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The Daily Star

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VOL. 1 NO. 92 REGD. NO. DA 781

BAISAKH 9, 1398 BS,

DHAKA TUESDAY APRIL 23, 1991

SHAWAL 8, 1411 HIJRI

10 PAGES : PRICE TAKA 3.00

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NEWS BRIEFS

Int'l women's club praises Khaleda

ROME, Apr 22: A widely attended luncheon meeting held under the auspices of International Women's Club of Rome concluded with a note of appreciation on the historic role played by the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in the restoration of unfettered democracy in Bangladesh.

Sangsad body on CHT demanded

Three Parliamentary members elected from Khagrachari, Rangamati and Bandarban Monday demanded formation of a parliamentary sub-committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts to solve the issues through renewed discussions, reports BSS.

Bir Pratik awarded

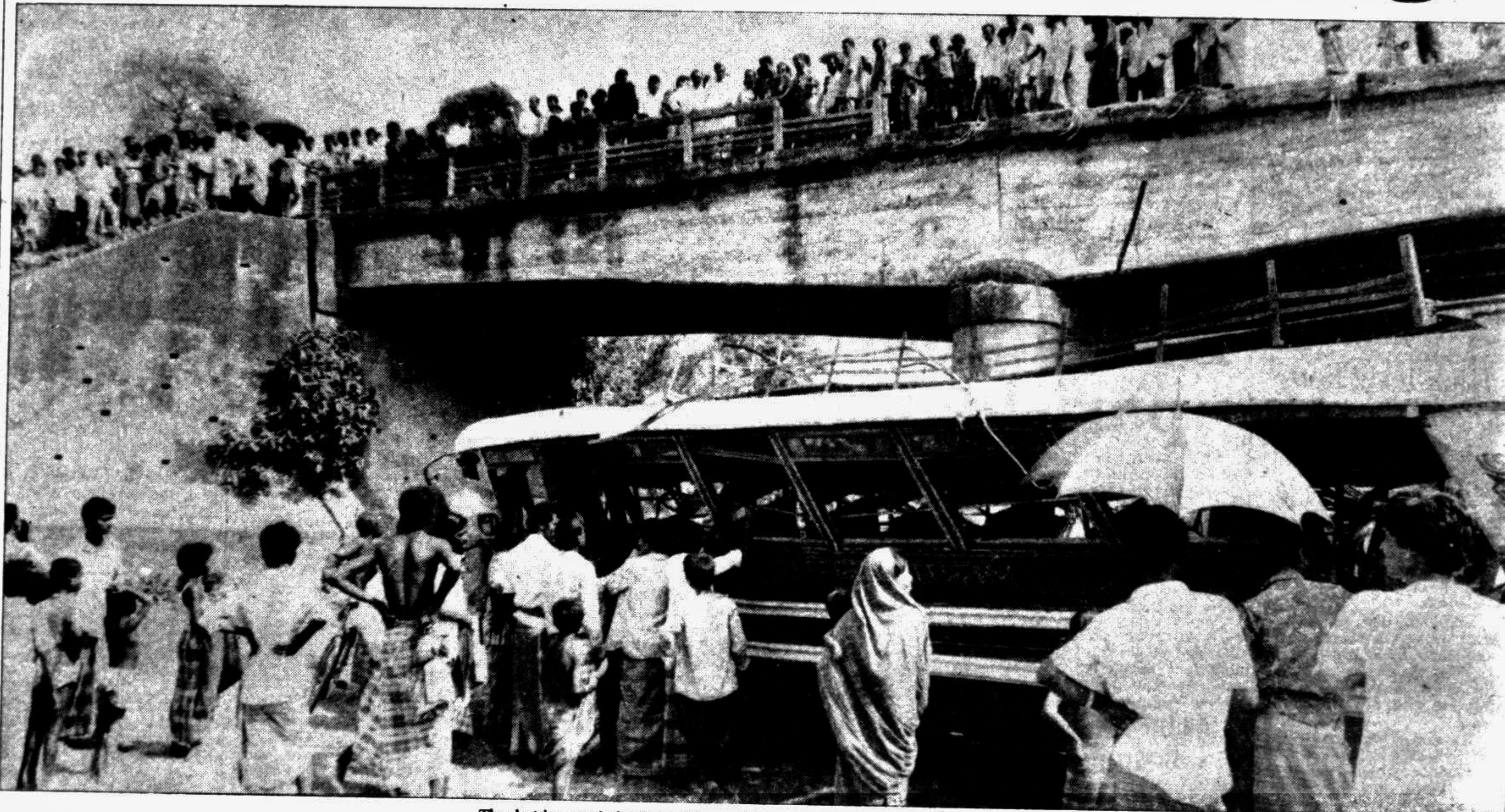
The government has conferred 'Bir Pratik' on Naib Subedar Mohammad Golam Mostafa, East Bengal, in recognition of his extraordinary valour and rare sense of responsibility during operation to curb the activities of the miscreants in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, reports BSS.

UP elections

The elections to the Union Parishads will be held but the schedule for the polls has not yet been fixed.

About 100 injured: Victims include children and women

51 killed as bus skids off bridge



The bridge and the bus. More pictures on page 10. — Star photo

By Staff Correspondent

Fiftyone passengers, including women and children, were killed and about 100 others injured when a Dhaka-bound bus from Aricha fell into a dry canal by smashing railing of a road bridge, 45 kilometers off the capital, on Monday.

This was the most tragic road accident in recent memory. The overloaded bus was at top speed at the time of its skidding off the 30-foot-high road bridge at Sutpara in Dhamrai upazila at 8.30 am. The vehicle was badly damaged.

According to police and hospital sources, 37 passengers died on the spot while 14 others succumbed to their wounds at Manikganj, Dhamrai and Dhaka Medical College hospitals. Later 36 critically injured persons were shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and the hospital for the Disabled at Sher-e-Banglanagar.

Earlier, the people of Sutpara, who rushed to rescue the victims sent 97 injured persons to Manikganj hospital, 16 to Dhamrai hospital and two to Ganaswasithya Kendra at Sewar.

Dhamrai police handed over most of the bodies to their relatives after they identified the victims on the spot and at Dhamrai thana.

The local people first started the rescue operation immediately after the accident occurred. Fire Service personnel from Manikganj and Dhaka and a five-member army team from Savar Cantonment later joined the rescue operation.

About 200 local people rushed to the spot and started pulling out bodies from the ill-fated bus. Later they put the vehicle back on its wheels and extricated all the passengers, dead and injured,

trapped inside the bus. They stopped the vehicles plying on the highway and used those for sending the victims to the hospitals with the help of fire fighters and army personnel. The rescue operation took several hours.

Police reached the spot two hours after the incident, the local people said.

Witnesses said, as the accident occurred, the passengers travelling on the roof of the bus were thrown into the canal and the bus fell on them. Parts of the bus were scattered.

Ths. correspondent found brain, blood, blood-stained clothes and goods including

vegetables lying scattered on the spot. Local people collected the valuables of the victims and returned some of those to their owners.

Rest of the things were handed over to Dhamrai police.

The passengers included a 17-member Tablig team who were returning to Kakrail Mosque in the capital from Rangpur, rescuers said.

It is believed that the driver lost the control as the vehicle tilted with its load on the uneven bridge. The road on the bridge is unusually sloppy at both edges. Hundreds of people were

rushing to the spot till afternoon.

Heart-rending scenes were witnessed at Dhamrai hospital and Dhamrai thana where the bodies were kept. The relatives of the deceased were found moaning over the deaths of their near and dear ones.

The driver of the ill-fated bus is allegedly absconding.

All of them, who were killed in the accident could not be identified besides Kahu Mia (30) of Dhamrai, Akhtar Hossain (40) of Sattaria, Abdul Majid of Sattaria, Saded Ali, Fazar Ali, Abdus Samad, Bahar Fakir, Moinuddin, Abdul Hamid and Azharul Islam.

14 witnesses cross-examined so far Informant of Ershad's arms case gained over by Defence

By Staff Correspondent

The Attorney General Aminul Haque yesterday declared that Ershad's arms case trial that the informant of the case Police Officer Shamsher Alam had been "gained over" by the Defence.

He told the one-Judge Special Tribunal trying deposed President Ershad that the prosecution had found there existed an association between Shamsher Alam and the accused Ershad.

The Attorney General said that he would not examine Shamsher Alam as a prosecution witness but would leave him to be cross-examined by the Defence if it wished to do so.

Police Officer Shamsher Alam who was the Deputy Police Commissioner (North) of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police has now been posted as Commanding Officer the Armed Police Battalion at Mohalchari in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Shamsher Alam was a

member of the Inventory Committee set up for the recovery of goods from Ershad's residence and he also lodged the FIR of the case at the instruction of the Home Ministry with the Cantonment Thana.

Earlier, Abdul Malek Senior Assistant Secretary of the political section of the Home Ministry in his statement as witness said that Shamsher Alam met Ershad six times at the Gulshan sub-jail between December 14 and December 23.

Tribunal Judge Mohammad Habibullah however questioned Shamsher Alam as a witness at a later stage in the proceedings.

Besides Shamsher Alam and Abdul Malek, two more witnesses were examined at the Tribunal yesterday (Monday). Joint Secretary of the Home Ministry (political) Abdul Hamid Chowdhury was also produced before the Tribunal as prosecution witness while

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Two more cases against Ershad

By Staff Correspondent

Two more cases have been filed against the deposed president, HM Ershad for alleged involvement in writing off industrial loan interest worth Taka 35 lakh and involvement in allotting housing plots in Uttara and Baridhara to his relatives.

Golam Murtaza, an officer of Anti-Corruption Bureau, lodged a case against the former president and the former chairman of Shipra Bank, AKM Mosharraf Hossain for writing of Tk 35 lakh interest of different industrial units belonging to Ershad's accomplices.

The other case was filed by Md Sazzad Hossain, another officer of Anti-Corruption Bureau, for allotting residential plots to 49 ministers by illegally ordering the Rajuk. He said the plots were allotted through unscheduled application forms.

Water talks with India begin today

Bangladesh and India begin talks today (Tuesday) on sharing of water of 54 common rivers including the Ganges.

The joint meeting is being held in accordance with a decision taken during Indian Foreign Secretary Muchkund Dubey's visit to Dhaka late March this year.

Official sources told UNB Monday Indian Secretary for Water Resources Dr. MA Chitale would arrive here Monday night leading a 6-member delegation to the two.

Dhaka concerned at BSF firing

A Foreign Office spokesman Monday expressed grave concern of the government at the reckless and wanton acts of Indian Border Security Forces (BSF) in Mherpur border villages recently, reports BSS.

The concern was conveyed to Indian High Commissioner K S Srinivasan at a meeting, held at Foreign Office Monday afternoon with Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Abul Hasan.

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Control crime with iron hands: PM

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia Monday asked the police force to control crime with iron hands and put in sincere efforts to maintain law and order in society, reports BSS.

Addressing the senior police officials at Rajarbagh Police Line, the Prime Minister directed them to discharge their duties without fear and favour. She assured them that they would get total support of the government in dealing with law and order situation. "My government would not interfere in the discharge of your professional duty," she said.

Begum Zia, also in charge of Home Ministry, said the country's administration was now being run by a democratically elected government and pointed out the role to be played by police in the changed circumstances.

"You have to serve the people as their friends and associate yourselves with them in fulfilling their hopes and aspirations," she said.

Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman, Home Secretary M A Sayeed and Inspector General

of Police A M Chowdhury also spoke on the occasion.

Begum Zia recalled that during the last nine years of autocratic rule the police force had been used for the selfish interest of the power clique.

She regretted that the failure of police to play their due and proper role in society at that time had tarnished their image and goodwill.

In this connection, she also recalled how interference in the police administration had caused deterioration of law and order situation in the immediate post-independence period.

Mentioning the activities of the police force during the administration of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman, the Prime Minister said their remarkable role at that time had ensured peace and stability in leading the nation toward progress. This was possible because the police were given the chance to perform their duties without any interference.

The Prime Minister expressed the hope that the police would regain their image and earn the confidence of the

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1 bill passed, 5 introduced

By Staff Correspondent
One bill was passed and five others were introduced in the Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) on Monday. The day's sitting was cut short in view of a Cabinet meeting scheduled to be held at night.

The Parliament passed the Eastern Railway Servants Benevolent Fund (Amendment) Bill providing for enhancement of monthly financial benefits.

Three members — Nurul Islam Mont (Independent), Salahuddin Yusuf and Principal MM Nazrul Islam of AL opposed the bill. They contended that the enhancement was not adequate.

Communications Minister Col (ret'd) OI Ahmed, who moved the bill informed the House that the law was long overdue since government servants in other departments

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Tight-lipped BNP works on bill for constitutional amendment

By Staff correspondent

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is reported to be preparing a constitutional amendment bill for introduction in the current session of the Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament). But the party leadership is tight-lipped about its contents.

A ranking BNP leader told The Daily Star on Monday that instead of concentrating on bills proposed by others, the BNP may move its own constitutional amendment bill in the House.

Sources revealed that there

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By-elections to JS vacant seats June 11

By-elections to the 10 vacant seats of the Jatiya Sangsad will be held on June 11, the Election Commission announced in Dhaka Monday, reports BSS.

According to a gazette notification issued by the Election Commission, nomination papers will have to be submitted to the Returning Officer or the Assistant Returning Officer on May 18.

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Top-level reshuffle in administration

By Staff Correspondent

A major reshuffle at the top-level of the administration has been made.

Fisheries and Livestock Secretary Lutful-Hil Majeed has replaced M. A. Sayeed as the Home Secretary. Sayeed is joining the World Bank as an Alternate Director. He left for Washington on Monday.

Land Secretary Syed Ahmed will take over as the Planning Secretary.

Information Secretary Nasruddin Ahmed is going to the Fisheries and Livestock Ministry. Manzur-e-Molla will replace him.

Some more changes at the top-level of the administration are in the offing.

Diarrhoea death toll 18 in two weeks in Rajshahi

From Our Correspondent
RAJSHAH, Apr 22: Four persons died of diarrhoea today in Rajshahi raising the toll to 18 in the last two weeks, Civil Surgeon office sources said.

More than 1,500 people were attacked with diarrhoea in Paba, Durgapur, Bagmara, Puthia and Godagar upazila and in the city, the sources added.

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Only 50pc of water requirement is being met

By Staff Correspondent

Total water requirement for Dhaka, Chittagong and other municipal towns of the country is 40.79 crore gallons daily. But only 20.06 crore gallons of water are being supplied at present.

This was disclosed by LORD Minister Abdus Salam Tahukder in a reply to a question of Col (ret'd) Shaukat Ali

Saddam likely to offer autonomy to Kurds

LONDON, Apr 22: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein appears to be close to making an autonomy deal with Kurdish rebels so that the United Nations will lift crushing economic sanctions, the London Times said today, reports Reuter.

The newspaper quoted Kurdish sources as saying that Saddam may be ready to make concessions on granting autonomy, believing that the West would look favourably on him and lift sanctions adopted after Iraq invaded Kuwait last August.

Iraq last week asked the U

N Security Council's Sanctions Committee for permission to sell nearly one billion dollars worth of oil so it could buy food and other supplies.

Under the deal Saddam was considering allowing the city of Kirkuk, an important oil centre which has a substantial Arab population, to be included in a proposed Kurdish autonomous region, the Times said.

It added, however, that many Kurds were wary of dealing with the Iraqi leader, who has violated past agreements with the Kurds, who form about 20 per cent of Iraq's 18

million people.

Saddam offered Kurds a measure of autonomy in 1974 but delegated few powers to the local government and real authority has remained firmly in Baghdad's hands.

Up to two million refugees fled to Turkey and Iran fearing for their lives when Iraq put down twin insurrections by rebels from the Kurdish north and Shi'ite south of Iraq in March.

The Iraqi state-run media has not mentioned any negotiations with Kurds and Iraqi officials on Sunday refused all comment on whether talks

had taken place.

Kurdish rebel spokesman said in London on Saturday that Jalal Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), was in Baghdad at the invitation of Saddam and his government.

AP adds: The International Committee of the Red Cross said Monday it would use its license to work anywhere in Iraq to bolster relief efforts for Kurdish refugees in the north.

By the end of their first day, establishing a haven in northern Iraq for Kurdish refugees, US Marines had bid goodbye to Iraqi troops and set up more

than 30 blue-and-white tents in a lush meadow near the Turkish border.

Jean de Courten, a senior ICRC official responsible for the Gulf, said Baghdad authorities had granted the humanitarian organization complete freedom of movement throughout Iraq.

This enabled the ICRC to operate in areas that were inaccessible to other relief agencies, he told reporters at a news conference in Geneva.

The ICRC had concentrated its relief efforts on vulnerable groups in areas around Baghdad and the southern city

of Basra, center of a crushed Shi'ite Muslim rebellion against President Saddam Hussein.

Two US soldiers were injured Monday by a land mine at a refugee camp on the Turkish-Iraqi border, military officials said. The border had been mined by both Iraq and Turkey before the Gulf War.

Lt. Cmdr. John Hopkins, a public affairs officer, said the extent of the injuries was not known.

They were the first such injuries reported among about 8,000 US troops aiding hundreds of thousands of Kurds.