

## 25 Colombian troops killed in rebel attacks

### BBC ONLINE

At least 25 Colombian troops have been killed and 19 are missing after two devastating attacks by Marxist rebels.

Farc rebels on Saturday attacked troops in Putumayo province near the Ecuador border, and fought for control of a road near the Venezuelan frontier.

The attacks left the worst death toll in a single day since President Alvaro Uribe came to power three years ago.

The BBC's Jeremy McDermott in Bogota says the rebels want to undermine Mr Uribe and ensure he is not re-elected.

The killings are part of a counter-offensive begun in February that has killed more than 120 members of the security forces.

In one incident, at least 19 soldiers were killed and 18 went missing after up to 300 guerrillas ambushed an army convoy during an attack apparently targeting oil wells near Puerto Asis in Putumayo province.

Aircraft had been sent to the scene and were attacking rebel positions, army officials said, adding

that the Farc had also suffered casualties.

And in more fighting near the Venezuelan border, 400km north-east of the capital Bogota, six troops were killed as they fought with rebels to gain control of a road linking Ocana and Sardinata.

### POLITICAL AIM

At the start of this year, the army said they had the rebels on the run and that the security policy of hard-line president Alvaro Uribe had forced the guerrillas into irreversible decline.

But our correspondent says the wave of attacks across the country since February has proven the military wrong.

Buoyed up by hundreds of millions of dollars earned from drugs, the Farc (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) seem to have taken the initiative away from the security forces, he says.

The guerrillas hope to destroy President Uribe's re-election hopes by showing that his security policy, a cornerstone of his administration, has failed.

The guerrillas want the next president to be more disposed to talk peace - but on their terms.

## BNP MPs

### FROM PAGE 1

Whip Ashraf Hossain and Jamaat lawmaker Abdus Subhan observed that the time extension of money whitening provision would encourage illegal income.

The finance minister in his budget speech proposed an extension of the time limit up to June 30 next year for whitening black money by paying 7.5 percent income tax.

Ashraf said, "It is not fair that corrupt people should get immunity by paying only 7.5 percent tax when honest taxpayers have to pay a minimum of 10 percent tax."

"We should not allow more time for whitening black money," he said.

Mahbubur Rahman, the prime minister's defence advisor, said the finance minister in his budget speech totally ignored the issue of national security.

"The finance minister [in the budget speech] did not utter a single word about our national security and there is no direction for the armed forces," said the ex-army chief.

He termed the allocation for defence sector "inadequate" and asked the government to double the proposed allocation which is 6.71 percent of the total budget.

Abdus Subhan of coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami also opposed the provision for whitening black money and demanded its withdrawal.

Whip Ashraf also criticised the government for wholesale closure of state-owned mills and factories rendering thousands of workers jobless.

He contradicted the finance minister's comment that there is a lot of employment opportunities in the country and said, "Hundreds of skilled and unskilled workers are now unemployed due to shutting down of mills and factories in my area [Khulna]."

"Many of the jobless industrial workers in Khulna are yet to get their arrears though they lost their jobs three to four years ago," he alleged.

## Gas leakage

### FROM PAGE 1

anonymity told The Daily Star that most probably they will entrust the US firm Century with the responsibility of drilling to seal off the burning relief well.

However, there is no possibility of Century men's reaching Tengratia within three to four weeks, he added.

Century, now working for Unocal in Moulvibazar, earlier completed drilling MB4 and MB5 gas wells there and started drilling MB5 on June 25.

## Court rejects

### FROM PAGE 1

left one killed and 40 injured.

The First Special Tribunal Judge ASM Jahirul Islam rejected the separate bail petitions of Dr Galib and JMBB members Shafiqullah and Joynal Sarkar.

The tribunal also discharged three other accused Abdul Kafi, Abdul Baki and Abdul Gafur following the police report that they were not involved in the incident.

Police yesterday morning produced Dr Galib, professor of Arabic department at Rajshahi University, and the other accused before the tribunal under tight security.

His followers thronged inside the court premises when police got him down from van at 10:00am.

Galib's counselor advocate Kaisaruzzaman told the tribunal that his client, a professor of a renowned university, is a true believer of Islam and was never involved in bombing.

He was implicated in the case as a result of a conspiracy, he added.

Opposing the statement, Public Prosecutor (PP) Saiful Islam said, "No incident of bomb blasts took place in the country after Galib's arrest, which proves his involvement in the earlier blasts."

"There is much chance of casualties if Galib is released in bail," the PP added.

As a photojournalist went to take photo of Galib when he was getting down from the police van, Galib blamed the journalists for branding him as a "militant leader".

Dr Galib and Abdur Rahman are charge-sheeted accused in three cases two for bomb blasts at Laxmikola and Gabtali villages and one for a murder at Laxmikola.

## Bidisha

### FROM PAGE 1

Hossain and Tanjib-Ul Alam assisted him.

Bidisha's counsels and family members expect that Bidisha, who is in the prison cell of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMUH), may be released today if her bail bond is furnished and no further case is filed against her.

Bidisha has been granted ad interim bail in all four cases, two of which were filed by her former husband Ershad.

The money laundering case was the last to be filed against her on June 16.

The lawyers for Bidisha yesterday went to the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka (CMM) at about 4:30pm to furnish bail bond in line with the direction of the High Court, only to find that CMM Jalal Ahmed had left his office by then. The bail bond may be furnished today.

## Disqualified firms

### FROM PAGE 1

Headed by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, the economic affairs committee took the exceptional decision to pay 10 percent of the cost for installation of the Fenchuganj 90 megawatt plant in advance to disqualified Chinese bidder Harbin.

Two years ago, the government through a circular restricted such advance payment to contractors as it leads to waste and misuse of funds and as contractors in the past even left without starting the works.

The government did not make any such payment in the last two years.

But yesterday, the committee approved a power division proposal to pay Harbin Tk 52 crore in advance against the total project cost of Tk 524 crore.

The Fenchuganj project went to Harbin after six rounds of bidding. The tender rule dictates that the bidder must have 10 years of experience in setting up and operating combined cycle power plants.

But the Power Development Board overlooked Harbin's lack of such experience. In the last bidding, another bidder withdrew accusing the PDB of siding with the Chinese company. The fifth bid was cancelled although it drew an offer of Tk 500 crore.

Harbin was previously awarded the Tongi 100-mw simple cycle power plant of the PDB, which was launched in March, a year behind schedule.

Yesterday's meeting also gave the go-ahead for awarding the Meghnaghat-2 power project to a consortium of UAE's trading company Belhassa, Bangladesh's Orion Power Company and German SteagAG.

The cabinet purchase committee in March did not approve this tender, as the original winner of the bid was different. The committee sought the power ministry's clarification on how the government could approve the contract in favour of this joint venture when the original winner of the bid was another company.

Belhassa and Orion Power showed the name of experienced Japanese power company Nissso Iwai Corporation as the "lead sponsor" to pre-qualify in the tender for this power plant back in September 2003.

But after the pre-qualification, Belhassa changed the name of the lead sponsor to BN Consortium while submitting the bid. This time the Belhassa consortium replaced Nissso with a German company SteagAG as the lead sponsor.

However, the real player of this bid is Orion, alongside Belhassa, which were awarded the Saidabad-

Gulistan flyover last week. The Orion-Belhassa-Steg consortium has been asked to provide only \$10 million worth of performance bond, whereas in Meghnaghat 1 or in Sirajganj the bond was \$30 million.

The ministry's proposal outlined a power tariff of 2.78 cents per kilowatt hour for the Meghnaghat-2 project.

The meeting also approved modification of the government policy on small power projects with a generation capacity of up to 50 megawatt. This policy, drawn to speed up power generation growth, will allow awarding contracts on a selection basis in lieu of tender process.

In April, the cabinet committee approved the revision of the existing small power project to withdraw the tendering process. Besides, it redefined the size of the small power project to 50 megawatt from 10.

The revision states that the government will not give the power developers any guarantee of purchase. The developers themselves will determine their market. If they have excess power, the government may buy from them, but it would not be compulsory.

However, when the revision went to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) for approval, it was returned with the observation that without government guarantee, developers may not be interested in the scheme.

Accordingly, the power ministry revised the policy again and the government is now guaranteeing purchase of excess power from small plants. However, the price of this power will be negotiated on a case-to-case basis.

Such facilities mount huge risks on the government, including paying demurrage to small power developers if the government fails to purchase the power due to lack of power distribution system.

While small power suddenly got so much importance, last year the PMO cancelled a bid to award contracts for 15 small scale power plants in different parts of the country although the tender had found a number of responsive bidders.

Sources said the problems did not lie with the bidding, but with a "politicised decision", because the top policymakers view one of the dominant bidders as "connected to the Awami League".

The present system will allow awarding contracts to bidders who are close to or involved with the ruling alliance and not necessarily on their competence to build a power plant, industry insiders say.

## EU unionists

### FROM PAGE 16

Javier Chércoles Blazquez, director of Indetex of Spain, were in the delegation which met the minister.

The leaders, who are in Dhaka for the second time in three weeks' time, said the exporters and the government of Bangladesh should consider the present situation and the six-month deadline as a wake up call for the garment industry.

They asked the minister to ensure paying the female workers double in case of working extra time and granting them leave with full salary during pregnancy so that the exporters can continue to sell their products to the EU countries.

About the compensation paid to the victims of Spectrum factory collapse, they said the amount was inadequate to compensate a human life. They alleged that many of the victim workers did not get their due salaries after the incident.

Responding to the EU workers' leaders and buyers, the minister said the government is going to form a trust fund for the workers.

"A national taskforce will also be formed to look into the safety measures," he said adding that the prime minister has already given orders in this regard.

The minister told them that the government and the private sector have resource constraints and sometimes it is very difficult for them to pay high compensation to the victims of an accident.

## Ties with Dhaka

### FROM PAGE 1

He reaffirmed that ongoing US cooperation with Bangladesh would continue. The Dhaka-Washington relationship is direct, not influenced by others, he said.

The United States foreign-office functionary rated the bilateral ties as "very good, sound and strong". The relationship has been built up for the mutual benefit of the two countries, he said.

In the perspective evolution of US Foreign Policy, Burns said, Bangladesh's position in South Asia is increasingly getting important.

He said an excellent relationship between Bangladesh and the USA has been maintained for long and they feel proud of the way it is improving under the leadership of the prime minister.

Burns said relations between the Bush administration and Khaleda government are excellent and that would continue as the US administration gives high value to this relationship.

Khaleda also hoped that the ties between the two countries would further strengthen in the days ahead for the mutual welfare of the two peoples.

The US under secretary apprised the PM that he had constructive discussions earlier in the day with Bangladesh foreign minister, foreign secretary and state minister for home affairs.

He also appreciated Bangladesh's role in fighting against world terrorism and role in UN peacekeeping missions and progress in women empowerment in the country.

## Youth held

### FROM PAGE 16

and American Centre in the name of al-Qaeda, threatening to blow up the establishments.

Police are investigating to detect if he really has a link with the al-Qaeda network.

He also sent email threats to the Rab and police headquarters asking them to release one of the 23 most wanted criminal, Arman.

The Rab filed a case against Hasanul and handed him over to Mohammadpur police on Saturday night.

## 8 held for attack

### FROM PAGE 1

beefed up security in and around the Ahmadiyya-inhabited areas since the incident.

A team of police is still keeping close watch on the areas to maintain law and order. Officials from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and Special Branch (SB) of police have visited the spots.

The superintendent of police of the district, ATM Tareque, told The Daily Star different units of police are trying to trap the bomb attackers.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) Md Ismail of Kotwali Police Station said they have gathered much information about the Friday's attack. He however declined to reveal anything for the sake of investigation.

Three time bombs seized from East Kandipara and Bhadughar have been kept in water at the police station.

"We have sought army assistance for destroying the bombs," the OC said yesterday.

## AL team meets

### FROM PAGE 16

Ambassador in Dhaka yesterday evening.

AL Presidium Member Kazi Zafrullah MP was other member of the two-member AL delegation while the outgoing US Ambassador Harry K Thomas and the national security advisor for South Asia aided the US under secretary at the meeting which lasted for about 45 minutes.

"The talks were positive, open and constructive, and we told the US delegate that Awami League will continue its dialogues with the US State Department," said Saber, the political secretary to the leader of the opposition in parliament.

The main opposition leaders said the next general election is critical for the country, and the people must be allowed to vote freely to elect a government of their choice.

"People must have the chance to get rid of the prevailing situation and Awami League believes electoral process is the only way to do so," Saber said.

They also told the State Department official that AL and other opposition parties here are working to devise a number of electoral reform proposals.

The meeting also discussed the recent spate of grenade attacks including the August 21 blasts in an AL rally, and also incidents like arms hauls in Chittagong.

The AL delegate told Burns that it is not the question of incompetence of the government to investigate these incidents, rather it is about the ruling parties' complicity in these acts of crime.

On the question of joining the parliament, the AL leaders in the meeting reaffirmed the party's commitment to parliamentary democracy. "But, mere attendance at the parliament does not necessarily ensure the effective functioning of the House. The opposition must be given the opportunity to play its due role," Saber said.

They then alleged that it is rather the government's attitude that accounts for the stalemate over parliament.

The AL delegate told the meeting that standing committees on different ministries are important in a parliamentary democracy, yet the present government formed the committees about two years after the first sitting of the House.

Moreover, the main opposition's demand for chair of the committees in proportion to its seats in parliament is also ignored, they observed during the meeting.

## Road crashes

### FROM PAGE 16

tempo on Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Rampur.

Two of the tempo passengers died on the spot and five were injured.

A Chandpur-bound bus from Dhaka collided head-on with a tractor near Baburnat, leaving two persons seriously injured.

The driver of the tractor, Rahman Mizi, 19, was pronounced dead on arrival at Chandpur General Hospital.

## AL human chains

### FROM PAGE 16

Elephant Road, Shahbagh, Kakrail, Bijoy Nagar, Purana Palltan, Zero Point, Gulistan, Motijheel Shapla Chatter, Tikatuli, Sayedabad and Demra.

The central leaders of AL held talks with the city unit leaders yesterday to make the programme a success. The meeting discussed preparations for the hartal, the human chain and the public meetings.

The meeting, held at AL president's Dhanmudi office, finalised six places for the public meetings -- Mirpur Outer Stadium, No 32 Dhanmudi Russell Square, Uttara Anwara Model High School ground, Motijheel Ideal School compound, Azad ground of Lalbagh and Jurain Rail Gate.

## Sagir murder

### FROM PAGE 1

his criminal activities and the gang he is tied to, the police said.

Geshu's father Altaf Uddin, mother Amirunnesa and sister Maksudia could only tell the police that they threw Geshu out of the house some four years ago after he had taken to criminal activities. They said since then they had no contact with him.

They also said they knew that Geshu had married and has a child but could not say where they lived.

Earlier on Saturday, Geshu's father identified him at the morgue of Mitford hospital.

However, other sources said Geshu had been involved with a gang patronised by the brother of a ruling BNP lawmaker from the old part of the city.

Meanwhile, Sagir's brother Syed Ahmed filed a case with Sutrapur Police Station late Saturday night, where he mentioned that four to five unidentified criminals gunned down his brother. He, however, did not cite any reason for the killing.

Assailants gunned down Sagir, general secretary of Dhaka City (south) Jubo Dal near his Nasir Uddin Sarder Lane house Friday.

The law-enforcers intercepted the killers while they were fleeing off and shot dead Shaon after the gang had allegedly shot and wounded a police havilder.

### New police version

The Police Headquarters in a press statement yesterday, meanwhile, said Shaon was fatally wounded after he had taken a bullet fired by

his associates when they were fleeing on being chased by a mob and members of the police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab).

It maintained that Havilder Rafiqul Islam of a police patrol caught Shaon, who managed to break free by shooting and wounding Rafiqul. As the locals, police and Rab chased the killers, they fired indiscriminately and Shaon received the bullet during the shooting. The mob eventually got hold of him and beat him up.

The statement -- which came two days after the media criticised the killing of Shaon who it said could help expose the real perpetrators of the murder -- further claimed that the police and Rab men "rescued" and sent him to Mitford Hospital where the doctors declared him dead.

Interestingly, Sub-Inspector Shahid of Sutrapur Police Station told journalists on the day of the incident that Shaon was killed in the police and Rab firing at Raisahebazar crossing in Old Dhaka after he had shot Havilder Rafiqul.

### Protest

A few thousand leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) took out a silent procession organised on Dhaka University campus yesterday to mourn Sagir.

Before the procession, the JCD held a brief rally at the foot of Aparajeyo Bangla and demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment to the killers.

## US asks govt to protect

### FROM PAGE 1

enquired whether the government is investigating the deaths in 'crossfire'.

"He [Burns] expressed concern over the Ahmadiyya issue," Babar told reporters after the meeting, adding that he briefed the US delegate on the steps taken for the security of the Ahmadiyyas.

Burns described the 22-minute meeting with the state minister as satisfactory. He, however, did not answer reporters' queries.

Babar said the visiting US secretary assured him of increasing co-operation in various sectors especially in bringing reforms in the police department.

"The US delegates asked me about the government action in response to Friday's attacks on Ahmadiyyas. I told them that we are conducting extensive investigations to find out the persons responsible for the attacks," Babar told reporters.

He also told the under secretary that the police have already arrested eight people in connection with the arson and bomb attacks on the Brahmanbaria Ahmadiyyas.

Babar said the US delegate had expressed satisfaction over the government investigations. "They are happy with us co-operating with Interpol and FBI (US Federal Bureau of Investigation) men, especially providing them with full access [to evidence]."

Nicholas flew in Dhaka yesterday morning on a brief visit for discussion on political climate and bilateral issues. During his about 20-hour stay in Dhaka he will talk besides the government officials, to political party leaders, and representatives of the civil society.

This was his first visit to Bangladesh since his appointment as an under secretary to the Bush administration on March 17 this year. He will leave Dhaka early this morning.

In the meeting with Babar, Burns raised also the issue of deaths in 'crossfire'.

"I've told them that we have directed executive inquiry into each such incidents of death. And in most cases, the magistrates are doing the inquiries," said Babar.

Burns was accompanied in the meeting by among others the outgoing US Ambassador in Dhaka Harry K Thomas.

Regarding Bangladesh's

stance on the US war against terrorism, Babar reiterated the government's resolve not to let any terrorist networks, be they external or internal, use its land.

## MEET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER

The US under secretary of state had an 80-minute meeting with Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan at the foreign ministry yesterday.

He told reporters after the meeting that he had excellent talks with the foreign minister.

He said he had reaffirmed during the meeting that the US would do everything necessary to maintain its close relations with Bangladesh.

When the reporters asked Burns whether US concerns in Bangladesh were discussed during meeting with Morshed, the top bureaucrat at the US State Department ducked the question.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Foreign Minister Morshed Khan said Burns and he agree that any political stalemate in Bangladesh should be resolved through discussion in parliament.

Asked whether the issue of Ahmadiyya persecution came up for discussion, Khan said he himself raised the matter and told him that some people are trying to make an issue of it, but the government is determined to deal with it.

The foreign minister said Burns had appreciated the government initiatives for poverty alleviation, setting up of an independent anti-corruption commission, measures against human trafficking, legal reforms, law and order, and Bangladesh's contribution to UN peacekeeping operations.

Khan said he had requested the US official to incorporate Bangladesh into the Millennium Challenge Account, a special aid programme by the US to help the developing nations with better governance records.

Referring to Burns' visit to Bangladesh, Khan said such high-profile visit would definitely open a new chapter in Bangladesh-US relationship.

He also said the US does not pay attention to any propaganda against Bangladesh.

Foreign Secretary Hemayet-uddin and the US Ambassador Harry K Thomas were present at the meeting.

## Omar gives Tigers

### FROM PAGE 16

had to win to have any chance of qualifying for the July 2 Lord's final.

Javed Omar, dropped on 19, made 81 as Bangladesh restored some pride after being bowled out for 139 in Saturday's 10-wicket defeat against world champions Australia at Old Trafford.

But their total was still below par with Khaled Mashud's near run-a-ball 42 not out the only other major contribution.

Flintoff took two wickets in two balls after Tigers captain Habibul Bashar won the toss and batted.

Darren Gough, returning to his Yorkshire home ground, bowled a testing first over but finished with none for 59 off nine.