

Rab and police nab 5 criminals, seize arms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police and the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in separate drives arrested two listed criminals and three alleged operatives of dreaded criminal Kala Jahangir in the last two days.

Acting on a tip off, members of the Cobra, a special police team, raided a house in Zafarabad in Mohammadpur at around 9:45pm Sunday.

Zahirul Islam alias 'Kutta' Zahir, a listed criminal of Mohammadpur Police Station, and his four accomplices opened fire on the Cobra members. Police fired back and arrested bullet-hit Zahir with a revolver and four bullets, while his operatives escaped arrest.

Zahir was admitted to National Institute of Traumatology & Orthopaedic Rehabilitation under police custody. He is accused of six criminal charges including two for murders and was a close aide of Galakata Mujibar, who was killed in a recent shootout with police.

In Gopibagh, a team of the Rab-2 led by Captain Anisur Rahman arrested Selim from the government railway colony at about 3:00am

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SAARC MEET Govt to take highest security measure to check threats

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday revealed plans to bring Dhaka under a blanket of security during the 13th Saarc Summit next year in a bid to check increasing security threats in the region.

An inter-ministerial meeting yesterday formed four security sub-committees to ensure security during the Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit.

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BCL LEADER MURDER Dawn-to-dusk hartal passes off peacefully

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gopalganj

The 12-hour dawn-to-dusk hartal in Gopalganj to protest the killing of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leader Rakib Hossain Tushar passed off peacefully yesterday.

All educational institutes, shops and markets remained close during the hartal hours. Traffic on the roads was minimal and officials' presence in the government and other offices low, while business transaction in the banks remained suspended.

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Ex-UP member killed

UNB, Cox's Bazar

A former union parishad (UP) member was chopped to death and 10 others were injured in a clash between two rival groups in Moheshkhali upazila of Cox's Bazar district yesterday.

The dead was identified as Mohammad Bakshu, 55, former member of Hoanakh Union Parishad.

Police said two rival groups, one led by BNP leader Mir Quasem and another by Jamaat leader Akter Hamid, clashed over control of a disputed shrimp enclosure.

Both sides used firearms and lethal weapons during the clash. On information, police went to the spot and dispersed the clashing groups.

They (police) recovered the body and sent it to hospital morgue for autopsy.

A case was filed with Moheshkhali police.

Banks' operating profit not so real

Provisioning, tax erode as much as 76pc of it

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Tax and provisioning of classified loans eat up as much as 76 percent of the operating profits of private commercial banks (PCBs).

The banks clocked a net profit of Tk 426 crore in 2003 after tax and provisioning, which is to be split among the shareholders, according to a report of the central bank placed before the parliamentary standing committee on finance ministry yesterday.

The banks however made an operating profit of Tk 1,790 crore in the same year, but as little as 24 percent of the operating profit end up in the pockets of the shareholders. Capital deficit, classified loan provisioning and tax gobble up the rest.

Of the 31 banks, one also counted Tk 39.33 crore in losses while another made no profit.

Eight private banks currently have capital shortfall, prompting the Bangladesh Bank (BB) to ask them to cover the deficit by March next year. The classified loans of the PCBs total 12.43 percent, but seven banks have more than 20 percent of such loans.

The Securities and Exchange Commission recently asked the banks not to go public with the figures of their operating profits as these confuse the shareholders.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday placed a report on the state of the PCBs at the standing committee meeting, presided over by Mushfiqur Rahman. Most of the managing directors of the PCBs were present.

The governor urged the PCBs to increase farm loans noting that the loan portfolio of the PCBs for the agriculture sector was a meagre 0.61 percent or Tk

225 crore of a total of Tk 37,241 crore last year.

Business sector was the highest recipient of bank loans with 47.57 percent, followed by working capital with 17 percent, industries 14 percent, construction 9 percent, transport and communications 2.25 percent and others 9.43 percent.

The PCBs blamed the poor farm loan disbursement on the condition set by the BB on the opening of branches in rural areas and urged the standing committee to move for its withdrawal.

The governor also told the meeting that the tightening measures of the central bank have helped the PCBs perform better. He however noted that interest rates on loans have been cut by 1 to 2 percent, but further rate cuts are needed.



PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia distributes relief among flood victims in Araihaaz in Narayanganj yesterday.

Turkish hostage in Iraq executed

Talks resume for release of Indians; Baghdad blames Zargawi for church bombings

AGENCIES, Baghdad

Iraq blamed al-Qaeda ally Abu Musab al-Zarqawi yesterday for a wave of church bombings that killed at least 11 people, saying militants wanted to spark religious conflict and drive Christians out of the country.

A group linked to Zarqawi, the most wanted man in Iraq, also killed a Turkish hostage, according to Islamist Web sites

which showed a videotape Monday of the killing.

Muslim leaders including top Shia cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani condemned the car bombings that were timed for Sunday evening church services in Baghdad and the northern city of Mosul. The attacks were the first on churches of the minority Christian community since the start of a 15-month insurgency.

"There is no shadow of a doubt that this bears the blueprint of Zarqawi," said national security adviser Mowaffaq al-Rubaie.

"Zarqawi and his extremists are basically trying to drive a wedge between Muslims and Christians in Iraq. It's clear they want to drive Christians out of the country," he told Reuters.

The Jordanian-born militant has

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BSF digs bunkers on border as talks start in Comilla

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) has been put on high alert at Chowgacha frontier under Sharsha upazilla of Jessore district while BDR and BSF are holding border talks in Comilla.

The move with effect from Sunday morning has been made in response to bunkers dug by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) at Naudapara frontier of Ashuipukur village of India, which stands only two kilometres off Chowgacha frontier.

Meanwhile, people who live near Chowgacha frontier were fleeing in panic to safer places following digging of two bunkers.

Sources said BSF for the first time has dug any bunker on the plain

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Unicef launches appeal for flood victims

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unicef yesterday launched a global appeal for donations to raise US \$ 13.4 million in emergency aid to save lives of children and women in the flood-hit districts of Bangladesh, said a press release.

The emergency appeal was made to address the immediate needs of the flood stricken people in the next six to eight weeks, said the United Nations Children's Fund in its statement.

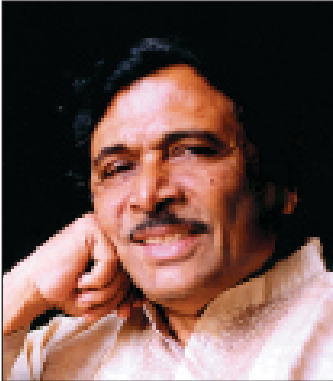
The appeal aims at saving children from the rising tide of water-borne diseases and acute respiratory infec-

tion (ARI); providing nutritious food, and creating learning spaces for them in the worst affected areas, the press release added.

"Bangladeshi children living on the edge urgently need attention to save them from the worst ravages of flood. It is important to provide them with safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, nutritious food and life saving medicine," the statement quoted APB Senagama, officer in charge of Unicef Bangladesh, as saying.

Unicef appeals for critical interventions in the key areas of health

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Abdullah Abu Sayeed receives Magsaysay award

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Noted litterateur and popular television anchor Abdullah Abu Sayeed has received the 2004 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts.

Sayeed, also founder and head of

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Mugger killed in shootout

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An alleged mugger was killed in a shootout with police in Rajakhali under Bakaliya thana in the city yesterday morning.

Three muggers opened fire on a team of patrol police in Tulatali Bridge area at around 7:00am when the cops made a bid to arrest them in the act of mugging.

The four-member team of Bakaliya Police Station returned fire. A bullet hit one mugger and left him dead on the spot. His accomplices, however, ran away.

Police seized a foreign-made gun, six cartridges and a bandoleer from the scene and sent the body to Chittagong Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Targeted US firms open under heavy security

AP, Washington

Financial institutions identified as targets of a terrorist plot in three cities opened for business yesterday under stepped-up security and defiant words from people who said they won't be cowed by the extraordinary intelligence

pointing to a potential attack.

Police sealed off some streets in New York, put international-finance employees in Washington through extra security checks, and added barricades and a heavy armed presence in Newark, N.J., in response to a heightened terrorism alert aimed specifically at titans of the financial sector.

Treasury Secretary John Snow, quick to try to reassure investors and Americans generally, said the nation's financial system operated normally in the first weekday hours of the code-orange alert.

"People around the world rightly have confidence in the U.S. financial markets," Snow said. "While we must always remain vigilant against terror, we will not be intimidated and prevented from enjoying our lives and exercising our freedoms."

Police checked identity cards as employees filed in to the World Bank headquarters, and guards at its

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Commissioner mugged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Muggers yesterday stabbed a ward commissioner of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and snatched away his gold chain and cell phone set in Dhanmondi.

Four muggers stopped Abul Khayer Bablu, commissioner of ward No. 49, near Dhanmondi Lake during his morning-walk at around 5:15am and asked for his gold chain and cell phone.

Refused, the muggers stabbed him in his neck and hands. Bablu suffered minor injuries and is receiving treatment at a local clinic.

Prayer Timing		
August 3		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-20	4-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-47	6-50
Esha	8-15	8-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Nasa satellite may find ice on hottest planet

REUTERS, Florida

A satellite that heads off to Mercury, the hottest planet in the solar system, yesterday has Nasa scientists buzzing because it is expected to journey there and find, of all things, ice.

The Messenger (MERcury Surface, Space ENVironment, GEOchemistry and Ranging) spacecraft takes off three decades after the last time Nasa took an up-close look at Mercury, where the temperature at noon is just a shade under 900 degrees F.

The \$427 million mission starts with lift-off aboard a Boeing Delta 2 rocket from the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida, the space agency said.

If ice does exist on Mercury, it manages to stay out of the sun, inside

the shadowy interior of craters at the poles of the nearly airless planet, where the temperature may not rise above minus -300 degrees F.

Radio telescopes on Earth have detected the signature of ice in those craters, scientists say, though they caution it might also be super-frozen silica or something else.

Equally intriguing is Mercury's composition. The planet is about two-thirds iron and as dense as a planet the size of Earth, although it is much smaller, scientists say. Mercury is slightly larger than the Earth's moon.

MORE EARTH-LIKE?

"Did Mercury start off more Earth-like, then lose its rocky exterior?" asked Sean Solomon of the Carnegie Institute of Washington

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The Mercury, the hottest planet in the solar system, is seen from Mariner 10's first image acquired on March 24, 1974.

PHOTO: NASA

