

Ershad Shikdar to be hanged on May 10

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

The authorities have decided to hang notorious criminal Ershad Shikdar on May 10 after his mercy petition was turned down by President Iajuddin Ahmed. Khulna Jail Superintendent Farhad Mia fixed the date in accordance with section 6 of the jail code after being officially informed about the president's decision yesterday. Ershad Shikdar was given the death penalty by a Khulna court on April 30, 2000, for murdering Jubo

Abandoned Bangladeshis not found in Baghdad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government could not trace any Bangladeshi worker stranded in Baghdad after running a check through Bangladesh embassies in Jordan and Kuwait. "We are ready to bring back any Bangladeshi who might be stuck there due to the war, but first we must know his or her exact location," said Daliluddin Mondal, secretary of the ministry of expatriate welfare and overseas employment while talking to The Daily Star last night. He said Bangladesh embassies in Jordan and Kuwait checked the

Plan to bomb British football stadium foiled

AFP, London

British police have foiled a plot by Islamic extremists to bomb a football stadium, possibly the Manchester United ground, following the arrest of 10 terror suspects, newspaper reports said Tuesday. Police arrested the 10, including a woman, in a series of raids Monday in northern and central England and they are being held on suspicion of committing or preparing acts of terrorism.

The Sun tabloid reported that police had foiled a suicide bomb attack planned at Old Trafford, the home ground of Manchester United, one of the world's best-known football teams.

The newspaper said intelligence chiefs believed several al-Qaeda extremists planned to blow themselves up in separate parts of the stadium during a match on Saturday and had already bought tickets for the game.

"If successful, any such attack would have caused absolute carnage. Thousands of people could have been killed," an unnamed police source told the paper.

Ctg tele-link snapped for 18 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

Telecommunications link of the port city with other parts of the country remained snapped for over 18 hours since early yesterday.

Chittagong was cut off from the rest of the country after unknown criminals stole parts of the optical fibre line at Madam Bibirhat of Sitakunda, about 26km off the city, at around 1:00pm, sources said.

The criminals must have taken the optic fibre for electric cable and removed parts of it for sale, apprehended Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board officials finding the line snapped.

An expert team from Dhaka reached the spot in the noon and was working to restore the line till 6:30pm and expected to restore the link by late last night.

Prayer Timings		
April 21		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-25	5-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-27	6-31
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Floods keep wreaking havoc in northeast

STAR REPORT

Flash floods in six northeastern and central districts worsened or remained unchanged yesterday as torrential rains led to swelling of rivers in the region, inundating vast areas and damaging crops, reports received in Dhaka said. The floods affected several lakh people and damaged boro paddy in 27 haors in the region. Educational institutions remained closed for the last four days in many areas, our correspondents reported.

The affected districts are Sylhet, Sunamganj, Habiganj, Netrakona and Kishoreganj and parts of Brahmanbaria.

The Surma, Kushiara, Plain, Gowain, Khowai, Bheramohona, Bahsira, Donu and Khangsa were in spate following heavy rainfall upstream and also in this part of the country. The Khowai, Khangsa and Donu were flowing above the danger level.

Our Sylhet correspondent reported the flood situation remained unchanged though raining stopped after a week yesterday.

Rainwater continued to roll down the hilly areas across the border, impeding improvement of the flood situation.

Extraction of stone and sand from the quarries in Companyganj, Gowainghat and Jaintapur upazilas

in the district remained suspended for the last six days due to the early flooding, putting at least over 60,000 labourers out of work.

Water was still flowing through the 30 breaches along the Surma and Kushiara dykes in Jakiganj upazila. As a result, Sylhet-Jakiganj road went under water at seven points, disrupting movement of vehicles.

Five out of nine unions in the upazila have been flooded. All educational institutions in the upazila remained closed for the last few days.

The district administration sent messages to the ministry concerned for relief goods and house building loans.

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Asian countries pledge to stand firm in Iraq

Honduras follows Spain pullout; Thailand reconsiders its presence; 21 prisoners killed in mortar rounds in Baghdad

AFP, Tokyo

Asian countries with troops in Iraq stood firm as Spain and Honduras prepared to pull out, but resolve was tempered by fears the withdrawals could spark a domino effect among US allies as violence raged on.

With Spain already removing its 1,432 personnel from Iraq, where spiralling violence and a spate of kidnappings has been aimed at pressuring troop pull outs, Australia, Japan and the Philippines all renewed their commitment.

But as Honduran President Ricardo Maduro added that his 368-strong force would also end its deployment, Thailand said it was reconsidering its presence while Japanese officials warned further

withdrawals could trigger a mass exodus.

"If Spain pulls out, then it is possible that other nations may say, 'my country too'," Japanese Defence Agency Director-General Shigeru Ishiba told a news conference.

But Ishiba ruled out any withdrawal of Japan's 550 or so troops from the southern Iraqi town of Samawa, where they are deployed in humanitarian and reconstruction projects.

Thailand government will pull Thai troops out of Iraq if they are assaulted and the situation becomes so dangerous that they could not continue their mission, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said yesterday.

"The safety of Thai troops in Iraq

is my first priority. If the Thai troops are target of assaults and if the situation get out of control, they would be withdrawn immediately," he said.

The premier was responding to the Senate's motion that demanded that Thai troops be pulled out Iraq due to continued attacks on the international allied troops, led by the US, Asian News Network reports.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard said his country would not bow to threats from Iraqi insurgents loyal to radical Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr to target 850 Australian troops deployed countrywide for kidnapping.

In the Philippines, which last week suspended the dispatch of 45

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Dhaka, Delhi should have common plan to face quota-free regime

Indian textiles secretary tells *The Daily Star*

RAFIQ HASAN

Bangladesh and India should work out a common strategy to face challenges in the garment sector in a quota free regime after 2004, observed visiting Indian Textile Secretary SB Mahapatra.

"After phasing out of quota system from 2005, China would be the main competitor to both Bangladesh and India. We can work together to face the challenges through increasing the competitive



SB Mahapatra

edge of our products," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mahapatra predicts a great opportunity for Bangladesh and India to increase the garment export in the quota free era as the two neighbouring countries currently share only 3 percent of the over \$300 billion global apparel market.

He stressed that close cooperation between the private sector people across the borders is a must to make the most of the opportunity.

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Better plan needed to pull the poor above the line: Experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts at a workshop yesterday called for better planning and broader programmes to tackle urban poverty as projections have it that half of the country's population will be living in urban areas by the year 2030.

The workshop on 'Urban Poverty' was organised by Bangladesh Urban Round Table (Burt), an informal group of leading national and international development organisations working with the urban poor, and held at the Local Government Engineering

Department auditorium.

"Although the government has planning and programmes for the urban poor, they are insufficient and we need help from NGOs and donors for the long-term, mid-term and immediate agenda," Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, who was the chief guest, said.

In the position paper, Dibalok Singha, Burt representative and chairperson of Coalition for the Urban Poor (Cup), said the current urban annual growth rate stands at 5-6 percent, almost twice the rural

growth rate.

The very rapid growth is concentrated in only five metropolitan cities, particularly in capital Dhaka, which alone holds 75percent of the total urban population, the paper added. The population of Dhaka was only 0.5 million in 1961 and 3.4 million in 1981, but it rocketed up to 8.1 million in 1991 and over 10 million in 2002.

There has been a rapid concentration of various economic resources including ownership of land to a small class of very rich people, the paper noted and stated

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BSF pushes 42 in

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

Indian Border Security Forces (BSF) pushed in 42 Bengali-speaking Indians including women and children through Keragachhi, a village bordering India in Kalaroa upazila on Sunday and Monday nights, said the push-in victims.

BDR, however, denied this.

While talking to this correspondent, Shahid Ali, Rehana Begum, Nesar Uddin and Minara Khatun said they had been living with their families at Sima Slum in New Delhi since 1979. On April 7, Indian police raided their houses and arrested them. On Friday they herded them into the BSF camp at Amudia that stands opposite to Keragachhi village. BSF pushed them into Bangladesh in the dead of night on Sunday.

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CONTROVERSY OVER APPOINTMENTS

RU teachers go on strike

ANWAR ALI and ABU KALAM, *Rajshahi*

Rajshahi University Teachers' Association (Ruta) started an indefinite strike yesterday protesting the 'controversial' appointment of 544 employees.

No classes and examinations were held yesterday as teachers did not report for duty.

The strike was called in protest against the 'unnecessary, illegal and politically motivated' recruitment

done allegedly without any public notice or properly judging the appointees' merit.

"We decided to go for the strike during an urgent meeting Monday night and will continue it until the authorities fulfill our two-point demand including cancellation of the recruitment," said Ruta President Prof Khalekuzzaman.

The other demand is removal of RU Vice-chancellor (VC) Prof Faisal Islam Faruki and Pro-VC Prof KAM Shahadat Hossain Mondol.

Khalekuzzaman said Ruta earlier warned university authorities about the strike in a memorandum to the VC, asking him to stop the recruitment.

RU unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) also faxed a memorandum to the president and chancellor of university to the same effect.

RU authorities Saturday appointed 327 third-class and 217 fourth-class employees against 270

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PHOTO: STAR

To avoid traffic jam in the city, a large number of commuters follow the river route from Gabtali to Fatullah, which not only saves time but also money. Improvement of the river routes around the bustling city can prove an effective solution to urban transport.

Bombs hurled at police van again, 3 hurt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Three unidentified people were injured when alleged Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajudhdha) members hurled bombs at a police van on Monday night.

Witnesses said at about 8-45pm, a gang of assailants threw two hand-bombs at a pick-up van carrying ten policemen in front of the Khalishpur Wonderland Shishu Park. The bombs missed the vehicle and exploded nearby. Police instantly fired four shots at the attackers, who again hurled three more bombs that exploded on the road this time at least fifty yards off the van. Police again fired ten shots and the attackers retreated.

None of the attackers or police was injured.

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Cops club Nagorik Andolon men in front of Proshika

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police clubbed activists at a rally of Oikyaabaddha Nagorik Andolon (ONA) in front of Proshika's head office in Mirpur yesterday and arrested at least 40 of its staff, including a deputy director.

The ONA (united civic movement) held a rally in front of the NGO's head office protesting a freeze on Proshika's donor funds and 'harassment' by the government.

It also protested intimidation and threats from local political groups including ruling BNP's youth wing Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal and the siege in front of the Proshika office on April 18. Proshika President Kazi Farook

happens to be the secretary-general of ONA.

"The commissioner and the local MP asked our president and staff on Sunday to stop our NGO operations," said a visibly unnerved Proshika staff, wishing to remain unnamed.

Police picked up Md Abdur Rab, deputy director of People's Cultural Programme of Proshika. Rab later told The Daily Star, "The officer in charge (OC) of Pallabi Police Station asked me to accompany him to the police station to answer some questions."

Rab added the presiding police officer asked him to cut the rally short by making an announcement,

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Second man of NBCP dies in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

The second in the line of command of outlawed New Biplobi Communist Party (NBCP), arrested Monday, died at Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) yesterday.

Sukumar Roy Taru, 30, succumbed to his injuries at 2:00pm after a frenzied Dumuria mob gouged out his eyes Monday night, police said.

He was admitted to the KMCH in critical condition after he fell sick during interrogation at Dumuria joint forces camp in midnight.

Earlier in the evening, a team of joint forces held the top NBCP leader at Mid Town Hotel in Jessore and sent him to Khulna the same night.

Following his confession, the team took him to Sundarbuni and Putimari villages and retrieved 20

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Arms, army uniforms found in Bandarban

BANDARBAN, BSS

Members of armed forces Sunday retrieved two firearms, bullets and some military uniforms in the deep forest of Bandarban.

During a drive in deep forest, a special army team found a Chinese pistol and a local gun, some bullets, toll collection receipts and military uniforms in various criminal hideouts in Kuhlalong union of Sadar upazila, official sources said yesterday.

The team also demolished the hideouts, but failed to nab anyone, sources added.

Recently, locals held Paila Marma, 25, and Kyajai Keyang, 28, at Rwangchhari upazila and handed them to police.

They are extortionists and involved in criminal activities in indigenous villages, police said.



PHOTO: STAR

Women freedom fighters pose for photographs at a reception accorded by the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu) at Jatiya Press Club yesterday.