

Arafat retrieves Powell's peace bid: Talks today

AFP, Jerusalem

The Palestinians said yesterday that US Secretary of State Colin Powell would now meet Yasser Arafat after he condemned all terror attacks on civilians, meeting a key US demand.

The meeting was not confirmed from the US side, but senior Palestinian official Saeb Erakat said it would go ahead today, after Powell had called off talks set for yesterday at Arafat's besieged West Bank headquarters.

The announcement gave a boost to Powell's peace mission, struggling quickly after talks with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on day one Friday ended in an impasse and were followed by a deadly suicide attack in Jerusalem.

"We've got the statement and we're looking at it," a senior US official said after the Palestinian leadership sent out the message.

The statement was also read on Palestinian television in Arabic, meeting another US demand after criticism from US President George W Bush that Arafat says one thing to the West and something else to his own people and the Arab world.

Sharon has said that a Powell meeting with Arafat would be a "tragic mistake," while Arab leaders have said it is crucial for US credibility in trying to calm the escalating violence.

"President Arafat and the Palestinian leadership express their condemnation of all terrorist actions which target civilians, Israeli or Palestinian, and terrorism, whether it be practised by a state, groups or people," the statement said.

"We reject violence and terrorism against civilians as a mean of achieving political results," it said, making specific reference to Friday's attack by a young woman suicide bomber that killed six and wounded more than 80.

The attack was claimed by a violent offshoot of Arafat's mainstream Palestinian faction. The Israelis claim they have documents linking Arafat directly to terror attacks.

US officials had made it clear that Powell was waiting for Arafat to denounce the attack before scheduling new talks. The Palestinian leadership has regularly condemned "acts of terrorism" in official statements.

Israeli troops, meanwhile, kept up their West Bank siege, rolling into

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Colin Powell



Yasser Arafat



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian woman shouts in front of the ruins of her destroyed house inside the Jenin Refugee Camp on Friday. Controversy is growing over reported massacre of at least 250 Palestinians in Jenin refugee camp by Israeli troops.

Bookseller shot dead in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A bookseller was shot dead at Shahinbagh in the city's Tejgaon area last night.

The dead has identified as Shaheen, 30, son of Abdus Salam Sarkar. The victim was running a bookstall at Banglabazar in old part of the city.

Police and family sources said two youths called Shaheen out of his 434, Shahinbagh residence at about 6:30 pm and shot him point blank. He died on way to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Body of Shaheen was sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy. The reason behind the killing could not be known immediately.

Police were preparing to file a murder case with Tejgaon thana.

Snatched briefcase abandoned at Ramna Park

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified muggers snatched a briefcase containing two checks for Tk four lakh in total, seven passports, and some other important documents of IRCON International Ltd yesterday.

Sources said a gang of robbers beat up Gautam, the caretaker of "Golden Crest" at House 5, Road 8, Gulshan-1, and took away the briefcase from inside the house at about 4:30am.

The muggers however left the briefcase at Ramna Park, which was later discovered from the southeastern corner of the park by a morning walker.

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Autorickshaw fare almost doubles

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Autorickshaw fare has nearly doubled since the government hiked fuel price and decided to cull two-stroke three-wheelers from the city.

A trip costing Tk 25 two months ago is as much as Tk 45 now. Fares for longer trips in the city have also gone up significantly.

Autorickshaw owners and drivers put the fare hike to increase in fuel price and also to decrease in the number of two-stroke three-wheelers due to strict measures taken against them.

An autorickshaw faces confiscation by police, if it does not display valid tokens of road permit, road tax and fitness certificate, issued by the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), on its windshield.

However, officials and observers believe that public suffering has increased because of the government's failure to outline a definite timeframe for the phase-out programme. The government has also failed to give commuters a suitable transport option, they said.

According to BRTA sources, "less than 100 applications" have been received over the last three months for registration of new four-stroke three-wheelers. Also, the BRTA has registered only 150 new vehicles for use as taxis in the city within the same period.

The BRTA has stopped issuing or renewing road permit and tax tokens to two-stroke autorickshaws since February 20, according sources in Dhaka.

However, it had to continue renewing fitness certificates following a High Court order obtained by a trade union leader in the city.

BRTA officials claimed that the number of registered two-stroke autorickshaws, now plying the city roads, had come down to 16,584, but could not confirm how many unregistered autorickshaws were there in the city.

Officials suspected that a good number of autorickshaws are plying the streets with forged documents.

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Steps to speed up trial of seven murder cases in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The government has taken special steps to expedite investigation and trial of seven 'sensational' murder cases recorded with different thanas in the district.

According to sources, investigation officers (IOs) of the cases have been asked to submit their reports within one month and to do the needful to prepare dockets correctly by quoting statements of witnesses.

The cases will be tried in court under existing laws, and not in any special court.

A committee has been formed by law ministry to "check and recheck" reports of IOs of the cases, the source said. Its members are cabinet secretary and secretaries to the ministries of home, establishment and law.

The seven cases relate to murders of Awami League Mayoral candidate S M A Rob, Khulna University Treasurer Sarder Abdur Razzak, JSD leader Kazi Aref, Janakantha Journalist Shamsur Rahman, BNP leader Abdul Awal of Bagerhat, Editor of Dainik Runner of

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LTTE strikes historic peace deal with Muslims

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger rebels struck a landmark peace deal yesterday with Sri Lanka's Muslims, agreeing to allow thousands of members of the minority community to return to their homes amid a Norwegian push to bring peace to the island.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), under intense US pressure to stop harassing Muslims, also agreed to stop extorting money from the community in the multiethnic eastern province.

Rauff Hakeem, leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, said the main Muslim party received the assurance during a three-hour discussion he held with LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran.

The Tigers in a joint statement also agreed to allow some 100,000 Muslims chased away by them 12 years ago from the northern peninsula of Jaffna to return to their original homes.

The two sides signed the statement as an initial confidence-building measure before entering talks in Thailand next month in line with Norway's efforts to broker peace in the war-ravaged island.

Talks between the majority Sinhalese-dominated

government and the LTTE will now include the SLMC on behalf of Muslims, Sri Lanka's largest minority after the Tamils, Hakeem said.

The United States warned the Tamil Tigers last month that their intimidation and harassment of civilians, including Muslims, seriously jeopardised the opened bilateral truce between government forces and the LTTE that went into effect February 23.

Hakeem, who is also a senior minister in Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's coalition government, had championed the cause of Muslims who have suffered LTTE attacks, especially in the eastern province, and his repeated complaints led to Saturday's historic meeting.

Hakeem said he flew to the rebel-held northern town of Kilinochchi for the talks with Prabhakaran but made it clear he was there not as a representative of the government but as a Muslim leader.

Muslims, who are regarded as a distinct ethnic minority rather than a mere religious group in Sri Lanka, account for 12.6 percent of the 18.66 million population.

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Janatar Mancha case Govt asked not to harass accused until hearing on bail petitions

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday asked the government through the Attorney General's office not to harass five of the accused in the 'Janatar Mancha' case until hearing of the anticipatory bail petitions on Monday.

The court passed the order following the five anticipatory bail petitions filed by Election Commissioner Safur Rahman, Member of Public Service Commission Sirajuddin Ahmed, Syed Bazul Karim, Abu Alam Shahid Khan and Rabiul Alam Mukhtar Chowdhury.

Out of the seven accused in the case, former state minister Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, is now in jail custody and already shown arrested.

A division bench of the High Court comprising Justice M A Aziz and Justice Montazuddin Ahmed gave the order after hearing the submissions by Barrister Amirul Islam and Shafique Ahmed on behalf of the five petitioners.

As the bail petitions were opposed by additional attorney general Abdur Rezzak Khan, the court asked him to ensure that the accused persons are not harassed in any way until hearing of the petitions on Monday.

FEER report needs to be probed: US envoy

UNB, Dhaka

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Mary Ann Peters has rejected the 'terrorist image' of Bangladesh as portrayed in a section of press last week.

She termed a recent report of the Wall Street Journal as an example of lack of understanding on the part of journalists covering the country's political and social structure.

Ambassador Peters said that reports of human rights abuses and allegations and that Bangladesh serves as a haven for terrorists need to be fully investigated and put into proper context.

The chief of the US mission in Dhaka expressed her views to members of the Congressional Bangladesh Caucus during a breakfast meeting on Thursday sponsored by the US-Bangladesh Advisory Council in Washington.

According to a message received here yesterday, the meeting was

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Forex smuggling Bahauddin Nasim chargesheeted

BSS, Dhaka

CID Police on Friday submitted charge sheet against A F M Bahauddin Nasim, former assistant private secretary (APS) to ex-prime minister Sheikh Hasina, in a dollar smuggling case.

Assistant police superintendent of CID Munshi Atiqur Rahman, also the Investigation Officer (IO) of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court after investigating the case for 43 days.

In the charge sheet, CID police named 10 persons as prosecution witnesses who are mostly police,

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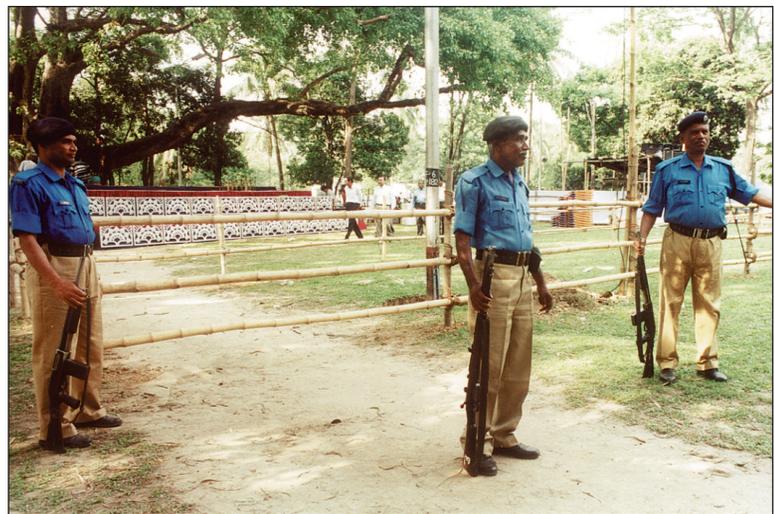


PHOTO: STAR

Tightened security in and around Ramna Batamul area on the eve of Pehela Baishakh today. At least 10 people were killed there in a bomb blast during last year's Bangla new year celebrations.

Draft of Judicial Service Pay Commission Rules finalised

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A cabinet committee yesterday finalised a draft of the Judicial Service Pay Commission Rules as part of a 12-point Supreme Court directive for separation of the Judiciary.

The Pay Commission will be headed by the comptroller and auditor general with the secretaries of law, establishment and finance ministries and the registrar of the Supreme Court as its members. Earlier, it was planned that a judge of the Supreme Court would head it.

The commission would fix the salary structure and other facilities for Judicial Service.

Meanwhile, it was decided that the cabinet committee on virtual separation of the judiciary would take the responsibility of a secretary level committee which was formed to resolve the basic conflicts between the judicial and the administration cadres. The decision was taken as the secretary level committee failed to resolve the conflicts.

The cabinet committee would now decide whether the jobs of judicial magistrates would be transferable to judicial service and vice versa. It would also decide what

would be the rules for promotion of judicial officers, whether criminal and civil courts would be separated, whether magistrates also could become High Court judges and whether there should be separate service rules for judicial magistracy and judicial service.

Sources said that regarding the absorption of administration cadre officials in the judiciary, it was decided that the Judicial Service would review previous instances of inter-administration cadre merger. In the past, health cadre officials were absorbed in the administration.

The cabinet committee would hold its next meeting on April 17.

Yesterday's meeting was presided over by Industries Minister MK Anwar and attended by LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, Land Minister M Shamsul Islam, Science and Information Technology Minister Dr Moyeen Khan and secretaries concerned.

The cabinet body was formed for implementation of the Supreme Court directive for separation of the judiciary by May 30.

Criminals campaign for candidates wanted by police

QUAZI AMANULLAH, Khulna

Deterioration of law and order is apprehended ahead of the Khulna City Corporation (KCC) election as at least 20 convicted and 86 listed criminals have joined the polls campaign.

These criminals have started giving threats to voters, particularly women, not to go to polling centres, residents and independent ward commissioner candidates in many city areas alleged.

Even some ruling party candidates for posts of ward commissioner are not free from worries. Political circles said 16 candidates belonging to both the rival groups of BNP are feeling insecure during campaign as the armed criminals are moving freely in the city.

Candidates belonging to Awami League, CPB and JSD have also expressed their grave concern at the situation. But they alleged that BNP candidates are giving indul-

gence to these criminals.

Sources said the 20 convicted criminals tried in absentia are campaigning for 10 ward commissioner candidates who are also wanted by police in cases including those of murder.

The convicts include Isa Ahmed, Kamal, Rana, Isharat Shaikh, Mohammad Dhaka, Didarul Islam Sana, Pukku Khan, Alam Sarder, Shukhur Ali, Azizhaikh, Saru Molla, Mintu Shaikh, Rintu, Shohag, Kabir Howlader, Nahid and Asad.

According to sources in Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP), 194 out of 280 listed criminals were arrested but most of them have come out of jail after getting bail from higher courts. "We can not arrest them as they are on bail", said a senior official of KMP.

It is also alleged that a section of ruling party leaders have asked police most to "disturb" the wanted criminals.

KCC polls: Khulna AL expels 15 commissioner aspirants

UNB, Khulna

City Awami League has temporarily expelled its 15 leaders for submitting nominations for the coming city corporation election defying the party decision.

The expelled party leaders are Amena Halim Bobby of ward-16, Sheikh Nuruzzaman of ward-18, Manjur Morshed Khan Lablu of Shonadanga thana, Roksanara Ali and Mamun Ara Zakir of ward-19, Jahangir Alam Mantu of ward-20, Shah M Alam, Mokammel Hossain Minthu and Abul Hossain of ward-21, Z A Mahmud Don and Sheikh M Rafiq of ward-27, Mahsinur Rahman, Afroz and A Shahid of ward-28.

The decision was taken at an extended meeting of the city Awami League on Thursday as the leaders failed to respond to their show-cause notices within April 11.

City AL president Adv Manzurul Islam and general secretary Talukder Abdul Khaleq were present at the meeting.

AL lawmaker's 'son' SB for action against 2 police officials for passport forgery

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Special Branch (SB) of police has recommended to the police headquarters departmental action against two police officials for involvement in passport forgery in which Awami League lawmaker Md Abdul Hye had falsely identified a young man as his son.

The two officials are Inspector Md Shahjahan Ali of SB's Passport Unit and Assistant Superintendent of Police Emadul Haq who was OC (Immigration) at Zia International Airport.

They were earlier 'closed' for submitting an inquiry report for issuance of passport to the young

man --Prenc -- without proper verification.

Sources said Prenc, identifying himself as the 'son' of Abdul Hye, had applied to the Immigration and Passport Office on January 26 for his passport. He submitted an application to the SB on the same day.

On the following day, Md Shahjahan Ali submitted a report saying that all the information mentioned in Prenc's application was correct.

Emadul Haq supported Shahjahan's report and recommended issuing passport to Prenc.

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Apr 14	4-45	6-20 pm
Apr 15	5-38 am	

Prayer Timings		
Apr 14		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-45	5-20
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-25	6-30
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation