

Cabinet nods to RAB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved a proposal to form an elite law-enforcement force styled Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) to combat the growing stream of crimes.

RAB would be formed by drawing skilled, physically fit and meritorious serving members from the armed forces, paramilitary BDR and other law-enforcement agencies and forces.

As per the proposal, RAB will be constituted as a striking arm of the Armed Police Battalion (APBn). The force will be equipped with sophisticated weapons and well-trained personnel drawn on a maximum of two years deputation. It will function under the supervision of the inspector general of police.

There is no provision for direct or fresh recruitment and inclusion of retired servicemen in the force.

The new elite force will be formed under the existing Armed Police Battalion (APBn) Ordinance, 1979 by amending two of its articles.

The ordinance will be placed in

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AL demands removal of Altaf, Patal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Declaring that politics of killing and democracy cannot go together, Awami League (AL) leaders yesterday demanded removal of the home minister and the state minister for youth and sports for their 'links' with the killing of party leader Mamta Uddin.

They also demanded immediate arrest and punishment of the killers and the 'masterminds' behind the murder of the vice-president of Natore district unit of the AL on Friday.

The main opposition party leaders were addressing a rally at the Bangabandhu Avenue, organised by the city AL to protest the killing of the former lawmaker.

They alleged that Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury had ordered withdrawal of murder cases against some BNP-backed criminals on the suggestion of State Minister Fazlur Rahman Patal. The elements killed Mamta Uddin within a week

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4 children of a family drown in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Four children of a family drowned Sunday in a canal at Mazh Kazirchar village in Mehendiganj upazila under Barisal district.

Sources said Suma, 4, Al-Amin, 3, and Hasan, 2, -- all children of one Shahid Sheikh -- and their cousin Lipi, 3, went missing from the house of a neighbour where a marriage was taking place.

However, their absence was only noticed toward the end of the day as the wedding crowd started to thin out, but the children could not be located despite a search operation in the evening.

The next morning (yesterday), their bodies were found floating in the canal.

Police believe the children drowned while bathing in the canal.

A case was filed with the local police station.

RECOMMENDATIONS REVEALED

Read the recommendations of the sensational probe report on Bangladesh's cricket World Cup debacle in its entirety on page 15.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
June 10		6-46 pm
June 11	5-10 am	

Prayer Timings		
June 10		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-52	6-57
Esha	8-15	8-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		



PHOTO: STAR

Contrary to most of the branches of state-owned banks, two security personnel guard the entrance of Agran Bank at Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Banks bank on poor security

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Robbers can sneak into most of the city's state-owned banks and walk away with their loots as nearly all the branches hardly have any effective security system.

A top official of Sonali Bank head office said that most of their 156 city branches do not have any armed guard as the authorities had stopped recruiting persons trained to use firearms since 1981.

"We do not have any armed guard in our branch. Like ours, most of the Sonali Bank branches that transact comparatively small amount of money every day are minus armed guards," said manager of a Sonali Bank branch at Karwan Bazar preferring anonymity.

Security system in the branches

of three other nationalised commercial banks -- Janata, Agrani and Rupali -- is also far from satisfactory during the peak hour, officials said.

The management of these three banks have however appointed one special security personnel in many of their branches to ensure safety in the wake of deteriorating law and order.

During a visit to different branches of Agrani Bank, Rupali Bank and Janata Bank across the city, The Daily Star found only one security man with an antique double-barrel gun doing rather a tough job of guarding the fort all alone.

Officials at many branches of these banks sent letters to their head offices, seeking more security guards but all in vain, sources said.

"We have sent letters to the head

office requesting additional security guards long ago. And we're still waiting for the response," an officer of Agrani Bank, Senpara branch said, with a laugh.

Many branches do have alarm system, but most of those are without close circuit camera.

Contrastingly, the security in private commercial banks is much better and cases of robbery or burglary there are rare. Apart from armed security personnel, many of the branches have their own security arrangements with close circuit camera and alarm systems. Telephone numbers of different police stations are also hung on the

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SC dismisses plea against Ayodhya excavation

PTI, New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed an appeal challenging a three month-old order of the Allahabad High Court directing excavation of the disputed site at Ayodhya by the Archaeological Survey of India to determine whether a temple pre-existed the demolished Babri Masjid.

A vacation bench comprising Justice R C Lahoti and Justice Brijesh Kumar while refusing permission to Naved Yar Khan to file the appeal, said the petitioner could approach the Lucknow Bench of the high court and raise the issue.

The bench, after refusing permission to file special leave petition (SLP), dismissed the petition.

Narrating the sequence of events from construction of the mosque, Khan stated that the order for excavation would prove to be a

bad precedent as now anybody could demand for excavation of any religious site on the pretext that another religious structure pre-existed the present one.

The petitioner further stated that the order for excavation at the disputed site was clearly violative of the 1994 order of the Supreme Court which had categorically directed maintenance of status quo at the disputed site till the high court decided the rival petitions claiming ownership over the land.

The Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court had on March 5 directed the ASI to excavate the disputed site.

Meanwhile, a day after Kanchi Shankaracharya said that the Muslim religious leaders were prepared to hand over the disputed site in Ayodhya to Hindu religious heads, All India Muslim Personal

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Student strike stalls CU

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Academic activities stood still at the Chittagong University (CU) yesterday because of a student strike.

Chhatra Union, Chhatra Front and Chhatra Foundation called the strike under the banner of Progotishil Chhatra Jote to demand the withdrawal of enhanced tuition and other fees.

The CU Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) is also to enforce a strike today with the same demand.

Student turn up yesterday was low and all classes and some tests were suspended.

The university students have been agitating for around a month now, as authorities have increased fees in every score. Besides, Tk 2500 is also being realised from each student on a departmental basis without any receipt.

However, authorities in a meeting decided to go for a 15 per cent decrease in fees that had been enhanced by 200 to 300 per cent. But all student organisations refused to accept the insignificant decrease.

The CU BCL in a press release last evening termed the 15 per cent decrease "nothing but a farce".

Democrats accuse Bush of lying on Iraqi WMDs

Bid to turn it into election issue

AFP, Washington

US Democratic presidential contenders moved Sunday to turn missing Iraqi weapons into an election issue, accusing the Bush administration of lying, and drawing parallels with the Watergate scandal.

The charges came as several candidates gathered in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, for a picnic and rally hosted by state Governor Tom Vilsack, who set the tone for the event by saying that in matters of war and peace, Americans "must be

able to trust our federal government to tell us the truth."

Democrats have been reluctant to criticise the administration of President George W. Bush over the military campaign in Iraq because of popular support for the effort to oust Iraqi president Saddam Hussein.

A recent CNN/USA Today/Gallup opinion poll noted 56 percent of Americans believed the conflict was justified, even if the United States did not find evidence Iraq was developing nuclear, chemical or biological weapons, the main

justification for the invasion trumpeted by the White House.

Moreover, 67 percent believed they were not deliberately misled by the administration by claims of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, compared to 31 percent who said they were.

But with little evidence so far of Iraq's weapons, and key congressional Democrats demanding an inquiry, the presidential contenders turned the table on the White House.

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BNP deems dialogue unnecessary to bring opposition back to JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP would not try to talk the opposition into returning to the parliament since it is the constitutional responsibility of all members of parliament to attend parliament sessions.

"I do not see the point of sitting with the opposition ahead of every session, because the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) is both for the ruling and opposition parties," BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told reporters yesterday.

"It is their responsibility to attend the sessions and take part in parliamentary activities without any

persuasion or invitation," he added.

Talking to a group of reporters at the BNP central office yesterday evening, Bhuiyan said the main opposition was boycotting the JS unnecessarily. "I think the opposition is boycotting the JS just to make it ineffective."

When his attention was drawn to the likely boycott of the budget session by the AL, Bhuiyan, who is also the minister for LGRD and cooperatives, said, "The national budget is not for the government or any party. So it would be wise for the opposition to attend the budget session and make contributions to it."

Asked whether the BNP would

take any initiative to bring the opposition to the JS on the budget day, he said the BNP would consider the move because it wanted participation of the opposition in all parliamentary proceedings.

Bhuiyan said the BNP is always ready to discuss with the opposition how to make the parliament more effective.

Expressing his optimism about the opposition's taking part in the budget session, Bhuiyan said the JS is the only institution where the opposition could play an effective role.

Israel starts evacuation of settler outposts

REUTERS, Neve Erez (West Bank)

Israel has begun an operation to remove settler outposts in the West Bank under a US-backed "road map" to peace affirmed at a Middle East summit last week, an Israeli military source says.

"The evacuation of the illegal settler outposts has begun," the source said.

A Reuters television cameraman said army tractors dismantled the uninhabited settler outpost of Neve

Erez near the West Bank city of Ramallah, destroying two caravans.

It was not immediately clear how many of the some 60 settler outposts established in the West Bank without Israeli government permission would be uprooted. Israeli media reports estimated about 15 would be scrapped.

The operation coincided with a new appeal by Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas for militant groups to halt attacks on Israelis -- an important obligation

under the road map -- but his call was rebuffed by the Islamic group Hamas.

The road map, which calls for an end to Israeli-Palestinian violence and reciprocal steps leading to a Palestinian state by 2005, mandated the removal of settler outposts set up since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon took office in March 2001.

Sharon pledged to begin disman

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PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia talks with Ambassador of Oman Salim Bin Mohammed Bin Salam Al-Wahaibi when the latter called on her at her office yesterday.

JS standing body funds remain mostly unutilised

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The budgetary allocation for parliamentary standing committees remained largely unutilised as most of the bodies still go un-constituted, 20 months into the Eighth Parliament's tenure.

Only Tk 29 lakh of the Tk 2.79 crore fund was used to fund activities of five committees formed in the first session of the Jatiya Sangsad in October 2001.

The constitution requires the parliament to appoint 50 standing committees -- 39 on different ministries and 11 on parliament affairs -- immediately after its formation.

But the current parliament formed 16 bodies to date, 11 of which were constituted in the seventh session in April.

The Parliament secretariat was allocated about Tk 1.52 crore for the 2002-03 fiscal for the committees, of which only Tk 29 lakh could be used.

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Pro-AL UP chairman murdered in Chuadanga

UNB, Chuadanga

A UP chairman and local Awami League leader was stabbed to death by unknown assailants near the sadar hospital here on Sunday night.

Ali Hossain, chairman of Juranpur Union Parishad in Damurhuda upazila, was inside a shop when some unknown men called him out. They took him to a nearby nursing centre and stabbed him to death, police and locals said.

Protesting the killing, Awami League general secretary Abdul Jalil MP in a statement yesterday termed it as part of the ruling party's conspiracy against Awami League.

He demanded immediate arrest and punishment of the killers.

10-year-old girl raped in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A 10-year-old girl was raped on the campus of Amrita Lal Dey College at Jhataula of Barisal town on Sunday night, police said.

The girl had been all alone in the house when she was picked up by two youths from the neighbourhood who tricked her into believing that her mother wanted her to go with them.

The two youths then took her to the nearby college campus and raped her before fleeing the spot. The girl was later rescued by local people and taken to the Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

The victim's father filed a case with Kotwali police accusing two youths, Soheli and Rubel, of raping his daughter.

None was arrested till filing of this report last night.

OIC Secy-Gen Oman to back Bangladesh's candidature

UNB, Dhaka

Oman has assured all-out support to Bangladesh's candidature for the post of OIC Secretary General.

The assurance was given by the Sultanate's new envoy to Bangladesh Ambassador Salim Bin Mohammad Bin Salim Al-Wahaibi when he called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday.

Al-Wahaibi further assured that Oman would actively campaign for Salauddin Qader Chowdhury, Bangladesh's candidate for OIC Secretary General.

Ambassador Al-Wahaibi also discussed other issues of common interest with the prime minister, officials said.

Khaleda Zia underscored the need for greater unity of the Muslim Ummah and strengthening the role

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