

US waits on Dhaka's reply to probe offer

STAR REPORT

The US has offered the government to assist in investigating the Chittagong arms seizure of April 2 and is yet to get a response.

The US proposes for the arms haul to be investigated by its customs department to track down the origin and destination of the cache.

"We offered assistance and have not heard from the government. We would like to assist the government and solve the case," US Ambassador Harry K Thomas told The Daily Star Wednesday.

The US government sent one of its customs officials to Chittagong to talk to a key government official in the case. But the official could not offer sufficient information.

"The customs people can truly track down the consignment. They would know who owned the ships that ferried the arms, who loaded the cache and who is the final owner," Thomas said.

When contacted, State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar expressed his ignorance about any US assistance offered.

On April 2, in the country's biggest ever arms haul, police seized a huge cache of heavy weapons and ammunition, including rocket launchers, AK-47 rifles, hand grenades, LMG, SMG, revolver and pistols, at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited jetty.

"We believe the haul was intended to run subversive activities in Bangladesh, as the consignment landed here," Babar told newsmen, hours after he helicopter to the port city in the wake of the seizure of 10 truckloads of arms cache on a tip-off.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which is now

Sonia starts parley to form govt

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

A day after spearheading her party to a stunning victory in parliamentary elections on Thursday, Congress President Sonia Gandhi yesterday launched efforts to put together a coalition government as also to include in it pre-poll regional allies and those outside it even as she gave the strongest-ever hint in public that she would be the next Prime Minister of India.

Sonia, the 58-year-old Italy-born

chief of India's oldest political party which emerged with the highest number of seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha, held a meeting with Congress ally Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar here yesterday morning on government-formation.

She is understood to have suggested to Pawar, a former Congress leader who had quit the party in 1999 on her foreign origin issue, that his party join the proposed Congress-led coalition government.

Congress and NCP had fought the parliamentary polls together in the western state of Maharashtra against BJP-Shiv Sena combine.

The meeting with Pawar is part of Sonia's initiative to take on board like-minded secular parties in the new government. She spoke to the chief of another key regional ally DMK led by M Karunanidhi Thursday night and dispatched her special emissary to meet him in a bid to persuade him to join the coalition government.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



Police pick up five people, including a minor domestic help, over the killing of Awami League lawmaker Ahsanullah Master in a raid on a house in North Badda in Dhaka yesterday. The boy was supposed to be released last night.

PHOTO: STAR

Another student abducted in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Abductors on Thursday night kidnaped yet another student from Harinarayanpur village under sadar upazila, in the third such incident in a week.

One of the two other students meanwhile was released yesterday on payment of a ransom.

Sources said a gang of six abducted Nurus Salam alias Chapal, 18, son of Headmaster of Harinarayanpur High School Nurul Amin, HSC examinee from Jhenidah KC Government College, from his house and demanded a ransom of Tk 2 lakh over cell phone.

Family sources said the gang posing as Chapal's friends called

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Trader shot dead in Razabazar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified assailants yesterday picked up a businessperson and shot him dead near Lake Circus Girls High School in Dhanmondi.

A gang of criminals by six rickshaws went to West Razabazar mosque and picked up Sohail Rana, 22, son of Mohammad Ismail Hossain, after the Magrib prayers.

Rana used to look after one of the six general shops belonging to his family's area.

The victim's father said a group of men called his son out of their house in the evening and he was missing since then.

Harun, the victim's brother, said a gang was demanding toll from Rana, which might have killed him for his refusal to pay.

On receiving information,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Bangla Bhai's outfit has BNP men's blessing?



JULFIKAR ALI MANIK, back from Rajshahi

A deputy minister and other local lawmakers are masterminding from backstage the vigilante action of the Islamic militant outfit, Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), against underground outlaws, locals in the northwest alleged.

The six-year-old JMJB and its lynchpin "Bangla Bhai" were unknown to ordinary people until last month when the Islamist operatives went killing the outlaws of the banned Purbo Banglar Communist

Party (PBCP) to "make the region free from crime".

JMJB's action started in certain upazilas of Rajshahi, Naogaon and Natore after the outlaws popularly known as Sarbahara killed four relatives and friends of Deputy Minister for Land Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu and other parliamentarians in six months.

The apparent support of the local administration and local lawmakers to JMJB's cleansing of Sarbaharas shows the ruling parties have links with the unlawful venture.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Armed cadres now off to Pabna

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Dreaded Operation Commander Bangla Bhai of the so-called Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) started withdrawing his operatives from Rajshahi on Thursday mid-night and dispatching them to Pabna apparently to carry out vigilante action against outlaws.

Witnesses said a large number of JMJB cadres left Bagmara camp in Rajshahi in two minibuses and a truck under the cover of dark.

The JMJB, an Islamic militant outfit, is blamed for killing five underground outlaws in vigilante action in the northwest since April 1.

Police set up at least 10 checkpoints and deployed additional forces in six areas of Rajshahi to ensure security in the absence of

Bangla Bhai, who gave his real name as Siddiqul Islam.

Superintendent of Police Masud Mia said security was beefed up to avert any outlaw attack on the JMJB supporters in backwash.

"Bangla Bhai and his operatives left Hamirkutsa camp in Bagmara and went to Ataikula and Satia in Pabna," a police official confirmed.

At the directive of government high-ups, the superintendent of police ordered the JMJB to stop their vigilante activities in the northwestern district, a senior police official told The Daily Star yesterday. He said the JMJB armed cadres left the area as police stopped supporting the outfit.

Contacted by phone, Bangla Bhai said, "I will return if necessary."

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Savar Textile protests

Savar Textiles in a rejoinder yesterday strongly protested the inclusion of its name in a list of industries, accused of gas pilferage in a probe by a three-member sub-committee of the parliamentary standing committee on energy and mineral resources ministry. Referring to a report headlined "JS probe accuses 24 firms of gas theft" published in The Daily Star on the basis of the parliamentary body's probe report on Friday, Savar Textiles said inclusion of its name was incorrect and baseless.

It said, "for the last 20 years or so we as a client of Titas Gas Company have never once defaulted on our bills nor have we ever adopted any illegal or illicit means to deprive the government exchequer."

"We may mention here that Titas Gas Company after complete

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

First ODI today

RABEED IMAM from St Vincent

The Bangladesh team's think-tank has decided to go into the first one-day international of the three-match series against the West Indies today with the same eleven that won the four opener against the WICB XI by three wickets on Wednesday.

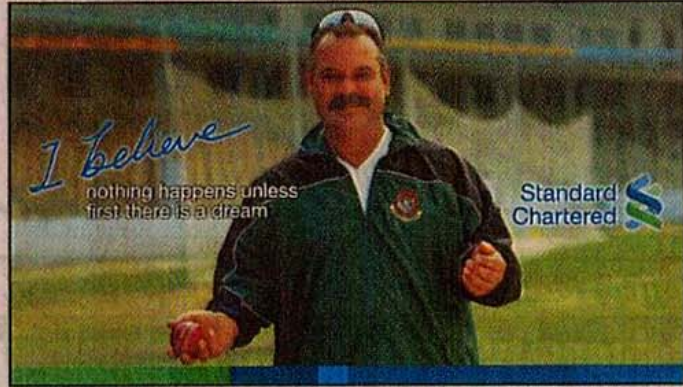
Chief selector and the side's operations manager Faruque Ahmed informed after a meeting on Thursday afternoon where coach Dav Whatmore and captain Habibul Bashar were present, that they felt this was their best possible line-up

for the first of the back-to-back ODIs here.

That means left-handed batsman Faisal Hossain and left-arm spinner Abdur Razaq, who were tipped to play in the series, will have to wait a little longer to make debuts.

The match could be crucial for the classy yet desperately out of sorts Alok Kapali who did his confidence no favours by getting out with an uppish square cut on Wednesday for just three. Opener Shahriar Hossain is also under a little pressure after his first-over duck in that

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



AHSANULLAH MURDER 3 more accused rounded up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday nabbed three more accused in the Ahsanullah Master murder case from a house at north Badda.

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) aided by Badda police raided the house at 3:45pm and arrested the three -- Mahbub, Monir and Dulal. Besides them, police also nabbed the landlord and a servant boy.

"We found all the three in the same room," Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Khalequzzaman, head of the four-member CID team investigating the May-7 killing, told The Daily Star.

That day Awami League (AL) lawmaker and Shramik League Executive President Ahsanullah and a schoolboy was killed and at least five others were injured in a volley of bullets during a public meeting at Naogaon, Tongi.

"The three arrestees rented and entered the house immediately after the killing at Tk 700 a month and since then have never went out," Khalequzzaman said.

The house at Purbanchal of north Badda is a one-storey one that stands on pillars.

The CID team arrested Kabir Hossain, owner of the house, and picked up the teenager domestic help for interrogation. "We will release the boy in the night," a CID officer said in the evening.

From the house, police seized four mobile phones, a VCD, a television, a table fan and six bottles of Phensidy.

Monir, Mahbub and Dulal are known in their community as members of a group of drug pushers allegedly controlled by Nurul Islam Sarker, a local leader of ruling BNP's youth front Jubo Dal. Locals said the gang controlled drug-dealing at

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Armed gang kills two in Mirer Sarai

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two people were killed and at least 15 others injured by an armed group allegedly in the presence of a local Jatiyatabdi Jubo Dal leader at Badullahpara village under Mirer Sarai upazila of the district on Thursday night.

The dead were identified as Fazlul Haq alias Iran, 22, and Joyram Jaloadash, 21.

Of the injured, six were stated to be in critical condition.

Six people were arrested from the spot.

Police and witnesses said trouble started as two members of the infamous Army Khan Group, whom the villagers had earlier driven away from the locality, came back in the evening. The two are allegedly Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) cadres Rafiq and Qamarul. Locals again drove them away.

Later at night, they along with a number of accomplices returned to the village and attacked it opening fire and exploding bombs indiscriminately. They went on the rampage in the village throughout the night.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Accidents kill 12 in 3 dists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twelve people were killed and 28 others injured in separate road accidents in Moulvibazar, Gopalganj and Bogra yesterday.

Six were killed in Moulvibazar, four in Bogra and the rest in Gopalganj.

Our Staff Correspondent from Sylhet reported that two separate road mishaps left six people killed on the Sylhet-Dhaka Highway.

The first accident occurred at Lasna near Satgaon forest area at around 2:00pm when a Sylhet bound minibus from Dhaka collided with a truck, leaving Moulvibazar

Sonali Bank CBA leader Shahidul Islam, 35, Belal Uddin, 34, Shahid Miah, 30, and an unidentified woman aged about 45, dead on the spot and injuring 28 others.

The other mishap took place at Jagannathpur on the highway at about 3:00pm when a pick up van of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) rammed a roadside tree, killing the driver of the vehicle, Ismail Hossain, 40 and office assistant of the BOU, Fazlur Rahman, 42, on the spot.

Driver Ismail hailed from village Bilbo of Gournadi upazila under Barisal while Fazlur Rahman from Kattimari bazaar under Roumari upazila of Kurigram. The bodies

were sent to Open university at Gazipur, sources said.

In Gopalganj, a first class magistrate and his wife were killed in a car crash on Faridpur-Bhanga road in Bhanga upazila of Faridpur district in the morning.

The victims were identified as Mujibur Rahman, magistrate of Gopalganj Collectorate, and his wife Sahin Sultana Pervin.

Mujibur's 12-year-old son Waliur Rahman and car driver were critically injured in the accident. They were admitted to Faridpur Medical College Hospital.

Police said the accident occurred

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

make us proud again

You did it in Zimbabwe. Hope you will do it in West Indies too. Best of luck to Bangladesh National Cricket Team.

GrameenPhone
Official Sponsor of Bangladesh National Cricket Team

Nor'wester kills 3, injures 200 in Netrakona

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

At least three people were killed and over 200 injured as a nor'wester lashed 30 villages of four upazilas in Netrakona Thursday evening.

The dead are Giran, 60, and Rafiqul Islam, 25, of village Hasanpur in Madan upazila and Amir, 8, of village Borail in Netrakona Sadar upazila. All the three died from house collapse.

The worst-hit villages are Borail, Laxmipur, Digjan Banglo, Borni, Amtala, Burihuri, Bashati, Saktir, Hathkondoli of Netrakona Sadar upazila; Madel, Jadavpur, Konapara, Shormusia, Bismupur, Sutazpur of Atpara upazila; Nalla Boaljana, Jalalpur of Bashata upazila and Tiosree, Fatahpur and Hasanpur of Madan upazila.

Official sources said the storm hit the villages at about 6:00pm at a speed of 120 kilometres per hour

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Positive Bangladesh See our special story titled 'the strength within' on page 12.

NEWEST ARRIVAL IN 'TOWN

Weeklong Italian Food Festival from 15 May '04 Inaugurated by His Excellency Dr. Pietro Ballero Ambassador, Republic of Italy to Bangladesh

the finest Italian Restaurant & Cafe WITH

- Pizza, Cake & Pastry
- Broaster Chicken
- Sandwich
- Burger & Light Meal

VILLA VISTA Italian Restaurant & Cafe

Dhanmondi Tower (Near Rapa Plaza), Plot No. - 4A, Road No.-16 New (27 old) Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205. Tel : 8115262 (Opposite Rapa Plaza)