



Tagore's birth anniversary today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Country today observes the 143rd birth anniversary of Nobel Laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore.

The cultural affairs ministry and different cultural organisations throughout the country have chalked out elaborate programmes to celebrate the day.

A three-day government programme has been announced yesterday. A discussion at the Osmani Memorial Hall today kicks off the national programme Shilpakala Academy and Bangla Academy will stage cultural functions and discussions featuring the poet's literary works and songs over the next three days. The National

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Political parties, labour bodies condemn killing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political parties and labour organisations yesterday condemned the murder of Awami League (AL) lawmaker Ahsan Ullah Master who was gunned down at a rally in Tongi along with at least two others, and demanded punishment to the killers.

"The death of Ahsan Ullah Master in broad daylight again proves that the BNP-Jamaat alliance has totally failed to control law and order," said Bangladesh Communist Party (CPB) Chairman Monzurul Ahsan Khan and General Secretary Muzahidul Islam Selim in a joint statement.

In another statement, the left-leaning 11-party alliance blamed

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Rumsfeld set to testify before Congress

New charges of Iraqi prisoner abuse

AFP, Washington

New charges of abuse of Iraqi prisoners by the US-led occupation force emerged yesterday as US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld prepared to testify before Congress, a day after President George W. Bush was forced for the first time to apologise for his troops.

A message attributed to al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden meanwhile called on Iraqis to wage holy war on the US-backed interim government due to take power on June 30.

The message, posted on a web site frequently used by Islamic extremists, also offered 10 kilo-

grams of gold to whoever killed the top US civilian and military officials in Iraq or UN Secretary General Kofi Annan or his envoy to Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi.

Newspapers around the world published a photograph of a 21-year female reservist in the US army, Lynndie England, holding a naked prisoner by a leash around his neck in Abu Ghraib jail near Baghdad.

Some papers compared the photo, plus others showing prisoners forced by grinning US soldiers to simulate sexual acts, to the most damaging images from the Vietnam War, the most painful and divisive period for the United States in the 20th century.

Bush, who faces re-election in November, apologised publicly on Thursday to King Abdullah II of Jordan for what he called "a stain on our country's honor and our country's reputation".

Speaking to reporters outside the White House, Bush said he had told the king: "I was sorry for the humiliation suffered by the Iraqi prisoners and the humiliation suffered by their families" and added "it's important that justice be done".

The outrage over the prisoners provided political ammunition to John Kerry, the Democratic senator

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Outlaws slaughter two Bangla Bhai's men in Naogaon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

The so-called Sarbahara operatives slaughtered two people belonging to Jagrota Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) in a Naogaon village in the early hours of yesterday.

The victims are Zillur Rahman and Abdul Majid, both aged 20.

Reports received here said more than 40 outlaws cordoned a house at Jamgram in Atrai upazila and asked the house owner, a union parishad member, to come out. As he did not, the operatives set fire to the house.

The house owner managed to flee and informed villagers about the incident over microphone at the local mosque. The villagers rushed to the spot but failed to nab the armed elements.

The outlaws slaughtered two, assaulted one and fled immediately. Bodies of the dead were sent to Naogaon General Hospital for autopsy.

The incident created panic in the area. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police, Rajshahi Range, Noor Mohammad visited the village later

and ordered his force to track down Sarbahara men. Police in his range is well equipped to identify and arrest them, he claimed.

Meanwhile, amidst reports of deaths at the hands of the JMJB, police administration on Wednesday urged people of the northwestern region to

aid JMJB leader Bangla Bhai and his men in cleansing the area of Sarbahara operatives.

2 PBCP outlaws lynched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A mob lynched two outlaws of the Purbo Banglar Communist Party's (PBCP) Janajuddha faction at around 12 midnight Thursday at Koyabazar in Batiaghata.

The outlaws could not be identified until yesterday evening. Police recovered a sawn-off rifle from the spot near the bodies with their eyes

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PCJSS enforces hartal in CHT today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Parbatya Chattagram Jano Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) enforces a dawn-to-dusk hartal in the three hill districts today to press home their four-point demand.

The demands include implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) peace accord signed on December 2, 1997, removal of CHT Development Board Chairman Wadud Bhuiyan MP, withdrawal of army, Armed Police Battalion (APBN), ansar and VDP camps from the hill region and inclusion of an indigenous person as CHT affairs minister in the cabinet.

The PCJSS started agitation afresh after Mohalchhari arson

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Prayer Timings		
May 8		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-50
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-34	6-38
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation



Unidentified people take a schoolboy, fatally injured in yesterday's shooting at the Secchhasebak League rally in Tongi, to hospital, left, and another gunshot victim is being carried to the hospital, right. The boy died later in hospital.



PHOTO: STAR

Karachi mosque blast kills 13

REUTERS, Karachi

A suspected suicide bomber blew up a crowded Shi'ite mosque in Karachi, yesterday, killing at least 13 people and wounding more than 80, police and officials said.

More than 100 people were packed into the mosque for Friday afternoon prayers when the blast rocked the building in the fourth bomb attack in five days in Pakistan, a frontline state in the US-led war on terror.

The mosque was badly damaged. Pools of blood dotted the floor and spattered the walls and pieces of flesh were scattered on the ground.

Karachi police chief Tariq Jamaeel said at least 13 people were killed and more than 80 wounded. Rohena Hasan, a doctor at the state-run Civil Hospital said more than 20 were in intensive care.

"This is a big incident," said provincial security adviser Aftab Sheikh. "It is a blatant act of terrorism. It's the work of enemies of peace. They targeted innocent worshippers."

Provincial police chief Syed Kamal Shah said it was too early to

confirm the details of the explosion.

"But there is a likelihood that it was a suicide bombing," he said. "There is no crater on the floor and the explosion occurred in the front rows of the main worship area."

Ali Abbas, his clothes smeared with blood, said he was in the third row of worshippers when there was an explosion and something hit him hard on the back.

"It was part of a body" he said. "There was chaos. All of us ran outside, jumping over the injured and human remains."

It was the just latest attack on a Shi'ite mosque in Pakistan, which has long been racked for decades by violence between the minority Islamic sect and militant majority Sunnis.

Police and paramilitary troops cordoned off the area, while Shi'ite Muslim protesters hurled stones and set fire to cars while shouting slogans demanding protection for their community.

"We are at the mercy of terrorists who are getting bolder because they are not being punished," said Shi'ite Muslim cleric Hasan Turabi. "Now

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Mobile operators still charge old rates

ABU SAEED KHAN

Although the recently reduced rates for long distance calls from fixed phones should be equally applicable to mobile phones, cell phone operators have decided to continue charging the old rates till May 15, triggering widespread discontent among subscribers.

From May 1, Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) slashed its NWD (nationwide dialling) and ISD (international subscribers' dialling) tariffs by up to 55 percent.

Since mobile phone users pay for both the airtime and BTTB's long distance rates, they should have rightfully enjoyed the benefit from the rate cut as soon as it came into effect.

But private operators have decided to defer the tariff reduction until May 15 without any apparent reason and published an announcement to that effect in national dailies on Thursday.

Mobile operators pay the long distance tariff to the BTTB after realising phone bills from their subscribers.

GrameenPhone, the largest

mobile operator, has even requested the BTTB and the BTRC (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission) to defer the tariff reduction by two weeks to enable mobile operators to make "necessary changes" in their billing systems.

Talking to this reporter, Ola Ree, managing director of GrameenPhone, blamed the BTTB for not clarifying "many billing parameters" to the mobile operators.

But engineers in the industry believe such issues are addressable within a day and the mobile operators had the last three days of April to do the needful.

"We are discussing how the over-billed amounts during the first weeks of this month could be adjusted," said Fazlur Rahman, an official of Aktel. Shawkat Osman, senior general manager of Sheba Telecom, said the matter would be decided once the company's top management, now on tour abroad, returns to Dhaka.

CityCell has taken a different position in this controversy. Intekhab Mahmud, head of the

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MUNICIPAL POLLS

BNP ahead of AL after second lap

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP is ahead of its arch-rival Awami League (AL) after the second phase of the six-lap municipal elections held on Wednesday and Thursday in 58 municipalities.

Thirty candidates of BNP, 21 of the AL and three of the Jatiya Party (Ershad) have been elected chairmen in the polls amidst allegations of violating electoral rules, sporadic incidents of violence and attempts to cast fake votes.

Two independent and two dissident BNP candidates have also bagged victory in the two-day polls

across the country.

Voters on the third day today will elect the local governments in 24 municipalities. No election was held yesterday.

The municipalities are Birampur, Gobindaganj, Shantahar, Natore, Ullahpara, Sujanagar, Kushtia, Alamdanga, Kaliganj, Norail, Morolganj, Bakerganj, Dhanbari, Nalitabari, Gouripur, Mohanganj, Rajbari, Tungipara, Madaripur, Damudda, Moulvibazar, Matlab, Chatkhal and Raipur.

Our Barisal correspondent adds: Four people, including one police,

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