

11 fishermen hurt

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establish control over the channel.

According to witnesses, the Bangladeshi nationals were wounded when Nasaka opened fire on their trawler in Batirdia channel around 9:00am, forcing all Bangladeshis to flee the area, abandoning more than 100 trawlers and nets.

The same day, Nasaka also entered into Bangladesh's maritime territory through Sabrang border and looted Hilsa worth several lakhs of taka from a trawler, according to Bangladeshi fishermen. The Myanmar border security force also beat up 13 fishermen of the trawler and threw them into the sea.

The fishermen were rescued by another Bangladeshi trawler in the afternoon. Five of them were seriously wounded, who are Mohammad, 50, Shafiq Ahmed, 39, Nurul Islam, 35, Abdur Razzak, 32, and Abul Foyez, 35. They were admitted to Teknaf Upazila Health Complex.

Mohammad, who had been shot in the head, was later transferred to Chittagong Medical College Hospital as his condition deteriorated, said Dr Md Lokman of the health complex.

President of Teknaf Boat Owners Association Rashid Ahmed said Bangladeshi fishermen are not secured in the sea, and are not willing to go fishing

following frequent Nasaka attacks on them.

"We are unable to fish when Hilsa are found in great numbers in the channel," he said adding that Nasaka have been patrolling the channel, so only Myanmar fishermen may fish there without any trouble.

Rashid said two Bangladeshi fishermen were killed on April 8, when Nasaka opened fire on them.

Li Monjur Ahmad, who is in charge of Bangladesh Coastguard in Teknaf, said they did not receive any written complaint about Thursday's incident, but he heard that a few Bangladeshi fishermen had been wounded by Nasaka firing. It is not safe for the coastguard to patrol the area since Nasaka are firing shots there, he added.

Saint Martin Union Parishad Chairman Firoz Ahmed said Nasaka looted at least 10 trawlers in the area in the last four months.

"They have been attacking us frequently, firing at fishermen and beating them, and also looting their valuables. In many cases, they kidnap our fishermen and release them after taking ransoms," he added.

Fish traders in Teknaf, Syedul Islam and Bashir Ahmed, said they could not supply Hilsa to Dhaka and Chittagong because fishing in Saint Martin's channel had been suspended since Thursday's Nasaka firing.

3 schoolboys

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Khandoker Hridoy, police said. Investigation Officer (IO) of the case Biplob Kumar Nath quoting the arrestees said Hridoy bought the digital music player with the money he took from his mother and he used to bring it to the school.

He said the three students took Hridoy to the beach area of the Beribadh in the name of travelling on May 9, the day he was killed.

At one stage, Parvez demanded the music player and Tk 2 lakh from Hridoy for doing poultry business, said the IO.

Parvez told reporters at the police station that he strangled Hridoy while Shuvo and Farhad assisted him in the killing after the victim refused to give the music player to them.

"After his death, we threw the body and his school bag into the sea," described Parvez. The body of Hridoy was found near an embankment in the area a day after the killing.

Tajnahar Begum, mother of the victim, filed a case with the police station accusing unidentified persons after the murder.

Daud

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regular contact and relation with the women but he is yet to give details about them.

"Once we arrest some of the women we will know more about their role and the network of Daud Ibrahim's gang," he said, adding that they suspect that more than 150 highly-paid agents have been working in the country for Daud Ibrahim.

Zahid disclosed sensational information to the investigators. He said Daud Ibrahim visited Khulna area in 1996 but he did not know details of the visit. He said he first met Daud Ibrahim at hotel Sayana in Mumbai. He used to know him as Raja Bhai, the DB official said.

Chhota Shakil maintained the gang so efficiently that the gang members do not even know each other. Giving an instance, the DB official said while Zahid came to the country first through Benapole in 2001, Chhota Shakil sent a man with a blue car to receive him from a place near Zia International Airport in Dhaka.

The man took him to Banani in the capital and from there another man took him to a hotel at Mohakhali where he stayed until he rented a house in Mohammadpur area.

Zahid told investigators that he never saw the two persons again during his long stay in the country.

Meanwhile DB police interrogated Brahmanbaria Municipality councillor Faruq yesterday and they will interrogate the mayor of the municipality today.

DB sources said councillor Faruq said Kamal Mian, who is known to him, took Daud Merchant to him and told him that Daud Merchant was a resident of the municipality. Councillor Faruq in good faith attested an application without verifying his nationality.

Rooppur nuke

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way, said the state minister.

Chairman of Atomic Energy Commission Mosaraf Hossain, Project Director Md Shawkat Akbar, lawmaker of Pabna-4 constituency Samsur Rahman Sanif Dilu were present, among others, during the visit.

Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant was established during the 60's over approximately 260 acres of land most of which has since remained unused.

The Daily Star

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environmental awareness. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina handed over the award to Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of the newspaper, at the launching ceremony of a two-day programme marking World Environment Day yesterday in the capital's Osmani Memorial Hall.

One individual and three organisations were the recipients of the National Environment Awards this year in four categories. A farmer turned beggar Md Gaher Ali, received an award in the category of environment preservation, for planting 18,000 palm trees on Naogaon-Rajshahi highway between Nowhata and Bablatla.

Square Knit Fabrics Ltd, and Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRR) were the other two recipients of the awards in the categories of environment pollution control, and research and technology innovation respectively.

BRR was awarded for its invention of BRR 47, a salinity resistant variety of rice.

Illegal structures

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Bata Market area to the east of the river until evening where the eviction team pulled apart makeshift structures.

Sarkar said they would seek approval for two or three days time extension to wrap up the drive in Tongi.

Today's drive will continue along the northern bank of the Turag to complete unfinished demolition and remove remnants of the makeshift ones, said BIWTA high officials.

Alam said, "We will carry on unfinished demolition and remove the demolished structures lying in piles on the northern bank of the Turag tomorrow (today)."

"We have flattened at least 30 new makeshift structures today near Biswa Itjema Ground to the west of the Tongi Bridge," said Alam.

BIWTA also fixed around 20 demarcation pillars at Pagar and elsewhere where illegal structures were brought down to the ground.

The eviction team yesterday also demolished encroached parts of the Merchants Limited dyeing factory built with heavy RCC pillars at Pagar and knocked down a number of small structures to the east of the Tongi Bridge.

Earth removal will be done under the ongoing circular waterway project, said Alam.

Hossain Dyeing factory at Pagar grabbed at least ten feet area of the river, he said.

BIWTA lacked magistracy power and it has been a big obstacle to freeing the rivers from grabbers, said its officials.

Deputy director level officers of BIWTA enjoyed magistracy power during the 1960s but they are not empowered now to resist the river grabbing.

BIWTA has to depend on the

district administration for magistrates and police force to launch a demolition drive, which is a pretty time consuming.

"It has now become a pressing need either to empower BIWTA officials with magistracy power or deputy magistrates at BIWTA for speedy action against encroachment," Alam continued.

Abu Naser Khan of environmentalist group Paribesh Bachao Andolon said that the survey of the river's demarcation seemed seriously anomalous and it should be reviewed.

"It is evident that even the river foreshore, as defined by the river port act, is not being protected," he said.

BIWTA Assistant Engineer Shajidur Rahman said that they had determined the foreshore and port area following a joint survey conducted by BIWTA and the district administration concerned.

Around 100 labourers in several groups were engaged in yesterday's drive in the port area from Pagar end to the Itjema ground.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) Subrata Pal Chowdhury and Gazipur Sadar UNO AKM Tipu Sultan were present at the evictionsite.

BIWTA launched the drive on June 3 following a vigorous media campaign led by The Daily Star against river grabbing and pollution.

A total of 63 structures on the Gazipur end of the Turag and 69 on the Dhaka end have been erected on the river.

The northern bank of the Turag is under the Gazipur district administration while the southern bank is under Dhaka.

PM pledges

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Hasina warned of stern action against mills and factories that violate the environment rules and regulations.

Termining the projects for reclaiming the rivers huge, time-consuming and challenging, the prime minister said her administration has received positive responses from international agencies regarding assistance.

"The work of this vital project will begin with the dredging of the Jamuna and then we will dredge other rivers in phases," she said.

Hasina offered condolences for the loss of lives caused by cyclone Aila in the coastal belts and prayed for the eternal peace of the deceased.

She said the embankments that were breached by tidal surges had become weak as shrimp farmers installed pipes through the embankments to supply water to their farms.

Hasina said this would not be allowed from now.

The prime minister said food production will have to be increased for the increasing population of the country, but at the same time the environment will have to be kept free from pollution for the safe and healthy life of the future generation.

"Arrangements must be in place to raise a buffer stock good enough to meet the nation's need in two-three years," she said.

Bangladesh, which is greatly dependent on agriculture, has recently been ravaged by cyclones, floods, tidal surges and other natural disasters, she said, urging scientists to carry out research on organic manure, hybrid crops, etc to overcome such losses in the future.

Hasina also stressed the importance of raising "green belts" across the country, especially along the coasts. "We all must plant trees and nurture green belts to protect our people and resources against natural disasters."

Pointing to the scarcity of water in the capital and other arid zones like the north-western regions, she said freshwater from the huge rainfall across the country can be harvested for use.

"Unplanned industrialisation and untreated waste dumping in open water bodies have caused grievous deterioration of the health of our rivers around Dhaka and other major metropolitan townships," she said.

She emphasised the need for appropriate research in innovating and developing new breeds of crops that will suit the gradually changing

climate regimes in different regions of the country.

"Our scientists must work in unison to find ways and modes to help the nation cope with the changing climes, survive and uplift quality of life simultaneously," she said.

Hasina urged all concerned to find ways to practise agriculture discarding chemicals like pesticides and fertilisers and highlight their negative impacts.

State Minister for Environment and Forest Mostafizur Rahman presided over the function. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hasan Mahmud, Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment and Forest Abdul Momin Talukder, and Acting Secretary of the environment ministry Mihir Kanti Majumder also addressed the programme.

Pakistan PM urges

US to write off debt

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani urged the United States Friday to write off its debt to help his cash-strapped nation grapple with insurgency, humanitarian crisis and global recession.

Gilani made the appeal during talks in Islamabad with visiting US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, said a statement from the prime minister's office.

Gilani made the request to help "overcome the present economic difficulties accentuated by the war on terror, growing crisis of IDPs (those displaced by an offensive) and the negative impact of the global recession," it said.

The prime minister also urged the US administration to increase aid substantially and fast track "much-needed military supplies for Pakistan's campaign against terrorism," the statement said.

His request came two days after Holbrooke said the US administration was seeking more than 300 million dollars in emergency relief for the two million people displaced by Pakistan's latest military offensive against the Taliban.

American lawmakers have introduced a bill that would triple US civilian aid for Pakistan to 7.5 billion dollars spread over the next five years.

Gilani "acknowledged" the US assistance but expressed hope that European and Muslim countries would follow the US lead.

Officials and analysts have said Pakistan's current fiscal year, which ends June 30, is on track to record the slowest economic growth in more than a decade, beset by the global recession and a manufacturing slump.

Phensidyl

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However, seizure of heroin, hemp and liquor has not experienced such an abnormal surge, according to Rab recovery statistics.

Director General of BDR Md Mainul Islam said they are stepping up BDR operations along the borders and taking actions against smugglers.

Asked about the rise in Phensidyl smuggling, he said, "There will always be smuggling along borders. But we'll control it by taking effective measures." He hoped to secure the border soon.

Bangladesh shares nearly 4,000 kilometres or 2,500 miles of land and maritime borders with its neighbours India and Myanmar.

The Rab officer said although the border guards are now patrolling the borders, their effectiveness is not satisfactory since BDR officers are still commanding their forces from different cantonments.

"Earlier, officers used to visit different camps at least 15 days a month to monitor the border guards discharging their duty," the officials said.

Acting Director of Rab Intelligence Wing Major Azim Ahmed said they have alerted all Rab battalions, intensified search of vehicles, increased block raids and doubled patrolling in different border areas to check Phensidyl smuggling.

Medicine expert Prof Mujibur Rahman of Suhrawardy Hospital said protracted consumption of Phensidyl causes various long-term side effects including gradual inactiveness of the brain, anaemia and clogging up of the lungs with liquid.

WFP claims

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Food Science and Technology of BCSIR."

The organisation said the levels of vitamin 'A' and iron were found to be higher than the levels stipulated by WFP in its contract with biscuit factories in Bangladesh, but were still well below those that can potentially cause side effects.

WFP's experts at its Rome headquarters have therefore concluded that there is nothing to suggest that the fortified biscuits could have been harmful for the school children.

WFP Bangladesh Representative John Aylieff said, "The organisation would continue to work with the government of Bangladesh and other partners as part of efforts to establish the cause of the reported illness."

Some 428 students of eight primary schools in Laxmichhari upazila of the hill district fell sick after taking biscuits distributed under the WFP school feeding programme on June 1.

Law Commission

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High Court premises are so appalling that these new officials soon after their joining begin to look for better opportunities elsewhere.

The commission had recommended about 200 new laws and amendments since its inception in 1996, but only three/four were adopted during the previous Awami League government while BNP-led 4-party government completely disregarded the recommendations.

The BNP-led government neither accepted a single recommendation nor sought its expert advice while passing 185 laws during its tenure.

The Law Commission Amendment Act 2001 made it mandatory for the parliament to place a report on implementation of the Law Commission's recommendations before its first session every year. Even that was not followed, a commission high official had told The Daily Star earlier.

Such utter disregard for the law sprang from a lack of political will, sources said.

Gaher Ali

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and a certificate to this senior citizen from Shikarpur village under Mahadevpur upazila of Naogaon at a ceremony in the capital on the occasion of the World Environment Day.

Gaher used to work as a hired farmer since he had no land of his own. But he had to leave work and start begging when he was diagnosed with an incurable disease.

It was then that he started planting trees: he would collect palm stones from different houses while taking alms and sow them on both sides of the Naogaon-Rajshahi road and the connecting roads of Shikarpur, Ballhar and Khanjanpur villages.

Gaher has planted at least 18,000 palm trees between 1950 and 2008 and nurtured them regularly.

Some 10,800 palm trees planted by Gaher are thriving now.

Brown seeks

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Both Purnell and Hutton are seen as Blairites -- supporters of the modernising agenda of former premier Tony Blair, and not natural Brown allies.

But Hutton stressed he did not support Purnell's actions and pledged to back Brown's government from the backbenches.

"There's nothing else to read into this, this is no big deal," Hutton told BBC television.

Brown's reshuffle Friday is likely to see heavyweights like finance minister Alistair Darling and Foreign Secretary David Miliband keep their jobs, media said, despite reports that Brown had wanted to move them.

Health Secretary Alan Johnson also looks set to take over from Home Secretary Jacqui Smith.

Smith plus Communities Secretary Hazel Blears and two junior ministers all indicated they would step down this week.

The reshuffle comes as local election results come in after Thursday's vote. The picture looks bleak for Labour -- with only three of 34 councils declared, the ruling party has lost 23 seats, compared to the Conservatives who have gained 18.

Results of European Parliament elections also held Thursday will not be published until Sunday, in line with the rest of the continent.

Opinion polls suggested Labour could suffer some of its worst ever results and finish behind the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats, and even fringe eurosceptics the United Kingdom Independence Party.

Suicide blast

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Pakistan for the operation, however, could falter if militant violence spikes in reaction. There already have been attacks in major cities such as Peshawar and Lahore that officials suspect were revenge by the militants for Swat.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack on the Sunni Muslim mosque in the Haya Gai area of Upper Dir, a rough and tumble district next to Swat. It was unclear if sectarian differences played a role.

"The latest report I just got is that 38 dead bodies have been identified. I cannot say how many more are dead, but there are scores of more wounded in the blast," Upper Dir district coordination officer Atif-ur-Rehman told The Associated Press by phone. He said a suicide bomber was involved and that rain and the far-flung nature of the area hampered rescue work.

Meanwhile, four soldiers were killed by a roadside bomb in South Waziristan, according to two intelligence officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media on the record. South Waziristan is a tribal region bordering Afghanistan that some suspect will be the next site of Pakistani military action against the Taliban.

Civilians displaced by the Swat offensive have been impatient to return home.

An AP reporter saw hundreds of Swat residents at Got Koto, an area just outside the valley, on Friday. The residents had heard reports the government would lift a curfew in the main town of Mingora to let them go back. But security forces on a main road stopped them, saying they could not allow civilians back in yet.

"I want nothing from the government. I only want that we should be allowed to go back to our Mingora city," said Dilawar Khan, 40, as his four children and two wives stood by him under the shade of a tree. Khan and his family had been staying at a relief camp in Mardan.

Zubayda Bibi, one of his wives, complained about conditions at the camps, located in areas that are much warmer than what Swat residents are accustomed to. "We can no longer sit at the camps where there is only dust, diseases and heat," she said. Even if damaged, "home is better than anything."

The army launched its latest operation in Swat about month ago after the militants undermined a peace deal brokered earlier this year by infiltrating a

high-level support for Purnell early Friday as a series of ministers toured television and radio studios defending Brown.

Johnson, seen by many commentators as the most likely replacement for Brown, urged unity, telling reporters: "I continue to believe that Gordon Brown is the best man for the job."

Miliband, also seen as a Blairite, said he did not share Purnell's judgement of the situation and insisted: "Today is a day for working, not resigning."

Brown was "disappointed" by Purnell's departure and was now concentrating on "restructuring the government", a spokesman for his Downing Street office said.

Conservative leader David Cameron, tipped by polls to be prime minister within a year, said Purnell's resignation showed the government was "falling apart in front of our eyes" and renewed his call for a snap general election.

Purnell said in his resignation letter he was not standing for the leadership himself.

In power since 1997, Labour has been badly hit by the scandal over lavish expense claims from the public purse by lawmakers which has seen 17 lawmakers say they will step down since it broke.

Public anger is particularly high as Britain struggles with the worst recession since World War II.

Media have reported that a group of rebel MPs are circulating a letter calling on Brown to step down which they will hand to him Monday after all election results are in.

neighbouring district just 100km from the capital, Islamabad. That truce, in which the government agreed to impose Islamic law in the valley and surrounding areas, was mediated by Islamist cleric Sufi Muhammad.

The military said security forces detained Muhammad's deputy Maulana Alam, his spokesman Ameer Izzat Khan, and another aide, Syed Wahab, during a raid Thursday to nab suspected militants at a religious school in a district near Swat.

Officers seized eight hand grenades and other munitions at the site, the army statement said. Muhammad's whereabouts were not immediately clear, but various officials told the AP he was not detained.

The army's top spokesman has estimated it will take at least another two months before the Swat Valley is cleared of militants. The military expects to stay in the region at least another year, largely because the area lacks a solid police presence. The offensive has also covered the areas of Buner and Lower Dir.

During a briefing with commanders Thursday, army chief Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani said the tide in Swat had "decisively turned" and that major population centres and roads leading to the valley were rid of Taliban resistance. But he said security forces were still hunting top Taliban commanders and that isolated incidents of violence would likely continue.

About 160,000 of the displaced Pakistanis are now living in relief camps. The US has pledged \$110 million to help the refugees. Holbrooke said this week the White House hopes Congress will agree to at least \$200 million more in aid.

The envoy, who visited a couple of relief camps Thursday, was meeting with Pakistani officials Friday.

Also Friday, a parcel bomb went off at a lawmaker's home in the southern city of Karachi, wounding the politician and three others, said Ashfaq Alam, a senior police officer. The bomb, concealed in a diary, was low intensity and the injuries were not severe, he said.

The apparent target, Yaqoob Bizenjo, is a member of the National Assembly representing southwestern Baluchistan province a suspected base for the Afghan Taliban. Baluchistan has also been the scene of a long-running low-level insurgency that wants more autonomy for the region and a greater share of money from its natural resources.

Obama calls

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Fresh from visits to Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Obama said that while regional powers and the entire international community are going to have to help Israelis and Palestinians achieve peace, "ultimately the parties involved have to make the decision that the prosperity and security of their people are best served" by an accord.

Merkel, for her part, promised to cooperate in her own right on this long-sought goal. She said the two leaders discussed a timetable for a peace process but did not elaborate.

"I think that, with the new American government and the president, there is a truly unique opportunity to revive this peace process or, let us put this very cautiously, this process of negotiations," Merkel said.

Added Obama: "I think the moment is now for us to act on what we all know to be the truth, which is each side is going to have to make some difficult compromises."

He renewed his call for Israel to halt settlement activity in the West Bank and follow through on such previously made commitments, adding: "I recognise the very difficult politics of Israel of getting that done and I'm very sympathetic to how hard that will be." He also pressed Palestinians anew to dial back anti-Israeli rhetoric that is not constructive to the peace process. Obama said Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas "has made progress on this issue, but not enough."

"All of these things are going to take time. But I'm confident ... we are going to make some progress on it," Obama added.

Touching on an issue that has strained the American-German relationship, Obama also said he didn't seek any commitments from Germany as the United States seeks to close the US prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and determines what to do with the terrorism suspects held there.

Merkel said her country is prepared to "constructively contribute" to US closure efforts and said she was confident of eventually reaching a "common solution" on the prisoners' fate.

On other matters, Obama said he's seen "some progress" in bringing stability to the world in the wake of the deep recession that has crisscrossed the continents in recent months, and said he and Merkel agreed that they must continue to "work very closely together" to restore stability. Addressing climate change, Obama also said "we're going to have to make some tough decisions and take concrete actions if we are going to deal with a potentially cataclysmic disaster."

The two leaders spoke to reporters after meeting privately at a castle in this east German city. He was ready to tour the Buchenwald concentration camp, where an estimated 56,000 people perished. Most were Jews worked to death, shot or hanged by Nazi guards.

In his Thursday speech in Egypt, Obama issued a scathing indictment of those who question the Holocaust, saying that to do so "is baseless, it is ignorant, and it is hateful."

"Threatening Israel with destruction or repeating vile stereotypes about Jews is deeply wrong and only serves to evoke in the minds of the Israelis this most painful of memories while preventing the peace that the people of this region deserve," Obama added. It was a pointed message to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has expressed doubts that 6 million Jews died at the hands of the Nazis and who has urged that Israel be wiped from the map.

On Friday, the president added: "The international community has an obligation, even when it's inconvenient, to act when genocide is occurring."