

The Daily Star

COMMITTED TO
People's Right to Know

REGD. No. DA 781

VOL. XII No. 223

DHAKA THURSDAY JANUARY 9, 2003

Dhaka dubs Delhi's alien claims absurd

Buddha says centre did not inform Bengal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka has brushed aside New Delhi's claim of nearly 20 million illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in India as "baseless and absurd".

"There are no Bangladeshis residing illegally in India, nor had there been any in the past," Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury told reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday.

Meantime, according to our Kolkata correspondent Sakyasen Mitra, West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharja told the Kolkata press that "the decision is basically a decision of the centre and the fact is that the decision has

been taken without talking to us. We have not received any official intimation on this. So, how can we react now?"

India on Tuesday decided to launch a special drive from April this year to detect and deport illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Pakistan on "security grounds". Reuters put the figure of the would-be deportees at 20 million. However, Indian newspapers put the figure at 15 million.

The decision was taken at a meeting of top civil administration officials and heads of police forces of Indian states and senior federal intelligence officials, reports from India said.

A West Bengal home department high official, talking on conditions of anonymity, described the decision as the BJP-led central government's bid to disturb peace in the state.

Bangladeshis who have entered Kolkata since 1971 have never any law and order situation, he said. "So, why should we suddenly start hunting them down? It is easier to stop fresh infiltration rather than finding out illegal immigrants."

In Dhaka, the foreign secretary said, "We've seen media reports on the Indian move, but have not got it officially confirmed. We have asked our High Commission in New Delhi to let us know the context and basis

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5



PHOTO: STAR
An elderly woman bundles up in polythene against the cold snap that descended on the country raising the death toll to 51 over the last eight days.

City cringes in mist and cold

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thin mists drifted lazily across near-empty city streets and life bitten by chilly wind went into hibernation yesterday. There was no sun to brighten up the grey cityscape with the mercury dropping to 12.2 degree Celsius.

The second spell of the cold wave also brought life across the country almost to a standstill.

At least 51 persons died in the last eight days owing to the cold wave, and more than 400 people, suffering from cold-related ailments, were admitted to hospital in Jessore, according to unofficial sources.

No sunlight was visible in the 16 northern districts, and heavy fog continued to disrupt normal life. Poor people are leaving their homes in search of warmer places.

Asadur Rahman, an official of the met office, said the situation would

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Saber's remand order stayed, bail granted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A division bench of the High Court yesterday granted an ad interim bail to Awami league leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury in the Mymensingh cinema blast case.

Also yesterday, another division bench of the court stayed for 15 days a magistrate's order that had placed the political secretary to AL president Sheikh Hasina on a seven-day remand.

While granting the bail, Justice Abdur Rashid and Justice Siddiqur Rahman Miah asked the government to show cause why Saber was shown arrested in a criminal case after his preventive detention order had been declared illegal.

The judges also ruled that the former deputy minister would be on bail until the government explains its actions.

Meanwhile, as they stayed the remand order, Justice Hamidul

Haque and Justice Salma Masud Chowdhury asked the government to show cause in four weeks as to why it should not be declared illegal.

Soon after the ruling, the state prosecutor moved for a stay on the order with the same division bench, which was summarily rejected.

Earlier on Tuesday, a magistrate's court in Mymensingh put Saber on a seven-day remand for a case he was shown arrested in on December 28.

Saber's lawyer, Mahbubey Alam, told The Daily Star last night that, if not shown arrested in any other case, there was no reason why the AL leader should not be released immediately.

Saber was arrested on December 8 without any specific charge and later detained under the Special Powers Act (SPA).

Meanwhile, columnist Professor

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Partial army pullout begins in a week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is going to partially pull out troops from 'peaceful and rural areas' from third week of this month, as most soldiers will get busy with the winter exercise.

To start with, highly placed sources said, the pullout will take place at the 'grassroots level'. However, the government has decided to keep army in some upazila headquarters where situation still needs to be improved. If things improve in the trouble-prone areas, the troops would be stationed at district headquarters while the government will have a look at how things stand.

Sources said the troops withdrawal goes along schedule and that it has nothing to do with the Union Parishad elections to get underway on January 25.

However, the current 'Operation Clean Heart' anti-crime drive will

carry on as long as deemed fit. There will be no let-up in the joint drive nor will troops be pulled out from 'crime-prone' areas, especially in Dhaka, Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Feni and some other cities and towns.

Official sources said troops are to engage in the winter exercise which is crucial since their promotion and posting greatly depend on their performance in the exercise.

Around 24,000 army personnel have been drawn into the Operation Clean Heart that began across the country on October 17 last to catch criminals and recover illegal arms as the law and order dipped to a menacing low.

According to government policymakers, troops deployment has greatly contributed to a fall of crime incidents. However, the death of more than 40 people arrest and detention during the drive has

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Water prices go up

UNB, Dhaka

Dhaka WASA (Water and Sewerage Authority), for the second time in last six months, has raised its water tariff by 5.5 per cent for domestic and 5 per cent for commercial users with effect from January 1.

WASA water will now cost Tk 4.75 per 1000 litres, instead of Tk 4.50 for domestic and social holdings, and Tk 15.75 in place of Tk 15 for commercial users.

Dhaka WASA managing director Dr Khandaker Azharul Huq said the rise in water service tariff is due to growing operational costs, mainly because of power tariff increase.

Water pumps and Sayedabad Treatment Plant consume electricity worth over Tk 60 crore annually, and power tariff increase directly increases WASA's operational cost, he said.

WASA officials said every year they opt for 5 per cent tariff increase as maintenance costs go up mainly due to increase of power tariff.

The last increase was made in July last year, following power tariff increase in January 2002.

Prior to the execution of the new tariff, Dhaka WASA informed its clients of the tariff increase through public notification in November last year.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Another death after army arrest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A middle-aged man, who was picked up by the joint forces on Sunday, died at a hospital in Gazipur yesterday morning.

According to police, a team of the joint forces picked Abdul Khaleq up from his Shafipur house at Kaliakoir after they failed to arrest his Jubo Dal leader brother.

The 40-year-old was taken to the army camp in the area for interrogation. Next day he was handed to the Kaliakoir police.

He was later produced before the court and sent to jail where he fell sick. As his condition deteriorated he was shifted to the Sadar Hospital

where he died yesterday morning.

Also yesterday, the joint forces arrested a Union Parishad chairman candidate and five notorious criminals in Barisal, Patuakhali and Jhalakathi.

Sultan Ahmed, an activist of the outlawed Sarbahara Party who has filed UP chairmanship, is accused of several crimes including murder.

Two other Sarbahara activists - Mukhles Munshi and Abdul Majid - were also arrested.

Our Feni correspondent reports that the joint forces arrested a municipal commissioner.

Also arrested yesterday, apart from Badrul Alam, are Nurul Islam,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Euro missions to monitor political cases

STAR REPORT

Some European embassies in Dhaka will regularly monitor the cases against opposition political leaders, according to diplomatic sources.

There have been informal discussions among the ambassadors of a number of European nations to gather on-hand information on the legal proceedings.

The embassies will send their representatives in turns to courts.

On Tuesday, First Secretary of the German Embassy Reiner Muhlig went to the Mymensingh Court to hear the proceedings of the case against Saber Hossain Chowdhury.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

CEC crossed the line, BNP high-ups say

REZAUL KARIM

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed's insistence on army deployment in the Union Parishad (UP) elections has irked the government which has ruled it out.

Most ruling BNP policymakers see the CEC's demand unreasonable and believe he has gone beyond the limit. They feel the current law and order does not demand deployment of army for the UP polls. Such a move may instead panic people at the grassroots level.

An influential minister yesterday told The Daily Star that it is physically not possible to deploy army in thousands of polling centres many of which are still do not have proper

road communications and accommodation.

"Army was not required in any Union Parishad elections over last 30 years...why are they required in this year's polls? It is even not physically possible to deploy police in all the polling centres across the country," he observed.

"Does the CEC think that troops would be in the villages during the polls that take nearly three months to complete?" he questioned.

The minister added that the army has many other crucial jobs at hand, including undergoing training and doing the winter exercise. More over,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2



Cross-examination of Latifur Rahman finally ends

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Cross-examination of Latifur Rahman, second prosecution witness in the Shazneen rape case and father of the victim, by lawyers of all the accused ended yesterday.

He was cross-examined for about 42 hours in 21 days from June 12 last year. The cross-examination was recorded in 498 pages.

Kazi Rahamat Ullah, Judge of the Second Special Court for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka adjourned the hearing till January 12 and directed the prosecution side to produce the next witness on the day.

During the cross-examination

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Mymensingh cinema blast: IO replaced

UNB, Mymensingh

The investigation officer of the sensational Mymensingh cinema-bombing cases has been changed at the instruction of higher authorities, officials said.

Criminal Investigation Department ASP Habibur Rahman Talukder replaced the previous IO, Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Abdul Khaleque, they said.

Talukder yesterday took charges from his predecessor to investigate the four cases regarding the bomb blasts at Ajanta, Purabi, Alaka and Chhayabani cinema halls in the town.

SEE PAGE 11 COL

Announcement

The news of the birth of the first human clone has turned the world topsy-turvy. SWM delves into the disturbing implications of the latest scientific debate.