

Iraqis find mass grave at Kerbala

REUTERS, Kerbala, Iraq

Iraqi officials said they found the skeletal remains of 31 people in what they described as a mass grave in the Shia holy city of Kerbala yesterday.

A senior official at the laboratory to which the bodies were taken said the people appeared to have died during the suppression of a Shia uprising against Saddam Hussein after the 1991 Gulf War.

"There are 31 bodies. We're still testing but it appears they are victims of the events of 1991," the official told Reuters.

There had been confusion over the scale of the find at a building site for a sewage project in the city centre, with police initially saying there were 150 bodies; police spokesman Rahman Mishawi later revised that to "dozens" of sets of

remains.

A Reuters reporter at the scene saw one sack filled with what appeared to be human bones.

With Saddam on trial for crimes against humanity, the Shia-led government is keen to remind Iraqis of their suffering under his Sunni-dominated administration.

Some minority Sunni Arab leaders have accused police and other government officials of exaggerating accounts of atrocities and of using Saddam's trial for sectarian political advantage.

Some 300 possible mass graves have been reported since Saddam's fall in April 2003, many in southern Shia areas of the country and in Kurdish areas of the north.

Human rights activists estimate that hundreds of thousands of people disappeared during Saddam's rule.

Philippines charges four US soldiers with rape

REUTERS, Olongapo City, Philippines

Philippine prosecutors charged four US Marines yesterday with raping a 22-year-old Filipino woman in early November but cleared two other soldiers who had also been accused.

Washington has not responded publicly to an earlier request by the Philippine foreign affairs department to transfer custody of the Marines to local authorities.

A statement by the US embassy, which has been holding the soldiers, made no mention of custody but said the United States would continue to cooperate with the Philippines on the case under the two countries' Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA).

"The US remains committed to seeing that justice is served, and looks forward to a fair and impartial process that can provide for a just outcome," the statement said.

Beyond small protests, the case has caused little public outcry or anti-American sentiment in the Philippines, the only former US colony in Asia and a major security ally to Washington in the region.

"We are happy the girl is going to get some kind of justice," said Katrina Legarda, a lawyer for the complainant.

In affidavits, five of the Marines had disputed allegations that the woman was gang-raped in a van at a former US Navy base at Subic Bay, suggesting there was consensual sex.

The sixth soldier, who had also taken part in two-week military exercises with Philippine troops in October, did not submit an affidavit.

The Filipino van driver, initially considered a witness, was charged as an accomplice, according to prosecution documents filed with a court in Olongapo City, northwest of Manila.

Some ministers

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also started an investigation which is still running.

A magistrate court yesterday sent Lutfar on a five-day remand after the police produced him before the court seeking 10 days' remand.

The investigators said Lutfar primarily confessed that he was close to Bangla Bhai and helped the JMB in their activities against the Sarbahara outlaws.

Bangla Bhai emerged with more than 20 outsiders, Lutfar told the police, adding that the JMB helped the Bagmara dwellers build a self-defence against the outlaws.

Lutfar denied knowing the whereabouts of Bangla Bhai, saying he has not seen Bangla Bhai since the JMB march in Rajshahi on May 23, 2004, threatening journalists and people.

He also denied his association with the JMB but admitted to taking part in several JMB operations against the Sarbahara after the then officer-in-charge Shamsul Islam formed committees with the JMB men and villagers to resist the outlaws.

However, the JMB is the same group that fought with police in Joypurhat in August 2003 under the name of JMB and started its activities openly in Rajshahi region during March-April of 2004.

BSF abducts

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entered into the Bangladesh part of the Ichhamati river at Komorpur and kidnapped the three fishermen and the boy with their boat and fishing nets and took them to India.

In another incident, BSF patrol team of Daharkanda camp entered into Bangladesh territory through Hijaldi border and kidnapped Golam Rasul near the Zero Point Near Hijaldi area, where he went to work in a field of crops.

BDR has sent protest letters to the BSF authorities asking them to release the Bangladeshis nationals.

Contacted, Major Asad, second-in-command of BDR Satkhira, confirmed the incidents and said they are trying to get them released.

15 injured in Sylhet gunfight

UNB, Sylhet

At least 15 people were injured in a gunfight between two rival groups at Tiargaon in Sylhet's Jagannathpur upazila yesterday.

Witnesses said the clash ensued between the groups over the construction of a road. About 50 bullets were exchanged during the half-hour gunfight which started around 7:00am.

Of the injured, five bullet-hit people were admitted to the upazila health complex while the rests to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College and Hospital. Two of them are in critical condition, the hospital sources said.

Kuwait sentences al Qaeda-linked militants to death

REUTERS, Kuwait

A Kuwaiti court yesterday sentenced to death six suspected militants linked to al Qaeda for bloody attacks in the country.

The six were among 37 Islamists on trial as members of the "Peninsula Lions" group believed to be linked to Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda in Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

They include 25 Kuwaitis, seven stateless Arabs, two Jordanians, a Saudi, an Australian and a Somali.

A Reuters reporter who was at the court said none of the defendants were present when the verdict was announced.

Other suspects received jail terms of between four months to 15 years, and one received a life term.

Seven were acquitted including Islamist cleric Sheikh Hamed al-Ali, lawyer Osama al-Munawer who represents Islamists as well as the wife of Amer al-Enezi -- one of al Qaeda's top leaders in Kuwait who died in custody in February.

"I thank God. I've believed in my innocence all along," Munawer told Reuters by phone. "The death sentence was very tough as it was never proven that they took up arms to fight against anyone. I hope they will get a fair trial on appeal."

Judicial source said 10 of the 37 suspects remain at large.

Two senior militants who are on the run, Khaled al-Dossari and Mohsen al-Fadli, each received a 10-year jail term in absentia.

Court sends

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Rashid, along with his lawyers appeared before the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1.

After hearing both the sides, Judge Shahed Noor Uddin ordered to send him to the Dhaka Central Jail.

Earlier on November 28, the tribunal sentenced Qaiyum to death, along with Jubo Dal leader Rafiqul Islam Kajal and eight others, for killing the businessman and his son.

The gang of criminals led by Kajal abducted Shamsul Haque, 52, owner of a hosiery market in Old Dhaka, his son Russel Sheikh, 29, and driver Moazzem Hossain, 37, on March 26 last year and killed them in a bid to grab Shamsul's market and Tk 5 lakh.

The gang chopped the victims' bodies into 149 pieces and dumped those at different places of Dhanmondi and Gazipur to destroy evidence.

BSP, NOAB

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would add Tk 6,000 more to the price for each tonne. Already the price of newsprint is increasing on the international market, the statement added.

"Whereas the import duty on newsprint for the newspaper industry in other Saarc countries is 2.5 to 6 percent, in Bangladesh it is 25 percent," the statement said adding that ultimately it takes Tk 63,000 per tonne to import newsprint including VAT, surcharge, advance income tax and PSI.

Although the government has formed Sixth Wage Board and announced 40 percent interim dearness allowance from July 2005, the present situation is not favourable for the newspaper industry due to this excessive price of newsprint.

Termining the situation as hindrance to freedom of the press, the statement urged the government to remove the import duty on newsprint.

Primary school

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paraded some city streets, held a brief rally on the street beside Muktagong and then returned to the Shaheed Minar.

At the rally, Secretary General of the association Akkas Ali Sheikh said, "We have been agitating since 1992 to realise our demand. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, while she was the leader of the opposition, had assured us of nationalising our jobs if her party (BNP) went to power. But she is not doing this."

He also said, "It is now a matter of our very survival and we will not leave the Shaheed Minar until our demand is met."

The agitating teachers said they are staying at the Shaheed Minar from Monday night.

Meanwhile, Bahadur Rahman Badsha, one of the teachers, was injured in a road accident near Muktagong. He was hospitalised with leg injuries.

Charge sheet given

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the six operatives of the banned Islamist militant outfit were released on bail. They have been absconding since then, except Sentu, who was re-arrested in November.

Investigating into the case, Dharmrai police later found the activities of the accusedes actually were of the nature of sedition. With approval from the home ministry, SI Zehad Hossain of the police station filed the sedition case against the six arrestees and their accomplice Pintu on September 11.

NG'ANJARRESTS

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday busted two JMB dens at Fatullah in Narayanganj and arrested four operatives of the outlawed terrorist outfit with 10kg ammonium nitrate, an explosive substance, and 342 books on jihad.

Tipped off, a team of Rab-10 first raided a West Masdar house in Fatullah at around 2:15am and arrested Rafiqul Islam alias Shoab, 20. The team also recovered 10kg ammonium nitrate, 290 copies of a book titled 'Berajale Al Jihad' and some sharp weapons from his room.

Major Jahangir Hossain of Rab-10 said some 1,000 small bombs could be manufactured with the seized ammonium nitrate.

Shoabi, who hails from Raipura in Narsingdi, said he is a student of a Kuwait-funded madrasa at Joydevpur in Gazipur and was sent by his JMB superiors to Narayanganj about two and a half months ago.

Following the lead given by Shoabi, we raided a house at Old Deovogue in the area in the noon and arrested Ziaur Rahman alias Tanveer and Ziaul Islam alias Obaida," Rab-10 Director Lt Col Manikur Rahman told The Daily Star.

Both Tanveer and Obaida hail from Tangail. Tanveer admitted to being the JMB Narayanganj district coordinator and regulating the August 17 bomb blasts in the district as part of the countrywide orchestrated terror strikes.

The Rab seized a cellphone set, 52 more books on jihad and Tk 8,620 in cash, which the arrestees said was part of Tk 15,000 detained JMB military commander Ataur Rahman Sunny had given them earlier as expenses for three months.

The Rab-10 director said the three arrestees are JMB Ehsars -- people who are ready to sacrifice their lives for Allah -- and are suspected to be members of its suicide squad.

Opposition out

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in the country and a halt to bomb blasts as they have not turned up for the dialogue."

She said when the country was advancing towards self-reliance on all fronts, a deep-rooted conspiracy was going on not only against her, the ruling BNP and the alliance but also against the country, people and future generation.

All these are being done to halt the country's advancement and weaken Bangladesh to make it dependent on others, she added.

Khaleda said a conspiracy was on using the name of Islam. "Innocent people, police were being killed as well as threats of attack given to educational institutions."

The prime minister said this conspiracy would never be allowed to get through. "Bombers will not succeed --our movement is against bombings and terrorism."

She blasted the opposition for carrying out false campaign abroad against communal harmony and terming Bangladesh a dysfunctional

state.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, Jute and Textiles Minister Shahjahan Siraj, Education Minister Dr Osman Faruk, PM's Political secretary Harris Chowdhury, State Minister for Water Resources Goutam Chakrabarty, State Minister for Power Iqbal Hassan Mahmood, State Minister for Communications Salahuddin Ahmed, lawmakers and local leaders also addressed the meeting.

Earlier, the prime minister laid the foundation stones of a bridge over Dhaleswari river and the construction work of Tangail-Aricha regional highway at Nalsandha in Nagarpur.

The 697-meter bridge will cost over Tk 65 crore while the construction of over 52-kilometer regional highway will involve Tk 86.43 crore.

She also inaugurated a rural electric power substation and the newly built academic building of Nagarpur Jadunath Pilot High School.

Journey

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claimed that at an inter-ministerial meeting earlier this month Haab had given the estimate of 45,000 would be pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

Accordingly, they arranged flights for 39,000 while the rest were to be flown by different foreign airlines, he added.

On the other hand, Haab Secretary Jinnur Rahman Chowdhury Dipu said, "We said that Biman had to arrange flights for at least 45,000 pilgrims while the rest could fly by other airlines."

Had Biman chartered another wide-bodied craft as per its initial plan, there would not be any crisis in the first place, Haab leaders said.

Biman could hurriedly manage to charter two aircraft including a 576-seat capacity wide-bodied one, Biman sources said, adding that it failed to charter another wide-bodied craft, even after signing contract with Thai Orient Airlines as the Boeing 747 got stranded at Jakarta after developing technical faults.

Even if Biman arranges more craft now, it would not be able to operate additional flights to Saudi Arabia, as it has no more slot permission, sources said, adding that the only option left for Biman now is to pursue the higher authorities for arranging at least 10 flights by wide-bodied craft of Saudi Arabian Airlines.

Haab leaders were scheduled to meet State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir last night for seeking government intervention in resolving the crisis.

Punish Islamist

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of pushing the countrymen into a confrontation by delivering provocative speeches.

The meeting discussed the overall current political situation of the country, AL General Secretary and Coordinator of the 14-party

Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star after the meeting.

It demanded tough punishment to the people responsible for the August 21 grenade attack on the AL rally, August 17 serial blasts across the country and other bomb attacks, killing AL leaders including Shah AMS Kibria, Ahsanullah Master and others, Jalil said.

Criticising and protesting the prime minister's threat of sedition charges against Sheikh Hasina, the opposition leaders held the alliance government responsible for any untoward incident following the speeches of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Matur Rahman Nizami.

The meeting condemned yesterday's attack on AL Organising Secretary Akhteruzzaman at Kaliganj in Gazipur and the death threat to AL Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta from the banned Islamist militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

The opposition leaders said the BNP men's attack on the 14-party demonstration against the price hike proves that they are against the countrymen.

The meeting decided to hold a press conference tomorrow at the Jatiya Press Club.

It also discussed overall preparation for the Dhaka march on January 22 and grand rallies in other districts including Chittagong, Sylhet and Barisal.

DCC

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movement and Wari Club for their praiseworthy contribution in their respective fields.

The awardees received a gold medal, Tk 50,000 cash and an honorary certificate.

The awards for literature and culture, health service, social welfare and sports categories were given yesterday. The DCC gave the awards for four categories even though it had promised awards in nine categories earlier.

The categories will increase in future including one for journalists for city affairs reporting, said DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka while speaking at the award giving ceremony. LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan attended the ceremony as the chief guest and distributed the awards.

Kazi Rafiqul Alam, president and chief executive of Dhaka Ashania Mission, film star Elias Kanchan, founder president of Nirapad Sarak Chai movement and M Abdul Bari, deputy commissioner of Dhaka district and president of Wari Club, received the awards.

Lauding the DCC for introducing the award Bhuiyan hoped the neutrality maintained in selecting the awardees will prevail in future.

Kanchan said on average 14 people are killed daily in road accidents in Bangladesh and 25-35 people are injured causing loss of Tk 4500 crore yearly which affects our gross domestic product (GDP).

Replying to Elias Kanchan's appeal for land to establish an orthopaedic hospital for accident victims the minister said, "I'll talk to the authority concerned in this regard as it's a good initiative."

Journalist Nurjahan said this award recognises her struggles and efforts to become successful while upholding ideals of Begum Rokeya, her father journalist Nasiruddin and husband Rokonuzzaman Khan.

14-party lays

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The 14-party observed the programme in Sirajganj despite police obstruction.

The opposition combine held a rally at the Bazar Station Chatter in Sadar upazila where AL leader KM Hossain Ali Hasan, Abdur Rahman, Daniul Haque Dani, JSD leader Dr Zahurul Haque Raza and NAP leader Hedayet Ullah spoke.

Similar programmes were held in Raiganj, Tarash, Ullapara, Shahjadpur, Chowhali, Belkuchi, Kamarkhand and Kazipur upazila headquarters.

In Nilphamari, the 14-party leaders and activists took part in demonstration in front of the deputy commissioner's office and brought out a procession.

District AL President Jonab Ali, Poura Chairman Dewan Kamal Ahmed, advocate Momtazul Haque, Prof Nur Mohammad Khan of the Workers Party and Sydur Rahman of NAP spoke at the 14-party rally.

The opposition combine laid siege to Naogaon Sadar upazila office and submitted a memorandum to the upazila nirbahi officer after holding a rally. Fazle Rabbi Baku, Abdul Malek, Nirmal Krishna Saha and Bin Ali Pintu addressed the rally.

In Khulna, the 14-party alliance submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner after a rally charged by Sheikh Yunus Ali Inu.

Begum Monnujan Sufian of AL, Mollah Jalaluddin, Hafizur Rahman of the Workers Party, Haider Gazi Salauddin Runu of Gono Forum, Rafiqul Haque Khokan of JSD and Fazlur Rahman of NAP spoke at the rally.

17 mobile courts

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magistrate Nazmul Ahsan Majumder, fined two vermicelli factories -- Swan Shemai and Golden Shemai -- for producing the food in unhygienic environment.

The court found the employees making vermicelli with rotten flour and drying it in the sun. Besides, the manufactured item was kept in a dusty place.

The court fined the owner of Swan Shemai factory Tk 50,000, said the magistrate adding that the same factory had been fined Tk 20,000 earlier. "If the penalty is increased, the rate of adulteration may come down," the magistrate said.

The court later fined Golden Shemai Tk 50,000. The owner and the employees had fled from the factory before the arrival of the mobile court.

Another mobile court led by magistrate Md Rokan Ud Doulah raided four restaurants in Kotwali area and a confectionary shop in New Market area. It collected Tk 90,000 as fine for selling adulterated food and maintaining unhygienic environment.

The magistrate told reporters that the locals complained to him about the sale of unhygienic foods that prompted him to raid the restaurants. Two of the restaurants are 'B'Baria Hotel' and 'Tayeba Hotel', while the

other two do not have any signboards.

The magistrate fined the restaurants Tk 10,000 each and arrested four employees of the restaurants as they failed to pay the fine.

The magistrate later fined Shahi Confectionery at Gausul Azam Super Market Tk 50,000 for selling unhygienic water in plastic containers. The court also arrested the owner of the shop Abdur Rahim for failing to pay the fine.

Another court conducted its raid in Lalbagh area and collected Tk 1.1 lakh as fine from a plastic goods factory and a vermicelli-producing factory.

Another court in Demra sentenced four persons, including the owners of two biscuit factories, to jail for seven to 15 days for producing adulterated biscuits. The convicts had committed the same offence earlier, the magistrate told reporters.

Another court at Sabujbagh fined two biscuit factories Tk 70,000.

In Teigaon, another court fined two restaurants -- Hotel Salimar and Hotel Farmgate -- Tk 23,000 each for selling adulterated food. The same court fined Dreamland Massage Parlour Tk 22,000 for illegal activities.

AFD chief

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troops will be deployed to ensure free and fair polls.

For appointment to the post, government policymakers and sources in the army are talking of four majors general -- Quarter Master General in the army headquarters Abu Roshde Rokonuddawla, GOC of Ninth Division Masud Uddin Chowdhury, BDR chief Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, and DGFI chief Sadique Hasan Rumi, sources said.

But it is not unlikely that anyone other than the four may get the post, said a senior army officer.

When the caretaker government takes over responsibilities to conduct the general elections, the president holds the defence portfolio according to the Constitution.

"During this period, the principal staff officer has to play a significant role in coordinating the forces. The AFD boss will chalk out the plan of troops deployment in consultation with the president," a former army chief said.

Govt mulls stopping

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number of irregularities including some private fertiliser importers' misappropriation of subsidy funds, a finance ministry source said.

The issue also came up for discussion in the finance minister's December 8 meeting with the officials of Bangladesh Bank, nationalised commercial banks, and National Board of Revenue.

The government introduced a 25 percent subsidy for imported fertilisers including TSP, MoP and DAP in the last fiscal year so that the farmers get them at a reasonable price.

It was alleged in the purchase committee meeting that a section of importers are involved in over invoicing to get extra benefit in the form of subsidy. Besides, many are importing huge quantities to make more profit in subsidy.

A consensus was reached in the meeting that the government, which is already importing urea fertiliser, will import the non-urea chemical fertilisers too.

The finance minister told the purchase committee that he would speak to the concerned ministries about the issue and take a decision, said a source.

At the December 8 meeting, the bank officials pointed out that over invoicing and excess import of fertilisers add to the ongoing dollar

crisis.

After the meeting, the finance ministry directed the central bank to look into the issue. Currently, the ministry itself is examining the unpaid invoices of the importers.

Saifur Rahman coming out of discussion in the finance minister's ECNEC meeting on Monday told the reporters, "Some people are trying to have the funds (for fertiliser subsidy) released quickly. We have to check first whether the farmers are getting the benefits of fertiliser subsidy."

Today's meeting is expected to discuss mainly the present situation in fertiliser import, its prices and ways to distribute the subsidy. The Bangladesh Bank officials among others will be present at the meeting.

Japan

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When contacted, Morshed Khan told UNB Japan is "the strongest development partner of Bangladesh since the country's independence in 1971".

Welcoming the aid, he appreciated Japanese contribution to Bangladesh's development, particularly in the infrastructure sector.

AL forms all but

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thana unit leaders about the district unit leaders' position and popularity in their areas.

The leader of the opposition in parliament will also give directions to the grassroots level AL level leaders to end intra-party feuds to rejuvenate all the district and thana units, and gear up for achieving victory in the coming national elections.

Moreover, she will ask them not to cooperate with government functionaries locally at the final stage of the opposition's anti-government movement, the sources said.