



The Daily Star



REGD. NO. DA 784

VOL. XIV No. 75

DHAKA SATURDAY APRIL 3, 2004

People's Right to Know

CHAITRA 20, 1410 BS

SAFAR 12, 1425 HURI

16 PAGES PRICE: Tk 7.00

www.thedailystar.net

Largest ever arms haul

Ten truckloads of 10,000 arms, including submachineguns, AK 47 rifles, rocket shells and launchers, 2,000 grenades and 20 lakh bullets seized in Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Joint forces seized 10 truckloads of submachine guns, AK-47 assault rifles, other firearms and bullets on tip-off in the largest ever arms haul in an early morning swoop on the Karnaphuli coast in Chittagong yesterday.

Police and coastguard forces found the new submachine guns, AK-47 rifles, submachine carbines, Chinese pistols, rocket shells and launchers, hand grenades and bullets stuffed in over 1,000 wooden boxes during unloading from two vessels at Chittagong Urea Fertilizer

Limited jetty.

An unofficial estimate said the consignment might run up to 10,000 arms, 2,000 grenades and 20 lakh bullets.

Police arrested five men engaged in unloading of the cache, later taken to the arms warehouse at Dampara Police Lines in Chittagong in 10 trucks guarded by a huge contingent of police, coastguard and paramilitary BDR.

Reaching Chittagong by helicopter yesterday afternoon, State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar said the weapons were smuggled in as part of a conspiracy for

subversion and did not rule out any link to the April 30 deadline of the main opposition Awami League for the fall of the government.

But a top police officer linked the cache to an international syndicate of arms racketeers.

"We cannot give you the exact number and types of the arms and ammunition until all the boxes are opened and a seizure list is prepared," said SM Sabbir Ali, commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan police.

"We are yet to find any links to the arms seizure. We don't know the motive for smuggling. A thorough

investigation will unravel the crime," he added.

Officials preparing a list near heaps of weapons opened from the olive, blue and white boxes in the police lines ground in the presence of Babar and high police officials said the task would take at least two days.

The police lines ground resembled a huge armoury after opening of the boxes and Food Minister Abdullah Al Noman, State Minister for Civil Aviation Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin and former minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and local legislators were surprised

at the huge display.

Deputy Commissioner (Port) Abdullahi Baki said Karnaphuli police hemmed in the jetty at 1:00am acting on the secret information that MV Khawja and FT Amanat were disgorging the hardware under the cover of night.

Members of the coastguard, led by Lieutenant Colonel Anwar Khurshid, also sealed the Karnaphuli channel.

Apprehending the movement of security forces the crew of the vessels, truck drivers and most of the 150 workers handling the consign

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

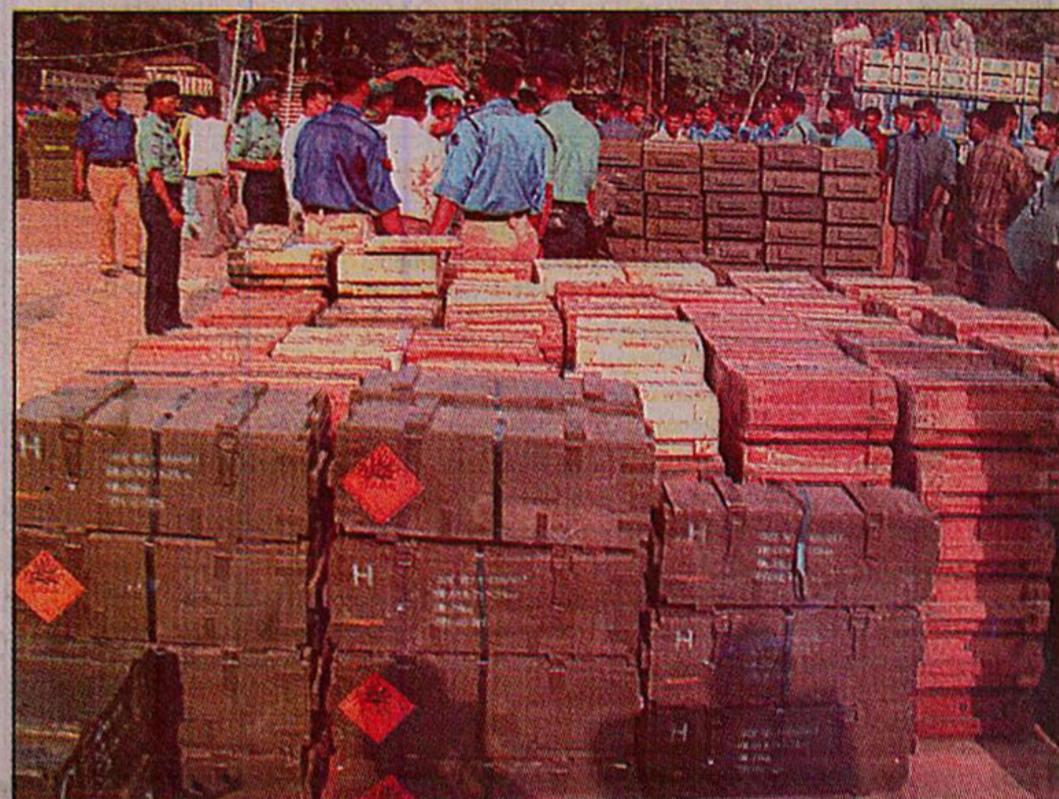
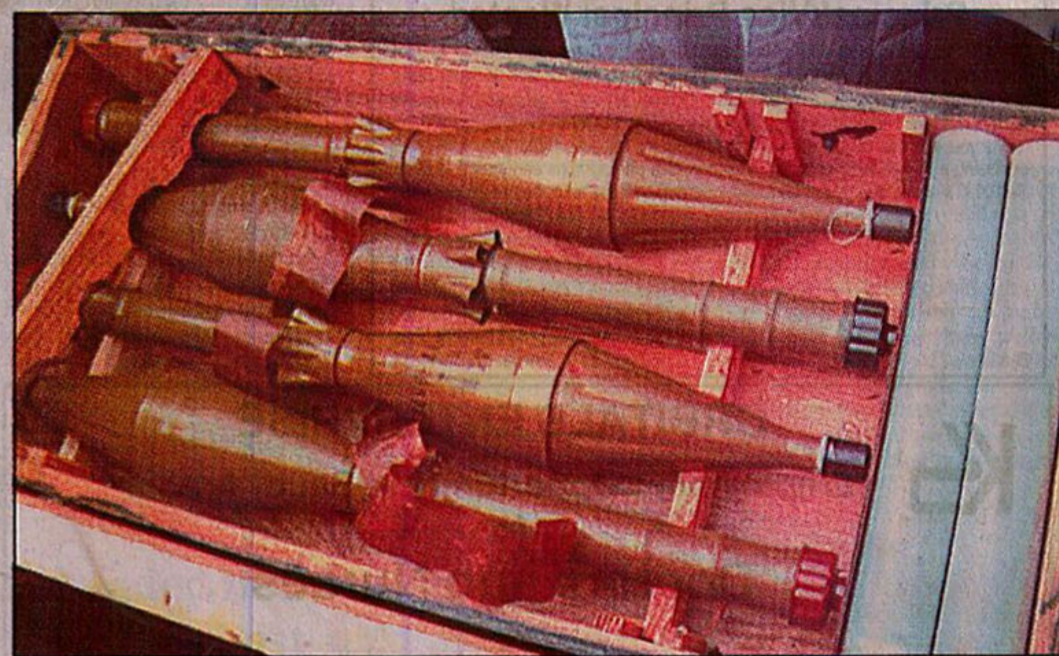


PHOTO: STAR



Rocket shells are kept in a wooden box, top; police drive a truck loaded with firearms to Dampara Police Lines, bottom left; army shows a rocket shell to State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar, bottom centre; and police guard wooden boxes of high-profile arms including AK-47 rifles after joint forces seized the largest ever cache of weapons in Chittagong yesterday.

Hasina's motorcade attacked, arches demolished: 11 hurt

AKTER FARUK SHAHIN, Barisal

Awami League (AL) President and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina began a five-day visit to five districts of Barisal Division yesterday amidst obstructions and attack on her motorcade and AL leaders and workers allegedly by BNP activists yesterday and the night before.

Hasina's motorcade came under attack as it reached Gournadi in Barisal just after noon.

At least 11 leaders and workers of AL units were injured by the attackers, who also assaulted some journalists.

Of the injured, one was sent to Dhaka for treatment and two were admitted to the medical college hospital here.

Besides, alleged BNP workers demolished seven welcome arches at different places and hijacked some motorcycles of AL activists.

But BNP denied the allegation of attacks and described the incidents as AL's pre-planned and self-staged drama for political gains. The party announced a programme at Gournadi this afternoon to protest what it said is AL's bid to create disorder.

Hasina is in Barisal on her second visit to this region in five weeks. During her previous visit also, her

motorcade was attacked and some party leaders and activists injured on February 25.

This time she is scheduled to address six public meetings, besides roadside rallies, in Barisal, Patuakhali, Barguna, Jhalakati and Pirojpur.

According to witnesses, the former prime minister's motorcade reached Gournadi shortly after noon.

Gulam Sarwar Faruk, AL leader and chairman of Gournadi Municipality, and other partymen proceeded to receive her.

Police however prevented them saying the programme was unscheduled. Jubo League chief Kabir Nanak, Sechhasebak League chief Bahaudin Nasim and other leaders protested this.

At this stage, a group of BNP activists chased the crowd and attacked Hasina's motorcade. They also chased journalists.

At a press briefing at Barisal Circuit House later, AL leader and former state minister Obaidul Kader said, "The BNP attackers carried fire arms and other lethal weapons and tried to hit the car carrying Sheikh Hasina."

Party leaders accompanying

26,000 Awami League men killed during coalition rule, rallies told

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Twenty-six thousand leaders and workers of Awami League (AL) have been killed across the country since the BNP-led coalition government took over, alleged AL President Sheikh Hasina yesterday.

"Soon after it had come to power, this government started repression on AL supporters. To hang on to power, it has been trying to strangle the opposition's voice by killing our leaders and workers," the leader of the opposition said while addressing two rallies at Bakerganj in Barisal and on a playground in Patuakhali.

AL leaders complained ruling party cadres obstructed them at various points on their way to Patuakhali from Barisal. But, local BNP leaders denied the allegation.

Hasina said the alliance government has no moral ground to remain in power, as the suffering of the common people from price hike of essentials has reached its peak.

"Prices of almost all essentials have doubled over the last two and a half years," said the chief of the major opposition party, accusing the government of taking no steps to bring the prices down.

She blasted the government, particularly the prime minister and

Babar sees it as part of a big conspiracy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar yesterday described the largest ever seizure of AK-47 rifles and other firearms in Chittagong as part of a "big conspiracy" and did not rule out any possible link to the April 30 opposition deadline for fall of the government.

"We believe these modern firearms were intended to run subversive activities in Bangladesh, as the consignment landed here," Babar told newsmen after he flew to the port city by helicopter in the wake of the arms cache joint forces discovered in 10 trucks on tip-off.

On whether the firearms have any link to the deadline the main opposition Awami League set for dislodging the BNP-led ruling coalition, Babar said: "Such a link cannot be ruled out altogether, but it is now subject to investigation."

"Such a slew of sophisticated arms smuggled into Bangladesh threatens national security, but we are on alert," he said.

"We will pull out all the stops to identify and punish the guilty," Babar said. "All including the owners and crew of the vessels that

carried the consignment will be quizzed to track down the racket."

"Several teams were tasked with investigation," he said, declining to give more details on government efforts to trace the smugglers. On the numbers of firearms, he said: "Let the seizure list be complete."

But an unofficial estimate says about 10,000 firearms and 20 lakh bullets were seized in over 1,000 wooden boxes.

Inspector General of Police Shahidul Haq accompanied the state minister to Chittagong. Chittagong ministers such as Abdullah Al Noman and Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin and former commerce minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury also visited the scene of the arms bust.

"It is a very bad time. The smuggling of such arms and ammunition may send panic through people," Khosru told the journalists.

Positive Bangladesh
See our special story titled 'the strength within' on page 12.

PSA enforces siege at CU from today

CU CORRESPONDENT

Progressive Student Alliance (PSA), a forum of three leftist student organisations of Chittagong University (CU), will be enforcing an indefinite siege on campus from today protesting Thursday's attack by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists that left at least 20 people injured.

The PSA announced the programme on Thursday to press for their four-point demand.

The demands include resignation of CU Vice-Chancellor (VC) Professor AJM Nuruddin Chowdhury, arrest and trial of alleged JCD cadres involved in Thursday's attack, ensuring security of general students and fulfillment of the demands of students of Shamsunnahar Hall.

On the other hand, university authorities in an emergency syndicate meeting on Thursday evening declared a one-month ban on rallies, processions, gatherings and political activities on the campus.

A six-member probe committee headed by Professor Mostafa Kamal Pasha of Botany Department was formed at the meeting to investigate the attack. The committee was asked to submit its report in 10 days.

The CU campus is tense due to PSA's siege programme and the concomitant countermeasures by university authorities. **COL 8**

Rice to address 9/11 panel on April 8

AP, Washington

National security adviser Condoleezza Rice will go before the federal panel reviewing the Sept. 11 attacks next Thursday to rebut criticism that the Bush administration failed to grasp the gravity of the terrorism threat before the hijackings.

She'll be the only witness during a 21/2-hour public hearing focusing on what Clinton administration officials told the incoming Bush White House about al-Qaeda and what the new administration did with the information.

"We really want to find out about the transition, what they learned, and what changes in policy the Bush administration decided and what focus there was on terrorism," commission Chairman Thomas Kean said in an interview.

Rice's performance could have enormous implications for President Bush's re-election campaign, which took a hit when former counterterrorism chief Richard Clarke testified last week that the Bush administration didn't consider al-Qaeda an urgent threat despite his repeated warnings.

Rice has resisted testifying publicly in favor of meeting privately with the commission, citing legal concerns. But after mounting pressure, the White House this week agreed to let her appear before the

panel after getting assurances the move would not be seen as legal precedent that could force other presidential advisers before congressional panels.

Later Thursday, the White House released fragments of a top-secret document finalised Sept. 4, 2001, that directed the Pentagon to draw up plans for attacking al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

The National Security Presidential Directive, normally classified, called on Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld to plan for military options "against Taliban targets in Afghanistan, including leadership, command-control, air and air defense, ground forces, and logistics."

The NSPD also called for plans "against al-Qaeda and associated terrorist facilities in Afghanistan, including leadership, command-control-communications, training, and logistics facilities."

Meantime, Reps. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., and Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., sent separate letters to White House counsel Alberto Gonzales asking him to explain why calls were placed to two Republican commissioners during Clarke's testimony.

At the hearings, those commissioners Fred Fielding, a former White House counsel under Ronald Reagan (news - web sites), and James Thompson, a former Illinois

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



PHOTO: STAR

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina addresses a rally in Barisal yesterday as part of her five-day visit to as many districts in the southern division.

Myanmar PM Khin Nyunt arrives tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Myanmar Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt arrives in Dhaka tomorrow on a three-day official visit.

This will be the first-ever visit by a Myanmar premier to Bangladesh. Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said, "His visit marks sincerity and commitment for a lasting friendship between the two neighbouring countries."

General Nyunt will sit tomorrow with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for bilateral talks. Besides important

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Unocal to exploit Bibiyana gas for domestic use

Proposal apparently signals end to gas export issue

SHARIER KHAN

American oil giant Unocal has agreed to develop Bibiyana gas field for local markets, signalling an apparent end to gas export issue that whipped up a torrent of debates in national politics.

Petrobangla sources said Unocal agreed to their proposal to develop and supply gas of 200 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) from late 2006.

The oil company is now making a development plan for the Bibiyana field shelving its proposal of gas export through pipelines.

"The government neither officially rejected the export proposal, nor accepted it," said a top Petrobangla source, "because the situation has driven the issue to a point where developing the Bibiyana field for domestic market turned out to be the most pragmatic

option for Unocal."

Unlike many pro-export projections that says Bangladesh's annual gas and energy consumption will hardly exceed 5 percent growth rate, domestic gas demand has been picking up at 10 percent.

The pro-export projections claim that Bangladesh is 'floating on gas', but all recent attempts of oil companies to strike gas failed miserably. Even in the highly prospective block

9 where international oil companies began exploration, initial failure echoed Petrobangla's caution against unreal suggestions on gas reserve.

With domestic demands for gas soaring, the proposal to export the resources came under serious scrutiny. Many suggested that exports would only benefit Indian industries and Unocal, not Bangladesh.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4