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Cops, militants trade fire in Joypurhat, 19 held

6 policemen hurt; guns and bullets looted; BDR manhunt on

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Operatives of an outlawed Islamist group looted three shotguns and 60 bullets in an early morning fierce firefight that left six policemen injured in Joypurhat yesterday, police and witnesses said.

Police arrested 19 suspected activists of Jama'atul Mujahidin after the hour-long shootout at Uttar Maheshpur in Kethal, Joypurhat,

and the authorities called in paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) to launch a massive manhunt.

Looted arms and ammunition could not be recovered until last night.

Our roving correspondent from northern region Anwar Ali adds: Acting on a tip-off a 35-strong police team, led by the officers-in-charge of the Joypurhat Sadar and Khetal police stations rushed to the house

of Montezar Rahman, a Jamaat-e-Islami leader, where the militants were holed up. The team reached the scene at about 1:30am.

As police wanted to know why they assembled in that house at the dead of night, the gangsters said they were holding a meeting on Islamic education.

When police asked them to show permission for the meeting, they told the policemen to leave the spot

and blacked out the house.

The moment the policemen threatened to raid the house, about 60 operatives attacked the law enforcers with firearms, sticks, swords and other lethal weapons. Police returned fire.

After an hour of fierce gunbattle, all but six managed to retreat. One of the captured members suffered injuries, police said.

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Thousands mourn death of Bangabandhu

UNB, Dhaka

Thousands of mourners wearing black badges and carrying black flags yesterday marched towards the Dhanmondi residence of the country's founding father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to pay homage to the slain leader.

They also placed wreaths on the portrait of Bangabandhu on his 28th death anniversary.

Mourners also visited the mazar of Bangabandhu at Tungipara in Gopalganj, offered fataha and placed wreaths. The Awami League observed the day as "national mourning day."

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Police-criminal nexus behind Ctg abductions

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Cosy links between police and criminals have triggered a wave of kidnappings of businessmen for ransom in Chittagong, according to victim's families, businessmen and intelligence officials.

In the last six months, over 50 kidnappings took place, mostly in rural areas, Chittagong Police admit.

In such an environment of terror, criminals are systematically collecting tolls from people threatening them with abduction.

"The policemen mainly act as mediators to broker ransom deals

between the criminals and the victims' families," said the relative of an abduction victim from Chittagong by phone.

"Upon release of the victims, thugs share the booty with corrupt cops."

This unholy alliance helps the kidnappers go scot-free. The police do not arrest them, agreed a detective branch official.

Due to the failure and virtual inaction by police, the business community in Chittagong is now demanding deployment of army. They are also demanding a total restructuring of the police in the

region. President of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury met the home minister on Wednesday and explained the chamber's stand on the deployment of army.

"We know the army is not a solution. The police have to do their job ultimately. But the police administration is highly corrupt and maintains close links with the criminals," Amir told The Daily Star.

Sources alleged that a section of police is involved in the recent

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Student killed in AK-47 fire in Raozan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A student of Chittagong University was killed in a spray of bullets that pierced through a wooden door when an armed gang fired from outside in Raozan Thursday night.

The gang arrived by microbus in search of local thana Awami League General Secretary Moslem Khan and killed his brother-in-law Omar Faruq, a first year BBA student, instantly when he shut the door on the gunmen in fear, said eyewitnesses.

Neighbours said the attackers used an AK-47 rifle in the shooting spree at about 8:00pm. The gang also tried to force its way into the house from backdoor and shot 15 bullets before they fled.

The neighbours alleged that the attack was aimed at killing Moslem and claimed to have seen Azizul Haq, one of the charge-sheeted accused in the Raozan Buddhist monk murder case, Jane Alam, a listed criminal with seven counts of crime including murder, and Giasuddin, an alleged criminal.

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41 MP hostel rooms in crony hands

SHAKHAWAT LITON

A group of parliamentarians has been unofficially possessing 41 unallocated rooms and three suites of the two MP hostels of the Jatiya Sangsad for nearly two years.

Most of them do not live in the hostels at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and Nakhalpara. Their relatives, private secretaries, assistant private secretaries and supporters from their constituencies live in the rooms instead, said sources in the Parliament Secretariat.

Over the last two years, the House Committee has been trying to free the rooms of illegal occupation, but failed. A Sangsad sub-committee on residential facilities did not succeed either.

The sub-committee was formed a year ago with Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain as its head to evict the illegal occupiers and to send the Parliament Secretariat recommendations for fresh allotment of the rooms.

But the committee members could not explain why illegal occupation still persists at the MP hostels. They said the sub-committee that held two meetings after its inception recommended that the Parliament Secretariat evict the illegal occupants.

Parliament Secretariat Assistant Secretary Monsur Ahmed Khan, in charge of the hostel branch of the Jatiya Sangsad, declined to comment on the issue.

The Parliament Secretariat allotted 107 of the 120 rooms of the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar hostel. Of the unallocated 13, eight were occupied by Jatiya Party (JP) (Ershad) lawmakers, three by ruling BNP lawmakers, one by a Jamaat-e-Islami MP and another by an independent MP, according to a list prepared by the Parliament Secretariat and placed at the June 21 meeting of the sub-committee.

Deputy Minister for CHT Affairs Moni Swapan Dewan, BNP Whip Zahed Ali Chowdhury and BNP

lawmaker Hafiz Ibrahim have possessed the three unallocated suites in the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar hostel.

Dewan lives in his suite, but the two others live in their own residences in Dhaka. "I didn't get any residence officially. So I applied for a suite long ago, but I don't know whether or not the Parliament Secretariat has given me any. I don't want to live here illegally," he said.

At the Nakhalpara MP hostel, the Parliament Secretariat has allotted 42 of the 75 rooms. Of the 33 unallocated rooms, 17 were unofficially occupied by BNP lawmakers, eight by JP (E) MPs and three by Awami League (AL) lawmakers.

Some MPs and whips of the ruling and opposition parties told The Daily Star that the Sangsad sub-committee recommended allotment of the rooms, but the Parliament Secretariat did not act in line with the recommendations.

The seventh parliament mem

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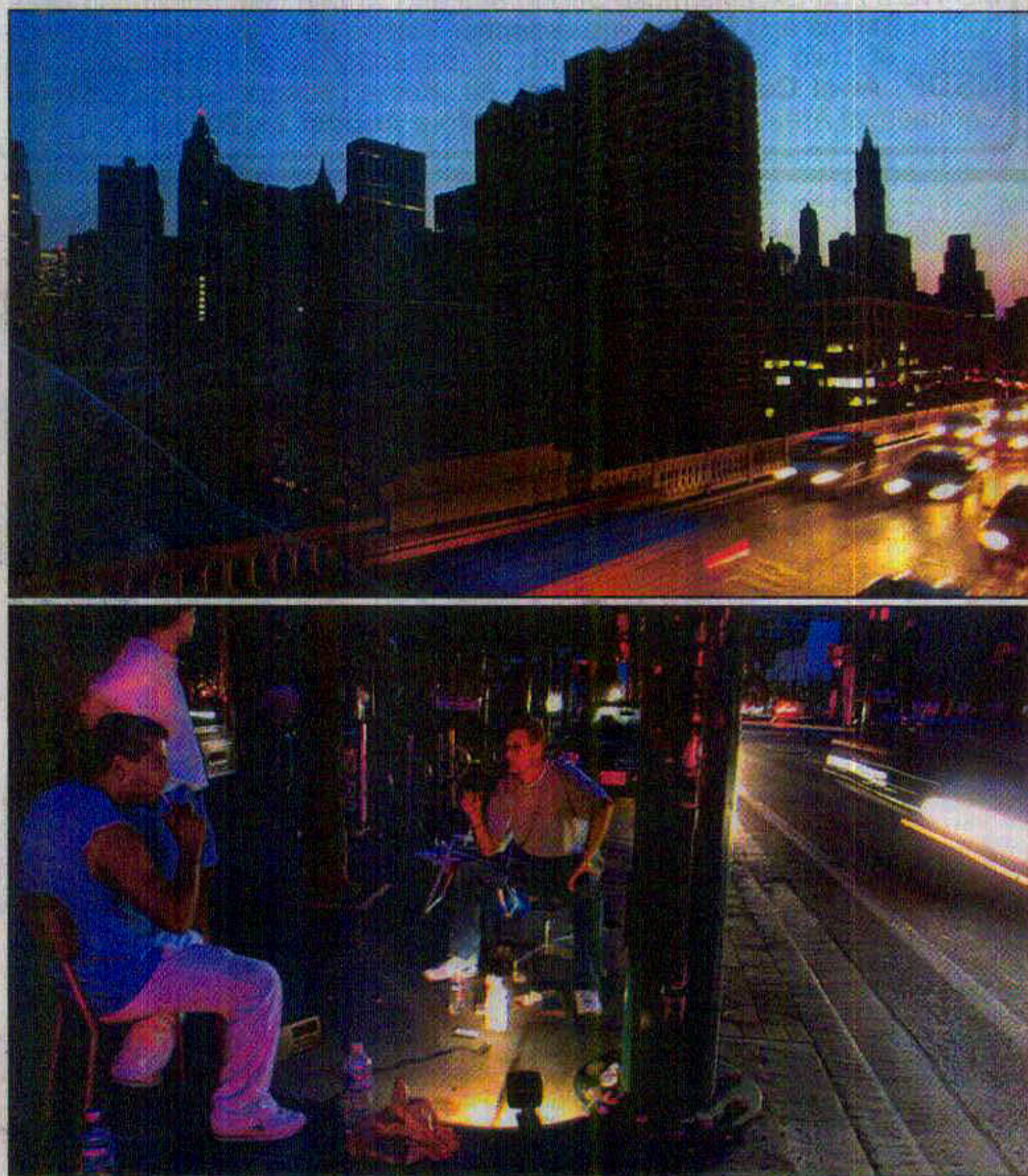


PHOTO: STAR

Mourners gather at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhaka yesterday to pay homage to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on his 28th death anniversary.

US, Canada power outage leaves millions in dark

Looting in Brooklyn, Ottawa



REUTERS, New York

The biggest power outage in North American history blacked out New York and other major US and Canadian cities yesterday, leaving millions of people in the dark and forcing thousands of stranded commuters to sleep in the streets of Manhattan.

As the lights went out on Broadway, officials ruled out sabotage, but could not agree on the cause of the blackout.

"The one thing I can say for certain is that this was not a terrorist act," President Bush told reporters.

The power grid failure spread as far as Detroit and Cleveland, and across the Canadian border to Toronto and Ottawa.

In New York, the blackout trapped thousands in crowded subways, forced millions of evacuated office workers onto the streets, darkened Broadway and hit late trading on US financial markets.

It briefly closed the city's three main airports and jangled nerves among New Yorkers whose memories of the airliner hijacking attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, are still raw. People could be seen running through the city's downtown financial district.

"Everybody just flipped out," said nurse Mary Horan, stranded with hordes of others, outside Grand Central Station. "Suddenly you start thinking about 9/11."

More than 12 hours after the outage much of New York and its suburbs were still without electricity.

Scattered sections of the city's electricity grid were slowly coming back on line, but officials could not estimate when power would be fully restored.

Authorities reported few black-out related incidents, but there was sporadic looting in Brooklyn, with 20 people arrested after breaking into a shoe store, five arrested for looting an equipment rental center and one for breaking into a phone store, police said.

In midtown Manhattan, ordi

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AL enforces countrywide hartal today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main opposition Awami League (AL) enforces a countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal today to press home its demand for immediate implementation of the verdict on the Bangabandhu Murder Case.

However, the AL has kept Netrakona outside the purview of the hartal, considering the August 21 parliamentary by-polls in the Netrakona-3 constituency.

The decision to enforce the general strike was taken earlier at a meeting chaired by AL chief Sheikh Hasina prior to her departure on August 7 on a two-week tour of Canada and USA.

Traditionally, while in opposition, AL enforced hartal on August 15, the day of Bangabandhu's assassination, but this year the day coincided with the weekly holiday shifting the hartal to August 16.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil urged all to make today's hartal a

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Mourners attacked, one killed in N'ganj

BNP men held with guns in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least one person was killed and 16 others were injured when observance of the 28th death anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was attacked in Narayanganj and some other districts allegedly by the ruling party men yesterday.

The attackers also ransacked stages and free kitchens built by the Awami League (AL) to hold discussions and feed the destitute and looted foods.

At Beparipara in Fatullah in Narayanganj, the activists of Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal, the youth front of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), threatened the AL activists with severe consequences if they went ahead with the destitute-feeding programme.

As the AL activists led by Afzal ignored the threat, a gang of Juba Dal

activists, led allegedly by Selim, Papon and Moslem, attacked Afzal's residence at about 7:30pm and opened indiscriminate gunshots.

AL activist Abdul Kadir, 22, brother of Afzal, died on the scene taking a hail of bullets, while Afzal, 30, and his associate Sukkur Ali, 35, were seriously injured.

The injured were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for better treatment, locals said.

Deputy Commissioner S M Harun Rashid and Superintendent of Police Helaluddin Badri visited the spot, but no case was filed and no one arrested till filing of this report early today.

Police arrested an alleged activist of the BNP leader of the ruling alliance, with two guns and eight hand-made bombs in Chittagong pre-empting his 'planned attack' on the AL programme.

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Mine blast kills 3 in Chittagong

UNB, Chittagong

Three people were killed and three others critically injured in a landmine explosion at a welding workshop in the port city yesterday.

Police and witnesses said a vendor picked the abandoned mine from a place mistaking it for an iron scrap.

He took it to the factory at Cachbaria College Gate crossing under Chandanaish Police Station to sell it.

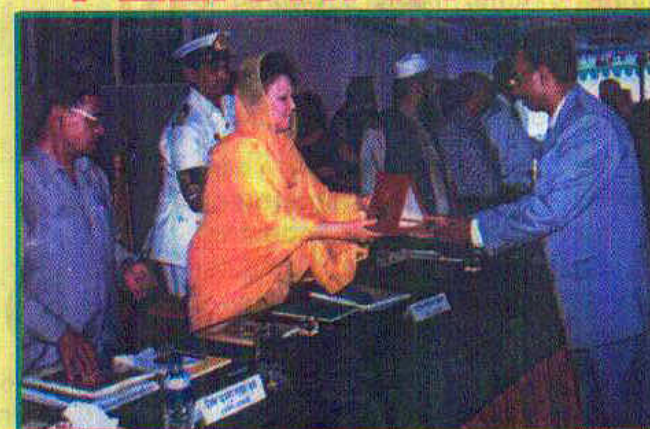
As workers at the workshop tried to test it with fire, the mine exploded, killing workers Abdul Mannan, 20, and Salahuddin, 22, and the vendor, Sobhan, 35, on the spot.

The workshop was blown up in the explosion that occurred at about 11am with a big bang. Two other adjacent shops were also damaged.

The injured were admitted to the Chittagong Medical College Hospital. One of them is Mohammad Selim, a worker at the workshop. Identity of the other two could not be known.

Police said the landmine was left by the Pakistani army during the Liberation War.

FELICITATIONS



Honourable Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Begum Khaleda Zia awarding Gold Medal to Sheikh Saidezzaman, Managing Director of Rupsa Fish & Allied Industries adjudged as best shrimp exporting firm for 2003.

We the officers & employees of all levels of the above Group of Industries express our hearty felicitations to him.

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