

# Kashmir rebel alliance declares 3-day truce

AFP, Srinagar

An alliance of rebel groups fighting Indian rule in Kashmir yesterday declared a three-day truce for the upcoming Eid festival, the biggest holiday on the Muslim calendar at the end of Ramadan.

"The unilateral ceasefire by all the militant groups will come into effect from October 12 and last for three days," said the United Jihad Council, an alliance of more than a dozen militant groups based in Pakistani Kashmir.

Eid-ul-Fitr, which marks the end of the fasting month, will be celebrated in the divided region on October 13 or 14, depending on when the new moon is sighted.

sighted.

"All militants are ordered to respect the collective decision and strictly implement the truce for three days," the council said in a statement to Current News Service.

The statement said the truce was aimed at providing a respite to war-weary residents of Indian Kashmir, where tens of thousands of people have died in nearly two decades of insurgency-related violence.

"We don't want to provide an excuse to Indian troops to create problems for ordinary people in the name of fighting the Mujahedin (holy warriors)," the council said.

There was no immediate response from New Delhi.

The truce is the first to be declared by the rebels since July 2000 when the Hizbul Mujahedin, the leading rebel group in the council, announced a unilateral ceasefire.

But the group ended the truce after only a fortnight when India refused to involve Pakistan in negotiations over the future of the Himalayan region.

Later that same year, New Delhi declared a unilateral ceasefire but resumed counter-insurgency operations after six months when the rebels did not reciprocate.



As a part of relief operations of Prime Bank Limited, Wing Commander (Retd) Md Tabarak Hossain Bhuiyan, Senior Vice President and Head of Human Resources Division, hands over a pay order of Tk 20 lakh on behalf of the bank to Major General Syed Fatemy Ahmed Roomy, General Officer Commanding, 66 Infantry Division and Area Commander, Rangpur Area, at his office recently.

## Iraq vows to punish Blackwater

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq has vowed to punish US security firm Blackwater after a probe found that its guards were not provoked when they opened "deliberate" fire in Baghdad three weeks ago, killing 17 civilians.

The US embassy was tight-lipped on Monday on whether those involved in the September 16 killings would be handed over for prosecution in a case that has thrown the spotlight on the often controversial work of private security operators in Iraq.

"This and other matters will be discussed by the joint commission as they proceed with their work, (so it is) best not to pre-judge the outcome of their discussions at this point," embassy spokeswoman Miremba Nantongo told AFP, referring to a joint Iraq-US inquiry into the shootings.

The Iraqi government said in its report into the killings in Nisoor Square released on Sunday that the Blackwater guards were unprovoked when they opened fire and that they should face legal punishment.

"The investigation committee appointed by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki... has finished its inquiry and has found that there was no evidence that the convoy of Blackwater came under fire directly or indirectly," a government statement said.

"It was not touched even by a stone," it said.

"Employees of the company violated the rules governing use of force by security companies," it said. "They have committed a deliberate crime and should be punished under the law."

It gave the number of dead from the shootings as 17, considerably higher than the previous toll according to which at least 10 people had been killed. The statement said 22 people had been wounded.

The Iraqi government would now take "judicial measures to punish the company," the statement said.

Blackwater, employed to protect US government personnel in Iraq, maintains its men were legitimately responding to an ambush while escorting a US State Department convoy.

Nantongo said the Iraqi government report into Blackwater - the largest private security firm in Iraq - had been debated during the first meeting of the joint commission in Baghdad on Sunday.

"The commission discussed the status of the Iraqi and US investigations," she said.

The commission is looking at the September 16 incident involving Blackwater as well as at the wider business of private security contractors in Iraq.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's envoy, ambassador Patrick Kennedy, is also conducting an overall review of how the State Department conducts its protective security detail operations in Iraq.

Nantongo said on Monday that another two members of Kennedy's team are expected in Iraq this week and it was not clear when they would complete their task.

"It is still too early to talk about timelines," she said. Based on Kennedy's initial findings, Rice on Friday tightened control of Blackwater's operations in Iraq, ordering security agents from the State Department to accompany every convoy.

The State Department said on Thursday it had ceded the lead role in the investigation of Blackwater, which is accused of involvement in nearly 200 shootings in Iraq, to the FBI.

Nantongo said a team of FBI investigators had arrived in Baghdad last Thursday and was involved in the investigations.

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates has also launched a review on his department's use of private security contractors.

Sunday's meeting of the joint commission was co-chaired by Iraqi Defence Minister Abdel Qader Mohammed Jassim and the US embassy's Patricia Butenis.

The commission comprises five embassy representatives, three from the US military and eight Iraqis.

"The two sides agreed to continue their coordination and to complete the process of inquiry in order to prevent the recurrence of any incidents in the future," said a statement from the committee heads.

## VOTER ID PROJECT UCBL donates 50 laptop computers

United Commercial Bank Ltd recently donated 50 laptop computers worth about Tk 44 lakh for the Election Commission's Voter ID Programme.

Haji Yunus Ahmed, chairman, Board of Directors, along with Md Jahangir Alam Khan, EC chairman, MA Sabur, director and Hamidul Huq, managing director, handed over the laptop computers to the Chief of Army Staff Gen Moeen U Ahmed at Army Headquarters.

UCBL also donated Tk 25 lakh to the Chief Adviser's Relief and Welfare Fund for the flood victims.

Earlier, UCBL also donated Tk 25 lakh for the landslides victims following torrential rain in Chittagong.

## Declarations of 8 weeklies, a newspaper cancelled

BSS, Madaripur

The district administration has cancelled declarations of eight weeklies and a daily newspaper for violating the Press and Publications (Declaration and Registration) Act of 1973.

The publications are: the daily Maksud, weekly Arial Kha, weekly Madaripur Bani, weekly Madaripur Barta, weekly Shahmadr, weekly Nawroz, weekly Atandra Prohori, weekly Moinakata and weekly Protibha.

At present, a daily newspaper and two weeklies and a monthly are being published from Madaripur. They are: daily Shubono Gram, weekly Bartaman Ishara, weekly Shariatullah and monthly Nobochetona.

## Smuggled powdered milk seized, 2 held in Jessore

BSS, Jessore

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) seized 50 packets of smuggled Indian powdered milk, Tk one lakh and arrested two persons from in front of Akij Filling Station on Jessore-Benapole highway on Sunday.

The arrestees were identified as Ashraf Islam, 35, son of Nurul Islam of Panchbaria village of Sadar upazila and Azizul Islam, 26, son of Ismail Hossain, of Abad Kachua village of the same upazila.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of the border guards took position at Laujani point on Jessore-Benapole highway and at one stage they identified the pick-up van, which was carrying smuggled goods, BDR sources said.

The BDR men gave signal to stop the van but ignoring the signal the driver tried to escape. BDR jawans chased the van and intercepted it in front of Akij Filling Station.

After searching the van, BDR recovered 50 packets of Indian powdered milk and Tk one lakh. They arrested two persons including the driver of the van and also seized the van.

## Western democracy a sham for 'donkeys' Gaddafi derides

AFP, Tripoli

Libyan leader Muammar Al Gaddafi derided Western democracy as a "masquerade" during a meeting with officers with whom he overthrew King Idriss in a bloodless coup in 1969.

In remarks reported yesterday by the official Jana news agency and on his website, he told the "free officers": "Libya is the state of the people and we will not step back from that."

Criticising Western pluralist democracy and its electoral system, he said "the world is disgusted with parties and elections" which he termed a "masquerade".

"They speak of alternating power; what does that signify? It shows that they take people for donkeys!" he said. Scoffing at elections, Gaddafi charged that the United States and its regional ally Israel wages wars and "commit crimes against humanity for the sake of elections".

"If the (US) president wants to be re-elected, he has to look for something to do abroad. He may destroy a country in order to win presidential elections. Is this democracy?" he asked. Gaddafi, in power since September 1969, has no official title in running Libya but is the linchpin of the north African nation's political system based on regional "people's committees".



Chief of Army Staff Gen Moeen U Ahmed receives one of the 50 laptop computers the United Commercial Bank Ltd donated for the Election Commission's Voter ID Programme at Army Headquarters recently.

## 15 executed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan has put 15 people to death for crimes including murder, government officials told AFP Monday, in the second confirmed executions since the fall of the Taliban.

The convicted men went before a firing squad late Sunday, officials said.

"Fifteen people who were convicted earlier were executed," a high-ranking government official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The head of prisons, Abdul Salaam Asmat, confirmed the 15 were put to death at Afghanistan's largest prison Pul-i-Charki. He refused to give details.

The last known execution by the post-Taliban government of President Hamid Karzai was in April 2004 when military commander Abdullah Shah was killed with a single bullet after being convicted for a spate of murders.

A Supreme Court spokesman, Wakil Omari, told AFP that other people were believed to have been executed in secret since then but he had no details.

A parliamentarian said Karzai may have been prompted to act with an eye on elections due in a year. "He wants to show he is strong," he said.

Around 300 people are on death row for crimes such as murder, rape, armed robbery, kidnapping and "political crimes" such as bombings and anti-government activities, a judge told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Karzai has however been reluctant to sign their execution orders. Pul-i-Charki prison was the

scene of mass executions during the 1979-1992 Soviet and communist governments.

During their 1996 to 2001 hold of government, the Taliban carried out executions in public including beheadings and shooting people in the head.

The Pajhwok Afghan News agency reported that some of those executed Sunday were "low-level militants". It did not say if they were linked to the Taliban.

An official said they included men convicted of the 2001 killing of four journalists -- an Afghan, an Australian, an Italian and a

Spaniard -- who entered Afghanistan to cover the 2001 toppling of the Taliban.

The Taliban movement, now waging an insurgency against Karzai's administration, was quick to react to news of the executions.

A spokesman, Yousuf Ahmadi, called journalists to read out a statement he said was from the Taliban leadership council that accused authorities of only killing men who could not afford bribes to save their lives.

It also criticised the government for carrying out executions during the holy month of Ramadan.

## Iran 'centre of global terror' Says Israeli president

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli President Shimon Peres launched a blistering attack on arch-rival Iran yesterday, calling the Islamic republic "the centre of global terror" aiming to dupe the world on its nuclear programme.

"The leading government nurturing terror and financing it with money and weapons is Iran, with (President Mahmoud) Ahmadinejad at its head," Peres told the opening of parliament's winter session.

"Iran is the greatest terrorist centre in the world today," he said, adding that "it is openly building an arsenal of long-range missiles and, secretly, nuclear weapons."

"If Iran attains nuclear weapons, they are likely to reach terrorists, because Iran is also the centre of global terror. The world will then become chaos," said the Nobel

peace laureate.

Widely considered the Middle East's sole if undeclared nuclear power, Israel along with the West fears Iran is using its controversial nuclear programme to build an atomic bomb, a charge Tehran denies.

The Jewish state considers the Islamic republic its top enemy following repeated calls by Ahmadinejad for Israel to be wiped off the map and his questioning of the Holocaust.

Iran also supports the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, which is committed to the destruction of Israel, and Lebanon's Hezbollah, with which Israel fought a devastating war in July-August 2006.

"The Iranian leadership is maintaining the Hezbollah in order to defeat the independent Lebanon and to turn it into an Iranian satellite," Peres charged.



Trust Bank and Immigration and Passport Department signed an agreement regarding passport application processing on October 7 at the conference room of passport directorate. Ishiaque Ahmed Chowdhury, DMD of Trust Bank and Dr Parvin Banu, Deputy Director (passport & accounts), Immigration and Passport Department signed the agreement on behalf of their respective organisations.

## Nato soldier killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A soldier with the 37-nation Nato force in Afghanistan was killed and another injured in a bomb blast in the insurgency-hit south of the country yesterday, the force said.

Nato's International Security Assistance Force did not give the nationalities of the soldiers, leaving this to their home nations, or details of the incident.

Most of the soldiers in the south are from Britain, Canada and the United States, although there are several other small deployments in the area -- which sees the worst of the Taliban's insurgency.

The new death takes to 181 the international soldiers to die in Afghanistan this year, most of them in hostile action.

There are 39,500 soldiers with ISAF and about 15,000 with a separate US-led coalition that help to topple the extremist Taliban from government in late 2001.

## Britain to cut Iraq troops to 2,500 by next year: Brown

AFP, London

Britain is to cut its number of troops in Iraq by more than half to 2,500 by next spring, Prime Minister Gordon Brown said yesterday in a long-expected statement to lawmakers.

"We plan for next spring to reduce force numbers in southern Iraq to a figure of 2,500," he said, a week after saying in Baghdad that there would be 1,000 fewer troops in Iraq by the end of the year, down to 4,500.

KASHMIR PROSTITUTION RING

## Indian court orders new probe

AFP, Srinagar

Indian Kashmir's High Court yesterday asked police to investigate the involvement of top officials, including a state minister, in an alleged prostitution racket.

Authorities uncovered the racket in April last year involving over 40 women and young girls whose clients allegedly included politicians, bureaucrats, security men and businessmen in the conservative Muslim-majority state.

"The high court has asked the Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI) to further investigate the role of over a dozen top officials, policemen and some civilians in the infamous sex scandal," a High Court official told AFP.

He said the names of these people -- including a state minister, two legislators and three senior police officers -- had figured during earlier investigations but they were never questioned.

The CBI had earlier arrested some 18 people, including two former ministers, top bureaucrats and several security officials. All of them have been granted bail by various courts.

The case came to light when amateur sex films began circulating, and religious and separatist leaders in the state have clamoured for the list of clients and prostitutes to be made public.

In response to the case, the state government said it would introduce legislation making prostitution punishable by life in prison.

Prostitution currently carries a jail term of up to three years for the first offence and up to five years for a second offence under the state's Prevention of Immoral Trafficking Act.

## Singapore returns to Unesco

AFP, Paris

Singapore returned to Unesco yesterday, 22 years after it walked out with Britain and the United States to protest alleged mismanagement at the UN agency and its political agenda.

Singapore became the 193rd member of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation during a ceremony in London, said a Unesco statement.

Singapore and Britain walked out in 1985, a year after the United States, amid controversy over mismanagement and disagreement over policies pushed by Third World countries that were seen as anti-American.

Britain and the United States rejoined Unesco respectively in 1997 and 2003. lpt/cml/boc

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M K Aaref, president of American Alumni Association, 2nd from right, AAA Secretary Nurat Aman, left, with Geeta Pasi, Charge d' Affaires, a.i., 2nd from left, and Amy Hart Vrampas, Director, American Centre, right, at an Iftar Get-together on Sunday.

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