

Defiant Saddam

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The ousted leader mounted the gallows inside a former torture centre in Kadhimiyah in northern Baghdad and was hanged just before 6:00 am (0300 GMT), said National Security Adviser Mowaffaq al-Rubaie, who was among those present.

Iraqi state television showed a brief film of Saddam being placed in a noose by masked hangmen, cutting away just before his execution.

The 69-year-old leader appeared calm, chatting to his burly, leather-jacketed executioners as they wrapped his neck first in black cloth then a thick hemp rope and steered him forward on a metal platform.

The gallows was constructed in red-painted metal and was fixed inside a dim room with blue-grey walls. The guards wore black balaclava-style hoods.

Saddam was manoeuvred forward firmly but not aggressively by the guards, the grey-bearded prisoner looking thin inside a smart, dark overcoat over a pressed white shirt but no tie.

Members of a small group of dignitaries who formally witnessed the execution said Saddam showed no sign of remorse in the final moments before being hanged for crimes against humanity.

Rubaie said in a series of televised interviews that the former strongman did not attempt to resist his executioners.

"He did not try to resist... He was holding a Koran in his hands that he wanted to have sent to someone, so the name of the person was taken down," Rubaie said.

"Saddam mounted the gallows calmly, without saying a word. He was resolute and courageous... At one point, he turned his head toward me as if to say 'don't be afraid'," Rubaie said. "It was a very strange feeling."

Once on the gallows, Saddam "refused to allow a guard to place a hood over his head. They stared at each other briefly" before the guard stepped away, granting Saddam's wish to leave his face uncovered, said Rubaie.

Saddam had an opportunity to speak his final words.

"He said 'I hope you will be united, and I warn you not to trust the Iranian coalition, because they are dangerous'," Judge Moneer Haddad, who witnessed Saddam's execution for crimes against humanity, told AFP.

"He said he was not afraid of anyone," Haddad said. The taunt was a last stab at the Shia-led ruling coalition, which many Iraqi Sunnis accuse of being a front for Iranian influence.

"He was asked for his last words," said Shia lawmaker Sami al-Askeri. "The rope was then wrapped around his neck, his hands were tied, and he was immediately executed."

Rubaie said death came rapidly. "It went like a blink of an eye. He died very, very quickly. It couldn't have been quicker."

State television prepared the ground for Saddam's execution by showing gruesome footage of his soldiers mutilating and beating prisoners, throwing a detainee from a roof and filling mass graves.

A 36-year-old engineer told AFP that he was given the opportunity view the body because members of his family had fallen victim to Saddam's brutal regime.

"I saw him after the execution," said Jawad Abdul-Aziz Al-Zubaidi. "He was inside an ambulance. His neck was broken. He was wearing black coat and a white shirt without a tie. His beard was long and his hair was long."

Zubaidi, who testified in the case that saw Saddam condemned for his role in the killings of 148 Shia villagers from Dujiail in 1982, said he had viewed the body along with some Iraqi officials.

It was a moment of "happiness for all Iraqis", he said, adding that Saddam, had "executed three of my brothers and my father".

Saddam's American jailers had handed him over to Iraqi officials and there were no US personnel in the building as the trapdoor dropped and Saddam's life was ended.

"This was a 100 per cent Iraqi process," said Rubaie. "There were only Iraqis present, no foreigners. The Americans were not present at the execution."

Eid tomorrow

FROM PAGE 1
share sacrificial meat with their relatives, neighbours and poor people according to the religious dictates.

On the occasion of the Eid-ul-Azha, President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Awami League (AL) Chief Sheikh Hasina and other political leaders gave separate messages yesterday greeting the people. In addition, different organisations and individuals including Bangladesh Christian Association and the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) greeted the Muslims across the country.

Hundreds of thousands of people have already left Dhaka for their village homes in the last few days to celebrate the festival with their near and dear ones after going through the hurdles of managing tickets for buses, trains and launches. The rush for home will culminate today.

In the capital, important public buildings will be illuminated and main streets and road islands will be decorated with miniature national flags and banners inscribed with 'Eid Mubarak' under government initiative.

The main Eid congregation will be held at the Jatiya Eidgah Maidan in front of the Supreme Court at 8:00am. Five congregations will take place at Baitul Mokarram National Mosque at 7:00am, 8:00am, 9:00am, 10:00am and 11:00am.

In case of inclement weather, the congregation at the Baitul Mokarram at 8:00am will be considered as the main congregation, says a PID hand-out.

Separate arrangements have been made at the Eidgah for women, diplomats and their wives.

The schedules of some major Eid congregations in the capital are - Gulshan Central Mosque Eidgah field

3 die in Meghna

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rammed MV Salahuddin II, heading for Madaripur, in the middle part of the vessel due to poor visibility in dense fog.

In MV Salahuddin II, which was heavily damaged, three people travelling on the first floor including a woman died on impact and two others are still missing. Both the launches were packed with passengers heading home for Eid holidays.

Panicked passengers started to run confusedly, hurting themselves.

Probe on to know

FROM PAGE 1
concerned despite being a much talked about loan defaulter.

The four-member investigation committee was formed including BB General Manager Abed Ali, Naushad Ali, and Mesbaul Haque with the central bank's Executive Director Khurshid-ul-Alam at the helm.

Meanwhile, a comment by Election Commission Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar sparked much resentment within the bankers' community.

Rashid Sarkar in one of his opinions said there is no scope for any appeal or objection once a candidacy is granted by a returning officer. Only in a case of a rejection one has the chance of an appeal, he added.

The bankers in reply said during 2001 election 22 objections were raised even after the nominations had been granted. If it could be done then why not now, they asked.

Eid observed early in many villages

STAR REPORT

More than thirty thousand people observed Eid-ul Azha yesterday in different areas of Chandpur, Barisal, Patuakhali, Bhola, Barguna, and Narayanganj.

Followers of different spiritual leaders (Pir Sahib) who go by the Saudi Arabian calendar for Islamic festivities were the main observers of the Eid yesterday.

In Chandpur, thousands of believers in many villages under Hajiganj, Faridganj, Matlab North, Shahraati and Kochua upazilas celebrated Eid-ul Azha yesterday.

The Eid was celebrated in different places in Barisal city and different villages under sadar, Bakerganj, Mehendiganj and Babuganj upazilas, reports our Barisal correspondent.

Our Patuakhali correspondent said Eid-ul Azha was observed in different areas of Kalapara, Baulf, Dumki, Galachipa and sadar upazilas.

Believers also observed Eid at different villages under Borhanuddin upazila of Bhola.

Eid-ul Azha was observed in many places in sadar upazila of Barguna district.

At Fatulla under Narayanganj, many believers celebrated Eid yesterday.

JP won't take part in polls if Iajuddin doesn't quit

Says Ershad

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad yesterday said his party will not participate in the upcoming general election unless President Iajuddin Ahmed resigns from the post of chief adviser to the caretaker government.

"The chief adviser runs the country at the behest of BNP. So the election under his caretaker government will not be free and fair," Ershad told a wayside rally while returning to Rangpur from Daperhara in Gaibandha yesterday afternoon.

Ershad said his nomination papers were cancelled as part of conspiracy as JP did not join the four-party alliance.

He said the BNP-led four-party combine is still conspiring against me, knowing that it will not win the election if Jatiya Party participates in the election with the grand alliance.

"The BNP-led alliance will not get any of the 22 seats in greater Rangpur. So it has no alternative but to conspire against Jatiya Party," he said.

Ershad also warned that if the grand alliance takes part in the election without Jatiya Party, the ball will be in the court of the four-party coalition.

Thousands of people queued on both sides of the highway from Gobindaganj to Matherhat of Sadullapur to greet the JP chief.

Prices of essentials

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The prices of condensed milk and sugar have also increased. A can of condensed milk, weighing around 400 grams, is selling at Tk 45, it was Tk 42 a few days back. However, the prices of spices seem to be normal.

Fuel pumps

FROM PAGE 16
almost come to a stop five days ago because of poor storage of Padma and Jamuna oil depots in Sylhet. He demanded that the oil company officers remain open for supplying oil for at least another day ahead of the Eid vacation.

An official of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation, meanwhile, said the supply of diesel was brought down by at least 20-50 percent in the last six months on the apprehension of smuggling.

Yunus

FROM PAGE 16
Chittagong chapter, yesterday afternoon.

Nobel Winner Muhammad Yunus Reception Council organised the meeting in cooperation with IEB Chittagong chapter, Institute of Architects, Chittagong Unit and Forum for Planned Chittagong.

Bangladesh is naturally gifted with its unique geographical position and it has the great advantage of having the sea as well as a port which some neighboring countries lack, Yunus said. "At first we have to decide what we want to do by 2050 and shortly decide our responsibility for achieving it. If we confine it to discussions, then it would be tough to achieve the goals."

He stressed the need for immediate steps to implement the development works.

Economic Association Chittagong Chapter President Professor Muhammed Sikander Khan, Editor of local daily Azadi MA Malek, architect Zarina Hossain, IEB Chittagong President Ali Ashraf, town planner Shahinul Islam Khan and Subhas Barua took part in the discussion.

Speakers put up the different problems of Chittagong port city and suggested recommendations to address the problems.

Saddam Hussein

FROM PAGE 1
Ministry faculty in northern Baghdad.

As Malik's fellow Shia Muslims, oppressed under Saddam, celebrated in the streets, the prime minister called on Saddam's Sunni Baathist followers to end their insurgency. President Bush hailed a "milestone" for Iraqi democracy.

"Saddam's execution puts an end to all the pathetic gambles on a return to dictatorship," said Malik, who officials said did not attend the hanging. State television showed him signing the order for hanging those swifts following the rejection of an appeal has delighted Shias who suffered under Saddam.

"I urge ... followers of the ousted regime to reconsider their stance as the door is still open to anyone who has no innocent blood on his hands to help in rebuilding... Iraq."

Police in Kufa, near the Shia holy city of Najaf, said 36 people were killed and 58 wounded by the car bomb at a market packed with shoppers ahead of the week-long Eid al-Adha holiday. They said a mob killed a man they accused of planting the bomb.

A triple car later bombing ripped through a mixed area of northern Baghdad, adding at least another 20 corpses to the grim daily toll.

In the coordinated attack, three vehicles exploded in rapid succession in a district of Hurriyah, security and military sources said.

A military source put the death toll at 20, with dozens more wounded, while a security source said up to 25 people had been killed in the attack.

Bush, who called Saddam a threat even though alleged nuclear and other weapons were never found, said: "Bringing Saddam Hussein to justice will not end the violence in Iraq, but it is an important milestone on Iraq's course to becoming a democracy that can govern, sustain, and defend itself."

The deaths of four troops pushed the American death toll to just four short of the emotive 3,000 mark. Bush already faces mounting public dismay at the war as Iraq slides toward all-out civil war between Saddam's fellow Sunnis and majority Shias.

Popular reactions were fairly muted as Iraqis woke on the holiest day of the Muslim calendar to begin a week of religious holidays for Eid-ul-Azha. Unlike at previous times of tension, no curfew was imposed on Baghdad after the execution.

Jubilant Shias, oppressed under Saddam, danced in the streets of Najaf and cars blared their horns in procession through Baghdad's Shia Sacd City slum.

The main Sunni television channel in the capital gave little coverage to the news - though it did show old footage of Saddam meeting former Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at a time when Washington helped Iraq against Islamist Iran in the 1980s. State broadcaster Iraqiya on the other hand ran graphic footage of Saddam's agents beheading and beating their victims.

A man from Dujiail who testified in Saddam's trial over the deaths of 148 Shia men from the town said he was shown the body at Malik's office and wept for his dead relatives: "When I saw the body in the coffin I cried. I remembered my three brothers and my father whom he had killed. I approached the body and told him: 'This is the well-deserved punishment for every tyrant.'" Jawad al-Zubaidi told Reuters. "Now for the first time my father and three brothers are happy."

Before his death, the former president recited the Muslim profession of faith "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed (SM) is his prophet," one of a dozen or so official witnesses told Reuters.

The rapid execution was a triumph for Malik, whose grip on his fragile national unity coalition has been questioned.

After complaints of political interference in the trial, however, the speed of the execution may fuel further unease about the fairness of the US-sponsored process.

"The timing of the execution and the sudden way it has been done may irritate people," Saleem al-Jibouri, a spokesman for the main Sunni party in the national unity government, said.

Many Kurds are also disappointed that Saddam will not now be convicted of genocide against them in a trial yet to finish.

Saddam's half-brother Barzan al-Tikriti and former judge Awad al-Bander are to be hanged after the week-long Eid.

Saddam's daughter Raghd, in exile in Jordan, wants her father buried in Yemen, a source close to the family said. The governor from Saddam's home town of Tikrit said his tribe was negotiating with the government to have the body interred in the village of Awja, where Saddam's sons were buried in 2003. The government wanted to bury him in Baghdad, the governor said.

6 constituencies

FROM PAGE 1
voter list. Leading to such an excess of voters," Brotee Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Sharmin Murshid said at the survey result dissemination programme in Cirdap auditorium in the capital yesterday.

Brotee conducted the survey in association with three other NGOs Peoples' Participation and Research Centre (PPRC), Unnayan Shamannay, and The Hunger Project - in which more than 10,000 grassroots level NGO workers collected and verified data.

Considering the voter list published in 2001 as their basis of investigation the NGO workers visited every house in the constituencies and deleted the names of those who died, emigrated to other constituencies, had duplications of their names on the list, or are under 18 years of age.

They included the names of those who became newly eligible to be voters or immigrated to the surveyed constituencies recently for various reasons.

The NGOs that conducted surveys in 30 constituencies as a citizens initiative to identify fake and genuine voters in order to assist the EC, will reveal the results of the rest of the surveys by January 10.

Presenting the survey result Sharmin Murshid said they will submit a report to the EC and hoped that the commission will take initiatives to correct the current voter list for holding a fair election.

The survey report however did not discuss how the excess voters got on the list.

"The Election Commission provided us with just the number of voters in the constituencies; it did not give us

the voter list. Therefore the reasons for having excess voters on the list could not be identified," she said.

The Brotee CEO said their survey is correct because they visited every house in the constituencies eliminating any chance of even a marginal error.

"In many previous elections candidates won with a difference of only few thousand votes, which is why having more than 2 lakh excess voters only in six constituencies might have an impact on the election," said The Hunger Project Country Director Bangul Alam Majumder.

"The Election Commission failed to follow the High Court order in regard to updating the voter list and it has yet to publish a draft voter list," he said.

Brotee Executive Committee Member Selina Hossain, who presided over the programme, said there is a lack of proper voters' survey in the country which prompted them to take the initiative.

"We will complete the survey gradually in all the 300 constituencies for a correct voter list," she added.

Syed Ziauddin of PPRC, Shahinour Alam of Unnayan Shamannay and Khan Sarwar Murshid of Brotee were also present at the programme.

Earlier, a survey by National Democratic Institute, a US based non-profit organisation, also found 1.22 crore excess or duplicate names on the current voter list.

Fog continues to disrupt journeys

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dense fog continued to disrupt road and river communications yesterday, causing immense sufferings to the homebound passengers of southern region ahead of the Eid-ul-Azha.

More than 50 vessels carrying thousands of passengers from Dhaka to the southern region remained stranded at different points on the Meghna and its channels.

The river craft reached different destinations under Barisal, Projail, Patuakhali, Barguna, Bhola, Jhalakathi, Khulna and Bagerhat districts 8 to 12 hours late,

according to our Barisal correspondent.

Ferry service at Maowa came to a halt at about 1:00am due to dense fog. The service resumed at about 10:30am amid huge traffic jam on both sides.

On Daulatdia-Paturia route, the ferry service was disrupted for three hours, causing severe traffic congestion on both sides of the Padma. Eight ferries remained stranded in the mid-river.

Chief of BIWTC ferry sector Shahadat Ali told the UNB that though there are adequate number of ferries on Daulatdia-Paturia route, the ferry movement is being hampered due to dense fog.

The BIWTC authorities in a press release yesterday said they have been monitoring the "temporary" problem in ferry movement on Daulatdia-Paturia and Maowa-Char Janajati route since Thursday.

High officials of BIWTC were present in the ferry ghat while army, Rab and police have been deployed to provide security to public life and property, the release added.

Passengers travelling by road in other parts of the country also faced the same problem due to dense fog. Buses with Eid passengers aboard reached their destination three to four hours late.

EC starts hearing

FROM PAGE 1
nomination papers Ershad had filed for Dhaka-5, Rangpur-3, Lalmonirhat-3, Sylhet-3 and Habiganj-3 constituencies on grounds of the Supreme Court's rejection of his appeal against a High Court (HC) verdict. The HC had sentenced Ershad to two years in prison in a graft case.

EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar yesterday met President and Chief Adviser Iajuddin Ahmed. Talking to The Daily Star after the meeting with the president and three other advisers, the EC secretary however said the meeting discussed the law and order as the Awami League-led alliance announced blockade on January 7 and 8.

The council of advisers already sent a message to the EC saying that they want an amicable solution of Ershad's case as the Jatiya Party has already announced that it would boycott the polls if Ershad could not contest it, sources said.

The EC will complete the hearing within three days and announce its decision whether it will accept the appeals or not. If one's appeal is accepted, his or her nomination paper will be declared valid.

The ROs on December 27 rejected 264 nomination papers on grounds of loan default and other disqualifying factors.

Interestingly, over half of the aspirants, whose nomination papers had been rejected by the ROs on different grounds, did not file appeal in last three days while the time limit for filing appeal expired yesterday.

Major (ret'd) Akhtaruzzaman (Kishoreganj-2), Benzir Ahmed (Manikganj-1) and Golam Faruk Ovi (Barisal-2) filed appeals yesterday.

Bush hails

FROM PAGE 1
Bush said in a statement released as he prepared to usher in 2007 at his Texas ranch.

"Bringing Saddam Hussein to justice will not end the violence in Iraq, but it is an important milestone on Iraq's course to becoming a democracy that can govern, sustain, and defend itself," he said.

Bush learned at 6:15 pm (0015 GMT) from US national security adviser Stephen Hadley that Saddam would go to the gallows in a few hours, but was fast asleep when the execution occurred, said White House spokesman Scott Stanzel.

The ousted dictator was hanged around 9:00 pm Texas time (0300 GMT), Iraqi officials said, as the violence-racked country braces nervously for possible reprisals by his remaining supporters.

"The president concluded his day knowing that the final phase of bringing Saddam Hussein to justice was underway," Stanzel told reporters. Asked whether that meant Bush was asleep when it happened, Stanzel replied: "That's correct."

Taking aim at critics of the special judicial process that led to Saddam's conviction, Bush emphasized that he "was executed after receiving a fair trial - the kind of justice he denied the victims of his brutal regime."

"Fair trials were unimaginable under Saddam Hussein's tyrannical rule. It is a testament to the Iraqi people's resolve to move forward after decades of oppression that, despite his terrible crimes against his own people, Saddam Hussein received a fair trial."

Saddam's death came as the US president planned to unveil a change in strategy in Iraq within about two weeks, amid heavy pressure from the US public to bring home the roughly 140,000 US soldiers there.

"Many difficult choices and further sacrifices lie ahead. Yet the safety and security of the American people require that we not relent in ensuring that Iraq's young democracy continues to progress," said Bush.

AL men refuse

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Both Habibur and Azizul are the leaders of banned Islamist militant organisation Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (Hujji) in Bangladesh and both have links with international militant groups.

Habibur, locally known as Bulbuli Huzur, himself revealed the link in an interview with a bulletin titled "Islami Biplob" (Islamic revolution), published on August 20, 1998 from Sylhet with the expressed purpose to celebrate "the total victory of Taliban and establishment of an Islamic state in Afghanistan".

The AL leaders and activists of Sylhet-6 (Golapganj) and Bikanibazar upazilas) have threatened to quit en masse from the party if Habibur is kept as the nominee of the grand alliance.

"We are building pressure on the top leadership of Awami League to remove Habibur as a nominee for the upcoming election," Bikanibazar upazila AL General Secretary Ataur Rahman Khan told The Daily Star over phone last night.

"We have clearly stated that it will be very difficult for us to support Habibur. He is so controversial that it is not possible to go for the elections with him," he said.

"He is against the Liberation War and against the Awami League. He is against female leadership and acted as a factor behind Awami League's losing election in Sylhet more than once," Ataur said.

"There are allegations of his involvement in several bomb blasts in Sylhet over the past years," he added.

"He prevented the late poet Shamsur Rahman and mother of a martyr Jahanara Imam from entering Sylhet. In 1992-1993, I managed to bring Shamsur Rahman to Bikanibazar, but could not take him to Sylhet because of Habibur Rahman," Ataur said.

Sylhet district AL President ANM Shafiq said, "We did not receive a copy of the party's candidate list this time. The nominations were decided by the top leadership of the party without consultation of the district leadership."

"Habibur Rahman was always against our politics and only the top leaders know how he crept into the grand alliance," Shafiq said.

Golapganj upazila AL President Iqbal Ahmed Chowdhury said, "There is no public acceptance of Habibur's nomination. Habibur boasts about in the area that he has met Mollah Omar and he wants to establish a Taliban-style rule in Bangladesh."

"Awami League is a secular party, but Habibur Rahman is not a secular man at all. Habibur's nomination has not been finalised by the grand alliance yet. But if it is finalised, it will be difficult for the local party activists to work for him," he added.

Meanwhile, AL central Education and Human Resource Affairs Secretary Nurul Islam Nahid, who won the Sylhet-6 seat in 1996, and lost to the four-party candidate in 2001 by a mere 4,000 votes, has also filed nomination paper from the same seat.

"The people of Sylhet and Bangladesh know Habibur as a radical, communal and militant man who has gone to Afghanistan to fight for the Taliban, but I have no comment in regard to his nomination from the grand alliance," said Nahid.

Many other leaders and activists of the AL are dead against Habibur's nomination as the alliance candidate but they are yet to be articulate about it fearing disciplinary action from the party. Still they expect the party high command to change the decision and opt for a party veteran as there is still scope for it until January 3, the last date for nomination paper withdrawal.

"If the party still sticks to the decision of Habibur's nomination, we will at best remain inactive," said many local AL leaders and activists seeking anonymity.

WHO IS HABIBUR?
The Hujji Bangladesh top brass includes Shaikhul Hadith Allama Azizul Haq, also chief of a faction of Islami Oikyo Jote (IOJ) and a former partner of the BNP-led alliance, Bangladesh Khelefah Majlis second-in-command Muhammad Habibur Rahman of Sylhet, Ataur Rahman Khan of Kishoreganj, Sultan Jaok of Chittagong, Abdul Mannan of Faridpur and Habibullah of Noakhali. All of them are involved with different Islamic organisations and madrasas, and one of them, Ataur Rahman Khan, was elected an MP with BNP ticket in 1991 from Kishoreganj-3.

In an interview a few years back, Habibur Rahman disclosed those names, with whom he had travelled to Afghanistan via Pakistan in 1988, visited some Taliban militant camps and also met al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

The bulletin in its front page ran an interview of Habibur Rahman, in which he gave a detailed account of his visit to Afghanistan in 1988. He said, "An invitation from Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami made it possible for me to make the fortunate trip to Afghanistan... Those of us who visited the Afghan war-fields during that trip are Shaikhul Hadith, Ataur Rahman Khan, Sultan Jaok, Abdul Mannan, Habibullah, myself and three others."

In Pakistan, leaders of the local chapter of Hujji greeted the nine members of the Bangladesh team and took them to the Hujji's Karachi office. Habibur said Hujji Pakistan chief Saifulah Aktar and a Bangladeshi Mujahideen Abdur Rahman Shahid drove them to an Afghan Mojahir (literally, refugee) camp on the Pak-Afghan border. They stayed at