

## 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, also was 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 smuggling links 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.

## 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

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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amend 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 amongst 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 member.

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 them that they will be returned the money they paid to the recruiting agency for their Malaysia job once flown back 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 Mehedi 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 Jessore 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 Bangladeshis are languishing in Malaysia half-dead.

### 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 Jahurul 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 businessmen.

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.

The FBCCI chief said corruption spread massively during the previous political governments. "We topped the list of corrupt countries for six consecutive years which was disgraceful for the nation," he said.

During that period, a group was compelled to do corruption while another quarter did it for greediness, he said adding, "In the greed-driven corruption, there was a nexus among the politicians, businessmen and bureaucrats."

He urged the government to conduct the ongoing anti-corruption drive in a way so that it does not hinder the country's economic growth.

"We want to have an environment in the country in which people will fear to indulge in corruption," the FBCCI president said.

## 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 localised 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 20 chosen NGOs."

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.

ADAB 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 directors said in the release.

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

## Truth Commission

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BBC World Service Trust in conjunction with the BBC Bengali Service organised the event moderated by Kamal Ahmed of BBC Bengali Service.

Law Adviser Mainul Hossain on October 3 said the government is going to set up a body, styled as "Truth Commission," to receive confessional testimony of businessmen accused of corruption with an aim to give corrupt businessmen a chance not to face arrest or undergo trial by surrendering their ill-gotten wealth or paying financial penalty to the government.

"The Truth Commission should not be formed for special quarters under any circumstances. It will never be logical. Laws could never be formulated for special quarters," Hamid, also a former speaker of the parliament, said. He, however, observed that such commission should be formed for all.

The caretaker government should take account of wealth of all former lawmakers and ministers of the last seven parliaments since the Liberation War and publish a white paper on the corruption of politicians and only then the anti-corruption drive by the government would be successful, the AL leader observed.

Ashraf Hossain observed that if punishment is reduced after confessions of wrongdoings or crimes, then crime would not be called crime anymore. Echoing Hamid, the BNP leader said that if such a

commission is set up for special quarters, the importance of the customary laws would be degraded.

Anisul Islam Mahmud said that the economy of the country could not be kept vibrant by giving shelter to the corrupt businessmen through setting up Truth Commission. "Formation of Truth Commission for special quarters will never be good for the future of the country," Mahmud, a former foreign minister, said.

Mahmud observed that the arrest of the corrupt businessmen did not make any impact on the soaring prices of the essentials, as there is no involvement of those businessmen as well as the ones included in the ACC's fresh corrupt suspect list with the commodity trade.

Prof Sadeka Halim observed that the Truth Commissions in other countries usually hear the victims of human rights violation. "We will have to be very careful so that corruption is not reinforced through formation of the commission," the DU professor said adding that the Truth Commission could be set up in line with creating the office of ombudsman as per the constitution.

The speakers blamed local and Malaysian recruiting agencies and a section of dishonest government officials and employees of both countries for the indefinite freeze by the Malaysian government on hiring workers from Bangladesh.

## Bogra arms haul

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"Once the proceedings start, we will take steps for further investigation into the case," he told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

Kahalu police on the night of June 27 recovered 62,100 bullets and 115kg RDX explosives under stacks of pineapples in an unclaimed truck parked close to a brick kiln of Yasin Ali in Jogarpara village in Kahalu.

After a large-scale search the next day, the police recovered more bullets and explosives, totalling 99,999 bullets and 174kg RDX from different areas of Kahalu and Dupchachia.

The investigators have not yet succeeded in detecting the people behind the scenes, the destination of the seized ammunition and the motive for the build-up.

The charge sheets came under sharp criticism as investigation officer CID's Assistant Superintendent of Police Munshi Atiqur Rahman submitted them rather hurriedly.

In the charge sheets, he named a few petty leaders of the front organisations of the then opposition Awami League (AL) that raised the question if it was possible for such low-profile political leaders to smuggle in such a huge amount of bullets and explosives.

The chargesheeted are local Awami Krishak League activist Akhlaqur Rahman, his wife Anwara Begum Bithi, truck driver Altu Mia, Ashish Kumar Burman and Bogra Jubo League leader Atiqur Rahman Dulu. Akhlaqur Rahman has been absconding since filing of the cases.

All the charge sheets say the ammunition and explosives were smuggled into Bangladesh under the supervision of leaders of the then main opposition Awami League. The charge sheets blamed the AL leaders for conspiring to

## LDC council

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Iftekhar assured that Bangladesh would attach highest priority to uphold the interest of LDCs.

Talking to media, the foreign adviser expressed his happiness for being elected to lead the group of 50 LDCs. "It's a challenge too. I am aware of its immense responsibility and I firmly believe that we have that ability," he said.

### Delwar

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being the party secretary general appointed by the chairperson.

On Friday, Bhuiyan, who is working to implement reforms in the party, urged BNP men to unite, irrespective of their opinions, with an aim to participate in the next elections.

Asked about the possibility of sitting with the expelled secretary general for talks, he dismissed any such possibility and, said he cannot have discussions with Bhuiyan on party affairs, as he is nobody in the party now.

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 Siraganj 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 theft and 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 Shikhhak 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.

"The summer vacation or other long-term holidays may be issued during August-September in the flood-prone areas," he said.

This year, over 10,000 educational institutions in 39 districts were submerged or made flood shelters during flood attacks. The authorities were forced to keep those institutions closed and postpone schools' second term examinations.

According to the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, educational institutions housed most of the 1,812 flood shelters opened by the government this year.

Apart from that, flooding has damaged 557 educational institutions completely and 7,565 others partially, sources in the flood control centre said.

Most of the flood-affected schools are situated in northern and northeastern districts, especially in Siraganj, Munshiganj, Rajbari, Faridpur, Comilla, Bogra, Pabna, Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Kurigram, Shariatpur, Rangpur, Manikganj, Sunamganj, and Madaripur.

Facilities in many educational establishments in these districts were also damaged by flood victims, said sources at the education ministry.

## US warns

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been carried out by the Burmese regime against its own people," he told the council, using Myanmar's former name.

If the junta doesn't respond to the demands of the international community, he warned, "the US is prepared to introduce a resolution in the Security Council imposing sanctions," citing a possible arms embargo.

But China and Russia remain opposed to council action, saying the situation in Myanmar is an internal affair that does not threaten international peace and security.

China's UN Ambassador Wang Guangya called on the Security Council to exercise restraint and reiterated his country's opposition to pressuring Myanmar through such measures as sanctions.

"Pressure would not serve any purpose and would only lead to confrontation," Wang said. "If the situation in Myanmar takes a worse turn because of external intervention it will be the people of the country who will bear the brunt."

Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said his government has called on the junta to implement democratic reforms. The Security Council's job, he said, "is to continue lending political support to the efforts of Gambari."

Myanmar's UN ambassador, Kyaw Tint Swe, also urged against Security Council action, saying his country was committed to forging ahead with national reconciliation.

"Patience, time and space is needed," he said. "Despite the recent tragic events, the situation in Myanmar is not, and I repeat not, a threat to either regional or international peace and security. No Security Council action is warranted."

Kyaw Tint Swe said stability had returned to his country and people have been holding peaceful, pro-government rallies "to demonstrate their aversion to recent, provocative demonstrations." Critics say such rallies are shams, filled with people ordered to attend by authorities.

In his speech to the council, Gambari urged Myanmar's military rulers to take steps toward democracy and quickly start talks with detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"This is an hour of historic opportunity for Myanmar," Gambari said. "To delay the prospect of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Myanmar is to deny it to those who deserve it most, the people of Myanmar."

Gambari said he was "cautiously encouraged" that the country's military ruler, Senior Gen. Than Shwe, said he would meet with Suu Kyi, with certain conditions. Those include giving up her calls for confronting the govern-

### Musharraf

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were small protests in southern Karachi city.

The president, who is also army chief, had hoped for a smooth poll before his plan to restore civilian rule to this chronically unstable country of 160 million people on the front line of the US-led "war on terror."

But the court, which has been at loggerheads with Musharraf since he tried to sack the chief justice in March, postponed the official result until it has resolved appeals against his eligibility and the legality of the vote itself.

The government however insisted Musharraf's victory was valid.

"It is a clear-cut victory, legally, constitutionally, morally and politically," Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid, one of Musharraf's closest advisers, told AFP.

The president had bolstered his position Friday by giving Benazir an amnesty on graft charges. The move paves the way for a power-sharing deal ahead of her homecoming on October 18.

Benazir in turn withdrew a threat for her MPs to quit, a move that would have robbed the vote of legitimacy.

"We cannot vote for a president in uniform, we will abstain," said presidential candidate Fahim.

The court decision means Musharraf could still be disqualified weeks after the poll -- heightened instability after months of turmoil and Islamist violence and possibly pushing the president towards martial law.

It could delay former commander Musharraf's plans to shed his military role -- a position he has said is vital for fighting al-Qaeda -- and finally become a civilian ruler before he takes the oath of office.

He had promised to do so by November 15 when his term ends and was expected to do it much earlier, possibly by Monday, but may now feel he needs the army behind him in case of a hostile court ruling.

The transition to civilian rule is seen as a crucial step ahead of general elections that are due by early 2008.

Musharraf's attempt to sack the chief justice badly damaged his popularity and sparked mass protests, and at the same time the country is also suffering extremist violence.

al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden urged Pakistanis in a recent video to rise up and wage holy war against Musharraf, sparking fears of a possible militant backlash during the election.

ment and for imposing sanctions against it, Myanmar state media said.

Gambari stressed, however, that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for talks without any preconditions to overcome "the high level of mistrust" between Than Shwe and Suu Kyi.

"From my own conversations (with Suu Kyi), she appears to be very anxious to have a proper dialogue and, of course, a dialogue that the secretary-general has characterized as without preconditions because that would be the best way to move forward. Just start talking," Gambari told reporters afterward.

Gambari said he has been invited to return to Myanmar in mid-November but may try to go earlier. Ban sent Gambari to Myanmar last week after troops quashed the protests with gunfire and detained hundreds of people. The government said 10 people were killed, but dissident groups put the death toll at up to 200 and say 6,000 people were detained, including thousands of monks.

Myanmar's ambassador said Friday that 2,095 detainees had been released, including 728 monks, and that more releases will follow.

The US, Britain and France circulated a draft presidential statement Friday that would welcome Gambari's mission, condemn the government's "violent repression" of peaceful demonstrations, and call for the immediate release of all detainees and political prisoners, including Suu Kyi, to promote "genuine reconciliation, dialogue and democratisation."

The draft statement, which the council is expected to discuss next week, supports a dialogue between the government and opposition "without conditions."

Myanmar's junta took power in 1988 after crushing the democracy movement led by Suu Kyi. In 1990, it refused to hand over power when Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, won a landslide election victory. Suu Kyi has been detained for nearly 12 of the last 18 years and is currently under house arrest.