

Hopes grow for release of 2 French reporters

AFP, Baghda

Hopes grew yesterday that two French journalists kidnapped two weeks ago in Iraq would be released by their Islamist captors.

"They are out of danger as was declared yesterday by Sheikh Hareth al-Dhari, their release could just be a matter of time," said Sheikh Abdel Salam al-Kubeisi, an influential cleric on the Committee of Muslim Scholars.

Kubeisi's organisation has privileged contacts with the Sunni militant groups operating in Iraq.

One expert on the militants said the two Frenchmen were being held in the Sunni insurgent stronghold of Fallujah, west of Baghdad, and suggested that recent US strikes on the town risked complicating the negotiations.

Another source with close links to the insurgency told AFP on condition of anonymity that journalists Georges Malbrunot and Christian Chesnot were still in the hands of the Islamic Army in Iraq and being detained in the Bagdad region.

But French diplomatic sources in Bagdad said Friday afternoon they had no fresh information on the whereabouts of the two reporters and expressed irritation at the "completely groundless" speculation on their fates of recent days.

The pair abducted August 20 on the perilous road between Bagdad and Najaf are "alive, in good health and being well treated" but still captive, one diplomat said, on condition of anonymity.

"There is hope and a great chance of a happy outcome. When will this happen? No one can tell. Maybe today, tomorrow or the day after that, but the situation in Iraq is such that it could not take much to scupper the whole process."

The Islamic Army in Iraq follows the strict Wahabist school of Islam and has already claimed responsibility for several abductions and executions in Iraq, including the killing of Italian reporter Enzo Baldoni last week.

The militant group thought to be based mainly in Fallujah has demanded Paris lift controversial ban on headscarves in state schools to secure the release of the hostages.

But the law came into effect regardless on Thursday as the French school year began. The ultimatum from the captors was the first time kidnappers here had made demands external to the whole process.

However the targeting of a country which vigorously opposed last year's US-led invasion apparently backfired as France managed to muster broad international support for its efforts to free the journalists and unite the vast majority of Muslim institutions behind its cause.

Messages of support continued to flow in Friday, with Shiite radical leader Moqtada Sadr calling for the reporters'

JCD barricades

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back.

The JCD activists also vandalised a number of buses and displaced counters of different bus services. They have also announced the MP persona non grata on the campus.

They lifted the barrier at 7:30pm following assurance from the JU vice-chancellor of taking the matter to the education minister for necessary action.

Earlier, Biruliya Ekadash, backed by the JCD president, and Savar Sammitto Ekadash, backed by the MP, met in the final of a tournament on Adhar Chandra School field.

Salahuddin slapped Mallik as the latter protested formation of the MP's team with all 11 hired players against the rules and regulations of the tournament, said a member of the tournament holding committee asking not to be named.

Each team could play six hired members, a rule that the lawmaker ignored, he added.

Additional police were on hand at the Dairy Farm gate to intervene in any untoward situation.

Mallik was not available for comments.

Nizami hints

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interference in Bangladesh. The situation therefore is undoubtedly very grave."

He once again claimed there is no Islamic fundamentalist group operating in the country and blamed a section of the media for running deliberate campaign to brand Bangladesh as a den of fundamentalist forces.

Observing that it has become a fashion to blame militant Islamists for every incident, he said, "We don't believe any Islamist organisation is involved in the attack. But if the investigation finds any of them guilty, we'll definitely act against them."

Referring to 'accusing the government of the grenade attack before any investigation and declaration of one-point movement by opposition parties to unseat it, creating anarchy and panic through rampage, arson and snapping rail-links, baseless allegation and malicious propaganda in Indian newspapers against the coalition government', Nizami said that indicate a ominous conspiracy against Bangladesh.

The Jamaat chief said those who committed the crime are not friends of BNP, AL, Jamaat or any one who believes in democracy. "They are enemies of the nation, humanity and

Alliance will benefit if I am killed, says Hasina, UNB, Dhaka

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina, who survived the August 21 grenade attack, has said the assassins wanted to kill her and destroy the nation's independence and sovereignty.

The remarks came when a delegation of Democratic Teachers Forum of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) called on Hasina, also the president of Awami League (AL) at her Dhamondi residence yesterday.

"Khaleda-Nizami alliance will be the beneficiary if I'm killed... previously (late president) Ziaur Rahman was the beneficiary of the killing of Bangabandhu," she said.

Referring to the bomb blasts during her rule, the former prime minister said the Awami League government had investigated all the bomb blast incidents and filed charge-sheets against the accused.

But the BNP-Jamaat alliance released those accused from jails after assuming power, she alleged.

The AL chief urged the teacher community to cooperate with her party in "advancing its one-point just-government movement."

The delegation, led by Prof Taslim Islam, called for forging national unity to uphold the spirit of the War of Independence.

Probe report

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It further suspected that the crude oil might have been collected illegally as it was found in ballast tanks instead of cargo tanks only where crude oil is usually to be stored, sources said.

The head of the two-member body, Captain Faridul Alam, also assistant harbour master of CPA, unofficially informed Shipping Secretary Ismail Jabiullah of the findings. CPA Chairman AMM Shahadat Hossain, BSC MD Captain Azizul Haq and other high officials were also present.

The probe body, expected to submit the 14-page probe report yesterday, made six recommendations to stop oil spillage in future.

The recommendations include adopting precautionary measures while carrying oil in tankers and replacing the hydraulic valves, sources said.

Oil spillage from Banglar Sourav spread over some 15km in the bay and the port channel of the Karnaphuli river causing severe pollution and a large-scale fish mortality.

Scores of dead fish kept floating in the sea following the spillage that prompted formation of another two probe bodies by the Marine Fisheries Department and the Bangladesh Forest Research Institute in Cox's Bazar.

Black will fly in from Delhi after meeting Indian intelligence officials on the Indo-UN joint working group on counter-terrorism.

With terrorism on the agenda, Black's talk with the government is sure to bring up concerns expressed in a US State Department report titled 'Terrorism in South Asia' updated on August 9. The report revived allegations of terrorist presence in the country that both Bangladesh and US governments had denied until two years ago.

The report mentioned Jamaat Islamiya (JI), a South-East Asian terrorist outfit, to be present in Bangladesh that could not be possible, it said, without some degree of tacit agreement from the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, which is thought by some to have close ties with the ISI of Pakistan.

Black will be present for long in the Bay of Bengal, and the port channel of the Karnaphuli river causing severe pollution and a large-scale fish mortality.

Members of the Nabi group earlier threatened my son not to work for the commissioner with whom they have a fierce rivalry," he said adding that the same gang took several attempts on Mamun's life in the last six months.

Pvt universities

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and its 1998 amended version lacked adequate provisions for governing the growing number of private universities.

The proposed act will specify the role of vice-chancellors and board of trustees of the universities to eliminate the existing tug of war between the two sides, he said.

Rules require that every private university must have five acres of land and it should be shifted to its permanent campus within five years. But most of those are housed in multi-storyed buildings, mainly in commercial areas, without the required campus.

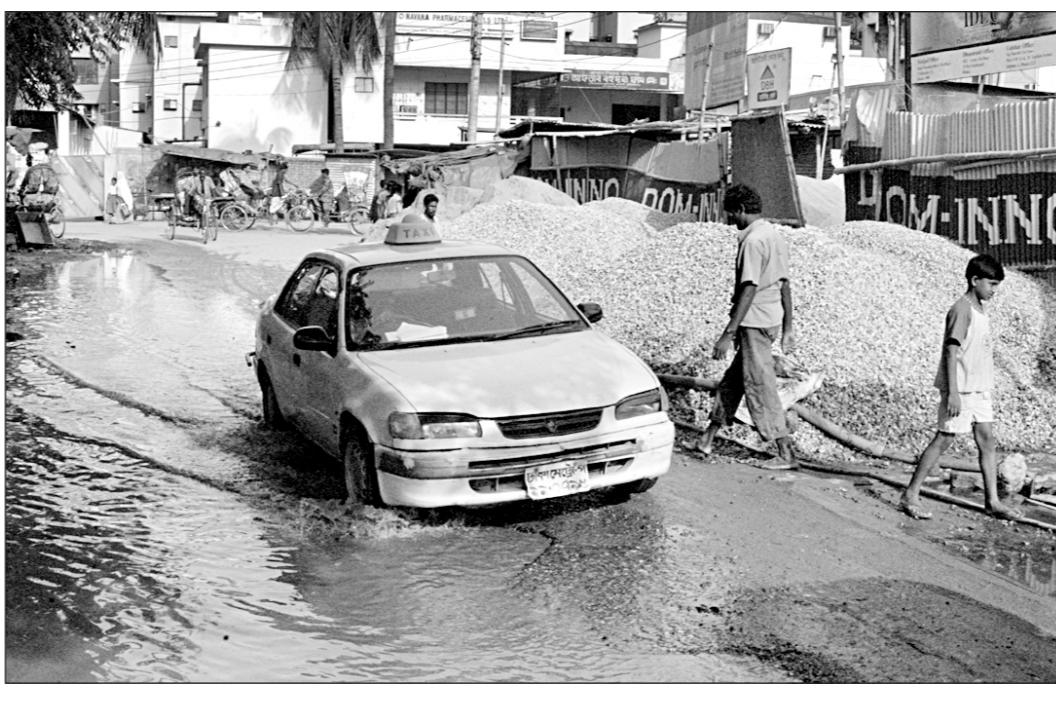
Worse still, some do not even have any infrastructures for their students and run on infrastructures hired on shift basis from non-government educational institutions.

A number of private universities are housed in buildings where garments factories are located beside them.

Meanwhile, one private university started construction work on its permanent site last month and some have procured land on the capital's suburbs with no sign of any constructions as yet.

The authorities have now asked the BIWTA to issue authorisation for extraction of sand from the riverbed on the 17-kilometre stretch of the Buriganga from Kholamora to Turag river.

But along the river from Basila to Kholamora, dozens of volgates were found extracting sand during

PHOTO: STAR
Drain water fed by rains spills onto a Segunbagicha road that is already covered in building materials making it difficult for pedestrians to use.

Nab attackers or face

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Oikyamancha Member Secretary Commander (Rtd) Abdur Rouf, Members Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Pankaj Bhattacharya, Barrister Rabea Bhuiyan, Engineer Abul Kashem, Advocate Zahirul Haq and Khandaresh Shamsul Alam Dudu.

Talking to The Daily Star after the meeting, Dr Kamal said an effective national unity is a must to overcome the insecurity that has pervaded the entire nation in the aftermath of the August 21 grenade blasts.

Referring to the presence of Interpol and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) personnel, the Oikyamancha president said they had urged this earlier and do still hold that international experts should be brought in if need be.

He, however, said the government should have considered opinions of all prior to seeking international help. He stressed the importance of transparency in different

state organs with regard to the investigation.

Yesterday's meeting was held at Dr Kamal's residence. Oikyamancha leaders will meet again today, this time at Oikyamancha office in the city.

Riverbank

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it was given to them long ago, not in my tenure," said Ukip Abdus Sattar, state minister for land.

The Narayanganj district administration took many initiatives to save the river, but the efforts fell flat because of the industrialists' cosy links with top government officials.

"The river has been narrowing down and drying up because of the industries. They have been running the business for years taking permission from the government," said Harun Ur Rahid, deputy commissioner of Narayanganj.

Aziz Supermarket

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where Ripon was shifted to the Orthopaedic Hospital in the evening as his condition deteriorated.

"We conducted a thorough search and found bomb-building materials including gunpowder, pieces of stone, empty bottles and three rolls of tape," Officer-in-Charge of Ramna Police Station Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star.

The staff of nearby shops said the NGO, owned by one Walur Rahman of Azimpur, was taking money from people in the name of giving them job in the NGO for the last two and a half years.

"It is a fake recruiting agency," the Ramna OC said.

Police did not find Walur at his home.

Mahbubur alleged Ripon was a member of the Gopal-Babu gang in Farmgate and lived in Kathalbagan before going underground.

Denying his role in bombing, Ripon said he was standing outside the Sangsta office

when the bomb went off.

But Shohag, who also denied the charge, said they were sitting at the office when three young men passed by and the bomb exploded.

He said the NGO ran several projects on mass education, poultry and tailoring.

Hospital sources said Ripon's injuries suggest the bomb might have exploded in his hand or at a close distance.

"They are professional bomb-builders," the Ramna OC alleged. "I think they worked as bomb suppliers and hired the office to carry on the crime under the cover of an NGO."

On the same day, a seven-year-old girl suffered bomb injuries in Demra, police said.

Yasmin was playing with some others near their house at Demra Baherspool at 5:00pm when a boy handed over a container to a girl.

As the children began playing with container, it went off and Yasmin suffered splinter injuries.

Interpol preparing

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the advance team on Wednesday.

Pullums who left Bangladesh yesterday afternoon took video footages and photographs to analyse the gory episode that local investigators said cover massive aspects. "If need be, more Interpol experts may come to Dhaka," an investigator said.

"It is not true that the investigation came to a standstill, rather it has made progress. The Interpol team does not want to disclose its findings immediately," he said, asking not to be named.

The Interpol team stayed all day in their hotel room talking to local investigators and analysing evidence they have gathered.

FBI INVESTIGATION

Gibson Wilson, an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), yesterday continued to probe the grenade attack with the assistance of local investigators in

Dhaka.

Inspector General of Police Shahidul Haque told The Daily Star that a local investigation team is working with the FBI agent, without giving further details.

JUDICIAL PROBE

Although the AL declined to talk to the one-member judicial probe commission terming it biased on Thursday, Justice Joyntu Abedin, describing the commission as neutral, still expects cooperation from all to make the probe a success.

Justice Abedin sought an appointment with AL President Sheikh Hasina on Thursday that the AL leaders refused saying the AL does not trust the commission.

"I still hope witnesses will help me probe the incident," he said in an interview with BBC Radio yesterday. "I am collecting the accounts of witnesses to find the reasons of the attack."

Unplanned sand

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eral resources ministry does not impose any restriction on how much sand could be extracted and how it should be extracted. The authorisation is 'easy to obtain' and it does not have any scientific basis.

The ministry also lacks monitoring cell to oversee the extraction.

"The only thing the authorisation mentions is the area where sand can be extracted and thousands of people have obtained it," said one expert requesting anonymity.

The authorities have now asked the BIWTA to issue authorisation for extraction of sand from the riverbed on the 17-kilometre stretch of the Buriganga from Kholamora to Turag river.

"What you see here is nothing compared to how much is being dumped on the low-lying land," Mashud said pointing his finger at the huge piles of sand on the bank of the Turag river.

Meanwhile, one private university

authorisation, workers of a volgate named Allar Dan said they did not have any.

The operator of the volgate said no one has any authorisation to extract sand from the riverbed.

According to Mashud, a sand trader at Amin Bazar, they buy at least 10 barges of sand a day. Sand trade is a big business in the booming construction sector and sand is also being used to fill up miles of low-lying land around the capital, he added.

Besides, the principal of the Veterinary College filed a murder case with the police station on Thursday and JCD leader Ashraf Bari filed another case against 15 Shibir activists of killing Sohag.

The letter referred to the killing of progressive, secular and intellectual people in 1971 and claimed that fundamentalists control all madrasas and 80 percent of schools and colleges and other institutions except for Dhaka University.

Aktheruzzaman told The Daily Star: "We cannot ignore it and there is no reason to take the matter lightly."

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