

Battle rages through Iraq, 12 GIs killed

40 worshippers die as US rockets hit mosque; Shias call for holy war against Americans

AP, Fallujah, Iraq

US Marines in a fierce battle for this Sunni Muslim stronghold fired rockets that hit a mosque compound filled with worshippers yesterday, and witnesses said as many as 40 people were killed. Shia-inspired violence spread to nearly all of the country.

The fighting in Fallujah and neighboring Ramadi, where commanders confirmed 12 Marines were killed late Tuesday, was part of an intensified uprising involving both Sunnis and Shias that now stretched from Kirkuk in the north to the far south.

An Associated Press reporter in Fallujah saw cars ferrying the dead and wounded from the Abdul-Aziz al-Samarrai mosque. Witnesses said a helicopter fired three missiles into the compound, destroying part of a wall surrounding the mosque but not damaging the main building.

The strike came as worshippers had gathered for afternoon prayers, witnesses said. Temporary hospitals were set up in private homes to treat the wounded and prepare the dead for burial.

Until the mosque attack, reports

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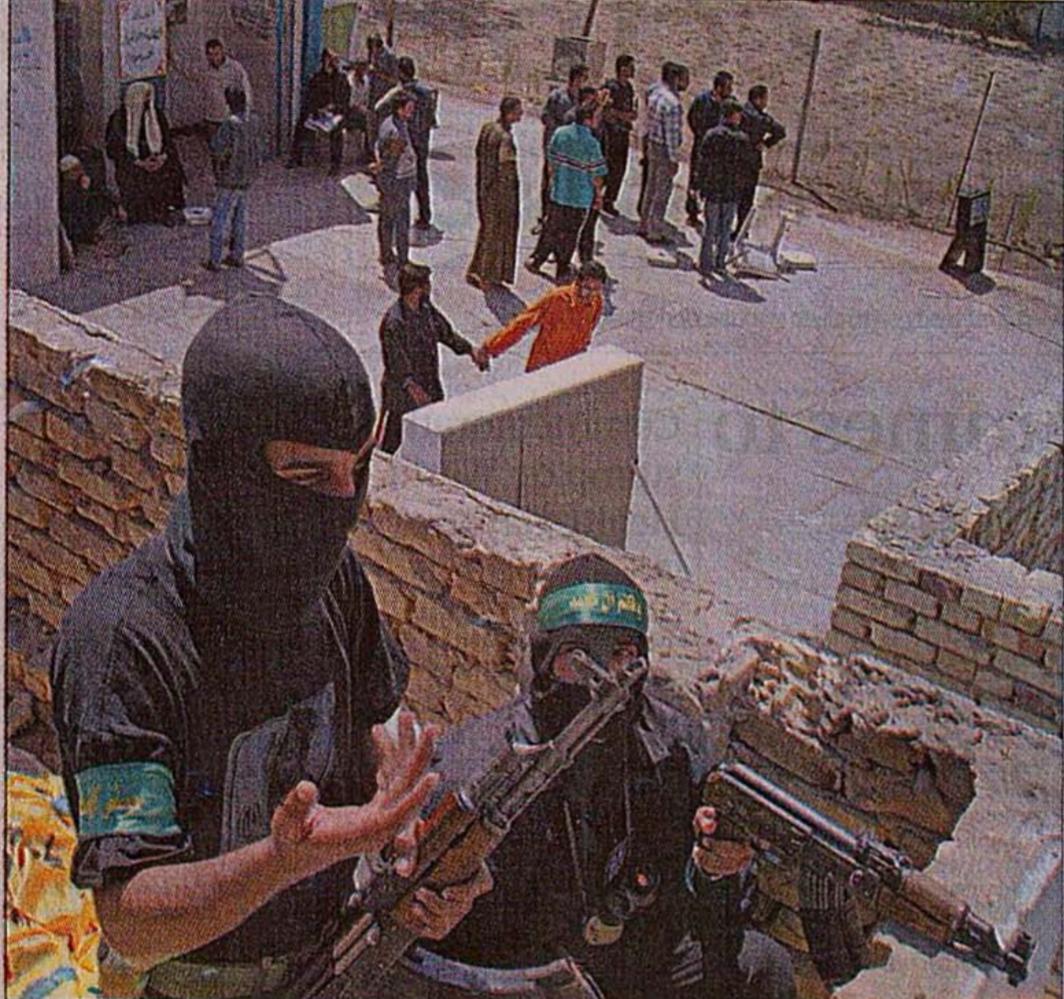


PHOTO: AFP

Cabinet body okays NGO watchdog

Only banks to take deposits

STAR REPORT

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs yesterday approved a proposal to set up a temporary regulatory body headed by the central bank governor with a two-year mandate to monitor micro-finance activities.

The cabinet body at a meeting chaired by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman also decided that no organisation, excepting banks, would be allowed to take deposits from the public.

Sources said, other than banks, the micro-finance institutions have taken deposits of at least Tk one crore. Besides leasing and housing companies also took deposits of Tk 407 crore till December last.

Central bank sources said the leasing and housing companies took these deposits as per the Financial Institution Act and a Bangladesh Bank circular.

In addition, various cooperative

societies have taken an undisclosed amount of money as deposits from the public amid legal loopholes. The central bank does not have any information about their deposit and also lacks any mechanism to check this practice.

"We feel that other than banks, no organisation should be allowed to take deposits because this affects the micro-economic condition," Saifur told the press after the meeting.

The decision to assign the Steering Committee on Micro-finance Research and Reference Unit (SCMRRU) as a temporary micro-finance regulatory body will help create a database to gather credit information from all micro-finance bodies.

The SCMRRU will seek to amend various laws to pave the way for setting up a fully-fledged regulatory body.

The regulatory body will approve micro-finance institutions and

NGOs involved in micro-financing.

According to the steering committee, there are 1381 micro-finance institutions and micro-financing NGOs.

In another decision, the cabinet body changed the structure of the proposed Small NGO Foundation meant for small NGOs. It will be named NGO Foundation and will accept funds from donors in addition to government financing, the meeting decided.

The government will initially donate Tk 100 crore to the NGO Foundation.

The meeting asked a secretary-level committee to amend the proposed NGO Foundation Act as per the new decision.

The cabinet committee directed the secretary-level committee also to amend the proposed guideline on private investment in infrastructure projects.

It differed on the tax holiday issue

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CTG ARMS HAUL
Seized trawler has history of smuggling

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The fishing trawler FV Amanat, seized with loads of weapon at the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Ltd. (CUFL) jetty April 2, was also detained by anti-smuggling team six months back.

"The FV Amanat loaded with smuggled fertiliser was caught by coastguards from high sea near the Myanmar waters and it was towed to the Chittagong Port jetty," Anwar Hossain, a superintendent of anti-smuggling rummage division of Chittagong Customs House, told The Daily Star over telephone.

"Only one month back we released the trawler following a writ filed with the High Court. But it seems it wasted no time to go back into smuggling," he said.

Local sources meanwhile said the FV Amanat was seen at the CUFL jetty unloading smuggled goods.

It has links with giant smuggling syndicate of Anwara coast that was run by the younger brother of a BNP legislator, they alleged.

Police arrested the owner of the trawler Feroz Ahmed but the crew remained missing as yet.

No plan yet to seek help of Interpol

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has not made any decision until yesterday on seeking Interpol's (International Criminal Police Commission under the United Nations) assistance to probe Friday's largest arms cache seizure in Chittagong.

Refuting a newspaper report, State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar told The Daily Star yesterday that his ministry has no plans yet to seek international investigation into the haul.

A newspaper report Wednesday quoting highly placed sources of the home ministry said the government is likely to seek the help of Interpol to trace the origin of the largest ever arms haul.

Earlier on April 3, Opposition Leader and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina demanded an international investigation into the gunrunning, alleging links between

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INDO-PAK TEST Hosts in command

REUTERS, Lahore

Pakistan's pace battery ran through the Indian top-order, putting the hosts on course for a series-leveling victory in the second Test on Wednesday.

India were left struggling at 149 for five on the third day, opener Virender Sehwag fighting a lone battle on 86, after Pakistan had

taken a 202-run first innings lead because of a fighting 73 by left-hander Asim Kamal.

Sehwag struck 14 fours in his sixth Test half-century but wickets tumbled at the other end as Akash Chopra (five), Rahul Dravid (nought), Sachin Tendulkar (eight), Vangipurapu Lakman (13) and Yuvraj Singh (12) fell in quick succession.

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Charges pressed against 13 in Manik Shahi murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Khulna police has pressed charge against 13 people under the Explosive Substances Act, for detonating a bomb that killed journalist Manik Chandra Shahi.

The court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate on March 29 received the charge sheet, submitted by Investigation Officer (IO) Inspector Asaduzzaman Faraz of Khulna thana.

They are Sumon alias Nuruzzaman, Akbar Ali Shikder alias Shaon, Akram, Abdus Sattar alias Disco Sattar, Abdur Rashid Shaikh alias Tapu, Shawkat Hossain alias Shokal, Altaf alias BDR Altaf, Moizul, Sarwar Hossain alias Saro, Bellal, Kochi alias Omar Faruque, Mithul and Bulbul alias Bulu.

Of them, Sumon, Akbar Ali Shikder, Akram and Bulbul are in jail custody while the rest are absconding.

The chargesheet has been

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Strike force against financial crimes soon

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

An inter-ministerial meeting yesterday decided in principle to set up an independent inter-agency strike force to fight money laundering and other financial crimes, including fund flow for terrorist activities.

In line with a US government recommendation, the high-profile meeting also decided to form a financial intelligence unit to collect, analyse and disseminate information on suspicious fiscal transac-

tions with relevant domestic and international law enforcement authorities.

The meeting held at the finance ministry and chaired by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman asked the law ministry and the attorney general to scrutinise the legal aspects of implementing the decisions and suggest frameworks.

A number of other recommendations of the Financial Sector Assessment Team (FSAT) of the USA that visited Dhaka in 2002 as part of

a US drive to stop fund flow to international terrorist outfits were also discussed.

The meeting also decided that fund flow of NGOs would be scrutinised and financial operations of NGOs would be subjected to anti-money laundering reporting requirements and controls.

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) governor, the attorney general and top officials of the Prime Minister's Office and the ministries of finance, home, law, foreign affairs and inter-

nal resource division attended the meeting, among others.

The FSAT came up with its recommendations and report on the basis of its discussions with various local authorities. It also offered technical assistance to Bangladesh in strengthening its anti-money laundering drive.

Yesterday's meeting deliberated on whether the persons or organisations accused by the strike force of financial crimes should be tried by

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Engineer gunned down in Pallabi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unknown assailants shot dead a civil engineer in front of his Pallabi home yesterday in a morning ambush over an apparent business dispute, police said.

A gang of three shot 55-year-old Abdur Razzaq point-blank shortly before 9:00am after he returned from supervising the construction of a local mosque.

Witnesses said the gunmen at ages 25 and 30 fled in a yellow taxi parked about 100 yards off the scene, where Razzaq collapsed taking six bullets in the throat, face and hands.

The proprietor of Proser Project Services, a construction planning and designing firm at Green Road,

Razzaq was declared dead after his son Jahangir Alam Sumon rushed him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

"I looked out the window hearing gunshots. I saw three youths attacking him," said Rafiqul Islam, caretaker of an under-construction building, close to Razzaq's Rupnagar Housing Society house.

"I shouted and the attackers fled in different directions, firing blank shots."

The incident underlines security fears triggered by a series of killings of businessmen over the months in Dhaka still reeling from the grisly beheading of a father and his son in March.

The way the murder took place

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AL deadline not constitutional: Khaleda

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Fixing a deadline to unseat an elected government before tenure is unconstitutional, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said yesterday at a public meeting on Chatkhil High School premises in Noakhali.

"The Awami League (AL) is trying to come to power through unconstitutional manners, creating an anarchic situation," the prime minister told the rally organised by local BNP.

Khaleda said the AL has become desperate to see the increasing support to the ruling four-party coalition government and its successes. The AL intends to disrupt the government's developmental process by calling hartals without any issue, she added.

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Police nabs 3 for links with gunrunning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police held three persons yesterday in connection with the arms haul seized Friday last, which a section of intelligence forces claims was heading for Bandarbans.

In several raids in the late afternoon police arrested a nephew of truck owner Abdul Motaleb and two relatives of another truck owner Abdur Rahim at north Halishahar and South Halishahar Sailors' Colony in the city.

Police yesterday also obtained court order to attach the property of Din Mohammad, owner of so-called business establishment Friends' Syndicate in the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited jetty area. Police is likely to conduct raid for the attachment at any time today, sources said.

According to sources, the Friends' Syndicate that controls all sorts of smuggling in the coastal areas of Anowar, Patiya and Karnaphuli was involved with the gunrunning. Hazi Abdus Sobhan, owner of F/Khazar Dan, and a man named Hafiz Mohammad were entrusted with the task of offloading the haul at the jetty.

Din Mohammad, a local

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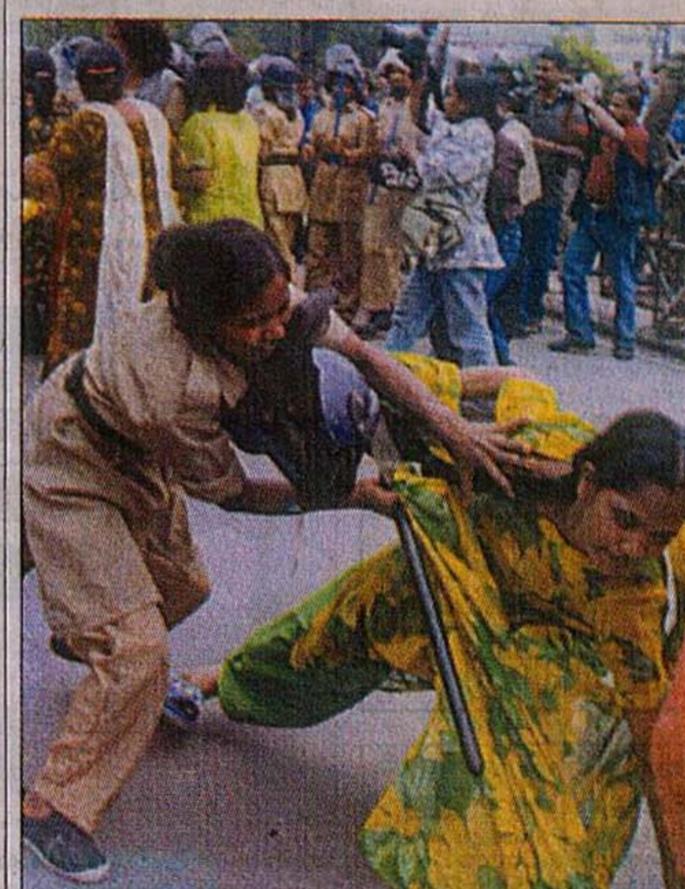


PHOTO: STAR

A policewoman pulls at the clothes of a picket in front of Dhanmondi Road No. 32 in a police swoop on a demonstration by Jabo Mohila Awami League activists during hartal yesterday.

Stray violence marks first day of hartal
64 injured; similar strike today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Stray bomb explosions, police-picket clashes and pre-strike violence marked the first day of the countrywide anti-government hartal yesterday called by two opposition parties demanding immediate resignation of the coalition and snap polls.

At least 64 opposition activists were injured and scores of others arrested across the country before and during the 11-hour shutdown that took hold at 6:00am.

The hartal shut most businesses, schools and offices, hampered cargo handling at the prime port and largely emptied streets of vehicles, except for pedal rickshaws and a few minibuses, in Dhaka and elsewhere, disrupting life. Authorities said train and air travel were normal.

The main opposition Awami League (AL) and Hasanol Haq Inled Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (ISD-Imu) will also enforce their second day of simultaneous hartal today.

At least five students were injured in repeat attacks of the activists of

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Biman to buy backup engine for old F28s

Maintenance cost to go up by miles

M ABDUR RAHIM

Biman Bangladesh Airlines is going to buy a backup engine for two newly-procured F28s fearing mechanical glitch in the 26-year old pair even before their commissioning, thus raising maintenance cost of the obsolete aircraft.

The national airlines has paid the Indonesian owner, Hieberg Group Ltd., 75 percent of the total price of \$2.97 million for the two aircraft, sources said.

The 1977-model aircraft, purchased in contradiction to fleet modernisation plan, will be drafted into the Biman fleet on April 16 amid widespread criticism about the high maintenance cost of the planes. The Rolls-Royce-manufactured engine for the F28s will cost Biman no less than \$5.25 lakh, 35 percent of the price of similar aircraft.

Maintenance cost of the aircraft

is high as the manufacturer, Fokker Aircraft Company of the Netherlands, has stopped production and providing after-sales service since 1981, meaning spare parts of the aircraft are rare and highly expensive.

Sources said Biman is keeping the procurement issue covert and making hurried arrangements to dodge media criticism. Biman has advanced the delivery date, which was late this month.

Official sources said large contingents of the navy were guarding Eastern Refinery Ltd, country's lone oil refinery, oil companies and Patenga-based terminals overlooking the Karnaphuli river and the army kept a watch on oil depots in Chittagong and elsewhere.

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