontry Bhaban at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the capital at 10:30am. Khaleda Zia will preside over the meeting.

Party leaders said Khaleda will give directions to grassroots level leaders and activists so that they can face the crucial few days at the field level following the handover of power in the last week of October.

"With the party leaders she will emphasise on continuing party activities after the handover of power," said a BNP leader adding that the party's interest might be

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Mahfuz clinches 2nd gold for Bangladesh

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

Mahfuzur Rahman Mithu sprinted to glory, giving Bangladesh their first athletics gold medal in the South Asian Games in eleven years when the hurdler became the 110m hurdles champion in the tenth edition of the regional Games here yesterday.

Mahfuz Alam won the last gold for Bangladesh at the tracks, in 1995 at Madras when he won the men's 200m. Bangladesh male athletes returned with empty hands from the Islamabad meet two years ago but there was no doubt over who was going to win after the Noakhali-born hurdler raced a metre clear of the pack at Lane 5 at the Sugathadasa National Stadium.

The 21-year-old Bangladesh national champion, who took 14.10 seconds (hand timing) to win the national championship, steamed home with a personal best of 14.19 seconds, leaving the two Pakistani contenders in woes. Pakistan had won both gold and silver in Islamabad but previous champion Abdul Rashid settled for bronze while his young teammate Muhammad Sazzad claimed silver in 14.26 seconds.

Pakistan's Ghulam Abbas still holds the Games record in 14.11 seconds, set in 1989 in Islamabad. Having failed to win a single



medal on Thursday, Mahfuz boasted Bangladesh's last chance to win gold in the ongoing Games.

The 6'1" tall Air Force Corporal, participating in his first international meet, had a superb start and left his rivals for dead over the opening 40 metres. The Pakistanis pressed hard in the final metres but Mahfuz went on to give final touch to the race and silence the home crowd. Indian hurdler R Mathew finished fifth while the two Sri Lankans brought the rear.

Although Mahfuz tumbled down on the track after his triumph, he suddenly became puzzled. However, the confirmation of victory came from coach Kitab Ali

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ATTACK ON TITO AL faction in Jessore calls for hartal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

A faction of the district Awami League (AL) will impose a half-day hartal in Jessore today to protest the attack on former minister and AL leader Khaledur Rahman Tito on Thursday night.

Tito was stabbed by his rivals in the party while addressing a rally at Chuadanda bus stand in Puratan Kasba area of the town. He was admitted to Jessore 250-bed hospital and then shifted to Queen's Hospital in the town. On advice of the doctors, Tito was sent to Dhaka yesterday evening for better treatment.

Supporters of the AL leader assembled in front of his house at Shastitala in the district town yesterday morning and took out a procession protesting the attack.

Meanwhile, Awami League leader Sheikh Helal MP visited Tito at Queen's Hospital yesterday morning.

Conspiracy to gag free thinkers

Says Hasan Azizul Haque

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi University professor and litterateur Hasan Azizul Haque said he is not afraid of the threats made by Islami Chhatra Shibir on his life for favouring secularism.

Bangladesh has not yet turned into a country of religious fanatics and secularism does not mean "anti-religion", Haque said at a meeting in remembrance of poet Shamsur Rahman at the Rajshahi Metropolitan Press Club yesterday.

Prof Haque criticised the government for recognising the Qawami madrasa degrees terming it "a communal step that demeans the constitution".

"The state and religion are separate things. The fusion of religion with the mainstream national education and state system can never be accepted. It will

be very dangerous for countrymen irrespective of religion," he said.

Activists of Shibir, student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, threatened Prof Haque on Thursday with death for his speech in favour of secularism. They told Haque that he will have to depart the world like Prof Humayun Azad or leave the country like Taslima Nasrin.

Haque termed the Shibir threat "a conspiracy" of the reactionary forces against free thought. He said his speech was on education, state and secularism, not on religion.

Other speakers at the meeting also strongly condemned the Shibir threat on Prof Haque's life, saying the fundamental anti-liberation forces actually threatened the entire community of progressive thinkers.

The meeting also discussed the

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PRICE INCREASE IN LAST TWO YEARS

Jute growers upbeat, now cultivating on more lands

RAFIQ HASAN, back from Pabna

Jute growers are upbeat as they are now getting good return on cultivating the 'golden fibre'.

The prices have gone up in the last two years due to good demand in the international market, Bangladesh Jute Association (BJA) sources said.

"The prices of jute vary between Tk 950 and Tk 1200 per maund this year. Farmers get around 12 maund of jute fibre per bigha, while the cultivation cost does not exceed Tk

2,500. And so, the farmers are getting good profit from jute cultivation now," said Sirajul Islam, a farmer in Shanthia upazila under Pabna district.

Only three years ago, the price of jute fibre went down to around Tk 250-300 per maund and the farmers had almost abandoned cultivating jute as it was not cost effective.

"Fall in jute production in India and China during the last two years pushed up the demand of jute from Bangladesh. As a result, the price

went up," said BJA Vice-president Puspendu Mohan Saha.

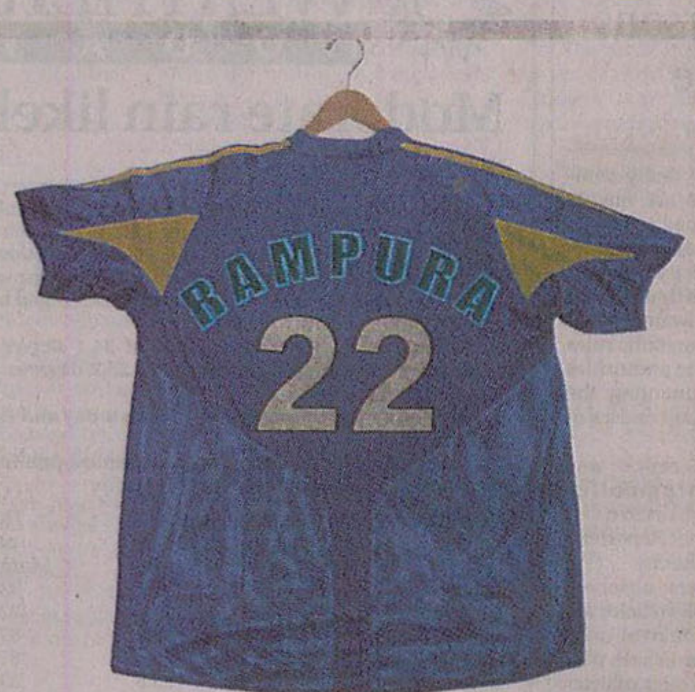
He said the price of high-grade jute also showed buoyancy this year. Last year the volume of raw jute export from Bangladesh was around 24.47 lakh bales. India imported around 10 lakh bale jute from Bangladesh due to production shortfall there.

Similar amount of jute is expected to be exported this year, he added.

A group of farmers talking to

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