

Cop raid

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residences of AL presidium members Tofail Ahmed, Sajeda Chowdhury, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Dhaka city unit AL President and former Dhaka mayor Mohammad Hanif, city AL General Secretary Mozaffar Hossain Chowdhury Maya and AL lawmaker Sheikh Helal Uddin.

Mir Ashraf Ali, an assistant commissioner (AC) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, who led the series of raids, told The Daily Star yesterday that the raids were conducted upon receipt of a court order to search those houses.

Police did not find any illegal weapons or unauthorised persons during the raid at the AL leaders' houses.

Terminating the incident unfortunate, Tofail Ahmed told this correspondent that this was the fifth time since the 2001 general elections that police raided his house. "I would not blame the police. They just carried out the orders but I feel sorry for the attitude of a political government."

He said policemen did show him a search warrant and scoured all the rooms of his two-storey Gulshan residence from 2:30am to 3:30am.

AL presidium member and former minister Sajeda Chowdhury said a huge contingent of police raided her Gulshan residence at about 3:00am and conducted an hour-long search.

"They came with ropes and handcuffs, went upstairs and searched all the rooms, but found nothing (illegal)," she said.

Deploing the incident, she said: "What a country we live in! Is this a

Cops seal off ,

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canisters and foiled every attempt of the demonstrators to gather and take out processions.

At least 40 people including AL's youth front Awami Jubo League General Secretary Mirza Azam and The Inquilab photojournalist Shafuddin Bitu were wounded in the police swoop. Police also picked up some 200 opposition activists from the city including Paltan, Mouchak, Central Shahid Minar areas.

A foot march of Hasanul Haq Inu-led JSD towards the Prime Minister's Office at about 4:00pm was also dispersed when it was passing Noor Hossain Square area.

BANANI SITUATION

Police put up barbed-wire barricades on all four main avenues leading to Hawa Bhaban, located on road number 13, block D in Banani and BNP leaders and workers played cricket in the ground adjacent to Hawa Bhaban. Residents, businesspeople, office workers and commuters going through Banani area said police continually harassed them.

People, who have their offices, schools and universities in Banani, were not allowed to enter Banani despite showing IDs. Vehicles driving from Teigaon link-road area toward Gulshan-1 and Gulshan-2 circles were also barred from proceeding further and diverted towards Badda at the point of National Shooting Complex in Gulshan.

A businessman, who had to run his office on Road No. 15 in Banani without any staff, said police did not allow anyone to go to his office.

"I was harassed irrationally when I was trying to enter my office at 9.30am. They swept my car, my bag and told me to return home. I shouted and argued until a high police official came," he added.

"I argued whether they would pay for the losses I would incur because of their illogical behaviour and after I answered to their query if I were the tenant of the office space, they finally let me in.. But they said nobody else will be allowed to go to my office."

Police vans ceaselessly patrolled the area to stop pedestrians and instructed them to either go back to their homes or outside the area immediately.

"I came with my wife for an urgent appointment with a doctor at a clinic on Road No. 8, but police stopped me and said even the doctor was not allowed to enter the area," said Abdur Rahim. "Now she will have to suffer until a further appointment."

Commuters who tried to enter Gulshan 1 and 2 through Teigaon Link Road were waylaid at the roadblock in front of National Shooting Complex and diverted towards Badda.

Traffic clogged the Airport Road despite sparse traffic around the city, as police blocked all alternative roads through Gulshan.

PALTAN MAIDAN PITCHED BATTLE

At Paltan Maidan, the demonstrators fought pitched battle with police for hours from 3:30pm, who chased the demonstrators at least 12 times. Prior to the police attack, Mirza Azam, also an MP, told reporters that the programme was successful. "Police and BNP cadres sealed off the entire Dhaka city and confined its one crore people," he said.

The law-enforcers also sealed off all entries to the AL headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue with barbed-wire fences and mounted guard since morning. "We are just carrying out the orders of government high-ups," said an on-duty police official without elaborating.

Armed police also forced shopkeepers to close their businesses

AL calls 3-day

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from across the country to join in the three-consecutive-day programme to force the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government to quit by April 30.

"We urge the people to gather in the city on these three days to end the alliance's misrule," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said last evening at a press conference held at the party's Dhanmondi office.

He said the exact mode of the three-day no-confidence demonstration would be announced later, adding yet sterner programmes would be declared on April 24.

The AL will demonstrate in the city this afternoon to protest yesterday's police attack on leaders, workers and supporters of its front organisations.

The party will also stage demonstrations across the country tomorrow, besides taking out separate processions in all the eight parliamentary constituencies of the capital. Frontline leaders of the AL will lead the processions.

Jalil said, as part of the new agitation programme, AL lawmakers would march towards the Jatiya Sangsad on April 25 demanding withdrawal of the proposed 14th amendment bill to the constitution.

Bitterly criticising the government for yesterday's police attack on his party's front organisations, the AL general secretary said the government was desperate to cling to power by any means.

He claimed around 7,000 opposition workers including 2,000 women were arrested during the last few days to thwart the opposition's anti-government movement. "The days of this government are numbered, as the people of the country have already shown no-trust to it for its total inability to govern," he remarked.

AL workers

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opposition workers from assembling, the state minister said that AL did not seek any permission from the authorities for the gathering.

Regarding the AL's allegation against Hawa Bhaban, he said, "Their allegation is not against Hawa Bhaban, rather against the government."

He said the AL should come up with the documents that substantiate the allegation against Hawa Bhaban.

Rajuk's drive

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The most common violation that the Rajuk inspectors come across is of the environmental space code, which requires a developer to construct a building leaving a prescribed space around it.

Other frequent violations by the developers include those of parking requirements and zonal restrictions. Rajuk has identified around 2,000 buildings in the residential areas of Gulshan, Banani, Dhanmondi and Uttara that are being used for commercial purposes.

Rajuk officials are now at a loss how to stop this malpractice. "We are trying our best to contain irregularities but are unable to do much due to lack of resources, which is haunting the Rajuk for decades," the Rajuk chairman said.

BSF

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Battalion, led the BDR side, while RC Gour, commanding officer of 106 BSF Battalion, headed the BSF team.

Earlier on Tuesday, the BSF stopped the construction following the BDR's resistance.

Sylhet flood

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Dyke at Ishabpur, submerging 14 villages in Sultanpur, Barothakuri and Baroah unions, sources said.

The government sanctioned 50 tonne of rice and Tk 50,000 for affected Jakiganj residents.

Water levels in the rivers Surma, Kushiyara, Plain, Gowain were still over danger mark at different points in the afternoon, official sources informed.

The river Surma was flowing 6cm above the danger level near Sylhet city in the afternoon. It was 117cm over the red mark at Kanaighat upazila headquarters point, they added.

The river Kushiyara was running 147cm higher over the red mark at Amolshid at Jakiganj border while it was 77cm above danger mark at Sheolaghat in Beanibazar during the same time.

The situation would start improving within a day or two, Bangladesh Water Board officials hoped, once rainfall in upper region stops.

BB seeks

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soared soon after the amendment of the act, which was said to be soft on loan defaulters.

"Some cases are often re-routed to the High Court from where defaulters obtain stay order on money loan court proceedings. In that way some big defaulters are staying out of the reach of the act," he said.

The figures of default loan cases are however too staggering to believe. Until December 31 last year, 79,367 cases involving Tk 14,185 crore were filed under the Money Loan Act. Of them, 47,679 cases involving Tk 7,512 crore belong to NCBs.

The courts could settle 35,412 cases so far to recover Tk 1,398 crore.

Don't create artificial crisis

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farsightedness and commitment for welfare of the people, they observed.

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Adviser of Commerce Ministry Barkatullah Bulu, Prime Minister's Political Secretaries Harris Chowdhury and M Mosaddek Ali and Commerce Secretary were present at the meeting.

Other members of the DCCI delegation included AM Mubashshar, M Abu Horaira, Ahmed Hossain Majumdar, Zillur Rahman, K Atiq-e-Rabbani and AYM Kamal.

The Prime minister told the DCCI leaders that the policies of her government were business-and-investment friendly.

"We are giving emphasis on the private sector and trying to increase export and investment," she added.

The law and order has improved much, she said adding that it would improve further if all quarters extend cooperation.

She mentioned various measures taken by her government to improve law and order, such as, introduction of speedy trial, reforms in police and formation of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB).

Khaleda Zia said the government has taken some pragmatic decisions to uphold the interest of textiles and garments sectors. Both the sectors would get all possible assistance from the government also in future, she added.

She said a national coordination committee has been formed to help readymade garments sector face the challenges of post-2004 period when the quota system would be phased out.

Responding to a proposal of the DCCI, the prime minister said her government was encouraging medium industry. Small and medium industrial units can be set up in export

processing zones (EPZs), she suggested.

She listed a number of steps taken by her government including lowering the rate of bank interest and hoped that the private banks would also reduce their interest rate.

Referring to the measures for development of power sector, the prime minister called upon the private entrepreneurs to invest in the sector.

She hoped that consumers would help improve the utility services by paying the bills regularly.

Khaleda also mentioned her government's steps taken for the development of agriculture sector and improvement of Information Technology (IT) in the country.

She said the foundation of the country's economy would be strong enough to run forward independently if the development activities continue for next three years.

Change of government and abandoning of development programmes in the past had affected the pace of progress, she observed.

While appreciating the achievement of the government in economic sector, the DCCI delegation pointed out that the national growth rate rose to 5.33 in 2002-03 from 4.42 in 2001-02 and it is expected to cross 5.5 in 2003-04.

Prime minister said the revenue income increased by 9.18 percent in the first nine months of the current fiscal while remittance by 11.4 percent. The overall export income increased by 14 percent in the first eight months. The foreign exchange reserve reached 2.70 billion US dollars in the current months (April).

Presenting the statistics, the DCCI leaders appreciated the government for achieving the success despite adversities. They also appreciated different government measures for improvement of business and invest-

ment and observed that government steps to enhance local and foreign investment were dynamic.

The business leaders expressed gratitude to the government for its sick industry rehabilitation programmes that rejuvenated at least 2000 sick industrial units across the country.

The DCCI delegation suggested a number of measures, including reduction of business cost and availability of bank loan at low interest for small and medium entrepreneurs to further enhance business and investment.

It felt the need for more import-alternative and export-oriented industry in the country.

The DCCI leaders also suggested massive economic diplomacy and appointment of professional persons in foreign missions to this end to augment market abroad. Regional cooperation can also help the country, they observed.

They praised the government's emphasis on agro-based industry and sought assistance for capital for the purpose.

The DCCI delegation also felt the need for a full-fledged human resources development institute to create efficient entrepreneurs in the country.

Bridge built

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the communications ministry said construction of the roads will start very soon after necessary approval from the RHD.

The bridge will establish direct road link between Chandpur and Noakhali and some other districts.

Magistrate

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among the lawyers, relatives of the accused and others present in the court, who shouted protests and questioned the validity of the ruling.

Some of the aggrieved attorneys called on the magistrate at his chamber; but he said he acted as per instructions received from 'higher authorities'. Later in the afternoon, the magistrate granted bails to the women.

The advocates also alleged some of the arrestees were charged under Section 74 of the DMP Ordinance, which is applicable to immoral activities.

The same magistrate doled out the same sentence to another 63 men and women on Tuesday, ahead of yesterday's opposition programme to lay siege to Hawa Bhaban, the office of the BNP chairperson.

That batch was arrested in Mirpur earlier in the day for putting up obstacles on footpaths. Some of the arrested women fell sick from being kept in a jam-packed court hajat and had to be hospitalised.

Meanwhile, police yesterday picked up about 200 people from different entry points to the city, mostly from bus, launch and train stations. Of them, the highest number of arrests, 45, was made by Motijheel Police.

Most of the arrests were made under the DMP Ordinance suspecting that the opposition might have been assembling people with arms and explosives from outside the capital for subversive activities yesterday.

Until Tuesday night, police arrested over 2,000 people. Seven hundred of them were produced before court until 5:00pm Wednesday. The rest were scheduled to be produced before the magistrate by 10:00pm last night, court sources said.

Front organisations of the main opposition Awami League called the siege programme of Hawa Bhaban as a part of their movement to unsettle the four-party alliance government.

4 more appointed

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vacancies. Several departmental planning committees including of Bangla and political science departments yesterday decided not to accept the new recruits, as they said the departments have no vacancy.

The recruits who could not join office were seen roaming the establishment section. Some alleged they paid different political leaders and RU teachers a large amount of money for recruitment. One of them told The Daily Star, "I am worried that the money I paid may go down the drain."

IO dropped

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office of the inspector general of police (IGP) directed the CMP commissioner to transfer the case to Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for further investigation.

Process is on to hand over the case from Officer-in-Charge (OC) and IO (investigation officer) Ahadur Rahman to the CID today, the CMP official said.

OC Ahad was tasked to investigate the gunrunning, although allegations were brought against him that he was helping the offloading of the arms and ammunition.

Meanwhile, a high-powered probe body led by Home Secretary Omar Farook has left for Dhaka after staying here for three days.

The probe body found involvement of BNP activist Hafizur Rahman, pro-Jamaat labur leader Din Mohammad and Sobhan Hajji, who are absconding, with the gun running but could not trace the origin of the consignment.

Suicide bombers

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restoration of Iraqi sovereignty."

The U.S.-led occupation is due to end on June 30 with the formal transfer of sovereignty to an Iraqi government.

A wounded Iraqi, Amin Dinar, said he had heard a huge explosion as he stood at the door of his house.

"I looked around and saw my leg bleeding and my neighbour lying dead on the floor, torn apart," he said from his hospital bed. "I saw a mini-bus full of children on fire."

AL QAEDA ACCUSED

The mayor, speaking at Basra police headquarters, said police had recovered the remains of one bearded bomber.

"I accuse al Qaeda," the mayor said. "We have arrested a person disguised in a police uniform. We are questioning him."

U.S. officials have blamed al Qaeda or its affiliates for some of the violence sweeping Iraq.

Interior Minister Samir Sumaidy said the Basra attacks were similar to devastating suicide attacks in the Shia holy city of Kerbala and the Kurdish capital Arbil earlier this year. But he told a news conference it was too early to assign blame.

Witnesses at hospitals said 200 civilians and police had been wounded. Reuters counted 55 bodies at one hospital. A morgue attendant said 39 bodies had been identified and at least 16 others were burned beyond recognition.

A British military spokesman said three vehicles had exploded at Basra police stations at about 7:15 a.m. British officials said the Zubair blast killed three Iraqis and wounded four British soldiers, two seriously.

The explosions sowed panic across Basra, which had been relatively peaceful during this month's surge of violence in other parts of central and southern Iraq.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC PULLOUT

The Dominican Republic decided Tuesday to withdraw its 300 troops from Iraq in the wake of Spain's decision to pull out. Defence Secretary General Jose Miguel Soto Jimenez said while South Korea is sending more troops.

"The armed forces' troops in Iraq will leave in a few days, in the next week," the general said after talks with President Hipolito Mejia. They had originally been scheduled to leave in July.

The Dominican troops were

attached to a Spanish-led brigade that is being withdrawn from Iraq. Honduras, which has 368 troops in the same brigade, announced Monday that they would also be withdrawn.

Mejia Sunday told new Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero the Dominican troops would leave when their mission ends in July, but reversed himself after speaking with Honduran President Ricardo Maduro.

Thailand's senate voted to maintain the kingdom's 451 troops in Iraq despite mounting danger and the announced withdrawal of at least three countries from the US-led coalition, a senator said.

In another development, a group of 330 South Korean military engineers and medics left for Iraq yesterday in a troop rotation to replace colleagues already conducting relief work in the war-torn country, officials said.

Another 330 non-combatant troops will be sent to the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriyah next week, the defense ministry said.

TRUCE SPLITTERS

In Falluja, west of Baghdad, fighting violated a fragile truce just hours after Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld suggested the cease-fire in the Sunni city would not last.

Six civilians were killed and 10 wounded in clashes between Marines and rebels that erupted at dawn, residents said.

"Thugs and assassins and former Saddam henchmen will not be allowed to carve out portions of that city and to oppose peace and freedom," Rumsfeld said Tuesday.

Dozens of families who had fled earlier fighting queued on the edge of Falluja Wednesday waiting to be allowed home. The truce deal stipulates that 50 families may return each day.

Marines at the desert roadblock initially turned people back, but let some through as the fighting died down.

North of Baghdad, U.S.-backed Iraqi soldiers killed four insurgents and seized three explosive-laden cars in a raid overnight, said Iraqi Major-General Anwar Amin in Kirkuk.

Canada said one of its citizens had been kidnapped in Iraq -- the latest in a spate of hostage-taking this month that has snared foreign civilians from more than a dozen countries.

Tribunal set up

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for the trial of Saddam, who was captured by US troops in December and has since been held by US troops at an undisclosed location in or near Baghdad.

AFP adds: A Jordanian lawyer heading a defence team to represent Saddam Hussein on Wednesday branded the selection process of Iraqi judges to try the ousted Iraqi president a "violation of international law".

Mohammed Rashdan also told AFP he was preparing to lodge a suit against the US government and President George W. Bush for preventing him from meeting his client.

"The appointment of (Sami) Chalabi violates international law," Rashdan said. "The defence committee will file suit against this selection if a trial takes place."

A senior aide to Iraq's interim Governing Council member Ahmed Chalabi said Tuesday in Baghdad that "lawyer Sami Chalabi was named president of the court" which will try Saddam.

Entifadh Qanbar, whose boss is also the head of the pro-US Iraqi National Congress, said that seven judges and five prosecutors have also been selected.

"By law the country of aggression (United States), has no right whatsoever to change the constitution of Iraq, issue laws or appoint judges and any measure it takes is null and void," Rashdan said.

Last month Rashdan said he was appointed by Saddam's first wife,

Sajida, and eldest daughter Raghda to represent the former dictator, who has been in detention since US forces captured him on December 13.

"So far I have not been allowed to travel to Iraq," by the US-led coalition, Rashdan said.

"So we are preparing to lodge a suit against the US government and its president, Bush, because the US administration is preventing us from meeting with our client," he said in reference to a defence committee which he heads.

Rashdan said the suit "which is being prepared in coordination with French lawyers will be lodged with the French high court ... because France is the mother of all law".

He also dismissed claims by veteran French lawyer Jacques Verges that he has been retained to represent the former Iraqi leader.

"We have been asked by the family to say that our strategy is the one retained by the family who reject any other strategy," Rashdan said.

"Any lawyer who wishes to join the defence committee must contact us in Amman because I am now the overall coordinator of this committee," he added.

Verges, who won a reputation for controversy by taking on Gestapo chief Klaus Barbie and terrorist "Carlos the Jackal" as clients, said last month that Saddam's nephew, Ali Barzan al-Tikriti, asked him to represent the toppled president.

Car bomb kills 10

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Last week, Washington ordered non-essential diplomats out of the Gulf state and warned Americans they should leave, citing fresh signals of possible attacks on US and Western interests.

Suicide bombings at foreign residential compounds in Riyadh killed 50 people last year, including nine Americans.

Ambulances rushed toward the site of Wednesday's blast and smoke billowed from damaged buildings in the area, which also houses state television and the Information Ministry.

The explosion gouged a deep crater in the road where dozens of blackened and twisted cars still smoldered and glass shards and concrete blocks lay thickly on the tarmac. Security forces cordoned off the area. Firefighters battled raging fires.

Dubai-based Arab satellite television channel Al Arabiya said a suspected suicide bomber was killed.

Saudi Arabia last week defused five cars rigged with explosives in Riyadh, security sources said. Suspected Muslim militants also killed at least five Saudi policemen last week.

"We succeeded in preventing

five like this but this one got through," the Interior Ministry source said.

Since Monday, police have been hunting a group of militants after gunbattles in which they also fired rocket-propelled grenades at police. The same group is believed to have killed four policemen at checkpoints.

Last week, one of Saudi Arabia's most wanted al-Qaeda militants, in a video carried on an Islamist Web site, called on Muslims to kill Americans everywhere and vowed attacks against Arab leaders allied to Washington.

Saudi Arabia has blamed the 2003 bombings at Riyadh residential compounds on al-Qaeda, which Washington accuses of the September 11 attacks on the United States three years ago.

US officials have praised recent Saudi efforts against militants, a contrast to earlier disquiet at perceived tolerance for radical Islam in Saudi Arabia -- 15 of the 19 suspected hijackers on September 11, 2001, were Saudi nationals.

Bin Laden, whose Saudi citizenship was revoked by the authorities, has often branded the kingdom's rulers as traitors to Islam and "infidel agents" of the United States.