

Blair due today

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Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan are likely to be the key issues on the agenda.

Bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Britain is also likely to come up for discussions.

Despite the evening arrival, most of Blair's official programmes have been stacked for today since Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will leave for Kathmandu tomorrow morning to attend the SAARC Summit. The British dignitary will continue with his other programmes tomorrow.

Foreign Minister Morshed Khan and Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury returned to the capital yesterday evening from Kathmandu to be available during talks between the two prime ministers.

After arrival by a special flight of British Airways, Blair will be taken to the Bangabhaban in a motorcade for a courtesy call on President Badruddoza Choudhury. Mrs Blair will be taken to Dhaka Sheraton where they will be staying.

Formal talks between the two prime ministers will begin at 8 pm at the official residence of Khaleda Zia. The British dignitary will then be treated to a working dinner in which Foreign Minister Morshed Khan, Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury, British High Commissioner Dr David Carter and seven other dignitaries will attend.

Britain is organising and leading the ISAF, set up under a UN Security Council Resolution passed last month.

The ISAF, created under Chapter Seven of the UN Charter, is different from the traditional Peacekeeping Force formed under Chapter Six of the Charter.

Chapter Seven calls for Enforcement Action involving high-risk exposure and action to prevent human rights violation, safeguard distribution of relief materials and check outbreak of factional fight, if it so happens. Chapter Six covers routine peacekeeping work.

Bangladesh earlier extended support to the US-led coalition against terrorism. On September 18 last year, it also offered use of strategic facilities including airport and seaport by the coalition force, if needed, to fight terrorism.

Since the September 11 terror attacks in the US, the British Prime Minister has been playing a pivotal role in mobilising world opinion against terrorism. He launched intensive diplomatic campaigns in the Middle East and in South Asia.

Blair will also be visiting India and Pakistan during his current South Asian tour. From Dhaka, he will fly to the Indian city of Bangalore prior to official talks in New Delhi on Sunday after Indian Prime Minister Atal Vihare Bajpai returns from the SAARC Summit. He is scheduled to fly to Pakistan on the following day.

Britain is providing assistance to Bangladesh for poverty alleviation and development of primary healthcare facilities, infrastructure and the energy sector.

The Blairs will place wreaths at the National Memorial at Savar tomorrow as a mark of respect to the martyrs of the War of Independence. Blair will also meet senior Awami League leaders during his stay.

Mrs Blair will meet members of the Acid Survivors Foundation and visit a BRAC project at West Kellia village at Joypara in Savar.

The British prime minister and his entourage will leave Dhaka tomorrow at 3 pm.

Pak cricketers

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Sheraton under police escort and spent the whole day at their rooms. They are scheduled to practice at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in the morning today.

Pakistan will open their four-week tour on January 5 with a three-day practice match against Bangladesh A at the BKSP.

The first Test commences at the Bangabandhu National Stadium from January 9. Chittagong will host the second Test, scheduled to start from January 16, and the first ODI on January 22.

The last two limited-overs matches will be day-night affairs in Dhaka on January 24 and 25.

Three players -- Shahid Afridi, Shoaib Malik and Azhar Mahmood -- will join the team for the one-day series. They would replace Danish Kaneria, Faisal Iqbal and Mohammad Sami, who are scheduled to return home on January 21.

(More stories on Sports pages)

Dacoit killed in mob beating

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

One dacoit was killed in mob beating and five others were caught red-handed by the villagers at village Palgaon under Keraniganj upazila yesterday.

According to villagers and police, a gang of 20 dacoits went to the village at about 3 am and looted valuables from a number of houses.

When they were fleeing with the booties by a mechanised boat, the villagers chased them. One of the dacoits, identified as Kalam, 25, was caught by the villagers and beaten to death.

Later, the villagers with the help of patrol police of Keraniganj thana caught five others. The other members of the gang managed to flee.

Shahriar Kabir

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rejected the bail petition of Shahriar Kabir.

Shahriar Kabir was detained by the Special Branch (SB) of police at immigration desk at Zia International Airport on his return from Kolkata on November 22 last year.

Police also seized his passport, five video cassettes, 13 audio cassettes, 3 CDs, a still film and his camera.

He was later shown arrested under Section 54 of CrPC for his alleged involvement in anti-state activities abroad. No specific case was filed against Shahriar Kabir till December 7 last year.

Mohammad Shahadat Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Airport thana, filed a seditious case against Shahriar with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, on December 8 last year.

Later, the case was registered as a regular case following an order of the CMM's Court.

When contacted, the defence lawyers -- Khondaker Abdul Mannan and Moklesur Rahman Badal -- said that they would file a Criminal Revision with the High Court. The defence lawyers submitted a petition seeking certified copies of the rejection order.

Shazneen case

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The defence lawyers were ready for hearing.

After hearing both sides, the court adjourned the hearing.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, chairman of Transcom Group, was raped and murdered at their Gulshan residence on April 23, 1998.

Latifur Rahman filed a murder case with Gulshan thana on April 24, 1998 accusing Shahidul Islam alias Shahid, a domestic help at his residence.

Mojibur Rahman filed a rape case with Gulshan thana after six months' investigation into Shazneen murder case.

All the accused -- Shahid, Hasan, Badal, Shaniram, Minu and Parvin -- were produced in the court during the hearing.

Indian troops

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attack or sponsoring Islamic militants.

Fernandes said India's troop build-up on the border was now complete.

"The forces are on the border, but they are not in battle positions," he said. "Such troops as the army wanted up front, I think it has already completed."

Fernandes said the troops had been deployed just short of the border and moving them up if needed would take time.

He would not say if India's medium-range Prithvi missiles had been deployed or if nuclear weapons were ready.

"On the operational aspect, I don't think it's possible for me to get into details," he said. "An army is always prepared for whatever situation may arise."

Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged heavy machine gun and mortar fire overnight in Kashmir, despite diplomatic efforts to ease escalating tensions between the two nuclear powers.

The troops traded mortar fire in the southern Kashmir region of Nowshera, while in nearby Hiranagar there was an intense exchange of machine gun fire, a defence ministry official said yesterday.

Meanwhile, Pakistan insisted yesterday that India provide evidence against 20 alleged terrorists whom it wants extradited as part of moves to ease tensions.

"The list is with regard to crimes committed in India. Obviously they have to provide evidence," said foreign ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan.

India is demanding that Pakistan arrest and extradite the "terrorists and criminals", saying Islamabad must keep taking vigorous anti-terrorist actions.

Share scam

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televised speech said the actual share market scamsters would be identified and brought to book as part of her government's 100-day agenda for action.

The government also said it would publish a white paper on corruption during the tenure of the previous government.

With 24 days remaining to the 100 days, the finance ministry last month asked the SEC to launch a fresh investigation.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia presides over the ninth meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Law and Order at her office yesterday.

Enlightened citizens

FROM PAGE 12
Prof Earl H Potter III from Eastern Michigan University, USA. Mrs Ali conducted the inaugural function.

The President said the need for private universities was felt as public universities could not cope with the growing demand for higher education in the country. But the ratio of intake of students in public and private universities is still wide, he noted.

Educational institutions have social responsibilities in a democratic country and university education should be affordable to all, Baruddoza said.

He expressed the hope that the university will work as a bridge, blending the culture and tradition of the East with the science, technology and management knowledge of the West through imparting education.

Dr. Osman Farruk said the past BNP government of Begum Khaleda Zia created the legal basis for setting up of private universities in the

country to meet the growing demand for higher education at home.

There are about 20 private universities in the country now.

Vice Chancellor M Monwarul Islam said EWU charges the lowest fees among the leading universities in the country and is equipped with highly qualified and experienced teachers. The dramatic growth of student enrolment manifest confidence of people in EMU, he said and assured maintenance of high standard of education.

Professor Earl H. Potter in his speech appreciated the vision of founders of the university to add the innovation and technology of the West to the culture and values of the East. The Eastern Michigan University is also interested to pursue the vision, he added.

At the ceremony, the Vice-chancellor presented crests of EWU to the President, the Education Minister and Prof. Potter.

Prices of secondary level textbooks reduced

BSS, Dhaka

The government has reduced the prices of secondary level textbooks despite their higher printing costs this year for using white print papers instead of newsprint as used in the previous years.

A National Curriculum and Textbook Board official told this news agency that price for textbooks for Class VI to X were reduced by four to 7.26 per cent than that of the previous year.

The government took the decision in line with the recommendations of a review committee formed to re-fix the textbook prices, he said.

Meanwhile, the board officials said printing of the primary textbooks is complete and the government is striving to reach the books to all the students by the end of the current month to fulfil its commitment.

Industrialist, maids slaughtered

FROM PAGE 1
did not turn up at one of his factories some employees went to the house at about 9:30am and asked the women, employed in the house to look after the household chores, about the reason behind the delay.

They told them that they could not say anything. The women live in staff quarters on the house premises.

The employees then informed their first wife Rizia Begum about the matter, who live in a separate house in Sutrapur. Rizia along with their children and relatives came to the Alam's house and started calling him. Having got no response, the family members informed the Shyampur police station. The police and the family members broke open the collapsible gate to enter the house where Alam stayed. All the four rooms on the first floor were found locked from inside.

Police broke open the door of Alam's living room only to find him lying in a pool of blood in the bed. Later, they opened the other rooms and found the three women in each of the rooms; all of them dead.

Initial inspection suggested that a scuffle between the victims and the killers had taken place. Some of the furniture were displaced. There was a locker room next to the living room and upon opening it, police found two almirahs, one empty and the other containing bundles of blood-stained bills worth more than Tk 1 crore. One of the women was found dead on the floor of the locker room. Family members said the almirahs were filled with money and gold.

Police also found Tk 20 lakh inside a torn bag on the floor of Alam's room. Farida supposed to be in the house at night was not found there. The other women who stay at the quarters could not say anything about the incident.

The house is well secured and located in an isolated point.

Police arrested three women including Farida, found in the crowd on the premises, and took them to the DB office at Minto Road for interrogation. They will be produced before the court today.

Neither the police nor do the family members have any clue to the incident. Some family members, however, suspect that Farida may have a hand in the killing.

Deputy Commissioner of DMP Noor Mohammad talking to reporters said that he believed that some people known to Alam might be behind it to lay their hands on the money.

Some of his employees said they did not know of any bickering between Alam and others over money or business. "He was a simple man who loved to make money and keep them in his locker," said one of the employees.

Police recovered five sharp knives and a toy pistol from a water body on the house premises. Police suspect that the killers threw the knives there after they were finished.

Police believe the operation was planned well in advance. It remains a mystery why the murdered women, who used to stay on the ground floor, were on the top floor during the incident.

A murder case was filed with Shyampur Police Station and the Detective Branch of Police is investigating the case.

According to family members, Alam's businesses sprawl over around 50 acres of land at Alambagh and include Alambagh Supermarket, Alambagh Steel Rolling Mills, a ceramic factory, Saman and Sons Re-rolling Mills.

Father of five daughters and three sons, Alam also had several garment factories in the city and 1200 acres of farmland in Kamrangirchar. He built the luxurious residence a few years back.

He started staying on the second

floor room of the house with his family. He married twice and his wives do not stay with him.

Khalequzzaman Roni, son-in-law of Alam, said his grandfather employed some 16 women in the house and one of them, Farida, used to watch their activities. "My grandfather craved for wealth and used to keep crores of money in the locker room."

He also said that Alam had a strained relationship with his family, who had asked him many times for a reunion.

Poliovirus

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compatible cases of polio in 2001 are yet to be finally classified by a 14-member foreign expert committee reviewing such cases in Bangladesh every three months.

Compatible wild polio cases are those resembling wild polio in terms of diagnosis, but are not clinically confirmed.

Experts however said some of the cases suspected last year have been examined at the Centre for Disease Control in Atlanta, USA, and Mohakhali in the city. The results are yet to be known.

Some 475 cases of wild polio were found in the country in 1998, 322 in 1999 and 197 in 2000.

The paralytic poliomyelitis virus that causes the disease enters a child through mouth and reproduces in the intestine. The virus incubates between five and 30 days before it attacks its host.

Only one per cent of the infected become paralysed while the rest would not even realise that they were attacked. The virus attacks and destroys certain nerves in the spinal cord causing paralysis. About 80 per cent of the virus are discarded from body through excreta.

SAARC summit agenda

FROM PAGE 1
newly elected Q A M A Rahim of Bangladesh takes over.

The SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vice President Padma Jyoti presented his report on cooperation in the fields of trade and investment, he said.

The council session, he said, resumes today to adopt a report for consideration by the summit.

The agenda items to be covered include, on economic sector a review of intra regional cooperation for common position on WTO issues, trade among regional countries, regional trade fair and a review of regional poverty alleviation mechanism, he said.

On social sector, he said, the council would discuss SAARC Social Charter, issues relating to women, children and health.

It will, he said, discuss two draft conventions to be presented to the summit for approval, which include, draft convention on combating

crime of trafficking women and children for prostitution and draft convention on regional arrangement for promotion of child welfare in South Asia.

Ministers from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are taking part in the talks, the first for the SAARC Council of Ministers since their May 1999 meeting in Sri Lanka's hill resort of Nuwara Eliya.

SAARC foreign ministers were originally intended to meet at least twice a year and summits should have been held annually.

However, bilateral tensions between India and Pakistan held up the 11th summit which should have been held here in November 1999.

SAARC was established to promote stability in a region which is among the most volatile in the world, with constantly simmering bilateral tensions and long-running internal conflicts.

The last summit was held in July 1998, since when disputes between perennial rivals India and Pakistan have derailed all attempts at holding another conference.

The summit is likely to be dominated by India-Pakistan relations which are currently at their lowest ebb since their 1971 war.

India has ensured that terrorism will top the agenda at the Kathmandu summit, and will lay out its case against Pakistan as a sponsor of "cross-border terrorist activity" in the knowledge that this particular SAARC meet will have an international audience.

India has so far ruled out any one-to-one meeting between Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf on the sidelines of the summit, but has left the door open to talks between the foreign ministers.

Persecution of Simi

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All the walls of the house, including the kitchen, bedrooms, dining room, corridors, staircase and the balcony were adorned with Simi's artwork. She had a special interest in pottery painting and finely painted earthen pots could be found everywhere in the modest house.

The events that led to her death are both tragic and terrifying. She had been under attack for months, a systematic and brutal verbal abuse that was meant to and ultimately did break her spirit. The persecution of Simi, homicidal in its tenacity and single mindedness, was led by a group of young men. Doel, Khalil, Tofazzal and Ripon may have been at the top of the pack but there were others as well. In fact they had been at it for months. They taunted, teased and humiliated Simi till she snapped.

Yet her fault was simply the timing of her work. Simi came home late from work and that was good enough for the able bodied men to bay for her blood. That is also what Sub-inspector Bashar told Simi and her family when they protested to him that she was being harassed. According to the family, he took the side of the abusers. He told them that returning late from work wasn't a good thing to do.

"Simi was a good alpina artist and was in great demand. Since alpina is usually designed in the evenings after the day's activities are done, she worked late to finish her work. That was her crime," said Shaba.

She would also return home late from her classes in Narayanganj because she commuted by train. If her classes were over at 5 p.m. she would have to wait for the train. She would get off at Kamplur station and by the time she reached home on a rickshaw it would be late. That too was her crime.

"The hoodlums hanging around at the entrance of the lane would pass dirty remarks whenever she passed by and the situation started to turn nastier day by day," Shaba added.

Simi complained to her family about it and often mentioned to her friends about the problem as well.

Family sources said only three days before her death the situation peaked. When she went to the local pharmacy for buying some medicine, the neighbourhood thugs confronted her openly in the street and threatened her "Where do you get so much courage to move around like this? Who gave you this liberty? Next time we find you on the street late you will be beaten up," Shaba quoted what the hoodlums had said.

After she returned home and heard her ordeal, Simi's brother Sumon went to meet the hoodlums and demand an explanation. But Sumon returned home with bruises instead. The gang members beat him up and threw him into a road-side pond.

After Sumon was beaten up, their father, Emdad sought help from some local community leaders, who assured him that they would gather soon and settle the matter in a shalish.

The following day, (Dec 22,) at around 10-30 AM, Doel, Khalil, Ripon and four others, all armed with knives and other weapons came to Simi's house and called out Sumon.

Emdad and his children Simi and Sumon faced the hoodlums at their doorstep. They were told in plain terms that he family would be taught a lesson. They told Simi that she was "nothing but a whore". At this point Simi slapped Doel as she burst into tears. The gang then left away after threatening Simi of dire consequences of an acid attack 'within a day'. They also said that they would kill her brother Sumon.

At around 3 PM on the same day, Simi and her friend walked towards the main road when a police van stopped them on the way. Doel, Khalil, Tofazzal and Ripon were sitting inside with the police. The police Sub-inspector Bashar stopped Simi and asked her to accompany them to her house.

In the house the perpetrators and the police, led by SI Bashar sat in the living room and summoned the entire family. SI Bashar then told the family that he had received a complaint from Khalil that the family had stolen TK 3,500 from the group and also had beaten them up.

"Why did you slap him? Do you know a man can slap a woman but a woman cannot slap a man? Do you know how much humiliation this boy had to undergo in the area? Do you know that in Quran it is said that if God ever asked anyone to worship after him, that would be the husband?"

Bashar was further quoted as saying, "Next time I hear you did the same thing I will handcuff you and drag you down and take you away in my vehicle." Bashar also threatened Emdad of dire consequences and asked him 'settle the matter' as soon as possible through a shalish.

On December 23, Emdad went to seek help from some community leaders in the area, who again assured him that the matter would be settled through a shalish in the evening.

In the evening a group of so called leaders, led by one Enayet Chowdhury, arrived at Emdad's house to tell him that there would be no shalish on that day. Family sources said that Simi was sobbing

at the time and asked the group why they had told her father that she was not a good girl. Enayet Chowdhury then insisted that he was sure Simi was 'a bad girl'.

Just as the men stood there a sobbing Simi ran into her room and locked it up from inside. Her mother Zarina Begum recalled the fateful day.

"A few minutes after she locked the room there was a pungent smell all over the house, I begged everyone including the men who had come for shalish to break open the door but they just walked away," Zarina Begum said sobbing.

As the family broke open the door, Simi was found lying on the bed motionless. She was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where the doctors washed her stomach and transferred her to the intensive care unit. At around 10 PM she was declared dead.

Simi had hastily written a note (copy obtained by The Daily Star) before taking the lethal potion. In that note she accused SI Bashar, Ripon, Khalil, Doel, Mofazzal and some others in the area for her death. She said the harassment she had undergone felt like 'worse than being raped'. She said her death would symbolize her protest against harassment of women. She was choosing death so that, other women would not have to experience what she had.

A day after her death, SI Bashar returned to Simi's house and told Zarina Begum, that he hoped they wouldn't lodge any complaint against him.

The government however took firm action on this and arrested Bashar for abetting a suicide. They have also launched a manhunt for the gang members. SI Bashar is now being interrogated but none of the other criminals have been apprehended yet.

Simi's class friend, Quamruzzaman said that Simi always preached life and worked with total dedication. "She told us sadly that the local hoodlums were after her and that police came to question her, but we could not do much to help her."

Humaira Jahan, another class friend said that Simi worked so hard everyday commuting from so far away that she was really encouraged by her example every time she met her. She said Simi had told her that she felt very sad as many people misunderstood her.

"I always found a leader in Simi because she always protested any wrong doing," Humaira said.

Rocky Ahmed Sumon, another friend of Simi said that a day before her death, Simi had told them that she had been deeply humiliated. Simi even wept in front of her friends on the last day.

Aslam, a freelance photographer and Simi's friend said that all her friends, teachers and whoever knew her wanted justice to be done.

A senior Teacher of Bangla language at the Mohammadpur Girls High School, Rakiba Anwar Dilu, who had taught Simi at the school said that Simi was an inspiration for all the girls in the institution. She said Simi fetched all the national and local awards in art competitions for the school.

"We are very proud of her in the school and all the teachers who knew her could not help but cry when they heard the news."

Meanwhile, at Bhuiyapara yesterday, the shops belonging to the perpetrators, Tonni General Store belonging to Mofazzal and Medipulus Pharmacy belonging to Ripon opened for business after being closed for ten days following Simi's death.

Sources said that the perpetrators were moving around in Bhuiyapara and threatening to take revenge on Emdad's family. The entire family is now living in extreme fear. Local sources also noted that, Doel's mother Lutfunnahar Lata has hired some local goons to remove all the posters, which demanded justice for the 'killing of Simi'. More important, the police have stopped looking for the perpetrators in the area, local people said.

It seemed that after the media hype is over, the case would take the usual course and loose itself in oblivion. Simi's death will soon be forgotten in the pile of many other deaths and her terrible sacrifice may well be in vain.

Legal aid body

FROM PAGE 12
seeking legal assistance.

Many of the letters contained complaints like police's refusal to take cases from victims, and the lengthy process of investigation, the sources added.

On December 26, the AL alleged that 296 leaders and workers of the main opposition party were murdered and 8,303 others injured in 642 incidents of terrorist attacks during the regime of the last caretaker government.

Moreover, some 300 AL leaders, workers and members of the religious minority have been killed and 1,500 others injured since the formation of the alliance government.

At a news conference in the city the same day, AL acting chief Abdus Samad Azad also alleged that strengthened by 'brute majority' the 'Khaleda-Nizami' government indulged in 'brutal terrorism'.

Kamal Majumder held

FROM PAGE 1
Sources said Pallabi police assisted by Gulshan police raided Kamal's Banani house at 127E, Road 19/A, and arrested him