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## Veerappan gang kidnaps Raj Kumar, 3 others

BANGALORE, India, July 31: A former movie actor and South Indian power broker was kidnapped with three other men at his home yesterday by a well-known criminal gang, the chief minister of Karnataka said today, reports AP.

Raj Kumar, in his '70s, gained fame by appearing in more than 200 Kannada-language films over a period of 50 years and is a hero in the southern state of Karnataka.

Stray incidents of stone throwing and road blockades occurred in Bangalore, the capital, and elsewhere in Karnataka state as news spread of Kumar's kidnapping. Shopkeepers pulled down metal shutters to protect their windows, bus services were suspended and schools were closed until Wednesday as a precaution.

Kumar was hosting a housewarming in his home village of Gajanur, just across the state line in Tamil Nadu, when a dozen gunmen burst in, kidnapping him; his son-in-law, SA Govindaraj, and two other men, the Karnataka chief minister, SM Krishna, told a news conference.

He said the gang was led by a

well-known criminal, Veerappan, who threatened Kumar in the past.

Kumar is politically powerful and there is rivalry over water and other issues between people who live along the border between the two states. But no clear reason was given for his kidnapping.

Veerappan, who has a price on his head and is wanted dead or alive by police, gave an audio cassette to Kumar's wife and told her to take to Krishna, the highest elected official in Karnataka.

After a meeting Monday with M Karunanidhi, chief minister of neighbouring Tamil Nadu state where the kidnapping took place, the two state leaders agreed to send an emissary to Veerappan, as he had demanded on the cassette.

Veerappan began as an ivory poacher and by 1986 had become a full-time smuggler of rare sandalwood from the forests where he dwells, after eliminating other gangs. Police accuse him and his gang of 36 killings of police and forest service officers since 1989. He has staged several kidnappings and released the victims, often

for ransom.

Members of the national Parliament expressed anguish in the capital, New Delhi, over the kidnapping. The state authorities were criticized in speech after speech for their inability to capture Veerappan, although journalists have interviewed and filmed him. Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh assured the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of Parliament, that the national government would help the local authorities free Kumar.

Kumar's wife, Parvathamma, appeared at a press conference with Krishna, Karnataka's highest elected official, and said the gunmen had entered the house about 8:30 pm Sunday, just after dinner.

"We were taken by surprise," she said, adding that her husband told the gunmen, "I will come with you and talk."

He went outside and then Veerappan, the gang leader, came into the house and handed her a cassette, telling her to take it to the chief minister. "He said they would not harm anyone. They behaved well," she said.

## Partial privatisation of Biman finalised

By Nazmul Ashraf

The government yesterday finalised its decision on partial privatisation of the national carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines, ignoring ongoing protests by its employees.

At a meeting last night, the Biman Board of Directors gave the final nod to its earlier plan to convert Biman Bangladesh Corporation into a public limited company (Plc), meeting sources said.

According to the plan unveiled on July 13, forty per cent of the Biman shares will be offered to a strategic partner which is not a business rival of Biman. Nine per cent of the stakes will go to the Biman staff while the government is meant to hold the remaining 51 per cent.

The move triggered protests from five trade unions of the Biman employees.

The plan further said that no South Asian airlines would be allowed to purchase the stakes, as they are considered as Biman's competitors. Airlines of the countries having no diplomatic ties with Bangladesh will also be barred from bidding, said the plan.

Yesterday's Board meeting,

held at Sonargaon Hotel in the city with all its members attending, was presided over by Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mosharraf Hossain, who is also the chairman of the Board.

The Biman authorities, in the meantime, had several rounds of failed talks, the latest being on Sunday, with the agitated trade unions.

Meanwhile, the steering committee of the five trade unions continued their protests against the government plan to turn the national airliner into a Plc. They staged a sit-in demonstration in front of the Biman headquarters at Kurmitola in the city yesterday.

Speaking on the occasion, the committee leaders reaffirmed their resolve not to allow the planned conversion of Biman into a Plc under any circumstances. They also asked the government to withdraw its "conspiratorial decision".

As part of their week-long agitational programme, the steering committee will submit a memorandum to the Biman managing director at 11 am today.



Shimon Peres (L) and Moshe Katsav shake hands in the Knesset just before the Israeli parliament voted for the country's president yesterday. Moshe Katsav was elected president.

## Peres defeated: Katsav new Israeli president

JERUSALEM, July 31: In a stunning upset, a little-known opposition lawmaker was elected Israel's new president today, defeating former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, reports AP.

The victory of Moshe Katsav of the hawkish Likud Party spelled a humiliating end to Peres' half-century political career and dealt a serious blow to beleaguered Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

Barak's teetering minority government faced another challenge in parliament later today — a motion of no-confidence over his willingness to make land concessions to the Palestinians. Barak was expected to survive the challenge, but just barely.

A number of coalition legislators have defected to the opposition in recent weeks, and his foreign minister, David Levy, this week threatened resignation.

Hawkish legislators said today's presidential vote was a protest against Barak's peace policies and that they did not expect his government to survive much longer.

"I think this is another stage in the revolution that will take place in the next few months when there will be elections and the right-wing camp will return to power," said Shaul Yabalom of the National Religious Party, one of three factions that quit Barak's coalition ahead of this month's inconclusive Mideast summit at Camp David, the US presidential retreat.

Responding to the no-confidence motion, Barak told par-

liament that he still enjoys the broad backing of the Israeli people. He portrayed opposition legislators and defectors from his coalition as beholden to narrow interests, rather than the public good. Barak acknowledged that at the moment, he does not have a majority in parliament for a peace agreement with the Palestinians, but that he expected the mood to shift under public pressure once an actual accord was being presented.

The people of Israel will see who does not want a responsible government that will take the country forward," Barak told opposition legislators.

Peres had been the front-runner in the race for president and was the public's favourite. However, in two rounds of voting today, Katsav won 63 votes in the 120-member parliament, compared to only 57 for Peres.

## Shibir cadre Mujibya held

CHITTAGONG, July 31: Police arrested a notorious criminal and Shibir cadre from a house at Chandgaon area today, reports UNB.

The arrested was identified as Mujibudowla alias Mujibya, wanted in 29 cases, including killing, abduction and robbery.

Police arrested him on October 23 last year for the third time. He was released from Chittagong jail two months back upon a High Court order.

## Kumaratunga holds secret talks with LTTE leader

COLOMBO, July 31: Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga held secret talks with a London-based leader of the Tamil Tiger rebels who are blamed for an assassination attempt against her, the opposition said today, reports AFP.

Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe in a statement said that Kumaratunga held talks with Anton Balasingham, the main ideologue of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in London.

He did not say when the talks were held but Kumaratunga returned Friday after a week's private visit during which the Indian Press reported speculation that she was meeting with Balasingham.

There has been no official reaction here to the Indian newspaper reports, but the authorities had said the visit was to seek medical treatment for injuries suffered in the December 18 suicide bombing blamed on the Tigers.

Opposition leader Wickremesinghe said he was not seeking political capital out of Kumaratunga's meet with Balasingham and drew a contrast to a state media campaign that has sought to link him to the Tamil Tigers.

The state-run Daily News reported two weeks ago that Wickremesinghe had "lengthy discussions" with a member of the separatist LTTE exactly a month earlier in Singapore.

## Tareque Rahman gets bail in corruption case

Tareque Rahman, son of Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia, was granted anticipatory bail for 3 months by the High Court in a corruption case when he surrendered before the court yesterday, reports UNB.

The Bureau of Anti-corruption filed the case with Motijheel police in July 13 accusing Tareque and two others of exercising undue pressure and influence in purchasing a state owned enterprise at cheap price.

It said Tareque managed to buy George Distilleries at Panchagarh from Shiipa Rin Sangsha in August, 1994 at Tk 5.012 crore. But the market price of the enterprise was estimated at Tk 16.455 crore. Thus, he sustained a loss of Tk 11.443 crore to the state.

Two other accused in the case are Haroon Ferdous and Abdullah Al-Mamoon.

After hearing Barrister Moudud Ahmed, counsel for the petitioner, Justice Nurul Islam and Justice Montazuddin Ahmed of a division bench granted the anticipatory bail.

## Amu leading for victory

From page 1

AL and Elen. At least 25 people were hurt, seven of them seriously, in the incident. Two of the injured were hospitalised.

Polling was peaceful at the rest 121 centres.

"The by polls taught us many lessons as participation of voters was spontaneous. Participation of women was significant despite remoteness of the area. There might have been some false voting, something that is not unusual in elections. But these maladies would be removed in future polls", the CECSaid.

Syed was talking to newsmen at Jhalakati Circuit House after visiting different areas of the constituency, supervising the first election since he took charge as CEC on May 23.

Looking confident earlier in the morning, a beaming Amu told this correspondent that the polling was going on smoothly and he was happy. He was visiting Number-2 Rangbari Union centre in Jhalakati at 12:30 pm.

In contrast to speculations fuelled by the ruling party candidate's frantic electioneering joined by other ministers, the challenge mounted by Elen Bhutto was not so strong.

Her biggest drawback was absence of her agents in most centres, barring some in Nalchhiti, her stronghold. At Khojakhal centre, a woman polling agent of Elen sat with a gloomy face at 2:12 pm. She remained silent when asked if she found anything wrong.

Shahidul Islam, an agent of Elen, complained that he was ousted from Nalchhiti High School centre by supporters of Amu. The presiding officer, as well as Amu's supporters denied this.

But the mystery behind the presence of agents of an obscure candidate running with Axe symbol remained a big puzzle. He conducted no campaign but his agents were everywhere in at least 35 centres visited by this correspondent. Some doubted if they were acting as dummies for the AL candidate as many of them even failed to say clearly whom they were representing.

The turnout of women voters was quite high at Kirtipasha

School centre in a remote village. But in sharp contrast, the women voters, some 6740, barring one stayed off the polls at Magar union of Nalchhiti as per an edict given by local leaders after a woman was humiliated while voting before independence.

At Kirtipasha School centre, a man in Safari sat among the agents without a badge. But polling officers could not explain this and the man slipped out at the sight of newsmen.

Delwar, a farmer, said that he was threatened by this man as he went to cast his vote. "They wanted me to seal the ballot openly and said otherwise I would vote for Elen", the man told journalists and observers including those from the US Embassy and Bangladesh Manabdhikar Samonny Sangsha.

The day was a holiday and people were enjoying the polls. But voting was marred to some extent by motorbikes and vehicles moving on Dapdapia road as police made no attempt to stop them.

## Tania rape case

### Names of police excluded from FIR: Complainant

By Court Correspondent

Abdullah Mahmud Hasan, the third prosecution witness as well as the complainant in the sensational Tania Rape Case was cross-examined in the Special Court for Women and Children Repression Prevention, Dhaka, yesterday.

Judge M Shah Alam Miah adjourned the proceedings of the case till August 28.

Hasan in his statement said the Officer-in-Charge of Kotwali thana refused to register a rape case when the names of policemen were mentioned in the FIR as rapists of the victim Tania.

The OC of Kotwali registered a case when the names of police as rapists were omitted, Hasan added.

Tania, an eight-year-old girl was raped on the premises of the police control room adjacent to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Dhaka.

## 48-hr strike by jute, textile workers end

By Staff Correspondent

The 48-hour-long strike by the workers of state owned jute, yarn and textile mills will end this morning.

The Sramik Karmachari Oykya Parishad (SKOP) called the strike demanding implementation of its seven-point demand.

Talking to The Daily Star last night SKOP leader Abul Bashar said the government did not call them to hold dialogue on the problem facing the workers and employees at the state-owned mills and factories.

SKOP leaders will call a convention for deciding next programme after the strike ends at 8 am today, he said.

The future action programme would certainly be a tougher one, he added.

The agitating workers brought out processions and demonstrated in all state-owned factory premises yesterday as part of their strike programme.

The seven-point demand of the SKOP includes cancellation of move to privatise state-owned jute and textile mills, implementation of wage commission report, withdrawal of illegal audit complaint and regularisation of temporary workers.

## 3 of a family slaughtered in Pirojpur

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, July 31: Three members of an imam's family were slaughtered in Pirojpur town by unidentified assailants today.

The victims were identified as Asia Khatun, 22, wife of Imam Mozammel Huq and son Saifullah, 7, and daughter Salma, 10.

The heads of Saifullah and Salma were severed from their bodies. Asia was also about to be beheaded.

## 2 young men murdered in city

By Staff Correspondent

Two young men were murdered in the city yesterday, police and hospital sources said.

The victims were identified as Anisur Rahman, a lineman at Sayedabad Bus Stand and Masum, 20, a college student.

Local people said Anis had rivalry with another group over collection of toll from vehicles in the area.

Police quoting the FIR said some unidentified people called Anis out of his Dayaganj residence at about 11 pm Sunday. He was shot at about 2:45 am yesterday. He died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital at about 4:30 am yesterday.

Labannya, wife of the victim, filed a case with Demra police.

Masum was beaten to death allegedly by his rivals Monir and Manik following an altercation while playing cricket in Demra yesterday. Hospital sources quoting relatives said, Masum was dragged to Bhangapress at Shekhbazar and beaten up seriously, they added. He later died at DMCH.

## B Chy tells press in city Take united move against dengue

By Staff Correspondent

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury said yesterday dengue fever is spreading rapidly in the country and apprehended an epidemic.

Dengue fever has already claimed about 40 lives and the number of affected people is increasing every day, the BNP leader noted.

Prof Chowdhury was addressing a hurriedly called press conference organised by Dengue Resistance Committee of BNP at the official residence of Leader of the Opposition in the city yesterday.

He said it is wise for the government to take initiative to unitedly check spread of the disease but it is not doing so although the whole nation is panicked in the prevailing situation.

In this context, he recalled that the BNP government had formed a high-powered anti-plague committee immediately after the diseases spread in India and took all necessary measures in this regard. Even representatives of armed forces, police and various other forces and departments were included in the committee, he added.

## Police raid DU hall: Eleven arrested

By DU Correspondent

Police in a pre-down swoop yesterday raided Ziaur Rahman Hall of Dhaka University and arrested eight outsiders and three students on charge of residing illegally at the hall.

The outsiders are Mottur Rahman of room no 407, Zahid Hossain of room No 119, Fazle Elahi of room no 213, Ruhul Amin of room 407, Sirajul Islam and Mosiur Rahman of room no 401, and Abdul Sattar and Basirullah.

The students are Nuruzzaman, resident of Zahurul Huq Hall, Saiful Islam of AF Rahman Hall and Moinul Islam, a third year student of management. Nuruzzaman was earlier expelled from the university for his involvement in terrorist activities on the campus.

Campus sources said police cordoned the hall at about 2 a.m. and searched almost all rooms and other places of the hall. No firearms or ammunition was recovered during the one-and-a-half-hour raid.

Ramma police said last night

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