

NEWS IN
brief

Pakistan plans park for Laden town

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistan is planning to build a \$30 million amusement park with a zoo and adventure sports facilities in the town where Osama bin Laden was killed by US special forces, officials said yesterday.

The 50-acre riverside development on the edge of Abbottabad, where US Navy SEALs shot the al-Qaeda leader dead on May 2, 2011, will include restaurants, a heritage centre and artificial waterfalls.

California bus accident kills 8

AFP, Los Angeles

At least eight people were killed and more than 30 were injured in a multiple vehicle accident in southern California that involved a passenger bus from Mexico, officials said.

The accident occurred at about 6:30 pm local time in a rural area north of the town of Yucaipa.

Suicide bomb kills 22 in Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

A suicide bomber blew himself up near a group of anti-Qaeda fighters as they were receiving salaries north of Baghdad on Monday, killing 22 people, the second bloody attack to hit Iraq in as many days.

The blast, which also wounded at least 44 people, came soon after officials raised the salaries of the Sunni militiamen in a bid to placate weeks of anti-government demonstrations in mostly-Sunni areas of the country.

Filipino extremists-rebels dash kills 21

REUTERS, Manila

Twenty-one people have been killed in the Philippines during an apparently unsuccessful bid to rescue a Jordanian journalist kidnapped by Islamist rebels eight months ago, Philippine security officials said yesterday.

Members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a group of former Muslim rebels who have made peace with the government, attacked jungle bases of the Abu Sayyaf group on Jolo island to free Jordanian Baker Atyani, said Antonio Freyra, a police chief in the area.

Syria, Mali crises overshadow OIC

AFP, Cairo

Leaders of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation states are to meet in Cairo on Wednesday to tackle crises ranging from the French-led battle against Islamist militants in Mali to the Syrian civil war.

Foreign ministers will begin a two-day meeting in the Egyptian capital on Monday to prepare for the summit, which will include leaders

Castro votes in Cuba election

AFP, Havana

Ailing Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro made a surprise appearance in Havana Sunday to vote in parliamentary polls, expressing confidence in the revolution despite a decades-long US trade embargo.

Castro's visit to the voting precinct in Havana's El Vedado neighborhood was the main event in Sunday's elections, during which Cubans chose 612 members of the National Assembly as well as deputies of local legislatures.

Cambodia cremates ex-king Sihanouk

AFP, Phnom Penh

Thousands of mourners massed in the Cambodian capital Monday as the kingdom cremated its revered former king Norodom Sihanouk, who steered his country through six turbulent decades.

The cremation was part of a week-long funeral for the mercurial ex-monarch, which started with a lavish procession through the streets of Phnom Penh on Friday and will see his ashes returned to



Kerry starts his diplomacy

AFP, Washington

John Kerry spoke with world leaders, including those representing Israel and the Palestinians, in his first phone calls as the new US secretary of state, officials said Sunday.

Kerry, the former head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, replaced Hillary Clinton on Friday.

America's new top diplomat spoke with Israeli President Shimon Peres on Saturday, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said in a statement.

On Sunday, he also spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

Netanyahu briefed Kerry on his work forming a new Israeli government, Nuland said, while the secretary of state "underscored his personal commitment and that of President (Barack) Obama to support Israel's security and to pursue a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians."

With Abbas, Kerry "pledged to continue efforts with the Congress to release budget support funds for the (Palestinian Authority) and noted the positive step the Israelis had taken by releasing the tax revenues," Nuland said.

Syria opposition chief urges Assad to hold talks

Iran says Israel will regret air strike; Strike damaged research site

AFP, Damascus

Syria's opposition chief yesterday urged President Bashar al-Assad's regime to respond positively to his call for talks to end almost two years of violence which has left more than 60,000 people dead.

"The ball is now in the regime's court. They will either say yes or no," Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib told pan-Arab channel Al-Jazeera, following up on his surprise announcement last week that he was ready for dialogue with the Damascus regime -- subject to conditions, including the release of 160,000 detainees.

Assad last month announced he was ready for talks with the opposition but ruled out meeting groups -- such as Khatib's National Coalition -- which back armed rebels seeking to overthrow the Damascus regime.

For its part, opposition groups, including the National Coalition, have in the past demanded Assad step down before peace talks can begin.

Meanwhile, Iran's security chief Saeed Jalili during a visit to Damascus yesterday told reporters Israel will regret its latest "aggression against Syria".

"The Syrian people and government are serious about this, and the Muslim world supports Syria," Jalili said.

Israel's air strike on Syria last week may have damaged the country's main research center on biological and chemical weapons, The New York Times reported Sunday.



Tanks of the Lebanese airborne division drive in the east Lebanon village of Aarsal, near the Syrian border yesterday.

A senior US military official told the Times that any damage to the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center was likely "due to the bombs which targeted the vehicles" carrying the anti-aircraft weapons and to "the secondary explosions from the missiles."

Meanwhile, Lebanon's army chief has warned that the military will "pursue" anyone who attacks it, in an interview published yesterday after two troops were killed in a clash with Islamists in the country's east.

Lebanon was dominated politically and militarily by Syria for nearly 30 years.

The small Mediterranean country is sharply divided over the Syrian revolt, which erupted in March 2011.



This handout picture taken by the Japan Coast Guard yesterday shows a Chinese marine surveillance ship (R) alongside a Japan Coast Guard ship near the disputed islets known as the Senkaku islands in Japan and Diaoyu islands in China, in the East China Sea. Two Chinese government ships yesterday entered waters around the Tokyo-controlled islands that Beijing claims as its own. Beijing has repeatedly sent ships to the area since Japan nationalised some islands in the chain in September.

PHOTO: AFP

BLETCHLEY PARK MYSTERY
Agatha Christie was investigated by MI5

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Did Agatha Christie have a spy in the government's top-secret codebreaking centre at Bletchley Park?

That was the fear of intelligence chiefs at MI5 during the second world war who were so concerned that they decided to investigate her contacts.

What made MI5 suspect one of Britain's famous crime writers? The answer, it can now be revealed, lay in the name of a character in her wartime novel N or M, whom she called Major Bletchley. He appears in the book as a friend of Christie's pair of detectives, Tommy and Tuppence.

In the book, published in 1941, N and M are the initials given to two of Hitler's agents as Tommy and Tuppence hunt for the enemy within. Major Bletchley comes across as a tedious former Indian army officer who claims to know the secrets of Britain's wartime efforts.

Christie happened to be a close friend of Dilly Knox, one of the leading codebreakers at Bletchley Park. MI5 was concerned that the major's inside knowledge of the progress of the war was based on what the codebreakers knew about Hitler's plans.



Agatha Christie

Pak, Afghan presidents hold talks

AFP, London

Afghan President Hamid Karzai and his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari held peace talks with British Prime Minister David Cameron yesterday which for the first time featured top spy chiefs.

The summit at Cameron's Chequers country retreat near London is aimed at boosting cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, amid growing fears that a civil war could erupt when international troops leave Afghanistan in 2014.

"This trilateral process sends a very clear message to the Taliban -- now is the time for everyone to participate in a peaceful political process in Afghanistan," a British government spokeswoman said.

S Korea, US hold naval drill under nuke threat

AFP, Seoul

South Korea and the United States launched a joint naval exercise involving a US nuclear submarine yesterday, as tensions rise on the Korean peninsula ahead of an expected nuclear test by North Korea.

A defence ministry spokesman confirmed the three-day drill -- condemned as a "warmongering" exercise by North Korea -- was under way in the East Sea (Sea of Japan) off the southeastern South Korean port of Pohang.

Although South Korean military officials stressed the drill was scheduled before the North threatened to detonate its third nuclear device, the presence of the submarine has been seen as a warning to Pyongyang.

The USS San Francisco, armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles, is joined in the drill by a 9,800-tonne Aegis destroyer, the USS Shiloh.

The drill comes as the North has ramped up daily threats of a nuclear test in response to expanded UN sanctions imposed after its long-range rocket launch in December.

BNP differs with Jamaat

FROM PAGE 1

Nayapaltn headquarters after announcing a month-long programme of the BNP-led 18-party alliance.

Tariqul, also a standing committee member, said his party supported the trial of those accused of war crimes, but that trial would have to be transparent and fair.

He alleged the ongoing war crimes trial was not being conducted in a transparent manner. The Human Rights Watch too had said the same, he added.

Besides top leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, two BNP leaders are now standing trial for war crimes.

Queried why his party supported Jamaat's January 31 hartal demanding dismantling of the tribunals, he said BNP extended support to that hartal because Jamaat was denied its democratic right to hold rally.

According to the programmes announced by Tariqul at yesterday's press meet, the 18-party combine will lay siege and submit memorandums to the offices of deputy commissioners tomorrow, demanding release of the opposition leaders.

The alliance will bring out black-flag processions in all districts and upazilas on February 11, protesting forced disappearances of opposition leaders including BNP's organising secretary M Ilias Ali.

It will also lay siege to the offices of upazila nirbahi officers on February 18, protesting the price hike of essentials and power.

BNP came up with what it calls "soft programmes" six days after it held a meeting at its chairperson's Gulshan office in the capital on January 28.

Tariqul said the opposition combine would hold

France bombs Islamists supply routes in Mali

AFP, Gao, Mali

French fighter jets pounded Islamist supply bases in northern Mali to flush the radicals out of hiding, as Paris pushed yesterday for African troops to quickly take over the offensive.

Dozens of French fighter jets carried out massive air strikes on rebel training and logistics centres in the area around their last stronghold of Kidal over the weekend in the mountainous north-east of the landlocked country.

"It is about destroying their rear bases, their depots," Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius told France Inter radio.

"They have taken refuge in the north and the northeast but they can only stay there long-term if they have ways to replenish their supplies. So the army, in a very efficient manner, is stopping them from doing so."

Preserve boat

FROM PAGE 20

over the years and their skills and process of work could also help introduce new technologies to develop it (boat) as a sustainable water transport.

In a digital presentation, Marre showed how a marginalised community like the Suthradhar (carpenters) builds boats by themselves using ancient knowledge learnt from their ancestors.

He described, in another presentation, the salvation process of an ancient boat of the Rakhine regime found in Kuakata and spoke why they faced difficulties in rescuing the boat due to the sandy nature and wave of the sea.

Samuel Berthet, director of Alliance Française de Chittagong, delivered the welcome speech.

French scholar Jean Francois Salles and Prof Momin Chowdhury spoke on the themes "Bay of Bengal and the ancient maritime routes" and "History of Bengal, a maritime perspective" respectively.

Two films -- "Bullion for goods, the Dutch come to trade" and "The river" -- were also screened.

The event is a sequel to The Daily Star-Odommo Chattagram Festival organised last year to promote the rich history, culture, heritage and economic prospects of Chittagong.

Destiny back in business

FROM PAGE 1

on charges of money laundering. Afsarul is also a shareholder of Destiny 2000.

Bangladesh Bank froze 196 bank accounts of the Group's 33 firms out of 37, and 265 bank accounts of its directors and the company's sister concerns. A total of Tk 132.71 crore was found in the bank accounts of 33 firms and another Tk 57.33 crore in the directors' accounts.

Destiny's bank accounts were frozen for one month in May for the first time under the money laundering act. Later, the period was extended thrice and the accounts still remain frozen.

Debabrosad Debnath, general manager of Financial Intelligence Unit of BB, confirmed that Destiny's accounts are still frozen.

"Destiny cannot open any accounts against its name. If it is running business through any bank account, it must have opened that in a different name," said Debaprosad.

The commerce ministry carried out a probe into Destiny's activities in February last year and found evidence of money laundering by the Group.

In its report in October last year, the probe committee said it found no trace of Tk 3,800 crore, and suggested that the government confiscate Destiny's properties so that it can compensate the stakeholders of the MLM company.

"We have made recommendations based on our probe. And we are now waiting for the govern-

ment's decision," said Bijon Kumar Baishya, registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms.

"The government seems to be lenient in acting against Destiny. We cannot say that the MLM company's activities are illegal unless the government makes any decision in this regard," said a member of the probe body formed by the commerce ministry.

He said the commerce secretary called a meeting in December last year to discuss the Destiny issue with them. But since then, no further talks or meetings were held on the issue.

In a report in March last year, the central bank said Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative Society, a sister concern of Destiny Group,

had collected nearly Tk 2,000 crore in deposits and share capital from people till December 31, 2011.

The BB found that Tk 5,132.46 crore was deposited in 282 bank accounts of the Group's three firms -- Destiny 2000 Ltd, Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd and Destiny Tree Plantation. Later, Tk 5,113.95 crore was withdrawn.

In another inquiry into the activities of Destiny's cooperative wing, the Department of Cooperatives (DoC) found that 14 Destiny high-ups plundered Tk 1,448 crore.

According to cooperative laws, the persons found involved in the irregularities have to return the money to the Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative

Society Ltd or else they will face charges that could lead to imprisonment up to three years or a fine or both.

A mi ya Ku ma r Chattopadhyay, additional registrar and head of the DoC probe committee, said they have almost completed gathering all details on the liabilities of Destiny high-ups.

Commerce Secretary Mahbub Ahmed said, "We will finalise the MLM laws soon. We are a bit late because the officer, who is in charge of it, fell sick."

In reply to a query, the secretary told The Daily Star that there was no development in appointing administrator in Destiny as decided earlier by the government.

Afsarul Amin could not be reached over the phone despite repeated attempts.