

'Chemical Ali' faces hearing next week

AP, Baghdad

Saddam Hussein's defence minister, who surrendered to American forces last year, will appear alongside another notorious general - known as Chemical Ali - when investigative trials open next week, an official said yesterday.

Gen. Sultan Hashim Ahmad, who gave himself up in September 2003 at a coalition military base in the northern city of Mosul, will be among the first two to face the hearings, which interim Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi announced will commence next week.

An Iraqi government official said on Thursday that Saddam's notorious former right-hand man, Ali Hassan al-Majid - known as Chemical Ali for his use of chemical weapons - would head the list of 11 top regime members to appear at the initial investigative court hearings.

"Chemical Ali and Sultan will be the first to face the hearings," the official, who is familiar with the proceedings, told The Associated Press.

Ahmad was No. 27 on America's list of 55 most-wanted regime figures. He surrendered on Sept. 19, 2003, to Lt. Gen. David Petraeus, who was then the commander of the 101st Airborne Brigade.

Ahmad is in US military custody at an undisclosed location in Baghdad.

During the 1991 Gulf War, Ahmad, then a lieutenant general, served as deputy chief of staff. He headed the Iraqi delegation at cease-fire talks.

Ahmad was responsible for persuading Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf to allow Iraq to use military helicopters on official business. The allies came to regret that decision later when the Iraqis used

Hasina

FROM PAGE 12 The discussion was addressed, among others, by Syeda Sejada Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Motia Chowdhury, Sheikh Selim, Tofail Ahmed, Abdur Razzaq, Abdul Jalil, Obaidul Kader, Asaduzzaman Noor and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, litterateur Syed Shamsul Haq and Supreme Court Bar Association President Rakanuddin Mahmud.

Abdur Razzaq said the BNP-Jamaat government wants to distort the history of the Liberation War because they were opposed to independence of Bangladesh.

Jalil called upon the pro-liberation forces to get united to dislodge the present coalition government.

Sharon offers state

FROM PAGE 12 After making responsibility for the areas which we leave," Sharon said.

Despite the kind words, violence raged in Gaza on Friday.

After 11 Israeli soldiers were slightly wounded in a Palestinian mortar attack, Israel sent tanks and bulldozers into the Khan Younis refugee camp early Friday to knock down buildings used as cover by militants, the military said.

Two Palestinians, one a gunman, were killed and eight people were wounded in the fighting.

Hundreds of Palestinians fled their homes for fear the army would demolish them. The families sought refuge in a nearby hospital, a stadium and at the homes of relatives who don't live on the front-line of fighting.

A few hours earlier, an Israeli helicopter fired a missile at a carpentry shop in the Rafah camp, which the army said was used to manufacture mortars.

Charging that Arafat was the main obstacle to peace, Sharon called 2005 "the year of the great opportunity."

Israel shunned Arafat and confined him to his West Bank headquarters for nearly three years before he died Nov. 11 in a French hospital. Since then, Israel has been signalling that it will work with his replacement, likely to be Mahmoud Abbas, the front-runner in a Jan. 9 presidential election.

Now, Sharon said, "We stand before a unique window of opportunity. Who knows when we will have this opportunity in the future. We must not miss this opportunity to reach an agreement."

Sharon said his planned withdrawal from Gaza and a part of the West Bank could lead to peace negotiations. Acknowledging that the pullout proposal has caused him political difficulties, forcing him to reform his government, he defended his plan.

"To do this, we have to take the initiative," he said. "This is the hour, this is the time, this is the national test."

If the Palestinians stop militant groups from attacking Israel, he said, the result could be fulfilment of their desire for a state.

Political movement is conditional on "real action by them against terrorism, liquidating it and

helicopters to quell rebellious Shias in Basra and Kurds in the north.

The Kurdish mediator instrumental in bringing Ahmad said at the time of the surrender that the deal was sealed after the Americans agreed to remove his name from the 55 most-wanted list, a move that would have seen him released without trial after his initial questioning ended.

It was not immediately clear if the alleged arrangements remained in place.

Saddam, 67, will not be among the group to appear in next week's court hearings, which will be open to some media representatives, the AP has learned.

DU-AEC dispute

FROM PAGE 12 vertically is not possible, as it will damage the aesthetic settings of the university.

"The AEC at a meeting two months back agreed to hand over the commission's building to the DU by December 27. The handover of the entire land is supposed to take place by April 2005," Prof Hasan claimed.

But the AEC authorities refuted the claim, saying there was no understanding on the handover.

On the academic exchange, Hasan said, "It's true some teachers and students of the science faculty use the AEC facilities, but this won't be hampered if the AEC is shifted."

9 killed

FROM PAGE 12 missing. Four militants have been killed and possibly another two are wounded," Lutfullah Mashal, Interior Ministry spokesman, said.

The prisoners killed by guards were Pakistani and Iraqi al-Qaeda members who had been arrested in Kabul by Afghan security forces, Abdul Salam Bakhshi chief of Kabul's Pul-i-Charki prison told Reuters.

The two others, believed to be Pakistanis, were surrounded by police and militia forces armed with machineguns and rocket-propelled grenade launchers, but had managed to keep security forces at bay for more than seven hours.

Two armored vehicles belonging to the German contingent of the Nato-led peacekeeping force stationed in Kabul were standing by outside the walls of the prison, overlooked by four watchtowers on a deserted plain on the outskirts of the capital.

The violence began when one prisoner stabbed and killed a guard, took his gun and opened fire, killing two other guards, Bakhshi said.

bring it to elimination," as well as internal reforms and an end to anti-Israel incitement, Sharon said.

"For their part, the Palestinians can then also live in dignity and freedom in an independent state and together with us enjoy good neighborly relations while cooperating for the good of both our peoples," he said.

Palestinian reaction to the speech was dismissive.

Palestinian Cabinet minister Saeb Erekat, who is in charge of negotiations with Israel, said the speech contained nothing new. "If he wants to withdraw from Gaza or anywhere else, no one will stop him. But as far as permanent settlement issues, this is dictation," he said. "We need negotiation, not dictation."

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said Sharon's speech was "a declaration of war against the Palestinian people and the rights of the Palestinian people," adding, "our answer will be that we will move ahead in our resistance against the occupation."

Hamas has been responsible for dozens of suicide bombings that have killed hundreds of Israelis during four years of violence.

Addressing the Palestinians, Sharon said, "We have no desire to rule over you. We have no desire to run control your affairs," endorsing their desire for an independent state while demanding that they stop attacks against Israel.

Sharon said that Israel's pullout from Gaza would ease demographic pressures on the country. About 8,200 Israeli settlers live among more than 1 million Palestinians in Gaza.

"It is clear that in a permanent peace accord, we will not be in Gaza," he said.

Sharon said that the Palestinians must "eliminate terrorism" as a condition for progress toward a peace settlement with Gaza. He repeated his pledge to cooperate with the Palestinians to allow free elections to replace Arafat.

Sharon praised Egypt for its intention to cooperate with the Israeli pullout from Gaza. He said if Egypt makes a concerted effort to stop Palestinian arms smuggling from Egypt into Gaza through tunnels under the border, Israel would withdraw from the patrol road - a key flashpoint in the conflict.

Maid murdered

FROM PAGE 1 Shibpur of Narsingdi to attend a political programme.

BBC Bangla Service quoted Akbar Hossain as saying that he was outside Dhaka and returned yesterday morning after being informed of the incident.

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and police detectives visited the house after the incident. The CID also collected fingerprints of four police guards stationed at the entrance and four staff of the house.

Ziaur Rahman Titu, Assistant Private Secretary (APS) to Akbar Hossain, said Shaheen came to the house at about 6:00am from Chittagong. There he works as a security guard at Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC). Security guards of the residence allowed him in, as he was known to all.

Shaheen claimed himself innocent. He said after changing clothes at a servant's room on the second floor, he went to his mother's room on the ground floor and found her lying in a pool of blood.

The on-duty policemen called in Gulshan police immediately after Shaheen informed them of the incident.

Titu said usually Bilkis keeps her doors locked from inside, but the security guards found the doors open after Shaheen had informed them of the matter. "Possibly Bilkis opened the door to allow Shaheen enter," he said.

He said Bilkis had been mentally sick for the last few weeks and receiving treatment from a family physician for abnormal behaviours.

"Shaheen used to call his mother from Chittagong and rebuke her for not helping make his job permanent despite working in a minister's house," Titu said.

Wife of Abdus Sattar of Goonbaria village in Motihar upazila of Rajshahi, Bilkis has been working as domestic help in Akbar Hossain's house for the last 12 years.

Rickshaw ban

FROM PAGE 12 rickshaw puller, Sharif Mia.

To meet public demands, BRTC has already introduced 40 double-decker buses to ply from Gabtoli to Azampur. The buses will transport passengers free of fare from Azampur to Kalabagan for the first ten days from yesterday.

"I welcome the government's decision, but also apprehend that buses from Mirpur or Mohamudpur may be jam-packed when it comes to the Kalabagan bus stoppage," said Kalabagan resident advocate Ezaz Rahman.

Different markets including New Market and Gausia Market witnessed less customers compared to other weekly holidays.

"We may face problem too due to the government's decision to ban rickshaw as most of the customers usually come by rickshaws," a New Market shopkeeper said.

Political stability

FROM PAGE 1 organised by Bangladesh-Malaysia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BMCCI), and a roundtable on Islam.

Three memoranda of understanding (MoU) will be signed during the two-day forum to promote bilateral trade and investment.

During his stay, Mahathir is likely to make a proposal for a free trade agreement (FTA). Earlier in October 2003, he proposed the FTA at the 10th Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit held in Malaysia.

The former Malaysian prime minister along with a high-profile business delegation is expected to visit various industries in the exclusive export processing zones (EPZs). He attends the 42nd convocation of Dhaka University today, where he will receive an honorary Doctorate of Law degree.

Mahathir is also scheduled to attend an official lunch, hosted by Morshed, and a BMFIF gala banquet dinner both scheduled for tomorrow.

Former president HM Ershad is scheduled to call on Mahathir tomorrow, before he departs at 10:00pm.

DU to honour

FROM PAGE 1 teachers and principals and directors of the institutes and constituent colleges to be present by 1:30pm.

They also asked the graduates and guests to take their seats at the convocation venue by 8:30am today and 9:00am tomorrow.

There will be separate entrances to the venue for the graduates and guests, who are not allowed to carry camera, cellphone or handbag.

The authorities yesterday held a rehearsal of the graduates and gold medalists on how to receive certificates and medals.

Security measures have been beefed up on the campus for the high-profile programme.

Classes and examinations scheduled for today and tomorrow have meanwhile been postponed and fresh dates for the exams will be announced soon.

India pile on runs

FROM PAGE 1 mammoth 259-run partnership for the second wicket as India amassed 334 for two in their first innings.

Little master Sachin Tendulkar, fresh from his unbeaten 248 in the Dhaka Test, was giving company to Dravid on 36 when balls were drawn at the MA Aziz Stadium.

For the second time Indian captain Sourav Ganguly won the toss but unlike in Dhaka, he preferred to bat first.

Although hard-hitting Sehwaig (10) again failed to capitalise in perfect batting conditions following his disappointing performance in the first Test, Gambhir and Dravid made no mistake to make the batting paradise their own.

Mashrafe brought early celebrations for a 25,000 jubilant port city crowd when Sehwaig tried to cut him but only edged the ball to first slip where Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar comfortably gripped the ball.

Smarting under a duck in the first Test, Dravid joined Gambhir to repair the early damage (14-1).

Rookie Gambhir, who missed out on a century against South Africa in Kanpur last month, was more aggressive than his senior partner and completed his maiden Test century in his fifth appearance.

The 23-year-old Delhi batter raced to 44 with six boundaries in eight balls including four fours in debutant Nazmul Hossain's one over but gave a chance on the same score.

Mofakkhar killed

FROM PAGE 1 disclosed that the outlawed operatives were scheduled to sit at a meeting in Bhadalia area of Kushtia Friday night, said a Rab statement.

But he did not disclose the names of his comrades, who have taken shelter in the capital, or the reason for their hiding, Rab sources added.

Rab-3 left Dhaka at around 11:30pm Thursday and handed him over to Kushtia Rab.

The Rab statement said a Rab contingent started for Bhadalia from Kushtia early hours yesterday and was ambushed by PBCP operatives in Baliapara field at around 4:00am. "PBCP men opened fire on the anti-crime force, prompting them to retaliate."

According to the Rab release, Mofakkhar tried to jump out of a Rab microbus during the one and a half-hour gunfight and was caught in the crossfire. He died on the spot.

After the end of the shootout, police rushed to the spot and retrieved two foreign pistols and a rifle with 15 bullets from there. They took Mofakkhar's body to Kushtia General Hospital for autopsy.

Fearing backlash against the death, security was beefed up at all vulnerable points and important installations in Khulna City and all the 10 districts of Khulna division. All police stations, outposts and camps in the division have been put on red alert.

Combining operations by law-enforcing agencies including Rab have also been intensified to track

Headmistress

FROM PAGE 1 brother, who teaches at the DMC Anatomy Department, received the bodies on completion of autopsies at 3:00pm.

The bodies are kept at ICDDR,B mortuary and will be buried after Sabera's son Shahriar Alam Sunny, who studies MBA in Bangkok, arrives Dhaka today.

Security guard Johor was sleeping close to the inner gate of the building. The killers may have attacked him because he had identified them or tried to stop them from fleeing the scene, said a police officer.

Police found the net of a window in the apartment's kitchen cut open. They recovered a bloodstained six-inch knife and collected finger- and foot-prints from the kitchen floor. A number of footprints were also there all over the apartment and bloodstains on the handle of the front door.

Police also found a folder of documents open in Sabera's bedroom and, suspecting some papers might have been stolen, seized it.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (North Zone) Golam Rasul said the killings were pre-planned. "The killers took nothing and displaced nothing. It seems they came solely to kill," he told The Daily Star.

Shamsul Alam filed a murder case last night without naming any one as accused. He, however, suspected that the security guards and their part-time housemaid might be involved in the killings, duty officer at Gulshan Police Station said.

Police endorses the suspicion, saying the staff of the house might have had a hand in the killing. "The killers did not have to break any of the doors or windows to enter the house. It suggests they entered through the main gate without any difficulty and managed to leave the scene safely," said a police officer seeking anonymity.

Gulshan police last night arrested

But Manzarul Islam, fielding at slips, failed to hold on to a low catch off Mohammad Rafique. Gambhir did not look back and pushed left-arm spinner Manzarul for a single to the on-side to complete his hundred with sixteen boundaries in 131 balls.

On the other hand, 31-year-old Dravid took some time to settle down but flourished in reaching his 18th Test century.

The right-handed batsman struck a brilliant back-foot drive against Talha Jubair -- his 14th boundary in 196 balls -- in the first over after tea to write his name in the list of century makers against every Test-playing nation after Gary Kirsten of South Africa, Australia's Steve Waugh and compatriot Tendulkar. Dravid also became the first cricketer to score Test centuries in each of the ten Test playing countries.

The home side finally got the much-desired breakthrough when Gambhir mistimed a pull on to his wicket to give 17-year-old Nazmul his maiden Test wicket and end Tendulkar's long waiting in the dressing room.

Gambhir's 196-ball essay was laced with 19 hits to the fence while Dravid, who has faced 275 balls, struck 21 boundaries.

India fielded the same side that played in Dhaka while the Tigers have made three changes, bringing in Aftab Ahmed, Talha and Nazmul for Tapash Baisya, Rajin Saleh and Mushfiqur Rahman.

down listed PBCP operatives.

Hailing from Fenchuganj in Sylhet, Mofakkhar came to the forefront of PBCP-ML in early '70s under the leadership of Abdul Matin and Alauddin. He served as secretary of the party's central committee until 1999, when he was expelled.

But he continued his political activities under the same banner. Mofakkhar in 2002 expelled a faction led by Abdur Rashid Malitha Tapan and some others from his faction of the PBCP-ML, who then formed the PBCP-Janajuddha, while those who had ousted Mofakkhar named their faction PBCP-ML-Red Flag.

The operatives of Mofakkhar-led outfit killed at least 200 people including politicians, businessmen and rival cadres in the regions in the last two decades.

On January 16 last, he faxed a message to Khulna Press Club condemning the murder of journalist Manik Saha the previous day. But his second-in-command Abdur Rashid Tapu was accused of the killing in the charge sheet. Police caught Tapu in the capital and he died in another alleged 'crossfire' between police and his comrades at Fakirhat in Bagerhat four months ago.

Meantime, getting advance information about a police operation, Shoaib and Sumon, two most-wanted operatives of the PBCP-Janajuddha, managed to escape from a madrasa in Pirojpur Town Tuesday midnight. A prominent Jamaat leader founded the madrasa.

Johor and Jahangir on suspicion and kept at the station.

Sabera's husband Shamsul also suspects that someone acquainted with his wife was involved in the killings. "It's highly improbable that my wife would answer the door for a stranger," he headed.

"Why did they kill them? I would have given them all my property for my wife and daughter's lives. Why did they kill such a pious woman [Sabera]?" he bewailed.

Law enforcers also do not brush aside the possibility of the killings being made from an intention to grab the victims' family property.

"I don't have any enemy neither did my daughter. Those who killed them are beasts in the guise of human beings and the country is now filled with such savages," Shamsul lamented with tears rolling down his face.

He was scheduled to fly to Bangkok tomorrow with the victims for Sharmin's treatment. "With whom will I go now, for what?" the traumatised man asked.

The victims' relatives said there seem to be no motive for the murders except for Sabera's enmity with some of her colleagues and members of the school's governing body.

"Some people had forced her to resign from the school in 2001 and she was reinstated after the BNP government came to power," Asad told The Daily Star. She then had filed a case against the people she held responsible for her forced resignation.

Mostafa Kamal, a mathematics teacher at Siddheshwari Girls High School, said, "I've heard some senior teachers have been fighting a legal battle with her for about four years."

DC Golam Rasul said, "We're working to identify the people who had personal animosity towards her." Sharmin graduated from the North South University and was working in a World Bank project. She was the eldest of one brother and two sisters.

BTTB proposes cellphone call rates

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) has proposed the tariffs for its postpaid and prepaid cellphones at Tk 3 and Tk 5 per minute, sources said.

"The BTB has submitted the rate to Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC)," a BTRC official told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We will discuss the matter on Saturday," the official said asking not to be identified.

The BTB, which has failed to launch its much-talked-about 2.5 lakh GSM (global system for mobile communications) cellphones by December 16, has extended the deadline until December 30, unconfirmed sources said.

When contacted, BTB Chairman Nurul Islam expressed his ignorance about the possible date for the launch. He suggested talking to the telecommunications minister to know about the service.

Sources said BTB is trying to soft-launch the service by this year, but the service will be made available to public by early next year.

All the four private operators have meanwhile agreed in principle to provide interconnections to the BTB's mobile phone.

"We've agreed to provide the service as a courtesy but it will require signing of an agreement with us before commercial launching," an official of Association of Telecom Operators, Bangladesh (ATO) told The Daily Star.

BTB's mobile phone has created a lot of hype because of its proposed low call tariff in comparison with private operators.

The BTB will announce the tariffs and offer the package after getting approval from the BTRC.

BNP Rally

FROM PAGE 1 multi-party democracy and freedom of expression.

He said the way the present government faced the unprecedented floods this year is a rare example in the world. It also introduced various schemes to establish the basic rights of the people.

BNP City Unit President Sadeque Hossain Khoka paid tribute to the martyrs of the Liberation War. He called upon all to forge unity to build a prosperous nation.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary Tarique Rahman also greeted the countrymen on the occasion.

After the rally, thousands of BNP leaders and workers took out a colourful victory procession that ended at Bahadur Shah Park.

Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Tarique Rahman, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, Advisor to the Ministry of Commerce Barkat Ullah Bulu, State Minister for Labour and Employment Amanullah Aman led the procession.

Dr Kamal

FROM PAGE 12 "Politics is now conducted by hired workers, who can never bring any positive result for the country," he said, adding there is no alternative to being united to save the nation.

Olkyia Mancha leaders Ajay Roy, Shamsuddoha and Abdur Rab also spoke on the occasion.

'Poor' rice stock

FROM PAGE 12 present government passed a law to increase the salaries of the prime minister and ministers even before the pay commission was announced. This clearly shows the lopsided values and priorities of the present government and lack of concern for the welfare of the low income people," Kibria said.

"The distorted priorities of the government must be revised to save the poor people of the country," he commented.

River-linking

FROM PAGE 1 topics being discussed in the Saarc. So, it [IRLP issue] can be discussed at the summit."

"We have to ensure that ecological disaster is not spawned by super engineering dreams," Muhiit added.

Eminent economist Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad said Bangladesh does not officially know the purposes and status of the river-linking project and, hence, what implications it may have on Bangladesh. But, earlier, both the governments of Bangladesh and India agreed to work together in any major intervention related to trans-boundary rivers, ensuring equity, fairness and no harm to either party, he pointed out.

"The project will have serious negative implications for Bangladesh, as it will reduce the flow of water into it and also affect its ecology, bio-diversity and navigation," described Water Partnership, Bangladesh Chairman Quamrul Islam Siddique.

Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed also spoke at the session, chaired by Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury. Mohammed Abdul Matin presented the vote of thanks.

Growing unhappiness with Rumsfeld in Republican camp

AFP, Washington

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is the target of increasing criticism from his own Republican camp, but the White House voiced Thursday its continued support for the Pentagon chief.

Several top Republicans have recently expressed discontent with Rumsfeld, who survived President George W. Bush's post-November election cabinet shake-up.

The defence chief has come under fire since last week over his answer to a US soldier in Kuwait who asked about the lack of armor for US military vehicles in Iraq.

In widely broadcast and published remarks, Rumsfeld responded: "You go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time."

Republican Senator Trent Lott, the Senate's former majority leader, said he hoped Rumsfeld would step down sometime next year, but he fell short of calling for his immediate resignation, saying Rumsfeld does not listen enough to his officers.

But the White House defended the 72-year-old veteran official, who was secretary of defence in the 1970s under President Gerald Ford.

"The president believes Secretary Rumsfeld is doing a great job, and that's why he asked him to