

17 murdered in city

FROM PAGE 1
At about 4.00am, two unidentified youths went to his house and told his mother that Babu had been murdered at block-C, section-11.

Victim's mother Safia Begum went there and found the body of her son dumped into a drain. The body was sent to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.

Safia Begum filed a murder case with Pallabi Police Station.

Police arrested Mahbul Islam Mithu on Sunday in connection with the killing. Pallabi police said Mithu confessed his involvement in the killing.

A rickshaw-puller identified as Ingil Mia, 25, received severe bomb injuries when unidentified miscreants hurled crackers near the Chest Hospital at about 8:30pm Thursday.

He was taken to the nearby Pangu Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

In another incident, a boy was killed in a gunfight between two groups of drug peddlers in the city's Mohammadpur area in the small hours of yesterday.

Police said Suman, 12, suffered bullet wounds as the two groups fought over supremacy in the area at about 12:30am. Suman died after sustaining multiple bullet wounds. His body was sent to the DMCH morgue.

In Demra, unidentified miscreants knifed a street urchin to death on Thursday afternoon. Police said the killers dumped his body near the Dayaganj Bridge at about 3:00pm.

Police recovered the body of the following day and sent it to the DMCH for autopsy.

Meantime, an unidentified young man was slaughtered at Jatrabari on Sunday night. Police recovered the body of the unidentified man, aged about 25 years, wrapped in a sack from a pond near the Wapda colony gate No. 2.

At SK Das Road in Gandaria, a young man was stabbed to death on Thursday morning.

Police and family sources said a group of youths called Sohel, 22, out of his residence at about 10:30am and took him to an unknown place. Sohel's body bearing stab injuries was later found near Zia Sarani the following day.

At East Jurain, unidentified miscreants allegedly raped a six-year old girl before suffocating her to death on Wednesday night.

Family sources said Sathi went missing since February 17. Mother of the victim found the body in an abandoned house in the area Wednesday evening.

At Sultanganj Road in the city's Hajaribagh area, a 98-year old woman, Monohari Das, was slaughtered inside her residence on Sunday morning.

Sources said the victim was staying at the house with her two daughters-in-law and a son-in-law. Like other days, her elder son and daughter-in-law went to work in the morning. The victim's younger daughter-in-law was also out of the house when unidentified miscreants slaughtered her at about 10:00am.

Police so far have no idea about the motive behind the killing.

In another incident, a housewife was strangled at BC Das Lane under Lalbagh thana last night. The dead has been identified as Meherunnessa Shampa, 26.

At Rawalpara of East Badda, an alleged cattle thief, Alamgir, 30, was beaten to death by local people in the early hours of Friday.

In Mirpur, a police constable was shot when a man opened fire on a police patrol on the Eid day.

Police and witnesses said constable Azhar received bullet wounds in the back when Masum, an alleged terrorist, opened fire at about 1:15am. Azhar was admitted to the DMCH.

At Meradia, a group of terrorists fired gunshots and exploded crackers to disrupt auctions of rawhides of sacrificial animals at Meradia Primacy School on Saturday, leaving at least five injured.

The auction was arranged by the authorities of Haji Aiminussa Madrassah, named after the mother of Meradia Ward Commissioner and Awami League's Meradia ward unit president Md. Mohsin. Former Awami League MP Shamim Miris is the president of the Madrassah committee.

Local people said the terrorists obstructed the auction at the school in the evening in an attempt to buy the rawhides at nominal prices. At one stage, they fired gunshots and blasted crackers putting an end to the auction.

FBI reportedly has anthrax suspect

AP, Washington

The FBI reportedly has a chief suspect in its anthrax investigation.

The Washington Times reports federal authorities are looking at a former US scientist. They believe the unidentified scientist learned how to make a weapons-grade form of the deadly bacteria at a government laboratory.

The paper cites law enforcement and other sources as saying authorities are targeting the scientist after interviewing more than 300 people tied to the government's anthrax programme.

Five people ended up dying after anthrax was found in letters sent to Florida, New York, Connecticut and Washington last fall.

Sources tell the newspaper the FBI has known for more than three months the person responsible for sending the letters was a US citizen.

The sources also say FBI agents have interviewed the suspect several times and have searched his house. They say he now works as a contractor in the Washington area.

Sources say he was fired twice from government jobs and had reportedly made a threat to use anthrax following the Sept 11 attacks.

Lankan truce

FROM PAGE 1

Representatives from Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland will arrive in Sri Lanka shortly to monitor the ceasefire.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said Sunday that the truce did not mean the end of the war but was a "small step" in the direction of peace talks.

Wickremesinghe's peace drive has received widespread international support with the Commonwealth, Britain, Canada, India, Japan and the United States all issuing statements backing the process.

US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said: "A political solution to this conflict in the context of an undivided Sri Lanka would be welcomed by the international community."

"If Sri Lankans constructively approach talks and show a willingness to compromise, we believe peace can return," he said. Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon welcomed the historic truce as "an opportunity for lasting peace".

However, at home Wickremesinghe has encountered opposition from his bitter rival, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who has complained that she was not given adequate time to consider the truce deal.

The truce deal is the first bilateral ceasefire in seven years. The last one, in 1995, ended after 100 days.

BNP men

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Injured when police repulsed a mob attack on Trishal Police Station on Saturday over the release of a suspected abductor.

Villagers of Saikampur said they caught Abdul Qadir, a suspected abductor, and handed him over to police on Friday. The police released him, though.

Police, however, said that upon prayer by Qadir's brother they rescued him from the angry villagers and set him free as found innocent.

The release of Qadir angered the villagers who alleged that the police acted under the influence of money. They besieged the police station Saturday evening, broke the windows, and damaged doors and three motorcycles.

Police fired several bullets in the air and chased the mob to bring the situation under control. Ten people were injured in the police action.

Later, the angry villagers put up a barricade on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway disrupting traffic movement for two hours.

Police filed a case against 400 villagers. Additional police were deployed in the area to ward off further trouble.

Deputy Commissioner Zafar Ahmed Chowdhury and Police Super Matiar Rahman visited the police station yesterday.

Pearl murder

FROM PAGE 12

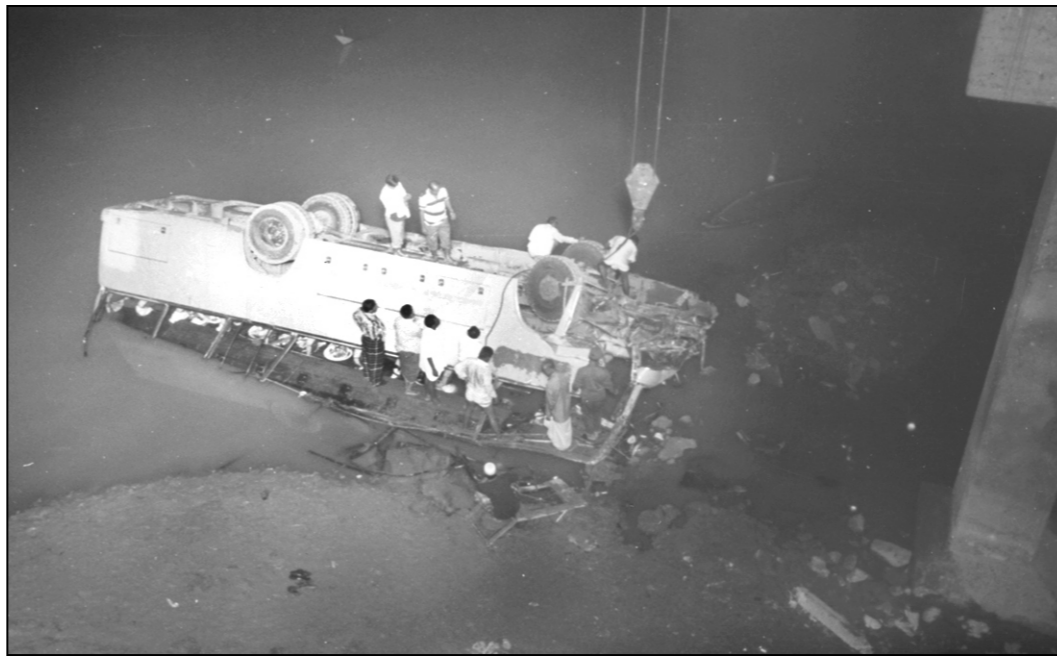
United States. Sheikh Omar was in police custody when US and Pakistani authorities received a videotape last Thursday showing Pearl's killing. Sheikh Omar's detention connected to his February 12 arrest was due to run out tomorrow.

A nationwide manhunt extending from the teeming streets of Karachi to the border with Afghanistan was under way for at least four people suspected of carrying out the murder itself. They included an Arab man with possible links to bin Laden.

A group calling itself the National Movement for the Restoration of Pakistani Sovereignty claimed responsibility for Pearl's kidnapping and accused him of being a spy -- first for the CIA, then for Israeli intelligence.

In a related development, the Bush administration was making plans to convene a federal grand jury in the United States for the purpose of issuing indictments in the Pearl case, the Wall Street Journal reported yesterday.

The newspaper, which employed Pearl, said it was unclear whether the United States would press the Pakistani government to turn over suspects in the case for trial in America.



A Dhaka-bound passenger bus fell into river Turag from Salehpur bridge in Savar upazila on Saturday night killing two women and injuring 15 others.

PHOTO: STAR

Body blow to BJP

FROM PAGE 1

contenders for powerBJP, Samajwadi Party headed by former Defence Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and Bahujan Samaj Party headed by Kanshi Ramsecuring majority on its own.

However, Samajwadi Party has emerged as the single largest entity followed by BSP and BJP. But Mulayam Singh Yadav's party is far from the majority mark of 202 seats in the 403-seat Uttar Pradesh legislature.

The hung electoral verdict in Uttar Pradesh has set the stage for realignment of political forces as the race for power in the state is narrowed to Samajwadi Party and BSP.

It appears to be an uphill struggle for Samajwadi Party to muster the requisite support to achieve majority. It has to lure away a sizable chunk of BJP and BSP MLAs to do that besides winning the support of all anti-BJP forces in order to form a government in Uttar Pradesh.

Mulayam Singh Yadav, aspirant for Uttar Pradesh Chief Ministership, has already asked all anti-BJP and "secular" forces to come together and so has the CPI(M) leadership to keep BJP away from power in the state.

But given the hostility between Samajwadi Party and Congress, it remains to be seen what decision Sonia Gandhi takes. During the electioneering in Uttar Pradesh, the two parties had launched vitriolic attacks against each other with Congress charge led by none other than Sonia.

Sonia cannot simply forget the fact that it was Mulayam Singh who had refused to back her bid to form an alternative Congress government to rule India in April 1999 after Vajpayee government had lost a confidence vote in Parliament.

Besides, majority in Uttar Pradesh unit of Congress party are averse to the idea of having any truck with Samajwadi Party for the simple reason that it will throttle

Congress' revival bid in the state and help Mulayam Singh to further expand his party base.

At the same time, Congress stands the risk of being accused of helping BJP if it does not support Samajwadi Party's bid to form government in Uttar Pradesh. No doubt, Sonia Gandhi faces a difficult political decision.

No less hard is BJP's choice. The party is keen on seeing Mulayam Singh failing to form government in Uttar Pradesh and that can happen only if BJP join hands with BSP as their alliance can easily reach the majority mark in the state legislature.

Besides, BJP has a bitter experience of its alliance with BSP in 1996 after the previous assembly poll had also thrown up a fractured verdict in Uttar Pradesh. At that time, the two parties had worked out a unique power-sharing accord under which they would share chief ministership for six months by rotation. But BSP, after enjoying the first stint, pulled out of the coalition forcing BJP to hold on to power by luring support of breakaway groups of smaller regional parties.

Majority opinion in BJP now seems to be in favour of sitting in the Opposition benches in Uttar Pradesh and wait and watch for some months how Mulayam Singh and Congress respond to each other.

The assessment in BJP is that even if Mulayam Singh does manage to put together a government, its stability will be highly vulnerable and then it may be the right time for the party to strike.

By all accounts, BSP's success in Uttar Pradesh poll has been remarkable. It had just 66 seats in the previous assembly and in the new house the party has already got 100, positioning itself in the role of a powerful king-maker if not the King itself.

What will be the impact of the outcome of assembly polls in Uttar

Pradesh, Punjab and Uttaranchal on the Vajpayee government?

The party, so goes the saying in Indian political circles, which controls Uttar Pradesh also holds power in Delhi. But that appears to be a thing of the irretrievable past, at least for now.

The saying had held good when Congress enjoyed unchallenged dominance in the northern state. But its heydays are long past and in the just-concluded poll, it has fared worse than in 1996.

Right now, there is no threat to the survival of Vajpayee government, which is already through its half of its five-year tenure, after the election outcome in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Uttaranchal. The resurgence of Congress may in fact prompt BJP's current allies at the Centre stick to it closer due to their anti-Congressism.

But what the election results are likely to bring about is a weakening of BJP's authority in the coalition it heads at the Centre vis-à-vis its regional allies. This may bring Vajpayee under pulls and pressures from the allies who are likely to press for accommodation of their views on some of the major and sensitive issues relating to economic reforms.

One big worry is on the reforms front. Some of the allies have voiced their strong reservations about Vajpayee government's key changes in Labour laws which enables a company employees not more than 1000 employees to go for retrenchment without government permission.

BJP's allies have also expressed their discomfort with Vajpayee government's policy of disinvestments, subsidy cuts, lowering of interest rates for middle class savings instruments. They may now be in a position to make Vajpayee to be more caring about their views.

Rain brings relief

FROM PAGE 1

Eid holiday were caught unprepared in the rain.

As the holiday hangover persisted, a limited number of rickshaws and auto-rickshaws in the city reaped windfall gains, charging fares much above the rates.

Sources at the Meteorological Department said rainfall was recorded at one mm each in Rajshahi and Ishurdi, six mm each in Rangpur and Madaripur and 18 mm in Dinajpur. There were traces

in Sylhet, Mymensingh and Tangail. Gusty winds blew at 64 km per hour in some areas of Sylhet between 5:15 pm and 6:08 pm.

The Met Office forecast showers with gusty winds today in most parts of the country including Dhaka city. But the night temperature would remain mostly unchanged over the country.

BSS adds from Mymensingh: The season's first hailstorm accompanied by gusty wind killed a four-year old girl at Izarapara village in

Dhobaura yesterday afternoon.

Afzal H Khan, former member of parliament and Convenor of Halaughat Upazila BNP, told BSS that a flying CI sheet from the roof of a house cut the girl into two pieces.

The storm damaged a large number of houses and uprooted trees in Dhobaura and Halaughat upazilas. It flattened the Koilati Bazar, he added.

The worst affected villages are Charpara, Krishnanagar, Bharta, Jainati and Bariyakanda of Shakua union, Shaluakhandha, Outi, Chupinagar, Bangram and Koilati Bazar of Bieldora union at Izarapara village of Guatula union, he informed.

Viral infection

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changes this time around from cold to mild hot.

Usually such a weather change causes allergic rhinitis or running nose leading to nasal mucosa or moistening of the thin layer inside the nose.

Once the virus starts multiplying, it causes mild cough, sinusitis, pharyngitis and tonsillitis, which are all upper tract infection and symptoms of influenza or para-influenza.

"At this stage an adult infected person experiences mild dizziness, weakness and headache. In addition to cough and running nose, dehydration may occur," said a doctor at the Milford Hospital.

He said, "This stage stays for a few days and if the person is too weak he or she may experience a severe attack."

Dr Khan Abul Kalam Azad of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital said the infected person usually experiences lower respiratory tract infection in the lungs in the secondary phase, causing bronchitis leading to sever form of coughs and often chest pains.

Children often contact bronchopneumonia that causes coughs, high fever, loss of appetite, headache and chest pains. They experience heavy breathing and often require oxygen support.

76 Maoist rebels killed, claims Kathmandu

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepali soldiers killed at last 76 Maoist guerrillas in a stepped-up offensive against rebels fighting to overthrow the Himalayan Kingdom's constitutional monarchy, the Defence Ministry said yesterday.

It said 67 rebels -- believed responsible for the worst single attack of the six-year rebellion this month -- were killed late on Saturday. The rest died in a series of separate clashes.

Nepal has stepped up its counter-insurgency drive after 167 people, mainly soldiers, police and rebels, died in a rebel offensive in Nepal's troubled west just over a week ago.

The rebellion has claimed more than 2,800 lives and badly hit the economy of one of the world's poorest nations. Parliament last week extended for another three months a three-month-old state of emergency granting government

forces extra powers.

Nepal has been in turmoil since June when popular King Birendra was slain by his son, who killed several other royal family members before killing himself.

New King Gyanendra has been unable to muster the same popular support as his brother and this, coupled with Nepal's poverty and unemployment and the over-stretched government's failure to impose control across the rugged nation, has fuelled rebel support.

The Maoists, who want a one-party communist republic in the world's only Hindu Kingdom, walked out of peace talks, broke a truce and attacked security posts late last year, prompting the government to declare a state of emergency in November.

Nepal also mobilised its army for the first time against the guerrillas, a job done by the ill-equipped and poorly-trained police force until then.

15 murdered in dists

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Local people said some unruly youths of the village stabbed Saiful Islam and Jamshed at about 9 am as the two asked them not to gamble on the Eid day.

Critically injured Saiful and Jamshed were taken to Feni Cosmopolitan Hospital where Saiful died in the afternoon.

At Comilla town, mutilated body of traffic police -- Mahbubur Rahman 40 -- was recovered by police from Tomsom Bridge area on Sunday morning.

Police said two youths-- Mohan and Kamal -- were arrested for their alleged involvement in the murder.

The traffic police was a tenant of Mohan and Kamal at Balajhuri in the town for the last four-five years.

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Sailor missing

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known till yesterday though a massive joint search by fire service, police, navy, is still on, sources in the radio control room of Chittagong Port and Shipping Agent said.

A general diary was filed with Patenga Police Station in this connection.

Cash, gold looted

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Sources said the dacoits entered the house when the maid servant of the house opened the door. They held the domestic help at gunpoint and took away the cash and other valuables.

A case was filed with Cantonment Police Station in this connection.

In another incident, miscreants looted gold bars said to be worth about Tk 1 crore from a jewellery shop at Uttara on Sunday night.

Police said the miscreants broke open the gate of the Al-Raji Jewellery Sunday night after sedating the security guards before looting 1500 gold bars from the shop.

Uttara police picked up guard Alam and supervisor of the shop Dulal Mia for interrogation.

In yet another incident, muggers snatched Tk 4 lakh from a rickshaw passenger at Babar Road in Mohammadpur Wednesday night.

Sources said the muggers way-laid rickshaw passenger Sharif Dewan when he was returning to his Mirpur residence at about 2:15pm after drawing money from the bank.

Metering

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As per the new tariff structure, local telephone calls at district headquarters will cost Tk 1.50 for every five minutes during peak hours and for every eight minutes during off-peak hours, as opposed to the existing tariff of Tk 1.70 for each call regardless of its duration.

At the district and upazila levels, every seven minutes would be counted as one unit during peak hours and 10 minutes during off-peak hours. The 15 per cent VAT per call will still apply.

The government formed the BTRC in January last to deal with the regulatory issues including tariff fixation.

Two garment factories

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vacation since February 19.

Ten fire fighting units rushed to the spot and extinguished the fire after about four hours.

Local leaders of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association visited the factories yesterday morning.

In Munshiganj town, at least three shops were gutted when a fire broke out at Chhabighar road in the early hours of Sunday.

The blaze burnt down a photo-binding shop, a hair-dressing shop and a restaurant causing a loss of property worth about Tk 1 lakh.

Affected shop-owners said the fire originated from short circuit at around 4 am on Sunday.

At least 60 houses of tribal people were gutted in a devastating fire at Headman para of Balipara union in remote Thanchi upazila of Bandarban Hill District on Sunday.

Official sources said the fire originated from an oven in a kitchen. Our staff correspondent from Khulna adds: Pucca jute bales worth about Tk 5 crore were gutted in a warehouse at Digholia upazila at about 10:30pm Saturday.

The godown belongs to Rosemco Ltd owned by jute

exporter Hossain Ahmed.

Firemen took at least 18 hours to put down the blaze that also destroyed walls and roofs of two other neighbouring warehouses.

The owner of gutted jute attributed the reason of fire to electric short-circuit. But other reliable sources termed it a sabotage to claim insurance money against bank loan.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1

to give ample scopes for leaders to hold bilateral meetings on the sidelines. A full-day retreat at Coolum, a sunshine coast of Queensland, is expected to allow the attending leaders of different countries the opportunity to engage in such talks.

Besides the world leaders, some 1500 delegates are expected to converge at the meeting. Australian High Commissioner Robert Flynn told reporters at a recent briefing. Host country Australia is one of the largest financial contributors to the Commonwealth and is sponsoring the visit of two Bangladeshi participants to the CHOGM.

White House sued

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when it produced a policy calling for more oil and gas drilling, as well as a review of nuclear power.

It is the first time since its creation over 80 years ago that the GAO has ever had to sue the government over access to records.

It has been close to suing the ruling executive branch five times.

But each time before now, one of the two sides backed away from a courtroom confrontation.

Former President Richard Nixon, no stranger to defending his presidential stance, shied away from a courtroom fight with the investigators.

And the Clinton administration although ruffled by the GAO's requests did not refuse it permission to delve in its records.

The Bush administration has refused to hand over the documents of the task force -- saying to do so could harm efforts to gain candid advice from outside experts.

Vice president Cheney has not specifically claimed executive privilege.

White House spokesmen say he is arguing simply that the GAO has overreached its authority.

Legal scholars split

Since its creation in 1921 the GAO has only once got as far as the federal court in the mid-1970s.

Then it accused the administra-

tion of President Gerald Ford when it impounded funds appropriated by Congress for the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

But the lawsuit ended when agreement was reached with the GAO and the department secretary.

Legal scholars are split on who might win this new courtroom battle.

Holiday mood

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ees were seen exchanging Eid greetings and gossiping. Many of them left offices earlier.