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Rab, police seize M16, guns in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and district police in a joint raid in Fatikchhari upazila yesterday seized an M16 rifle and some other firearms and ammunition from the possession of two Islami Chhatra Shibir cadres, who were arrested on Wednesday.

Fatikchhari police had arrested Shibir cadres Shahin and his elder brother Helaluddin from their house at Shahnagar near the upazila headquarters.

Shahin, known to be a close accomplice of notorious Shibir Nasir, confessed to police that he possessed some sophisticated firearms, sources said.

Acting on his confession, the joint Rab and police team seized the M16 rifle from an abandoned house of one Jalil Sikder at Babunagar. The team then went to Shahin's house and seized two single-barrel guns, six magazines and nine bullets of M-16 rifle.

Shahin is accused in many criminal cases including one for murder. Police were quizzing the two arrestees.

Insurgents mount attacks ahead of Iraqi polls

2 GIs among 21 killed in pre-election violence

AFP, Baghdad

At least 21 people, including two US soldiers, were killed in Iraq yesterday as insurgents intensified attacks on Iraqi and US targets, and election workers backed by troops started distributing ballot boxes for the vote in three days time.

With worse violence feared in the final days before the landmark election, US President George W. Bush urged Iraqis to brave death threats and seize what he termed an "historic opportunity" embodied in the vote.

Despite a massive security clampdown, insurgents set off car bombs, staged ambushes on Iraqi and US forces and attacked polling stations and government buildings.

An American marine was killed and four others wounded yesterday while conducting military operations in Babil province. Another US soldier was shot dead in the Diyala province north of Baghdad yesterday, the US military said in a statement.

In Samarra, in the Sunni triangle north of Baghdad, a suicide bomber killed seven people and five more died in clashes between insurgents and Iraqi forces backed by US troops.

Five people were killed and 15 wounded in a bomb attack on an Iraqi military convoy in the so-called Triangle of Death south of Baghdad.

One person was killed in clashes between Iraqi and US troops in the rebellious town of Ramadi, while a car bomb attack on a provincial government headquarters north of the capital killed a police officer and wounded seven people.

New bomb attacks also rocked the northern city of Kirkuk, one targeting a US military convoy, while a police officer was killed in Saddam Hussein's home town of Tikrit on Wednesday.

The Iraqi government has cancelled all leave for security forces through the election and thrown them into the protection of polling stations and the public.

The two days before and two days

after the election will be a national holiday and a daily curfew will be extended.

But the measures have failed to ease fears of an insurgent onslaught to dissuade voters in the country's first democratic election, and discredit the result.

Samarra, one of the blackspots in attempts by Iraqi government and US forces to restore order, saw the worst attack of the day.

A suicide attacker blew up his car as an army patrol passed near a polling station in the centre of the city, an insurgent stronghold, Lieutenant Colonel Mahmud Mohammed of the Iraqi police told AFP.

"Seven Iraqis, including four soldiers, were killed and five others - two soldiers and three civilians - were wounded," he said.

Iraqi forces, backed by US troops, clashed earlier with insurgents in Samarra, leaving five dead - four Iraqi soldiers and a civilian, according to police. Similar clashes in

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



A handcart full of raw cattle hide after reaching the capital by river is on way to the tanneries in Hazaribagh. Hides are particularly abundant and less pricey now after the annual sacrifice of the Eid-ul-Azha.

PM accuses opposition of attempts to mar peace

UNB, Munshiganj

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has urged people to beware of various attempts by an opposition party to mar the prevailing peaceful atmosphere in the country following the anticrime drive by her government.

"When people remain in peace, this opposition party does not like it. They are carrying out various activities to disturb peace," she told a public meeting at the Bsic ground at Mukhtarpur in Munshiganj yesterday.

The prime minister said the coalition government has curbed crimes as per the commitment made to the people before the general elections. "Legal action will be taken against those engaged in terrorism. None will be allowed to resort to terrorism," she cautioned amid applause from the audience.

Accusing her main political opponent of anti-development and destructive politics, Khaleda, also chairperson of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), said they are prone to enforcing hartals without any issue to hinder the development activities.

"The people of Bangladesh don't want hartal, chaos and anarchy they work, study and engage in agricultural activities."

8 cops escape bomb attack in Meherpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Eight on duty policemen of Bamandi camp in Ganjini upazila in Meherpur narrowly escaped a bomb attack on Wednesday.

The incident took place at about 9:00pm when eight of the 18 policemen stationed in the camp were present.

Witnesses and police said criminals belonging to an alleged outlawed party appeared by two motorcycles and hurled three powerful bombs at the camp and left the scene.

The bombs went off with a loud bang. No-one was hurt in the blasts that left four rooms of the camp badly damaged and the wireless system crippled.

High officials of district police visited the spot. Police collected splinters and are examining them.

The area has recently witnessed a law and order slide. Four people were killed, at least three were abducted and 15 robberies committed in the upazila this month, police and news reports say.

Meghna devouring Bhola

SURANJIT DEBNATH, back from Bhola

In the absence of a permanent embankment, the Meghna river has devoured 162 square kilometres of the country's largest island Bhola rendering at least 2 lakh people homeless in the last three decades.

According to the latest Institute of Water Modelling (IWM) report, home to two million people, Bhola had a land mass of 1550 sqkm in 1973, whereas now it has less than 1400 sqkm. Besides, the Meghna has also fragmented another 42 sqkm of its land.

With emerging shoals changing the course of Meghna, river erosion has turned severe in last seven years. Leaders of a local organisation that campaigns for measures to protect the district from erosion said the number of homeless and landless may hit the one million mark within the next five years if a strong embankment of concrete cement block (CCB) is not built there to halt the erosion.

"The Meghna has already gobbled up a big part of the district while the rest lies dangerously exposed to the threat of erosion," said Alhaj Golam Nabi Alamgir, convenor of the Bhola District and Town Rakkha Sangram Committee (BDTRSC).

The view that temporary and untimely construction of embankments in past years had accounted for the unabated progression of the erosion is echoed by local leaders, Bhola municipality chairman, victims, researchers and even government officials.

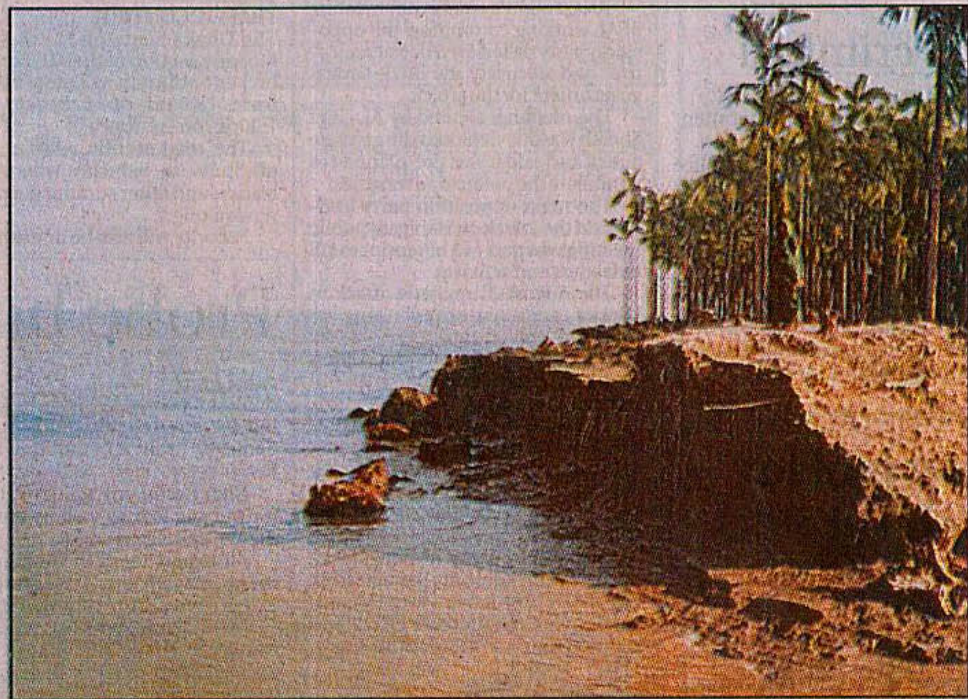
The Water Development Board (WDB) had constructed a number of embankments in the past. But as those were built mostly during the rainy season, they themselves could hardly survive the erosion let alone protecting Bhola.

"The WDB knows that construction work needs some time for the embankments to get solid and for that the best season is winter. Still, they do it during the rainy season and, as anticipated, the embankments wear away fast. This is nothing but a sheer waste of resources," said Mostafa Kamal, secretary of BDTRSC.

Liyakat Al Faruque, superintendent engineer of the WDB, said temporary embankments are flawed and not enough to prevent erosion. But it is not feasible either to build embankments with CCB, as those are too costly, he added.

He, however, said a combination of CCB and geo-bag to build embankment might be a good

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



Unhindered by any permanent protective embankment, the Meghna continues to devour Bhola, the country's largest island district.

Govt slated for sitting on farm subsidy

JS body sees food crisis if boro farming is hampered

SHAKHAWAT LITON

A parliamentary body yesterday blasted the government's 'dilly-dallying' policy on farm subsidy and warned that a food crisis could hit the country if the ongoing boro cultivation is hampered due to high prices of diesel and fertiliser.

The parliamentary standing committee on agriculture ministry asked the ministries concerned to take measures on emergency basis to provide the farmers with subsidy on the two major agri-inputs to help them recoup their losses.

The farmers were disappointed at the aman harvest last season and the production target could not be achieved due to crop losses from the devastating floods.

The committee observed the ministries of finance and agriculture are at loggerheads on the subsidy issue, when the farmers are compelled to buy diesel and fertiliser at high prices that has increased the production cost of boro crops.

"We are disheartened by the government's policy on agriculture subsidy," Committee Chairman Abdul Mannan told reporters after

the meeting. "We are already late in providing subsidy for diesel and fertiliser. Boro cultivation may be hampered if the subsidy is not given immediately," he observed. Boro cultivation needs massive irrigation and most pumps are run by diesel.

The finance ministry's handling of subsidy issue also dismayed Agriculture Minister MK Anwar, the committee members said. When asked, the minister however did not make any comment about the discussion at the meeting.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Call money, dollar remain high

Central bank pumps Tk 350cr into market, NCB's release \$10m

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The call money market and the US dollar sales continued to be red hot yesterday despite the central bank pumping Tk 350 crore into the banking sector and two nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) releasing \$10 million at a rate of Tk 61.

The inter-bank call money rate peaked at 70 percent, only 5 percent less than the previous day's ceiling.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Top criminal killed in 'crossfire'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

A top criminal was killed in 'crossfire' between his accomplices and police in Kotchandpur upazila of Jhenidah early yesterday, raising the death toll to 19 in such shootouts in the district since November 1 last year.

Police said an assistant sub-inspector and two constables were also injured in the shootout.

Kotchandpur police arrested Asadul Islam alias Hatkata Asad of village Solaimanpur Uttarpara in Kotchandpur from Jhenidah town on Wednesday and took him to the police station for interrogation.

Police took Asad, an accused in five cases including two for murders, to Solaimanpur at about 5:00am to recover illegal arms following leads extracted from him. But his accomplices fired on police and they

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Criminals damage Hindu temple

RAFIQUE SARKER from Rangpur

An alleged criminal and his accomplices damaged a Hindu temple and three idols in Lalbagh in the town Tuesday night.

Tension is prevailing in the area for the last two days, as the gang continues threatening the Hindu families adjoining the temple.

According to a belated report, Rashid, son of Nurul Islam alias Kina, and several of his accomplices damaged the idols and a signboard and snapped electricity supply wire of Kali Mondir at about 11:30pm.

They also threatened the members of the temple committee with physical assault if anyone would protest them during their act.

Secretary of the temple Prof

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

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VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE

Service rule yet to see light after 2 years of decision

AKBAR HOSSAIN

A service rule to recruit visually impaired people in first class government jobs is yet to be formulated, although the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) instructed the ministries concerned to take necessary steps two years ago.

The visually impaired, in absence of a service rule, do not know whether they are eligible for the jobs. Two such candidates, however, appeared in the 26th Bangladesh

Civil Service (BCS) examination held on December 31 last year.

Earlier on March 7, 2002, the PMO issued a circular asking the ministries concerned and Public Service Commission (PSC) to lift barriers to recruitment of the vision-impaired in the first and second class jobs.

PSC sources said the establishment ministry did not introduce any service rule for the visually handicapped people following the PMO

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Hasina accuses govt of attacking party workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday accused the government of committing atrocities against grassroots level leaders of her party and said Awami League (AL) leaders and workers at many places cannot even conduct party activities due to such repression.

Hasina also alleged that in the last couple of days the police have conducted a mass arrest operation against AL leaders and workers in Goplaganj, on the eve of a conference of the BNP held there yesterday.

"The BNP-Jamaat-led coalition does not believe in democracy and for this they want to eliminate the opposition by resorting to all forms of repression," she said while

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

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