

Nato-Afghan operation kills 30 Taliban

AFP, Kandahar

A military operation in which a British soldier died in Afghanistan at the weekend left about 30 Taliban fighters dead, Afghan police said yesterday.

The British forces, however, could not confirm the rebel toll but said "possibly a significant number" were killed in the fighting in the Kajaki district of the southern province of Helmand that started Saturday.

"In the two-day operation 30 Taliban were killed and another 20 were wounded," Helmand police chief Mohammad Nabiullah said. He said the operation concluded Sunday.

"Some of the insurgents' bodies are still left at the battle site," he

said.

Lieutenant Colonel Rory Bruce of the British task force in Helmand said there were no other casualties to the troops beside the death, the first this year among the roughly 40,000 foreign soldiers in Afghanistan.

"Number of Taliban were killed in the course of the action, but we don't know how many ... possibly a significant number," he told AFP.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Mohammad Youssuf Ahmadi, said only three fighters were killed and eight wounded.

The hardliners routinely underestimate their own casualties while exaggerating those of the Afghan or foreign militaries, the main targets in an insurgency launched

after the Taliban were forced out of government in 2001.

Death tolls in clashes between security forces and rebels in Afghanistan's dragging insurgency are usually impossible to verify, with various sides giving different accounts including over whether civilians are killed.

Around 4,000 British troops are based in Helmand, one of the most volatile provinces in Afghanistan and where some areas fall outside of government control.

Helmand produces most of the country's opium crop -- which makes up 90 percent of the world supply -- and the narco-trade is said to feed the insurgency, which was its deadliest last year.

Ex-commissioner held by army

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Army men yesterday arrested Motiur Rahman Mashik, a locally influential political leader, but the reason of his arrest could not be known.

Mashik is a president of JSD (Inu) Moulvibazar district unit and former commissioner of Moulvibazar Pourasava.

Moulvibazar police has confirmed the arrest of Mashik.

Meanwhile, criminals as well as many political leaders of Moulvibazar have gone behind the screen to avoid arrest.

Army, Rab and police have started raids at different places of the district to capture miscreants and recover arms.

RMP employee held, 30 bullets seized

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday held an employee of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) and seized 30 bullets of shotgun from him.

The arrestee Abdul Aziz, a cook of RMP, was engaged in arms trading using the opportunities inside the police line.

A team of plainclothes Rab members sent one Majedul Islam for buying the bullets at around 12:00 noon.

As Aziz brought 30 bullets from his secret place inside the police line, Rab members caught him.

They took him to their Rajshahi office and interrogated him for several hours.

A Rab source told this correspondent that some senior police officials might have involvement in illegal arms trade.

He however could not confirm whether the seized bullets were smuggled or belong to government.

"We are investigating," the source added.

Rab is likely to handover the RMP cook to police and sue him in an arms peddling case with Rajpara Police Station by today.

Schoolboy murdered in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police recovered a body of a school student yesterday from the bank of Kobdak River near Agarghati bazar under Paikgacha upazila of Khulna district.

His hands and legs were found tied up with rope.

He was identified as Kinkor Aich, 13, son of Ananda Aich, and a student of class seven of Keshabpur Kakbadhal High School of Jessore district.

Kinkor came to Agarghati with his cousin Bacchu Das from Keshabpur on Saturday noon, said police.

His body was sent to Khulna Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Bacchu has been absconding since the murder was committed.

Coast Guards strengthen security

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Coast Guards have strengthened their security measures across the country to combat crimes through waterways.

They conducted search operations in 235 cargo boats in last 72 hours.

Death anniversary

STAFF REPORTER

The first death anniversary of freedom fighter and eminent sports organiser Mahmudul Haque Manu will be observed today.

Manu, a director and joint-secretary of the Bangladesh Cricket Board, was also the secretary of Eskaton Sabuj Sangha.

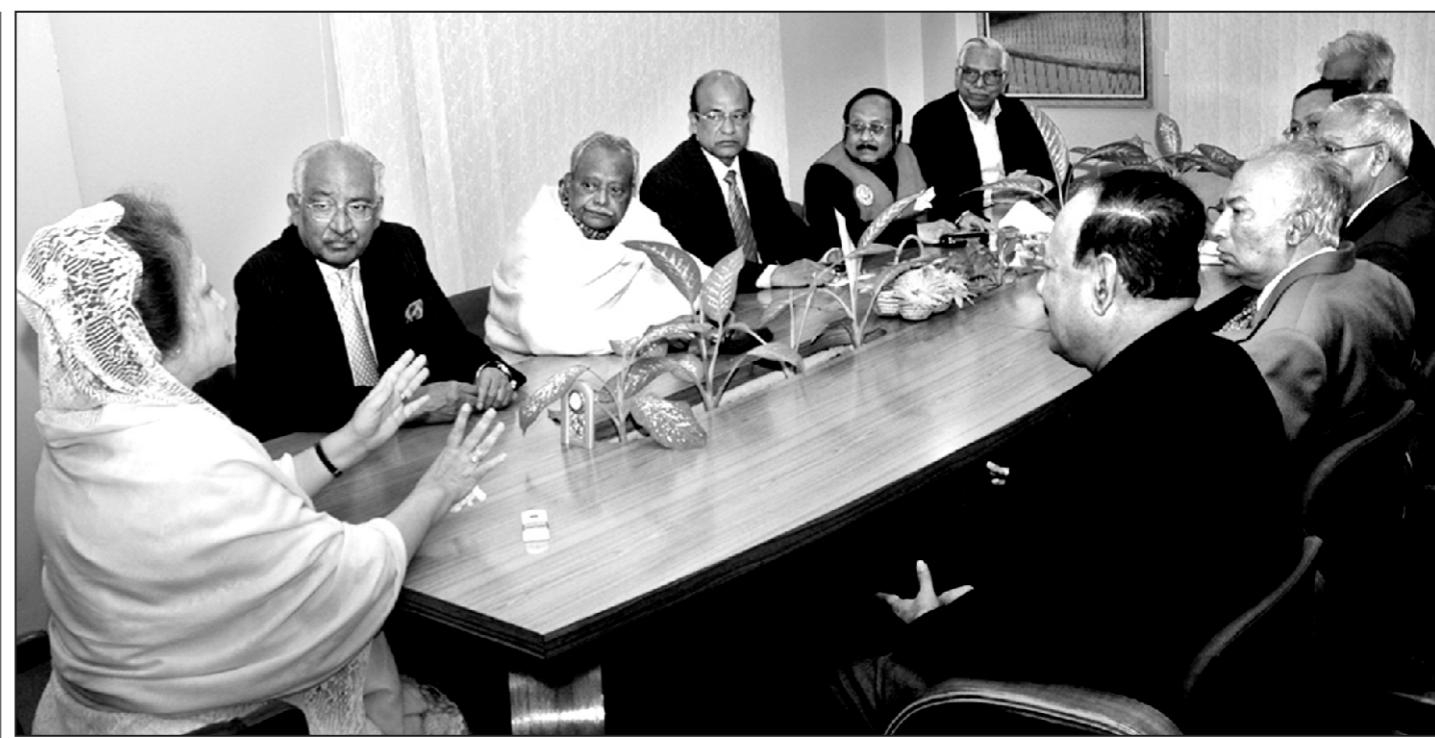
His family will organise qurankhwanai and doa mahfil apart from distributing food among orphans.

DHAKA TODAY Fashion show

Announcement programme of PARIS COMES TO DHAKA Fashion Show will be held. French Ambassador in Dhaka Jacques Andre Costilles and Care Bangladesh Country Director Steve Wallace will be present on the occasion. Venue: Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel. Time: 4:00pm.

Discussion

Music and Dance Department of Shilpkala Academy organises a discussion in memory of eminent artiste Momotaz Ali Khan. Venue: Shilpkala Academy. Time: 5:30pm.

PHOTO: STAR
BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia presides over the party standing committee meeting at Hawa Bhaban in the city yesterday.

2 brothers strangled in Keraniganj

Two more found dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two brothers were strangled by their cousin following an altercation with their mother over a sewing machine in Keraniganj on Saturday night.

Meanwhile, two more unidentified people were found dead in Keraniganj and Jatrabari yesterday.

Police recovered the bodies of the brothers -- Mohammad Arif, 12, and Badshah, 7, -- in separate places at Chunkuthia village in Dakkhin Keraniganj at 10:00pm.

Police said Hridoy, a cousin of the victims, took Arif and Badshah to a nearby bush at around 6:00pm and then strangled Arif. When Badshah threatened to inform his mother about the incident, Hridoy also killed him in the same manner.

After killing the two, Hridoy went to Kotwali Police Station in Dhaka and confessed to his crime.

Hridoy told police that he killed them following an altercation with his

MOTIJHEEL IDEAL SCHOOL Guardians protest admission fee hike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tens of thousands of Hindu devotees plunged joyfully into the frigid Ganges river yesterday to cleanse away their sins on an auspicious day at a huge religious festival in northern India.

Braving near-zero temperatures, the pilgrims swarmed into the sacred waters in Allahabad at the confluence of the revered Ganges and the Yamuna rivers for the Ardh Kumbh Mela, one of the largest gatherings of humanity on earth.

Sunday and Monday, two of the 45-day festival's six auspicious bathing days, mark Makar Sankranti, the transition of the sun into the tropic of Capricorn.

"This river is enchanting. You cannot stop. I dip into the water and it's a top-of-the-world feeling," said Mahendra Verma, a building contractor who was standing shivering in his underpants.

"At first one feels cold, but the feeling vanishes with one dip."

Pilgrims began bathing in the murky river waters early Sunday, hoping to break the endless cycle of reincarnation.

"Tens of thousands have already started taking baths (Sunday). In next two days over five million devotees are expected to take baths," said festival organiser P.N. Mishra.

Mishra said about 2.5 million pilgrims had already taken a dip since the festival began January 3.

They said they will hold a meeting with the managing committee very soon and take a decision considering the guardians' demand.

Birth anniversary of Mohiuddin Ahmed today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 82nd birth anniversary of late Mohiuddin Ahmed, a language movement veteran and organiser of the Liberation War, says a press release.

He was also a close associate of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and a veteran parliamentarian.

To mark the day, Mohiuddin Ahmed Jatiya Smriti Sangsad will place wreaths at his grave in the morning.

Motbaria Kalyan Samity, Motbaria Chhatra Kalyan Samity and other organisations in Dhaka will also observe the day in a befitting manner.

Former AL MP Bari passes away

UNB, Sherpur

MA Bari, former Awami League lawmaker, passed away due to a cardiac arrest at Apollo Hospitals in Dhaka on Sunday morning at the age of 70.

He left behind his wife, three sons and three daughters and a host of relatives to mourn at his death.

Bari, who was elected member of parliament from Sherpur-3 in 2001, was admitted to Apollo Hospitals on Saturday with heart and respiratory problems.

He will be buried at his family graveyard of Bhayabanga village in Sreobordi upazila today.

Aung Tha Kyow

Aung Tha Kyow, an eminent Buddhist leader and founder-secretary of Patuakhali Bouddha Bihar Samity, passed away at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in Barisal due to brain haemorrhage on Saturday at the age of 60, says a press release.

He was also a trustee of Buddhism Welfare Trust and joint convenor of central convening committee of Bangladesh Buddhist Citizens' Forum.

He left behind his father, four brothers, four sisters and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

His funeral was held at Potuakhali Bouddha Bihar yesterday.

Former deputy minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts affairs Moni Swapan Dewan, Buddhism Welfare Trust Secretary Sukomol Barua, former minister Kalparanjan Chakma and former state minister for religious affairs Mosherref Hossain Shahjahan expressed deep shock at the death of Aung Tha Kyow.

Nizamuddin

Nizamuddin, former employee of Abahani Limited, passed away due to a cardiac arrest on January 13 at the age of 67 while going to Dhaka from Benapole to attend Tablig Jamaat, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, one daughter, two sons and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

Abahani Limited Governing body and its employees expressed deep shock at his death and conveyed sympathy to members of the bereaved family. The club flag was hoisted half-mast yesterday in honour of his memory.

Md Rustom Ali

Md Rustom Ali, chairman of Aram Properties Ltd, passed away on Saturday at Japan Bangladesh Friendship Hospital at the age of 53, says a press release.

Rustum had been suffering from cancer for long.

He left behind his mother, wife and five daughters to mourn his death.

Cotton, property worth Tk 9.5 lakh gutted in Chittagong

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Around 100 bales of cotton and property worth around Tk 9.5 lakh were gutted in a fire at a cotton mill here yesterday.

Sources said a fire broke out at the storehouse of Ibrahim Cotton Mill at Baluchara area under Bayezid Police Station at around 2:40am.

The fire burned around 100 bales of cotton to ashes out of total 500 bales kept in the storehouse.

Four fire fighting units from city's different stations rushed to the spot and managed to extinguish the fire after struggling for over three hours, said the sources in the fire service.

The fire fighters had to remove the bales from the storehouse to put out the fire and they managed to recover around 400 bales at last, said Liton, a fire fighter.

BNP-backed UP chairman arrested in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday arrested a BNP-backed union parishad (UP) chairman, who is accused in more than one dozen of criminal cases, with a pistol and bullets from Raozan upazila of the district.

Sources said Abu Zafar, chairman of Bagowan Union Parishad, is known as a notorious cadre loyal to Salauddin Quader Chowdhury faction of BNP. Currently he also holds the post of vice president of the party.

They said Zafar is accused in at least 14 criminal cases, including murder, rape and abduction. Some weeks after the general elections of 2001, he allegedly raped four women of religious minority at Jelepara of Koyepara village and a case in this regard is yet to be disposed off.

Tipped off, a team of the elite force raided Tulatoli area of Goschi village at around 1:15pm yesterday and caught Zafar with a 9MM pistol, 16 bullets and 16 cartridges. He was then brought to the Rab headquarters in city's Patenga and after a brief interrogation, the Rab team again set out taking Zafar with them in search of more firearms.

Sources said Zafar was an Awami League cadre until the 2001 parliamentary election.

PHOTO: STAR
Adviser Major General (Retd) Abdul Matin talks to journalists after he comes out of the Chief Adviser's office in the city yesterday.

4 die in road crashes

STAR REPORT

At least four people were killed and seven others injured in separate road accidents in Gopalganj, Keraniganj and Gaibandha yesterday.

UNB from Gopalganj reports: Three people were killed when a bus hit a motorcycle at Tilchhara in Kashiani upazila on Saturday night.

Witnesses said the Gopalganj-bound bus from Dhaka rammed the motorcycle at about 8:00pm, leaving all its riders dead on the spot.

The dead were identified as Papon, 24, Raju, 22, and Chapal of Pangkharchar in Kashiani upazila.

Later, police seized the bus but the driver managed to escape.

Another report from Keraniganj adds: A young man was crushed under the wheels of a bus at Rajendra on Dhaka-Mawa highway yesterday.

Police said Zakir Hossain, 19, was run over by a Mawa-bound BRTC bus when he was crossing the road at about 4:30pm.

On information, police recovered the body and sent it to the Mitford Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Our Correspondent from Gaibandha adds: Seven people were injured, three of them critically, when a fertiliser-loaded truck crushed a rickshaw van at Narshapur on Gaibandha-Shaghata Road yesterday.

The accident occurred when

Fishing boat with urea seized

CU CORRESPONDENT

Members of Bangladesh Coast Guard seized a fishing boat with 230 sacks of urea fertiliser while being smuggled to