

Alaska wildfire forces hundreds to flee

AP, Fairbanks, Alaska

Hundreds of people -- including about 200 workers at the state's largest gold mine -- fled a wildfire in Alaska's interior and headed toward Fairbanks.

The evacuations were ordered Wednesday afternoon as the winds picked up and the 225,000-acre blaze threatened cabins and clusters of homes.

Firefighters and state troopers went door-to-door and telephoned homes, telling residents to pack their belongings and head for Fairbanks, 30 miles to the south.

Fire officials said the fire was not a threat to Fairbanks, Alaska's second-largest city, with a population of 29,000. The big concern there is dense smoke, which is prompting people with respiratory problems to consider going farther south, said Brett Ricker, a Fairbanks-based spokeswoman with the state Division of Forestry.

"It looks prehistoric here, like a wasteland because it's so smoky," she said Thursday. "The sun is a neon orange ball in the sky, and the sky looks like mud."

About 200 workers at the Fort Knox gold mine north of Fairbanks were among those evacuated, but mine officials said Thursday they were resuming operations with a smaller crew of 15.

"It's a little better than we thought yesterday. The fires are a little bit farther north," said John Wild, general manager of mine owner Fairbanks Gold Mining Inc.

The American Red Cross set up a shelter for displaced residents at a Fairbanks high school. Animals including chickens, reindeer and

nine pregnant pigs were taken to the state fairgrounds. Sled dogs were taken to a fenced baseball park and the homes of local mushers, said Jeanne Olson, manager of the borough animal control.

Chatanika Lodge owner Ron Franklin refused to leave, even though vintage clothes, guns and furs and mining memorabilia were being taken down from the walls in case the place burned.

"I'm sticking here," he said. "I built this place. This is 32 years of my life."

There were 61 active fires Thursday in Alaska, where 331 fires have burned more than 1.1 million acres so far this year.

In Reno, Nev., meanwhile, smoke from wildfires 10 miles to the west cloaked high-rise casinos Thursday.

The complex of four fires crept up to subdivisions near the California-Nevada line, but no evacuations were ordered. The largest of the fires consumed at least 850 acres of sagebrush and scrub pines.

In Arizona, firefighters reinforced lines to keep a 43,000-acre fire away from three mountain towns.

The lightning-caused fire was about four miles away from Payson, a community of about 14,000 about 70 miles northeast of Phoenix. The wildfire was spreading away from Payson and the smaller towns of Strawberry and Pine.

Seventeen buildings, including homes, barns and sheds, were considered threatened by the fire. All the people in the area had voluntarily left by Wednesday, said Mike Johnson, a spokesman for the crew fighting the fire.

Legal battle

FROM PAGE 1 preparing for the legal battle on behalf of the government.

The HC ordered the government on Tuesday to deploy necessary numbers of army personnel at each of the 103 polling centres in Ramna-Tejgaon constituency. Although 314 troops were called out, they were on the move mostly on the roads outside the polling centres and did not mount guard inside.

Acting Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Safur Rahman observed that the court order was violated as the army was not deployed at polling centres. "I hope legal action will be taken against the guilty," he said in an instant reaction to the court order violation.

By-poll to the Dhaka-10 constituency ran into legal roadblocks as Mannan went to the HC seeking the election symbol kula (winnowing fan) after he was denied it by the returning officer.

Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud, who moved for allocation of kula to Mannan and centre-to-centre army deployment, will work as one of the counsels for the Bikalpa Dhara candidate to challenge the validity of the much-talked-about election.

On when the counsels will go to the HC, Rakanuddin told The Daily Star yesterday that they were examining the election and would go to court once the preparation is complete.

Sources said the legal challenge might come on Sunday or Monday, as the main opposition Awami League enforces a dawn-to-dusk hartal today.

Tuesday's HC order on army deployment came after Mannan and three other candidates Abu Saleh Mohammad Kibria, Mazharul Islam and Abu Hamidur Reza Khan filed a writ petition with the court on June 27 for army presence at all polling centres.

In its order, the HC directed the home secretary, defence secretary, principal staff officer of the armed forces division and principal secretary to the prime minister to deploy the army at all polling centres.

The accountability of the respondents was called into question and contempt of court arises, as the HC order was not followed, Rakanuddin said.

Mannan's lawyers also consider filing cases with the election tribunal for allegations including bearing-up and intimidation of Mannan's polling agents, polling centre capture and false balloting.

Two additional attorneys general have been instructed to move the HC if Mannan's lawyers file a contempt petition. Once the rule is issued, the respondents will employ lawyers of their choice.

Sources said the Attorney General's Office remained alert on Thursday for a possible legal battle, fearing any candidate might go to court seeking to stay the election.

Contacted by phone, the family of Attorney General Hassan Arif said he would not talk about the issue.

Quake kills 18

FROM PAGE 12 district near the Iranian border at 1:30 a.m. (1830 GMT).

Residents wailed as bodies were pulled from the rubble in Yigincil, where all the 18 dead were found, Anatolian said. It said there had already been several aftershocks.

"Work is continuing on clearing away the rubble. There is also damage in other villages, but there are only slight injuries there," the official said.

The first television pictures from the scene showed emergency workers carrying the injured into an ambulance while locals looked on amid devastated one-storey houses.

The remote Dogubayazit area is a destination for adventurous travellers who come to visit Mount Ararat and palace ruins on a hill near the main district town.

The Red Crescent aid organisation said it had sent 500 tents and 500 blankets to the area along with two mobile kitchens, Anatolian reported.

Agri Governor Huseyin Yavuzdemir told CNN Turk television he did not think the death toll would rise, because it was summer. Many northerners move to homes in the mountains in summer months to escape the heat.

"The search and rescue is finished... There is no one in the rubble. These are not buildings that can withstand earthquakes, they are made of earth and stone. Some of the houses are made of concrete and those are fine," Yavuzdemir said.

The weather in the area was mild and locals spent the night outside, he said.

Earthquakes are common in Turkey, which is criss-crossed by geological faultlines.

Nine people were killed and dozens injured when a quake of the same magnitude hit Erzurum province in eastern Turkey in March. A massive quake in August 1999 killed some 18,000 people in an industrial area of northwestern Turkey.

Fertiliser, machines

FROM PAGE 12 production of organic fertilisers at all the 12,500 agricultural blocks and doubling of public sector seed production capability from hardly 20 percent now to 40 percent next year are also among the steps to slash farm input cost.

The minister said this while speaking as chief guest at a book-launching ceremony in the capital yesterday.

The Forum for Information Dissemination on Agriculture (FIDA) in cooperation with crop science multinational company Syngenta Bangladesh Limited organised the function at the National Press Club for launching the book titled, 'Windows of Agriculture in Bangladesh.' The book, a compilation of 12 write-ups on core agricultural issues in the country, is the second in series since 2002 published under the 'FIDA-Syngenta Fellowship Programme.'

Minister of State for Agriculture Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir was the special guest at the ceremony.

The function was attended by, among others, heads, directors and scientists of different NARS (national agricultural research system) bodies including Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) and representatives from International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) and Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) and journalists who contributed articles for the book.

Syngenta Managing Director Sarwar Ahmed delivered the welcome address and FIDA General Secretary Reaz Ahmad conducted the programme chaired by Editor of the book Dr M Golam Rahman.

The agriculture minister noted that Bangladesh farmers make the highest expenditure on irrigation in the entire south and southeastern Asia. They spend 56 percent of the cost of paddy production on irrigation against only 26 percent in Thailand, 17 percent in India and six

percent in Vietnam.

"In Andhra State of India, farmers are charged only 0.29 rupee per unit of electricity consumed for irrigation purpose while commercial power rate is 3.50 rupees per unit," Anwar mentioned, explaining how farming and farmers' interests are protected across the world.

The minister said soil fertility in the country has declined to a dangerous level partly because of imbalanced application of chemical fertilisers. "In mid-80s, prices of urea and non-urea fertilisers (TSP, DAP, MP) were at par but later on prices of non-subsidised fertilisers (TSP, DAP, MP) soared to such a level that farmers went for applying too heavy doses of subsidised urea, greatly harming the nutrient balance in soil."

Anwar pointed out non-formal sectors now meet about 80 percent of the seed requirements in the country and their qualities are not guaranteed. The government will now provide as much funds as required to raise quality seed production capability of the state-run BADC and DAE from 20 percent now to 40 percent next year.

The government will also provide poor farmers with low-cost home-grown farm machinery free of cost.

The minister stressed minimising the widening yield-gap of different varieties of paddy at the BRRI and at farmers' level.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir underscored better agricultural marketing and strong farmers unions or farmers co-operatives.

"If we fail to make farming profitable for the farmers, we'll not be able to achieve the millennium development goals," he said.

IRRI Liaison Scientist in Bangladesh Dr Hamid Mia, Dr Abdul Razzak and Jahangir Alam of the BARC, DAE Director General Tarik Hasan and BARI Director General Abdus Sattar also spoke. BADC Chairman Md Ismail, Director Mokhlesur Rahman and former principal of Haji Danesh Agricultural College Md Yasin Ali and many other scientists, academics and researchers were present.

Probe on into Biman's

FROM PAGE 1 bill, bearing the same serial number and charged to the same customer, give different billable weights. In some cases, copies of the same document bearing the same airway bill number name different cargo operators -- a practice quite alien to the industry and reflect the extent of deceit committed by the small-time operators.

One of the airway bills in question, numbered 997-8897-2520, dated May 17 last and charged to M/s Dhaka Trade International, shows a 228kg consignment in five pieces was handled by Darwish Murad Clearing and Shipping Services. Yet another copy of the same bill but dated May 18 shows that M/s Tour Care Travel and Cargo handled 2,880kg involving 25 pieces for the same client. The first copy of the document charges Dh4,455 and the second, Dh54,855 on the same customer.

DETECTION In a letter dated June 23 last, Biman's finance manager in Dubai first pointed out the discrepancy to Biman's controller of accounts and hinted such frauds might have been taking place for quite some time.

He wrote: "Kindly be informed that on receipt of sales report for the month of May 04 on June 15, 2004, regional manager, Dubai informed that cargo sales revenue seems much less than the total cargo handled for the same month and advised me to re-check that the cargo sales figure is correct."

"Accordingly, I re-checked all the airway bills in my office and also visited airport office and checked our airway bills with cargo manifest kept at airport and found weight discrepancy and accordingly raised short collection letter to the GSA and realised AED 1,16,987.35 (Tk 18.54 lakh) involved as short collection for the months of April and May, 04.

"Please note that it took from June 15, 2004 to June 21, 2004 for preliminary re-check of airway bills and cargo manifest from January 03, 2004 will raise final short deposit on receipt of all the cargo manifest kept at the airport office. However, we have asked the GSA to deposit AED 2.50 lakh (Tk 39.62 lakh) for discrepancy during that period. After final checking amount will be settled with GSA," the letter read.

It said the detection led them to re-check previous airway bills with the cargo manifests kept at the airport and identify previous discrepancies, which will be realised accordingly.

Kazi's Dubai Station Manager Kazi Akhtar admitted to The Daily Star that a high-powered investigation team is currently in Dubai to look into the scandal. "We've detected the weight discrepancies after checking the cargo manifests. We have bank guarantees of the GSA. In case of forgery, we can claim the amount from them," the newly appointed station manager said.

Other sources in Dubai confirmed they have checked the shipments of 2003 and 2004 and detected discrepancies amounting to around Tk 1 crore.

Sources at civil aviation and tourism ministry said, based on the probe report, legal actions and other measures will be decided.

Biman's Regional Manager in Dubai Khawaja Jonaid who has recently been called back told The Daily Star the onset of detecting the fraud lies with Biman officials in Dhaka, as they receive both the audit coupon sent from Dubai as well as the second and the third coupons showing the actual volume of goods dispatched.

"By comparing the coupons, it should have been easy for the head office to detect any anomalies in documents and the actual weight of cargo," Jonaid noted.

UN officials stunned to find refugee camp emptied in Sudan

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Sudanese government officials emptied a camp of thousands of refugees hours before UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was to arrive here Thursday, preventing him from meeting some of the hardest-hit victims of the humanitarian crisis in the province of Darfur.

"There may have been 3,000 to 4,000 people here as of 5:00 p.m. yesterday," UN spokesman Fred Eckhard said as he gazed upon the empty camp at Mashtel. "Now, as you can see, no one is here. I can't imagine they spontaneously moved."

The forced removal came a day after Sudanese officials promised Secretary of State Colin Powell that humanitarian aid workers would have unrestricted access to Darfur and agreed to other U.S. demands to avoid possible UN sanctions.

Sudanese officials acknowledged they had moved the refugees, but said it was for their own good.

"We didn't move them because of the secretary general's visit," said Anwar Ibrahim, the state minister for Darfur. "It is because we were trying our best to help them."

As many as 30,000 people have died and 1 million more have been driven from their homes by a scorched-earth campaign carried out by pro-government Arab militias. The militias, called the Janjaweed, were recruited to wipe out a rebel insurrection that began 16 months ago, but they have unleashed their fury on civilians who belong to the same tribes as the rebels.

On Wednesday, Powell warned the government to rein in the militias and to create a safe environment so that refugees can return to their homes. The United States is circulating a draft resolution at the United Nations calling for an arms embargo and travel restrictions on Janjaweed leaders, and possibly Sudanese officials, if the government does not fulfill its promises to end the crisis.

On Thursday, Annan, along with UN and Sudanese officials, arrived in the province to get a firsthand look at the plight of the displaced.

At the Zam Zam refugee camp, Annan talked with tribal elders. Senior Sudanese officials listened to every word.

Ahmed Noor Mohammed, one of the elders, was asked if women were being abused in the camp. He rattled off long sentences in Arabic.

"Some women face some difficulties. Masked men, even soldiers... Annan's translator began. Before he could finish the sentence, Sudanese government ministers and officials cut him off, saying he had translated it wrong.

RAB swings FROM PAGE 12 Superintendent of Police in Sylhet Mustafa Kamal at an opinion exchange meeting with reporters yesterday said, "All steps will be taken to keep law and order situation under control here."

Calling for cooperation from all, SP said, "We want to keep the holy place free of terrorist activities."

SP Kamal took over the office after it remained vacant for over a month since SP Shahadat Hossain was suspended three days after the grenade attack at Hazrat Shahjalal Shrine on May 21. Three people were killed and 70 injured in the attack including Bangladesh-born British High Commissioner Anwarullah Chowdhury.

Rajshahi Zone Deputy Commissioner Abdul Rahim was appointed as SP of Sylhet at first but soon was replaced by Habiganj SP Mostafa Kamal.

Marlon Brando FROM PAGE 12 later professed not to know what had happened to the award.

In more recent years, Brando's brilliance as an actor was overshadowed by his eccentric reclusiveness, the turmoil in his family life and financial disputes.

Christian Brando, his son by his first wife, Welsh actress Anna Kashfi, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for the 1990 murder of his half-sister Cheyenne's boyfriend. Cheyenne later committed suicide, in 1995, at the age of 25.

Brando, who was paid a then-staggering \$14 million for his walk-on performance in 1978's "Superman," remained enmeshed in legal disputes over money up until his final weeks.

He poured millions into Tetiaroa, a South Seas atoll he bought in 1966 and where he spent much of the 1980s living out a boyhood fascination with Tahiti rekindled during the shooting of "Mutiny on the Bounty."

Movies, he said, he made only for the money. "Acting is an empty and useless profession," he said.

Still, Brando inspired a generation of beatniks and rebel actors, including James Dean.

Harris FROM PAGE 1 poling centre, the prime minister's adviser asserted, "The government acted in line with the High Court directive and we have evidence of it."

"As the returning officer and all the presiding officers have certified the voting as fair, there can't be any doubt about it," he maintained.

Guardians weary

FROM PAGE 1 fabric that was not easily available in the market.

The English medium schools spiked all fees last year when Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman mentioned that the private schools would be brought under the tax net. But the government did not impose the tax back then.

Some disgruntled guardians of the students of Scholastica and Bangladesh International Tutorial (BIT) held press conferences last month to accuse the management of the institutions of 'irrational hikes in fees and other charges'.

As Scholastica did not budge from its stand, the guardians went to court, seeking to eliminate 'irregularities'. The guardians pleaded for a court order to ensure good standards of education and congenial academic atmosphere.

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Held militants

FROM PAGE 1

Abdur Rahman, students of Barguna Alia Madrasa. Waliullah was identified as chief regional coordinator and Mustafa Hassan as local coordinator of the group.

Police sources said all the 33 arrestees identified themselves as members of Islamic Mujahid Party (IMP). A list of 50 cadres with secret code numbers was recovered from them. The arrestees mostly gave wrong or partial address.

Syed Saifuddin Almi, officer-in-charge of Barguna Sadar Police Station, said it was yet to be confirmed if the arrestees are linked to the JMB of Bangla Bhai or any other militant organisation.

Sources in security agencies seeking anonymity however said they have sufficient evidence of the arrestees' links to the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Among the arrestees, Masumbillah was identified as

Jamaat-backed Islami Chhatra Shibir, Salauddin is younger brother of a district Jamaat leader, Saiful Islam is son of the district Jamaat chief and Shahidul Islam is a brother of district BNP leader Fariduddin Forkan, and is involved with Jamaat politics, they mentioned.

People of remote Shialia area under Barguna Sadar Upazila caught the 33 cadres from local Ahmed Master Bari Mosque and handed them over to police on Wednesday. They were taking arms training.

Jasimuddin of Shialia, a madrasa teacher at Mohamadpur in Dhaka, is also believed to have links to the group.

Meanwhile, security sources also reported on June 17 similar training programmes of Islamic militants at Hafeza Madrasa at Barguna. This led to an abrupt stop of the programme and the Madrasa authorities denied any connection with it.

Bangla Bhai men

FROM PAGE 1

murdered in the morning of June 30. A Rajshahi police official quoting witnesses said Abdul Kuddus of Kathalbaria along with other masked men kidnapped Yasin from his cousin's house and beat him to death at a madrasa in Kudapara.

Sources said Iswardi police picked up the three on suspicion from Snigdha Boarding at 1:20am on July 1. They registered at the hotel at 11:00pm on June 30, 11 hours after Yasin was slain.

The militants were released from the police station at around 2:00pm on July 1 after Bahadur district Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Secretary Habibur Rahman Tota and local Jamaat-e-Islami leader Amzad Hossain in a meeting with police officials secured the release. The meeting took place at a police official's residence in Iswardi, sources said.

Officer-in-Charge of Iswardi Police Station Azimuddin told that they had let the arrestees go under custody of BNP leader Habibur Rahman, as there was no allegation against them.

Habibur Rahman Tota claimed the three belong to BNP and told Prothom Alo that he negotiated their

release following instructions of Deputy Minister for Land Affairs Ruhul Kuddus Talukdar Dulu.

Superintendent of Police in Pabna Khurshid Hossain told The Daily Star that the OC had the judicial authority to take such decision.

Rajshahi SP Masud Mia said Yasin was a member of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party and was wanted by the law enforcers in connection with two murders. He was not accused in any criminal case, but some arrested outlaws informed police of his involvement in those murders, the SP added.

Replying to a query on the safety of Rashid, Solesman and Mithu who are the next targets according to a hit list by JMB, SP Masud said they too had been searching for Rashid and the other two, but to no avail.

Local sources, however, claimed the three still stay at their homes, as was Yasin before being killed by the JMB.

Meanwhile, forensic experts of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital said autopsy report suggests that Yasin died of 'excessive torture'. "His body bore nearly two dozen strokes of lethal weapons and many of his bones were badly fractured," said a forensic expert.

60pc votes cast

FROM PAGE 1

"There were simply too many instances of false voting and other interference that prevent us from calling this event free and fair," the statement cited Kalimullah as saying.

An observer of Bamasop, Babul Auhikary, told The Daily Star he found supporters of the ruling alliance candidate active in front of magistrate and plainclothesmen inside the polling centre at Bangladesh Institute of Ceramics, all of whom were sharing lunch packets among themselves.

"When I wanted to know his name, the magistrate said it was not required," Babul said.

False balloting was a dominant feature of the election, said Bangladesh Human Rights Commission (BHRC) in a press statement signed by its Director Nasrin Ahmed.

The BHRC observers found environment at the polling centres peaceful, free of violence, but reported a thin turnout of voters. They found no queue of voters at Ispahani College centre in Moghbazar where only 20 percent of the votes were cast until 1:00pm.

The number of ruling alliance supporters far surpassed that of genuine voters in and around most of the centres, the statement said, adding genuine voters were far less in number than the votes cast.

Not more than 35 percent voters took part in the election, it noted.

The commission asked the government to retake the by-polls, as voters' presence was less than 40 percent. It also recommended introduction of voter identity card immediately, revision of election laws and codes, and empowerment of the Election Commission.

Greece sizzle in ecstasy

FROM PAGE 12

Athenians assembled there less than an hour after the match was over. As many as 100,000 assembled in the Salonica, Greece's second-biggest town, local police told AFP.

Once the goal went in, champagne bottles were tossed into the air and some ecstatic fans kissed the asphalt. Street sellers flogging Greek flags to the celebrating crowds ran out of merchandise in a matter of minutes.

"I just can't believe it. Huge crowds poured out on the streets as soon as the final whistle blew," said engineer Costas Rantzos, 34, from the northern city of Drama which was immediately awash with celebrations, just like any other city and village throughout the nation, according to television pictures.

And optimism was sky-high for the final, a rematch of the opening match of the tournament in which the Greeks announced their intent to surprise with a 2-1 victory over the stunned Portuguese.

"We won against them once, so why shouldn't we do it again?" Rantzos said.

"The victory will be good advertising for the country ahead of the Olympics," Georgia Kasme, an

Athens student, told AFP.