

89 undercover cop teams in action

Plainclothes police carry arms, Rab also joins anticrime combat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eighty-nine armed undercover police teams swung into action last night with 40 of them under the much-talked-about elite Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) to restore law and order amid scenes of growing violence in Dhaka.

The deployment of Rab, a day

after joint forces of paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles, armed police and police were pressed into action, marks its entry to the government's efforts to fight crime.

But members of the defence forces who contribute 40 percent of the Rab strength are not taking part in raids. "They may supervise the action," said a top police officer who

would not give his name.

"Each plainclothes police team of six operates in a ward and the joint forces will be carrying out block raids until further order," the officer said, quoting an action plan laid out on March 16.

The latest anticrime measures came amid law and order downside

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Vietnamese president due Monday

AFP, Hanoi

Vietnamese President Tran Duc Luong arrives in Dhaka Monday for a three-day official visit aimed at improving ties with the two countries, the foreign ministry here said yesterday.

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Correction

In our March 18 report headlined 'Blame on ministries for agri inputs crises' inadvertently quoted Agriculture Minister MK Anwar as saying at a parliamentary standing committee meeting that despite repeated pleas finance ministry showed indifference to grant more agricultural inputs subsidies.

But meeting sources said the minister did not use the phrase 'indifference.'

JS BOYCOTT

Hamid asks Bhuiyan to arrange Khaleda-Hasina talks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid said yesterday he had asked ruling BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan for initiating a dialogue to end opposition's parliament boycott.

Talking to newsmen at his Sangsad Bhaban office yesterday, Hamid said he asked Mannan to tell Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to talk to the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina for a dialogue.

He acknowledged getting phone calls both from Mannan Bhuiyan and Salauddin Quader Chowdhury about sitting for talks with the government to end main opposition Awami League's parliament boycott since June 25 last year.

"I told Mannan Bhuiyan to ask the leader of the house (Khaleda) to talk with the leader of the opposition (Hasina)," said Hamid.

On SQ Chowdhury's proposal to AL to sit across the table for talks first and see if it should go back to parliament, Hamid said, "If there

is a pre-conceived notion that talks would not be fruitful, then what's the point of holding talks."

Hamid also said, "We've made a three-point demand in writing long back to the government and if it comes up with its position on these demands only then can we consider the offer."

On March 13, Bhuiyan made a telephone call to Hamid offering the AL to hold dialogue for resolving the parliamentary stand-off due to the main opposition party's indefinite House boycott since June last year.

Bhuiyan asked Hamid to convey to his party high command the ruling party's request to join parliament and sit for talks, if needed.

In January last, Bhuiyan had made a similar offer to Hamid for talks to end the stalemate. But the talks did not take place as the AL termed the offer just an eyewash.

On Wednesday last, Khaleda's parliamentary affairs advisor Salauddin Quader Chowdhury repeated the same offer of dialogue to Hamid.

INDO-PAK CRICKET

Rivals ready for another cracker

BBC ONLINE, Peshawar

India face a dilemma over the make-up of their bowling attack ahead of the third match of their one-day series against Pakistan in Peshawar.

With the series tied at 1-1, they have suffered a major blow with the

From your GP Mobile, write **CRIC** and send* SMS to **2777**. In return Text mail you will receive the latest cricket related information.

*Charge applicable

Prominent labour leader bombed to death in Mongla

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A prominent labour leader was bombed to death in southwestern Mongla town last night in a drive-by attack, sparking angry protests and political backlash, police and witnesses said.

Assailants with apparent ties to an outlawed outfit smashed the head of Mohammad Abdul Baten, 50, president of Bagerhat district Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal and former chairman of Mongla Pourasabha near his Madrasa Road house at about 8:00pm.

Witnesses said the attackers hurled a potent bomb at his head

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CONFRONTATIONAL POLITICS

Businessmen to try to put an end

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Top business leaders yesterday decided to pursue an agenda to get political parties including the ruling BNP put an end to violent political confrontation in the wake of a wave of attacks on business enterprises to settle political scores.

At a meeting of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) in the afternoon, business leaders shared their common fears that politics would only

become more volatile unless something was urgently done.

They also discussed possible strategies for action and decided that a plan of action would be adopted at Sunday's meeting of the apex trade body. Representatives of country's all chambers and business bodies will finalise a joint statement at another meeting on Sunday.

The FBCCI leaders met at an office of a business leader in the wake of attacks on a dozen enterprises of Mannan whose resignation

from the party enraged the BNP.

FBCCI President and BNP leader Abdul Awal Mintoo met Prime Minister Khaleda Zia after the meeting and conveyed his concerns about the attack on the enterprises of renegade BNP leader Abdul Mannan and the volatile political environment.

"I have urged the prime minister to provide protection to industrial units and factories," Mintoo told The Daily Star, "besides, I have asked

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Diplomats meet Tarique, voice concern over attacks on opposition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Top diplomats from 15 countries yesterday held talks with Tarique Rahman, senior joint secretary general of the ruling BNP, and expressed their concern over political violence in a move that surprised senior ministers.

Highly placed sources said the high commissioners and ambassadors from Bangladesh's key development partners, including the United States, the Netherlands, and

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US embassy launches finger scans for visa seekers

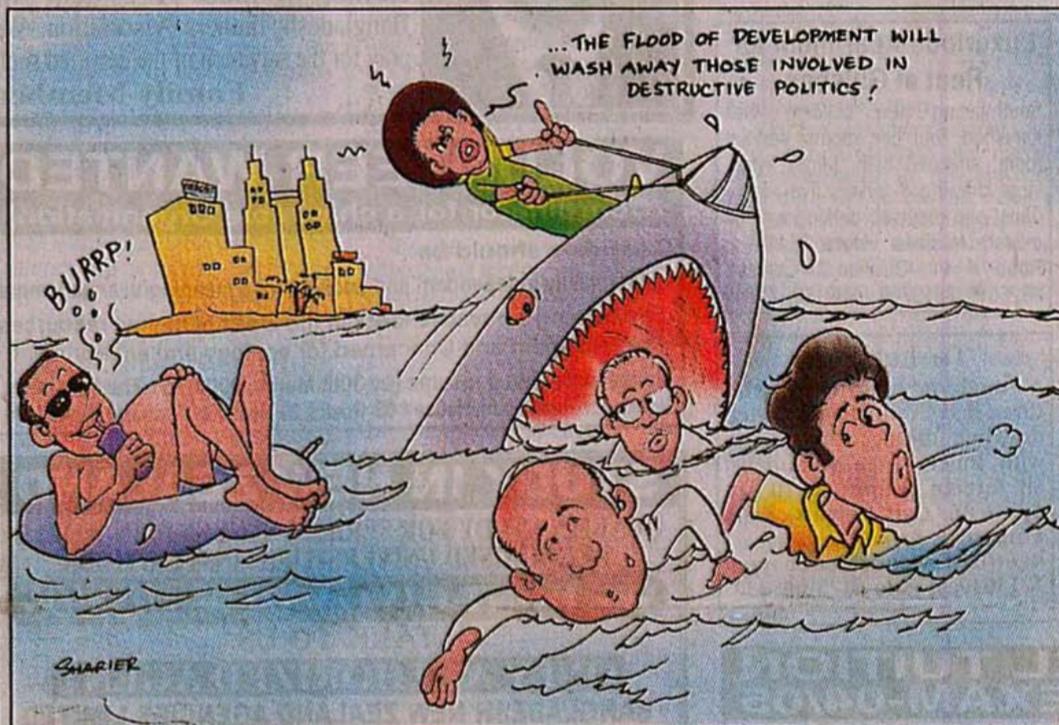
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The US embassy in Dhaka yesterday launched biometric finger-scans for visa applicants to tighten what American Ambassador Harry K Thomas said was the US homeland security.

All visa applicants -- except for children below 14, adults over 79, diplomats and others on official travels to the US -- must submit finger-scans.

"We are aware that this may create controversy ... these new procedures are required by US law to be implemented at all visa issuing posts worldwide ... to enhance US national security as well as the

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Businesses shut, govt careless

Hasina tells of law and order at rallies

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina has said the business people are now being compelled to shut down their businesses for lack of security.

"People, including the business community, are the worst victims of law and order situation. But, the coalition government is not at all concerned about it," she said while addressing a number of wayside rallies on her way back to Dhaka from Gopalganj yesterday.

After attending programmes, marking the 85th birthday of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Tungipara, the AL chief also visited Sri Sri Horichand Thakur's fair at Orakandi in Kashiuni of Gopalganj district in the morning.

She exchanged greetings with the Hindu pilgrims who came to join the fair, an annual event attended by thousands of people from across the country.

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Conspirators' black hands will be smashed: Khaleda

BSS, Jhenidah

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has accused the opposition Awami League (AL) of pursuing the path of conspiracy and said the 'conspirators' will be resisted to sustain democracy and development.

"None will be allowed to foil democracy. The black hands of conspirators will be smashed," she said while addressing a public meeting at Mahesphur Degree College ground in Jhenidah yesterday.

The prime minister sought cooperation of all to carry out the ongoing development programme and said the conspirators will be swept away in the wave of massive development initiated by the government across the country.

Rejecting the AL's demand for the government's resignation, the prime minister asked the opposition to wait for people's verdict in the next general elections that will be held after two and a half years.

Khaleda blasted the AL for resorting to vandalism and destruction on the streets instead of speaking on the

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Pakistan to get elite military status

US reward for support in terror war

AFP, ISLAMABAD

The United States will reward Pakistan for its support in the war on terrorism with an elite military status despite concerns about nuclear proliferation, US Secretary of State Colin Powell said yesterday.

Powell said US President George W. Bush would soon designate Pakistan a "major non-Nato ally," a move that will significantly enhance military cooperation between the two countries and make it easier for Islamabad to acquire certain armaments from Washington.

"I advised the foreign minister

this morning that we will also be making a notification to our Congress that will designate Pakistan as a 'major non-Nato ally' for the purposes of our future military to military relations," Powell told reporters after meeting his counterpart Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri.

The designation means Pakistan will join an exclusive club of nations -- including Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Japan, Kuwait, New Zealand, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines, which are given preferential treatment in the areas of foreign aid and defense cooperation.

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India face a dilemma over the make-up of their bowling attack ahead of the third match of their one-day series against Pakistan in Peshawar.

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