

Fresh bloodshed in Khulna

BNP leader knifed to death; injured AL leader dies at DMCH; fish trader gunned down; Janajuddha factions claim responsibility; anti-crime drive on cards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A BNP leader was knifed to death and an Awami League (AL) leader died from his wounds yesterday and a fish trader was gunned down a day ago in a fresh flare-up of violence in restive Khulna, dubbed as the valley of death for outlaw violence.

The Janajuddha and Janajuddha (Marxist and Leninist) factions of outlawed Purbo Banglar Community Party (PBCP) claimed responsibility for the bloodletting in the wake of which highly placed government sources hinted at an anti-crime joint drive in the regions

from midnight last night.

Manzur Morshed Khan Labu, 32, general secretary of Sonadanga unit of the main opposition AL, died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) after suffering serious injuries in bomb attack by assailants on Haji Ismail Road in Khulna city on January 29.

Alleged operatives of an outlawed outfit savagely stabbed Kubbad Shaikh, 36, a leader of Terokhada upazila unit of ruling alliance leader BNP and member of Ajartha union, until death soon after Friday midnight after his abduction.

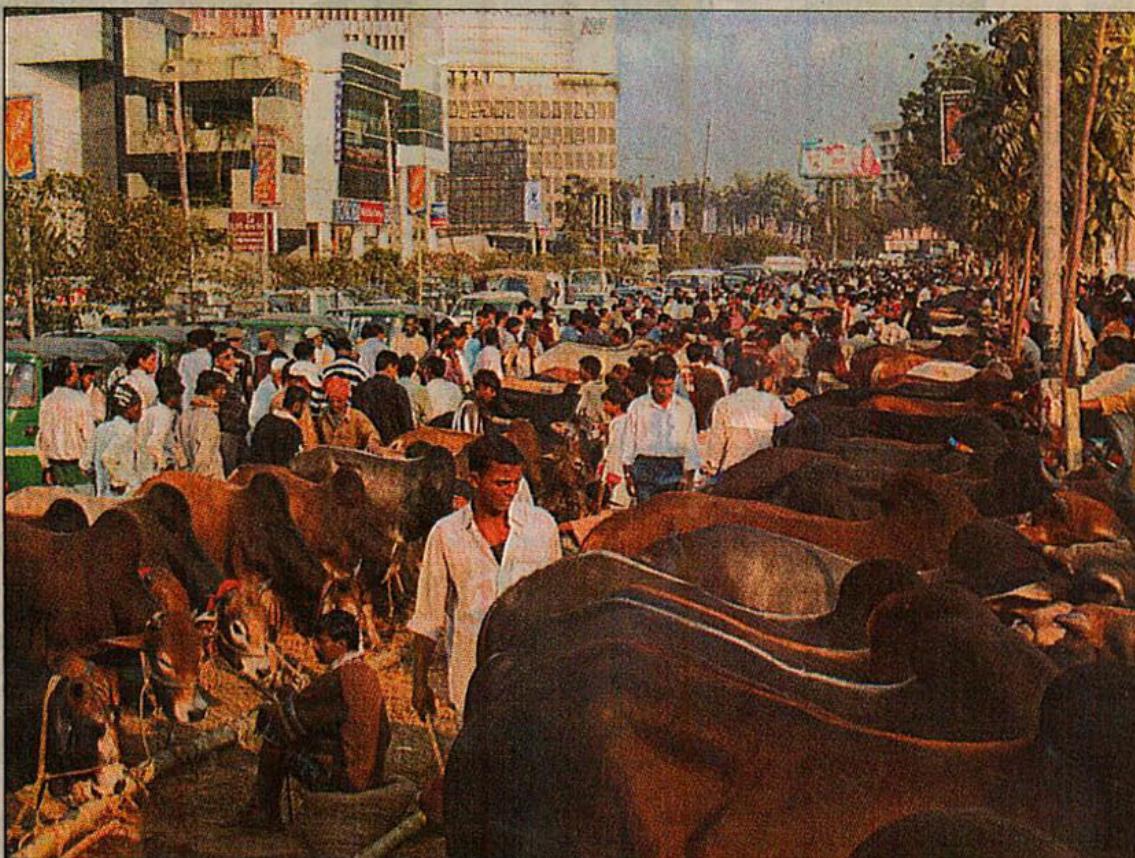
Unknown assailants killed fish trader Iqbal Biswas, 24, in a staccato burst of gunfire in Khalishpur on Friday night.

HIGH-PROFILE DEATH

Manzur, who suffered serious injuries in the abdomen when assailants hurled three handmade bombs on him on his way to the district judge's court by motorcycle, died at the intensive care unit of the DMCH at 1:30am.

He was flown in Dhaka by helicopter after the attack and was operated upon in the hospital on January 30.

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The designated cattle market behind Sundarban Hotel has spilled onto Panthapath road stretching from near Sonargaon Hotel to the Green Road intersection, violating city authorities' regulations and forcing pedestrians to the middle of the road alongside vehicles.

PHOTO: STAR

Steep prices fallout of extortion frenzy

Says cattle traders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eid cattle prices continued to rise yesterday, thanks to rampant extortion on highways as well as at several entry points of the city.

An increased price of cattle feed and additional transportation cost also contributed to the upswing in prices, cattle traders said.

"Expensive cattle feed, transport price hike and above all extortion have pushed prices further up, compared to last year," said Nurul Amin, a trader from Sirajganj who brought 10 bulls at Panthapath cattle market.

"We have to pay a substantial amount of money to extortionists otherwise they would not let us bring our cattle into the city," said Nuruddin, a cattle trader from Manikganj.

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49 killed in political violence in 30 days

Says Odhikar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Forty-nine people were killed, 477 injured, 114 arrested and five abducted in incidents of political violence in the first 30 days of the new year, says Odhikar.

Seven people were killed by torture and fire by the law enforcers and 12 died in jail custody during the period, Odhikar also said, compiling media reports.

As many as 135 incidents of violence against children also took place, it added. Thirty-five children were killed, 34 injured, 23 raped and

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Eid-ul-Azha tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eid-ul-Azha, one of the two biggest religious festivals of Muslims, will be celebrated in the country tomorrow with due religious solemnity and fervour.

On this day, the 10th of Zilhaj, some 3800 years ago, Prophet Ibrahim (A) offered to sacrifice his beloved son Prophet Ismail (A) for the satisfaction of Almighty Allah. But in spite of his willingness, Ismail (A) was spared by Allah (A) and a ram was sacrificed instead.

To commemorate this historic incident, Muslims all over the world slaughter sacrificial animals on this day and draw inspiration from the

unique example of sacrifice for Allah laid down by the two great prophets.

The government has drawn up elaborate programmes on the occasion that include arrangement of Eid congregation at the National Eidgah Maidan, hoisting of national flag atop government and non-government buildings, decoration of main roads and traffic islands with national flag and flags inscribed with 'Eid Mubarak' and illumination of the main government buildings.

A three-day public holiday begins today. Many city-dwellers have already left for their native villages or towns to celebrate Eid

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HOLIDAY NOTICE

The office of The Daily Star will remain closed from February 1-3 on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha. Therefore, there will be no issue of the newspaper from February 2-4.

Defence pact okayed to train up Kuwaiti army

Cabinet approves Bar Council Order amendments, sends back BIMST-EC draft deal for scrutiny

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved Bangladesh-Kuwait Defence Agreement under which the armed forces will provide technical and vocational training to Kuwait Army for six years.

The agreement will be in force for as many years and it can be renewed for another six years if the two governments agree, official sources said.

The approval came at the weekly

regular meeting at the Prime Minister's Office, held ahead of schedule because of the Eid-ul-Azha, for which there will be a three-day national holiday starting today. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia chaired the meeting.

The agreement will be signed formally soon.

About 3,741 members of the armed forces will be sent for three years on deputation to train up the Kuwaiti army.

With the signing of the agree-

ment, Bangladesh would greatly benefit financially and the image of the armed forces will be brightened further, the sources said.

The three-year contract of the members of the armed forces can be further extended on satisfactory performance and support from the Kuwaiti government. If that's not the case, another batch will take over from them.

The agreement provides for a liaison headquarters of Bangladesh

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College student abducted in city

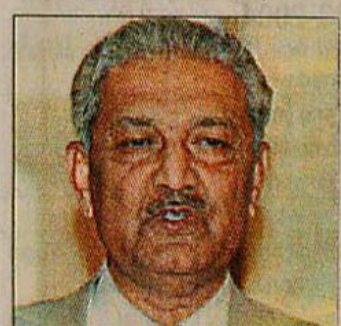
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Miscreants allegedly belonging to notorious 'Pichhi' Hannan group yesterday abducted a college student from Tejgaon.

A nine-member gang kidnapped Sohag, son of Hazi Solaiman, from their family shop Alta Book Agency at Tejgaon at around 3:00pm, sources said.

Alleged members of 'Pichhi' Hannan group was pressing

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Abdul Qadeer Khan

Pakistan sacks nuclear chief

AP, Islamabad

The founder of Pakistan's nuclear program, Abdul Qadeer Khan, was removed yesterday from his position as a government adviser amid an investigation into allegations of nuclear proliferation.

Khan was dismissed as a scientific adviser to the prime minister "in the background of the investigations into alleged acts of nuclear proliferation by a few individuals and to facilitate those investigations in a free and objective manner," the government said in a statement.

Khan -- who had held the advisory position since retiring as head of the country's top nuclear facility in 2001 -- has become a key suspect in allegations that Pakistani

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BA, Air France cancel flights

Cite al-Qaeda threat

BBC ONLINE

Three British Airways flights to the United States yesterday cancelled for security reasons, the company says.

Flights BA 223 from London Heathrow to Washington on Sunday and Monday and flight BA 207 to Miami on Sunday were grounded on government advice.

Air France later said it was cancelling two Paris to Washington flights.

The move comes after US offi-

cials said fresh intelligence showed BA and Air France flights could be hijacked by al-Qaeda and crashed into US targets.

A BA spokeswoman said safety was the airline's top priority.

"The safety and security of our operations is our absolute priority and will not be compromised," she said.

Chris Yates, aviation and security editor for Jane's Transport, told the BBC the reason for the cancellations could be a result of people returning

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Truckers 'loot' toll plaza on Dhaka-Aricha Highway

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Truckers beat up four toll collectors and looted Tk 1.5 lakh from a toll plaza on the Dhaka-Aricha Highway yesterday morning.

Sources said some truckers entered Tora toll plaza on the bank of the river Kaliganga at about 9:00am, beat up toll collectors Zahangir, Badal, Akram and Alamgir and looted the money.

Hundreds of vehicles remained stranded on the Dhaka-Aricha Highway for an hour from 9:00am.

Toll collectors said the truckers swooped on them as they

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Car bomb claims 9 Iraqis, blast kills 3 US troops

REUTERS, Mosul, Iraq

Guerrillas killed nine people in a car bomb blast outside a police station in the Iraqi city of Mosul yesterday, and a separate attack on a US convoy north of Baghdad killed three American soldiers.

Police and hospital officials in Mosul, 240 miles north of Baghdad, said 44 people were also wounded in the car bomb attack.

Thick smoke billowed from blazing vehicles after the blast, which shattered windows in a wide area.

Major Hugh Cate, spokesman for the 101st Airborne Division in

Mosul, said there were no US casualties.

"Iraqi fire and rescue teams are on site. US personnel are on site to assist as required," he said.

The US military said three US soldiers were killed when a roadside bomb blew up next to a convoy traveling between Kirkuk and Tikrit, ousted leader Saddam Hussein's hometown 110 miles north of Baghdad.

Major Josslyn Aberle said the attack involved soldiers from the 4th Infantry Division and occurred southwest of Kirkuk.

The deaths brought to 364 the number of US soldiers killed in

action since the start of the Iraq war last March. Including non-combat deaths, the toll is 522.

The attacks came on the eve of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Azha. Guerrillas have often struck on significant dates -- a car bomb destroyed a Baghdad restaurant on New Year's Eve, killing eight, and on Oct. 27, the first day of Ramadan, coordinated suicide attacks in Baghdad killed at least 35.

Despite the violence plaguing Iraq, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has given the go-ahead for a team of experts to arrive within days to assess the feasibility of holding

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1.7m perform Hajj amidst terror fear

AFP, Plain of Arafat, Saudi Arabia

The Muslim faithful massed yesterday on the mount where the Prophet Mohammed gave his last sermon 14 centuries ago as the annual pilgrimage flourished under the shadow of terror, with Saudi Arabia arresting seven men suspected of plotting an attack.

Unprecedented security measures protected the 1.7 million pilgrims who flowed in a sea of humanity across the plain of Arafat to pray for forgiveness on the Mount of Mercy (Jabal al-Rahma).

However little has so far disturbed the pilgrimage and yesterday the masses travelled from Mina, outside Makkah, some seven kilometers (4.5 miles) to Arafat, many walked but others took buses and pick-ups, to the pilgrimage's most important site.

"Here I am Allah, answering your call; there is no God but you," the pilgrims, all dressed in white, chanted as they approached Arafat. Standing on Arafat before sunset

on Saturday is the high point of the hajj, and pilgrims who fail to make it here on time must repeat their pilgrimage in future.

Many pilgrims headed straight for the 70-meter (230-foot) high Mount of Mercy, where they prayed for mercy in a symbolic re-enactment of Prophet Mohammed's only pilgrimage.

Pilgrims spend the day imploring forgiveness and beseeching God for success before returning to Mina to sacrifice an animal, generally sheep, marking Eid al-Adha, or Feast of the Sacrifice, which starts here on Monday.

The interior ministry said Friday that 1,419,706 pilgrims had come from abroad, 16,083 less than last year.

Hajj Minister Iyad Madani said they were expected to be joined by some 250,000 pilgrims from within Saudi Arabia, in addition to faithful from among Mecca residents.

The authorities, who have warned they will not tolerate any

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Nuruzzaman freed on bail after 66 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The High Court has released on bail businessman Nuruzzaman 66 days after his arrest in cases for bringing bribery charges against ruling BNP MP Naser Rahman.

Nuruzzaman, accused of cheating and kidnap in as many as eight cases filed with Fenchuganj, Srimangal and Moulvibazar police stations, was released from Moulvibazar District Jail on January 28.

He took an interim bail from the High Court in all the cases on January 26.

At a press conference in Dhaka on October 2 last year, the executive director of construction firm Yunus and Brothers alleged that Naser, president of Moulvibazar district BNP, demanded Tk 2 crore in bribe from him.

He also alleged that Naser had his Tk 20 crore work orders cancelled, as he refused to bribe him.

Police picked up Nuruzzaman from his house at Mirabazar in the

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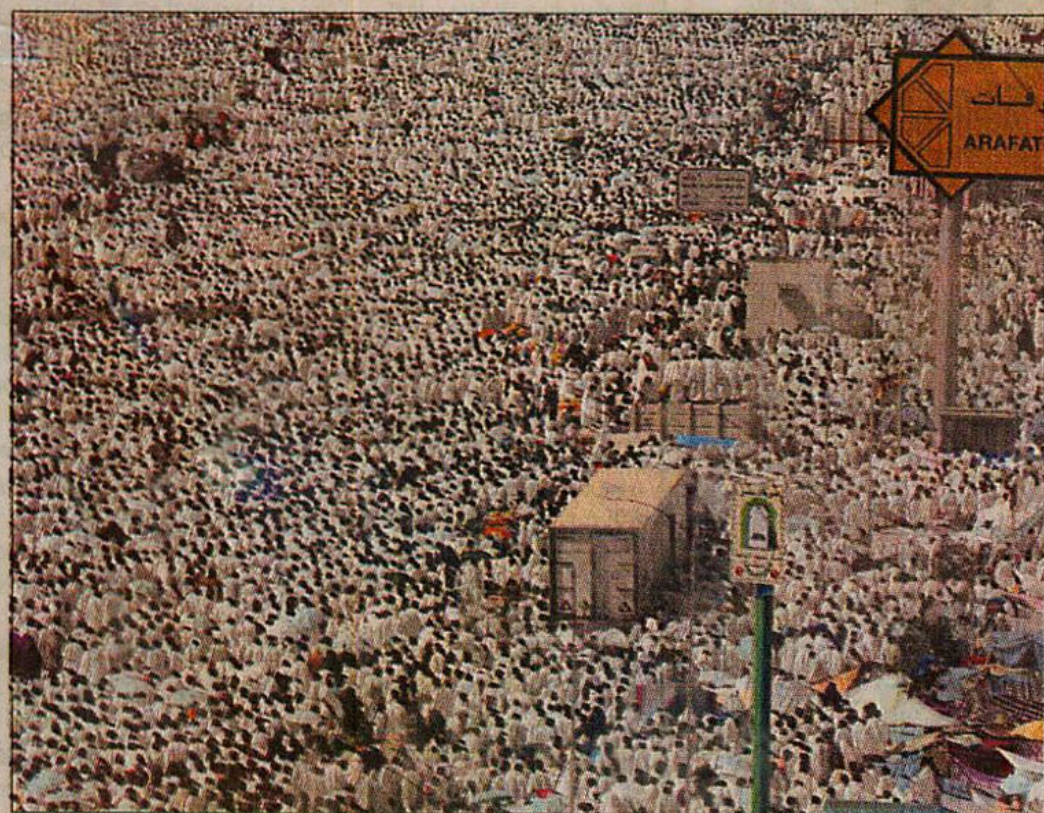


PHOTO: AFP

Hundreds of thousands of Muslim pilgrims make their way to perform noon prayers at the Namira Mosque at Mount Arafat outside the holy city of Makkah during the annual Hajj pilgrimage yesterday.

