

Pull out Iraq troops or face attacks

Top militant tells Japan

REUTERS, Dubai

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an Islamic militant with suspected ties to al-Qaeda, has demanded that Japan pull its troops out of Iraq or face attacks, according to a statement posted on an Islamist Website.

"This message is directed to the Japanese government. Do what the Philippines has done because no one else can help you... Your fate will be like that of the Americans and others," read the statement by Zarqawi's al-Tawhid and Jihad group, posted on a Web site that has carried previous messages of his.

"We will not tolerate anyone who did not come to help the Iraqi people but to protect the Americans," added the statement dated Tuesday.

Japan has 550 non-combat troops in Iraq.

The warning coincided with the release in Iraq of Filipino truck driver Angelo de la Cruz a day after Manila withdrew its small contingent of troops a month early in response to demands from kidnappers who had threatened to behead him.

Zarqawi also warned Muslim and Arab states against sending troops to Iraq or supporting the U.S.-led coalition and Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's government. He issued the

same warning to Arab and Muslim companies operating in Iraq.

"This message is especially directed to Pakistan, Jordan, Turkey, Iran, Gulf Arab and Middle East states, to Indonesia, Malaysia and all Muslim countries... We warn you for the last time that we will strike with an iron fist anyone who backs the Americans and Allawi and his gang," it said.

Jordanian-born Zarqawi has offered a reward of \$282,000 (179,700 pounds) this week for the killing of Iraq's premier who he described in a statement as an "American agent".

He also urged Arab and Muslim soldiers to reject orders to serve in Iraq if their governments ask them.

"To the soldiers of Arab and Muslim states we advise you to revolt if you are sent to Iraq. If you do not comply then columns of cars rigged with explosives will be awaiting you. The list of people ready to become martyrs is full and will not deplete. God willing," Zarqawi said in his statement.

The Jordanian-born militant's group has claimed deadly suicide bombings, assassinations of Iraqi officials and the kidnapping, beheading and killings of a Bulgarian, South Korean and American hostage.

At least 60 people have been kidnapped in Iraq and reported freed since April.

Sarbahara leader held, 7 surrender after gunfight with police

UNB, Rajshahi

A leader of the outlawed sarbahara Party was arrested after gunfight with police at Pochamaria village in Charghat upazila in the early hours of yesterday.

Jalal, injured with bullets in the leg, was arrested with a loaded pistol. After his arrest, seven operatives of the underground outfit named Gafur, Mobin, Rabiul, Fazal, Salam, Khaleq and Kader surrendered, while others fled away, police said.

Tipped-off, police surrounded the house of one Abdus Salam at the village at 3:00am where the Sarbahara men were holding a meeting.

Sensing presence of the police, the outlaws opened fire. Police returned fire, leading to a shootout between the two sides for half an hour.

Pakistan vows to pursue peace with India

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's new prime minister has vowed to pursue peace with rival India and resolve their decades-old dispute over Kashmir at the heart of hostilities between the nuclear-armed South Asian neighbours.

Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, who became prime minister last month for an interim period only, told a seven-nation regional meeting of foreign ministers yesterday that the resumption of dialogue between Pakistan and India augured well.

Pakistani and Indian diplomats have had informal talks on the sidelines of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) economic forum being held in Islamabad.

"I want to assure all members of SAARC and indeed the world that Pakistan is committed to pursuing peace with India," Hussain said.

"I am happy to report that with the vision and the will Pakistan has under the leadership of President (Pervez) Musharraf, we have embarked upon a meaningful effort to resolve all differences and disputes with India including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir."

Despite positive official statements, there is little tangible sign of how India and Pakistan intend to bridge their differences over Kashmir, which they both claim.

Tens of thousands of people have died in a 15-year rebellion in Indian Kashmir that New Delhi blames on Pakistani militants but which Islamabad says is a struggle against Indian rule in the Muslim-majority area.

In the latest violence, suspected Muslim insurgents killed a retired soldier and four members of his family, including his five-year-old son, on Tuesday.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) said everyone it interviewed in a recent mission to Pakistan-controlled Kashmir called for a greater say for Kashmiris in the peace dialogue, an idea Pakistan supports but India opposes for the time being.

"We also found a convergence amongst all shades of Kashmiris that there should be an intra-Kashmir dialogue," HRCP's chairman Tahir Mohammad Khan told a news conference after the four-day mission, which concluded on Monday.

A total of around 14 million people live in the whole of Kashmir.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmod Kasuri said peace with India was key to unlocking the region's economic potential.

The SAARC countries, with a population of around 1.4 billion, form one of the world's poorest regions. Besides India and Pakistan, the group includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The police arrested Goshai Bari Union Parishad (UP) member Shah Jalal on Tuesday for his alleged roles in misappropriation of relief.

Although WDB officials filed a general diary with Dhunat Police Station accusing unnamed saboteurs of cutting the dam, local lawmaker Golam Mohammad Siraj accused some newspapers of publishing 'false' reports linking some people to the sabotage.

Our Brahmanbaria correspondent said: At least 13 people drowned in floodwaters in five upazilas in the district in a week. All roads including the Dhaka-Agartala Road have gone under floodwater.

Medium-term erosion has turned serious leaving 1,500 people homeless and threatening to displace about 1,000 others.

The floods in Barisal, Bhola and Patuakhali worsened in the last 24 hours, our Barisal correspondent said.

Our Moulvibazar correspondent reported that all six upazilas in the district are submerged and the water level in the rivers is going up.

The floods hit 58 of 65 unions in Manikganj and all 13 unions in Hariampur upazila, our Manikganj correspondent reports.

About 62,000 houses and crops on 1,31,648 hectares were damaged and diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases have broken out in the areas affected about 300 people.

Our Pabna correspondent reported that 40 unions in eight upazilas went under water in the last 24 hours. Officials said the floods damaged 6,500 houses and parts of 35,000 houses.

A correspondent from Sherpur adds: Three more people have drowned in floodwaters since Sunday as the flood situation deteriorated in the district.

Auditor general's

FROM PAGE 1

As the auditor general's office launched departmental action against the officer, the Public Accounts Committee of the Jatiya Sangsad did not discuss the issue in detail yesterday.

The auditor general lodged an appeal with the parliamentary body on July 7 seeking its protection against violation of constitutional rights of his office by the railway division.

Asif has already sent a letter to Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman expressing his concern over the issue.

The office of the auditor general has prepared a list of alleged corruption by Rokeya who is now deputy controller and auditor general (reserve).

Rokeya violated the constitution as she herself disposed of four audit reports ignoring the approval of the Public Accounts Committee and the auditor general, the allegations say.

The constitution has empowered the parliamentary body to dispose of all pending audit objections, but Rokeya as the director general of post and telecommunications (audit) exercised their power without legal

authority.

Rokeya as the senior finance controller (army) released 13 officials for not rebating vat amounting to Tk 66 lakh to contractors.

As the additional director general of the railway division, she gave approval for the purchase of two vehicles violating her legal jurisdiction.

On the non-cooperation of the ADG of the railway division, Communications Secretary Shafiqul Islam told the meeting that they had nothing to do with the officer.

"We don't have administrative control over officials coming from the audit cadre," a meeting source quoted the secretary as saying.

The parliamentary body urged all ministries to cooperate with the auditor general's office and give them access to necessary documents.

"The committee will send its resolution to all ministries asking for cooperation to the auditor general's office," Advocate Harun Al Rashid, chairman of the committee, told The Daily Star.

The committee also discussed some audit objections to the railway division.

Injuries led

FROM PAGE 1

A three-member forensic team of Dr Mohammad Salman, Dr Siddiqur Rahman and Dr Shamsul Alam of Gazipur Sadar Hospital submitted the report to Gazipur Civil Surgeon yesterday.

The report on the death at Tongi Hospital said shock in the internal organs by external injuries caused cardiac arrest to claim his life.

The autopsy report, sent to the Superintendent of Police in Gazipur Atikul Islam in the day, matched with the inquest carried out by Magistrate AKM Sohel on Friday that said Sumon's body wore multiple injury marks all over.

Sumon's family claimed he was subjected to 'inhuman torture' in the Rab custody and died a couple of hours after arrest at his house.

Rab, however, claimed he was nabbed during extortion of protection money in front of a hotel.

Both Atikul and Officer-in-Charge of Tongi Police Station Chowdhury Tarikul Islam denied receiving the report.

The main opposition Awami League and its front organisations staged a procession and a rally in Natun Bazar in the morning to protest Sumon's death.

AL wants

FROM PAGE 12

other," Hamid added.

He said the dam was protecting people in Dhunat, Sariakandi and Kaziur areas from flood. Abdul Hamid who visited the area recently told the reporters that such incidents will continue to occur if the government fails to punish the criminals who left thousands of people flood affected.

He also expressed his grave concern over the loss of lives, destruction of property and the deteriorating flood situations of many districts.

He said when people in the flood-hit areas are passing their days in misery, the government seems to be reluctant to stand beside the helpless people.

Abdul Hamid also described a minister's observation as "foolish" that claimed there was no flood and the newspapers were publishing pictures of flood that occurred earlier.

AL leaders Abdul Mannan, Ashim Kumar Uki and BM Mozammel Haque were also present at the press conference.

Man arrested

FROM PAGE 1

Of them, Minar died at Kushtia General Hospital on July 11, sources added.

Rab officials handed over Anwar and Juman to police soon after Minar's death. Both were undergoing treatment at the same hospital, police added.

Families of Juman and Minar claimed that the crackdown force tortured them in a Rab camp and both died due to torture.

In another incident in Meherpur Sadar upazila in Kushtia, unknown criminals abducted a college student on Sunday, locals said.

Khalequzzaman Manik, a roommate, told police that a gang picked up Humayan Kabir Pintu, 23, second-year honours student of chemistry at Kushtia Government University College, sometime after 2:30pm.

A man called Pintu's elder brother Sangram Hossain, an employee of Meherpur Municipality, over his cell phone on Monday and demanded Tk 5 lakh ransom.

Sangram filed a case with Kushtia Sadar Police Station.

Army officer

FROM PAGE 1

gave the exemption orders on a petition by Acting Principal Staff Officer (PSO) of the Armed Forces Division at the Prime Minister's Office Brigadier General Illias Iftekhar Rasul.

The army officer and three other top government officials are facing contempt charges for violating the court order. However, Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, Home Secretary Omar Faroque and Defence Secretary KM Ehsanul Huq will appear in court.

On Monday, the army officer went to the High Court and signed court documents before an affidavit commissioner.

In the petition, the army officer prayed for exemption from initial personal appearance in court. He said, "... [I] diligently obeyed the (directive) of the court in letter and spirit and the question of disobedience to (court's) orders was far from [my] mind and I [reiterate] [my] highest respect to the court."

Dr Kamal Hossain, lawyer for BDB candidate Abdul Mannan who filed the contempt petition, opposed the move and told the bench the constitution has given no-one but the president immunity from appearing in court.

TH Khan, lawyer of the petitioner, agreed to Kamal's argument, but said according to the constitution, an investigation should be initiated before the court appearance of the respondents in question.

He cited articles 102 and 108 of the constitution and contended the civil court has no scope to try army men who are governed by the Army Act and Rules.

Barrister Amir-UI Islam and Advocate MK Rahman also assisted Dr Kamal and Advocate Khandakar Mahbubuddin Ahmed also moved for the petitioner.

Filipino, Egyptian

FROM PAGE 12

Egyptian driver Mohammed al-Gharabawi was freed after the Saudi firm he worked for met kidnappers' demands by promising to stop doing work in Iraq.

"In the beginning, in the first few days, I was threatened," Gharabawi said at the Egyptian embassy in Baghdad late on Monday. "It was a real threat to me; they were shouting at me and pushing me with guns."

A group led by Zarqawi seized two Bulgarians earlier this month and sent video footage to Al Jazeera television showing one of them being beheaded. Hopes that the second is alive are fading.

A Turk may also have been taken hostage in Iraq, colleagues said Monday.

Zarqawi, whose group has also claimed responsibility for many of the deadliest bombings in Iraq, is the US military's prime target in the country, with a \$25 million price on his head.

VETERINARIANS

Four veterinarians were killed and three wounded when a roadside bomb exploded yesterday in the path of their bus near the flashpoint town of Baquba, northeast of Baghdad, a hospital official said.

The minibus, which was transporting nine veterinary surgeons, hit the bomb in Ghalabia, 20 km west of Baquba, said Ali Ibrahim, the head of the nearby Al-Khalis hospital.

Three of the vets died on the spot and another en route to a hospital in

Baquba, Ibrahim said, adding that two others were in serious condition and a fourth was only slightly hurt.

Faycal Yassin, 23, one of those who survived, said two Iraqi national guard vehicles overtook them just prior to the explosion and may have been the intended target.

Baquba, 60km from Baghdad, is an area renowned for anti-US sentiment and is a hotbed of violence against the new Iraqi security services.

COUNCIL MEMBER

The Iraqi council member running for governor in the southern port city of Basra was killed as he left for work last morning, along with his driver and bodyguard, an Iraqi official said.

Hazim al-Aynachi was pulling out of his driveway when gunmen opened fire on his car. Another person was injured, said council head Abdul Bari Faiyek.

Faiyek blamed the killing on opposition to elections for a local governor which were due to occur Tuesday, but were delayed in response to the shooting.

"Many threats have been directed to the eight council members nominated to the post," Faiyek said, adding that another councilman escaped an assassination attempt on Monday.

The shooting was the latest salvo by insurgents determined to undermine the country's post war reconstruction.

(Reuters, AFP and AP)

Business strike

FROM PAGE 1

on Monday made some decisions to help the traders, the shop owners should not stick to the strike.

"The FBCCI would further negotiate with the NBR to resolve the issues. In running our businesses, we have already been facing hartals and other disruptions from the political parties too often. It therefore is unfortunate if businesspeople themselves enforce strike at a time when most of their demands are already met and we are still in negotiation," Mintoo said.

The BSOP at a press conference Monday called a daylong strike for today in Dhaka and a half-day one in Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna cities and the district towns.

Acting on Prime Minister Khaleida Zia's instructions, the NBR on Monday withdrew the arrest power vested with Vat inspectors, while retaining that of assistant commissioners.

Following protest from businesses, the NBR at the meeting with the FBCCI Monday also exempted importers with outstanding VAT from paying the arrears at once.

The NBR also decided to allow the importers to clear their goods seized at ports upon payment of 30 percent of the arrears. The rest 70 percent of the arrears could be paid in installments by March 31 next year.

The NBR said the country's importers owe Tk 400 crore in VAT to the national exchequer. It also

extended the deadline for self-assessed VAT return by retail-level taxpayers to August 31 this year from July 31, considering the current flood crisis.

Talking to The Daily Star last night BSOP Convenor M Helal Uddin said the NBR negotiations with the FBCCI taskforce had failed to meet their core demands to stop collection of 1.5 percent VAT at import level and introduction of package system for VAT payment at retail level.

"So, we have decided to go ahead with the strike programme. We appreciate the prime minister's instructions to curtail the arrest power of VAT inspectors and hope she will also fulfil the rest of our reasonable demands," he said.

However, President of Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity (shop owners' association of Bangladesh) Amir Hossain Khan said, "Our association has nothing to do with the strike. It is entirely a programme of the BSOP, which involves importers, indentors, assemblers, retailers, wholesalers and others."

The minimum annual VAT for shops in the capital is Tk 4,200 and an additional 15 percent for higher income. The FBCCI gave a list of only 7,500 shops of the city, while the shop owners' organisation estimate there are 200,000 shops.

The government introduced VAT in 1991 for different businesses, which in 1997 was extended to retail level.

Sylhet airport remains

FROM PAGE 1

Some contingents from Jalalabad Cantonment joined the relief operation in Chhatka upazila and some more from Comilla Cantonment were on the way to Sylhet to join them to carry out relief work in Companganj, Kanaighat, Gowainghat and Sadar upazilas in Sylhet.

Rail links between Sylhet and other districts remain snapped since Monday night as the rail stations went under knee-deep water.

Train service up to Kulaura junction was on and all intercity and express trains in and out of Dhaka and Chittagong are now running up to Kulaura.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre said the floods in the north and northeast are likely to worsen as different rivers surged because of downpour (twinned with upstream overflows).

Hundreds of people living on Rajshahi shoals started moving to town or other places for safety as the surging Padma flooded a vast tract of lowlands and shoals.

Floodwaters inundated an exploratory gas field of state-run Bapex at Srikail in Muradnagar upazila in Comilla, seriously damaging the drilling equipment.

Officials said the gas structure would not be affected by the waters, without giving details on the extent of damage to the costly rig and other drilling machinery.

Thousands of people in the flood-hit districts are living with a little or no food and relief is yet to reach them. Torrential rains added to their woes.

Rushing waters blasted eight holes in the 10-kilometre DND (Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra) flood control embankment on Monday, as driving rains and upstream overflows sent most rivers around the capital surging above the danger mark.

The Water Development Board (WDB), Wasa and Roads and Highways officials along with locals plugged the holes at Bamoli, Konapara, Deilla, Matuail and Karim Jute Mill points.

DEATH BY WATER

According to news dispatches from the flood-ravaged districts, at least 23 more people died in the last week in different places, taking the death toll to 93 since the beginning of monsoon, blamed for the deluge in two other South Asian countries India and Nepal.

Papiya, 3, Fatema, 5, and Osman Ali, 55, of Agatalukandi village in Sylhet died of diarrhoea yesterday and

about 100 other villagers became ill with the waterborne disease. Locals found the bodies, one covered with funeral clothes, floating in floodwaters.

The body of Abdul Rashid, upazila food controller of Gowainghat, who was missing in a boat-capsize on Sunday, was retrieved on Monday.

Our Bogra correspondent reports: Thousands of embankment sabotage victims in Dhunat upazila in Bogra did not get any relief since the July 14 incident.

The local administration said officials distributed 44 tonnes of rice among the people in Bhandarbari and Goshai Bari, still under water.

The police arrested Goshai Bari Union Parishad (UP) member Shah Jalal on Tuesday for his alleged roles in misappropriation of relief.

Although WDB officials filed a general diary with Dhunat Police Station accusing unnamed saboteurs of cutting the dam, local lawmaker Golam Mohammad Siraj accused some newspapers of publishing 'false' reports linking some people to the sabotage.

Our Brahmanbaria correspondent said: At least 13 people drowned in floodwaters in five upazilas in the district in a week. All roads including the Dhaka-Agartala Road have gone under floodwater.

Medium-term erosion has turned serious leaving 1,500 people homeless and threatening to displace about 1,000 others.

The floods in Barisal, Bhola and Patuakhali worsened in the last 24 hours, our Barisal correspondent said.

Our Moulvibazar correspondent reported that all six upazilas in the district are submerged and the water level in the rivers is going up.

The floods hit 58 of 65 unions in Manikganj and all 13 unions in Hariampur upazila, our Manikganj correspondent reports.

About 62,000 houses and crops on 1,31,648 hectares were damaged and diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases have broken out in the areas affected about 300 people.

Our Pabna correspondent reported that 40 unions in eight upazilas went under water in the last 24 hours. Officials said the floods damaged 6,500 houses and parts of 35,000 houses.

A correspondent from Sherpur adds: Three more people have drowned in floodwaters since Sunday as the flood situation deteriorated in the district.

Tigers' trial by India

FROM PAGE 1

West Indies in the Caribbean last month.

The Tigers' management however surprised many by resting pace spearhead Tapash Baisya and deciding to give Tareq Aziz, the new ball along with left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak.

"Don't get surprised if we do something different tomorrow. Tareq will open the attack and I won't hesitate to give Razzak a chance to bowl at the other end inside the first ten overs," said Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar on his first-choice bowlers.

Razzak was on Sunday reported by match referee Roshan Mahanama for a suspect action against Pakistan. But Bashar was unperturbed by the controversy surrounding the 22-year-old.

"I've told him to go on with his normal style of bowling. If he changes his action now, he will never know what was wrong."

"Our plan remains the same. We can't go for runs early on these wickets. So we will try to keep wickets intact and slog later," said the Bangladesh captain adding that Javed's loss was a big blow for the team.

"These things can happen. Hewas in form but now we'll have to do without him."

BANGLADESH: Mohammad Ashraf, Manzoorul Islam, Habibul Bashar, Rajin Saleh, Alok Kapali, Faisal Hossain, Khaled Mashud, Mohammad Rafique, Khaled Mahmud, Abdur Razzak and Tareq Aziz.

Saarc FMs talk

FROM PAGE 12

after a 30-month hiatus and the 2002 confrontation that almost erupted into their fourth war.

"Pakistan has under the leadership of President Musharraf embarked on making meaningful efforts to overcome all differences and disputes with India including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir," Shujaat said.

"Let us resolve that Saarc must become a symbol of peace and progress, not only to ensure stability in South Asia but to win the hearts and minds of the people of this region."

Exploratory talks among senior officials since the January summit have brought new momentum to the normally sluggish 19-year old forum, which also groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

"Saarc has started to exude new confidence and its international profile has enhanced," Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri said in his opening address.

The seven nations represent one-fifth of humanity and one of the world's poorest regions.

Tensions between South Asia's giants India and Pakistan have been blamed for crippling trade and development among South Asia's poverty-stricken 1.4 billion people, who earn an average 450 dollars a year.

The two-day meeting is focussed on reducing poverty by freeing up trade, sharing energy, promoting investment and jointly developing information technology and telecommunications.

The foreign ministers will also push forward a free trade