

'Kidnappers looked like tribals'

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area. We have sent people to investigate", he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He did not rule out involvement of UPDF or JSS and said he is waiting for details. "There can be anyone, either from UPDF or from JSS".

JSS officials immediately denied their involvement and blamed UPDF for the kidnapping.

UPDF leader Adhikar Chakma rejected the claim and accused JSS for this.

A British High Commission official told some newsmen over phone that they would not disclose identities of the kidnapped persons for security reasons. All efforts to secure their release are on, the duty officer at the High Commission in Dhaka said.

The High Commission made no comment regarding payment of ransom.

Kalparanjan Chakma also avoided a question about payment of ransom and said they will be freed soon as security forces have gone into operation to rescue them.

The gunmen who took away the

hostages were eight or more in number, British consultant David Weston freed by the gunmen told The Daily Star. He was also held along with the three but freed to convey the message for payment of Tk nine crore as ransom.

Weston said they were armed with 'old fashioned' shot guns and pistols. Some had ribbons of bullets on their chest.

He said they appeared to be tribal people. They took away two cameras from his vehicle and a Global Positioning System (GPS) before disappearing into the bush with three of his colleagues.

The gunmen searched all of them for weapons, and also the vehicles, but took no money or even his wristwatch, Weston said.

Weston, 56, an engineer from the URL Ltd. of UK arrived in Dhaka on Monday from London and left for Chittagong on Thursday.

The three others were posted in CHT for supervising road construction.

Naniarchar, surrounded by bush and lake, is an area where JSS and UPDF groups are fighting each

other. Eighteen people were kidnapped from there in the last two weeks.

Differences between JSS chief Jyotirindriyo Bodhipriyo Lama and the student, youth and women fronts of the organisation had become prominent before he signed the peace treaty on December 2, 1997.

On February 10, 1998, when the first batch of Shanti Bahini guerillas laid down their weapons at a ceremony at Khagrachhari Stadium, the dissidents covered their faces with black clothes and displayed banners demanding 'total autonomy' for CHT.

The dissidents eventually formed their own political party - UPDF - and were involved in a series of clashes with JSS activists. At least 70 people have so far been killed in clashes between the two groups since signing of the accord.

Lama accuses them of sabotaging the peace process and UPDF accuses him of selling out the interest of CHT.



A doa session and discussion meeting on the life of late Tawfiq Aziz Khan, former Executive Editor of The Daily Star, was held at the office of the daily yesterday.

Opposition conspiring to foil upcoming election: Hasina

UNB, Morelganj, Bagerhat

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday charged the opposition leader with hatching conspiracy to foil the next election through creating anarchy in the name of movement.

"The opposition is trying to satisfy political interest trampling corpses, trying to incite dissensions in the police by killing policemen," she said pointing to the killing of policemen during opposition hartals.

The Prime Minister came up with the observations about her principal political foe at a huge public meeting at Solombaria Bus Stand ground here in the afternoon a day after she offered to call election anytime if Begum Zia returned to parliament and set a date.

Sheikh Hasina questioned the justification of agitation by the opposition when the government will resign after three or four months in normal course at the end of her tenure.

"Do they want to show that they have pulled down the government? Do they want to score in the open net?" Hasina questioned saying that the people are not fool, election will be held under caretaker government after the government's resignation.

In fact, she observed, Begum Zia and her aides went mad losing power and were now trying for political agrandizement unleashing terrorism and killings.

The PM called upon the people to remain alert against the "evil design" of the agitating opposition parties.

Referring to the February 13 killings in the capital, she said the BNP cadres killed the innocent police. "What was his offence? Why they are killing police and people in the name of movement?"

Youngman stabbed, mugged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A youngman was stabbed by muggers inside a tempoo on way to Gabtali from Asad Gate last night.

Muggers, who were travelling in the tempoo, stabbed Nitay Chandra Pramanik, 30, an assistant contractor working at Jahangirnagar University, and snatched away Tk. 6,000 from him. He was treated at a city clinic.

Abduction, killing rampant

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tion of foreigners was very rare. In 1998, US oil company UMC suspended its operations in the CHT after a defence official in charge of security was shot and a UMC geophysicist was kidnapped and released after payment of ransom.

In 1983, three foreigners working with Shell Oil were abducted and taken to Tripura in India. But they were released on payment of Tk 10 lakh.

In 1978, a German and a Bangladeshi, both experts of Petrobranga, were abducted in CHT by Shantibahini guerillas. But both were released after questioning, sources said.

Last month, two European tourists driving from Rangamati to Naniarchar were waylaid by two tribal gunmen at a place about 40 kilometres north of Rangamati.

According to one of the tourists, the two tribesmen, one with a rifle and the other with a shotgun, sprang onto the road and ordered the tourists to stop. The visitors sped off and reported the matter to the next army checkpoint.

"When we told the army personnel they asked us if the bandits had taken anything from us. When we replied in the negative, they simply walked off," one of the tourists, a Scottish, had said.

But later, an Army Captain stationed at a hilltop cantonment, told the tourists that roads were 'safe' only on the days when army personnel move from one checkpoint to another.

"You can move without risk for three days a week when army vehicles transport troops to different checkpoints," the visitor told The Daily Star.

9 killed

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labourer, Farooq, 30, of Sadar upazila.

The injured were admitted to Sadar Hospital, where the condition of Majid, 28, Buddha, 30, Nasir, 28, and Salam, 32, was stated to be critical.

The bodies were sent to the local hospital morgue for autopsy. Police seized the truck, but its driver managed to flee.

Local Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police visited the spot.

A case has been filed with local police station.

India

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match at the Jagannath Hall ground of Dhaka University.

There were doubts whether India would take part in the tournament but eventually they got the permission of their government, which is presently maintaining a stubborn stand with Pakistan.

Pakistan, placed in the other group with hosts Bangladesh, picked up their third successive victory at the second strip of Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Proisthan (BKSP) in Savar. They thrashed Singapore by nine wickets.

Defending champions Sri Lanka also ambled to their third straight success at the expense of Malaysia, who suffered a massive 296-run defeat at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

Elsewhere, in a clash of the no-hopers Nepal defeated Kuwait by five wickets at the strip number one of the BKSP.

Hosts Bangladesh on the other hand enjoyed a day's rest yesterday after two successive wins.

Although today is an official rest day, two matches will be held at the BKSP. India will take on Malaysia while UAE will meet Oman.

Malaysia

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reached for comment. The Bangladesh embassy was also closed.

More than 100,000 mainly Muslim Bangladeshis work in Malaysia's construction, plantation and services sectors.

More than one million foreigners, many of them without valid documents, work in Malaysia, which is one of Southeast Asia's wealthiest countries and has recovered well from the 1997-98 Asian economic crisis.

More than 60,000 illegal workers were deported in 1999 and another 97,251 were sent back last year. The Immigration Department expects deportation figures to surpass 100,000 this year.

Rural poor

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On the other hand, the capital market and the industrial economy of the country will also get a significant boost if the potential rural savings can be channelled," he said. (More on Business Page)

Baghdad blitzed again

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north of the 33rd parallel, the upper limit of a no-fly zone that extends across southern Iraq to the Kuwait and Saudi borders.

"Saddam Hussein has got to understand that we expect him to conform to the agreement he signed after Desert Storm," Bush said in San Cristobal, Mexico, Friday.

Bush, who was speaking after summit talks with Mexican President Vicente Fox, described Friday's raid as "a routine mission ... conducted to enforce the no-fly zone."

Asked whether the strikes signalled a tougher US stance toward Hussein, the US leader said: "Our intention is to make sure the world is as peaceful as possible, and we're going to watch very carefully to see if he develops weapons of mass destruction. And if we catch him doing so, we'll take the appropriate action."

The strikes were in response to recent and more sophisticated Iraqi efforts to use the radar around Baghdad to co-ordinate surface-to-air missile attacks against US and British aircraft in southern Iraq, said Lieutenant General Gregory Newbold, operations director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Two dozen strike aircraft from the aircraft carrier USS Harry Truman and land bases in the Gulf launched the attack at 1730 GMT, firing long-range precision guided munitions from within the southern no-fly zone, Pentagon officials said.

The stand-off weapons struck five radar and command and control nodes positioned 3.8 to eight kilometres from Baghdad, Newbold said.

All but one of the targets was north of the 33rd parallel, the upper limit of a no-fly zone that extends across southern Iraq to the Kuwait and Saudi borders, he said.

The Iraqis fired anti-aircraft guns and surface-to-air missiles in return, he said.

By 1840 GMT, the attacking aircraft had cleared Iraqi airspace and were on their way back to their bases, Newbold said.

The sites attacked were the Taji Command and Radar facility, the Baghdad radar, the Al Taqaddum command and radar facility, As Suwayrah control station, and An Numanayah control stations, the Pentagon said.

Meanwhile, Iraq vowed Saturday to avenge the air strikes that underscore a tougher line by the new Bush administration in the decade-old showdown between President Saddam Hussein and Washington. "This new crime will not go without dissuasive punishment for the American aggressors," warned the armed forces' newspaper, Al-Qadisiya.

The official newspaper said Baghdad was determined to teach US President George W Bush, "son of the viper (former president) George Bush, a lesson which he will never forget."

However, contrary to the aftermath of previous attacks that left civilian casualties, Iraq's information ministry did not organise a visit to the bombed sites for journalists. At the same time, the authorities gave no details on the facilities hit.

Saddam chaired an emergency meeting of the Iraqi leadership and struck a tone of defiance.

"Iraq will continue to fight them (enemies) on land, in the air and at sea. Iraq will finally win," a communiqué said.

Britain defended the operation as justified under international law.

"We are quite confident that in international law our pilots have the right to defend themselves when they come under attack," British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon told BBC radio.

But both Russia and China condemned the raids while France said it had not received any advance notice of the strikes.

"What the American military is in the process of doing, at the beginning of the new US administration, is a threat to international security," said Moscow defence ministry official General Leonid Ivashov.

And speaking in Damascus, Russian President Vladimir Putin's special envoy to the Middle East,

Alexander Saltanov, said Russia and Syria consider the attacks "will not produce positive results."

He was speaking after a meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara.

The Chinese delegation to the United Nations said military attacks must be sanctioned by the Security Council.

"China opposes the armed intervention by any UN member state under any circumstances against any other nation without the express consent of the Security Council," delegation spokesman Meng Li said in a statement.

Canada, however, said it "completely supports" the air strikes, although it was not informed in advance.

Meanwhile, regional power Iran led Middle East condemnation Saturday of the US bombing of Baghdad as "signs of adventurism" by the new US president, but Gulf states maintained an embarrassed silence.

The Arab League complained that the attack had "no justification."

However, neither Saudi Arabia nor Kuwait answered Baghdad's taunts that they were "accomplices in crime" for allowing US and British warplanes to fly from their countries.

Arab world heavyweight Cairo was also slow to react.

Riyadh and Kuwait City, which celebrates the 10th anniversary of liberation from Iraqi occupation on February 26, are due to receive visits next week by US Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Other Gulf monarchies that rely largely on US might for their security - Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates - made no comments.

Turkey expressed regret and urged the new Washington administration to consult with Ankara on its Iraq policy.

3 foreign R&H consultants

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The British national and the car driver went back to Rangamati last night and informed the police of the incident.

Police searched the area last night but could not trace the hostages. Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong Bobaidul Islam and DIG of Police, Chittagong Range Nazrul Islam this morning rushed to Rangamati. They held a co-ordination meeting at noon to intensify the search operations to rescue and return them unhurt, administration sources said. The co-ordination meeting also decided to involve army teams to intensify the search.

Later, army personnel started search operations in the rugged hills.

A security official said that law enforcers have cordoned off the bush alongside the Rangamati-Khagrachhari road from where the foreigners were abducted. The Army Commander of Chittagong (Army) Division is expected to arrive in Rangamati soon. The army may use helicopters tomorrow if necessary, sources said.

Meanwhile, local politicians were putting pressure on leaders opposed to the peace treaty to force the abductors to free the foreigners, sources said.

Administration sources said that the abducted foreigners went on the road for a survey work under a project of Roads and Highway Department for rehabilitation and uplifting of selected major roads in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

They had gone there for the same survey under police escort a week ago, sources revealed, adding that they did not seek any police escort this time around.

The three kidnapped consultants have been on the project for sometime while David Weston joined them last week.

Ochendo freed

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Commission, jail sources said.

He will be flown back to Nigeria today, they said quoting the High Commission officials.

Today, the High Commission will inform the High Court the steps it has taken regarding Goddya, they said.

A Division Bench the High Court on February 11 ordered the Nigerian High Commission in Dhaka to take Goddya back home within five days.

The order followed a suo moto rule issued by the Division Bench comprising Justice Abu Sayeed and Justice Khademul Islam Chowdhury on February 5.

The suo moto was issued following a report in The Daily Star.

Goddya, then 19, was arrested in 1992 in connection with a drug smuggling case involving a teen-aged US girl, Eileada MacCord. He was acquitted in the case in July 1993.

But on July 13, 1993, he was again charged with entering Bangladesh using an invalid passport. He was given two month's jail term in 1995. Since the end of the jail term, he was languishing in jail due to legal complications.

Sit-in around Secretariat today

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maximum turn-out at the sit-in, dubbed by the opposition as the second largest street protest since the AL assumed power, the government has taken adequate security measures to maintain law and order in the vicinity of the Secretariat.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police have already banned gathering, rally and procession around the secretariat for 24 hours from midnight last night. The ban will be in force till midnight today. Carrying of all types of firearms during this period has also been banned.

According to sources, the govt will deploy more than 6,000 security personnel, including armed police, paramilitary BDR and plainclothes detective in and around the Secretariat. Hundreds of security personnel will also be deployed at different entry points of the city, building tops, important government and private establishments.

Large numbers of SB, CID, NSI, and DFI personnel will also be deployed on the city streets. There will be a four-tier security cordon by the riot police, Ansars, armed police

and BDR.

The areas where gathering, rally and procession have been banned are - Golap Shah Mazar to Zero Point, GPO Link Road to House Building crossing to Matshya Bhaban via Kadam Chatter and Topkavana Road, Zero Point to the south gate of Baitul Mukarram.

Matshya Bhaban to Kastury Hotel at Purana Paltan via New Road and Narcotics Department crossing, Golap Shah Mazar to Doel Chatter via Phoenix Road, Karmajibi Hospital, Abdul Gani Road and Old High Court crossing and all lanes and by-lanes in the area.

Police sources said last night that security personnel would be deployed in the restricted areas at midnight. Huge barbed wire structures have been arranged to put up strong barricades on those roads.

They said all senior police officials of DMP would remain on the streets to maintain law and order. BDR personnel will be kept stand by in and around the Secretariat while Armed Battalion Police will be deployed on rooftops of all-important establishments.

Riot vans, water cannons, fire brigade vehicles, ambulances, dog squads will be kept ready near the Secretariat and the Police Control Room.

The opposition parties have selected specific spots for gathering and also decided not to break the police barricades. BNP leaders and activists will start gathering near Dainik Bangla crossing, Jatiya Party at Matshya Bhaban, and Jamaat-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote at Bijoynagar. Jagpa and Democratic League will also be in the Bijoynagar area.

BNP sources said party's top leaders, MPs, central leaders as well as leaders and activists of the front organisations have been instructed to stage sit-in in front of the House Building Finance Corporation building, Dainik Bangla crossing and Motiheel up to Shapla Chhatar in a disciplined way. They have been asked not to try to cross the police barricade, the sources said.

BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia will join the demonstra-

tion. The sources said the party has no plan to proceed towards the Secretariat in a procession.

JP leaders and activists will be led by its acting chairman Roushan Ershad, and Jamaat and IOJ by Matiur Rahman Nizami and Muhiuddin Khan respectively.

Opposition sources said non-stop hartals from the beginning of this month have seriously hampered its campaign as well as preparations taken by other parties, especially the JP, is inadequate.

During the sit-in from 10am to 2pm, leaders of the opposition parties will deliver speeches one after another at their respective gatherings.

BNP leaders and activists from Dhaka's adjoining districts including Manikganj, Narayanjang and Narsingdhi will have their token participation in today's programme. They have been asked to come in Dhaka as general passenger.

Sources said that already hundreds of BNP activists have arrived in Dhaka and many of them taken shelter at 29 Minto Road, the official

residence of the Leader of the Opposition.

The party has instructed all districts and thana units to be ready for next course of action to be announced instantly if the sit-in programme is attacked by the government or any major incident occurred.

The alliance will call a country-wide dawn-to-dusk hartal tomorrow, even if no major incident occurs, sources said. In case of any major incident, the alliance would go for a two-day hartal on Monday and Tuesday, they added. A series of hartals and other tougher programmes would follow from February 25.

Meanwhile, Khaleda yesterday had a meeting with senior party leaders and instructed them to make sure that the sit-in be "completely peaceful and disciplined," said sources. The senior leaders were instructed to convey the message to all leaders and activists of the party and its front organisations. She also advised all not to react to "any type of provocation" from the government side.