

Clashes sparked by attempt to besiege PMO



FROM LEFT... Police stop a 14-party procession at Mohakhali intersection that tried to march towards the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) yesterday; A police armoured personnel carrier parked in the middle of the Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue near the city's Bangla Motor intersection; Police charge truncheons on innocent bystanders at Bangla Motor intersection; Locals taking an opposition activist badly injured in police beating on Dhanmondi Road-27; An youth bleeding from the head after police attacked the opposition's rally at Bangla Motor.

PHOTO: STAR

Court quizzes JMB leader Sunny

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday questioned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) military commander Ataur Rahman Sunny and four others in connection with two cases filed in December last year.

The cases, one under Arms Act and the other under Explosive Substances Act, were filed with Sabujbagh Police Station on December 14 last year.

The other accused are Sunny's friend Fariduzzaman Swapan, JMB regional commander of Gazipur unit Enayet Ullah alias Jewel, Kamrul alias Sumon alias Zahidul and Alamgir alias Bijoy.

Out of the five accused, Sunny, the younger brother of JMB chief Shaekh Abdur Rahman, Swapan and Jewel are now in custody while the remaining two are still on the loose.

Sunny, Swapan and Enayetullah alias Jewel pleaded not guilty and demanded justice before the court after Judge Monzurul Bachhid of the Fourth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court read out the charges brought against them from the statements of 26 prosecution witnesses during the trial.

The court fixed September 17 for arguments from the prosecution and the defence.

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Gunmen try to take US Embassy in Syria

Four killed in attack

AP, Damascus

Militants attempted to storm the US Embassy in Damascus yesterday using automatic rifles, hand grenades and at least one van rigged with explosives, the government said. Four people were killed in the brazen attack, including three of the assailants.

No Americans were hurt, and the attackers apparently did not breach the high walls surrounding the embassy's white compound in the city's diplomatic neighbourhood.

But one of Syria's anti-terrorism forces was killed and at least 11 others were injured, the country's official news agency reported. The wounded including a police officer, two Iraqis and seven people employed at nearby technical workshop.

A Chinese diplomat also was hit in the face by shrapnel and slightly injured while standing on top of a garage at the Chinese Embassy, China's government news agency said.

A witness said one Syrian guard outside the embassy also was

walk outside the embassy, along with a burned car apparently used by the attackers. A sports utility vehicle with US diplomatic tags had a bullet hole through its front window, and the glass windows of nearby guard houses also were shattered.

There were conflicting reports of what happened. Syrian TV said one car was rigged with explosives but never was detonated by the attackers. But one witness said a second car did explode, and TV footage from the scene showed a burned car.

The Syrian Interior Ministry, which is in charge of police, said a fourth attacker now in detention was wounded in the incident, which it called a "terrorist attack." The report, carried on state-run television, said anti-terror units brought "the situation under control" and an investigation was underway.

In Washington, a State Department spokesman confirmed the attack by "unknown assailants" but had few details.

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Home ministry for dropping 2 cases filed on 'political ground'

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The government decided to withdraw two cases filed against two brothers in connection with the possession of 520 bottles of contraband Phensidil saying the cases were filed with 'political motivation'.

The two brothers Mohammad Sobahan and Mohammad Selim lived in the South Begunbari sium in the city's Tejgaon area.

Metropolitan Public Prosecutor

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ATTACK ON NASIM, NOOR Hartal called in Pabna, Nilphamari

STAR REPORT

District Awami League (AL) units in Pabna and Nilphamari yesterday called half-day hartal for today in the districts protesting police assaults on their local lawmakers Mohammad Nasim and Asaduzzaman Noor during the opposition's siege of Prime Minister's Office in the capital.

Our correspondent in Pabna reports: Pabna district AL at an

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Butenis for polls with opposition participation

BSS, Chittagong

US Ambassador in Dhaka Patricia A Butenis yesterday said her government wants the upcoming election in Bangladesh to take place as per the constitutional provisions and the opposition parties to participate in it.

Talking to senior journalists at the American Corner in Chittagong, she said the next election is crucially important for the country and "everybody [of the international community] is looking at what you are doing and will do during the election."

"At the end of the day, we would like to see the result is credible. Someone has to lose, it is democracy and it is expected that the loser should accept the result that would help forward the country and democracy," Butenis told pressmen on the second day of her three-day visit to the port city.

When asked if there is a possibility of mediation from the US to narrow down the gap between the confronting political parties, she replied in the negative and said, "We do not support or disfavour any party but are very careful about holding the election."

About the present political stalemate, Butenis said the government and the opposition should sit down to find a solution, as the people want a fair election so that they can exercise their voting rights.

She observed that personal ego should not get in the way of resolving the issues of national interest and there is still a lot of room for the dialogue.

Bangladesh has great potentials as the people here are hospitable, sincere, peace- and democracy-loving while the media is free, noted the American ambassador.

Earlier, Butenis visited the two-century-old Chhattaeshawry Kali Temple and talked to the Hindu leaders there. Chief priest Chandra Shekhar Chakraborty and human rights activist Advocate Sunil Sircar received her at the temple.

Talking to the press on the temple premises, she said Bangladesh has a proud tradition of interfaith harmony and the constitution safeguards the rights of the minority communities.

Butenis said the country's

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Peace within reach in Kashmir: Musharraf

AFP, Brussels

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said yesterday that peace was within reach in the divided region of Kashmir and challenged India to seize the opportunity to end the bloody conflict.

"I sincerely believe that today opportunity exists and it must be seized to resolve the dispute through peaceful dialogue," he said at a conference on the disputed region at the European Parliament.

He said that improved relations between India and Pakistan, as well as a "conducive international environment," could help improve

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Pakistan has not done enough to control terrorism: Manmohan

PTI, On board Air India One

Setting the tone ahead of his meeting with President Pervez Musharraf, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has said Pakistan has not done enough to control elements like Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba.

He even hinted that he might try to pin Islamabad down on its commitment of not to allow its territory for launching terror attacks against India.

Ahead of the meeting on the margins of the NAM summit in Havana, he made it clear that both the countries should move forward on the dialogue process, but said that terrorism surely acts as a "dampener" and violence "vitiates" the atmosphere.

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Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) opens a temporary store at Irani Math in Azimpur in the city to sell essential commodities at fair prices ahead of the holy month of Ramadan when usually price of essentials shoot up.

PHOTO: STAR

50 killed in stampede at Yemen election rally

AFP, Sanaa

At least 50 people were killed and 100 hurt in a stampede yesterday at a stadium in southern Yemen during an election rally by President Ali Abdullah Saleh, a week ahead of polls already marred by violence.

The victims were crushed to death when tens of thousands of people tried to gain entry into the sports stadium at the town of Ibb, which was already crammed with some 100,000 rallygoers, witnesses said.

"More than 50 people have been killed and over 100 injured," a senior security official told AFP, requesting anonymity.

The stampede at Ibb, around 180km south of Sanaa, occurred just minutes after Saleh had

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27 people killed in Iraq violence

AFP, Baghdad

Insurgents killed at least 27 people in Iraq yesterday, including six in a car bomb attack against a US convoy in Baghdad, security officials said.

The car bomb attack in the Iraqi capital's upscale Mansur neighbourhood left another 15 people wounded.

A roadside bomb blast targeting a police patrol near Baghdad's University of Technology killed a policeman and a civilian. Another officer and six other bystanders

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Hartal victim fights for life

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

A cab driver, badly burned during the opposition's hartal on Sunday, has been fighting for his life in Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH).

Abdul Malek, 27, resident of Jasim Uddin Road in Uttara, is now undergoing treatment at the Burns and Plastic Surgery unit of the hospital with appalling burns all over his body.

His family is struggling to bear the medical expenses. The black cab that was the only source of income for the nine-member family, went up in flames as the pickets on Sunday set fire to it during hartal hours in the city.

"I was returning from Pagla in Narayanganj where I drove a passenger on Saturday night. A picket posing as a passenger flagged me down at around 7:00am at Fakirapool," Malek told The Daily Star.

The moment he pulled in, the youth poured petrol all over the cab.

"As I tried to speed off, someone from behind set light to the car," he said in a choked voice.

Malek could not leave the blazing car immediately and suffered a number of severe burns.

He had bought the car for Tk 5.25 lakh that was borrowed from a bank. He has yet

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PHOTO: STAR

Taxi driver Abdul Malek is fighting for his life at Dhaka Medical College Hospital after his taxi was set ablaze by pickets during hartal on Sunday.

Iran sets conditions for enrichment suspension

AFP, Vienna

Iran has set a list of conditions in offering to consider a two-month suspension of uranium enrichment, but the United States has welcomed progress made in weekend talks between the EU and Iran.

Top Iranian nuclear negotiator Ali Larjani and European foreign policy chief Javier Solana held talks here at the weekend to try to find a compromise to reopen talks on Iran's disputed nuclear programme

and avoid threatened UN sanctions.

In the closed-door meetings Iran "had a long list (of conditions) including (a) complete and total halt in activity at the UN Security Council, an absolute stepping down from going for sanctions and that Iran would have the right to nuclear fuel technology on its soil," a Western diplomat told AFP on Monday.

"In return for this, Larjani said the Iranians would consider --

two-month halt in enrichment. It was all very conditional," the diplomat said, in relating a briefing from Solana.

The Iranian offer first revealed Sunday had raised hopes of a breakthrough in the international standoff over Iran's nuclear ambitions but the diplomat said that Larjani's conditions dashed these hopes.

But the conditions are "unacceptable" to the six world powers

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