

Over 10,000 rally against Musharraf

AP, Quetta, Pakistan

More than 10,000 protesters rallied in this southwestern city in Pakistan on Friday, demanding President Gen. Pervez Musharraf step down.

The supporters of a coalition of radical Islamic groups chanted "God is great" and "Pakistan will not be allowed to become a U.S. colony."

The six-party United Action Forum has accused Musharraf of renegeing on a promise to become a civilian head of state and leave his army job by the end of 2004.

No to Musharraf's uniform" and "Musharraf has to step down," two protester signs said. Police put the crowd at more than 10,000.

Musharraf has become a key ally of the United States in the war against terrorism since he seized power in a bloodless coup in October 1999.

While Musharraf held general elections in 2002 that elected a Parliament and a prime minister, he keeps a firm grip on power.

Seven killed in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Suspected Muslim rebels killed seven people, including three women of a Muslim family in revolt-hit Indian Kashmir, a police spokesman said yesterday.

He said suspected militants early Saturday barged into the house of Shabir Gujariy in the village of Hassote in the state's southern Udhampur district and shot dead his mother, wife and infant daughter.

"Before fleeing, the militants also set fire to the house," the spokesman said, adding Gujariy was a former militant who had surrendered last year.

Later, the militants barged into the house of another man in a neighbouring village and shot him dead.

Police said suspected militants also killed two more people in the southern districts of Anantnag and Rajouri.

None of the dozen rebel groups active in Kashmir claimed responsibility for the killings. Rebels have been targeting pro-India politicians, surrendered colleagues and people they suspected of working for Indian troops.

Meanwhile, rebels on Saturday shot dead a policeman in a gunbattle in the village of Yambtrach, near Kulgam town, 70 kilometers (43 miles) south of the state summer capital Srinagar, police said.

"The gunbattle was going on when reports last came in," a police spokesman said in

Graffiti irk PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday vented her annoyance with the graffiti of different organisations and political parties, including the ruling BNP, that defiles the fair face of the just-beautified capital city.

A massive city beautification programme was completed just before the stalled Saarc summit.

Khaleda asked the authorities to take "legal measures, including fines", against those responsible for displaying posters at different points of the city, Prime Minister's Office (PMO) sources told the news agency.

She looked at the posters on her way to different programmes she attended on the Independence Day.

The prime minister asked the authorities concerned to be more sincere in keeping the city clean.

Job seekers

FROM PAGE 1 talking to the returnees over mobile phones in front of journalists waiting at the airport.

According to sources the Bangladeshis came from the African country by an Emirates flight from Dubai in the afternoon. The International Organisation for Migration arranged their repatriation, the sources added.

On March 19, 24 Bangladeshi fortune seekers returned home a year after travel agents had sent them to western African country of Mali promising to get them job in Italy.

6 die

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In another accident, rickshaw passenger Wakil Uddin, 45, hailing from Chandair village under Sadar upazila died on the spot when a bus ran over the rickshaw at Bhatbaur, Manikganj, police said.

The critically injured rickshaw-puller was admitted into Manikganj Sadar Hospital.

Amini's new theory on independence proclamation

UNB, Dhaka

Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) Chairman Mufti Fazlul Huq Amini MP yesterday claimed that "hakkani, ulema, masaekh" were the first proclaimers of independence of this country as Imam Abdul Aziz @ first issued "fatwa" in 1806 for the start of jihad against British rule.

With that declaration, he said, the struggle for liberating the subcontinent from the British rule started and the first independence movement was started under the leadership of Syed Ahmad Shaheed who embraced martyrdom in Balakot. The second independence movement was started in 1857 under HajiEmdadullah Mohajer Makki.

Later, "Resmi Rumal" movement was launched in 1919 under the leadership of Shaikhul Hind Mahmud Hassan, driving out the British from the sub-continent in 1947. "Had the Britons not been driven out, today's Bangladesh would not have been liberated," he said.

Claiming that ulema-masaekh had laid down their lives at the start of Bangladesh's Liberation War, Amini warned that they would not tolerate if the clerics are called "anti-liberation", "atheist" or "murtad".

Tripura cops gun down Bangladeshi

UNB, Comilla

A Bangladeshi youth was shot dead and his brother wounded by Tripura police when they crossed the border and entered a rubber garden to cut wood on Friday.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sources said Tripura police fired on Russell, 46, and his brother Rubel, 14, of Sadar upazila when they entered the rubber garden in Anandapur area under Sonamrta Police Station at noon. Rubel died on the spot.

Being informed by their family members, BDR sent a protest letter to their counterpart, BSF. The slain youth's body was handed over to Bangladesh yesterday following a flag meeting between the two border forces.

Tripura police arrested Russell and filed a case against him.

Shibir bars screening of films against fundamentalism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) members at the Chittagong University (CU) barred a cultural group from screening the films, Lal Shalu and Matir Moina, two anti-fundamentalism films at the CU Social Science Faculty hall on Friday night. Sunbeam Cultural Group that organised a two-day film festival on March 25 to 26 to mark the Independence Day was forced to replace the anti-fundamentalism films in its schedule with two commercial ones. Satisfied, the ICS activists then joined the watchers and relished a commercial film named Wrong Number, screened instead.

Salutes to martyrs

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Major political, social and cultural organisations observed the day through elaborate programmes.

The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the mainstream opposition Awami League (AL) took out colourful processions in the capital to observe the day.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia paid tributes to the martyrs of the War of Independence by placing wreaths at the National Memorial at Savar in the early morning.

The president took salute at the ceremonial march-past by contingents of freedom fighters, armed forces, BDR, police, BNCC and Ansar-VDP at the National Parade Ground at 9:00am. The prime minister also attended the function.

Rajbari: The Independence and National Day was observed here with much enthusiasm.

Different political parties and socio-cultural organisations placed wreaths at Rajbari Shaheed Muktiyoddha Smriti Saudha.

National flag was hoisted atop all important government, semi-government and private buildings. The ceremonial march-past was held at Rajshbari Stadium.

The district administration accorded a reception to the freedom fighters at Rajbari Stadium.

Fairdipur: The day was observed here with much enthusiasm. National flag was hoisted atop all important government, semi-government, and private buildings.

District administration, Fairdipur municipality, different political organisations and socio-cultural organisations placed wreaths at Swadhinata Smriti Minar at Ambika Maidan at 7:00am.

Sammilito Sangskritik Jote arranged a cultural function at the local Swadhinata Chhatrar in the evening.

Manikganj: The district Muktiyoddha Sangsad, on the occasion of the Independence and National Day, named two roads after two valiant freedom fighters.

Families of 64 valiant freedom fighters and 17 war-wounded freedom fighters were accorded reception at the district Muktiyoddha Sangsad Office at noon.

Savar turns safe

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lawmaker is reportedly providing shelter to them at a Textile Mill in Akran of the union.

Niribili, a village adjacent to the National Memorial, as well as Gazirchat and Sreepur of Dhamsuna union and a village resort in Shimulia union of another BNP lawmaker from Dhaka city are also known to be the meeting places of criminals, sources said.

Fantasy Kingdom, Demra, Tentuljhora, Imandipur, Mazidpur, Amin Bazar and areas adjacent to the Savar municipality (poursova) are meanwhile infested with crime and drug-peddling. Local activists of Jatiyatabadhy Chhatra Dal and Jubo Dal are allegedly involved in nursing the outside criminals.

A total of 30 incidents of murder, 11 of rape, 30 of bus robbery, and about 100 of mugging and snatching have taken place in the last six months since the deployment of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) in

Savar. RAB and Police, meanwhile, have arrested top listed terrorist Pichchi Hannan, three cadres of the outlawed party of Chuadanga and Rajbari, while two live Arges grenades and an anti personnel hand grenade were recovered from Savar.

Nazrul Islam, officers in Charge of Savar thana, said however, "We have tasked our intelligence sources to find the hideout of the criminals and we are working on it. The investigations into the cases filed regarding the killing and rape are on going."

Local residents, meanwhile, say that members of the public are afraid to report crimes. "The criminals are moving freely after committing crimes but nobody dares to utter a single word against them as the law enforcers remained inactive regarding the crime owing to lack of information," said a resident of Biralia preferring anonymity.

Three US soldiers

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nor an Iraqi Defence Ministry spokesman was able to confirm the operation at Musayyib, 40 miles south of Baghdad.

Some of the suspected guerrillas planned to attack Shia Muslims expected to head in the coming days to an annual religious celebration in the nearby city of Karbala, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

There were no injuries to any US troops or Iraqi security forces, the official said, and no word on any casualties among the suspected insurgents.

The names of the US troops slain Saturday were not immediately released, and no other details were given on the car bombing.

The military also announced Saturday that a Marine was killed a day earlier in strife-torn Anbar province, a heavily Sunni Arab region west of Baghdad that contains the flashpoint cities of Fallujah and Ramadi.

No further details were given of the death of the Marine, assigned to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.

As of Friday, at least 1,524 members of the US military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count.

On Iraq's political front, the interim government's deputy prime minister, Barham Saleh, said Friday

that negotiators are intensifying efforts to bring in the country's Sunni Arabs, believed to form the core of Iraq's rebellion. That has caused delays, leading to public frustration with the nascent political process.

"It is not acceptable that two months on from the elections, that Iraq does not have a transitional government yet," Saleh told The Associated Press in an interview. "We are under pressure, and we have to respond to public sentiment and have a government established as soon as possible."

Jawad al-Maliki, a negotiator from the Shia-led United Iraqi Alliance, said Shia and Kurdish officials agreed to hold their second National Assembly session on Tuesday.

Since holding their first session on March 16, lawmakers elected in Jan. 30 elections have repeatedly

DCC renames

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Liberation War to introduce the valiant freedom fighters to the new generation.

The mayor first announced the move to rename city streets after the sector commanders at a freedom fighters' reunion on December 16 last year.

Three roads have earlier been renamed after three sector commanders since March 20.

The road from Mohakhali crossing at Jal Khabar to Gulshan Circle-1 has been renamed as Bir Uttam AK Khandaker Road after AK Khandaker, Bir Uttam.

Another city street from Panthapath-Sonargaon crossing to Russell Square has been renamed as Bir Uttam Quazi Nuruzzaman Road after Col (retd) Quazi Nuruzzaman, Bir Uttam.

The DCC has also renamed the road from Science Laboratory to Peelkhana BDR Gate as Bir Uttam MA Rabb Road after late Maj Gen (retd) MA Rabb, Bir Uttam.

Renaming of a road after sector commander Maj Gen (retd) CR Datta, Bir Uttam is on the cards, DCC sources said.

A date will be fixed after Datta returns home from abroad, the sources added.

5 robbers

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Local people rushed to the spot and nabbed the robbers with a pistol and two mobile phone sets.

Severely beaten by the mob, all of the five died.

They are Julmat, 35, Magar Uddin, 31, Ibrahim, 28, Oli Ahmed, 28 and an unidentified man, 40.

Narsingdi Police Superintendent Mir Rezaul Karim admitted the incident and said no police team reached the spot till filing of this report.

Rab-7 punishes 6 own men, kills 22 in 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Highlighting a successful first year for Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)-7 operations in Chittagong, a top Rab official also acknowledged yesterday that disciplinary actions have been required on several occasions against wayward members of the elite force.

Speaking at a press conference at Rab-7's Patenga headquarters, Major Sharif Hasan, the second-in-command of Rab-7, revealed that the Chittagong force apprehended 482 criminals, 22 of whom died in 'crossfire', and recovered 234 fire-arms, including AK-47s, AK-56s, M-16 rifles, and seized 1,767 rounds of ammunition in the last one year, ending on March 5.

Major Sharif claimed that Rab has conducted its operations with total transparency and honesty during the past twelve months, saying that around ten Rab-7 men were sent back and six punished for questionable activities that went beyond the strict ethical and lawful bindings set by the government.

"Besides, one sergeant of Rab-7 who come from the air force is now undergoing a departmental court martial for similar reasons. These disciplinary actions are indeed a testimony to our transparency," Sharif told journalists.

He added, "We generally take action against any member of our force as soon as we can sense any 'wrong' or 'misdoing'."

Major Sharif observed their major success lies in the fact that Rab operations have sent criminals on the run and into hiding. "I think we could imbue a sense of insecurity in the minds of all criminals and this is our success."

Of the 482 criminals, 22 top-notch terrorists of the city and district were killed in 'crossfire' with Rab members. They were Md Idris, Ahmadul Haq alias Ahmadya, Minhaz, Jane Alam alias Jainna and his nine associates, Nabir Hossain, Mohimuddin alias Mohim, Iqbal Bahar Chowdhury, Sajal Kanti Nath, Aminul Haque alias Aminya, Aminul Islam alias Khalifa Amin, Babar Alia alias Petkata Babar, Hossain Ahmad Munna alias Foyez Munna and Abu Naser alias Gitta Nasir.

Rab also arrested several infamous terrorists, including Saju Dev, Azrail Delwar, Shipon, Shafiqul Alam Samrat, ward commissioner Shahidullah, Bhagina Ramjan, Jamai Faruque, Dhakaiya Nazrul, Dega Selim, Jamai Selim, Jasimuddin, Killer Abbas, Haniful Haq alias Bholaoya, Kala Mahbub, Rahmatullah alias Dos and Solaiman Member, the press briefing was informed.

The elite force has recovered seven AK-47 rifles, one AK-56 rifle, one AK-(point) 22, one M-16 rifle, three SMC (Sub Machine Carbine), two 7.62 China-made rifles, one SLR (Self-Loading Rifle), seven .303 rifles, one single shooter rifle, one foreign-made 7-mm rifle, 19 revolvers, 12 pistols, 13 foreign-made double barrel guns, 39 single barrel guns, 112 shot guns, six air guns and seven pipe guns, Major Sharif said.

"We have also seized a huge amount of ammunition, narcotics, cash amounting to Tk 21.74 lakh, and electronics items during the year," he said.

13-yr-old girl raped at city garment factory

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 13-year-old girl was raped at a garment factory in Pallabi in the city yesterday.

Jakir Hossain, an employee of Millennium Printing Factory Limited, enticed the victim to the factory promising her a job. He took the girl to the seventh floor of the 10-storey building and raped her.

The factory was closed for the Independence Day and National Day.

Locals rescued the girl after she had flung her blood-soaked dress outside through the window at around 3:00pm. She was admitted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) in a critical condition.

The girl told her rescuers that Jakir had identified himself as the manager of the factory. He is absconding.

A river sacrificed

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Yad Ali, a local trader at Nababerbagh, along a vast stretch of low lying land by the river Turag, said that real estate is the 'hottest and the most lucrative' business in the locality. He said that developers have filled up more than a dozen natural canals originating from the river Turag within the last five years.

He pointed his finger at the low lying land and said that if the trend of construction continued, the green paddy fields would be replaced by buildings and the river would become a drain within the next ten years.

At Tongi, near the locality of Abdullahpur, a new settlement has grown on the shore of the river Turag. Local people said that every year during the lean period the river is subjected to landfill.

Mirza Ferdous Ahmed, a student and a permanent resident of Mirpur along the river, said that every year encroachers are occupying the river along Amin Bazar, Hizla and Baghbari.

"I was born in this area and I have witnessed since my childhood how network of natural canals in the area and the river Turag are disappearing," Ahmed said.

"Thousands of families in the locality were dependent on this river for navigation and washing purposes but now it seems the river is facing extinction," said Ahmed.

US to help India grow as major world power

AFP, Washington

The United States unveiled plans Friday to help India become a "major world power in the 21st century" as it offered to step up a strategic dialogue with India to boost missile defence and other security initiatives as well as high-tech cooperation.

Under the plans, Washington and New Delhi will also work together to expand economic and energy cooperation.

The US announced the plans even as it announced moves to beef up the military of New Delhi's nuclear rival, Pakistan.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has presented to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh the Bush administration's outline for a "decisively broader strategic relationship" between the world's oldest and largest democracies, a senior US official said.

"Its goal is to help India become a major world power in the 21st century," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity. "We understand fully the implications, including military implications, of that statement."

He did not elaborate but noted that South Asia was critical, with China on one side, Iran and the Middle East on the other, and a somewhat turbulent Central Asian region to the north.

The US-India plan was announced as Washington decided Friday to sell an undetermined number of F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan under a plan to prop up Pakistan on the political, military and economic fronts.

Rice discussed the US-India plan with Singh during her Asian visit earlier this month but it was not revealed to the public.

The US proposal culminates efforts to repair relations strained by India's May 1998 nuclear tests.

The healing process began when Bill Clinton visited India in March 2000 near the end of his presidency, as the first president to go there since Jimmy Carter in 1978. He eased sanctions on purchases of high-tech equipment and broke into a market formerly served by India's Cold War ally Russia.

President George W. Bush's administration, under a so-called "Next Steps in Strategic Partnership," pushed that process forward by completely lifting sanctions, including military sales, in return for India's support on the US-led war on terrorism. "This year the administration made a judgement that the 'Next Steps in Strategic

Alliance govt hooks up

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Jalil said while speaking at a rally at city's Muktangan.

After the rally, AL brought out a procession to mark the 35th Independence Day. The procession, which started at about 4:30pm from Muktangan, marched to the Bangabandhu Bahaban in Dhanmondi.

Thousands of people from all walks of life joined the rally and the procession. They carried colourful posters, banners and placards, and chanted slogans against the BNP-led coalition government.

Speaking at the rally, Jalil accused the government of distorting the history of the Liberation War through a relentless effort to establish that Ziaur Rahman proclaimed the independence.

"It was none other than Bangabandhu who steered the country to independence," Jalil said adding that people took up arms against the occupying Pakistani forces in 1971 after proclamation of independence by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The AL general secretary alleged that the BNP-led coalition government has brought the country on the brink of a disaster by destroying al

Cops inactive

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gazette, so there is no question of implementing the law," said Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner SM Mizanur Rahman adding that after receiving the gazette they will decide the way of implementing the law.

The police officials also said that they did not receive any directive from authorities concerned.

The anti-smoking law was passed in parliament on 13 March this year. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare declared the law effective from Saturday through a gazette notification as per sub-clause 1(2) of the bill.

According to the law, smoking in public places is prohibited. The violators of the law will be punished with a fine of Tk 50.

The law-defined public places include educational institutions,

offices of government, semi-government and autonomous bodies, libraries, lifts, hospitals, clinics, court buildings, airports, sea and river port buildings, railway stations and bus terminal buildings,

Partnership,' though very important, wasn't broad enough to really encompass the kind of things we needed to do to take this relationship where it needed to go, and so the president and the secretary (Rice) developed the outline for a decisively broader strategic relationship," the US official said.

Bush was inviting Prime Minister Singh to visit him in July in Washington and the US leader would also like to travel to South Asia later this year or early next year, he said.

Those presidential meetings, he added, would "be consolidating an enhanced dialogue" on the strategic, energy and economic tracks with India.

The strategic dialogue will include global issues, regional security matters, Indian defence requirements, expanding high-tech cooperation and even working toward US-India defence co-production, the official explained.

The United States, he said, was prepared to "respond positively" to an Indian request for information on American initiatives to sell New Delhi the next generation of multi-role combat aircraft.

"That's not just F-16s. It could be F-18s," he said.

Deputy State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said US corporations were now "free to talk to India" about whatever aircraft they could offer.

"I'll be up to India to decide what it wants. And then negotiations, if it does decide it wants something from us, based on its needs, would proceed from there," Ereli said.

Beyond possible sale of fighter planes, the US is ready to discuss the more fundamental issue of defence transformation with India, including transformative systems in areas such as command and control, early warning and missile defence, the official said.

"Some of these items may not be as glamorous as combat aircraft, but I think for those of you who follow defence issues you'll appreciate the significance," he said.

The energy dialogue is to include civil, nuclear and nuclear safety issues as well as the issue of space launch vehicles and satellites while the existing economic dialogue would be revitalised with discussion of energy, trade, commerce, environment and finance.

US energy, treasury and transport ministers are to visit India this year.

the democratic institutions.

"In last three and half years, the BNP-led coalition government failed to give the nation anything but corruption and terrorism," Jalil observed.

He also said that spiralling prices of essentials have made life unbearable for the commoners.

He urged AL leaders and activists to unite in opposition to the 'misrule' of the coalition government and act to uphold the spirit of the Liberation War and restore peace in the country.

Huge numbers of law enforcement agency members were deployed in and around the venue of the rally.

Presided over by AL Dhaka city unit President Mohammed Hanif, the rally was attended among others by AL Presidium Members Suranjit Sengupta, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Quazi Zafarullah, AL leader Sultan Mahmood Mansur, Prof Abu Sayeed, AL Joint Secretary Obaidul Quader and Dhaka City AL General Secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury.

ferries, movie houses, covered exhibition centres, theatres, shopping centres, public toilets, and government and private children parks.

Smoking is also restricted in public transport like motor vehicles, buses, trains, ships, launches and all mechanised vehicles and aeroplanes.

Rickshaws, uncovered boats and vans, open spaces, hotels and restaurants have, however, been kept outside the purview of the law.

The law also prohibits advertisements of tobacco products in movie houses and on sale of movies or videotapes containing advertisements of tobacco products, publication of ads in books, magazines, leaflets, handbills, billboards and newspapers.

Also, thirty per cent of each packet of all kinds of tobacco products must be focused by anti-tobacco message through colourful and well-visible ads, according to clause 10 of the Act.