

Shia militia leader caught in Iraq

25 dead in operation

AP, Baghdad

A Shia militia leader accused of forcibly removing Sunnis from their homes north of Baghdad was captured in a raid, while another operation in the same area left 25 people dead, the US military said yesterday.

The commander was detained Friday after US forces raided Khalis, a Shia enclave of 150,000 people in the volatile Diyala province some 50 miles north of Baghdad. The man led a group of 20 insurgents that was allegedly responsible for a July attack in which Sunnis were forcibly removed and their homes and farms were destroyed, the military said, adding no one was killed or wounded.

The commander, who was not identified, was also suspected of ambushing a Sunni van driver, shooting him and throwing his body in the Tigris River, the military said.

Another pre-dawn raid Friday in the same town killed at least 25 people after troops met a fierce barrage while hunting suspected arms smugglers between Iran and Shia militiamen. The military described those killed in airstrikes as fighters, but village leaders said the victims included children and men protecting their homes.

Also Friday, the US military said it was investigating the deaths of

three civilians shot by American sentries near an Iraqi-manned checkpoint. Iraqi officials said the victims were U.S.-allied guards and were mistakenly targeted. And on Saturday, the decapitated bodies of two members of an awakening council in Iskandariyah, south of Baghdad, were found. Both were Sunnis.

While details could not be independently confirmed, the reports reflected rising concerns about possible friendly fire killings and the targeting of those who join vigilante-style groups to fight extremists and fill the vacuum left by Iraq's collapsing national police force.

Such claims could hinder crucial U.S. efforts to draw Sunni and Shia leaders into alliances against insurgent factions such as al-Qaida in Iraq.

In Baghdad, meanwhile, a U.S. soldier was killed and three others were wounded Saturday by a roadside bombing while they were taking part in a raid against suspected insurgents in the capital, the U.S. military said in a statement.

Four American soldiers were reported killed in earlier incidents three Friday in roadside bombings in Baghdad and near Beiji to the north, and one Thursday in a small-arms attack in the capital, the military said.

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Govt to showcase

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The present caretaker government has done a lot in curbing corruption. If a review of the ranking is done, the country may surpass the median rate of many indicators including that of controlling corruption," the ERD official said preferring anonymity.

The ERD, in the meantime, has advised different ministries and departments concerned to take necessary actions for better performance on the MCA indicators, he added.

During the ongoing talks, the government will be highlighting its significant contribution towards the eradication of corruption and establishing good governance, the ERD official said.

The MCA assistance programme, with a mission to reduce global poverty through the promotion of sustainable economic growth in the recipient countries, is funded by the United States government and run by Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC).

Established in January 2004, MCC is based on the principle that aid is most effective when it reinforces good governance, economic freedom and investments in people.

Before a country can become eligible to receive assistance, MCC looks at their performance on 16 independent and transparent policy indicators and the selected countries are eligible to receive Compact Assistance.

Countries that have demonstrated significant improvement in policy indicators, but do not yet qualify for the Compact Assistance, may be eligible for the assistance titled Threshold Programme.

The Threshold Programme is a smaller grant designed to help improve performance on specific indicators.

Since 2004, MCC has awarded 14 multiyear development grants to countries that have involved their communities in setting priorities for their poverty reduction

USTR asks

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activities by 2008, sources said.

The USTR made the suggestion during the public hearing held at its office in Washington on Friday following a petition by a US based rights group, American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO).

During the hearing, it also wanted to know how the Bepza allows the activities of Workers Representation and Welfare Committee, which is responsible for solving problems of the workers. It also sought a list of such committees.

The USTR also sought details of elimination of child labour from the shrimp processing plants in Bangladesh.

It also requested Dhaka to provide supporting documents, which can prove that it acts in favour of protecting human rights.

The AFL-CIO made four complaints in its petition. These include violation of domestic and internationally recognised workers' rights in the EPZs in Bangladesh, violation of domestic labour laws and internationally recognised labour standards in RMG industry, similar violations in shrimp and fish processing industries, and violent actions by government security forces against trade unionists, workers and labour rights groups.

goals. Seven of the grants, totalling more than \$2.4 billion, have been made to African countries.

MCC is likely to sign a further \$2.2 billion worth Compact Assistance contracts with Burkina Faso, Morocco, Namibia and Tanzania -- resulting in a total assistance of \$4.6 billion in 11 African nations.

Electricity crisis

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sustained due to short supply of gas and technical faults at generation units.

The present generation shortage forced the power sector authorities to resort to a load-shedding of more than 1,000 MW across the country.

However, Load Dispatch Centre officials claimed that the country-wide load-shedding was about 700MW during the peak hours yesterday.

The sources said a 210 MW generation unit at Rawjan and another unit at Mymensingh remained closed due to gas crisis while some other units were forced to shut down due to technical faults caused by the prevailing hot weather.

Consumers in many areas under the Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa) faced load-shedding as it could supply only 1,370 MW of electricity against the demand for about 1,800 MW.

About the frequent power outages, Energy Adviser Tapan Chowdhury said the situation is unlikely to improve before April next when about 300 MW of electricity is likely to be added to the national grid.

Lobi

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The Lobi couple amassed wealth worth about Tk 25 crore, disproportionate to their known sources of income, the ACC alleged.

The joint forces arrested Lobi at his Gulshan residence on February 6 while his wife at a city hospital on June 26.

Tax ordinance

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amended the Grameen Bank Ordinance 1983 allowing the bank to extend its activities all over the country, not merely in rural areas.

As per the amended Grameen Bank Ordinance, the government share in the bank has been reduced to 15 percent from 25 percent while number of the government nominated members in the board of directors of the bank has been reduced to two from three.

The board of directors of the bank, instead of the government, will elect a chairman of the bank from among its directors.

The meeting approved the Acid Control (Amendment) Ordinance 2007 incorporating law secretary, social welfare secretary and Inspector General of Police (IGP) as members of the Acid Control Council.

In the amended Ordinance, the Acid Control Council has been given the authority to co-opt new members.

The council also reviewed the progress of transforming the T&T Board into company and directed the ministry concerned to quickly complete the formalities in this regard.

Members of the Advisory Council, the cabinet secretary and other secretaries concerned attended the meeting held at the Chief Adviser's Office.

Bangladeshi

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body would be flown back home by today.

Earlier 80 workers staged hunger strike last month on the premises of Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur after the Malaysian company, PTC Asia Pacific, which hired them for factory jobs failed to employ them.

On the night of September 15, the Bangladeshi recruiting agency's henchmen allegedly attacked the workers following which they were shifted to a church in the Malaysian capital with the help of police and a rights organisation, Tenaganita, that works for migrant workers.

The workers were later accommodated in a house rented by the same recruiting agency after a Bangladesh delegation led by the acting secretary of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Abdul Matin Chowdhury, visited Malaysia.

The secretary also assured that they will be returned the money they paid to the recruiting agency for their Malaysia job once home.

Till October 5, only 25 of the workers arrived in Dhaka though Matin, the secretary, promised to bring them back within October 5. The top ministry official, however, could not be contacted yesterday for comment on the government's failure to live up to its promise.

Those who disembarked on October 5 include Azgar Ali of Gaibandha, Sultan and Mehedhi Hasan of Bogra, Aynal of Savar, Dhaka, Shahadat of Kushtia, Moksed Ali Sarder of Naogaon, Al-Amin of Faridpur, Masud Rana of Tangail, Zia of Jessor and Ibrahim.

Tangail's Mirza Faruk and Al-Amin of Naogaon arrived on October 3, while Jahurul Islam of Bogra and Selim of Comilla on September 28.

The returnees said thousands of unemployed Bangladeshi are languishing in Malaysia half-fed.

Khaleda

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Khaleda Zia, her younger son Arafat Rahman Koko and 11 others for their alleged irregularities in awarding the contract to Gato.

Meanwhile, detained former health minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain was interrogated yesterday at Dhaka Central Jail gate in connection with the case.

He was one of the members of the purchase committee that awarded the container-handling contract to Gato.

Sources said an investigation team comprising ACC Deputy Director Jahirul Huda and CID Inspector Nurul Islam of Taskforce-23 questioned Mosharraf for an hour from 1:45pm to 2:45pm.

The Anti-Corruption Commission has already questioned six former ministers, six retired secretaries and one serving additional secretary of the communications ministry in connection with the case.

Ministries seek

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Sources said the government has no plan to adjust the prices of the products and utilities at the moment. However some temporary measures will be taken to minimise financial losses.

According to a government plan, the central bank will provide 300 million dollars to three nationalised commercial banks for importing petroleum products, the sources added.

The ministries concerned may also get some extra allocations for subsidies according to their requirements.

The government will review the overall situation early next year and take further actions, said the sources.

FBCCI hails

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He said Truth Commission is not a new concept adding that many countries including South Africa, South Korea and Sri Lanka have such commissions, which have already fined many big business men.

The government last week decided to set up a Truth Commission to have confessions from businessmen accused of corruption with an aim to settle the charges against them without putting them on trial.

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TIB says

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study report did not say that all the NGOs are corrupt. The report did not measure the individual range of corruption in individual NGOs in relation to their sizes, ways of getting funds, their ranges of work and their locations. The report even shows that the identified problems don't exist in all the surveyed NGOs. There was not any sweeping comment on the NGO sector.

The TIB study titled 'problems of good governance in the NGO sector the way forward' released on October 4, noted that there is a lack of transparency and accountability in the sector as well as some serious irregularities.

The study took into account activities of 20 NGOs operating in different districts in the six divisions of the country, one of which is an international NGO, while eight are national NGOs and 11 are local NGOs.

The publication of the study elicited mixed reaction from the development community.

Dr Iftekhar said in the release that the methodology used for the research is scientific and widely accepted. Data were collected through interviews with NGO officials of different levels, from case studies and focus group discussions (FGD), and through interviews with the main sources of information. "So it is absolutely logical to have a perception on the sector's problems in good governance and its nature, through the scientifically extracted data on the NGOs," he said.

The release went on saying, TIB thinks that the NGOs have been

playing an important role in national development of Bangladesh including poverty reduction, non-formal education, health, empowerment of women, and the environment. Transparency and good governance in the important supplementary development sector of the government is essential for the sake of its own credibility and sustainability.

TIB carried out the research as a part of this sector itself, with a view to provide the sector with a set of recommendations for removing the hindrances to good governance and to create a space for self investigation.

ADB reaction

Meanwhile, the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (Adab) in a separate news release yesterday lambasted the TIB report claiming that the report had labelled 80 percent of the total 47,000 NGOs in the country as corrupt.

"The methodology used in the study is faulty and information gathered from a faulty research cannot be acceptable," said the Adab release signed by its Director Aminul Islam. A composite picture of the vast sector cannot be perceived on the basis of a survey of a mere 20 organisations, the Adab director said in the release.

When Bangladeshi NGOs are earning international repute and different countries are expressing interest in using the Bangladeshi model in poverty reduction there, such a report from TIB will definitely have a negative impact on the NGO activities, he said.

Raising questions about the Anti-corruption Commission's list of suspected corruptionists, Delwar said he cannot fathom who are preparing such lists, why and how they are doing it.

Replying to a query he said nothing would happen to inside the party without the go-ahead of the chairperson.

Delwar also questioned the motive behind the proposed Truth Commission. He alleged one of the purposes of the commission could be to pardon BNP leaders and workers on condition of not participating in the elections.

Earlier, leaders and workers of Sirajganj BNP expressed their solidarity with the present BNP secretary general. However, the local leaders engaged in push and shoves among themselves over taking seats in the room during the press briefing.

Sajeda

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Sajeda said it is being done under a planned design to silence the voice of AL leaders and workers.

I have the right to know of my offence. Is it my offence to oppose Rajakars?"

Sajeda said she was implicated in corruption charge based on the statement of arrested chief conservator of forest Osman Gani whom she suspended on charges of corruption while she was the minister for forest and environment.

She admitted that as a minister she gave jobs to many unemployed people but not in exchange for money.

Flood-friendly

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academic session," he added.

This year, most of the flood-affected institutions are yet to resume educational activities, resulting in dropouts of many poor students, said Selim Bhuiyan, coordinator of Shikkha Karmachari Oikya Jote, a platform of eight organisations of non-government teachers and employees.

"As Bangladesh is a flood-prone country, we should maintain a flood-friendly academic calendar. Our students won't be victimised by floods any more if the annual exams end before July," he added.

Education Joint Secretary (Secondary) Nazrul Islam Khan admitted that academic session should be introduced considering floods.

"We'll consider the idea and discuss it with academicians and concerned people if a formal proposal is tabled," he told The Daily Star.

He however pointed out that scheduled vacation for students should be given based on regional atmospheres and demands so that students' studies are not hampered.

According to the FIRs of two cases, Moizam Mondal saw Pintu and Sohel at the brick kiln on the night of June 27 and Moizam called out another witness Altaf as the conversations between Pintu and Sohel seemed suspicious.

Challenged by Moizam and Altaf, Pintu claimed that the truck was loaded with machine parts, which would be kept in a friend's house because of Alta