

Gunmen kill sister of Iraqi vice president

Two Italian soldiers slain

REUTERS, AP, Baghdad

Gunmen killed the sister of Iraqi Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi in Baghdad yesterday, Interior Ministry sources and two officials in his party said.

They said Meysoun al-Hashemi was gunned down in the Hay al-Ilaam section of Baghdad. The killing comes after one of his brothers was killed on April 13. Hashemi, a Sunni Arab, was appointed on Saturday in efforts to form a unity government.

The brother of another leading Sunni politician, Saleh al-Mutlaq, was found dead this month after he was kidnapped.

Hashemi's Iraqi Islamic Party is the largest in the main Sunni political block and was the first Sunni Islamist party to join the political process, which US and Iraqi officials hope will defuse the Sunni insurgency.

Hashemi made his first public appearance as vice president on Wednesday at a news conference with President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, and Shia Adel Abdul Mahdi, the other vice president in the new administration.

They vowed to press ahead with efforts to form a national unity government they hope can avert a sectarian civil war.

The al-Qaeda leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, appeared unmasked for the first time in a video broadcast on Tuesday vowing to bring down the new government.

Meanwhile, a bomb blast rocked an Iraqi convoy at a base in southern Iraq yesterday, killing two Italian soldiers and a Romanian, the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

The bombing targeted a four-vehicle convoy on its way to relieve troops at the local Iraqi police station in the city of Nasiriyah, the statement said. One of the vehicles was destroyed, killing the three soldiers and gravely injuring at least one more passenger.

AL walks out of JS

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The main opposition also asked for holding discussions on 11 "burning" issues including price hike of essentials, Kansat killings, frequent load-shedding of power and corruption in rural electricity distribution, and the recent police assault on journalists in Chittagong.

Among other "burning" issues were all-pervasive corruption, damage to country's image abroad due to what it said were government-sponsored terrorism and law and order slide, and alleged nepotism in recruiting staff for the Jatiya Sangsads (JS). Alleged foot-dragging and reluctance to complete investigations into the grenade attacks and killings of opposition leaders and the UK envoy were also on the list.

But, the ruling alliance did not accede to discuss none of the issues. The AL members on the Bic then walked out of the meeting at 5:20pm.

"Our proposals were turned down by the government, which is isolated from the masses, and so does not want to face the people," Suranji said, adding, "May be the Kansat problem has been resolved, but Kansat-like situation now prevails at every home."

Ruling BNP Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain, who is also on the Bic, however told reporters that they decided to continue the current session for seven workdays until May 9 to accommodate the opposition's demand. "The session was supposed to have only four workdays, as it was summoned only to meet the constitutional bindings," he said.

About the AL demands for holding discussions on the "burning" issues, Khandakar said the opposition lawmakers have the chance to discuss those on points of order in the House.

After the House convened at 5:30pm, the Speaker in his welcome address said the lawmakers will have scopes to discuss any issue in the upcoming budget session.

Suranji said in the Bic meeting they were advised to discuss the price spiral of essentials including sugar in the budget session. "If we wait for the budget session to discuss the situation, by then the price of sugar will be Tk 100 a kilo," he quipped.

At the beginning of the session, the House adopted an obituary reference following the deaths of a lawmaker of the current parliament and some former lawmakers.

A short discussion was held before adopting the reference. Participating in the discussion on the death of lawmaker Abdul Motaleb Akand, Suranji said a few words about the veteran politician Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, whose name was in the obituary reference, and demanded inclusion of the names of those people killed in police firing in Kansat.

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Judges killing case

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yesterday examined three out of the 53 witnesses mentioned on the charge sheet.

The witnesses cross-examined were Sultan Ahmed Khan, driver of the vehicle that was bombed and complainant of the case Anisur Rahman and Abu Khair.

The seven accused Abdur Rahman, Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai, Ataur Rahman Sunny, Abdul Awal, Mamun, Sultan and the recently arrested Khalid Saifullah were produced before the Court of Additional District and Sessions Judge yesterday around 10:00am.

Khalid acknowledged his involvement with the judges' killing during charge framing. He said he did not want any justice from this world court under man-made laws.

Reza Tarik Ahmed, additional district and sessions judge of Jhalakathi, directed Public Prosecutor Haider Hossain to start the examination of witnesses.

Advocate Siddik Hossain also conducted the cross-examination of witnesses as state lawyer for accused Sultan.

The accused top most JMB leaders were seen smiling and exchanging good wishes with newly arrested Khalid Saifullah.

JMB chief Abdur Rahman, Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai and operations commander Ataur Rahman Sunny were flown from Dhaka to Barisal. They were brought to Jhalakathi yesterday.

They were taken to Shilpakala Academy, recently renovated with air-conditioning, which was officially declared as sub-jail. Khalid Saifullah also joined them there after he was brought to Jhalakathi yesterday afternoon. JMB leader Awal, Mamun and Sultan are in Jhalakathi District Jail.

The ministry had previously said that three Italians and one Romanian had been killed, but later corrected its numbers. Romania's Defence Ministry confirmed the death of its soldier.

The Italian news agency Apcor, citing government sources, reported many injuries.

Italy's president, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, quickly released a statement expressing "dismay and immense grief." Centre-left leader Romano Prodi, who will head the next Italian government, said in a statement that "this tragedy strikes at all of Italy," and added that he shared the pain of the victims' families.

Prodi opposed the war and has pledged to bring Italian troops home by the end of the year. Italy already has begun withdrawing troops under Premier Silvio Berlusconi, who also was prepared to end the Italian participation in the multinational force this year.

The convoy was carrying an Italian Army officer, 15 troops with the Carabinieri paramilitary police and the Romanian, the Italian Defence Ministry statement said. An Italian convoy was the target of another bomb attempt five days ago, but it did not cause any damage, Apcor said.

Clarifying reasons for not attending on the four-party alliance meeting yesterday at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), he said, "We hoped that the prime minister would take our opinion before taking any major political decision. But we did not see any sign of that."

The IOJ leader was critical of BNP for inviting them to the meeting just hours before of it. "We will not go to any of the alliance meeting without prior discussion."

Maulana Siddiqui Rahman, Khorsheed Alam Kashiemi and Maulana Jalal Uddin were present at the press conference.

It was the first reported death for a Romanian soldier in the country.

Since the start of the war in 2003, at least 211 foreign soldiers have been killed in Iraq. At least 2,393 US military members have died.

4-PARTY DECISIONS IOJ's Shaikhul Hadith faction unhappy over BNP's role

UNB, Dhaka

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JCD men attack

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However, Proctor Sayed Kamru Ahsan said, "We are trying to find out the persons involved in the incident."

The JCD cadres, who students believe to be disguised ICS cadres, equipped with firearms, iron rods, hockey sticks, bamboo sticks attacked when the demonstrators were chanting anti-Jamaat-Shibir slogans.

Earlier a joint team of MMH Hall authorities and representatives of students could not find Mona, a student of Philosophy who took shelter in the dormitory after being chased by students in the evening.

Mona and Shikat, under the banner of Chhatri Sangram Parishad, had called a meeting on the Shaheed Minar premises demanding cancellation of quotas including freedom fighter quotas in the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) exams Wednesday evening.

On information of ICS involvement in the programme, students thronged there and caught Mona on suspicion of being an ICS member. Mona managed to flee from the agitating students and hid inside MMH Hall.

Students found evidence in the form of ICS books, routines and leaflets in MMH Hall, Al-Beruni Hall, and Moulana Bhasani Hall.

Meanwhile, President of JCD of JU unit Parvez Mallik said, "JCD will help to uproot ICS activists on the campus."

4 to die

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and police informer Quddus wounded.

Sources mentioned that following a clash with rivals at Gopibagh long before this incident, Idul and his accomplice Millat used to stay at DU Jahanul Haq Hall, sheltered by the then JCD hall unit president Tanjirul Rahman.

More than 14 cases against Idul, including four for murder, are pending with different courts in the city.

Special Public Prosecutor Abdul Latif Talukder appeared for the state while advocates AFM Abdul Wadud and ABM Sharuddin Khan Mukul defended the accused in the tribunal.

Protesting the Speaker's decision, AL lawmakers walked out of the House at 6:09pm and did not return during the rest of the session yesterday.

The BNP chief whip lambasted the opposition for walking out during the obituary reference. "It's unprecedented in the parliamentary history that the opposition staged a walkout during an obituary reference," he said.

"They [AL] know that names of general people are not included in the obituary reference. Still, they raised the Kansat issue from political motive. By this they wanted to rip political gains," he alleged. "Why are they so impatient? Their attitude will not help strengthen the parliamentary democracy," Khandakar remarked.

After adoption of the obituary reference, the Speaker postponed the other business of the House for the day and adjourned the sitting until 5:00pm on May 2.

Names will be sent in the letter, he added.

The 14-party opposition combine led by Awami League (AL) has made a plea that Jamaat should be excluded from the government's panel for discussion on reforms of caretaker government and the Election Commission (EC).

In its third letter, the opposition combine has nominated five leaders only from the AL and asked the government side to nominate their leaders only from the main party in the coalition, BNP, for the dialogue.

He is also expected to visit the graves of his grandfather Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and uncles at Tungipara in Gopalganj and Piroganj in Rangpur.

Asked if he has plans to stay in Bangladesh permanently, Joy said, "I haven't thought about it yet. But I will visit the country frequently."

Sheikh Hasina received her son at the airport. Senior leaders of the AL and its front organisations were also present there.

Later, a huge motorcade escorted Joy from the airport to Hasina's Dhanmondi residence.

Several thousand leaders and activists of AL and its front organisations thronged the airport as well as Hasina's Dhanmondi residence to greet Joy.

Joy had earlier visited Bangladesh with his wife Kristine Overmire on December 22, 2004.

Joy is expected to exchange views with the new BCL leadership during his over-10-day stay in the country. He will also talk to the top AL policymakers and Judo League leaders.

Advocate Siddik Hossain also conducted the cross-examination of witnesses as state lawyer for accused Sultan.

The accused top most JMB leaders were seen smiling and exchanging good wishes with newly arrested Khalid Saifullah.

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Mahmud for price hike

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government in any way.

MEETING WITH NCBs

Earlier, in the meeting, officials of Agrani and Janata banks made it clear to the energy adviser that, unless BPC pays back its outstanding loans, they would be unable to lend it any more, meeting sources said.

They are suffering from a severe liquidity crisis, the officials of the two nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) told Mahmud. Besides, they said, the inter-bank call-money market is also in such a bad shape that they cannot raise money from that place.

"We are suffering from the call-money market, but now we have to buy from there. Even that is not possible now, as the call-money market has run dry too, a Janata Bank official explained.

"BNP wants to go alone and is taking all major decisions without taking us into confidence," he added.

He said IOJ will not take the responsibility of any misdeeds of BNP, including the Kansat massacre.

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