

## FRESH GUNFIRE, BLASTS ROCK LAL MASJID

## Pak cleric says he would rather die than surrender

AFP, Islamabad

A Pakistani cleric holed up in a besieged mosque in the capital declared yesterday he would rather die than surrender, dramatically upping the stakes amid claims human shields are being held inside.

Gunmen meanwhile fired on President Pervez Musharraf's plane with a Taliban-style anti-aircraft gun in an attack that officials said had possible links to the mosque stand-off. Musharraf was unharmed in the incident.

Abdul Rashid Ghazi, deputy leader of the pro-Taliban Lal Masjid, or Red Mosque, vowed not to give himself up to government forces on the fourth day of the bloody confrontation there that has already

claimed 19 lives.

The government rejected a conditional surrender offer last night by Ghazi, whose brother Abdul Aziz was captured on Wednesday while trying to flee the mosque dressed in a burqa.

"We have decided that we can be martyred but we will not surrender. We are ready for our heads to be cut off but we will not bow to them," he told the private Geo television station.

"This may be my last conversation with you."

Heavy gunfire and explosions rocked the mosque early on Friday and there was no call for pre-dawn prayers from the mosque's loudspeakers, indicating the damage inflicted by security forces on the fortified complex.

Troops backed by armoured personnel carriers and helicopter gunships have been moving closer to the mosque and have blown up much of its surrounding walls.

A mosque official said, on condition of anonymity, that there were casualties in the early Friday gunbattles and the building had been hit by further mortar fire from security forces.

During a lunchtime relaxation of the shoot-on-sight curfew in force around the complex, militants shot and wounded a man coming to see his daughter inside an Islamic school attached to the mosque, officials said.

Residents living near the mosque said the siege was taking its toll.

"The last few days have

changed my son's mind. He is 10 years old and started talking about bullets and shells," said housewife Nasreen Jehan.

Hundreds of Islamic students are still inside the mosque compound, along with up to 60 "hard-core" armed militants, officials have said.

Musharraf had earlier ordered that no military action should be taken until women and children were out of the mosque, but repeated that only an unconditional surrender was acceptable, officials said.

"The president has ordered authorities that force should not be used until we are sure that all the innocent people, who are being used as human shields, have come

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## Low turns into land depression

UNB, Dhaka

The well marked low over west of Jessore moved west-northwestwards, intensified into a land depression and lies over West Bengal.

It is likely to move in a north-westerly direction, said a special bulletin of the Met Office.

"Steep pressure gradient persists over the north Bay and squally weather may continue over the ports," it said.

Maritime ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Mongla have been advised to keep hoisted local cautionary signal number three.

All fishing-boats and trawlers over the north Bay have been advised to remain in shelter until further notice.

TK 25CR GRABBED AT BURIMARI LAND PORT  
Customs dockets 'destroyed' to conceal revenue theft

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

Customs documents involving more than Tk25 crore government revenue have been allegedly destroyed by some customs officials at Burimari land port in Lalmonirhat district to conceal misappropriation of the public money, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) sources said.

The office of assistant commissioner (AC) of the land port has informed the ACC about this misdeed.

The government was deprived of the huge amount of revenue due to illegal opening of two Import Manifest Registers (IMRs) without the knowledge of the land port

authorities.

AC of the land port AKM Mahbubur Rahman, when contacted over telephone, said the ACC and the commissioner of customs, excise and VAT, Rajshahi, were officially informed of the matter on June 19.

The two IMRs, opened by Customs Inspector Kamrul Islam and Customs Superintendent Mozaffar Rahman, have been destroyed just to hide the corrupt act, ACC and customs sources said.

Following complaints of evading government revenue lodged with the National Board of Revenue (NBR), the customs authorities had launched two probes into the matter.

One probe report said the allegations were false. The other probe body has not submitted its report.

On the other hand, the Superintendent of Police (SP) of Lalmonirhat had ordered the officer-in-charge (OC) of Patgram Police Station to investigate alleged destruction of customs documents involving over Tk 25 crore, sources said.

OC Ashraf Alam however said there were so many complaints about Burimari land port and they submitted their reports accordingly.

He could not say anything

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## Burglars loot cellphone shop

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Burglars broke into a cellphone shop at Raj Laxmi Shopping Complex in the city's Uttara area sometime between Friday night and early yesterday and took away mobile sets worth about Tk 3.73 lakh and Tk 33 thousand in cash.

Police arrested a security guard named Abdur Razzak suspecting his link to the heist.

Police quoting the shop owner, Selim Hossain, said he closed his shop "Ekushey Telecom" on the third floor of the market at 7:00pm on Thursday.

"I came to my shop at around 8:30am yesterday and found the lock and shutter of the shop broken," Selim said, adding, "After entering the shop, I found the burglars looted the mobile sets and the money."

Shop owners of the market kept their shops closed until 2:00pm

yesterday in protest against the burglary and demanded immediate arrest of the culprits.



Burglars took away Tk 6.5 lakh in cash and kind from this mobile shop at Rajlaxmi Complex at Uttara in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: FOCUSBANGLA

## Air, ground strikes kill 33 Taliban

AFP, Kabul

Air and ground strikes on Taliban fighters killed 33 rebels yesterday after the militants attacked police in southern Afghanistan, the defence ministry said.

The US-led coalition confirmed the fighting in the southern province of Uruzgan but said only that it killed "a significant amount of insurgents."

"We asked for air support from friendly forces," defence ministry spokesman General Mohammad Zahir Azimi told AFP.

"In total as a result of air strikes and ground forces' action, 33

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Prayer Timing		
July 7		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-10	4-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-55	7-00
Esha	8-17	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

## Clashes erupt in Iraq amid bombings

## 8 Iraqi troops, GI killed

AFP, Samawa

Deadly clashes have erupted between Shia militants and police in the southern Iraqi town of Samawa, police said Friday, while separately roadside bombs killed at least eight Iraqi troops.

Meanwhile, US forces killed three insurgents in raids in western Iraq in which a senior al-Qaeda leader involved in supplying weapons for attacks and preparing propaganda videos was captured, the military said.

A Samawa police captain, speaking on condition of anonymity, said fighting had broken out on Thursday when police attempted to crack down on armed members of radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army militia.

Fighting was continuing, he said.

"The militias planted bombs on the main roads around the Sadr

office in the city using large quantities of explosives to prevent the police advance," the captain said, adding police posts had been bombed with mortars.

Hillal al-Hatchami, an emergency medic at the town's Muthanna Hospital, said at least one policeman and four civilians had been killed in the fighting and 26 people wounded.

Muthanna province governor Mohammed Ali al-Hassani told reporters: "We will not negotiate with the militias as they are outlaws. We will work to impose law and order in the city."

Meanwhile, further north near the town of Hilla, a roadside bomb hit an Iraqi army patrol on the main route east of town on Friday and killed four soldiers, according to Lieutenant Haider al-Husseini.

Four more members of the security forces, police commandos, were killed in a similar attack

near the ruined Al-Askari shrine in the northern city of Samarra, a local security official told AFP.

The golden domed shrine is a revered Shia pilgrimage sight and its destruction by Sunni bombers last year was one of the triggers of Iraq's sectarian conflict.

At least four more Iraqis were killed in armed attacks in the north of the country, according to security officials, including Captain Hilkurd Mohammed of the Iraqi army who was gunned down in the oil city of Kirkuk.

Iraq is in the grip of several overlapping civil conflicts between rival political and sectarian factions, and the US-backed government and its American allies face daily attacks by Shia militias and Sunni insurgents.

In Baghdad, what appeared to be a salvo of at least five mortar shells crashed into the fortified

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PHOTO: STAR

Despite the ban on hilsha export, the delicious fish continues to remain too dear. A seller demands Tk 1,000 for a pair of hilsha at Karwan Bazar in the capital yesterday.

## Fertiliser seized in Ctg, one held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Members of Bangladesh Coast Guard seized fertiliser worth Tk 5.24 lakh, reportedly hoarded for smuggling abroad, and held an alleged smuggler at Chandnaish upazila in Chittagong early yesterday.

Sources said a Coast Guard team of eastern zone following a tip off raided Moteleb Store at Dohazari Bazar. The Coast Guard team in presence of upazila nirbahi officer and upazila agricultural officer of Chandnaish recovered 1,021 sacks of Urea and 264 sacks of Triple Super Phosphate (TSP) fertiliser kept in a hidden storage area of the store.

The recovered Urea fertiliser is worth about Tk 3.26 lakh and the TSP fertiliser is worth around Tk 1.98 lakh.

The Coast Guard detained Dulal Chandra Das, 47, in this connection. He was later handed over to Chandanaish police.

## 2 cops punished at Nachole for accidental firing of shots

UNB, Chapainawabganj

Two policemen were suspended yesterday for careless handling of firearm that resulted in the firing of 12 bullets from a sub-machine gun (SMG) from Nachole Upazila Parishad premises in Chapainawabganj.

Officer-in-charge (OC) of Nachole Police Station Fazlur Rahman said a team of police was deployed on the premises following farmers' unrest on Wednesday.

Yesterday morning, Reserve Force Habildar Abdul Mukit went to the toilet leaving his SMG with his colleague Abdul Awal, a constable of Nachole Police Station. At one stage 12 bullets were accidentally fired from the SMG.

Superintendent of Police Moklesur Rahman told UNB that the police team was withdrawn from the Nachole Upazila Parishad premises and the two policemen were suspended and closed following the incident.

No one was hurt in the incident.

## Archives show Israel levelled 100 mosques

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel destroyed more than 100 mosques in Palestinian villages incorporated into the state, including the site where the head of Imam Hussein was allegedly buried, a daily wrote yesterday.

According to archives quoted by the Haaretz newspaper, Israel's legendary general Moshe Dayan -- himself an avid amateur archaeologist -- gave the order to blow up the mosque while he was a young lieutenant colonel.

Haaretz said the Mashhad Nabi Hussein in Majdal, now Ashkelon, dated back to the 11th century and was where tradition had it that the head of Imam Hussein, killed in 680 by armies of the Sunni caliph Yazid in Karbala, was interred.

Around 9,000 Arabs who lived in Majdal fled during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and 3,000 who remained in a ghetto were subsequently forced out by Israel.

The Mashhad Nabi Hussein mosque was blown up deliberately

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## Hilsha prices yet to ease

STAR REPORT

The government decision to ban hilsha fish export for the next six months is yet to make any impact on its wholesale and retail prices during the last 48 hours in Dhaka markets.

Big-size hilsha was selling at Tk 300 per kg at Karwan Bazar yesterday.

The ban on hilsha export has failed to contain the price in Khulna and Bagerhat markets also, reports our staff correspondent from Khulna.

In Bagerhat, a section of sellers are allegedly cheating the customers in weight by inserting small iron pieces into hilsha fish, he added.

However, hilsha price fell by 15-20 per cent in Barisal.

Following the government decision taken on Wednesday, customs officials in Benapole land port on Thursday sent back the

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## Gunmen fire shots at Musharraf's plane

AFP, Islamabad

Gunmen fired on Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's plane using an improvised Taliban-style anti-aircraft gun after it took off from a military airbase yesterday, intelligence officials said.

Musharraf, a key US ally who has escaped several al-Qaeda-linked assassination attempts, was unharmed and the shots did not hit the aircraft, the officials said on condition of anonymity.

"It was an unsuccessful attempt to shoot the president's plane," one official told AFP.

Musharraf flew from the Chaklala military base in Rawalpindi, a garrison city adjoining Islamabad, to the southern provinces of Sindh and Baluchistan to visit people affected by recent floods, the military said in a statement.

Pakistani military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad denied that the shots had targeted Musharraf's plane.

"It was not related to the president," he told AFP.

But intelligence officials dealing directly with the incident insisted Musharraf's plane was the target.

Security forces arrested a suspect and recovered the weapon and a crudely-made wooden tripod from the flat roof of a house in Rawalpindi, a security official said.

"The shots were fired from a house that was rented by a couple some days ago. They have arrested one suspect and taken into possession a machinegun which was used as an anti-aircraft weapon," one security official said.

The 14.5 mm calibre weapon was found on the tripod on the roof. It had been specially modified to increase its range, the official added.

But he said that it did not have enough range to hit the president's plane.

"It is a similar weapon to those



Pervez Musharraf

used by the Taliban in Afghanistan," the official added.

"The man and woman who

rented the house fled by the time security forces got to the scene. The suspect (a third person) was arrested near the scene," he said.

Officials had earlier said that the incident happened several minutes after Musharraf's plane had passed the house after taking off from Chaklala.

Security officials said it was "possible that the incident was against the backdrop of the episode of Lal Masjid," referring to the ongoing siege of a radical mosque in Islamabad.

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## Britain recalls 7/7 attacks as terror probe widens

AFP, London

Britain said yesterday it was "getting to the bottom" of a militant cell behind last week's failed attacks, amid tight security ahead of the anniversary of London's July 2005 suicide bombings.

The cautiously upbeat assessment came after Australian police searched two hospitals and questioned five doctors over the London and Glasgow attacks, after arresting a suspect earlier in the week.

Although Britain has lowered its national threat level from "critical" to "severe" after rounding up eight suspects, police remain on high alert and will be out in force for this weekend's start of the Tour de France cycle race in London.

A week after the London attacks -- followed last Saturday by an attack on Glasgow airport -- Prime Minister Gordon Brown voiced satisfaction with progress in the probe, which has seen eight suspects detained so far.

"From what I know, we are getting to the bottom of this cell that has been responsible for what has happened," Brown told BBC television, after speaking to Australian Prime Minister John Howard about the latest developments.

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