

Cut crime

FROM PAGE 1 projects because there is no kick-back there."

"This should change," he stressed.

The legislators also urged Saifur to increase allocation to road transport projects, set up small power plants to support irrigation for agriculture and re-introduce food-for-work instead of the money-for-work programme.

The finance minister said he would initiate a study on the viability of setting up small power plants with 10 to 15 megawatts of capacity for irrigation.

"I will consider the suggestion," he assured the lawmakers.

Although the government transformed the food-for-work programme into money-for-work last year to 'cut corruption', Saifur agreed to revive the old system.

Saifur said the government would require as much as Tk 86,000 crore to implement the prime minister-committed road projects.

"But given our limited resources, we cannot implement them right away. This is why we are funding road-building schemes on the basis of priority."

On the suggestion of suspending ADP for areas where legislators are unable to improve law and order, Saifur said, "I agree with the concept. If the MPs act properly, it is possible to cut crime."

Citing examples of his home district Sylhet, the finance minister said, "When police arrest anyone of our student front, I don't ask them to release the arrestee. No officer is transferred. There is no instance of extortion."

"In the country of 14 crore people, the rural people are not

involved in violence. A handful of urban people are involved in criminal activities," Saifur observed.

"Therefore, we need to motivate, better train and manage the police."

Criticising press reports on law and order, Saifur said, "They (the press) have their own agenda. This is why they blow up the murder incidents out of proportion. Such murders take place in New York too."

"On Pahela Baishakh, there was not a single incident anywhere in the country."

An MP suggested the government that it launch a combing operation imposing a three-day curfew to improve order.

Another deputy called for equipping the police with modern arms and better vehicles.

A parliamentarian suggested deploying 60 lakh village defence party (VDP) members on law enforcement duty, enhancing their salaries.

Hafizuddin Ahmed, the lone opposition lawmaker attending the meeting, said, "Failing law and order stoked price hike of essentials."

Members of public accounts, public estimates and public undertaking committees and parliamentary standing committees on finance and planning ministry and chairmen of other Jatiya Sangsad bodies on different ministries attended the meeting.

On April 27, the finance ministry is scheduled to hold a pre-budget meeting with all lawmakers, including from the main opposition Awami League.

Harun appears in court for bail tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leading businessman Yussuf Abdullah Harun will appear before a Comilla court tomorrow to seek bail in a case filed against him on charge of attempting to kill a resident of Muradnagar in Comilla.

One Siraj Mian filed the case with the court on August 7, 2001 after his son Abu Taher took a bullet during a clash between activists of the opposition Awami League and ruling BNP on August 3, 2001. The court tasked Muradnagar police with a probe, but they are yet to submit probe report to it.

Siraj filed another case with the court against Harun and 24 others on May 5, 2002 where he alleged the accused hurled bombs on a BNP procession and Harun at one point got down from his car and shot his son.

The incident took place in 2001, the case was filed in 2002, the medical report was submitted in 2003 while the charge-sheet was submitted the following year. Harun, former president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries, said yesterday.

Harun added the first information report alleged that Taher took a bullet in his left leg but the charge-sheet said it hit him in the right leg. "The witnesses gave contradictory statements."

Harun met the inspector general of police (IGP) on May 6, 2003 to ask for a neutral probe to put an end to harassment on him through filing of such a false case. The IGP tasked Chittagong deputy inspector general (DIG) of police with a special probe. The DIG, in his report, termed the allegation against Harun false, he said.

Harun is now on a bail that expires on April 20.

JS body cautions ministers about making pledges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary standing committee yesterday cautioned cabinet members about making indiscriminate pledges at the Jatiya Sangsad (JS).

Reviewing the assurances made by the minister in charge of primary and mass education ministry at a meeting, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Government Assurances asked ministers to be careful about giving assurances to countrymen.

Abdus Sobhan, committee chairman, said the JS body has found that the minister in charge of the ministry made five pledges in the current parliament without fulfilling any.

Ministers gave 33 pledges in the seventh parliament, only 12 of which were implemented, he added.

Dr Kamal

FROM PAGE 12 emancipation of ordinary citizens. "All must unite when national security is at stake. At such times, there is no scope for party politics."

He said the people today were being held hostage to criminal godfathers and black money, and asked all to unite under the platform of Jatiya Oikya Mancha to change politics for the better. "There has to be a meaningful change for a pro-people governance and Jatiya Oikya Mancha is a platform where all need to unite to get rid of exploitation and misuse."

Awami League leader Abdur Razzak MP, Mujahidul Islam Selim of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, Gonoforum General Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik and Oikya Mancha leader Kazi Faruq Ahmed were present among others.

KEPZ chief

FROM PAGE 12 at the city's busy Muradpur Road when some six to seven unidentified assailants waylaid him on his way to KEPZ site. They snatched the belongings of him and five other colleagues who were also on the microbus bound for KEPZ and shot once only at Rabbani in the throat.

Rabbani was immediately rushed to the Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and later shifted to Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Dhaka the same afternoon following deterioration of his condition.

He was flown to Bangkok by a special air ambulance on Wednesday. Sources said commodore Rabbani went into coma on last Tuesday at CMH and was then flown to Bangkok.

Meanwhile, Chittagong police are yet to make any headway into the case seven days since the attack. The two main FIR-named accused, former general manager Abu Naser Chowdhury and former security officer Humayun Kabir of KEPZ are still at large.

Police so far arrested 10 people on suspicion.

Sources in police think that an internal feud within the KEPZ involving some of its officials axed recently by the authorities might be the reason for the murder of commodore Rabbani.

An official of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) said the way the attack was carried out shows surely it was no act of amateurs and it was not simply a case of mugging, rather it was planned much earlier. "The matter of mugging attempt came to light only to camouflage the real intention of the attack."

Khaleda also emphasised development of Benarasi industry and marketing of Benarasi at local and foreign markets.

Homeless camp out

FROM PAGE 1 About 3,000 people of 23 tornado-affected villages are now living under the open sky amid mismanagement in relief distribution. Diarrhoea has broken out in Uluti and Kairati villages and 10 patients were admitted to Netrakona General Hospital until yesterday.

A lecturer of Purbadhala College, Iqbal Ahmed, who lost his sister-in-law and a house help, said no official or political leader has yet visited Atkapara, Koirati, Fochika and Wahnapur villages in Purbadhala upazila where the storm-hit people are still to get any relief.

Sixty-year-old Jamila Khatun of Kanchanpur who survived with her only grand daughter said, "The storm killed my daughter, son and his wife." The two had only dry food three times in the last three days.

Netrakona General Hospital after having a little aid from the health department is running short of medicines. Eighteen medical teams are working with insufficient supply of necessary medicines.

In Mymensingh, the storm-hit people of Samulia Para, Gazir Bhita, Boalmara, Surjapur and Kaliani Kanda of Halaughat upazila have been suffering from acute crisis of food and shelter. The relief that includes cash, clothes and dry food is minimal, Gazir Bhita and Samulia

Shoddy work

FROM PAGE 1 contractor and a local criminal," Home Secretary Muhammad Omar Farooq said.

A number of retired army officers suggested that an international syndicate of gunrunners was taking the cache to a third country, but State Minister for Home Luffozaman Babar said the arms were smuggled in for use in Bangladesh.

On June 27 last year, police seized over one lakh bullets and about 200 kilograms of explosives from an abandoned truck parked near a brick-kiln in Jogarpara village in Bogra.

Police after a firefight seized four AK-47 assault rifles with over 1,000 bullets, two revolvers, 20 grenades and four time bombs from a sign-board shop in the capital's Kuril Badda area on November 30 last year.

There are allegations that charge-sheets in the arms busts were submitted to courts in a hurry to victimise the political opponents of the government, diverting attention from the real gunrunners.

A survey of the cases reveal that the findings in the charge-sheets, the first information reports and witness accounts are not the same.

In all the charge-sheets police tried to establish the political identity of the accused in an apparent attempt to shift the blames onto the main opposition Awami League and

Para villagers say.

The district administration has so far distributed 100 tonnes of rice, 250 bundles of CI sheet, 300 pieces of saree, 200 pieces of lungi and Tk 2,50,000 among the victims. Local administration sources said the tornado left 3,000 people of 720 families homeless, reports our Mymensingh correspondent.

The storm left many indigenous Garo families homeless. Profulla Barman of Gazir Bhita who lost his all three houses told The Daily Star that now they fear fresh hit of the storm, as they are under the open sky with other families. They are in need of housing materials and food.

Razia Begum, 45, a resident of Samulia Para, has lost all her belongings. All of her family members are injured and receiving treatment at hospitals.

Haron Miah, a shop worker at Halaughat Bazar, said they need food and rehabilitation first to overcome the situation. He said as the victims have lost everything, it will be difficult for them to make a fresh start without help from the government and other corners of the society.

Military teams are serving cooked khichuri but many families have no pot to take. The villagers also cannot take bath, as they do not have any other clothes, except those on.

suggest that the arms consignments were smuggled in to topple the government.

Locals alleged that police tried to hunt down Ashish Dev Barma in the wake of Bogra ammunition seizure, but shifted the focus of probe on political grounds.

In the Kuril case, accused Abdul Aziz and Mehedi Hasan Manik linked Lincoln to the crime in confessional statements in court, but the investigation officer in the charge-sheet dropped his name on grounds that he did not find out his address.

Locals allege police dropped his name under political pressure as he is associated with a top ruling alliance leader.

Investigation officer of the case, Criminal Investigation Department's Assistant Superintendent Munshi Atiqur Rahman, said he submitted the charge sheet on the basis of his investigation.

On dropping Lincoln's name, he said he mentioned in the charge-sheet that he would place a supplementary one on tracing the address of Lincoln.

Asked whether raids are on to nab the accused, Atiqur said he has sent warrant orders to the police station concerned in what many see a 'subtle tactic not to arrest' a criminal.

Budget steps

FROM PAGE 12 innovative agricultural extension methods including 'Rice Seed Network,' 'Rice Knowledge Bank,' and 'Mobile Pump.'

Funded by the British Department for International Development (DFID), PETTRA project, launched in 1999 and scheduled to be wound up this June, is the biggest-ever donor-aided rice research programme in Bangladesh.

Head of the Social Science Division of the IIRI Dr Mahabub Hossain, IIRI Representative to Bangladesh and PETTRA Project Manager Dr Noel P Magor and Director General of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) Dr Mahiul Haque also spoke at the opening session chaired by the DAE Director General Md Tariq Hassan.

The agriculture minister said only 2.47 percent of the country's annual development budget is being channelled to agriculture compared to 22 percent in 1979.

Anwar blamed unbalanced application of chemical fertilisers for degrading soil fertility. He noted that previously there was a price parity among urea, TSP (triple super phosphate) and MP (murate of potash) but now the prices of TSP and MP have doubled compared to urea, which acts as a disincentive to applying balanced doses of fertilisers.

Anwar also expressed concern at the fast pace of cropland depletion and said rice is grown on 75 percent of arable land, which does not augur well for other crops. Newer technologies are required so that per unit productivity sees a phenomenal growth. The minister also stressed bridging the wide gap between rice yields at breeder's plots and farmers' fields.

Dr Mahabub touched on the future challenge before Bangladesh's agriculture where with the increase of population by 20 lakh every year an additional five lakh tonnes of rice is required.

"The challenge gets bigger when we see as our land shrinking," said Hossain.

Dr Magor gave an overview of the PETTRA project and said it had commissioned 45 sub-projects in last four years with

4 Israelis hurt in Palestinian suicide bombing

REUTERS, Erez, Gaza

A Palestinian suicide bomber blew himself up yesterday at the Erez checkpoint on Israel's border with the Gaza Strip, Israeli military sources said.

Israel Radio said four Israeli soldiers were wounded in the blast. The military sources confirmed four injuries but would not say whether the injured were soldiers.

They said the bomber blew himself up near an army post at the entrance to an industrial complex inside the Erez border crossing. Hundreds of Palestinians workers cross the checkpoint every day to work inside Israel.

The Palestinian militant groups Hamas and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, which is part of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction, claimed joint responsibility for the attack in an anonymous phone call to Reuters.

The blast occurred days after President Bush endorsed Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to retain some large West Bank Jewish settlements and bar refugees from returning to what is now Israel.

The Erez border crossing has long been a target for Palestinian attacks. On March 6, six Palestinians died while trying to carry out a bombing on Israeli soldiers. On January 14, four Israelis were killed by a suicide bomber in the area.

Mob gouges out eyes of 3 PBCP cadres in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A mob yesterday gouged out the eyes of three alleged Puro Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janaajuddho) activists at Sonadanga in Khulna.

The frenzied crowd dug out the eyes of Parvez, 30, his elder brother Nizam, 34, both hailing from Nehalpur village of Rupsha, and Rafique Sheikh, 28, of Parikhali village in Bagerhat, after snatching the trio from plainclothes men at Basupara at about 2:30pm, sources said.

The mob also pounded them and fractured their hands before taking out their eyes in front of the law enforcers, sources added.

They were admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital in critical condition, said Akbar Ali, district commissioner (south) of Khulna Metropolitan Police.

Earlier, undercover policemen held the three with bomb making materials, posters and leaflets of the PBCP at a house on Sattar Biswas Road, he added.

Rain

FROM PAGE 1 The maximum temperature was recorded yesterday in Chuadanga at 38.7 degrees Celsius and it was 35 degrees Celsius in Dhaka. Last week, temperature rose to 3-5 degrees Celsius in some parts of the country.

The meteorological office also said some raining at the beginning of the month eased the drought-like situation in some parts of the country.

Clouds have already gathered over the sky in Kishoreganj, Sunamganj, Sylhet and Sirimongol, which may cause rainfall in the areas, the forecast officer added.

The meteorological office also said there is no chance of significant rain in the current week, which means the heat would continue to dominate the weather.

According to the state-run news agency BSS, absence of rain worsened the dry weather since the beginning of the year, hitting hard the irrigation for boro cultivation. Nor westers again damaged crops in some parts of the country.

Dhaka to share

FROM PAGE 1 own intelligence. There was no external involvement in the weapons haul in any way."

Replying to a question whether the government was contemplating involving the Interpol in the investigation, he said, "When the necessity comes, we will not leave any option (unexplored)."

Regional council

FROM PAGE 12 Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) continue informal discussion in a cordial atmosphere, it is possible to settle the problems in the CHT," he added.

"The meeting did not discuss the land dispute, but we will discuss the matter in the next meeting," Swapan told the BBC Bengali Service last night. "We are looking into the land dispute issue so that we can take the right decision."

The committee also decided to send a proposal to the finance ministry seeking a Tk 15 crore fund to generate employment for the members of PCJSS under a self-employment project.

"Implementation of the CHT peace accord would prove whether the government is sincere about the peace accord and I hope the government would move in that direction,"

Gautam Kumar, member of the PCJSS who was present at the meeting, told the BBC.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed, Land Minister M Shamsul Islam and PCJSS member Sudha Sindhu Khisha also attended the meeting.

US soldier kidnapped

FROM PAGE 12 The masked gunmen standing around him have demanded the release of insurgents being held by US-led forces in Iraq.

Maupin was among nine Americans, including another soldier and seven contractors, who went missing after an attack on a convoy near Baghdad airport on April 9 that left one US soldier dead and 12 wounded.

There has been no news of the other missing soldier, Sergeant Elmer C. Krause, 40, but at least one of the civilian contractors -- truck driver Thomas Hamill, 43 -- is also believed to be a hostage somewhere in Iraq.

The US-led coalition estimates around 40 foreigners from 12 countries have been abducted as part of a kidnapping campaign designed to break the resolve of coalition partners in Iraq.

Three Czech hostages and one Canadian were freed on Friday but a

BSF fires on BDR outpost in Dinajpur

BSS, Fulbari (Dinajpur)

The Border Security Force (BSF) of India opened two rounds of fire along Fulbari border of Dinajpur in the small hours of yesterday, official sources said.

According to residents in the frontier villages and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sources, the BSF troops of Doghata BSF Camp under 11 BSF Battalion opened two rounds of fire opposite to Dainur Border outpost of BDR within the jurisdictions of Fulbari 15 Rifle Battalion under Fulbari Upazila of Dinajpur at around 2:30am.

BDR personnel are keeping a close watch on the area. No injury or casualty has been reported, BDR sources said.

Bush, Blair support

FROM PAGE 12 upstairs here in the White House was he views it as a hopeful moment as well," Bush said.

On Iraq, the two said any retreat from the planned June 30 transfer of power from the US-led occupation authority to Iraqis would be unthinkable despite the recent violence. The United States has about 130,000 troops in Iraq, while British soldiers make up the next-largest contingent, with 12,000.

Bush said of the Iraqis, "If they believe that we'll cut and run, in other words, if times get tough, we'll just say, 'See you later,' nobody is going to take a stand for freedom and liberty."

Blair denounced the recent attacks "from every variety of reactionary forces" who do not want to see a democratic Iraq.

"We will do what it takes to win this struggle," he said. "We will not yield. We will not back down in the face of attacks, either on us or on defenceless civilians."

The leaders, hoping to put a more international face on the US- and British-dominated coalition, warmly welcomed a work-in-progress proposal from UN Iraq envoy Lakhdar Brahimi on transferring sovereignty.

"We're actually trying to work with the UN now, because everybody understands the importance of fulfilling that objective," Blair said.

Brahimi envisions a caretaker government led by a prime minister, with a president as head of state, two vice presidents and a conference to create a consultative assembly with no legislative powers. The envoy is due to report his plan to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, then return to Baghdad for more talks.

Bush called Brahimi's outline "a way forward to establishing an interim government that is broadly acceptable to the Iraqi people," and he signalled his support for the continued work of the envoy and the United Nations in Iraq.

Bush and Blair, who last met in November at the British leader's home in rural England, dismissed questions about the motives behind their Iraq policies. Like Bush, Blair has seen his public support drop and has been forced to support the creation of a commission to examine the prewar intelligence on Iraq as the weapons that were once a primary justification for war have not been found.

Both focused instead on the importance of success in Iraq as well as in the Middle East, which they said is crucial to advancing the war on terror generally.

"It's a political year, everything I'm going to say, they're going to say is political," Bush said. "We're standing firm on our word because it's right, and it's in the long-term interests of our countries."

Myanmar junta allows

FROM PAGE 12 committee told Reuters.

The move, which came after two senior party officials were freed from house arrest on Tuesday, has intensified speculation that Nobel peace laureate Suu Kyi may be released soon.

She and vice chairman Tin Oo are the last senior party leaders still confined since a May 30 clash between NLD followers and government backers, which critics blamed on the junta.

Yanong denied orchestrating the violence, but it has come under fierce international pressure to end the crackdown, release hundreds of political prisoners and move toward democracy.

"I do believe she will be set free very soon," one NLD member said outside Than Tun's home where the party's executive committee met hours after the junta removed a lock and chain from the shabby NLD office near Yanong's historic Shwedagon Pagoda.

In Bangkok, exiled dissidents were more skeptical, noting that only about 70 of 300 NLD offices were allowed to reopen the last time Suu Kyi was freed from house arrest in 2002.

Pak foreign secy

FROM PAGE 12 Dhaka on a three-day annual consultation visit to discuss all bilateral issues between the two countries.

The Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka however in a message on Thursday informed the ministry that Riaz would not be able to arrive on schedule. The message did not explain the reason for the postponement of the visit.

Danish citizen was feared abducted as the spate of kidnappings continued.

The hostage takings began during a flare-up of violence this month between US troops and Sunni insurgents in Fallujah and Shia militants in and around the capital.

A coalition official said US forces had been repositioned in the besieged town of Fallujah on Saturday to allow access to the general hospital.

The move came as local leaders started a second day of talks with senior US military commanders and coalition officials at a US marine base there to hammer out a permanent ceasefire after some of the bloodiest clashes in a year left around 600 Iraqis dead, according to hospital sources.

Hasina

FROM PAGE 12 The BNP came to power forming alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami, which directly opposed the Liberation War and collaborated with the Pakistani occupation forces. "The alliance wants to turn Bangladesh into a failed state," she alleged.

Participating in the discussion, President of the Communist Party of Bangladesh Manjurul Ansan Khan said, "Let us work for people and not for power." Power politics prevents politicians from doing good to people, he added.

He also demanded a ban on religion-based politics.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said "We want an immediate end to the alliance rule through a united movement."

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) president Hasanul Haq Inu said the present government's days are numbered and a united move is now needed to oust it.

Gonoforum leader Pankaj Bhattacharya, Samyabadi Dal leader Dilip Barua and United Citizens' Movement chief Quazi Faruk Ahmed also spoke on the occasion.

with a president as head of state, two vice presidents and a conference to create a consultative assembly with no legislative powers. The envoy is due to report his plan to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, then return to Baghdad for more talks.

Bush called Brahimi's outline "a way forward to establishing an interim government that is broadly acceptable to the Iraqi people," and he signalled his support for the continued work of the envoy and the United Nations in Iraq.

Bush and Blair, who last met in November at the British leader's home in rural England, dismissed questions about the motives behind their Iraq policies. Like Bush, Blair has seen his public support drop and has been forced to support the creation of a commission to examine the prewar intelligence on Iraq as the weapons that were once a primary justification for war have not been found.

Both focused instead on the importance of success in Iraq as well as in the Middle East, which they said is crucial to advancing the war on terror generally.

"It's a political year, everything I'm going to say, they're going to say is political," Bush said. "We're standing firm on our word because it's right, and it's in the long-term interests of our countries."

Myanmar junta allows

FROM PAGE 12 committee told Reuters. The move, which came after two senior party officials were freed from house arrest on Tuesday, has intensified speculation that Nobel peace laureate Suu Kyi may be released soon.

She and vice chairman Tin Oo are the last senior party leaders still confined since a May 30 clash between NLD followers and government backers, which critics blamed on the junta.

Yanong denied orchestrating the violence, but it has come under fierce international pressure to end the crackdown, release hundreds of political prisoners and move toward democracy.

"I do believe she will be set free very soon," one NLD member said outside Than Tun's home where the party's executive committee met hours after the junta removed a lock and chain from the shabby NLD office near Yanong's historic Shwedagon Pagoda.

In Bangkok, exiled dissidents were more skeptical, noting that only about 70 of 300 NLD offices were allowed to reopen the last time Suu Kyi was freed from house arrest in 2002.

Bank, customs

FROM PAGE 12 five-day remand at Sathkhira Sadar Police Station.

The importer also claims he was not aware that as from March 15 this year, under Article 26 of the Import Policy Ordinance, 2004, prior permission of the government was required to import such materials, police said.

Abdul Kader Beg, officer in charge of the police station and the investigating officer of the case, said they are investigating why Khulna Bazar branch of United Commercial Bank Ltd issued the LC worth US\$ 2,304 on March 18 last for importing the chemical. They are also looking into why the customs authority at Bhomra land port realised Tk 105,000 as taxes from the importer in total disregard of the legal requirements, he added.

Police also claimed another consignment of more than 15 tons of this explosive material, due to enter through Benapole land port Thursday last, was scared off by Wednesday's Bhomra operation.