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PHOTO: STAR

**STOP KILLING:** Children wear black gags in a human chain in front of the Shishu Academy in Dhaka yesterday to protest the August 21 deadly grenade attacks on an Awami League rally that killed 19 people in the latest in a series of bomb attacks over the years.

## Sadr militias hand in arms, leave Najaf shrine

### Sistani-Sadr deal brings hope of peace

REUTERS, Najaf

Shia rebels began handing in weapons and leaving a holy shrine yesterday in Iraq's Najaf, where tens of thousands of pilgrims flocked to celebrate a peace deal reached overnight to end a bloody three-week uprising.

Fighters tossed AK-47 assault rifles and mortar launchers into wooden carts being pushed around near the sacred Imam Ali mosque after an order from renegade cleric Moqtada al-Sadr for his Mehdi Army

militia to disarm and leave the shrine.

Mosque loudspeaker announcements in Sadr's name gave the order in accordance with a peace deal brokered by Iraq's most revered cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, on Thursday.

Sistani made a dramatic return to Najaf on Thursday and persuaded Sadr to accept his peace initiative after a day of violence in which at least 74 Shia pilgrims were killed.

Al Arabiya television said Sadr's representatives had handed over the

keys to the mosque, Iraq's holiest Shia shrine.

As part of the peace deal -- which lifts some of the enormous pressure on interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi -- US marines will also pull out of Najaf after weeks of fierce daily ground and aerial attacks on Mehdi militia positions.

Sadr's militia was to have left the mosque by 10 a.m. (0600 GMT), although as the deadline passed, some men were still there, witnesses said. However, no weapons could be seen inside.

At least four decaying bodies were brought out, they added.

But after bitter fighting with US marines that killed hundreds and drove world oil prices to record highs, many Mehdi militants still breathed defiance.

"We will support whatever Ayatollah Sistani and Sayyed Moqtada have agreed. But we will still slit the throats of the Americans," said one militiaman, Hussein Taama.

Another holding an AK-47 rifle, SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Mourners carry the coffin of writer Humayun Azad to the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka yesterday, two weeks after he was found dead in Germany on August 12.

## Thousands pay tearful homage to writer Azad

DU CORRESPONDENT

The wreath-covered coffin of writer Humayun Azad was borne to a crowd of mourners yesterday, two weeks after he was found dead in Germany to the disbelief of his family.

Professor Azad, who survived a knife attack in February before he died from what an autopsy said was heart attack in Munich on August 12, was laid to rest in his home village in Srinagar in Munshiganj.

Thousands of mourners, including his family, kin, colleagues, teachers and students, well-wishers and admirers paused in tearful silence to pay him homage on Dhaka University (DU) campus.

A Biman flight flew the body to the tears of the distraught family SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Arson, bomb blasts ahead of hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Overnight arson attacks on public transports and bomb injuries to several people preceded today's countrywide daylong hartal jointly called by main opposition Awami League and other opposition parties demanding resignation of the government.

The hartal called Wednesday night by the AL, the left 11-party alliance, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) and National Awami Party (NAP-Muzaffar) is also to protest the August 21 grisly grenade attack on an AL rally and police excesses.

The latest shutdown comes after two other back-to-back hartals that the AL, JSD and 11-party enforced on Tuesday and Wednesday and their countrywide demonstration and 'special prayer' programmes yesterday.

In one of the numerous pre-hartal incidents in the city last night, unidentified miscreants put a bus on fire at Palashi. No injuries were reported.

One Nasiruddin Khan, 18, was injured in a bomb explosion at Gopibagh, while at least six more SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Interpol briefed on blasts

SC Bar body starts probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Police yesterday formally sought help from Interpol for proper investigation into the grenade attack on an Awami League (AL) rally in the capital on Saturday last that killed 19 people and injured over 200 others.

Inspector General of Police Shahidul Haque told BBC Radio they have already informed Interpol how many grenades were exploded, how many remained unexploded, their nature and the number of people injured in the attack.

He also said Bangladesh Police want to get Interpol help as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, a six-member probe body of Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association yesterday took the SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## Khulna police seek remand of Kamrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday handed over Kamruzzaman alias Kamrul, who has close links to outlaws in Khulna region, to Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP).

Police showed him arrested in the bomb attack on Khulna city BNP leader Sekander Zafrulla Khan Shachchul last month.

Officer-in-Charge of Khulna Police Station Mosharraf Hossain said they have submitted a prayer to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court seeking a seven-day remand of Kamrul for interrogation.

The Rab arrested Kamrul from Bailey Road in the capital on Tuesday for his suspected links to the grenade attack on an Awami League (AL) rally that killed 19 people and injured over 200 others. Rab officials grilled him for two days at SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

## Ahmadiyya complex capture plan foiled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

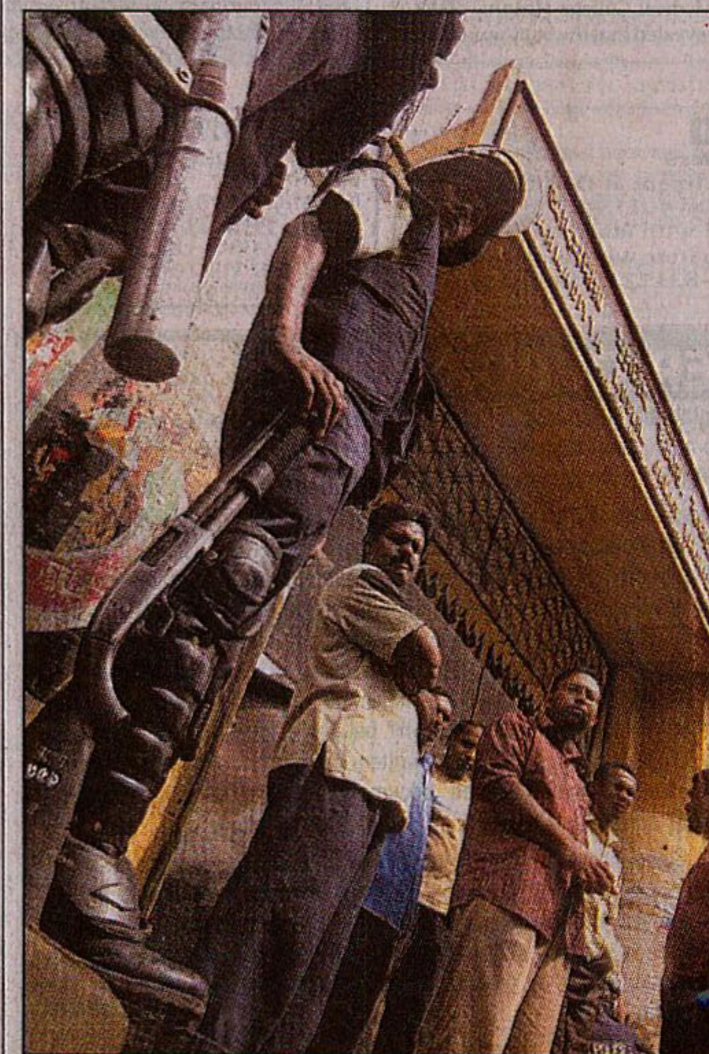


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Police mount guard at the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Bakshibazar yesterday, as religious bigots threatened to capture the mosque there in a hate campaign against the sect.

Police action and civil society resistance kept at bay religious fanatics who threatened to capture the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Bakshibazar yesterday to the relief of Dhaka residents reeling from deadly grenade attacks on an Awami League rally.

The fanatics under the banner of Aamra Dhakabashi failed to gather at any point in the capital, but threatened to take the Ahmadiyya base soon after the release of their four top leaders arrested overnight.

A Dhaka court sent Aamra Dhakabashi President Shamsul Huq, Secretary General Jamal Nasser Chowdhury and key leaders Abdul Kader and Sharafat Ali to jail yesterday.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, Bangladesh, hailed the government and civil society steps, saying the government role proved it could resist fundamentalists if wanted.

Fourteen platoons of police were deployed at 12 points in and around the Ahmadiyya Complex in the morning to stop Aamra Dhakabashi activists who threatened to say their Friday prayers at the mosque in the sect's headquarters 'at any cost'.

A group of bigots tried to gather at Islambagh Jam-e-Mosque, Chawkbazar Shahi Mosque and Boro Katara Madrasa before the Juma prayers, but police scared them away.

Apart from Azad Field where the bigots declared to gather before marching to the Ahmadiyya complex, policemen also kept close watch on Urdu Road Mosque, Churhatta Mosque, Lalbagh Shahi Mosque, Lalbagh Chhoto Mosque, SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Overloaded trucks expose Jamuna bridge to damage

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority (JMBA) is allowing overloaded trucks to use the bridge exposing it to serious damage in violation of rules.

In the first few days after the inauguration of the bridge in 1998, the South African leaseholder of JMB toll plaza JOMAC -- used the four weigh bridges, two on each side, to prevent overloaded trucks crossing the bridge to protect it from damage, JMBA sources said.

But 'some officials' of the JMBA then asked JOMAC not to comply

with the rules on the plying of overloaded trucks on the bridge.

A transport expert and an engineer of Technical Services of the Roads and Highways Department (R&HD) said overloaded trucks are damaging roads and bridges across the country.

"Despite being equipped with weigh bridges, the JMBA is ignoring how much damage an overloaded truck can cause to the bridge," he said on condition of anonymity.

"The bridge was built on a loan of \$600 million from Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Asian Development Bank and World Bank

(WB). WB sources said the matter is of 'utmost concern' for the donors. The WB told the government to implement the relevant rules to stop overloaded trucks using the bridge, a source said.

"The government has endorsed formulating a Land Transport Policy and we are emphasising strict implementation of the rules under this policy. This time we will stick to our stand," the source said.

Engineers and transport experts said more than 90 percent trucks in Bangladesh have two axles and are permitted to carry five tonnes of goods. The vehicles weigh approximately five tonnes. Rules require that 40 percent of the load must be put on the front wheels and 60 percent on the rear wheels. Unscrupulous transport owners and workers almost invariably violate traffic laws and load up to 18 tonnes of goods in a truck without any police intervention.

Overloading generates 'extreme pressure' on the roads and bridges and gradually weakens their base.

According to engineers of Technical Services of the R&HD, the cost of repair of these infrastructures is so high that the government SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

## Black doesn't suit Iraq

AFP, Athens

Iraq's footballers have refused to join their Olympic bronze medal opponents Italy in donning black armbands as a mark of respect for murdered Italian journalist Enzo Baldoni.

The reporter was executed by an Islamic group in Baghdad on

Thursday in an act widely condemned throughout the world.

Iraq and Italy meet in Salomika later Friday for the bronze medal but Iraqi coach Adnan Hamd said that Iraqi coach Adnan Hamd said that his team wouldn't wear black armbands although he said he respected the Italians' wishes.

"We will not be wearing black armbands. The Italians will be and

we respect their choice," said Hamd.

"We regret the death of the Italian journalist but it's necessary also to think of the hundreds of Iraqis who have died each day during resistance to the occupation.

"It would be necessary to wear an armband every day. We sent a message to the kidnappers to free the journalist but sadly it was in vain."

An Islamist group calling itself the Islamic Army in Iraq executed Baldoni after holding him for a week, Arabic-language satellite news channel Al-Jazeera reported late Thursday.

It said the decision "was taken after the refusal by Italy to reply favourably to the demand (by the group) to withdraw its soldiers from Iraq within 48 hours."

Baldoni's captors had on Tuesday threatened to kill their hostage unless Italy withdrew its 3,000 troops from Iraq within 48 hours. Their threat came in a video also broadcast by Al-Jazeera.

## I want justice, not sympathy

Zillur at Ivy's qul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"I don't want mere sympathy on my wife's death, I want justice," said Zillur Rahman at the qukhwani of Awami League (AL) Women's Affairs Secretary Ivy Rahman yesterday.

Several hundred people from all walks of life thronged Ivy's Gulshan residence to attend the qukhwani after Asr prayers. They prayed for the peace of the departed soul of Ivy and offered condolences to the bereaved family.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, AL leaders Sajeda Chowdhury, Tofail Ahmed, Motia Chowdhury, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Abdul Motin Khasru, AM Abdul Muhit, Dr HBM Iqbal, Jatiya Party leader Rawshan Ershad, cultural activist Jamiluddin Hossain, columnist and dramatist Mamtaz Uddin Ahmed and business leader Yusuf Abdullah Harun were SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

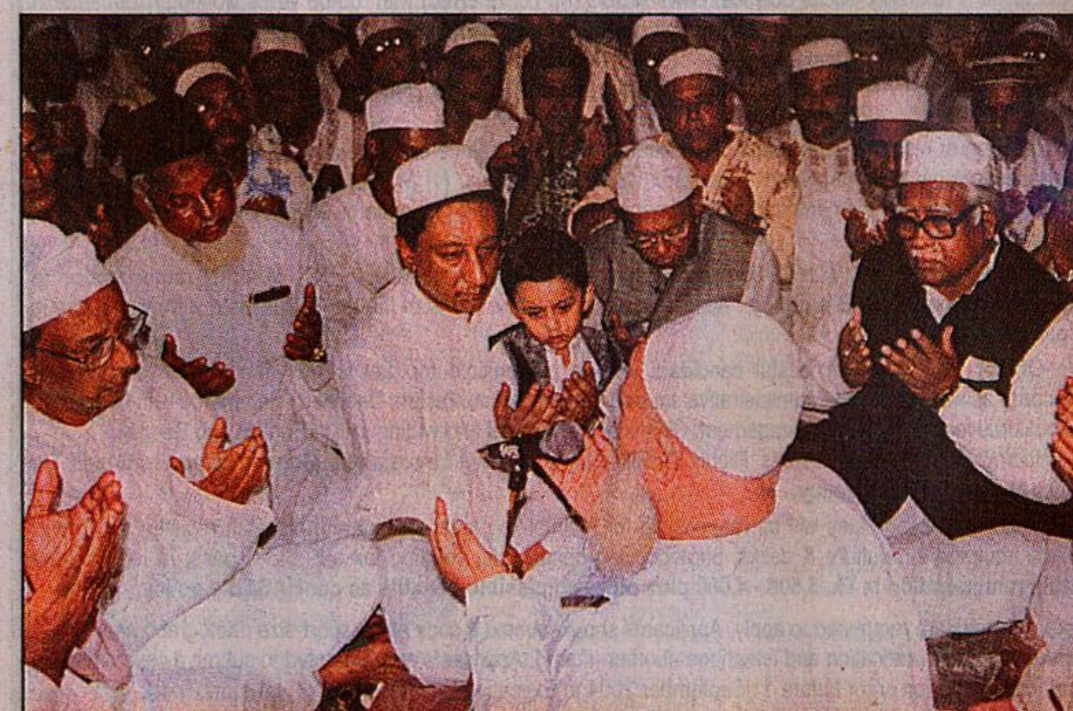


PHOTO: STAR

Awami League leaders and activists pray at Ivy Tower in Gulshan yesterday for the salvation of the departed soul of AL Women's Affairs Secretary Ivy Rahman who died from wounds in the August 21 grenade attacks on an AL rally.

## Villagers see Rangpur arson as persecution

ANWAR ALI AND RAFIQUE SARKER

From Rangpur

Monday's robbery and arson attack by BNP-linked mobsters on 22 houses at Adam Sarkarpura village under Peeragachha upazila in the district was part of a three-year-long persecution, this time aimed at evicting six Hindu families from their ancestral homesteads, the villagers said yesterday.

The reluctance and inactivity of police to investigate and act on the previous complaints of the minority families about ejection threats by the BNP-aligned thugs further encouraged them to make the attack, the victims alleged.

The families targeted by the raiders are of Suresh Chandra Barman, Shuktu Chandra Barman, SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

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