



Tanvir Haider dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tanvir Haider, renowned sports organiser and vice president of Mohammedan Sporting Club, died at the BIRDEM hospital yesterday.

He was 54.

Tanvir was suffering from various diseases including diabetes. He was first admitted to the Holy Family Hospital and later shifted to the BIRDEM where he died at about 3:30pm yesterday.

He was actively involved in sports for the last 32 years and played a significant role in various activities including formation of cricket teams of his club. He also held several important positions of Bangladesh Cricket Board.

In a statement, officials, players and employees of Mohammedan Sporting Club, including chairman of its governing body, Abdul Matlub Ahmad, member secretary Monir Ahmed, president Alhaj Mohammad Mosaddek Ali and general secretary M Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan condole the death of Tanvir.

They also expressed sympathy for the bereaved family members and prayed for the salvation of the departed soul.

Abahani Krira Chakra and the Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association also expressed profound shock at the death of the cricket organiser.

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina expressed her deep shock at the death of Tanvir Haider.

"The death of Tanvir is an irreparable loss to the country's sports arena," she said in a condolence message.

Former state minister for youth, sports and culture, Obaidul Kader, also condole the death of Tanvir.

The first namaj-e-janaja of Tanvir will be held at Shantinagar after Zohr prayers today (Thursday). His body will be taken to Mohammedan Sporting Club for a second namaj-e-janaja.

He will be buried at the Azimpur graveyard.

Exports

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of Coastal Sea Food and former president of Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association.

"Not a single export certificate was issued from the association office in the last one week," he said. The sector would be hit hard if the crisis persists, he feared.

As the war is going to bring economic hardship throughout the globe, the consumption of a costly item like frozen shrimp would decline, he observed.

"The next season for cultivating shrimps of a particular variety (black tiger) is going to begin in April and I do not know what would happen to the huge investment in shrimp cultivation".

It would mean a disaster for the country's second largest foreign currency earner if the cultivators are deprived of a reasonable price, Mostafasaid.

He said the exporters and packers need a lot of money to ensure a reasonable price for the cultivators. "Shrimp cultivators would not get a reasonable price if the exporters stop buying their products."

Independence Day

FROM PAGE 1
reviewed the parade and took salute during the march past.

On arrival at the Parade Square, the president was received by Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, State Minister for Home Minister Lutfuzzaman Babar and the chiefs of the three services.

Members of the army also presented spectacular rope jumping from helicopters while a number of paratroopers carrying flags landed in the middle of the Parade Square.

Air Force planes, some emitting coloured smokes, flew past the Parade Square.

Mechanical section of the parade included tanks, artillery, torpedoes, mobile transmitters and some other equipment used by the armed forces.

Earlier, the president, prime minister and leader of the opposition in parliament gave separate messages on the occasion of Independence Day.

The day is being celebrated at national and local levels as well as at Bangladesh missions abroad.

State-owned radio and television put up special programmes and newspapers brought out special supplements highlighting the significance of the day.

Special diets were served at hospitals, prisons, orphanages and vagrants' homes.

However, reception by the president at the Bangabhaban and some cultural functions were called off while illumination of government buildings was cancelled.

In darkness, Baghdad shakes

FROM PAGE 1

meaning. A tyrant, he wrote, is a man who allows his people no freedom, who is "puffed up by pride, driven by the lust of power, impelled by greed, provoked by thirst for fame".

Yet Tuesday morning, 20 miles from Baghdad, ordinary Iraqis, without the presence of the "minders" who dog our heels, spoke of George Bush in just such language. I was standing on what may soon become the Baghdad front line, perhaps 10 miles from the B-52 bombings, 30 miles from the nearest US Marines, and behind me coils of black smoke were twirling into the sky from the burning oil berms. A ferocious storm was blasting sand into our faces, turning the sky a dark, bloody orange, the ground shaking gently as the B-52s came back.

A senior Iraqi business executive wanted to explain how slender was the victory the Americans were claiming. "Throughout history, Iraq has been called Mesopotamia," he said. "This means 'the land between the two rivers'." So unless you are between the two rivers, this means you are not in Iraq. General Franks should know this.

Alas for the businessman, the US Marines were, as we spoke, crossing the Euphrates under fire at Nasiriyah Tuesday as hundreds of women and children fled their homes between the bridges. But still, by Tuesday evening, only 50 or so American tanks had made it to the eastern shore, into "Mesopotamia". It didn't spoil the man's enthusiasm.

"Can you imagine the effect on the Arabs if Iraq gets out of this war intact?" he asked. "It took just five days for all the Arabs to be defeated by Israel in the 1967 war. And already we Iraqis have been fighting the all-powerful Americans for

five days and still we have held on to all of our cities and will not surrender.

And imagine what would happen if Iraq surrendered. What chance would the Syrian leadership have against the demands of Israel? What chance would the Palestinians have of negotiating a fair deal with the Israelis? The Americans don't care about giving the Palestinians a fair deal. So why should they want to give the Iraqis a fair deal?"

This was no member of the Baath Party speaking. This was a man with degrees from universities in Manchester and Birmingham. A colleague had an even more cogent point to make. "Our soldiers know they will not get a fair deal from the Americans," he said. "It's important that they know this. We may not like our regime. But we fight for our country."

The Russians did not like Stalin but they fought under him against the German invaders. We have a long history of fighting the colonial powers, especially you British. You claim you are coming to 'liberate' us. But you don't understand. What is happening now is we are starting a war of liberation against the Americans and the British."

Now the businessman wanted to talk of President Saddam. "We Arabs care about dignity," he said. "Half of Lawrence's 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' is about Arab dignity. In our lands, populism won over democracy for historical reasons. Saddam has provided societal safety. I am safe providing I do not confront the regime."

Saddam may be very severe against political dissidents but he is also very severe on criminals or anyone who is aggressive with us. That includes the Americans."

Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan was more rhetorical Tuesday. He talked of the "perfidious

aggression and invasion", and demanded that the Arab states use an oil boycott against the US and Britain, that at least they withdraw their ambassadors from their embassies in Washington and London. Some hope.

Mahomed Saleh, the Trade Minister, accused Kofi Annan, the secretary general of the UN, of bowing to US pressure to prevent ships carrying supplies under the oil-for-food programme from landing in Iraq. "We don't need humanitarian assistance," he said and insisted the Iraqi government was sending 20 trucks loaded with flour to Basra every day. British shellfire, he claimed, had set fire to a warehouse containing flour.

But other stories from the south were worrying the Iraqis Tuesday. How, for example, did the 100 Iraqis lying along 10 miles of road-way north of Nasiriyah come to be killed? A French correspondent has described the smell of burnt flesh as he passed them, adding that he could not tell if they were soldiers or civilians.

What happened to these dead people, the Iraqis are asking themselves? Almost every war in the Middle East ends in a massacre, a ghastly routine that weighs heavily on everyone's mind.

By dusk last night, the air pressure was changing again as the B-52s returned. In Baghdad, ever mindful of advice, I laid hands on apples and bananas to wolf by my bedroom window. I shall be back to the biography of Thomas More again.

But I am possessed of a strange thought. That if the war is still going on when I reach the end of this book, if the bombing and the shelling is continuing when Thomas More has his head chopped off, then it is likely that General Tommy Franks' head will roll too.

Arab states

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In Egypt, the war has led to some of the most outspoken anti-government protests in years on the streets of Cairo, as well as a wave of brutal police repression. Thousands of mostly Islamist students chanted slogans against Egypt's President, Hosni Mubarak, late last week. Hundreds of them were arrested and hundreds more were beaten, according to the US watchdog Human Rights Watch. There were reports of defendants being tortured with electric shocks while in custody, HRW said.

"The crackdown many feared has come," Hanny Megally, the group's executive director for the Middle East and North Africa, said. "Fundamental freedoms in Egypt are now under serious threat."

Several Arab countries warned the United States that the war could have a damaging ripple effect on the region. Arab leaders, especially in Egypt and in the Persian Gulf, are in a very, very dangerous situation," one analyst, Diaa Rashwan of the al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo, told The Washington Post. "We could all feel this danger coming."

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets yesterday in Syria, where the government is vehemently against the war.

Police in Beirut used tear gas to stop thousands of demonstrators from marching on the British embassy and witnesses said about 20 people were detained.

Protest marches also took place in Tunisia and Libya, and the Iraqi embassy in Algiers said some Algerians had volunteered to fight the US and British troops.

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Hasina blasts

FROM PAGES

"Is the prime minister not a Muslim? Why have Khaleida and Nizami kept mum and why are they not showing sympathy for their Muslim brothers?" she questioned.

Referring to the conferment of Independence Award to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the former prime minister said the people of Bangladesh will never accept any move to degrade Bangabandhu.

"It's nothing but a mockery" she said.

Film actor Azim passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Renowned actor and film producer Nurul Azim Khaled Rouf, popularly known as Azim, died of cardiac attack at the Sikder Medical College Hospital yesterday at the age of 67.

A popular actor in the 60s, Azim's first film was Rajdhanir Booke.

His namaj-e-najana was held at the Film Development Corporation (FDC) yesterday afternoon.

Azim was buried at the Martyred Intellectual Graveyard at Mirpur.

UNB reports: Awami League general secretary Abdul Jalil MP has expressed profound shock at the death of Azim.

"Azim's death has caused an irreparable loss to our cultural arena," he said in a message of condolence yesterday.

In another message, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selima Rahman condole the death of Azim.

UN will appeal

FROM PAGES

to a water treatment plant in Basra. Much of the city has been without piped water since Friday.

Some of the 1.2 million residents have resorted to drinking from the Euphrates.

The river is polluted with untreated sewage, and aid agencies fear the spread of diseases such as dysentery and cholera.

The Red Cross team, including a specialist engineer from its international staff, was only able to reach the Wafaa al-Qaid plant, north of Basra, after having first been granted safe passage by both the British forces surrounding the city and the Iraqi fighters inside.

The engineers were working Tuesday night to install portable generators to get the plant working, although it will not be able to operate at full capacity.

There will be a further delay while sufficient pressure is established for water to start flowing from taps.

The Red Cross is also attempting to get safe passage for local technicians to assess and repair the damage to the high voltage power lines, which were cut on Friday during intense fighting.

Florian Westphal, a Red Cross spokesman, said: "It cannot be a permanent solution to run on generators, because you have to cut them at times to refuel them or let them cool down."

"But it will definitely be a major improvement on the current situation."

Getting humanitarian supplies into Basra is becoming an increasingly urgent task for the US and British forces engaged in the "hearts and minds" battle to convince ordinary Iraqis that the invasion forces are there to help them.

Hundreds of tons of aid loaded on to the Royal Navy supply ship Sir Galahad has not been landed because of resistance in the port of Umm Qasr and around Basra.

British commanders said yesterday that the Sir Galahad was expected to dock at Umm Qasr yesterday morning, after negotiating the tricky path along the Khawr Abd Allah river following its clearance by coalition minesweepers.

Saudi proposal

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Tuesday that the kingdom had presented a peace plan to the United States and Iraq, and appealed to both sides to stop military action immediately.

"We have made the proposal and we are waiting for a positive response. We have not been rebuffed," he said.

Both Baghdad and Washington denied they had received a Saudi proposal.

Wheat drive

FROM PAGES

target as the season is about to end. And this results in various wrong-doing.

Last year, the government went for buying additional one lakh tonnes of wheat even after the procurement season was already over. As a result, a section of traders having strong political backing in connivance with dishonest officials imported poor quality and low-priced wheat from India to make quick bucks. This deprived the local wheat growers from getting price support provided by the government.

Two government-commissioned probe bodies found direct and indirect involvement of a number of officials and ruling party lawmakers in the wheat scam.

The internal wheat procurement target has been slashed to two lakh tonnes this year from three lakh tonnes last year.

Food officials attributed this downsizing of wheat procurement target to last year's bitter experience and also possible a production shortfall this year.

However, the decision of reducing the procurement target came at a time when the agriculture minister informed the parliament earlier this month that country would produce 17.50 lakh tonnes of wheat this year, higher than the last year's production.

But officials quoting field reports apprehended that wheat output might be lower than the government's projection.

The government would buy wheat at Tk 9,250 a quintal this year against Tk 9,000 a quintal last year.



PHOTO: STAR

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina addresses a gathering on the Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday afternoon prior to a procession she led on the Independence Day.

Baghdad bombing buries civilians

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storm swept Iraq, coating soldiers in grime and temporarily slowing their northward advance.

In Baghdad, where Tuesday's sandstorm hit as US and British warplanes kept up their fierce air attack, visibility worsened again yesterday afternoon with high winds blowing sand through the city.

In southern Iraq, soldiers quickly moved to clean up their vehicles and equipment -- using compressed air to clean giant engine filters on tanks, and emptying buckets of sand out of the backs of their Humvees.

Members of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, heading north toward Baghdad west of the Euphrates river, presented an eerie sight as gray dust coated troops already dressed in chemical protection suits.

Soldiers literally peeled layers of dirt and grime off their faces as vehicles got under way, navigating through areas of deep mud left by overnight rains.

Basra confusion

US-British forces claimed that there were signs of a civilian uprising in Basra and the Iraqis pounded

on the rebels.

But an Al-Jazeera television correspondent in the city said he found no evidence to support the claim.

Fierce fighting continued for Basra yesterday with Iraqis firing artillery at British troops. US warplanes dropped missiles on central Basra.

British marine commandos were in a cat and mouse game to try to draw a group of around 500 army regulars and Baath party loyalists out of their cover in a residential area on the outskirts of the Basra suburb of Abul-Khasib.

Umm Qasr contradiction

Iraq has refuted US-British claim of capturing the port city of Umm Qasr.

Information Minister Mohammad Saeed Al-Sahaf said the invading forces have rather captured Dock No. 10 of the port and the city is still under Iraqi control.

Najaf encounter

With a second day of sandstorms buffeting the capital and US armor drawing closer, Reuters correspondent Luke Baker reported a ferocious battle between US tanks and Iraqi infantry near the Shi'ite Muslim holy city

of Najaf.

US confirmed it lost two tanks in the battle, but Iraqis said the loss is much higher.

US officials said Iraqi infantry attacked the US Seventh Cavalry, around 100 miles south of Baghdad.

"Apparently ground forces tried to hit some of our guys with rocket-propelled grenades," one official said, putting the Iraqi death toll at up to 300. There were no US casualties, he said.

Nassiriyah chaos

A column of about 4,000 US Marines ran the gauntlet of heavy Iraqi fire to cross the Euphrates River.

Iraq said some 200 civilian houses have been destroyed in the city.

Invaders' loss

A US Apache and a Black Hawk helicopter attached to the Third Infantry Division went missing in southern Iraq in low visibility.

Two British troops were killed and two severely wounded in a friendly fire incident between two of the British army's high-tech Challenger TT tanks in fighting outside Basra.

Amnesty

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The US government particularly protested the television interview of the prisoners of war saying that by bringing the PoWs before television, Iraq had humiliated them and violated their rights as defined by the Geneva Convention.

However, human rights organisations like the Amnesty International felt that like Iraq, the US also televised faces of captured Iraqi soldiers and thus violated the Convention.

SSC exams

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Rajshahi Education Board has the highest number of examinees -- 2,73,224 -- followed by 2,72,577 in Dhaka, 1,06,395 in Comilla, 1,06,303 in Jessore, 68,999 in Chittagong, 63,535 in Barisal and 30,616 in Sylhet.

The Education Ministry has taken all preparations to prevent cheating during the examinations. Special measures were taken for vulnerable examination centres.

Our Barisal correspondent reports: BDR will be deployed in 19 of the 57 examination centres here as they have been identified as trouble-prone, said officials of the Barisal Education Board.

Ten of these centres are in Barisal, four in Bhola, three in Jhalokathi and two in Patuakhali.

Fear grips fatigued troops

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sergeant was there beside me as scared as I was.

"The Bradleys came up and started shooting the hell out of them. We got them. Took them prisoner. But, God, I thought I was going to piss myself."

His friend turns to shield his eyes from the sand. "That's the problem with this **** army. We just wait to take hits. They [the Iraqis] took those mechanics prisoner and shot some of them in the heads. They start throwing shells at us and we can't even fire back in case it hits civilians. Damn that 'hearts and minds' shit." The first turns to the third of the guard duty who has been staring out into the sand clouds. "How you doing?"

"Not too good," he said. In recent days he has repeatedly spoken of wanting to talk to his mother.

"You'll be OK."

"I don't know if I will get out of this."

"Yes you will. We'll get through this."

The oldest, the first to speak, Sgt Bill Jones, is 21. The youngest, the last, Pte Roman Komley, is 18. It is only four days since the American army crossed the Kuwait border but

many of its soldiers are already tired and frightened.

People back in Britain and the United States have a far better idea of what is going on in Iraq than the average soldier. The troops on the ground hear only the occasional snippet of information passed down the line, the bad news, such as the capture of prisoners or the renewed fighting in Nasiriyah, moving the fastest.

Few are aware that American forces are within sight of Baghdad or that waves of Apache helicopters and B52s have been blitzing the Republican Guard.

Even less have any idea how many hostile Iraqis are out there and who it is who keeps taking shots at them from the cities that were meant to already be pacified.

For the vast majority, it is their first taste of combat. After the skirmishes around Tallil airfield over the weekend, one of the Abrams tank commanders caught in the fighting, 25-year-old Lt Davis Garavato, lay exhausted on the floor of a vehicle.

"You go through all that training," he said. "You know you are in Iraq but, until you hear bullets and see those tracers, you don't think anything of it is real. I can remember

thinking, 'I can't believe it. They're taking on the might of the American army.' It shocked me."

After that fight, groups of American soldiers clustered around a still smoking white lorry. Some were having their photographs taken.

An Iraqi can be seen lying on the ground, a rocket launcher fallen beside him. Someone had placed a jacket over his head. In the front seat are two skeletons, the flesh stripped off by the power of the American shell. In the back, a corpse has been burnt almost to ash, its blackened shape caught in the pain of its last moments, arms thrown up, head pushed back.

Amid yesterday's sandstorm, a group of soldiers sheltered inside a M88 maintenance vehicle, its hatches shut as protection from the dust and possibility of more mortar fire.

"This is worse than Somalia," Sgt Norman Weaver, the vehicle's commander, said.

"That it is," answered Sgt James Swinney, a medic whose truck had been destroyed by an enemy shell. "And you know the worst part of it? There is only one way home, and that's through Baghdad."



PHOTO: STAR

Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka leads a procession of the Bangladesh Muktijoddha Sangsad to mark the Independence Day in Dhaka yesterday.