

Independence Day

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history the Independence Day was observed under a non-partisan interim government.

On the night of March 25 of 1971, the Pakistani military rulers set their army to massacre the Bangalees and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh on March 26, 1971.

The nine-month-long Liberation War that followed resulted in the surrender of the Pakistani occupation forces and emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign state on the world map on December 16.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser of the interim government Fakhrudin Ahmed laid wreaths at the National Memorial at Savar yesterday morning to pay homage to the martyrs of the Liberation War.

A 31-gun salute heralded the day and it was a government holiday.

A combined parade of Bangladesh Army, Air Force, Navy, Bangladesh Rifles, police, National Cadet Corps, Rapid Action Battalion, President's Guard Regiment and freedom fighters was held at the National Parade Square in the morning. President Iajuddin Ahmed took salute at the march past while Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed was present on the occasion.

Army personnel also presented spectacular rope jumping from helicopters while air force craft including Migs and combat helicopters also joined the show flying past from a low altitude when the army commandos came down in parachutes carrying the national flag.

A mock exercise of seizure of corrugated iron sheets from the possession of influential persons as part of the government's campaign against corruption apparently enthralled the huge audience.

The state-owned Bangladesh

Mamun produced in court

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Betar and Bangladesh Television as well as private television channels aired special programmes and newspapers brought out special supplements highlighting the significance of the day.

Special meals were served at hospitals, prisons, orphanages and shelter homes for vagrants.

Political parties did not hold any discussion meeting or any political programme to mark the day as the country is now under emergency rules.

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil along with his party colleagues laid wreath at National Memorial early in the morning. Later they placed wreath at the portrait of father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dharmundi.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan led the party leaders to lay wreath at National Memorial at Savar while the party Chairperson Khaleda Zia stayed at her cantonment residence. Later the BNP leaders offered fetea at the grave of late president Ziaur Rahman.

Different political parties and organisations including Communist Party of Bangladesh, Gono Forum, Amra Mukti Joddha Sontan, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, Gono Mukti Andolok, Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote, National Woman Lawyers Association, Mukti Joddha Sangsads, Bangladesh Police, Doctor Malika College, Charan Sangskritik Sangsads and Udichi Shilpi Gosthi also placed wreaths at National Memorial at Savar to pay tribute to the Liberation War martyrs.

Army personnel also presented

and eight bullets are seized from his house. The accused and his accomplices are still in possession of illegal firearms and ammunition. He needs to be grilled for information that, the law enforcers believe, would lead to apprehension of his accomplices and facilitate recovery of huge arms and ammunition.

On hearing both the sides, the court ordered for him to be taken on a five-day remand.

During the hearing, Mamun's lawyers sought cancellation of the remand prayer.

They said they learnt from the detainee that the joint forces had raided his house six times and found nothing. Even the pistol and bullets that the police claimed to have seized from the house were in fact planted on him, they argued.

Dismissing the claim that Mamun was picked up yesterday as illogical, the defence said different newspapers already reported extensively on the arrest made on January 31.

One of the lawyers told the court that Mamun's mother in an application had pleaded the state to hand over her son to the law.

"If Mamun was arrested today [yesterday], all newspaper reports published on his arrest were false and baseless," one lawyer told the court.

Asked if he was tortured or taken abroad for investigation, Mamun said, "You will know later."

In a light ash t-shirt and black trousers, one of the top catches, he was taken to the court premises in a prison van at 3:52pm. The security was tight but he was not wearing any bulletproof vest or helmet like his detained friend Tarique, senior joint secretary general of BNP and the eldest son of former premier Khaleda Zia.

A large number of policemen cordoned Mamun and took him to the 2nd floor in the courtroom of Metropolitan Magistrate ABM Abdul Fattah. As some of the lensmen asked him to raise his head for a pose, he could only manage a grim smile.

On his way back, he asked some of his men crowding the prison van to pray for him as tears filled his eyes.

Earlier, the hearing started half an hour after his arrival at the court. By this time, he talked to his counsel and signed affidavit.

The defence lawyers vehemently opposed the police prayer for a seven-day remand.

Prosecution argued that a pistol

involvement in all election related activities--controlled from Hawa Bhaban--prior to and during the 2001 general elections.

He set up One Group soon after the BNP-led four-party alliance came to power. He also set up One Textile, a yarn-dyeing factory, in Gazipur. The factory has been in production for the last two and a half years. Later, he launched electric pole-manufacturing factory Khamba Ltd in Panchagarh.

His quick rise as a business tycoon during the five years of the immediate past government surprised many businessmen and politicians.

Besides owning One Textile, Khamba Ltd, One Composite, Precrest Concrete Industries Ltd, One Spinning, One Denim, One Consumer Product Ltd, and Channel One, Mamun is also the director of Silver Line Composite Mill and Rahman Navigation.

A few former BNP ministers and lawmakers with close links to Hawa Bhaban, the BNP chairperson's Banani office, are reportedly his business partners.

Of his businesses, Khamba Ltd became the most talked about in recent times. Built on around 99 acres of land at Goalpara of Panchagarh upazila, it went into production in 2003.

Mamun also owns Precrest Concrete Industries, another electric pole-making factory, at Bhaluka in Mymensingh.

His syndicate reportedly earned thousands of crores of taka by selling concrete electric poles to the Rural Electrification Board.

The pistol and eight bullets were recovered from inside the foam of a sofa in his bedroom.

RISE OF MAMUN

Mamun became involved in business by establishing Rahman Shippers with two ships in 1991 during the tenure of the BNP government.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman was the managing director of the company while his younger brother Arafat Rahman and Mamun were the directors.

Mamun came to limelight for his

Detained Britons well, location secret: Iran

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran says British sailors it detained are well but has not disclosed where they are being held. Britain said on Monday, as tension over their capture and Tehran's nuclear plans sent oil prices to a 2007 high.

Naval Revolutionary Guards units seized the 15 sailors and marines in the Gulf on Friday, sparking a diplomatic crisis -- just a day before the United Nations imposed new sanctions on Iran over its disputed atomic program.

Britain said it had asked Russia, which has close commercial and diplomatic ties with Tehran, and other countries to help in efforts to secure their release.

"We are in touch with governments in the region to enlist their help in lobbying Iran for the release of the group," a Foreign Office official said in London.

Iran has said it is considering charging the Britons with illegally entering its waters. Vice Foreign Minister Mahdi Mostafavi said on Monday they were being interrogated to see if they had crossed into Iranian territory on purpose or not.

"When that is clear the appropriate decision will be made," Mostafavi said. Iranian state television reported.

Britain said it was talking to Iran privately so as not to aggravate the problem.

"We're making a very genuine effort to have discussions with the Iranians in private that don't escalate tensions," said a spokesman for British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Some hard-line groups in Iran suggest the case could be a bargaining chip in its nuclear and other rows with the West, exposing what analysts say are divisions with more moderate voices who want to build bridges abroad not exacerbate tensions.

"It appears there is no decision on (how to handle) this issue," said one Iranian analyst pointing to the relatively subdued coverage in Iran's media so far.

A diplomat echoed this view, saying hard-line news sources were making the most noise. Both the analyst and diplomat said the incident may have taken the authorities by surprise and did not appear pre-planned, so there was a debate about next steps.

In London, the Foreign Office said Britain's ambassador to Tehran had asked to see a senior Iranian Foreign Ministry official for details of the 15 and to be allowed to see them.

More chickens

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comprising high-ranking officials and experts from Dhaka drove to Sharishabari upazila in Jamalpur to conduct chicken culling. Fani Bhushan Majumdar, deputy director of livestock department Dhaka division led the team.

A correspondent from Jamalpur reports that a team from Dhaka reached Sharishabari's bird flu-infected farms--Hasan Poultry Farm and Naz Poultry Farm--in Kuranipara. Under the supervision of the team of experts from Dhaka, local officials and farm owners packed jute-sacks with chicken and buried those in a large ditch at Kuranipara.

The correspondent also said the chickens of those farms became sick around a month and a half ago. Since then no less than 5,000 chickens have died, the report quoting local sources said.

There are about 112 farms with layer chickens in Sharishabari upazila.

Our Narayanganj correspondent reports that the government issued instructions to kill all chickens at the Sonakanda Poultry Farm yesterday, although the authorities did not mention anything about bird flu in Narayanganj. Recently, more than 5,000 chickens died at the farm within a very short period of time.

The farm sources said they collected 10,000 chicks from Phoenix Poultry Farm in Savar and most of those have already died.

Emdadul Haq, upazila livestock officer, told The Daily Star yesterday that they have received directions to kill 2,110 chickens at the Sonakanda Poultry Farm.

Around 400 chickens died at a poultry farm in Bhabanipur Bazar near Jirani Bazar area in Gazipur, our Gazipur correspondent reports. The chickens were instantly buried and samples were sent to Central Disease Investigation Laboratory (CDIL), Phulbaria, Dhaka to find out if they died of bird flu, Mirza Abdul Bari, upazila livestock officer told The Daily Star.

Gazipur district livestock officials yesterday with the help of the army surveyed 47 poultry farms in five upazilas of Gazipur. They checked 64,634 layer chickens and broiler chickens but did not find any new cases of avian influenza infection.

The deputy commissioner of Sylhet district held a meeting there and formed a District Task Force Committee to keep watch over poultry farms in the district, our Sylhet correspondent reports. The meeting also decided not to allow any business in poultry products unless the task force approved it.

Tamil tigers bomb

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not only to Sri Lanka ... especially India must be vigilant of this," Highways Minister Jeyaraj Fernando told reporters.

Heavily armed troops manning checkpoints between Colombo and the airport carried out stringent checks on vehicles.

The Tigers, who say they are fighting for an independent state for minority Tamils in the north and east, last attacked the airport in 2001, the year before a ceasefire deal, which has since collapsed.

In that attack half of Sri Lankan Airlines' fleet of planes was destroyed. The rebels have since reassembled them.

Pro-rebel website www.tamilnet.com carried pictures of shadowy rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, who lives in hiding in the rebel-held north, standing with Tiger pilots. It also showed a single-propeller two-seater plane painted in army camouflage colours with four bombs attached to its underside.

"A couple of aircraft of Tamil Eelam Air Force have launched an attack on a Sri Lankan military airfield and hangars of military aircraft," rebel military spokesman Rasias Ilanithiraiyan said by telephone.

Five US soldiers

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Security officials also reported six Iraqi dead, including two killed in Baghdad, where 80,000 Iraqi and US troops have deployed as part of a massive security operation seeking to wrest back control of the war-torn capital.

A policeman was killed and four others wounded when a roadside bomb ripped through their patrol in the south Baghdad neighbourhood of Zafaraniya. A civilian died and three others were wounded in a mortar attack in the Sunni insurgent stronghold of Dura.

In Iskandriyah, south of the capital, a soldier and a civilian were killed when Iraqi army troops clashed with gunmen at a Sunni mosque.

Violence also swept the north, where a Sunni leader of the Al-Ubada tribe was killed in a drive-by shooting in the main city of Mosul on Sunday that also wounded his son and nephew, police Major Mohammed Ahmed said.

A police major was shot dead in the city on Monday and the bodies of two male civilians -- one beheaded and one riddled with bullets -- were also found dumped in a western district of Mosul, Ahmed said.

In an interview published by the New York Times on Monday, outgoing US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad admitted for the first time to holding talks with presumed insurgent leaders last year in a bid to bring Sunnis into mainstream politics.

"There were discussions with the representatives of various groups in the aftermath of the elections, and during the formation of the government before the Samarra incident, and some discussions afterwards as well," Khalilzad said.

The interview made him the first US official to publicly acknowledge

he said the aircraft had flown back to the Tigers' northern stronghold after what he called a "successful mission." The Tigers also have a naval wing, the Sea Tigers.

"It is not only pre-emptive, it is a measure to protect Tamil civilians from the genocidal aerial bombardments by Sri Lankan armed forces," he told Reuters. "More attacks of the same nature will follow."

Peter Hill, Sri Lankan Airlines' chief executive officer, said all inbound and outbound commercial flights had been halted for several hours.

Sri Lankan Airlines resumed its services, but Cathay Pacific Airways said it had suspended flights to and from Colombo, while Pakistan's PIA and Thai Airways had yet to decide whether to cancel flights scheduled for later in the week.

"It will take another 24-36 hours for us to get fully back together," Hill said. "The airlines and ourselves will be asking the government questions as to what they can do to prevent anything like this happening ever again ... as we asked back in 2001."

The civil war has killed around 68,000 people since 1983 and has forced hundreds of thousands from their homes, many of whom are now living in refugee camps.

Pakistan signs

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deals, saying they led to an increase in attacks on foreign troops.

"The local Taliban organisation has authorised me to sign this agreement and they have assured that they will not take part in any subversive activity," said Malik Abdul Aziz, the Taliban representative, after the signing.

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he said there is no way but to talk to everybody -- with the exception of militant network al-Qaeda, for whom talks are in any case anathema.

Khalilzad, an Afghan-born Sunni who played a key role in negotiations over a new Iraqi constitution and the formation of the governing coalition, has justified his outreach to Sunnis as vital to national reconciliation.

"I recognise from the beginning when I came that the big issue was to get an agreement among Iraqis on the basic issues that divided the country," he told reporters in another interview on Sunday.

Ex-MP Rafiqul

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interrogating Rafiq, sources added.

Mohammad Faruk, caretaker of the flat located on 11/2 Purana Paltan Lane, told The Daily Star that former AL lawmaker Rafiq rented the flat on second floor of the four-storey building a few years back at Tk 15,000 a month.

Rafiq usually stayed at the flat for only a few days, but before his arrest yesterday, he had been staying there for about 20 days, added the caretaker of the flat.

Paltan Police Station officers on duty however could not confirm the arrest.