

US planes, ships ring defiant Iraq

Bush 'discouraged' by Saddam's posturing

REUTERS, Washington, Baghdad

The United States poured planes and ships into the Gulf for a potential war in Iraq and called a defiant statement from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "discouraging news" for a peaceful resolution.

UN inspectors hunting for banned weapons took to the sky for the first time yesterday, flying in helicopters to a site near Syria's border. Experts headed also to a missile plant, cancer research centre, university, cement plant and air base.

US President George W Bush, speaking amid a major American military buildup and revelations of US plans for administering a post-war Iraq, delivered a fresh demand for Saddam to come clean over any weapons of mass destruction.

The Iraqi president, who denies having any arms programmes, accused UN inspectors of carrying out intelligence work, a comment seized on by Bush as an example of Iraqi defiance.

The US president, who has made no secret of wanting to see Saddam toppled, was given no ammunition by a senior UN inspector to justify a war against Baghdad, however.

"We haven't yet seen any smoking gun," International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei said Monday after several weeks of searches in Iraq by his nuclear experts.

UN arms inspectors are due to report to the UN Security Council



PHOTO: AFP

A US soldier from the Third Infantry Division sits on a tank yesterday at Camp New York in the northern Kuwaiti desert, only 24 kilometres from the Gulf emirate's border with Iraq.

Thursday. They have to deliver a major assessment on Iraqi compliance with council resolutions by January 27.

In Britain, defence sources said the country was expected to announce the mobilisation of

frontline troops and ships as well as put 7,000 reservists on notice.

In France, President Jacques Chirac told French troops yesterday to stand ready for "anything that could happen" in the year ahead, and highlighted the need for vigi-

lance over Iraq's respect for disarmament resolutions.

None of the UN inspection chiefs has reported any evidence of an illegal weapons program since the inspectors returned to Iraq in November after a four-year

absence. A new Security Council resolution allowed inspectors to resume a mission that began after the 1991 Gulf War.

Television footage yesterday showed thousands of armed Iraqi men and women in a military parade near Baghdad one day after Saddam used a televised address to say Baghdad was ready for any attack and to brush aside Washington's threats as the "hiss of snakes and bark of dogs."

Iraq identified the marching units as part of the volunteer Jerusalem Army, which it says numbers seven million people.

Bush said Saddam's remarks were "discouraging news for those of us who want to resolve this peacefully."

Bush administration officials insist the president has not made a decision on whether to launch a war against Iraq for failure to declare and dismantle weapons programs, but contingency plans have been drawn up to run Iraq after war.

US officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Bush's foreign policy advisers had put together a plan for post-Saddam Iraq including security, food and economic aid, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction.

The officials said troops would stay until there was stability in Iraq, a country of 24 million people which has the second largest oil reserves in the world and where ethnic and religious divides have long posed problems for rulers. They declined to provide a timetable.

PCJSS-UPDF

gunfight: One killed

UNB, Rangamati

One person was killed and eight others were injured with bullets in a gunfight between the activists of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) and Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) at Boro Dolupara in Kauhali upazila yesterday morning.

Police said Angshi Marna, 25, died on the spot during the clash between the two rival groups over establishing supremacy in the area.

Tinni murder Piyal's bail petition rejected

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The District and Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, yesterday rejected the bail petition of Shafkat Hossain Piyal, former husband of Tania Mahbub Tinni.

Piyal is an accused in the Tinni murder case.

Judge ATM Fazle Kabir passed the order upon a criminal appeal seeking bail on behalf of the accused.

The defence lawyers -- Advocate Masud Ahmed Talukder and Tawhidul Islam Gazi -- submitted the appeal to the Sessions Judge's Court on December 28 against the rejection order on bail. The First Class Magistrate's Court, Dhaka rejected the bail petition of Piyal on December 27.

Quota

FROM PAGE 1
chancellor Professor Mustafizur Rahman.

About two months back the proposal for such a quota was presented at the seminar titled 'The social right for the disable', organised by the Islamic University Press Club.

Info on Saber

FROM PAGE 1
in Germany. The German government wants to have a clear picture of this and other cases against the members of Awami League. The German Embassy's presence at this court session serves to collect the first-hand information on the rightful progress of the judicial process against Saber Hossain Chowdhury.

When contacted, an ambassador of a European country told The Daily Star last night that many European nations have been following with great attention the treatment of politicians under arrest in Bangladesh.

The first secretary's presence in Mymensingh court might be part of that process, he said.

More than hundred lawyers appeared for Saber in the court that turned down a petition for the AL leader's bail and cancellation of remand.

Arrested on December 8 from Dhaka, Saber was taken to the Mymensingh jail from the Sylhet jail Monday night.

He was produced before the court yesterday. From the court, he was sent to the Mymensingh jail.

CPJ concerned

FROM PAGE 12
Both were arrested on charges of "anti-state activities" after working with a documentary crew for Britain's Channel 4 "Unreported World" series.

Two Britain-based journalists working on the Channel 4 documentary, Zaiba Malik and Bruno Sorrentino, were arrested on November 27 on sedition charge, but later released and deported to the United Kingdom on December 11.

Samad had worked as a fixer for Malik and Sorrentino.

The New York-based CPJ said that Priscilla Raj, a Bangladesh freelance reporter and human rights activist, was also arrested on November 25 and charged with "anti-state activities" for acting as an interpreter for Malik and Sorrentino. On December 22, Raj was released on bail but the charges against her still stand, it said.

Cooper, in his letter to the Prime Minister, said that as a non-partisan organisation of journalists dedicated to the defence of colleagues worldwide, CPJ condemned the government's "complete disregard for the legal process" in Bangladesh under which both Saleem Samad and Shahriar Kabir should have been released on bail.

Expressing concern at the "torture" perpetrated on Samad and Kabir in custody, the CPJ executive director called for their release from prison and demanded that all charges against Samad, Kabir and Priscilla Raj be "immediately and unconditionally dropped."

Meanwhile, the allegations of torture must be "promptly and thoroughly investigated," she said.

Yet tortured

FROM PAGE 1

"Later, a sub-inspector from the Tejgaon Police Station came to our house and told us Swapan was hospitalised with serious injuries," Jhuma said.

On Monday, Swapan lay at the Green Unit of AB Ward of the National Orthopaedic Hospital (Pangu Hospital) with grievous injuries in his legs and hands. He could not even move his arms and legs. A policeman lazed on the verandah to keep watch on the "suspect".

Swapan does not know whether he would ever be able to go back to his small restaurant near their house. After the death of his father, an air force employee in the medical corps, he had given up his studies in search of livelihood. His restaurant helped the family survive.

To add to his sufferings, the hospital authorities asked Swapan to leave the hospital saying that his injuries would take a long time to heal and 'home would be the best place for it'. Tejgaon police who are to take him into custody from the hospital have so far refused to do so, saying that the boy is too ill to be shifted.

"We are still not sure if he would survive. The hospital authorities have discharged him because he failed to pay for his treatment. He

needs an operation in his hand urgently," said a police official requesting anonymity.

A doctor at the hospital said Swapan suffered "multiple abrasions" all over his body, which is known as 'blunt trauma'. He needed thorough 'skin drafting'.

"He was discharged because this sort of blunt trauma takes a long time to heal and rush of patients is very high at the hospital," he said.

As Swapan talked to this correspondent at the Green Unit on Monday, a group of policemen arrived there. The on-duty nurse said Swapan had just been discharged from the hospital. The official who led the police team had a closer look at the injuries of the boy and said, "How could one with such injuries be discharged from hospital. We cannot take him." The policemen then walked off the hospital.

Meanwhile, police confirmed that Swapan is not a criminal wanted by them.

One source said someone working in the civil aviation authority managed to get the boy arrested with a motive. Later, two cases were filed against him -- one for a scuffle and the other for 'possessing' a knife. The charges against him are baseless, the source added.

Transport crunch

FROM PAGE 12

The association leaders have tried to justify the hike saying that road tax, income tax, fuel price and bridge tolls have gone up. The government will decide on the proposal once it gets the report from a committee headed by the BRTA chairman.

At present, CNG-run auto-rickshaw drivers are taking excessive fares from passengers on the pretext that the vehicle owners are charging them up to Tk 550 in daily rents.

If the three-wheelers are installed with meters, the government must step in to force the owners to reduce the rents and restrict it to around Tk 300 or less, the drivers said. If not, the drivers will boycott driving indefinitely, they threatened.

Differing with the policies of the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) to launch more buses on the city roads, the traffic department officials said the number of buses in the city has risen to about 4,200 up from 2,350 in December 2001.

The officials said the problem does not lie with the number of buses but with planning. More buses mean more traffic jam, said a top official. Deputy Commissioner (south) of the traffic department Abu Musa Md Fakhru Islam Khan said all 41 city bus-routes would eventually be made rickshaw-free.

"Instead of introducing more buses we are focusing on increasing the frequency of the existing buses by freeing all bus routes of non-mechanised vehicles," Musa said.

Moreover, other modes of transports like human haulers, Duranta and Rider will be introduced in larger numbers to run in parallel with buses, which will ease troubles, he said.

But commuters say the CNG-run three-wheelers numbering 4,200 (according to traffic department officials) will continue charging exorbitant fares until mileage is metered.

Installation of meters is expected to be completed by February 1, as per a government order.

The BRTC, which operates nearly 400 buses on 16 city routes, is now waiting for approval of the communications ministry to add 400 more to its fleet. Their launch may take quite a long time, the officials said.

Every day, thousands of com-

muters wait for transports at different intersections. A top BRTC official said the authorities should take urgent steps to 'discipline' transport workers. "It must be ensured that drivers use the stops and stop taking passengers wherever they like," he added.

Police should make sure vehicles continue plying as usual even during not-so-busy hours when drivers and their helpers are reluctant to go by schedules.

An official of the ministry said the authorities should also work out a far more efficient network of bus routes.

Hartal

FROM PAGE 1
mal price hike of fuels and will announce the date within a day or two," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told newsmen at the party's central office on the Bangabandhu Avenue in the city.

A senior presidium member, however, told The Daily Star that the hartal would be enforced on January 11.

The presidium meeting at the party's Dhanmondi office, chaired by former foreign minister Abdus Samad Azad in absence of an indisposed Sheikh Hasina, also decided to observe a countrywide demonstration day today, Jalil said.

The main opposition will also hold issue-based discussion with progressive political parties for greater unity and a strong movement "against the atrocities of the government", he said.

The newly elected AL general secretary termed the price hike illogical, as the price "did not increase on the international market".

Public life is already "miserable for misrule and torture" while prices of essentials have gone beyond the reach of the commoners, he said. "The fuel-price hike will add to the sufferings of the people and cause further price hike of everything in a cascading effect."

The presidium meeting was also decided that Hasina would lead members of the newly elected central committee to a visit to Tungipara on January 10 and offer feteah at Bangabandhu's grave.

January 10 will be observed as the day commemorating Bangabandhu's return to independent Bangladesh in 1972 upon his release from jail in Pakistan.

NGO foreign guests

FROM PAGE 12
cism from the NGO sector and it was termed 'a restrictive and negative step'.

In the face of criticism, the government changed its posture and issued the new order, according to sources.

The NGO Affairs Bureau in a letter, signed by assistant director Sultan Ahmed, said it has been observed recently that foreign delegations have been visiting Bangladesh on invitation from various NGOs. It further said the delegates have been visiting different parts of the country and exchanging views. In some cases, they are conducting different surveys.

In view of these, the letter said, "There could be misunderstanding on many sensitive issues and so to avoid that situation, NGOs have been asked to provide the list of the names of foreign delegates and their detailed programmes to the NGO Affairs Bureau. However, no prior permission of the bureau is needed for such visits."

Meantime, another 54 NGOs quit the Association of Development

Agencies (ADAB) yesterday and joined hands with the newly floated National NGO Coordination Committee.

The NGOs that quit ADAB are Gram Bikash Kendra, Bashurdhara Kalyan Sangstha, Ekota Samaj Unnayan Kendra, Bandhu Kalyan Sangstha, Sirajganj Flood Forum, Gram Unnayan Sangstha (VDS), Artho-Samajik O Sangskritik Sangstha (Shikha), Socio-economic and Rural Advancement Association, Osed, Palli Samajik Unnayan Sangsthan, Gram Bikash Sangstha, Jubok Samity, and 42 other members of ADAB Faridpur region, said a press release.

In a joint statement, the NGOs said the ADAB has become a 'pocket organisation' of a few people and has lost its 'acceptance' due to the 'negative attitude' of the leaders eager to remain in power.

They have expressed their solidarity with 150 NGOs, including 25 big ones, who have quit ADAB and urged all concerned to make the coming second national NGO convention, to be held in February, a success.

Saifur smells rats

FROM PAGE 12
of those were "manipulated in narrow perspectives".

He said the previous government claimed that the country was self-sufficient in food, at the same time letters of credit (LCs) worth Tk 700-800 crore were opened every year for rice import. "How could these two different statistics be reconciled?"

It would be frustrating if Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) is seen losing its objectivity due to intrusion of "narrow sectarian interests", Saifur Rahman said.

Citing instances of mismatches in planning due to wrong or inadequate statistics, he said that the government had liberalised sugar import after the Industries Ministry estimated that import of 300,000 tons of sugar would meet the local demand.

But import LCs were opened for over 500,000 tons in last six months, proving that the demand estimate was wrong, he pointed out.

The minister said that same thing happened in case of Soybean oil, import of which is unabated and unlimited. Import LCs worth Tk 500-600 crore are opened for soybean oil, but nobody knows where it goes, he said, drawing the attention of BBS statisticians to many such areas that need proper data.

He said authentic statistics are inevitable before planning for each and every social or economic sector -- be it literacy, nutrition, health, industry or agriculture.

Final PRSP must base on accurate data on all relevant sectors, he felt.

BSA president Dr M Kabir said abolition of the Statistics Division affected statistical functions of the BBS and weakened the national statistical agency that provides basic data for planning and research of the government and non-government agencies.

The Statistics Division was merged with the Planning Division last year.

Planning Secretary Badiur

Rahman said lack of a sense of direction leads to inclusion of huge number of projects in development plan that can never be implemented given the budgetary allocation.

Implementation of all projects so far inducted in ADP would require Tk 109,000 crore, whereas ADP size is a mere Tk 19,200 crore, he said.

BSA secretary general Abu Zafar also spoke at the session.

Forex ceiling

FROM PAGE 12
The limits were also slashed for the departing individuals, according to a central bank circular, dated January 6 (Monday). Prior to the revision, both the limits were equivalent to 5,000 US dollars.

"The decision will help curb pressure for foreign currencies," a senior official of the bank told UNB yesterday, explaining that extra pressure for forex pushes up prices to destabilise the money market.

Following the corrective measure, demand for foreign exchange, particularly the greenback, would be reduced as individuals departing the country will not be allowed to take away more than the re-fixed amount without declaration, he observed.

However, Bangladesh Bank allowed taking back the full amounts by non-residents, including Bangladeshi citizens working abroad, they brought in during their arrival. But it requires declaration on arrival in the specified form of the central bank kept with the customs authorities.

However, travelers need not declare if they take back not more than US\$3,000 each.

A person will be allowed to bring any amount of currencies on arrival bar unissued currency notes and Bangladeshi currency notes amounting over Tk 500. Individuals will also be allowed to leave the country with Bangladesh currencies not exceeding Tk 500.

Shahriar, Shafi freed

FROM PAGE 1
ions. That is why it tends to put those with divergent political opinions behind the bar.

Shahriar and Shafi started for Dhaka along with their family members last night.

After his release from Rangpur Jail, Shafi's wife advocate Tahera Khondoker and local Awami League leaders received him.

However, the authorities at Rangpur Jail initially refused to free Shafi when his family members went there with the High Court order. The jail authorities told them that they had received a fresh order to detain Shafi for 90 days.

Shafi's family members told the jail authorities that the fresh detention order was illegal since it was issued on December 29, 2002 while the High Court declared the order illegal on January 4. The authorities then contacted high officials and released Shafi.

Meanwhile, the Mymensingh

District Cognizance Court yesterday placed Awami League leader Saber, also the political secretary to the AL president, on a seven-day police remand for interrogation in connection with Ajanta cinema blast case. The magistrate rejected the plea for Saber's bail placed by his lawyer advocate Sahara Khatun and others. The investigation officer of the case CID ASP Abdul Khaleque put up the remand prayer. However, he could not tell reporters when and where he would remand Saber.

The lawyers then filed another petition for a stay on the remand order saying that they would contest the remand order in the High Court. However, the magistrate rejected the plea, too. Saber was later sent from the court to the Mymensingh Jail.

Saber was shown as an arrestee on December 28 in the Mymensingh cinema blast case. He was transferred to the Mymensingh Jail from

the Sylhet Jail Monday night. Saber's supporters were chanting slogans demanding his immediate release while he was taken to the court yesterday amidst tight security.

Saber was arrested earlier on October 20 last year and released following a High Court order after having been in prison for one month.

Meanwhile, another Awami League leader Talukder Abdul Khaleque was shown to be an arrestee for the fourth time in a murder case. He was arrested on November 1, 2002 without any specific charge. Later, he was detained for one month under the SPA. However, the High Court declared the detention illegal.

Talukder has been implicated in a series of murder cases one after another as he continued to secure bail from the court. Now he is in the Rajshahi Central Jail.

Sarbahara leader dies

FROM PAGE 12
the on-duty doctors declared him dead.

Police said he was a heart patient and they found medicine for heart ailments in his pocket.

The postmortem report said there were no marks of injuries in his body.

Our correspondent also adds that the joint forces arrested two listed criminals from different parts of the district during the drive.

In Tangail, the joint forces arrested one person and seized a revolver, a pipe gun and bullets from Pankata of Dhanbari upazila, our correspondent reports.

Our Rajbari correspondent reports that the joint forces arrested three criminals from different parts of the district. They are Afzal, a gang leader, and two of his accomplices, Reazul Karim and Sunny. They also arrested Budy from his village Horindanga in

Pangsha upazila with one pistol and some bullets.

In Kushtia, the joint forces arrested three people and recovered a firearm from different parts of the district, our correspondent reports. A team of the joint forces raided the residence of Sihab at Taragonia, arrested him and his associate Liton, and recovered a pipe gun from his possession. Later, the joint forces arrested a Jubo League leader, Masud Rana alias Pinu from the same area.

Our Barisal correspondent reports that the joint forces arrested two people from different parts of the district.

A team of the joint forces arrested Babul Talukder, a BNP leader from Awalipar of Bakerganj upazila and recovered a pipe gun along with bullets and crackers. In another raid, they arrested a notorious criminal from Barguna district town.

The joint forces arrested 79 people, including 16 listed criminals, from different parts of the country in the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

They also seized 17 firearms including one pistol, six guns, three pipe guns, six shotguns and a G-3 rifle along with 10 bullets during the period, according to a home ministry press release.

The latest spate of arrests pushed the number of people rounded up since the start of the anti-crime crackdown on October 17 to 11,119, including 2,443 listed criminals. The joint forces have so far seized 2,011 firearms and 29,745 rounds of ammunition.

The police headquarters in a press release yesterday said they rounded up 1,237 people, including 12 identified criminals from different parts of the country in the 24 hours ending at 6:00am yesterday.

During the drive, police also recovered four firearms, one other weapon and two bombs, the press release added.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police in a press release yesterday said they arrested 211 people, including 32 accused in different cases during a special drive in the city.

Gun grips

FROM PAGE 12
firearms-- to a nominated member of the family.

A decision has also been taken to ease the process of transferring the licence in case of death of the licence-holder.

A person can get a new licence in the event of the licence being damaged or found faulty. A person having a valid licence can also change its type for buying a new weapon.

The home ministry has been authorised to approve the applications for licences.

Sources said the ministry of home sent a circular to this effect to the deputy commissioners and others concerned on December 31.

Meanwhile, the government has decided that firearms holders can renew their licences without fine within one month of getting back their arms and ammunitions. The decision was taken as people deposited their arms following a government directive.

Officials said many owners of firearms could not renew their licences as their arms and ammunitions remained deposited, when the last date of licence renewal expired.

S African First Lady

FROM PAGE 12
fourth time, said poverty is a big problem for her country where effective strategy is needed to fight it.

She noted that the situation in Bangladesh improved due to participation and intervention of the government.

Khaleda Zia, during the discussion, said the government is not only carrying out macro-credit programme but also implementing more schemes and innovative programmes like housing for the poor to improve the lot of the commonman.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister said apart from the NGOs, the government is also active in making micro-credit venture a success.

She particularly mentioned the training programmes for capacity building of the poor who seek micro-credits to undertake income-generating projects and trades.

Impressed at the success of micro-credit programmes in Bangladesh, Zanele Mbeki said a team of experts was involved in the sector in South Africa to get first-hand information.

She also expressed keen interest in taking experts for training managers and quality controllers in micro-credit and garment sectors of

her country.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister also briefly explained her government's programmes in other sectors, particularly girls' education for empowerment of women.

Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Dr Kamal Siddiqui and Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury were present during the meeting.

Khaleda Zia inquired about wellbeing of President Thabo Mbeki and through the First Lady extended invitation to him to visit Bangladesh.

CEC

FROM PAGE 1
meeting early last week decided for the first time to deploy army for the UP polls that begin on January 25 and run through March 26.

The decision sparked off resentment in the government ranks. A government spokesperson has already questioned the EC authority to take any decision on army deployment.

Meantime, the EC has finalised budget for the UP polls and sought approval from the finance ministry. Out of a total Tk 58 crore, the commission sought Tk 31 crore for maintenance of law and order.