

Maoists abduct cops after attack on Nepali police station

AFP, Kathmandu

Maoist rebels abducted more than a dozen police officers yesterday after launching a gun and bomb attack on a police station south of the Nepalese capital, police said.

A group of rebels stormed the station shortly before noon sparking a gun battle until the police were overpowered and abducted, police said.

charges of being Maoists," the statement said. Shrestha also demanded the names of missing persons be made public and that the government repeal an anti-terrorist law that allows summary detentions.

Earlier nine Maoist rebels and four policemen died in fresh clashes in Nepal Saturday, bringing the number of dead from revolt-related violence in the past week to at least 131, officials said.

Pathan spoils

FROM PAGE 12 Despite the youngest Test century's great knock, the home team stared at another innings defeat when they lost their second-innings wickets like nine-pins to crash to 118-9 at stumps after being forced to follow-on.

Bangladesh resumed the day on 54-3 and everybody was expecting another meek surrender. But Ashraf had other ideas after captain Habibul Bashar (22) was dismissed following a 70-run partnership.

He launched a counterattack from the first ball and demoralised the Indian left-arm seamer duo Pathan and Zaheer with exquisite stroke play. The right-hander whacked a huge six over fine-leg in the initial stage and never looked behind, punishing the high-profile Indian attack.

He displayed all the shots in the book apart from a magnificent reverse sweep against Harbhajan Singh and the next ball, he came down the track to on-drive the off-spinner to the mid-wicket fence to complete his second hundred after his acclaimed century against Sri Lanka in 2001 on debut.

Ashraf's hundred came off 124 balls and studded with 15 fours and two sixes and before that, he steered Anil Kumble for two to complete his fifty from 70 balls. He also became the third Bangladeshi to go past 1,000-run mark in Test cricket after captain Habibul Bashar and Javed Omar. He was later joined by Khaled Mashud.

He was also involved in a brilliant 115-run fifth wicket partnership with local lad Afab Ahmed, who made 43 off 72 balls that produced five fours and six.

The only regret of Ashraf, who remained unconquered in 194 balls (24x4, 3x6), was that he failed to save the follow-on for just seven runs.

Bangladesh might be on the brink of another defeat but the Test will be remembered by the cricket fans for Ashraf's scintillating knock. The little prodigy became first Bangladesh batsman to cross the 150-run landmark and emerged larger than life to assault the star-studded Indian bowling.

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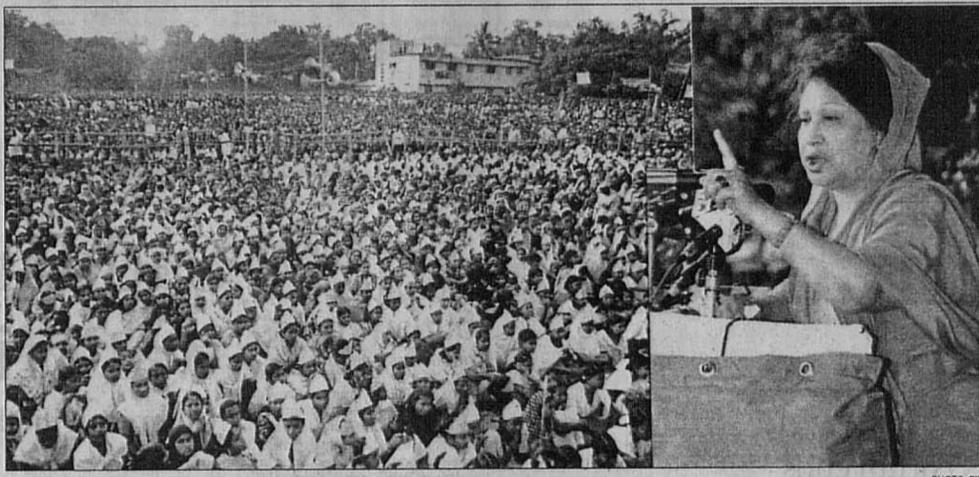
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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia addresses a rally at Bargharia in Chapainawabganj on the occasion of foundation laying of a technical training centre yesterday.

No headway

FROM PAGE 12 (CID) office tomorrow to see whether his fingerprints match those collected from the crime scene.

Police, meanwhile, could not yet extract any lead from Shaheen. He kept denying killing his mother, the IO added.

The IO dismissing suggestion of suicide said that it is highly improbable for one to slit one's own throat and still manage to put the knife in a particular position, as in this case, under the bed.

He said police still suspect Shaheen of matricide. He cited Shaheen's entering the house an hour before she was found dead as the reason behind their suspicion.

He also mentioned Shaheen resented his mother not making his job at Bangladesh Shipping Corporation permanent despite working at a minister's house.

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Transparency in river-link

FROM PAGE 12 held at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium, Indian High Commissioner to Dhaka Veena Sikri expressed her dissatisfaction that India has invariably been blamed for almost all problems relating to the water of the rivers shared by its neighbouring countries.

"I am well aware of the debate that covers the full gamut of water resource issues, including flooding, inadequate lean season flows, salinity and the construction of embankments. And recently, hitherto unknown groups like international Farakka Committee have sprung up. This tends to create a mindset that is one-sided," she said.

Sikri added that the title of the conference 'International Conference on Regional Cooperation on Trans-boundary Rivers: Impact of the Indian River-Linking Project' was inaccurate, as there was no 'project' but thinking was at a conceptual stage and was undertaking technological, socio-economic and political feasibility studies.

He said Bangladesh is in favor of creating an environment where all the co-riparian countries can join hands to harness the water resources of the region for a win-win scenario for all.

Forest and Environment Minister Tariqul Islam said the agriculture and ecology of Bangladesh is being damaged seriously by the impact of Farakka Barrage. Land is turning into desert, the water level is reducing and the salinity of water is increasing, destroying the bio-diversity of the Sundarbans.

The water of Teesta, Brahmaputra, Barak and many other rivers do not enter parts of Bangladesh during dry season and so, India must consider these issues before implementation of river-linking project.

He said the participation and consultation between the neighbouring countries must take place before India goes for the implementation.

Former agriculture minister Motia Chowdhury urged people not to make the river issue political. She said the Ganges Treaty, that ensures the participation of all the countries in any river-related project, has not been properly implemented.

Water and Sewerage Authority Managing Director ANH Akhtar Hossain, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology Professor M Firoze Ahmed, Hunger Project Director Badul Alam Majumder, Bangladesh Economic Association President Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad and Professor Khaleduzzaman of Lock Haven University, US, among others, also spoke. Professor Jamilur Reza Chowdhury presided over the afternoon session.

Witness says

FROM PAGE 12 Ali, Mahub and Kabir Hossain. He will be cross-examined again after the hearing resumes at 11:00am today.

Alam told the court that Dipu, Shipu, Tipu, Ratan, Alamin, Monir and Dulal opened fire on Ahsanullah with pistols and revolvers. The Al. lawmaker was at a conference to form the committee of Sechchhabok League.

Another group of Mahub, Anu, Kana Hafiz, Bara Ratan, Sohag, Jahangir, Salam, Amir, Mohammad Ali and Moshir also opened fire, the witness added. Chhoto Ratan shot Ahsanullah at around 12:35pm when the latter was leaving the stage, he said.

On completion of their mission, they left the spot and went northward, Alam added.

Among the 30 accused in the case, 12 were present. Kabir Hossain, Ayub, Pappu and Alamin were out on bail, while Dipu and 17 others are still at large.

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Mahathir

FROM PAGE 1 making, maintaining a 'rule of justice' rather than 'rule of law' and curbing corruption 'from the top'.

He also urged Muslim countries to stop trading in US dollars to undo a 'unipolar world order'.

Mahathir met Hasina and Ershad in the morning at Hotel Sonargaon before he flew off on a private jet around 10:00am. Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and Commerce Minister Alif Hossain Chowdhury saw him off at the airport.

Speaking to the press after her meeting with Mahathir, Hasina, also president of main opposition Awami League, said "His (Mahathir's) party brought independence for Malaysia, our party also brought independence for Bangladesh, and if Bangabandhu (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) could continue with his policy to this day, we could have been even more successful than Malaysia."

"The anti-liberation forces in power right now and military cliques since 1975 have foiled the trend of development in the country," she added.

Claiming that the incumbent government has pushed Bangladesh-Malaysia relationship into a shaky state, Hasina said, "During my rule, Mahathir had regularised 1.5 lakh Bangladeshi workers upon my request."

Hasina also said manpower exports to Malaysia were on a steady rise during the reign of the previous Awami League, she headed, but "they (the government) have destroyed the good will we had established between the two countries."

On Mahathir's receiving the honorary Doctorate of Laws degree from Dhaka University at its 42nd convocation on Saturday, Hasina said, "I am really proud that such an honour has been conferred on Dr Mahathir by the university I had attended."

"Now we are both alumni of the same university," she quipped.

Car bombings kill 62

FROM PAGE 1 The explosion left a deep crater and blew out windows and shop fronts, showering the area with broken glass.

PREVIOUS ATTACKS The Karbala attack was the second in five days. On Wednesday, a bomb apparently targeting Shia cleric Abdul Mehdi al-Karbala'i exploded as he was returning to his office after evening prayers at the Imam Hussein shrine.

Yesterday's bomb was just a few hundred yards away. Twelve people were killed and 30 wounded in Wednesday's attack, including the cleric, who is regarded as close to Iraq's supreme Shia authority, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Sistani, who lives in Najaf, has overseen the creation of a powerful Shia coalition to stand in the election, a bloc of candidates widely expected to emerge victorious.

Many militant Sunnis, waging an insurgency against American occupation, fear domination by the Shia majority who make up 60 percent of the population but have never held power.

There have been concerns about attempts to aggravate religious divisions since March, when suicide bombers struck Baghdad and Karbala during an annual Shia mourning rite, killing more than 170 people, an act blamed on Sunni militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian allied to al-Qaeda.

Shia religious leaders say they will not be provoked by bombs and reject accusations by some secular opponents that they want to install an Iranian-style Shia theocracy.

"They are trying to ignite a sectarian civil war and prevent elections from going ahead on time. They have failed before and they will fail again," said Mohammad Bahr al-Uloom, one of Iraq's most respected Shia clerics.

"The Shias are committed not to respond with violence, which will only lead to violence. We are determined on elections and Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has made this clear."

ELECTION OFFICIALS KILLED As well as attempts to drive a wedge between religious sects that have historically co-existed fairly peacefully, insurgents have made direct efforts to wreck plans for the poll. On Friday and Saturday, three election officials were attacked in the north.

In Baghdad, gunmen dragged three junior Electoral Commission employees from a car and shot them dead in broad daylight, although it was not clear if they were targeted because they worked for the commission, a commission spokesman said.

Witnesses said insurgents had opened fire on the vehicle first. Two other commission employees escaped.

Separately, four Kurds were killed by gunmen in Hawija, southwest of the ethnically tense city of Kirkuk.

US and Iraqi officials have warned that attacks will increase in the run up to the election, Iraq's first fully democratic poll in nearly half a century.

Electoral officials say 14 of Iraq's 18 governorates are safe enough to hold free and fair polls, but violence in the remaining areas -- mostly populated by Sunni Arabs -- has led Sunni organisations to call for a delay.

Militants have kidnapped and are threatening to kill 10 Iraqis employed by a US security company unless the firm pulls out of Iraq, a caller from the militants told Reuters. Arab satellite channels broadcast a tape showing the hostages.

It was not clear when the men were kidnapped. No deadline appears to have been set.

AKTEL reaches FROM PAGE 12 network coverage and improving call quality," Nasir Bin Baharom, chief executive officer and managing director of TMIB, told reporters at a briefing.

AKTEL plans to bring 275 upazilas under its coverage by the year-end and all remaining upazilas by the next year and double the number of base stations.

"This is just the beginning of a long journey and we are looking at the market which has got potential to grow," Baharom said.

TMIB, a joint venture between Telekom Malaysia Sdn Bhd and AK Khan Group, also plans to invest up to \$200 million for network expansion and introducing new technologies by the next year.

(MORE ON BUSINESS PAGE)

Headmistress murder

FROM PAGE 1 The five were taken to Gulshan Police Station where the CID men and police started interrogating them last night.

Well-placed sources said a state minister and a secretary to another state minister phoned an investigating policeman yesterday morning asking him not to dig into the role of a former member of the managing committee.

The investigators said they were examining documents that Sabera had filed to get back her job of headmistress after she was forced to resign on January 22, 2000 and the documents her opponents had filed against her, sources said.

Meanwhile, during primary interrogation Saturday night, Sabera's part-time domestic help Bilkis said she went to the house for work in the morning and came out in the evening.

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Armed Forces

FROM PAGE 1 problem if the regulation was applicable for sensitive defence purchases.

"I think it will be more helpful for the Armed Forces if the government allowed a separate purchase policy for it," said Mahub, who is also a ruling BNP lawmaker and defence adviser to the prime minister.

However, Col (ret'd) Shawkat Ali, an Awami League lawmaker and member of the parliamentary standing committee, said, "We will make our recommendations after discussing the matter at the meeting."

Ministry seeks FROM PAGE 1 but he (Saifur) said it was not possible in the present socio-economic situation of Bangladesh.

CPB won't join

FROM PAGE 1 make the human wall from the Sundarbans to Sunamganj a success. That includes the Communist Party," Jall said.

"The 11-party leaders told us that they would join the combined rallies and the CPB leaders said that they would hold a rally in Dhaka on the day," he said. "We are not concerned about this," he added.

The CPB president also said the decision would not cause any trouble in the opposition camp and said, "We are observing agitation programmes simultaneously for the December 30 demonstration, the Communist Party is undertaking massive mobilisation programmes."

He said the CPB will today start rallies in the districts through which the human wall will go.

PM pledges

FROM PAGE 12 electronics, fruit processing and automobile diesel engines.

The prime minister said Bangladesh can earn more foreign currency by exporting skilled manpower proficient in foreign language.

Bangladesh is now exporting software, Khaleda said, adding that establishment of an ICT Park in Dhaka is underway. All these government steps have brought about a revolutionary progress in the use of computers in the country, she said.

She emphasised the need for having skill in English and other foreign languages to get jobs abroad or work in foreign companies at home, she added.

SSC examinee

FROM PAGE 12 Mathpara and arrested three cadres of New Biplobi Communist Party (NBCP).

All the three arrestees, Shahjahan alias Saja Pagol, Saiful and Masud, were bodyguards of NBCP leader Akid Hossain alias Hobibur Rahman, who had twice been sentenced to life imprisonment.

Police said the three stand accused in two murder cases including one for killing Juba League leader Mahabubur Rahman Ripon.

Police recovered a foreign made revolver and four rounds of ammunition from their possession.

Saddam to challenge

FROM PAGE 12 effectively being taken at Washington's behest, the Sunday Times reported.

The lawyer charged that the Iraq Special Tribunal set up by the US-led coalition last December amounted to 'victors' justice' creating 'inherent illegality and bias'.

The report came a day after judges questioned one of Saddam's most notorious lieutenants in the tribunal's first investigative hearing.

CHEMICALALI Reuters says: War crimes trials against Saddam Hussein and his closest aides moved forward on Saturday when his feared cousin known as 'Chemical Ali' was the first to face a formal interview with the chief investigating magistrate.

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