

## 2 killed in 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An accused in the sensational quadruple murder case in Badda and a regional leader of an outlawed party were killed in 'encounters' with the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) at Badda in the capital and in Khulna early yesterday.

Jilan Al Abedin alias Leon alias Jilani, who was killed in the capital, is a hired killer and a close associate of Mamun who executed the four murders with his accomplices at South Badda on Tuesday, Rab said, adding that Leon was accused in a number of cases including eight for murder.

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## Robber lynched in Ctg

UNB, Ctg

An alleged robber was lynched by a mob at Noapara in Rauzan upazila early yesterday.

Locals said a gang of six robbers entered the house of Haji Jamaluddin at the village at about 5:00am, but left the scene as Jamaluddin opened fire, leaving one of the gang members named Shafi injured.

The injured robber is undergoing treatment at Chittagong Medical College and Hospital

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## HILI LAND PORT Indian traders, truckers now call non-stop strike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Early resumption of export-import through Hili land port has become uncertain, as the Indian traders and truckers enforced a strike protesting the indefinite strike of Bangladeshi C & F agents and traders, which entered its 13th day yesterday.

The Bangla-Hili Unit of All India traders Association and Truck Owners' Association began

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# Holiday at home turns sour for workers in ME

*Chronic delay of Biman flights puts their jobs at stake*

SHARIFUL ISLAM

The delay in return flights of state-run Biman Bangladesh Airlines has put a large number of expatriate Bangladeshi workers in the Middle East at risk of losing jobs for not reporting back on time.

The national flag carrier's mishandling of the hajj flights has led to the delaying of the flights to take workers back to business after a two-month biennial vacation, said sources.

Biman flights to the Middle Eastern countries are often delayed by three to four days and as a result, many expatriate workers cannot return on schedule and sometimes end up losing jobs, added the sources.

Biman sources said the failure of the Biman to operate on schedule has been caused mainly by 'over-cautious' efforts of the airline authorities to ensure the return of

hajj pilgrims from Saudi Arabia.

Mohammad Alauddin of Sylhet, who runs a business in Kuwait, had been stranded at a hotel in city's Uttara for three days until 9:30 last night when his flight finally took off from Zia International Airport (ZIA).

Alongside him, some 150 others, mostly workers in Kuwait and Bahrain, had to wait for days to be on the return flights.

Frustrated at being delayed for long, Alauddin called The Daily Star and spoke about the sufferings resulted from uncertainty over their flights.

He said they arrived at ZIA from Sylhet and Chittagong on their way to Kuwait and Bahrain on February 5, and their flight was to depart at 5:45pm the same day.

"But on arrival at ZIA, we were given a hotel cheque and told that our flights have been rescheduled at 12:30pm Monday," said Alauddin.

"Since then, flight schedule has been changed for several times," he added.

The passengers bound for the Arabian Gulf were finally on board at around 9:30 last night.

Alauddin alleged that no Biman official bothered to update them on the changed flight schedule.

Deputy General Manager (Public Relations, Biman) Syed Ahasan Hossain Kazi told The Daily Star that the flights were delayed due to scarcity of aircraft and arrangement for returning the hajj pilgrims.

Nur Mian, who works for a private firm in Kuwait, was supposed to leave the country by a Biman flight on February 5 and attend work the next day. But he could not do so because of the delay.

"I may even lose my job for not

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# US accepts Russian move to contact Hamas

*Annan pushes Palestinian group to end attacks on Israel*

AFP, REUTERS, Washington/ United Nations

The United States said Friday it had accepted Russia's move to meet with the Palestinian group Hamas after Moscow gave assurances it would press the militants to renounce armed struggle against Israel.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Washington respected the "sovereign decision" of Russian President Vladimir Putin to offer talks with Hamas after the movement's shock win in Palestinian elections last month.

His comments came after Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice phoned her Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov early Friday to discuss Moscow's opening to Hamas, which is expected to form

the next Palestinian government.

Russia and the United States, United Nations and European Union -- the diplomatic "quartet" -- have demanded Hamas renounce violence, recognise Israel's right to exist and respect prior agreements with the Jewish state.

"Should the Russian government follow through and have a meeting with Hamas, have some contact with Hamas, we've been assured that they will send that message that is contained in the quartet statement," McCormack said.

He said the Russians promised to send "the very clear, strong signal that is outlined in the quartet (text) that Hamas has a choice to make and it must meet the conditions as outlined by the quartet."

Washington, which lists Hamas as a terrorist group, reacted warily

Thursday after Putin unveiled his initiative. US officials admitted they were caught by surprise and sought "clarification" of Russia's intentions.

The Russian move came with the United States and its allies threatening to cut aid to the Palestinian Authority if Hamas takes the reins following its landslide win in the January 25 legislative polls.

The quartet statement issued last week in London said only it was "inevitable" aid would be reviewed. But Russia, which does not consider Hamas to be terrorists, later came out against any cuts in assistance.

McCormack reiterated that "we consider Hamas a terrorist organization. We have, we do and we will,

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## JMB men's confessions false: AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League yesterday said the BNP-Jamaat coalition government is forcibly extracting 'false and fabricated' confessional statements from the kingpins of militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) implicating AL leaders in their militant activities to destroy the party's image.

The alliance government is staging a drama to divert public attention from militancy. It has long been patronising militants who are now giving confessional statements against AL leaders

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## Judges sit today to draw up agitation plan

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Lower court judges from across the country will hold an extended meeting today at the Judges Conference Room of Dhaka district court to decide their next course of action if the government does not fully meet their 11-point demand.

District and Sessions Judge Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, president of Bangladesh Judicial Service Association (BJSA), will chair the meeting at 5:00pm.

Earlier on January 15 -17, the judges observed a token protest

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Prayer Timing		
February 12		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-25	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	5-57	6-01
Esha	7-15	7-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		

## BSF kills 3 in Kushtia, Thakurgaon

STAR REPORT

The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) gunned down two Bangladeshi cow traders and injured one at Dharmadah border point in Daulatpur upazila in Kushtia early yesterday.

The dead were identified as Akbar Hossain, 40, and Ashraful Islam, 32, of Kazipur village in Gangni upazila in Meherpur district. The injured Lalchad hails from the same village, reports our correspondent from Kushtia.

Meantime, a UNB report says a Bangladeshi youth was shot dead by the BSF in Haripur border area in Thakurgaon district yesterday. The dead was identified as Ershad Ali, 18, son of Shafuiddin of Dongaon village of Haripur upazila.

Sources of 9th Rifles Battalion of

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## Doctors struggle to save Sharon

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, incapacitated by a stroke on January 4, was undergoing emergency surgery for digestive complications yesterday and a hospital source said he was likely to die by the end of the day.

"We expect him to die today," said the source, who asked not to be identified because he was not authorized to speak to the media on behalf of Jerusalem's Hadassah hospital.

Earlier, hospital spokesman Ron Krumer said a CT scan had revealed "serious damage to the

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PHOTO: STAR

Shia community in Dhaka brings out a traditional Taajia procession on the Ashura day, marking the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his companions at Karbala in Iraq. The photo was taken from Azimpur on Friday.

# Trishal bigots barred from capturing Ahmadiyya mosque

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Law enforcers foiled an attempt of the anti-Ahmadiyya zealots to capture Dhanikhola Ahmadiyya mosque in Trishal in Mymensingh on February 10.

The fanatics however hung a signboard on a tree at Boiler Bazar, about two kilometres off Dhanikhola, asking Muslims not to say prayers at the Ahmadiyya mosque.

No untoward incident took place

during the agitation. The bigots have been agitating for the last two and a half years demanding that the government should declare Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim.

A large number of panicked locals left their houses as the International Khatme Nabuwat Movement, Bangladesh had announced to capture the mosque and hang a signboard branding the mosque merely as a place of worship and asking Muslims not to "mistake it for a mosque".

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## Hanif taken to Bangkok

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka city unit Awami League (AL) President Mohammad Hanif was shifted to Bamrungrad Hospital in Bangkok on Friday afternoon by an air ambulance for better treatment.

Three doctors from the hospital, who arrived in Dhaka in the afternoon, examined the former Dhaka City Corporation mayor before he was flown off at 5:30pm.

His son Syeed Khokon and a relative accompanied him.

Hanif had been kept on artificial life-support in the intensive care unit (ICU) at the Birdem hospital in Dhaka.

Dhaka City AL Joint Secretary Haji Mohammad Selim and Haji Makbul Hossain also flew to Bangkok the same day to attend the AL leader there.