

# 4 more US troops killed in Iraq

## 9 Iraqis kidnapped

AFP, Baghdad

The US military announced yesterday the death of four more troops in Iraq, including one killed in a brutal suicide truck bombing near a school in the oil city of Kirkuk a day ago.

The soldier died from wounds when struck by the bomb, which exploded outside a police centre and a primary school in Kirkuk on Monday, the military said.

Thirteen Iraqis, including eight schoolgirls and a toddler, were also killed in the blast when the bomber carrying food supplies exploded his vehicle.

Another 192 Iraqis were treated for injuries after the blast. The military said three more US soldiers were also wounded.

Another soldier was killed on Monday in a roadside bomb blast next to his vehicle during combat operations near Baghdad, the military said.

A third soldier and a marine were killed in combat operations in the western Anbar province on Monday, the military reported.

The latest fatalities brought the US military's losses in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion to 3,254, according to an AFP count based on Pentagon figures.

Meanwhile, nine more people have been abducted in Iraq's flashpoint province of Diyala, police said on Tuesday, a day after the bodies of 21 Shia workers snatched in similar circumstances were uncovered.

The nine workers for a provincial electrical company were kidnapped at gunpoint on their way

home from work on Monday near the Shia town of Khalis, often used as a killing ground by presumed Sunni extremists.

The 21 Shias, whose bodies were found on Monday, were also kidnapped on their way back from work after gunmen ambushed their minibuses on the main road out of Baghdad to Diyala, the most dangerous area in Iraq after Baghdad.

Police in Diyala also said four insurgents were killed in Khalis on Tuesday when a car bomb they were intending to blow up detonated by accident. Two cars were gutted in the blast, police said.

Elsewhere, attacks killed three Iraqi civilians in Baghdad and three policemen in other cities, security officials said.

Two students at a pharmacy college travelling in a car through the southwestern Baghdad district of Saydiya were killed when a bomb exploded.

Another civilian was killed when a second roadside bomb exploded in the heart of the Al-Kubaisi shopping centre in Zafaraniya, in southern Baghdad.

Gunmen shot dead one policeman in an eastern district of the northern oil city of Kirkuk, another in the city of Tikrit, and a third policeman in Kut, south of Baghdad, separate police sources said.

Insurgents and sectarian killers have increasingly focused their efforts outside Baghdad where a massive US-Iraqi security crackdown, now into a seventh week, has seen American officials boast about signs of progress.

# VoIP equipment seized in C'nawabganj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel seized VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) equipment worth Tk 2 crore from a shop at Balaiddigh under Shibganj upazila of C'nawabganj district on Monday and held two people.

Acting on a tip-off, Rab-5 members with assistance from Bangladesh Rifles personnel seized the equipment from Tasnim Enterprise and held its general manager Ahsan Habib alias Jewel, 28, and Mijanur Rahman Mithu, 30, a Rab press release said.

The seized equipment include 105 pieces of fixed wireless terminal antennas, satellite modem, generators, cellular sets, 105 SIM cards of Indian mobile operator Airtel, one of another Indian company Hutch, 49 A k t e l S I M cards, 132 GrameenPhone SIM cards and other electronic materials.

A case has been filed with Shibganj Police Station in this connection.

# Butenis

FROM PAGE 1  
people of Bangladesh want to know it," the US ambassador told reporters after the meeting.

A few US embassy officials accompanied Butenis at the meeting with the CEC.

The people are concerned about the election and so, the government should disclose its measures regarding holding of the election, the US ambassador said, adding that they assured the EC of providing all assistance in holding a free and fair election.

Neither the CEC nor any of the election commissioners talked to reporters after the meeting.

However, when contacted through the EC Secretariat officials, the CEC told a group of journalists that the US ambassador made a courtesy call and that he did not have anything to say in this regard.

The EC Secretariat officials said the CEC will speak at a press briefing tomorrow. The CEC may talk about a tentative timeframe for holding the stalled elections and the EC's progress regarding electoral reforms, they said.

The reconstituted EC has not yet specified any timeframe for holding the stalled January 22 elections but initiated a massive task for electoral reforms in February. It later announced to complete the task by July this year.

The CEC had earlier disclosed the EC's plan for simultaneously preparing a voter list with photographs and national identity cards at an estimated cost of Tk 350 crore. The EC Secretariat is now preparing a project proposal for the task.

At the end of last year, the EC Secretariat prepared a project proposal for voter identity cards, according to which it would require two years and three months to do the task.

# Sri Lanka

FROM PAGE 1  
must become a Union where we will endeavour to achieve our political and economic pursuits. It is also high time that we adopt a single currency," Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa said in his speech at 14th Saarc Summit.

Rajapaksa said adopting a single currency would enhance productivity of the region and improve trade without barriers.

He said while countries, particularly in Europe, have formed regional blocs despite major differences in language, culture, religion and income levels, Saarc has not realised its potential.

"I am particularly concerned that Saarc has not realised its enormous potential yet," he said adding that time has come for action and relentless effort to meet aspirations of the people in the region.

Referring to menace of terrorism, the Sri Lankan president said the recent air attack at Katunayake by the LTTE must attract attention of the Saarc leaders.

"The recent attack at Katunayake by the LTTE must attract attention of all of us to the fact that our region as a whole is not safe from the barbaric terrorist groups," he said.

Rajapaksa said the Saarc countries must work jointly on a counter terrorism strategy for the entire region.

He said while the Sri Lankan government has emphasised on eradicating terrorism and making the country safe, the threat has to be 'grappled with, on a political platform.'

# Afghanistan

FROM PAGE 1  
Addressing the opening session, Karzai said Kabul's political and economic isolation must never be repeated.

"Instead, enhanced economic cooperation must be pursued for the sake of regional economic and political stability," he said.

"Terrorism and criminality plagued Afghanistan with detrimental consequences for all of us, Karzai told the august assembly of South Asian leaders. "Therefore, it's our common duty to fight extremism and terrorism in all forms and sources, including political sponsorship and financing," he said.

He said the Afghan people are eager to learn from regional experiences in many endeavours, including micro-finance projects in Bangladesh, rural development in India and oil and gas exploration in Kazakhstan.

About energy cooperation, Karzai suggested speeding up the process of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and its expansion to other Saarc countries should be a priority to the regional forum.

# Observers pledge full support

FROM PAGE 1  
said, adding that while majority of the economies is growing there remains many challenges in encouraging trade within the region.

"Our own experience shows the importance of this for sustained development and regional integration, and this is indeed one among a number of areas where we are happy to cooperate with the efforts that Saarc is making," Benita said.

China put forward a five-point cooperation proposal for alleviating poverty, disaster management, human resource development and strengthening Saarc-China relations.

Chinese Foreign Minister (FM) Li Zhaoxing made the offer in a statement at the opening session of the 14th Saarc Summit. "The Chinese government supports the objectives and priority areas of Saarc. It respects the position of Saarc countries and the principles of equality, mutual trust and win-win cooperation," Zhaoxing said.

He said Beijing is ready for exchanges and expanding practical cooperation with the regional forum to contribute to its cooperation process and peace and develop-

ment in South Asia. China wants to establish a cooperation mechanism for poverty alleviation and carryout comparative studies on models of poverty alleviation through discussion, the Chinese foreign minister said.

China will invite the Saarc countries to attend multilateral training programmes and will consider hosting bilateral training programmes for the Saarc countries, he said.

The Chinese FM said his country is ready to intensify cooperation with the Saarc countries in infrastructure based on mutual benefit and encouraging Chinese enterprises to invest in the region.

He proposed institutionalisation of the China-South Asia Business Forum so it can serve as a platform for discussion on economic cooperation and trade.

**SOUTH KOREA**  
The Republic of Korea (ROK) is ready to share its experience in ICT, government innovation, human resources development and other economic fields in South Asia for mutual benefit.

"South Asia today is demonstrating a renewed sense of vitality... economic advance of Saarc coun-

tries and Korea has brought with it a growing mutual interdependence," ROK Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Song Min-Soon told the inaugural session of the summit.

He said since 2000 the volume of Korean trade with Saarc countries has been increasing at an average rate of 22 percent per year and two-way trade reached \$11 billion in 2006.

Korea's direct investment in Saarc countries has also been increasing at an average 23 percent per year.

The minister said there were 533 cases of Korea's direct investment in Saarc countries amounting to a total of \$1.4 billion.

Min-Soon said the vestiges of the Cold War still linger on the Korean Peninsula. Korea has been exerting every effort to achieve lasting peace and stability in Korean Peninsula.

"With the continued support of the international community including Saarc member countries, I am confident that the process of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue will continue to move forward," he told the summit.

# Import surges

FROM PAGE 16  
growth in private sector credit increased 18.27 percent during the period, which was 15.91 percent during the same time of the previous fiscal.

The majority share of the credit was for industrial investment. According to statistics, industrial term loan stood at Tk 5856.80 crore during July-December period of the current fiscal year, which is an increase of 18.41 percent compared to the same period of the last fiscal year.

According to a central bank high official, strong domestic economy defeated political unrest in making the growth in private sector credit.

"Our entrepreneurs are now very much competitive and cautious about risk management. They are now capable to manage any kind of short-term crisis," added the official.

BB sources said there is no adverse effect on liquidity and balance of payment despite higher growth in private sector credit.

The central bank did not interfere in higher private sector credit growth since foreign currency reserve, foreign exchange rate and call money market have been stable, the sources added.

Bangladesh Textile Mills Association President Abdul Hai Sarker said businesses faced problems during the political unrest in November-December last year but the situation has now improved after the present caretaker government took charge.

# Tarique

FROM PAGE 16  
X-rays of cervical spine, chest and the back, Tarique was taken back to the jail hospital at around 2:00pm.

Prof Syed Mizanur Rahman of Department of Radiology and Imaging at BSMMU said usually, X-rays and MRIs are done on a patient to find out whether the patient has any injury.

Great excitement was noticed among the people inside the BSMMU when Tarique was taken there amid tight security. However, Tarique wore a calm look during the ordeal.

It would take a few more days to get the diagnostic reports, said Tarique's physician Dr Shamsuzzaman while talking to The Daily Star.

"Tarique's condition was quite stable and he had no sign of recent injury," he said, adding, "Old back pain sometimes gets worse due to increased tension."

Deputy Inspector General (prison) Maj Shamsul Haider Siddiqui told The Daily Star that Tarique was admitted to the Dhaka Central Jail Hospital on March 12 after he fell ill and he has been staying in the jail hospital as per a court order.

Tarique would be sent abroad for treatment if necessary, said the DIG while talking to journalists.

# Nazmul Huda

FROM PAGE 16  
Deputy Director Shafulq Islam lodged the case against Nazmul Huda with Shahbagh Police Station for providing railway land to his wife Sigma Huda's organisation illegally and abusing power while at the helm of the communications ministry.

The other case, filed with Dhanmondi Police Station, also accused Sigma besides Nazmul for taking Tk 2.4 crore bribe.

**TUKU CASE**  
The same court showed former state minister for power Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku arrested in a graft case filed against him, his wife Rumana Mahmud, son Abed Hasan Mahmud and daughter Farah Hasan Mahmud on March 21.

The case was filed with Mohammdpur Police Station, as their wealth worth Tk 35.95 crore did not match with their income sources.

**PINTU CASE**  
Former BNP lawmaker Pintu was shown arrested in a case filed with Hazeribagh Police Station for misuse of government relief materials.

**SALAHUDDIN AND SALIM CASES**  
Former state minister for communications Salahuddin and lawmaker MAH Salim were shown arrested in two cheating cases filed with Gulshan Police Station on Monday.

# Saarc Summit

FROM PAGE 1  
reflected in the establishment of Saarc Development Fund (SDF) and a food bank.

The eight leaders stressed the need for connectivity of resources, rail and roadways, and welcomed the decision to set up a South Asian University to facilitate the sharing of ideas and information between the countries.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, the outgoing Saarc chairman, said, "Larger and better resourced among us, have a greater responsibility to extend support to those lower down the scale of development."

In his inaugural address, India Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced that the largest Saarc nation would provide zero-duty access to the least-developed Saarc countries by the year's end and would reduce its negative list of goods. And it all would be done as part of a new vision of the regional grouping, he added.

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa, meanwhile, asked for a single currency to improve trade without barriers as he felt it is time for the Saarc to be more unified.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said an effective Saarc requires a resolution of disputes and differences to ensure security and to close the 'trust deficit' that he said "hampered meaningful cooperation in the region."

Fakhruddin said, "To optimise the potential of Safta, we must pursue trade-facilitation measures and address the non-tariff barriers."

"The economies of South Asia are varied and diverse. We should, therefore, make the best use of each others' complementarities," he said, adding that the larger nations must come forward to help the smaller ones.

He called for 'redoubled efforts' to ensure the Saarc Development Goals are attained and hoped that the Saarc Development Fund operations would get going soon.

Fakhruddin, at his first major international summit, urged the organisation to address the root causes that lead to violent actions, and said, "We must make bold efforts to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations."

He said all South Asian leaders are committed to a democratic system where, "the state and its vital basic institutions would ensure a level-playing field for all and uphold the rule of law and good governance."

The chief adviser also asked his fellow leaders to ensure that the South Asian University is beneficial to all member states and is participatory, while also calling for a 'uniform fee' for all Saarc country tourists at heritage sites.

The head of the Bangladeshi government also offered to host a Saarc Youth Camp in 2007 and urged a more elaborate Saarc scholarship programme in the ICT and Bio-Sciences.

Manmohan Singh said Saarc must now break with the past. "South Asia has flourished most when connected to itself and the rest of the world," he said adding, "As an immediate step, I propose that we link all our capitals through direct flights."

He said, "In another step, India is announcing a unilateral liberalisation of visas for students, teachers, professors, journalists and patients from Saarc. Let us aim to double the intra-Saarc flow of tourists in the next five years."

On trade, Singh said his country is ready to accept asymmetrical responsibilities, opening its markets to its South Asian neighbours without insisting on reciprocity. The regional free trade agreement can be part of an "ongoing process of building an open and integrated market from the Himalayas to the Pacific," he noted.

"I am happy to announce today that we (India) will allow zero-duty access to India before the end of this year to our South Asian neighbours who are LDCs and further reduce the sensitive list in respect of these countries," he said.

Observing that South Asia is now or will soon be short of energy, the Indian premier proposed an "energy exchange with energy markets that cover the whole region" by harmonising systems and grid structures.

He said the Saarc needs to move from a declaratory to an implementation phase and completion of tools for Saarc's integration is crucial, such as the start of Saarc Development Fund operations.

Shaikat Aziz in his address asked for a 'goal-oriented' Saarc, as its progress, he thinks, remains short of aspirations. He offered a roadmap to greater efficacy, noting Saarc nations first need to resolve differences and disagreements in order to work towards effective implementation and that necessarily requires "political will".

He said the promotion of a level-playing field is required for "truly effective regional division of labour and production," adding, "It would require a truly open environment for regional trade devoid of all types of barriers to free trade."

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa stressed on terrorism, which has been the island nation's main theme in pre-summit meetings, saying, "Unless we act collectively as a region, trans-border terrorist groups will find safe haven in other parts of the region."

"We need to implement the provisions of international agreements on terrorism related matters," he said, urging the Saarc leaders to work out a regional counter-terrorism strategy.

Expressing concern at Saarc's lack of progress, he said, "We badly need to be action-oriented rather than dependent on rhetoric." He added that a single currency should be adopted to expedite the process.

Rajapaksa also asked for a sincere and strict "timetable to implement Safta" in order to make it effective, while asking for a greater focus on 'rural development.'

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai, as his country's first leader to represent it at a Saarc summit, said that a proposed gas-pipeline from Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India would benefit the whole region.

He said regional experiences, such as micro-finance, have been invaluable in helping the reconstruction of Saarc and he feels that further collaboration and assistance from the countries would only help Afghanistan in the future.

Karzai invited regional investors to come forward and take advantage of 'enormous' commercial possibilities in his country.

Nepal Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala in his address emphasised the need for trade-facilitation measures to make Safta a win-win situation for all Saarc countries.

He observed that synergies among the Saarc nations need to be raised to a level that can sustain long-term collaborative efforts.

Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the only leader to attend all 14 summits, said a meeting of Saarc business leaders should take place simultaneously with the summits to promote greater public-private partnerships in Saarc projects.

Bhutanese Prime Minister Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk said in the absence of 'time-bound and result-oriented programmes the Saarc would risk becoming 'ineffective'.

Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing in his country's first ever address as observer, said China is ready to discuss with Saarc leaders possible cooperation mechanisms on infrastructure and energy, poverty alleviation, mitigation of disasters and relief, and human resources development.

Terminating it a historic opportunity between the two fastest-growing regions in the world, Li said this new partnership would foster peace and stability in region.

Japanese Foreign Minister Tarō Aso said South Asia is the "central pillar" of the Asian arc of prosperity that stretches from east to the south. He added, "The Japanese government has just put an additional \$7 billion into the Saarc-Japan Special Fund."

He also warned that lack of strong connectivity within the region and with the outside world might disturb Saarc in tapping its potential.

South Korea Foreign Minister Song Min-Soon said his country's trade with Saarc nations has been growing at 22% a year, and reached \$11 billion in 2006. He said Korea is willing to formulate concrete programmes for cooperation and share its experiences in ICT, government innovation and other areas in the economic field.

Song also hoped that with the help of Saarc, "The process of resolving the North Korean Nuclear issue will move forward."

US and EU representatives, who too attended the summit as observers for the first time, were present.

# Bush slams Democrats over war funds

AP, Washington

President Bush yesterday called Democrats in Congress irresponsible for approving war bills that order US troops to leave Iraq by certain dates. He said such efforts will backfire, keeping some troops in battle even longer.

"In a time of war, it's irresponsible for the Democratic leadership in Congress to delay for months on end while our troops in combat are waiting for the funds," Bush said in a Rose Garden news conference.

"The bottom line is this: Congress' failure to fund our troops on the front lines will mean that some of our military families could wait longer for their loved ones to return from the front lines," Bush said. "Others could see their loved ones heading back to the war sooner than they need to."

Bush's comments underscored his standoff with Congress. Democrats won power in November, fueled in large part by national anti-war sentiment. They are intent on using their power over money to force Iraq to take more responsibility, and prod Bush to wind down the war.

The president renewed veto threats on both a Senate-passed bill calling for most US combat troops to be out of Iraq by March 31, 2008, and an even stronger House-passed bill demanding a September 2008 withdrawal. He said both bills "undercut the troops."

Bush bluntly said that Congress could not override such a veto.

The president's remarks come one day after Iraq's Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (news, bio, voting record), D-NeV., announced he would try to eliminate money for the war if Bush rejects Congress' proposal to set a deadline to end combat.

"It's interesting that Harry Reid, leader Reid, spoke out with a different option," Bush said. "Whatever option they choose, we hope they get home, get a bill, and get it to my desk," Bush said. "And if it has artificial timetables for withdrawal, or cuts off funding for our troops, or tells our generals how to run a war, I'll veto it."

The Senate is in recess this week; the House is on break for two weeks.

The House and Senate are preparing to send Bush a bill by the end of the month that would approve of some \$96 billion in new money for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also set an end date to combat in Iraq. The House wants to order troops out by September 2008, whereas the Senate wants troops to be leaving right away and set a nonbinding goal of ending combat operations on March 31, 2008.

# Aziz dwells

FROM PAGE 1  
"How relevant is Saarc to our people? How has it impacted on their lives? Where is the Saarc dividend for our people? These are some of the challenging questions that we, as leaders of South Asia, must answer," he said in his speech at the opening session of the 14th summit.

Aziz suggested an environment of genuine peace and security in the region by resolving differences and disputes, establishing mutual trust and confidence, respect for sovereign equality, building inter-dependencies and sharing best practices to have real benefits that accrue equally to all sides and a level-playing field for a truly effective regional division of labour and production.

"As a first step, we require a truly open environment for regional trade devoid of all types of barriers to free trade," the Pak premier said, adding that the implementation of the roadmap is not impossible if there is necessary political will.

He said: "We must be able to rise above our differences for the good of our people and our future genera-

tions. These future generations will judge (us) by our actions and not by our words."

The Pakistan prime minister focused on enhancement of trade and economic activity, which must show sensitivity to the need for creating a level playing field, market access and development in each member state.

He said interconnectivity through improving infrastructure, regionwide transportation and communication links, promotion of energy security, poverty alleviation, protection of environment, Saarc Food Bank will help reach the Saarc agenda.

Aziz hoped that South Asian leaders, who assembled at the summit, have the courage and determination to change the course of South Asian history.

He said: "It is time to place our people in the centre of the Saarc process...a reservoir of trust that can be continually drawn upon in dealing with difficult issues to unleash the true potential of the peoples of our region."

# Headhunting body

FROM PAGE 16  
the human resource development process.

"But this requires absolute freedom from political influence, recruitment of high quality staff, modern recruitment practices and autonomy to manage its business within its areas of expertise," the public administration expert noted.

The PSC should move to a modern building equipped with necessary facilities and build a printing press on its own premises, Prof Kashem said. It should also strengthen its monitoring on question leak and hold the BCS examinations on time, he added.

Making comments on the study, Dr Syed Giasuddin Ahmed said that constituting a search committee would not be easy, as adoption of such a mechanism requires amendments to the constitution.

The chairman and members of the PSC should rather be appointed from the people of highest public standing who are detached from all political association, he noted.

But so far, mostly the university professors with political link and no experience in civil service management have been appointed as the PSC chairman and members, Dr Gias said adding "This trend must be stopped."

The comments of Professor Manzoor Hasan of the Brac University, read out at the discussion, noted that the existing PSC should be replaced by a new and fully autonomous and transparent institution to deal with recruitment of public sector officials and exercise control over promotion and disciplinary aspects of public servants.

Speaking as the chief guest, Ministry of Establishment Secretary Abdul Salam Khan said the government wants to see PSC as an independent body, adding that providing it with money does not mean snatching its independence.

He, however, opposed the idea of a search committee. "The society of Bangladesh has not gone so bankrupt that a search committee is

needed to form for selecting the chairpersons and members of PSC."

The problem in PSC is mainly governance problem, the establishment secretary noted.

On the controversial 27th BCS examination, he said that they would look into the matter.

UNDP Country Director Manoj Basnyat, Iftekharuzaman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), Public Administration Training Centre Rector Abu Md Maniuruzaman Khan also spoke at the discussion chaired by PSC Secretary Abdus Sattar.

# Aminul Haque

FROM PAGE 16  
municipality BNP president Rafiq Uddin, secretary and municipality Chairman Anwarul Islam, Tarikul Islam, Mofazzal, Tofazzal, Ahmed, Tarikul, Nazrul and Eltaz.

Meanwhile, Harunur Rashid, a farmer of Chanduria, lodged another case with Tanore Police Station in Rajshahi on Monday night accusing Aminul and four other BNP men of felling and stealing government-owned trees on both sides of Ajaripur-Ekhtarpur road between March and June 2005.