

# 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-Mutak, was found dead this month after he was kidnapped.

Hashemi's Iraqi Islamic Party is the largest in the main Sunni political bloc 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 Italian 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

**FROM PAGE 1** The main opposition also asked for holding discussions on 11 "burning" issues including price hike of essentials, Kamsat 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 Sangsad (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 acceded to discuss none of the issues. The AL members on the Bac 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," Suranjit, also a member of AL Presidium, told reporters after the meeting.

"We wanted that the killing in Kamsat be discussed in the House. But the prime minister said the issue has been resolved," Suranjit said, adding, "May be the Kamsat problem has been resolved, but Kamsat-like situation now prevails at every home."

Ruling BNP Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain, who is also on the Bac, 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

## Judges killing case

**FROM PAGE 1** 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 Abdul 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 worldly 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 by road on Tuesday afternoon.

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 Wednesday afternoon. JMB leader Awal, Mamun and Sultan are in Jhalakathi District Jail.

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

UNB, Dhaka

The Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) faction led by Shaikhul Hadith Maulana Azizul Haque yesterday regretted that they were not taken into confidence in taking major decisions of the alliance government.

"Majlis-e-Sura will decide in its meeting shortly if IOJ will continue to stay in the four-party alliance," Maulana Abdur Rab Yusufi, secretary general of the IOJ faction, told a press conference.

Replying to a question, Maulana Rab said the issue will be discussed in the central committee meeting on May 6. The final decision will be taken by Majlis-e-Sura.

"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 Kamsat massacre.

Clarifying reasons for not attending 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 Siddique Rahman, Khoshed Alam Khashemi and Maulana Jalal Uddin were present at the press conference.

## JCD men attack

**FROM PAGE 1** However, Proctor Sayed Kamrul 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 Chhatra 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 Maulana 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

**FROM PAGE 20** and police informer Quddus wounded.

Source mentioned that following a clash with rivals at Gopbagh long before this incident, Idul and his accomplice Millat used to stay at DU Jahurul Haque Hall, sheltered by the then JCD hall unit president Tanjilur 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 Sharfuddin Khan Mukul defended the accused in the tribunal.

## Reform talks

**FROM PAGE 1** press briefing at the PMO.

He said they will send reply to the latest letter of the opposition alliance this evening.

Repeatedly asked whether Jamaat-e-Islami has representation in the dialogue panel, Bhuiyan said, "You will know tomorrow the contents of the letter."

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.

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer and Industries Minister Maulana Matir Rahman Nizami and Secretary General and Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, Health Minister Khandokar Mosharraf Hossain and Information Minister M Shamsul Islam, Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) Chairman Nazir Rahman Manjur and Secretary General Saifur Rahman, Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) chief Mufti Fazul Huq Aminee and Secretary General Abdul Latif Nezami, chairman of another faction of the BJP MA Matin MP and ABM Golam Mostofa attended the meeting.

# Mahmud for price hike

**FROM PAGE 1** government in any way. **MEETING WITH NCBs** Earlier, in the meeting, officials of Agrani and Janata banks made it clear to the energy advisers 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 used to supply money to 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.

Agrani Bank, which paid about Tk 380 crore to BPC early week, is scheduled to pay it another loan on Tuesday. But, the Agrani Bank officials expressed doubt in the meeting whether they would be able to arrange for the payment on Tuesday, meeting sources said.

BPC requires about \$20 crore (\$200 million) to import oil to meet the domestic demand until June. If Janata and Agrani banks lend Tk 1400 crore to BPC, the central bank is ready to give the foreign currency in exchange.

BPC also said it is not in a position to make any further payment for importing oil, if domestic oil prices are not increased.

About BPC's foreign-currency need to import oil, Mahmud told reporters that the state petroleum

agency will get \$125 million from Islamic Development Bank by May 15 and \$250 million more from Standard Chartered Bank by July.

The NCBs at present are suffering from a lack of local currency not foreign exchange, an NCB official told The Daily Star, adding, "If BPC does not pay off its dues all other businesses of us will be greatly hampered."

According to sources, BPC owes about Tk 3,500 crore to Janata Bank, Tk 2,200 crore to Agrani Bank, and Tk 6,000 crore to Sonali Bank.

**MAHMUD AT ROUNDTABLE** Replying to a query on the ongoing power crisis at the roundtable organised by Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute in its seminar room yesterday, Mahmud advised the RMG units to shift from diesel-run power generators to gas-run ones to face power outage.

"The cost will also be lower if you produce power by gas-run generators. At the current gas price, per unit power generation cost using gas will be Tk 2.50, while you have to pay Tk 4 per unit power bought from the national grid," he pointed out.

He said the price of natural gas in Bangladesh is the cheapest in the world.

Mahmud also advised the RMG entrepreneurs to diversify both export products and destinations. "We are targeting the EU and US markets only, ignoring the Asian markets. But, there are some big markets like China and Japan in Asia," he said.

## Robbers loot Tk 36 lakh in cash, goods from city house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Armed robbers looted over Tk 36.5 lakh in cash in local and foreign currencies and gold ornaments from a house at Shyampur in the capital early yesterday.

Cutting the wires of the boundary wall, a gang of around 20 robbers broke into the house of Mahbubur Rahman, a businessman, at about 2:30am, police said quoting Rahman.

The robbers took the inmates hostage at gunpoint and took away Tk 5.58 lakh, \$702, gold ornaments and three cellphones.

Rahman filed a case with Shyampur Police Station.

## Sadequee

**FROM PAGE 1** A Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) affidavit says Sadequee was one of the two US citizens who met with Islamic extremists in Canada. There they allegedly discussed possible terrorist targets within the United States.

The arrest affidavit, filed in US District Court for the Eastern District of New York, says Sadequee lied to federal agents in August when he was questioned at New York's JFK Airport. He was flying to Bangladesh to get married, he said. Authorities asked him about his trip earlier in 2005 to Canada. Agents say Sadequee told them he had travelled to Canada alone and stayed with an aunt there.

Meanwhile, Sadequee's father Sarder Md Sharif said he visited the US Embassy in Dhaka on Wednesday and submitted an application to allow him to go to the USA and meet his detained son.

"The embassy will inform me about it on May 2," Sharif, who claimed to have been admitted to a city hospital for serious illness, told The Daily Star yesterday. He said he went to the embassy with doctors' permission.

Sharif also said the US Embassy returned the medicine and inhaler he had given the embassy on April 20 for Sadequee although it assured him of delivering those to his son if possible.

## India slap tax

**FROM PAGE 20** Bangladesh exporters to bear the increased cost of newly imposed import tax by decreasing the price, said Yusuf Ali Sikder, president of Barisal Fishing Exporters and Importers Association.

Anwarul Huq, a leader of fish importers association of West Bengal, said they will discuss the matter with the ministry of finance of India.

## Bolts zap 3

**FROM PAGE 1** Lawmaker Rowshanara Farid visited the affected areas and assured the victims of all possible help.

Meanwhile, police said Sahara Khatun, 50, and her son Sabui, 25, were struck by lightning as they were running to their rooms from the yard around 10:00pm at Rajarampur in Mithapukur upazila of Rangpur. Both died on the spot, our Rangpur correspondent reports.

Family members said they had heard a huge thunder followed by a flash of light before they found them lying dead on the ground.

## District ministers

**FROM PAGE 1** arrangement, they said.

Arguing that such designation might have been created out of political motives, the counsels said the local administrators were unable to function independently as a result of this move.

Termining the concept "federal" in nature that totally contradicts the structure of the constitution of Bangladesh, they said this provision gives one the impression that each district has a designated "chief minister" now although the state governing system is constitutionally centralised.

The counsels argued that the petitioner should be accountable to his electorate for overall development of his constituency, but he hardly could play any role because of the interference by the minister in charge.

After delivering the verdict, the petitioner's counsel MK Rahman told the press that the government provision of district minister is against the constitution. It is not covered by any law and is out of ministerial responsibility. The government introduced the provision through an executive order, he said.

He also said according to the present provision, a cabinet member (minister) is responsible for the whole country and not for any particular area or district. But the provision of district minister illegally shows that a minister is chief executive of a district. It looks like a cabinet parallel to the existing one, he said.

Court appointed Dr Kamal Hossain and Advocate Mahmudul Islam as amicus curie for the case. Additional Attorney General Fida M Kamal moved for the government.

# Abbas calls on EU to keep Palestinian aid flowing

AFP, Helsinki

Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas yesterday called on the European Union to continue channelling financial aid to the Palestinian people, even if it meant bypassing the Hamas-led government.

"The EU is a big donor to the Palestinian people," Abbas told reporters during a short visit in the Finnish capital before travelling on to France.

"The Palestinian people is in bad need of their help and they should continue to help in a way that satisfies them," Abbas said.

"Without funds I do not think we can survive," he added.

The Palestinian Authority has been battling with a financial crisis since Hamas took power in government in March, prompting international boycotts and a suspension of EU and United States funding.

Direct aid was halted in response to the refusal by Hamas, which runs the key Palestinian ministries, to reject violence, recognise the state of Israel and honour past peace deals.

The EU, the largest donor with some 500 million euros (\$222 million dollars) per year, has promised however to continue its humanitarian aid.

The bloc has been looking for ways to channel its aid earmarked for Palestinians through Abbas' office.

Finnish President Tarja Halonen said at the Helsinki briefing that the EU had to balance its commitment to democracy with the fight against

terrorism.

"The EU of course respects democracy, but we also respect the rules that we have committed to, to be against terrorism," she said.

Finland takes over the rotating EU presidency in July.

Abbas was on Thursday to fly on to Paris, ending a tour which also took him to Norway and Turkey.

On Wednesday in Oslo, Abbas had called for direct negotiations to be held "immediately" between Israelis and Palestinians at the basis of international conference on resolving the Middle East conflict.

Israel responded coolly to the idea, saying the Hamas-led government stood in the way of any talks.

Abbas said "an international conference should be summoned immediately, in which direct negotiations take place (between the Israelis and Palestinians), on the basis of international UN resolutions and signed agreements."

"I believe that to resolve the conflict, both sides should not be left alone with this imbalance of occupier and occupied," he said.

He said representatives of the international community, such as the so-called Quartet (the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations), could "play the role of the broker and arbitrator at the same time".

# Iran poised to defy

**FROM PAGE 20** imposing sanctions or military action.

"We indeed think the Iranian nuclear issue is at a crucial stage," he said, "We hope all parties concerned can keep calm, exercise restraint and create favourable conditions so as to properly resolve this issue."

Russian President Vladimir Putin also said the IAEA needed to continue playing a key role in the crisis—signalling his reluctance to see the matter fully referred to the Security Council.

"We believe it is the IAEA that must play a key role and not have this weight unloaded on to the back of the Security Council," Putin said.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose country is Iran's largest European trading partner, also called for a diplomatic resolution to the standoff at a joint press conference with Putin.

Iran said it had held "encouraging" last-minute talks with IAEA head Mohamed ElBaradei on Wednesday, but there appeared to be no sign of any compromise on enrichment.

ElBaradei's report is expected to be released on Friday, with Western diplomats predicting yet more criticism of Iran's cooperation.

The deadlock could open the door to UN economic sanctions or

even military action. Senior diplomats from the UN Security Council's five permanent members plus Germany are due to discuss the next steps in a meeting in Paris on Tuesday.

Iran has already warned that sanctions could force it to halt cooperation with the IAEA or even quit the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The IAEA has been investigating Iran for more than three years, but the UN watchdog says it is still not in a position to judge the true nature of the country's nuclear programme.

The IAEA is still seeking documents on dealings Iran had with a nuclear black market network run by disgraced Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Kahn, the father of his country's atomic bomb.

It also wants to interview military officers who may have overseen secret enrichment or "dual-use" activities and to find out if Iran hid work with sophisticated P2 centrifuges, which can enrich uranium more quickly and abundantly than earlier models.

The IAEA also seeks documents Iran has on making uranium hemispheres that form the core of atom bombs and has questions about work that could be aimed at designing missiles with nuclear warheads.

# Koirala new PM

**FROM PAGE 20** mass rally in the centre of the capital Kathmandu.

"But without that it wouldn't be quiet now...It is quiet and this has raised hope and confidence for permanent peace."

King Gyanendra caved in to the pro-democracy movement on Monday, reconvening the country's dissolved parliament.

Mainstream political parties were invited to form the government and they promised to hold elections for a special assembly to write a new constitution, reflecting Maoist demands.

The rebels, after initially announcing a blockade of Kathmandu and district capitals, called off the move. The declaration of a unilateral ceasefire was the icing on the cake.

"This is people power," said Gagan Thapa, a youth leader of the Nepali Congress, the largest political party. "The people are putting pressure on the Maoists to leave violent means and on the political parties not to repeat their past mistakes."

"The people who came on the streets were neither Maoists nor members of any political parties. They are just common people who have faith in democratic values."

The Maoists, while announcing the three-month ceasefire, reiterated their demand that the parliament's first session on Friday make plans for a constituent assembly.

The Maoist demand for an unconditional constituent assembly is generally interpreted to mean it should have the power to strip the king of his title and establish a republic.

But an assembly on those terms is not something the king would be happy with, and could use the Supreme Court, dominated by royal appointees, to block it.

"Our People's Liberation Army will not carry out any offensive military action during this period and will remain defensive," rebel chief Prachanda said in a statement.

A senior political leader welcomed the Maoist announcement, and said the incoming government would likely join the truce.

"They (Maoists) have taken the

initiative to take the credit of showing themselves as initiators of peace," said Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), the second-largest in the main seven-party alliance.

He expected the government to announce a ceasefire of its own, release Maoist prisoners, withdraw international arrest warrants for its top leaders and invite them for talks.

The Maoists had initially called the king's deal with the political parties a "sham," unhappy that his address to the nation to dissolve parliament made no explicit mention of a constituent assembly.

But they later came around, underlining they expected their demands to be met very soon.

"We want to make it clear that if the first meeting of the parliament does not take a positive decision on the declaration of an unconditional constituent assembly, we will be compelled to reimpose the blockade," Prachanda said in an earlier statement.

The US Embassy welcomed the turnaround in the kingdom and the possible formation of a constituent assembly.

If the MPs fail to pay their telephone bills in spite of issuance of notice to pay, the authorities concerned would be obliged to take action against them in accordance with the law in force in Bangladesh.

On behalf of Blast, Dr Shahdeen Malik and Barrister Sara Hossain moved the case. They were assisted by Amatul Kabir, Abdul Mannan and Nizamul Kag Nasim.

Advocate Raisuddin Ahmed appeared on behalf of the BTB.

It is a reminder that members of parliament are trustees of people's power and they are not above law, Dr Malik said following the verdict.

## 427 MPs

**FROM PAGE 1** country. Otherwise, the authorities shall be liable for dereliction of their duties.