

Mystery lingers around Yasser Arafat's death

REUTERS, PARIS

What killed Yasser Arafat? It's a mystery that could keep the rumour mill churning and fuel conspiracy theories for years to come. Internet Web sites are spilling over with speculation that Arafat, who died in a French hospital on Thursday, had anything from stomach cancer or a rare blood disorder to AIDS -- an idea ridiculed by Palestinian officials. A top Hamas official, who was poisoned by Israeli agents but survived, accused Israel of poisoning Arafat -- a theory which his private doctor did not rule out despite being discounted by the Palestinian foreign minister. Hopes of the riddle being solved are slim. The French chief doctor who announced Arafat's death in the early hours of Thursday is bound by privacy laws invoked by Arafat's widow which prevent him releasing details. "There is still no diagnosis, and medically it is known that when there is no diagnosis, the doctors carry out an autopsy," Ashraf al-Kurdi, a Jordanian doctor who treated Arafat for a quarter of a century, told Reuters in the West Bank on Friday. "I ask for an investigation into the illness of President Arafat and an investigation to find out why he died," said Kurdi, who had apparently felt squeezed out after Arafat was transferred to Paris. Asked about suggestions that Arafat had been suffering from a rare blood cancer, he said: "What is this? I still don't rule out that Arafat was poisoned." Arafat, 75, was flown from the West Bank to Paris on Oct 29 suffering from stomach pains, diarrhoea and vomiting. He had blood and urine tests, internal investigations and scans.

Eid tomorrow

Thursday, which was a public holiday, followed by weekend yesterday and a four-day Eid holiday from today. In Dhaka, shopping centres and shopping malls were crowded with Eid shoppers yesterday as on the last few days. President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, in separate messages yesterday, extended warmest greetings and heartfelt felicitations to the people of the country and to all heads of state and government of Muslim countries on the occasion of the Eid-ul-Fitr. Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina also issued separate message greeting the people on the eve of the Eid. The prime minister, who returns home this morning from Saudi Arabia, will exchange Eid greetings with people from all walks of life including political leaders and workers, professionals and senior civil and military officials at the Prodhannontri Bhaban from 11am to 12noon on the Eid day. Khaleda will also exchange Eid greetings with diplomats and other guests from 10:15 am to 11am at Jamuna Guest House at Hare Road on the day. In Dhaka, the main Eid congregation will be held at the National Eidgah at 8:30 am or at Baitul Mokarram mosque in case of inclement weather. There will be separate arrangement

Hepatitis cases

BIRDEM hospital and Mitford Hospital have also reported treating patients with the viral infection. Some of the patients have chronic infection (suffering for over six months). Moreover, a number of patients with acute infection were admitted to different private hospitals including Bangladesh Medical College Hospital, Holy Family Red Crescent Hospital, Samorta Hospital and Comfort Nursing Home in the past two weeks. An expert pointed out many patients infected with hepatitis A, B or C viruses have few or no symptoms of being ill. Incidence of hepatitis B is the highest among the younger generation, the hospital reports show. According to the Liver Foundation of Bangladesh, an estimated 7-10 per cent or 9.1 to 13 million people in Bangladesh carry hepatitis B virus but all of them may not develop the disease until the virus turns active from its incubation period that can last one year to several years. Life threat FROM PAGE 12 Justice Faizal Mahmud Fayeze and 110 other lawyers published in the daily Bhorer Kagoj on October 30 and 31. Samaresh filed a general diary with the Kotwali Police Station. CUJ (Chittagong Union of Journalists) leaders in a statement last evening strongly condemned the threat and asked the administration to identify and punish the culprits.

FROM PAGE 12 service quality of BTB, Post and Telecommunications Minister M Aminul Haque said a few days ago. "We will look into the matter and take necessary action if any subscriber complains." Considering the BTB's scenario, a substantial number of people and businesses now depend more on mobile telephony than land phone. The number of mobile phone subscribers is now four times the number of fixed phone users. While BTB has less than nine lakh subscribers, more than 35 lakh people are now using mobile phone services. One of the reasons why BTB could not perform well is the lack of a corporate structure to run the show, industry sources said. In January last year, the government formed a committee for restructuring BTB that recommended transforming the state-owned board into a public limited company. But corporatisation of BTB still remains a far cry due to legal hurdles, complications in job descriptions and lack of systematic inventory and accounts of its assets and liabilities. Besides, lack of financial audit, fixation of tariff, and allocation and redistribution of human resources are the other major obstacles to making BTB public. Industry sources said BTB as a corporate body would be able to provide telecommunications access to many more people. The country's main line per 100 inhabitants is now 0.34, which is the lowest in the South Asian region, which is 1.13 even in Nepal, 2.65 in India, 2.21 in Pakistan and 3.64 in Sri Lanka.

Extortion peaks

FROM PAGE 1 he did not pay up Tk 2 lakh in tolls demanded a few days earlier.

A physician who practises in Mirpur Section-1 said on condition of anonymity he had to pay Tk 20,000 to local musclemen facing a threat of dire consequences if he did not come up with the sum. Businessmen and shopowners of Farmgate area alleged some local leaders of Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal, the youths' front of ruling BNP, had been sending their cadres or making phone calls demanding tolls. On an average, they charged a business house Tk 5,000 to 'meet their Eid expenses'. "I closed my office two days before the scheduled vacation as they started to make repeated phone calls asking an Eid-toll of Tk 5,000," said an executive of a private firm seeking anonymity. "I don't know what they will do when I open my office after the Eid," the man really was a little scared. Former operatives of underworld kingpin Pichchi Hannan, who was killed on August 7 in 'crossfire' during an operation of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), have been squeezing tolls harder from the businesses at Karwan Bazar throughout Ramadan, a number of traders told The Daily Star. The band has lately been commanded by a new chief, Masud, with a man named Badal as his right-hand man. "I paid Tk 35,000 to Masud and Badal after they had threatened to kill me on my way back home," said a trader of the market preferring not to be named. Toll collectors employed by police widely known as 'linemen' have also been charging additional money on occasion of the Eid, alleged hawkers of Gulistan area, who claim to pay regular tolls to police for doing business on footpaths. "Normally I pay them Tk 150 a day, but now, ahead of the Eid, the linemen charge me Tk 300," said Mohammad Miraj, who sells clothes on the footpath along Bangabandhu Avenue. He said there are more than 1,000 hawkers like him in the area, who have to pay 'protection money' to both police and mafiosi.

Kala Jahangir

FROM PAGE 1 sister Khadija Begum, adding that Monir was taken to the Detective Branch (DB) office later for interrogation. Members of Cheeta and Cobra, both comprising DB personnel, took him to Kafur area at 1:30am yesterday 'to arrest criminals'. The criminals opened fire on them, prompting the law enforcers to retaliate, a Dhaka Metropolitan Police press release said. "Monir received bullet injuries and the Cheeta and Cobra men seized a 7.62 bore revolver and two bullets from his possession," said the press release. Later Cheeta and Cobra men handed over Monir's body to Kafur Police Station. Kafur police Sub-Inspector Abul Kashem took him to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead at 2:30am. Two separate cases -- one for possessing illegal firearms and the other for police assault -- were filed against Monir with Kafur Police Station. Meanwhile, Monir's sister said they would file a murder case against Cheeta and Cobra men after receiving his body on completion of autopsy today.

BTTB acts

FROM PAGE 12 service quality of BTB, Post and Telecommunications Minister M Aminul Haque said a few days ago. "We will look into the matter and take necessary action if any subscriber complains." Considering the BTB's scenario, a substantial number of people and businesses now depend more on mobile telephony than land phone. The number of mobile phone subscribers is now four times the number of fixed phone users. While BTB has less than nine lakh subscribers, more than 35 lakh people are now using mobile phone services. One of the reasons why BTB could not perform well is the lack of a corporate structure to run the show, industry sources said. In January last year, the government formed a committee for restructuring BTB that recommended transforming the state-owned board into a public limited company. But corporatisation of BTB still remains a far cry due to legal hurdles, complications in job descriptions and lack of systematic inventory and accounts of its assets and liabilities. Besides, lack of financial audit, fixation of tariff, and allocation and redistribution of human resources are the other major obstacles to making BTB public. Industry sources said BTB as a corporate body would be able to provide telecommunications access to many more people. The country's main line per 100 inhabitants is now 0.34, which is the lowest in the South Asian region, which is 1.13 even in Nepal, 2.65 in India, 2.21 in Pakistan and 3.64 in Sri Lanka.

US claims controlling most of Fallujah

Fighting goes on in Mosul

AFP, Fallujah

US troops controlled most of Fallujah yesterday but were forced to confront rebels in Iraq's northern city of Mosul and officers said there were signs of insurgents resurfacing in other Sunni Arab strongholds across Iraq. The officers said they feared that some militants fled Fallujah before the battle for the city started on Monday and are now in flashpoint areas such as Mosul, where a US soldier was shot dead on Thursday. On the fourth full day of the battle for Fallujah, US tanks rolled through the entire city as thousands of US troops, backed by Iraqi soldiers, moved from house-to-house to root out pockets of insurgents. "What is left (to take), comparatively speaking, is a small piece of

what we started with," said marine spokesman Lieutenant Lyle Gilbert. "We control it (Fallujah) in the sense that we are ever-present but it will still take some time to secure it," he told AFP, without giving a timeframe. As of Thursday evening, the US military said 18 US and five Iraqi soldiers had been killed and 178 US and 34 Iraqi troops wounded in the offensive. At the same time, the military says more than 500 rebels have died. There are no clear figures on the number of civilian casualties. At least two-thirds of Fallujah's 300,000-strong population is thought to have left the city ahead of the fighting. In the face of the onslaught in Fallujah, some insurgents appear to have shifted elsewhere, with bomb-

ings and other attacks being carried out across Sunni areas of central and northern Iraq. These attacks have prompted the authorities to impose curfews in seven cities. In Mosul, US military operations to try to quell unrest continued on Friday after clashes during the week prompted the provincial governor to ask US forces for help. The military said it launched air and ground attacks on Thursday during which one US soldier and several rebels were killed. Three other towns also saw continued violence -- Ramadi, a Sunni rebel bastion 50 kilometres west of Fallujah, Hawija, another staunchly Sunni town in northern Iraq, and Samarra, which was retaken from insurgents in an offensive last month.

Tribute to an undying flame

FROM PAGE 1 held it as situation suited them. The Arab unity, on which so much depended as for the future of Palestine, proved elusive over time as leading Arab countries pursued their own independent agenda vis-a-vis the US. The disintegration of the Soviet Union was a severe blow for Arafat and the Palestinian cause as the socialist bloc was a constant supporter -- both in terms of resources and military hardware -- for the PLO and its cause. Arafat realised that with the emergence of the US as the sole superpower he had no alternative but to use its good offices for a negotiated peace with Israel. Thus the Oslo and Camp David peace accords followed. Arafat perhaps genuinely believed in the sincerity of Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton as honest brokers but became disillusioned with them on the questions of East Jerusalem and return of the Palestinian refugees. In 1991 he made what can be termed the biggest mistake of his life when he sided with Saddam Hussein in supporting the occupation of Kuwait by Iraq. In one stroke he divided the Arab world 'many of whom withdrew their support of the PLO and Arafat himself. This also alienated him from many non-Arab Muslim countries that could not support occupation of Kuwait. He also lost a lot of support from Europe, that traditionally backed the Palestinian cause much to the chagrin of the US. His worst days began with Ariel Sharon being elected as Israel's PM and George W. Bush becoming the President of US who gave the former a free hand to do whatever he pleased with Arafat and the

Palestinians. Thus began his days of humiliation when he was literally held as a prisoner within his compound in Ramallah, isolated and powerless. This was also the time he showed his vulnerability as an administrator and brought upon himself criticism of nepotism, corruption and financial patronage. More than 60 per cent of the Palestinians are below the age of 40 and have known no other leader but Arafat. His passing away will no doubt create a vacuum that will be hard to fill. This is also the first time in four decades that enemies of Palestine have a chance to manipulate events to affect Palestinian unity and leadership. Thus it is of utmost importance that Palestinians and their leaders maintain their unity. History, as we know, is always written by the victors. In the case of Palestine and Yasser Arafat we are sure the battle is far from over. But given the stage in which we are now much will be written about Arafat by those who would have liked to see him dead much earlier than November 11, 2004. For them we would like to say Arafat may not have fulfilled his dream of an independent Palestinian state but he has been able to deeply implant that dream in the mind of his people and today or tomorrow that dream will be realised. The question is how much more blood will have to be spilled before that comes true. For us in Bangladesh Yasser Arafat has been and will remain a valiant freedom fighter, a patriot, a most devoted leader, and one who has sacrificed his life for the cause of his people. We salute his memory and pray for the Eternal Peace of his Soul.

Arafat laid to rest

FROM PAGE 1 Egypt's director of intelligence, tried to emerge from the helicopter, but were kept back by the huge, chaotic crowd. "It is not what we expected," said Palestinian Cabinet minister Saeb Erekat, who travelled in the Egyptian military helicopter with Arafat's coffin. "At the same time, we had to do the burial before sunset in Islamic tradition... I expected much better, more organised, but things got out of hand, unfortunately." The red, white, green and black flag was ripped off the casket as it was carried through the crowd. The failure of the police to control the pandemonium anguished poorly for Palestinian hopes to maintain calm and order in the wake of Arafat's death. Earlier, people burst through gates of the Muqata and climbed over walls to pay their final respects to the man who embodied their dreams of statehood. As Arafat's helicopter landed, the crowd cried out 'Welcome, welcome Abu Ammar!' using his nom de guerre. "Welcome, welcome old man!" Armed policemen had tried for several hours to keep people back, but mourners, eager to get close to the gravesite, pushed their way through. Police scrambled to keep people off the landing pad. Buildings and windshields in the West Bank and Gaza were plastered with Arafat's photo and people waved black and white scarves, the colours of the late leader's Fatah movement. In Gaza City, hundreds gathered on rooftops, streets and apartment balconies in hope of catching a glimpse of Arafat's helicopter. Barred from attending the burial, tens of thousands of Gaza residents held rallies and symbolic funerals across the strip. A small group of masked gunmen marched into the Muqata, ignoring calls from official Palestine TV not to carry arms or mask faces, as is common in Palestinian funerals during times of crisis. However, the gunmen calmly submitted to inspection by plainclothes security personnel who ensured there were no bullets in the chambers. The cooperation between militants and policemen was a likely reflection of Palestinians' desire for

consensus in the wake of Arafat's death. The 75-year-old Arafat, who led the Palestinians for four decades, died Thursday at a Paris hospital from an undisclosed illness that had plunged him into a week-long coma. He had spent his final three years confined to his Ramallah headquarters never leaving out of fear the Israelis wouldn't allow him back in. Yesterday, teenage boys climbed onto the walls of the compound chanting "Whoever poisoned Arafat, we will drink his blood." Others cried out, "Allahu akbar," Arabic for "God is great," and "We want to see Abu Ammar." Top Arafat aide Tayeb Abdel Rahim emerged from the compound and asked the crowd to stop chanting. "The whole world is watching us now on television and we have to reflect our real picture," he said. In Jerusalem, hundreds of Palestinian youths scuffled with Israeli police outside the al-Aqsa mosque -- the third holiest site in Islam -- after police barred them from praying amid fear of riots and unrest during Arafat's funeral. Israeli police, ordered to stay on the sidelines of the burial, were on their highest state of alert and canceled all leaves, worried that the prayers for the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan, would get out of control. Egypt gave Arafat a state funeral in Cairo, even though he never realised his dream of Palestinian statehood. Presidents and dignitaries from more than 50 countries waited in a red patterned tent as pallbearers placed the coffin, draped in the black, red, green and white Palestinian flag, on the traditional gun carriage. After a short procession, the coffin was loaded on to a helicopter for the journey to Ramallah in the West Bank. The service began amid heavy security with humble prayers at a mosque in a military compound and ended with the procession, his flag-draped wooden casket set on a horse-drawn gun carriage and followed by a crowd of presidents and kings. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah as well as Abbas and Farouk Kaddoumi, the newly chosen leader

Change of govt

FROM PAGE 1

threefold: to re-evaluate US-Bangladesh relationship after the Bush re-election, visiting Chittagong and, "We remain concerned about the direction of this country. I think overall the country is doing the right thing, but it must make progress in peace, stability, and law and order and against corruption." The US State Department functionary was speaking at a press briefing at the American Center before his departure for Washington at the end of the five-day trip. POLITICAL CONCERNS Asked about his comments about a mid-term election, Patterson said, "The constitution allows a change of government in the middle of its term, through such things as vote of no confidence." Expressing his concern about the recent attacks on political programmes of Jatiyo Oikya Mancha attended by its leaders former President Badruddoza Chowdhury and Dr Kamal Hossain he said all political parties should be allowed to express their views. Patterson also reiterated his concern over investigations into the August 21 grenade attacks on an Awami League rally in Dhaka, May 21 grenade attacks on the British high commissioner in Sylhet and the large arms hauls in the country, particularly the April 2 arms haul in Chittagong. He said the US offers to help in the investigations were still on the table and Dhaka had sought assistance on a small scale only, when they asked for the help of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to probe the August 21 grenade attacks. "Easy answers to the problem are not enough, the answers to all the questions in the investigations must be found in their fullest extent," he asserted, adding the issues had to be investigated by the fullest capability of the country. "We will not be satisfied until the real perpetrators are brought to justice," he said. On corruption, he said if leaders at the top, especially in the government, do not do anything to curb corruption in the country, "then people get the message." But, he said, the government's promise to form an anti-corruption bureau remains crucial and he is looking forward to it. Patterson said not only military and economic assistance but the new Bush regime would also like to see how US 'brains' could contribute to any country in the world, adding, besides Iraq and Afghanistan, Bangladesh is one country that would attract keen US interest.

mechanism. I think it's something we can study more." He also insisted that the US government has not been pushing specifically for a US company to develop a private port in Chittagong. It rather considers privatisation of Chittagong Port as crucial for Bangladesh's economy he explained. Underscoring the potentials of the port's regional location, Patterson said the impact of a modern and efficient port would be significant for the country's economy and any efforts for privatisation could be assisted by Asian, American or trans-national financial institutions. He was also of the opinion that any plan for a future deepsea port in Chittagong would be an excellent one and US assistance for that might come after careful consideration. The US high official expressed disappointment at the lack of economic activities at a larger scale saying that not many major highways, bridges or other large infrastructure projects were undertaken here to facilitate a vibrant growth of small and medium industries. He however said he was impressed with Bangladesh's moves against human trafficking and satisfied with what he had seen at a rehabilitation centre for rescued victims of women and children trafficking. Stressing shared ideals between Bangladesh and the US, he said both the countries have vibrant press, religious tolerance and numerous political parties. Patterson informed the reporters that the number of student visas issued to Bangladeshis has gone up by 50 per cent over the last two years, issuance of non-immigrant visas has also gone up and Bangladeshis account for the largest number of winners of the US Diversity Visa (DV) for 2005. He said, since the birth of Bangladesh, the US has given it \$4.5 billion in aid and assistance, has been the largest partner in bilateral trade and the biggest source of foreign private investment.

ON ECONOMIC COOPERATION

On providing greater US market access to Bangladeshi goods, Patterson said, "I do believe the most important thing we could do for Bangladesh would be to allow greater market access.... We should try to do that. But I don't know the specifics of how to do that or what's the proper

Kala Monir

FROM PAGE 12 they opened fire on them, prompting them to retaliate," said Akbar. Monir collapsed on the ground receiving four bullets in his legs, but his accomplices managed to flee. Police found a Czechoslovakian pistol loaded with two bullets and 250 rounds of .22 bore bullets after the 10-minute gunfight. Monir was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and was being treated till filing of this report at 1:30am today. Bullet-hurt Mahbub and Humayun were admitted to Rajarbagh Police Lines Hospital. Police said Monir and his gang were taking preparation for an operation. But, talking to The Daily Star Monir denied having any firearms or ammunition and said he went to Jurain to see his sister.

FM hands over PM's letter to Chandrika

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday handed over a letter of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, inviting her to the 13th Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit to be held in Dhaka January 9-11. During the meeting at the President House, the foreign minister briefed the Lankan president about preparations of the summit. The Lankan president accepted the invitation and expressed her keenness to participate in the summit. Later, the foreign minister met his Lankan counterpart Lakshman Kadirgamar at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They discussed the issues relating to the forthcoming Saarc summit.

DU student

FROM PAGE 12 Rabhani, 17, son of Jalal Ahmed of Purba Kachbar village in Sadar upazila, died on the spot when a speeding truck hit the auto-rickshaw he was travelling in. Four people were killed and eight others injured when a bus collided with a tempo on Laxmipur-Chaumbhani road at Matabi in Sadar upazila yesterday. The dead are Litam, 25, Fancy, 15, Javed, 6, and Abul Kalam, 20. The injured are undergoing treatment at a local hospital. Police seized the killer bus. In Jhenidah, a Dhaka University student was killed in a road accident at Hamdoha bus stand in the town yesterday morning. Police and witnesses said Rajib, 25, a student of Accounting Department and son of traffic inspector Fazle Haque, now posted in Jhenidah, died on the spot when a speeding truck rammed his bicycle at about 10:30am. Rajib went to Jhenidah to meet his parents during the Eid vacation. Police seized the truck, but its driver managed to flee.

Karwan Bazar

FROM PAGE 12 They said a section of the BNP bigwigs also lobbied to ensure a top position on the committee for L Rahman, president of BNP Dhaka City Ward No 39. Nabi Solaiman, I Rahman and Sahabuddin organised a rally on October 24 under the banner of 'Committee against Criminal Activities and Toll Collection' at Karwan Bazar, which also raised a lot of eyebrows. Sahabuddin was killed four days later, on October 26, in another Rab 'crossfire'. Market sources said, after the death of Sahabuddin, followers of Pichchi Hannan went on hiding for the time being. But, some said they are still collecting 'protection money' from the bazaar in secret. Karwan Bazar, stretching from Tejgaon Railway Station to Bangladesh Film Development Corporation gate, houses over 22 markets and 10,000 businesses. Of them, only a half or 11 markets -- eight owned by Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), two by private houses and one by Bangladesh Railways are legal. The rest include four fish markets on Railways land adjacent to Hotel Sonargaon, one on the DCC children's park, three on public footpaths and four squatting on commercial plots. Locals said the mafiosi collect a

few lakh taka a day in tolls from these markets. A big amount of hush money also goes to the dishonest government officials concerned so they do not create trouble for the illegal markets. Sources said around 10 gangs including the one once headed by Pichchi Hannan are active at Karwan Bazar who, among other things, even abduct businessmen to force them to pay up. "Hannan's chela (an accomplice) Badsha and two others kidnapped me at gunpoint and confined me to a room in July, a few days before Hannan was arrested. They demanded Tk 2 lakh from me. But I managed to buy freedom by paying only Tk 40,000," a vegetable warehouse owner told The Daily Star requesting anonymity. Over 300 businessmen had to wind up their business from Karwan Bazar since 1998 when the gang of Pichchi Hannan and four rival gangs led by Saidul, Ali, Sobhan and Raipura Shailya started mugging, abductions and toll collection at random. Traders said since then at least seven traders were killed in their hands and on an average the mafiosi abducted five businessmen a day and collected huge ransom, adding after Hannan's death the situation improved a bit.