

18 killed in Iraq

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occasional explosions and gunfire were heard from the center of the city until about midnight. The roads were largely deserted as people stayed indoors.

This week, Marines took over authority in Fallujah and surrounding areas from the Army. The city on the banks of the Euphrates River is in the so-called Sunni Triangle, where support for Saddam was strong and rebel attacks on American forces are frequent.

In recent months, American troops have rarely ventured into downtown Fallujah, one of the most dangerous areas in Iraq for the US military.

Earlier Friday, four members of the US-trained Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, or ICDC, also were killed while raiding a hideout near Saddam's hometown of Tikrit with US soldiers, the American military said. Three suspected rebels also died and 21 were captured in the raid.

In the town of Shwan, near the

BSF kills two Bangladeshis

UNB, Thakurgaon

Border Security Force (BSF) shot dead two youths at bordering Tareya of Panchagarh yesterday morning.

Villagers said Nazimuddin, 30, of Mondalpara stood at the zero-point to talk to his Indian national relative Daimul of Bagpur village on the other side of the border at 9:00am.

The BSF of Kamarganj outpost opened fire on them without any provocation and dragged their bodies away.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) of the area immediately protested the killing and demanded of the BSF to return the body of the Bangladeshi.

Khosru

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welfare of the people of his constituency [Pahartoli-Double Mooring-Bandar].

He said the resignation would rather help him since he would be able to give more time for the people of his area.

Khosru denied that the reported dispute with a senior cabinet member over lease of a land prompted his resignation. But he kept mum on why he had to resign at a time when the prices of onion and some other essentials some-what decreased.

The port city is agog with speculation that disagreements with his cabinet colleagues might have led to the resignation.

The ruling BNP lawmaker attended four functions -- at two schools and two mosques -- in the port city Friday before flying back to the capital in the evening.

A large number of BNP partisans and supporters from his Chittagong-8 constituency and other parts of the city thronged at Shah Amanat International Airport to welcome Khosru when he arrived by a GMG Airlines flight in the morning.

From the airport the former minister went direct to Agrabad Jamboree Field area to inaugurate Kalakakoli School there.

He then laid the foundation stone of a mosque at nearby Abbaspura, inaugurated a newly constructed mosque at Chhotopole Police Line and said Juma prayers there, before going to his Mehediagh home for lunch.

In the afternoon, the business-magnate-turned-politician went to Kattoli in his constituency and attended the annual prize giving ceremony of Daxin Kattoli Ahmad Ullah Government Primary School as the chief guest.

AL heading

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also do not believe the party can dislodge the government by April 30. They rather think the party will be ruined if nothing happens," Bhuiyan claimed.

He however said the government has received information the AL might try to create anarchy and go for killing of noted personalities before its deadline in a desperate bid to topple the government even in an unconstitutional way. "We have also information the party may kill its own leaders to put the blame on the BNP," he said and urged all to remain vigilant against such unholy designs.

The government will crush any attempts to create lawlessness with a heavy hand, he warned.

The AL lacks the strength to bring no-confidence motion in parliament and it is also incapable of causing a mass upsurge to remove the government. This is why it is looking for unconstitutional ways for a change of power, Bhuiyan thought.

He announced there will be by-election within 90 days as per constitutional provisions if the AL resigns from parliament and asked the party to refrain from any such move and join parliament sessions for its survival.

He called upon the party men and people to join the May 1 public meeting at Paltan Maidan to be addressed by Khaleda Zia.

Chaired by Mayor and city BNP President Saadeque Hossain Khoka MP, the rally was also attended by some ministers, senior BNP leaders and lawmakers.

The rally was followed by a procession that paraded different city roads.

northern city of Kirkuk, four people en route to a wedding died when the vehicles they were riding in struck an anti-tank mine. The explosion injured 12 other people, police said Friday.

Gunmen shot and killed an Iraqi police officer late Friday while he was walking home in Kirkuk, Fhadiia Rashid, an official at the city's morgue, said Saturday.

Also Friday, Time magazine said Omar Hashim Kamal, an Iraqi translator who worked in its Baghdad bureau, died of wounds sustained Wednesday. Kamal was shot by unidentified assailants.

BAGHABARI PROJECT

PDB signs deal with Westmont Power today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Power Development Board (PDB) today signs a power purchasing deal with a Malaysian company to install and operate the second unit 130mw barge-mounted power project in Baghabari.

The PDB inks the agreement with Westmont Power at its office in the morning.

In early October, the Cabinet Purchase Committee approved an unsolicited proposal of the Malaysian company to set up the zero-fired power plant in Baghabari.

Westmont claims it can set up the plant within six months and will charge only US 2.79 cents for per unit of power for 20 years. However, industry insiders say the company is intending to install a decade-old plant, which is lying with them unused.

UP member stabbed to death

UNB, Pabna

Assailants stabbed a Union Parishad (UP) member to death at Kazirhat-Gopalpur village in Athgharia upazila Friday night.

Member of Chatmohar Union Parishad, Hasan Ali, was also an activist of Awami League.

Following a conflict with his rivals at the village, Hasan took refuge in the house of his sister-in-law at Kazirhat-Gopalpur, where an arbitration was arranged on Kazirhat-Gopalpur Primary School premises to resolve the conflict.

At one stage, the assailants stormed the meeting venue and picked up Hasan, firing blank shots to scare away the people. The criminals chopped Hasan and left him a little away, witnesses said.

Hasan died on the way to hospital.

Taiwanese office

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permission has not been cancelled."

"No instruction has been given to close this office which has been allowed to operate for helping Bangladesh's economic development."

News agency CNA on March 26 quoted Taiwan foreign ministry official Lin Sung-Huan as saying that the Dhaka office is operating normally despite obstruction from Beijing.

Bangladesh ministers concerned dismissed a Chinese complaint that this office was issuing visa while Lin Sung-Huan declined to comment on reports of visa issuance.

Huan also rejected the suggestion of any links between the resignation of commerce minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and the opening of Taiwan's trade liaison office saying, Khosru stepped down due to Bangladesh's domestic economic problems.

China had warned Bangladesh of 'unimaginable consequence' if it does not close down the Taiwan office. It, however, had also said it does not oppose Bangladesh's doing business with Taiwan, it only opposes political recognition of Taiwan as a separate state.

Robbers gun down

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said on the shooting.

After autopsy, colleagues sent Kalimullah's body to his village home in Patia while that of Pradip was sent to Boalkhali in Chittagong.

Deputy Commissioner M Lutfar Rahman and Humayun Kabir, superintendent of police, Laxmipur, visited the spot.

Ziaul Haque, state minister for local government, rural development and cooperatives, instructed local administration to arrest the culprits immediately.

Women

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The government earlier allowed three private recruiting agencies -- Royal Associates, Rupsha Overseas and Tribney Recruiting Agency -- to send women workers to Saudi Arabia for household jobs.

Two hundred and sixty women workers have been sent to Saudi Arabia so far.

Dhaka, Delhi agree to map out product standards

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, from Delhi

India and Bangladesh have agreed on a time-bound programme to recognise each other's certification of commodities like food products, agro-products, textiles and leather, in a bid to remove a major non-tariff barrier in bilateral trade.

The two countries also agreed to map out the certification of Bangladeshi products by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).

The decisions were taken at the second meeting of India-Bangladesh Joint Working Group on Trade held here on March 23 and 24.

The issue of BIS approval for Bangladeshi goods came up in the meeting with specific reference to Bangladesh's cement exports and made significant progress, official sources here said yesterday.

The BIS will inspect the Bangladesh cement plant in the middle of April this year when the Indian High Commission in Dhaka will meet with potential Bangladeshi applicants of the 109 products listed for mandatory certification earlier notified by BIS to clarify their doubts, they said.

The draft of the revised India-Bangladesh trade, agreed to by both sides at the joint working group meeting after negotiations for nearly a year, will be signed at a high level meeting on a mutually convenient date, according to the sources. The meeting also agreed to press ahead with discussions on the possibility of a bilateral free trade agreement between India and Bangladesh.

Both sides noted that the proposal of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries to organize an exhibition of Bangladeshi products in Kolkata sometime in early September this year would help boost trade between the two countries.

Mob slaughters two 'outlaws' in Bagerhat

UNB, Bagerhat

A mob yesterday hacked to death two alleged underground operatives at Chitalmari in Bagerhat.

Locals held alleged outlaws Ajay Mazumder, 30, and Bolai Mohant, 29, at Kharia village where they went to extort money, police said.

The frenzied crowd beat up and then slaughtered them, police added.

Police sent the bodies for autopsy.

The officer-in-charge of Dumuria camp of joint forces visited the spot and sought villagers' cooperation in arresting underground operatives of the area.

With yesterday's incident, enraged mob lynched seven members of different outlawed organisations in the district in last 18 months. Three were killed in Chitalmari on February 9 while two others in Sadar upazila on March 6, sources said.

Dhaka signs

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economic system with the latest state-of-the-art technology, will land in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Italy, Tunisia, Algeria and France.

"The project will provide unprecedented high speed telecoms links," AFP reported from Dubai quoting UAE Telecoms Minister Ahmed Humaid al-Tayer as saying at the signing ceremony yesterday. "It will also contribute to breaking the digital divide between developed and developing countries."

The cable is expected to become operational in the third quarter of 2005 and will be able to handle 20 million voice calls or 60,000 broadcast television channels at the same time, according to a presentation by Etilsalat, the UAE telecoms company.

The SMW4 cable will connect to existing telecoms networks in Europe, according to a France Telecom executive who attended the ceremony.

The French operator has participated in all three previous underwater cable projects. SMW3, the largest one, was completed in 1999 at an estimated cost of \$1.5 billion and involves a 39,000-kilometre (24,000 miles) cable network running from China to Germany and serving Japan, Australia, southeast Asia and the Middle East.

Industry players are hoping the start of work on the latest under-water cable will revive the market's appetite for similar projects following the lull in big telecoms investments over the past three years due to the global slump in the industry.

"There were many projects planned but could not be realised due to shortage of investment," Yukio Mizuochi, group vice president at Fujitsu, told AFP.

"We hope this project will lead the market recovery... and meet increased demand from broadband and Internet."

Independence Day

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Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar, former president Abdur Rahman Biswas, freedom fighters, ministers, diplomats, chiefs of the three services and senior civil and military officials were present.

Khaleda Zia along with other party leaders also laid wreaths at the memorial on behalf of the party as chairperson of the ruling BNP.

Leader of the Opposition in parliament and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina laid wreaths at 7:25am. She was accompanied by AL leaders Abdul Jalil, Abdus Samad Azad, Amir Hossain Annu, Suranjit Sengupta, Abdur Razzak and Sajeda Chowdhury.

Dr Kamal Hossain and Kazi Farooque Ahmed laid wreaths under the banner of Jatiya Oikya Mancha at 9:15am.

Jatiya Party leaders Sheikh Shahidul Islam and Sadek Siddique laid wreaths at 9:00am.

The prime minister also laid wreaths at the mazar of late president Ziaur Rahman. BNP leaders and workers were present.

A combined parade of Bangladesh Army, Air Force, Navy, Bangladesh Rifles, police, National Cadet Corps and freedom fighters was held at the National Parade Square in the morning. President Iajuddin Ahmed reviewed the parade and took salute at the march past.

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

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

Special diet was served at hospital, prisons, orphanages and vagrant homes.

The president, prime minister

Sourav

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India in a Test match. Ganguly also missed the second Test at home against New Zealand in October following a boil-induced surgery.

Left-handed batsman Yuvraj Singh will take Ganguly's slot as the sixth specialist batsman behind Akash Chopra, Virender Sehwag, Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar and Venkatesai Laxman.

Tendulkar, who made his Test debut during the previous series in Pakistan in 1989, is the only player from either side to have experienced an India-Pakistan Test match on Pakistani soil.

India have been bolstered by the return of frontline bowlers, seamer Ajit Agarkar and leg-spinner Anil Kumble, who missed the preceding one-day series due to injuries.

Pakistan, looking to make amends for their 2-3 defeat in the one-dayers, played safe by not making a short-list. They will name their team after another close look at the wicket on Sunday morning.

Businesses sceptical

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lenges facing the garment industry and also about other key challenges Bangladesh economy is facing," the BGMEA president said.

On the new commerce minister, he said, "We would like to work with him and hope that he would take effective steps to help overcome MFA fallout on readymade garment sector."

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President Abdul Awal Mintoo said, "We have seen in newspapers that he has resigned on personal ground, so we cannot comment on that. We from FBCCI will meet the new commerce minister tomorrow (Sunday) and would like to work together (with Altaf)."

"As Bangladesh is negotiating FTA with some neighbouring countries and RMG sector is likely to face setback at the end of MFA era, we must work together and help the commerce ministry with inputs," Mintoo told The Daily Star last night.

Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry President

JCD leader beat Bangladesh Today reporter at DU

DU CORRESPONDENT

A Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader Friday bashed a staff reporter of a daily at Jasimuddin Hall of Dhaka University (DU).

Fakrul Islam Liton, vice president of the DU unit of JCD, severely beat Mirza Shamim Ahsan Habib, sports reporter of Bangladesh Today and a resident of Jasimuddin Hall, as he lit a cigarette before him at around noon, sources said.

Habib, also a master's student of library and information science department, was first admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and later shifted to a private clinic as his condition deteriorated, they added.

The hall authority is bearing medical expenses of the injured journalist, but could not take action against Liton, as it did not receive any complaint against him, said Prof Mahbubur Rahman, the hall provost, yesterday.

"We would take stern action against the JCD leader once specific complaint is filed against him," he added.

Azizul Bari Helal, general secretary of JCD, DU, said they would also take action against Liton, if found guilty.

and leader of the opposition gave messages on the eve of the Independence day.

Bangladesh missions abroad also celebrated the day. Bangladesh high commission in UK honoured 15 people for their significant role there during Bangladesh's Liberation War, UNBSaid.

They are late Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury, Gous Khan, Abdul Matin, Peter Shore, Shamsur Rahman, Haji Naser Ali, Sheikh Abdol Mannan, Mimbor Ali, Badrul Hossain Talukdar, Sultan Mahmood Sharif, Serajur Rahman, Badrunnessa Pasha, Nikhileswar Chakraborty, ATM Wali Ashraf and Mainuddin Ahmed.

SC Bar polls begins today

BSS, Dhaka

The election to the executive committee of Supreme Court Bar Association begins today, with three panels and some independent candidates vying for 14 posts of office-bearers and members.

Supreme Court sources said all preparations have been completed for the two-day election. Voting will begin at 10:00am and continue till 5:00pm each day.

Dr M Zahir and Mamun Rahman are vying for the posts of president and secretary from the pro-government Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Oikya Parishad.

The other candidates of the panel are Mohammad Nawab Ali, Golam Arshed, Amir Hossain Chowdhury Raibhan, Farid Uddin Khan, Shihab Uddin Mahmud, Afrin Ara Begum, Khan Mohammad Pir-e-Azam Akmal, Mohammad Harun-ur-Rashid Khan, Mohammad Kalim Ullah, Mohammad Saad Ullah, Mohammad Salahuddin and Shahanara Begum Sanu.

Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud and Bashir Ahmed are contesting for the posts of president and secretary from the opposition-backed Ainjibi Samannoy Parishad.

The other candidates are Md Mainul Islam Chowdhury, Md Sirajul Haque, BA Rashid, Md Shahidul Islam, Syed Mamun Mahbub, Abdul Hai Fakir, Jesmin Sultana Shamshad, Md Harun-ur-Rashid, Md Taifur Kabir, Prabir Ranjan Haider, Shakila Rowshan Khuku and Satayndra Chandra Bhakta.

Dr Mohammad Zakir Hossain and Rafiqul Islam Mehedi are contesting for the posts of president and secretary from Bikalpa Dhara United Panel.

The other candidates are Mohammad Hepzul Bari, Mushfiq Uddin Bakhtiar, Mohammad Anawaruzaman and Mohammad Abul Hossain.

AYM Mossiuzzaman is contesting the polls as an independent candidate for the post of president. Md Harun-ur-Rashid and Mohammad Shafiuddin Bhuyan are independent candidates for the post of secretary.

3 killed Friday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three people were killed in city's Mohammadpur, Ramna and Demra areas on Friday.

A gang of three or four fired several shots point blank at Engineer Kazi Manzur, 52, at the entrance of his house at Pisciculture Road in Mohammadpur at about 8:45pm. He was returning home after saying Esha prayers at the nearby mosque.

With bullets in lungs and kidneys, Manzur was first rushed to Suhrawardy hospital and later shifted to Chest Diseases Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

At Ramna, about six assailants sprayed hotel Capetown at Moghbazar with bullets at about 6:30am killing a hotel boy allegedly at not getting tolls from the hotel manager.

The criminals looked for the hotel manager, and failing to find him shot hotel-boy Emon thrice leaving him dead on the spot with two bullets in his chest and head.

The gang demanded Tk 2 lakh a few days back, an employee of the hotel said.

In another incident in Demra, criminals stabbed one Mamun (30) to death on Friday evening.

Mamun's family members said, he got out of his 2282, North Dhania home at around 6:30pm Friday, and one rickshawpuller brought him severely injured home at around 9:00pm.

He was declared dead on being rushed to the DMCH at 10:30pm.

Ershad calls to free democracy from 'fascists'

UNB, Dhaka

"Neo fascism" has gripped the country, said Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman Hussein M Ershad yesterday, urging all to free democracy from the hands of 'killers'.

Addressing a pre-rally gathering of the student wing of JP, held on the occasion of its 21st founding anniversary, Ershad said, "The foremost meaning of democracy is tolerance." But, the ruling alliance government can't tolerate any opposition, he added.

The JP chief said the government's oppressive policy and price hike of essentials prompted the people to get united. He called for forging an even greater unity to help install a new government for building a 'new Bangladesh'.

He claimed it was only his party that could salvage the nation from the suffocating situation, where the whole administration was shattered by the downside of law and order, price hike of essentials and mismanagement.

Ershad later inaugurated a rally at Mukhtangon.

Idols of three temples damaged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Unidentified assailants ravaged the idols of three temples at Uttar Bedkashi Union Parishad under Koyra upazila Thursday midnight.

The incident occurred on the eve of Bhasanti puja at Sharbarajan Puja Mandir in Barlabari village. The criminals destroyed all idols of Tarakeshwari Mandir and Patharkhali Kalimandir, police said.

The leaders of Koyra Puja Uddipan Parishad have expressed deep concern over the attack.

Police said they are probing the incident.

Tiger kills one fisherman in Sundarbans

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A fisherman was killed by a tiger on Kachchikata canal in the Sundarbans yesterday morning.

The victim Golam Bari Mondal, 45, son of Azibar Rahman Moral of Bhekhal village in Shyamnagar upazila, went fishing with a group of 25 fishermen, taking permission from the Forest Department.

Eyewitnesses said a tiger suddenly swooped on Mondal and dragged him into the deep forest. His accomplices later recovered his body from the jungle.

Nasaka abducts

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proposed a flag meeting to resolve the problem, but the Nasaka is yet to respond to it.

Locals said three of the 13 abducted people -- Md Taher, Syed Alam, and Shahriar -- managed to escape and return to their villages. The abducted locals included Zainal Abedin, Faridul Alam, Abu Taleb, Selim Mian and Shah Alam, they added.

Poor demarcation of boarder in Naikhangchari has fuelled such abductions in recent years.

An initiative to properly demarcate the border was taken 4 years ago, but the death of three people in a landmine explosion stalled the process.

Thursday's Nasaka incursion into Bangladesh has unnerved locals and prompted the BDR to be on high alert.

Mob gouges out eyes

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two of his 'commanders' -- Nur Karim and Selim. The condition and whereabouts of Nurul Islam Commander, a fourth bandit arrested along with the three others, could not be known immediately.

Four policemen including a sub-inspector were injured in an ensuing scuffle between police and the mob before police fired blank shots to disperse the angry crowd.

The injured policemen were taken to Char Jabbar Health Centre while the severely injured bandits were admitted to Noakhali General Hospital. Naybba Chora and Nur Karim were referred to Comilla Medical College Hospital yesterday.

Talking to The Daily Star at the hospital, the three injured bandits said police fired only after the attackers were finished with carving their eyes out.

Police said they came to know about Naybba Chora's hideout from his brother Manik, who was arrested Thursday from a house at Dhaka's Jigatala area.

Following Manik's confessional statement, a police team from Char Jabbar Police Station raided an area adjacent to Shital Pahar under Bakulia Police Station and arrested the bandit chief and his three henchmen.