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Rajiv assassinated

SRIPERUMPUDUR (Tamil Nadu), May 21: The former Prime Minister and AICC (I) President, Rajiv Gandhi, was killed in a bomb explosion in Tamil Nadu's Sriperumpudur, 40 km from Madras while on a campaign tour in the state tonight, reports PTL.

Gandhi's head was blown off in the explosion which occurred at 2220 hours as he got down from his car to address a public meeting in this town.

More than a dozen other persons were also feared killed in the blast.

The Congress (I) President had arrived in Madras this evening from Andhra Pradesh on a two-day election tour of the state, tonight and tomorrow.

Gandhi's body was lying in a pool of blood along with several other unidentified bodies.

Security men immediately cordoned off the area and were trying to rush the casualties to nearby hospitals.

The explosion which took place at the venue of the public meeting, 10 metres from the dais, could be heard about 200 metres away.



Gandhi's death was a brutal one, similar to the one his mother, Indira Gandhi had suffered in 1984.

Gandhi was jostling with partymen and admirers at the venue at the time of explosion. When police officials and party leaders, including O K Mooppanar, realised that the explosion had occurred, they found Gandhi's body with his head severed.

On identifying Gandhi's body the Congressmen broke down even while they were in a state of tremendous shock.

Immediately after the explosion people ran helter-skelter and chest-beating and wailing men shouted 'Rajiv enge, Rajiv enge' (where is Rajiv, where is Rajiv).

A PTI correspondent, barely 30 yards away from the explosion site, found Gandhi's body lying with his head smashed.

Several bodies were lying near his body. Two or three of the severely injured persons, with wounds all over their bodies, were found twitching.

Dazed policemen were trying to bring about some semblance of order and control. It

took several minutes for the policemen to pull out Gandhi's body from the pile of bodies heaped at the spot.

The air was filled with smoke and the stench of burning flesh.

Among those who sustained minor injuries was the Congress-I MP of the dissolved Lok Sabha, Mrs Jayanthi Natarajan. Several other Congress(I) women with blood-stained clothes were wailing, "They have killed Rajiv".

Several state Congress(I) leaders, including O K Mooppanar, escaped unhurt as they happened to be a few feet away from the explosion site.

A maximum alert was announced in Delhi tonight following Gandhi's death.

A police spokesman said, the entire police force was kept on a state of full preparedness to meet any law and order situation in the capital.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi, wife of Rajiv Gandhi and their children, Priyanka and Rahul, were not with him during the Congress-I leader's last moment.

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We mourn

We in Bangladesh, along with the democracy loving people all over the world, express our deep sorrow at the death of Rajiv Gandhi who was assassinated by a bomb blast near a small town in Tamil Nadu, 20km from Madras. While we mourn his death, we also express our outrage at the re-emergence of the politics of killing that has too often taken some of our best leaders from amidst us. At this moment of trial of the Indian people we wish them courage, sagacity and most of all, vision.

Dark clouds of uncertainty is gathering over the political sky of India as the nation braces itself for tackling the vacuum left by the death of Rajiv Gandhi. India faces an uncertain future as it has never done before. Following two unstable governments in succession, Indians were hoping for stability through the holding of this general election. But instead of stability, a far greater crisis has now fallen upon them.

It was a foregone conclusion that Rajiv's Congress(I) would emerge as the single majority party in the election for the Lok Sabha (Parliament). There were some indications that he may even get an absolute majority as Indian's may forgive his past mistakes and opt for a stable government that only his Congress could provide. Now that prospect of stability appears also to have eluded them.

Rajiv Gandhi's assassination is of particular concern to all of us in South Asia, because it comes at a time when India's unity was already under heavy strain through the emergence of various divisive forces in many parts of the country.

While we mourn the death of Rajiv Gandhi, we hope that this tragic event will strengthen the resolve of the Indian people to uphold the principles of freedom, democracy, secularism, tolerance and peace that he so valiantly fought, throughout whole life, to establish.

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NEWS BRIEFS

100 students join JCD

Over one hundred student leaders and workers of Ganotantrik Chhatra Shakti on Tuesday joined Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal severing all relations with the Shakti and expressing their faith in the ideals and programme of BNP, reports BSS.

Islamic varsity teachers protest

KUSHIA, May 21: Teachers of the Islamic University today abstained from classes, protesting "forced release" of two professors of the university, reports UNB.

Unsatisfactory progress in project implementation

WB alone withdraws \$368m aid pledge

By Reazuddin Ahmed and Moazzem Hossain

The World Bank alone has so far withdrawn development aid commitments amounting to 368 million US dollars due to inadequate preparation and unsatisfactory progress in project implementation in Bangladesh.

The amount represents 10 per cent of the Bank's cumulative aid disbursements of 3.8 billion dollars till date.

The bank may have to cancel more aid in the existing pipeline of 1.34 billion dollars unless aid utilisation performance improves.

Similar cancellations of aid commitments were made by other donor countries and agencies over the years, reflecting what the donor circles said in Dhaka, "poor aid absorption capacity of Bangladesh". The project aid pipeline has been bulging. It is

likely to stand at 5.6 billion dollars by June next.

Resident Representative of the World Bank mission in Dhaka Christopher Willoughby told The Daily Star in an exclusive interview on Tuesday that effective and faster utilisation of aid, already in the pipeline, should be the main priority of the government. "Mere fresh aid pledges will not change the economic scenario in Bangladesh unless aid absorption capacity can be substantially increased", he said.

He observed, "There is lot of hope, goodwill and sympathy among the donors for the newly installed democratic government in Bangladesh and more so now after the devastating cyclone". But there is also a demand for better performances for higher aid pledges and commitments, he

said.

Willoughby said that Bangladesh would require adequate flows of cash foreign exchange for balance of payments support and budgetary resource management after the cyclone.

The Aid Club in its meeting in Paris will discuss the overall plan and aid requirements which will be somewhat larger for next year.

The World Bank recommended 2.2 billion US dollars as fresh aid pledges by the donors at the forthcoming Paris meeting. The amount may be higher now and the Bank is awaiting the detailed assessment by the Bangladesh government about its requirements of additional support considering the impact of the cyclone on the overall economy.

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US will help develop early warning system: Mrs Quayle



Marilyn Quayle, wife of US Vice-President Dan Quayle, being received by Foreign Minister Mustafizur Rahman at International Airport on Tuesday.

Mrs. Marilyn Tucker Quayle, wife of United States Vice-President Dan Quayle and Chairperson of International Disaster Advisory Committee said US will try to help develop early warning system against cyclones and permanent steps against tidal surge, reports BSS.

Mrs Quayle, driving straight to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's residence from the Zia International Airport after her arrival, handed over a letter from US President George Bush to Begum Zia and informed her that she had come to Bangladesh to review the relief efforts and report back to President Bush.

Mrs. Quayle expressed her deep sorrow and sympathy for the victims of the cyclone in Bangladesh.

Mrs Quayle will also assess the effectiveness of US Marine Task Force's efforts and what more the United States may be able to do to contribute to the reconstruction of Bangladesh and to develop disaster relief programmes.

Begum Zia gave a resume of the relief operations going on in the cyclone-battered areas by the government and other agencies, including the US Task Force.

She said the people of Bangladesh had welcomed efforts of the Task Force to mitigate the sufferings of the cyclone survivors.

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Bush commends tackling of crisis by Khaleda Zia

US President George Bush has commended the leadership of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in tackling the crisis following the devastating cyclone which hit the coastal areas of Bangladesh on April 29, reports BSS.

President Bush in a letter to Begum Zia said, "I can also appreciate how difficult it was for you to face an emergency of this magnitude so soon after installation of your government. Your leadership in this crisis has been truly commendable".

President Bush's letter was handed over to Begum Zia by Mrs. Marilyn Tucker Quayle.

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Fahd expresses sympathy

King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia has expressed his sympathy and sorrow anew for the loss of lives and damage to property, caused by the recent cyclonic storm and tidal surge in Bangladesh, reports BSS.

The King, who is the custodian of the two holy mosques, also said that the help extended to Bangladesh was a brotherly gesture of the government and people of Saudi Arabia to the brothers of Bangladesh in their crisis.

The Saudi monarch said this in a letter to Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmad who had thanked King Fahd.

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Khaleda, Fahd to hold wide range of talks

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia during her visit to Saudi Arabia will hold talks with Saudi King Fahd on bilateral, regional and international issues.

The four-day 'goodwill' visit of Khaleda Zia to the Middle East countries will commence from May 25.

On the second leg of her visit she will also go to Kuwait to hold talks with the Amir of Kuwait and the Crown Prince.

Briefing newsmen, the Foreign Secretary, who will also accompany her during the

See Page 10 Col. 3

Devastation unimaginable, says British Commander

More foreign missions join relief effort

Star Report

More foreign missions were engaged in relief operations in the cyclone-hit areas Tuesday ushering in new hope for the survivors.

Coordinated efforts of the relief workers are encouraging the cyclone-hit people to live normal lives again.

The British Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) ship Fort Grange joined the multi-national mission here Tuesday in reaching relief materials to the survivors.

The 270-member British team includes navy personnel and the Royal Marine Special Boat Squadron.

Our Chittagong Correspondent adds: International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO) sent a seven-member team here to join the operations.

The team comprises four members from Saudi Arabia and three from the United Arab Emirates.

Talking exclusively to The Daily Star Tuesday morning at Chittagong airbase, the leader of the team Brigadier Dr. A. Z. M. A. Ahmed said that the IIRO would build a good number of cyclone shelters in the affected areas as part of the rehabilitation programme.

It had already sent relief goods for the affected people and some consignments were expected to reach here shortly, he added.

Brigadier Ahmed said that his organisation would supply CI sheets, bamboo and tubewells to expedite the rehabilitation process in the affected areas.

Meanwhile the relief opera-

tions were slightly hampered for the last two days due to inclement weather as some of the helicopters could not be made by both the US Task Force and the Japanese team.

The US Task Force has so far dropped about 900 tons of relief goods in different affected coastal areas, an official said.

Meanwhile our Staffer Sabir Mustafa reports from aboard RFA Fort Grange in the Bay of Bengal: Anchored eight kilometres south-west of Cox's Bazar, the British Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship Fort Grange Tuesday joined the multi-national effort to ferry relief materials to survivors of the 235kph cyclone and 22ft tidal surge that devastated the country's coastal belt on April 29.

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Farewell to Indian copters

By Staff Correspondent

Three MI-8 Indian helicopters with 27 crew members returned home Tuesday morning after accomplishing their relief mission in cyclone affected areas.

These three were the first foreign helicopters to come for gearing up relief operations in Bangladesh.

The other three MI-17 Indian helicopters, which joined the relief operation on May 9, are scheduled to fly back home on Friday.

The pilots and crew of the MI-8 helicopters were accorded a farewell at the old

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Mengistu flees home as rebels press on

ADDIS ABABA, May 21: Ethiopian President Mengistu Haile Mariam resigned and fled the country today as rebels advanced towards the capital, Ethiopian Radio said, reports AFP.

He was replaced by Vice-President Lieutenant-General Tesfaye Gebre Kidan, the commander of troops in Asmara, the besieged capital of Eritrea where a secessionist rebellion has been going on for 30 years.

Reliable sources in Nairobi said Lieutenant-Colonel Mengistu had arrived at the

Kenyan capital airport today.

He was aboard a twin-engine Buffalo aircraft accompanied by around a dozen people, and was refusing to leave the plane until he saw Ethiopian Ambassador Assefa Wolde.

The sources said, however, that the Ambassador was currently in the Ugandan capital Kampala.

Diplomats in Addis Ababa said the former President, who ruled his famine-plagued East African country for 17 years, was headed for Zimbabwe.

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Flood situation in Jamalpur turns grave

By Staff Correspondent

The flood situation in Jamalpur district turned grave on Tuesday. Waters gushing down from the Indian Garo Hills inundated vast tracts of land in the upazilas of Dewanganj, Madarganj and Islampur.

Low-lying areas of Jamalpur town were submerged on the day following heavy rainfall. The water level in the flood affected upazilas of the district was increasing, according to reports reaching Dhaka.

Meanwhile, the flood situation remained more or less unchanged in the greater Sylhet region. Although most of the rivers continued to recede the water level in the flood affected areas remained steady.

In Ranikhat union under Sylhet outbreak of cerebral malaria was reported.

The Flood Warning Centre in Dhaka said the Surma at both Sylhet and Sunamganj continued to fall and was flow-

ing 26 and 29 centimetres below the danger levels. The Kushiya at Sheola and the Manu at Moulvibazar receded further but still remained 18 and 10 centimetres above the red mark.

The Khowai at Habiganj and the Sumeswari at Durgapur marked rise on the day but remained below the danger levels.

According to the warning centre, the Surma at Sylhet and Sunamganj, the Manu at

Moulvibazar, the Kushiya at Sheola and the Khowai at Habiganj are likely to fall further, and the flood situation in the greater Sylhet region is likely to start improving.

Heavy rainfall continued in all the flood affected districts increasing sufferings of the people.

Our Jamalpur correspondent reports: The flood situation in three upazilas of the district deteriorated due to onrush of waters from the Garo

Hills and the rise of the Old Brahmaputra and the Jamuna.

The worst hit upazilas are Dewanganj, Madarganj and Islampur. In Madarganj, the Jamuna has started devouring the upazila headquarters.

Official sources confirmed five deaths in the district but the unofficial sources gave the figure at 16.

Road communication between the district headquarters and Madarganj upazila remained disrupted. The

Deputy Commissioner told The Daily Star that 21 unions of the three upazilas were badly affected. Crops of 50,000 acres of land were also damaged.

Sylhet

Road communication of Dhaka and Chittagong with greater Sylhet district was snapped on Monday night following the damage of a balley bridge at Chunarughat upazila under Habiganj district, official

See Page 10 Col. 1

Hearing of Ershad's arms case again adjourned

The Special Tribunal has again adjourned the hearing of Ershad's arms case as the hearing on the petition for transfer of the case is continuing in the High Court.

The hearing of the arms case was scheduled to resume on Tuesday in the Special Tribunal No 1, chaired by District and Sessions Judge Mohammad Habibullah.

The defence lawyers adopted an unconventional way

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