

Chechens threaten to start executing hostages today

AFP, Moscow **Rebels set free 15 captives**

Chechen separatist rebels holding 700 hostages in a Moscow theatre threatened to start executing them today if their demands are not met, an official with the theatre told AFP yesterday, quoting a hostage.

The hostage-takers said they had now given the Russian authorities three days following the beginning of the hostage-taking late Wednesday to pull out troops from Chechnya, having initially set a deadline of a week.

Negotiators were still engaged in talks with the rebel commando, among them a leading anti-war reporter, Anna Politkovskaya, whom the rebels had specifically asked to intervene.

The head of Russia's FSB intelligence service Nikolai Patrushev said the Kremlin had offered to spare the lives of the hostage-takers if they released their captives.

Earlier the rebels released 15 hostages, including eight children, but detained 700 others in the booby-trapped theatre amid growing public pressure on President Vladimir Putin to end the Chechen war.

As the media lambasted the Russian authorities for failing to prevent the commando from striking within five kilometres (three miles) from the Kremlin, one of the hostages said the hall in which they were being held contained a large bomb that could be exploded at the first sign of any attempted assault.

Seven hostages were freed early yesterday by the rebels -- about 50 men and women -- who are demanding an end to the three-year war in Chechnya, Federal Security Service (FSB) spokesman Sergei Ignachenko said.

Red Cross officials were allowed to bring out eight children from the building, but FSB officials said at least 20 other remained inside.

The rebels also failed to stick to an earlier agreement to release 75 non-Russian hostages, who with the others now face a third day surviving on little more than chocolate and water.

A doctor allowed into the theatre said the hostages were in reasonable health, were not being physically ill-treated, but were under great stress.

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ASM NURUNNABI

The paucity of recreational facilities is increasingly felt in Dhaka City, which is poised to become a mega city in the 21st century. The big question that confronts a citizen after the day's work is how to pass his or her leisure hours or holidays. In other metropolises around the world, people are known to enjoy blithesome evenings or visit various recreation spots, which help to shake off the burden of the hectic day and energise the person for the challenge lying ahead on the next day.

In the context of our social ethos, the recreational needs of the majority of the city-dwellers are simple in nature. Yet in the frenzy of rapid urbanisation, we seem to have failed to realise the need for such simple recreational necessities, let alone provide for it.

Apart from the city's parks and open spaces, which have more or less lost their appeal as recreational outlets because of increasing

DOWN TO EARTH

Crying need for newer recreational facilities

presence of antisocial elements at such places, the few other places that provide recreation are the movies and the theatres. The middle class people however tend to stay away from the city's movie houses because of the unpleasant atmosphere in these places created by the sale of tickets on the black market by anti-social elements as well as other immoral activities. Besides, cinema has lost much of its appeal on account of the proliferation of videos and television with

cable-operated programmes. As regards theatres, there is a lot of interest and enthusiasm surrounding them. But the existing theatres are only a few. The Mahila Samity and the Girl Guides' Auditoriums are unable to meet the heavy demand of a large number of theatre groups that have come into existence. There is another auditorium within the precincts of the Osmany Udyan, which is not open to general public and is reserved only for select functions. The city's

cultural perspective, however, find some expression in the auditoriums of the German Cultural Centre, British Council, Public Library, Engineers Institute, Shilpakala Academy, etc.

In the developed countries, art galleries, museums and public libraries also provide an outlet for intellectual pursuit. There are a few such facilities in the city but they are not developed enough to exercise

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The air-conditioned operation theatre, left, and the general ward, right, of the 50-bed hospital complex, established 18 years ago for tea labourers at Isabpur, Srimongol, look abandoned.

Lone hospital for tea labourers in Srimongol

Equipment rusting away, staff take salary without work

IQBAL SIDDIQEE, Sylhet

The country's lone hospital for tea labourers, established 18 years ago, could not be made operational yet due to alleged negligence of the health department.

The 50-bed hospital complex with residential quarters for its staff, set up on five acres of land at lush green Isabpur, three kilometres from Srimongol town, is now in an abandoned condition.

During a recent visit to the hospital, this correspondent saw that the costly equipment are either rusting

away or have been stolen, and the staff are taking salary without any work.

Built in 1984 with a foreign assistance of Tk four crore, the hospital was equipped with all necessary facilities including two air-conditioned operation theatres, labour room, 100 MM X-Ray unit and pathological laboratory.

At the beginning, a controversy rose over whether the annual expenditure of about Tk 30 lakh would be met by the health department or by other sources also.

This continued till 1988 when the

health department agreed to pay salaries of a section of the doctors and other staff. This made the hospital limping till 1993. The indoor department was kept running somehow but due to lack of supplies of medicine and other items only 225 patients came for treatment yearly on an average during the period.

In 1994, Tk 80 lakh was spent for renovation of the main buildings. But a good number of doors and windows at doctors' residences and at the hospital building got damaged within years.

Rainwater leaking through the

roof damaged the X-Ray unit and costly equipment in other departments. Beds, pillows and other materials had already gone damaged.

At the beginning, some doctors started residing at hospital quarters, but this did not continue for long. The lone doctor now staying in the hospital complex gives only prescriptions to the small number of patients who come from adjacent villages.

The other staff including nurses,

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SAARC trade fair opens in Kathmandu

AFP, Kathmandu

Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand opened a South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) trade fair here yesterday with a call for a united effort by all member countries to promote regional trade. The five-day trade fair will coincide with a meeting of the SAARC Committee on Economic Cooperation (CEC) scheduled to be opened tomorrow by Finance Minister Badri Prasad Shrestha.

"All SAARC member countries should move forward united for the development of industry, tourism, agriculture and water resources and the upliftment of the economic conditions of the rural poor," Chand said.

He urged SAARC member coun

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'Arms seized from Mockbul's mills are licensed'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of Panna Textile Mills owned by Awami League leader and former lawmaker Mockbul Hossain, yesterday claimed that the firearms seized by the army from the mills Thursday were licensed.

The arms were used for security purposes, said a statement by the textile mills. "The arms were purchased from the Trade Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB)," the statement added.

The Panna Textile Mills, a large export-oriented company with about 1,000 workers in Savar, transacts a business of crores of taka a month. "The government issued the company with five shotguns for

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Zubeida Rab's qul today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The qulhwani of Zubeida Rab, a philanthropist and an ardent educationist, will be held today (Saturday) after Maghrib prayers at house 12, road 50, Gulshan-2.

Relatives, friends and admirers of the deceased have been requested to attend the qulhwani.

Zubeida Rab, wife of late Abdur Rab, passed away on Tuesday (October 22) at the Bangladesh Medical College Hospital. She was 90.

Zubeida Rab was a patron of the hospital and had donated Tk four crore for men and women's free wards in the hospital. She was a teacher at Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School, Kolkata, and later worked as Inspector of Schools in the then East Pakistan. In pre-partition years, she was a pioneer in many fields.

Inflow of tourists falls by 11pc in last six months

Tightening of on-arrival visa rule blamed

RAFIQ HASAN

The inflow of tourists has declined by more than 11 per cent during the first six months of this year mainly due to the tough attitude of the immigration authorities in issuing on-arrival tourist visa.

The government toughened on-arrival visa rule following September 11 terrorist attacks in the US last year.

"Visa tightening has affected flow of tourists into the country in the last several months," State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin told The Daily Star.

The Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) sources said 104,658 tourists visited the country during January-June this year against 118,082 during the same period last year.

When contacted, Chairman of the BPC Abdur Razzaq also admitted that the tourism industry was affected following the government's new visa policy. Razzaq said since 1995, the flow of foreign tourists grew at a significant rate and more than 200,000 foreign tourists visited Bangladesh in 2001.

The BPC considers a foreigner to be tourist if they enter the country for more than 24 hours and stay less than six months without getting involved in moneymaking activities.

"To attract tourists, the visa system should be eased," Nasir Uddin said. "Tourists from the SAARC region should be given on-arrival visa."

Sources in the Department of Immigration and Passports said the government does not normally allow on-arrival tourist visa.

Immigration officials at the Zia International Airport said on-arrival tourist visa is now given to the citizens of South Korea only, visiting Bangladesh for the first time.

On the other hand, if a person comes from a country where Bangladesh has its mission, they are not given on-arrival visa.

Nationals from countries where Bangladesh has no missions are allowed to enter and stay for 30 days if they can show documents such as certificates

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Sun Rises Sun Sets

Oct 26		5-23 pm
Oct 27	6-02 am	

Prayer Timings

Oct 26

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-00	5-25
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-32	5-37
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

South Africa pin Bangladesh down

REUTERS, Potchefstroom

South Africa recovered from an embarrassing start to claim the upper hand by the close on Day One of the second Test against Bangladesh on Friday.

The hosts were 61 for one wicket in reply to Bangladesh's first-innings total of 215 as the North West Cricket Stadium at Potchefstroom became South Africa's 11th and the world's 86th Test venue.

Herschelle Gibbs was undefeated on 36 after his opening partner Graeme Smith was dismissed in the final over of the day, fending at the first delivery from occasional off-spinner Sanwar Hossain to be caught behind for 24.

Earlier, Bangladesh made the

most of winning the toss, reaching lunch at 124 for one on a pristine batting strip.

Hannan Sarkar and Al Shahriar compiled an opening partnership in excess of 50 for only the second time in Bangladesh's Test history.

The South African bowlers appeared to have little answer to the blazing strokeplay of the Bangladesh openers, and the fielding became increasingly ragged as test cricket's minnows punched well above their weight for a session.

When South Africa did eventually force the breakthrough there appeared to be an element of luck about it, Al Shahriar (30) caught by Graeme Smith at third slip off the

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Two sniper suspects held

AFP, Washington

Police have arrested a Gulf War veteran and a teenager in the Washington-area sniper attacks that killed 10 and wounded three as area residents breathed a collective sigh of relief at the end of the three-week shooting spree.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation said ballistics tests had matched the rifle found in the suspects' car to the 13 attacks.

Ending one of the biggest criminal manhunts of the

past decade, a tactical team early Thursday detained John Allen Muhammad, 41, and John Lee Malvo, 17, as they slept in a car at a highway rest stop in Maryland, north of Washington.

Muhammad was later charged with a federal firearms violation not connected to the sniper killings. Malvo appeared before a juvenile court. But police said both were the official suspects in the shootings that had terrorised the Washington region since October 2.

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