

AL's no-confidence day foiled by tough cops

AL to march towards JS today; Hartal on April 28-29; BNP takes to street to counter opposition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Wholesale arrests, barricades and high-handedness by police foiled the first day of main opposition Awami League's (AL) three-day 'mass no-confidence programme' in the city yesterday as part of its plan to overthrow the government by April 30.

The AL has called countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartals for April 28 and 29 and a nationwide agitation programme on April 27 at a press briefing last night in protest at the mass arrests and demanding resignation of government and mid-term elections. The 'mass no-confidence programme' will continue today and tomorrow.

As part of the previously announced programme, AL MPs will march toward parliament today that coincides with the resumption of the adjourned 11th session, demanding withdrawal of the proposed 14th amendment bill to the constitution.

The ruling BNP meanwhile has also announced a programme to

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Awami League (AL) lawmaker Asaduzzaman Noor tries to free a woman activist as she resists arrest by police women in the city's Motijheel heart yesterday, the first day of AL's three-day agitation expressing 'no-confidence' in the government.

PHOTO: STAR

Watch tightened
on key points
ahead of AL
deadline
Additional force
deployed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has put the law-enforcement agencies on high alert in Dhaka and adjoining districts in the run-up to the main opposition Awami League's (AL's) April 30 deadline for unseating it, home ministry officials said.

Although the four-party coalition appeared relaxed about the deadline, it still beefed up security of key government buildings, deployed additional forces, brought efficient officials to the capital, acted promptly on intelligence reports side by side with adding spark to its political programmes.

The administration tightened security around key installations including the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, Bangladesh Secretariat, Zia International Airport, Bangladesh Bank and diplomatic zones in Bandhara, Gulshan and Banani to preempt 'sabotage'.

"We reinforced uniformed and undercover police units in important areas yesterday. Armed police battalion personnel were in the streets and paramilitary BDR troops were ready to act," a top home ministry official said, requesting anonymity.

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7 GIs, 4 cops killed in Iraq blasts

US mulls sending more troops

AGENCIES, Baghdad

A series of explosions across Iraq has claimed the lives of seven US soldiers, four police officers and 18 Iraqi civilians.

The incidents occurred both in the Sunni Muslim north of the country and in Shia dominated areas, including the volatile Baghdad neighborhood of Sadr City where explosions killed eight Iraqis.

Insurgents struck a US military base north of Baghdad with rockets at dawn yesterday, killing five American soldiers, an official said, while a rocket crashed into a crowded market in the Iraqi capital, killing at least 13 Iraqis and injuring 30 wounded.

One woman was killed in a separate attack in the same area when a mortar bomb hit her home. Her daughter was wounded.

At the same time, police seized a truckload of explosives and arrested three Iraqis suspected in a series of suicide attacks in British-occupied

southern Iraq that had killed 74 people on Wednesday.

In Taji, just north of Baghdad, five US soldiers were killed and six more were wounded -- three of them critically -- when a rocket was fired at their base, a military spokeswoman said.

A truck that had been used to fire the rocket was destroyed by a US military helicopter after the troops called for reinforcements, she said.

Two US soldiers were killed and one wounded in a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) attack on a convoy near the southern city of Kut, police said.

The latest casualties brought to 718 the American military death toll since the US-led invasion of Iraq in March last year, including 520 killed in action, most of them fighting against insurgents.

In another incident, four Iraqi policemen were killed when a booby-trapped car exploded near a US military base in the northern city

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Conspirators
won't be
successful: PM
UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has said the conspirators have never been and never ever will be successful in executing their design to foil the development process initiated by the government.

She was addressing the National Conference 2004 of Doctors Association of Bangladesh (Dab) at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Center yesterday.

"Guard against the conspirators," the prime minister told the Dab, a body of physicians who support the BNP.

Khaleda mentioned that Dab members, apart from their professional job, work spontaneously with the nationalist ideology in the struggle for maintaining democratic rights.

She recalled, with appreciation, the role of the physicians in the country's language movement, War of Independence, anti-autocratic and other democratic movements.

The prime minister expressed her hope that the scientific session and discussion in the daylong conference would have a far-reaching impact on expansion and improvement of healthcare service in the country.

Referring to professional duties of the docs, Khaleda regretted that the government, despite resource constraints, is supplying medicine,

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MUNICIPAL POLLS

CEC irked as officials don't report real law, order situation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed expressed annoyance at high government officials at a meeting yesterday for not reporting the real law and order situation in 143 municipalities going to polls next month.

The Director General of the Forces Intelligence (DGI) Major General Sadek Hasan Rumi identified 43 of the municipalities as vulnerable, but the divisional and district officials found nothing wrong with the areas ahead of the polls from May 5 to May 10.

Visibly annoyed by the officials' remarks, the CEC said the review of law and order in the run-up to the

WB president pledges more assistance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

World Bank President James D Wolfensohn has assured Bangladesh of additional support to implement the reform agenda aimed at faster economic growth and poverty alleviation.

Talking to Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman in Washington Thursday, Wolfensohn encouraged the government to continue its reform process, pledging strengthened support from the International Development Association (IDA).

The WB president lauded the government's achievements in overall economic growth, poverty reduction and making improvements in human development index.

The meeting was also attended by WB Vice-president for South Asia Praful C Patel, WB Bangladesh Country Director Christine I Wallach, Bangladesh Ambassador to the USA Syed Hasan Ahmad, Alternative Executive Director of WB Dr Akbar Ali Khan and Finance Secretary Zahir Ahmed Khan.

They said law and order in the

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1,000 more netted in blanket arrest drive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested over 1,000 people in Dhaka yesterday as they continue blanket arrests across the country in the run-up to the April 30 deadline of the main opposition Awami League (AL) to unseat the BNP-led coalition government.

The police drive to hunt down opposition leaders, activists and supporters began in the capital on April 18 and elsewhere on April 23.

The number of arrestees in Dhaka alone exceeded 6,069.

Of the total, 4,775 were arrested under the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Ordinance and sentenced without producing them before magistrates and not giving them the opportunity of self defence is a gross misuse of law.

Magistrates have jurisdiction to award punishment to arrestees but they must be given the scope of defending themselves," said Nuruzzaman Nani, former general secretary of Dhaka Bar.

"It is a violation of human and

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US warns Sharon on Arafat threat

AGENCIES, Ramallah, West Bank

The United States has insisted that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon honours a promise not to harm the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat.

"We have made it entirely clear to the Israeli government that we would oppose any such action and have done so again in the wake of these remarks," a senior Bush administration official told Reuters. "We consider a pledge, a pledge."

Arafat meanwhile responded defiantly yesterday to new threats against his life by Sharon, telling a crowd of supporters he would embrace "martyrdom."

"All of us are martyrs-in-the-waiting," Arafat said in the compound of his Muqata headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah, where some 4,000 people chanted they would sacrifice their "blood and souls" for the veteran leader.

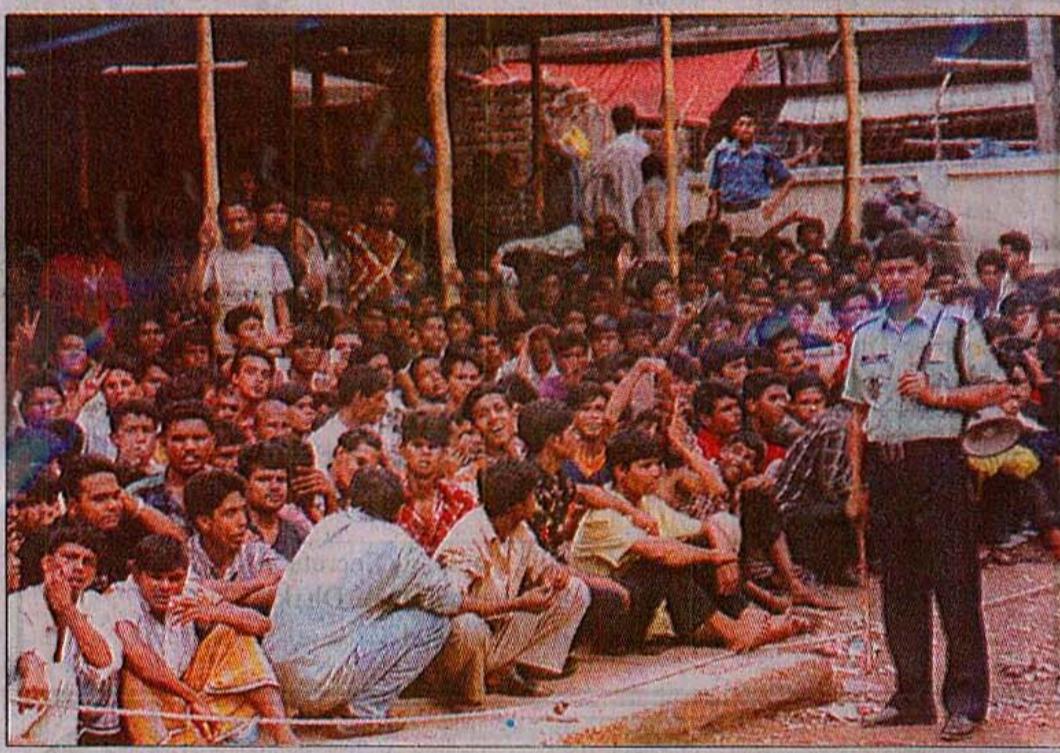
On Friday, Arafat appealed to world leaders to over the threats, his chief advisor said. "Arafat called this evening on Egyptian, Jordanian, Arab and European leaders to warn them of the consequences of the escalation of the violence in the Palestinian territories and the threats by Sharon against him," said Nabil Abu Rudeine.

In fresh violence in the West Bank, Israeli forces killed three Palestinians, at least two of them militants, in disputed circumstances.

Sharon, in comments that could rally support in his right-wing Likud party before its May 2 vote on his Gaza pullout plan, said on Friday he no longer felt bound by a pledge he made three years ago to Bush. "I release myself from this commitment regarding Arafat," Sharon told Israel's Channel Two television, giving no indication any action was imminent.

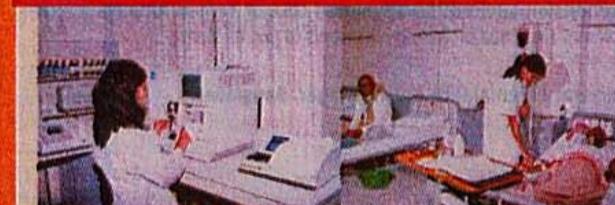
As they stepped into the war-ravaged city, they soon realised how mercilessly they were cheated out and burst into tears.

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Police herd prisoners together outside a court hajat at Sadarghat yesterday as such facilities in the city are now packed with thousands of people arrested in the run-up to the Awami League's April 30 deadline for unseating the government.

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Lift ban on Ahmadiyya publications
AI asks government to ensure freedom of religion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Amnesty International (AI) has urged the government to immediately rescind the ban on Ahmadiyya publications and not yield to Islamist groups' demands that are discriminatory in nature and amount to violation of Ahmadiyya rights.

The international human rights watchdog also asked the government to publicly declare its full support for the freedom of religion and ensure that no acts of intimidation or violence against the Ahmadiyyas are tolerated and all perpetrators are brought to justice.

The AI made these recommendations in a report titled 'Bangladesh: The Ahmadiyya Community - their rights must be protected' posted on its website Friday.

The report said Ahmadiyyas have been the target of a hate campaign organised by a number of Islamist groups in recent months, adding these groups mobilised crowds to chant anti-Ahmadiyya slogans, sought confiscation of Ahmadiyya mosques, and demanded that the government declare them non-Muslims.

About 100,000 Ahmadiyyas have been living in fear of attack, loot and murder since around October 2003 when the anti-Ahmadiyya agitation began, it said.

It urged the government to institute an independent and impartial international-standard investigation by a competent authority into



Conned by a fake overseas manpower recruiting agency, these men ended up in the war-ravaged Iraq before managing to return to Dhaka yesterday.

Distraught they return Cheated by manpower agents, 13 finally land in Dhaka after a brush with harsh realities in Iraq

STAR REPORT

Cheated out by manpower agencies, 13 Bangladeshis returned home from Iraq yesterday ending their harrowing ordeal of a week.

Each of the young fortune-seekers paid between Tk 120,000 and 160,000 to the recruiting agencies, Kazi Air and Greenline International, for jobs in Jordan.

They could not realise they only had transit visa for Jordan and tour-

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