

# 6 more taken hostages by Iraq militants

AP, Baghdad

A militant group said yesterday it had taken six more hostages -- three Indians, two Kenyans and an Egyptian -- and would behead them if their countries did not immediately announce the withdrawal of their citizens from Iraq. The US death toll since the start of the war rose to 900 when a roadside bomb killed a soldier.

The seizure of the hostages came a day after a Filipino truck driver was released in exchange for Manila's withdrawal of its 51-member troop contingent -- a move criticized by Washington and other allies as encouraging more abductions.

Those fears seemed to be realised with the new kidnappings.

In a statement given to The Associated Press, the group, calling itself "The Holders of the Black Banners," said it had abducted the six truckers and would behead one

of them every 72 hours starting at 8 p.m. (noon EDT) yesterday if their nations did not pull out of Iraq and the company they work for did not close its branch here.

"We have warned all the countries, companies, businessmen and truck drivers that those who deal with American cowboy occupiers will be targeted by the fires of the Mujahedeen," the statement said. "Here you are once again transporting, goods, weapons and military equipment that backs the U.S. Army."

None of the countries are part of the 160,000-member coalition force in Iraq, however Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi appealed last week to Iraq and Egypt to join the coalition and send troops.

More than 60 foreigners have been taken hostage in Iraq in recent months.

Also yesterday, U.S. allies Poland, Japan and Bulgaria rejected threats

of new attacks by militants if they don't pull their troops out of Iraq.

In violence Wednesday, a car bomb went off in eastern Baghdad, killing at least three people and wounding one, witnesses said.

New clashes between U.S. forces and insurgents in a residential area near the city of Ramadi killed five Iraqis and wounded 17 others, said Dr. Mohammed Ali of Ramadi emergency hospital. Some of the casualties occurred when a U.S. military helicopter attacked a building in the area near Ramadi, 70 miles west of Baghdad.

The U.S. death toll as counted by The Associated Press reached 900 with the report by Maj. Neal O'Brien of the 1st Infantry Division, who said the bomb killed the American soldier shortly after midnight during a patrol in a Bradley fighting vehicle in Duluiyah, 45 miles north of Baghdad.

## Natwar, Kasuri talk

FROM PAGE 12

Natwar Singh, on his first visit to Pakistan as foreign minister, and his counterpart Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri were expected to touch on the 56-year-old territorial dispute over Kashmir, the thorny issue at the heart of their rivalry and the cause of two of their three wars, and to review the progress of resumed dialogue.

Dialogue between Pakistan and India was reborn after a 30-month hiatus at an earlier regional summit in Islamabad in July, when President Pervez Musharraf and then Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee struck a landmark agreement to restart talks on all issues including Kashmir.

Since then the South Asian foes have held two rounds of talks on peace and security, including confidence-building measures and Kashmir.

Those talks resulted in a joint pledge to "continue the sustained and serious dialogue to find a peaceful, negotiated final settlement" of the Kashmir dispute.

Singh vowed on his arrival in Islamabad Monday to "take the peace process further," saying he had brought with him "a message of goodwill" from the Indian government.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Chaudhry Shujaat told the opening of the regional summit Tuesday that his government was committed to making peace with India.

"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," he said.

A spokesman for the Indian High Commission in Islamabad said Singh, a former envoy to Pakistan, was paying a "courtesy call" on Kasuri.

"It is a courtesy call on the sidelines of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit by the foreign minister of India on the foreign minister of Pakistan," the spokesman told AFP.

The two sides' foreign secretaries met on Monday to lay the ground for the ministers' talks. They discussed progress in confidence-building measures and a proposed bus service between their respective zones in Kashmir, Pakistan's foreign secretary Riaz Kohhar said.

Six other rounds of talks have been scheduled from July 28, starting with two days of talks in Islamabad on a controversial dam on the Jhelum river, which is sourced in Indian-ruled Kashmir but feeds Pakistan.

Three rounds of talks are slated for the first week of August in New Delhi, followed by talks on terrorism and drug trafficking in Islamabad August 10 to 11 and economic talks on August 11-12.

Kashmir, divided between India and Pakistan and claimed in full by both, caused two of their three wars and nearly triggered a fourth conflict in 2002.

Relations began to thaw in April last year after Vajpayee's offer of dialogue and both countries embarked on reciprocal confidence building measures.

## High cholesterol key to drugmaker profits

REUTERS, New York

Pfizer Inc. yesterday posted solid quarterly earnings on surging sales of cholesterol treatment Lipitor, while results of rivals Merck & Co. and Schering-Plough Corp. were hurt by increased competition for key drugs.

Merck and Schering-Plough are awaiting imminent approval for a new cholesterol treatment that combines their two drugs and should spark a reversal of fortune.

Wyeth reported strong second-quarter sales growth from its key drugs for depression and ulcers, despite the ongoing litigation from its recalled diet drugs that has forced it to set aside more than \$16 billion in liability reserves.

Overseas, Roche's profit nearly doubled on strong cancer drug sales.

Shares of all five companies rose on Wednesday, with Wyeth enjoying the biggest boost -- a 3 percent gain.

"There's a sigh of relief today on Wall Street that there were no major disappointments among the drugmakers that reported earnings," said David Moskowitz, an analyst for Friedman, Billings, Ramsey.

Demonstrating that cholesterol is king in the current pharmaceutical climate, Pfizer said sales of Lipitor -- the world's top-selling drug -- rose 17 percent to \$2.36 billion for the quarter.

Merck's cholesterol drug, Zocor, had sales of \$1.4 billion but grew at a slower rate than Lipitor.

Merck and Schering-Plough expect approval -- possibly as soon as this week -- for a new cholesterol tablet that combines Zocor with newer Zetia in a single pill.

Wall Street believes the new drug, Vytorin, will eventually reach annual sales of up to \$8 billion, providing much-needed good news for Schering-Plough and insurance for Merck as it faces the loss of Zocor patent protection in 2006.

## Over 2cr live

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situation improves.

Passengers from Dubai, London and New York, bound for Sylhet, will be brought to the northeastern district via Dhaka by alternative arrangement, a civil aviation official said.

Another 25 people drowned or died of diarrhoea in the last one week in different districts, spiking the death toll to 118 since the beginning of monsoon blamed for the damage in two other South Asian countries India and Nepal.

An 8-year-old girl drowned slipping down into the water from a raft near Bhuiyarmura in Jakiganj upazila in Sylhet.

The authorities put the Kapitai dam and Chittagong port on high alert as the river waters are swelling by the day.

Rail links between seven northern and northeastern districts and the capital remained snapped and inter-district road links remained cut off yesterday.

Army and paramilitary personnel have been deployed in northern districts to streamline the relief operations, but the relief is much inadequate, our correspondents reported from different districts.

Low-lying areas in and around the capital, especially on its eastern fringe, are reeling under water. The flawed drainage and sewerage system already full of water prevents stagnated rainwater receding from lanes and by-lanes.

A storm damaged at least 1,500 houses on Tuesday night and more than two lakh people there are affected by food and drinking water crises.

At least 12 people drowned in floodwaters in 10 upazilas in Netrokona in a week. Thousands of flood-hit people started shifting from swamped areas to town and other safer places.

At least seven people died in boat capsizing on the ever-rising rivers or from snakebites in Habiganj. Thousands of people hit by flooding in the wake of breaching a flood control dam in Dhunat upazila in Bogra did not get any relief in the last seven days.

The water levels in the rain-fed rivers are climbing in Pabna, one of the worst-hit areas. Five people went missing and 60 others were injured as a storm lashed Vangura upazila.

A one-year-old child drowned in floodwaters in Sherpur on Tuesday.

## House-owners

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establish a violence- and corruption-free state.

He welcomed a similar call by Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh chief AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury for an all-party unity to tackle the flood that is taking a turn for the worse by the day. Dr Kamal said the state should employ all its resources to save people from drowning in floodwaters and dying of hunger.

Millions of endangered people are passing their days without foods, pure drinking water and waterborne diseases are spreading fast among them, he said, adding relief materials are very meagre compared to the need.

Asking the government to allocate adequate relief, he suggested deployment of defence personnel for orderly distribution.

"Preparation should be taken now to rehabilitate the affected people, especially the farmers, after recession of floodwaters," he said.

Witnesses said the agitating house owners shouted at the city father that he should develop the services before raising the holding tax. They consider self-assessment of holding tax as a ploy for an unjustified raise.

"Now I give Tk 900 as holding tax. If the latest bid is imposed, it will raise the amount to Tk 10,000," said one of the landlords.

As the protesters tried not to allow Khoka to proceed, police went into action to clear the roadblocks. The law enforcers also picked up five agitators from the scene.

Police and personal staff of the mayor, however, said the procession was brought out by main opposition Awami League and they tried to create a situation knowing that Khoka would take that way.

## Holding tax assessment

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holding will assess municipal taxes himself and the city corporation will collect taxes based on his assessment.

Khoka said, "The reassessment of holding tax through self assessment system will help the house owners escape harassment and will reduce corruption. The assessment form is simply designed so that the owners can fill it up easily. Around 4,500 volunteers have also been deployed to reach the forms to every holder and collect the filled up forms from door to door."

The mayor said the DCC has not imposed any new tax and there is no ground to fear that the self-assessment system would increase holding taxes, as the reassessment is mainly aimed at bringing the newly-constructed houses under the holding tax net.

He said thousands of new houses were constructed in the last 14 years, but the DCC has no accurate statistics on the number of new holdings and assessment of their exact tax amount.

Besides, thousands of buildings were reconstructed and renovated in the period, from which too the DCC is not getting actual amount of tax due to lack of assessment, Khoka added.

The mayor admitted that the city corporation has for long been deprived of a considerable amount of tax revenue due to corruption of a section of its officials.

On the campaign against the reassessment of holding tax through self-assessment system, Khoka said the reassessment has no connection with any government body. "In the last two and a half years, we have increased services for the city dwellers and want to further expand our services. That is why we need the reassessment," the mayor explained.

Khoka said the DCC earned around Tk 125 crore in last fiscal as holding tax and hoped it would be more than Tk 200 crore after the reassessment.

ALUTIMATUM

The main opposition, Awami League (AL), yesterday gave a one-week ultimatum to the DCC to withdraw the self-assessment system.

## JS body

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navy headquarters.

Army officials also expressed ignorance about the issue saying the navy high officials would talk about it in detail. The navy chief was not present at the meeting.

The Jatiya Sangsad body also discussed the activities of the Ordnance Company and recommended that the government modernise and diversify it to meet the demand of small arms and ammunition.

Commandant of the Ordnance Company Major General Jiban Kanai Das presented a report on its present situation at the meeting also attended by committee members Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Rezaul Bari Deena, Samsul Alam Pramanik, Syed Eskander and Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Hasan Mashud Chowdhury.

Westmont began its operations with a 90-MW production capacity on June 26, 1999.

Faruque said the investment of the company at present stands at \$100 million, which will rise to \$250 million with commissioning of the three new plants.

## Media men slam

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said the government is contemplating to enact a policy to restrain satellite TV channels transmitting programmes, which is undesirable in the context of the country's social norms and religious values.

"Information ministry officials are working on the issue to control satellite channels, which air obscene programmes," he added.

Some journalists alleged that a number of satellite channels, including some Indian ones, are transmitting late night programmes contrary to social and religious values.

"The sky is open and it is difficult to control," the information minister commented.

The government is considering piracy check in films and tightening film censorship rules. Although the piracy issue falls under the jurisdiction cultural affairs ministry, both ministries are working together to resolve the issue, he said.

On another question, the minister said the government would allow more TV channels and radio stations

tem for reassessing holding tax and threatened with tough agitation programmes, including hartal, siege and road blockade if its demand was not met by the deadline.

Dhaka City Unit AL President Mohammad Hanif alleged the new system is a complicated one and nothing but a scheme to increase taxes, adding it will also cerate new avenues of corruption.

"It will badly affect thousands of tenants, as the house owners will be compelled to increase rents in proportion to the rise in holding tax," Hanif predicted.

At a news conference at the Bangabandhu Avenue office of AL, the former DCC mayor said AL would hold opinion exchange meetings with professional bodies and social organisations from today to July 27 to arrive at a consensus on the issue and consolidate people's voice against the new system.

The party will organise a citizen rally on July 28. "From that rally, we will announce fresh agitation programme if the authorities ignore our demand," Hanif added.

AL leaders told the newsmen that instead of increasing earning of the city corporation the system would create more scopes for corruption, as it is too complicated a way to fix taxes.

"Many of the house owners are unable to understand the complicated self-assessment form and are running to lawyers and city corporation officials just for filling up those," Hanif said, claiming, "Even I who was the mayor of the city for eight years have failed to comprehend the form".

Dhaka City AL General Secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury was present at the conference.

## Westmont

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June 30, would reach Chittagong Port outer anchorage by July 30. "We hope to install the plant at Baghabari within two months of its reaching Bangladesh," he added.

The government also has given the joint venture company nod to set up two more units, which will generate another 170-MW electricity. Westmont on March 28 signed agreements with the Power Development Board and on May 22 with the government on import and installation of the third and fourth units.

"In the second phase of the expansion, we will import two plants in September," the Westmont chief said, adding, "After installing all the four plants, we will have a total production capacity of 340-MW electricity by December this year."

According to the new agreements, the unit price of electricity produced by the new plants will be Tk 1.63, he said, which was Tk 2.35 for the power produced by the first plant.

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The government may also allow radio channels for information on traffic situation in the capital, he added.

On the recent killing of journalist Humayun Kabir Balu in Khulna, the information minister said the government provided security for Balu as per his desire but later on he discontinued police protection.

"The government has asked all DCs and SPs (deputy commissioners and superintendents of police) to provide security if any journalist asks for it," he told media people.

The minister said police had so far arrested 11 people in connection with the Balu killing and the charge sheet would be filed as soon as the investigation is completed.

Among others, Information Secretary AMM Nasir Uddin, Principal Information Officer Khakdaker Manirul Alam, Director General of BTV AKM Mustafizur Rahman, Director General of Bangladesh Betar Jafar Ahmed Chowdhury, were present at the press conference.

## Oikya Mancha calls

FROM PAGE 12

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## Tigers go down weekly

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under the circumstances and was treated with caution by Tendulkar and Ganguly, who are acknowledged masters against spin. The 21-year-old conceded just 17 runs in his 6 overs with the new ball.

The two Indians added 154-run for the second wicket before the captain departed with his side needing another five runs for victory.

Ganguly's 55th fifty featured three fours and as many sixes, including two against left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique. A wily Rafique however had the last laugh by having Ganguly caught at deep mid-wicket for his 50th one-day victim.

Man-of-the-match Tendulkar, whose previous best against the Tigers was 54, struck ten boundaries and a six in his 127-ball knock. It was his 67th one-day half-century.

Earlier, sent into bat, Bangladesh tumbled against some fine swing bowling from left-arm paceman Irfan Pathan, who struck twice off successive deliveries to dismiss Habibul Bashar and Rajin Saleh.

Bashar was bowled for two while playing at a delivery that nipped back sharply. Rajin was trapped lbw off a similar delivery, leaving Bangladesh at 10-2.

The highlight of the innings was Mohammad Ashraful's brilliant

## BCS exams

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flood-affected areas".

The PSC will announce a fresh date for the test later but the seating arrangements and venues will remain unchanged.

The PSC meeting presided over by PSC Chairperson Professor Dr ZN Tahmidia Begum, discussed the difficulties of the candidates as communications are mostly cut off in the flood-affected areas and educational institutions closed. Candidates from some areas, especially from greater Sylhet, could have faced difficulty in taking part in the exam.

A record number of 1.5 lakh candidates were supposed to sit for the preliminary BCS test at 111 centres of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet and London.

## Rab's midnight raid

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team of the elite anti-crime force, armed with automatic weapons, crept onto the first floor of the four-story building and entered the house breaking open a door.

A senior police official told newsmen the officer-in-charge of Kafrul Police Station had informed him about the incident at 4:00pm yesterday. He also said the 'victim' did not file any complaint.

The colonel's wife told The Daily Star yesterday the incident shows how faulty are the information they (Rab men) act on.

Sirajul said the team members later apologised and said they had made a mistake due to a wrong address.

He protested the incident and demanded an investigation into it and sought compensation for the damages caused.

The commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said it was matter with the Rab and that he knew nothing. He also declined to comment on police refusal to record a case.

The Rab in a press release last night said Lt. Commander Shahed led several teams of Rab men in carrying out an operation in new DOHS on information that three listed criminals were hiding in a house.

The armed miscreants managed to flee from the house due to direct and indirect help from the house owner. Had he (owner) helped the Rab team, they could be arrested, the press release said.

It also said the house owner made undesirable comments on the Rab action in a private television channel.

The Rab team arrested six young girls and five men in the operation, the release added.

knock that ended prematurely on 35 after a lot of promise.

The fluent stroke-maker pulled Pathan once and drove Laxmipathy Balaji twice for boundaries to salvage the side to 92 for three after Kapali wasted a good start.

Ashraful and Faisal Hossain (17 off 34 balls), who whacked Harbhajan Singh for a six, were going smoothly but the fragile middle-order gave in to the Indian slow bowlers.

Ashraful was run out while chasing a single. The lower order put some meat to the total with Khaled Mahmud (22) and Razzak (21) producing 36 runs for the ninth wicket.

Pathan returned to end the partnership to finish with 3-32. Tendulkar also took three wickets for 35 for a virtuoso all-round performance.

Bangladesh will play their next match against hosts Sri Lanka on Friday.

## Most shops

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small businesses.

"The strike was completely successful...we will hold a meeting today to decide on the next programmes," Delwar Hossain, joint convener of the Parishad, told The Daily Star yesterday.

President of Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity (shop owners' association of Bangladesh) Amir Hossain Khan, who termed the strike 'meaningless' to a section of press earlier, said all the members observed the strike.

Members of Bangladesh Restaurant Owners' Association took out a procession and submitted their demands to the National Board of Revenue (NBR) chairman yesterday morning.

The NBR chairman assurance the association leaders of discussing their demands in future.

The minimum annual VAT for shops in the capital is Tk 4,200 and an additional 15 percent for higher income. According to the shop owners' organisation, there are 200,000 shops in Dhaka.

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

## Car bomb kills 3 in eastern Baghdad

AP, Baghdad

A car bomb went off in eastern Baghdad on Wednesday, killing at least three people, witnesses said.

Associated Press Television News footage showed at least three bodies covered in sheets, including one that was dismembered by the blast.

At least one person was wounded by the explosion, which occurred about 5:30 p.m. in the al-Jadida district.

The sedan used in the attack was reduced to a charred skeleton without a roof, but the force of the blast seemed to have been confined to the narrow alley-like road where the car blew up. An unexploded artillery shell lay on the street.

## Two cases filed

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after two cases were filed by his wife and daughter-in-law under Woman and Child Repression Prevention Act on July 12.

Meanwhile, Tejgaon police filed an arrest case against Golandaj for possessing a time-expired licensed gun.

## 13th Saarc

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A number of new proposals covering mechanisms and funds for implementation of Saarc programmes and projects were discussed.

Bangladesh will also host a ministerial meeting on implementation of the Saarc Convention on Terrorism and its Additional Protocol.