

Bolivia detains 16 including Bangladeshis on terror tip-off

REUTERS, La Paz

Bolivia's state news agency said authorities in La Paz detained 16 Muslims on Thursday after a tip-off from French police that some of them were planning to hijack a plane and attack targets in the United States.

No independent confirmation was immediately available of the report from the ABL agency, which is regarded as a mouthpiece of the Bolivian government.

It quoted Interior Minister Alfonso Ferrufino as saying most of those arrested were Bangladeshis and that they were detained at Viru Viru airport near the southern Bolivian city of Santa Cruz on Thursday morning.

"(Ferrufino) said that the tip-off from French police said that the 16 Muslims were planning to hijack a plane en route from La Paz via Santa Cruz to Buenos Aires to attack targets in the United States," the news agency report said.

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Govt takes hard line on contractual service

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a break with a two-year trend, the government has this time determined not to cave in to the high-pitched lobbying of contractual appointees for service extension in the civil administration.

A rash of contractual appointments in the last two years fuelled resentment in the administration and the government decided to extend the service of only a handful of officials on merit and unwavering allegiance to the ruling BNP, said sources at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Around 200 officials are in service on contract both at home and abroad. Three dozen of them are secretaries and over a dozen of them are set to retire by January.

But most contracts are not up for renewals after expiry, as the majority of officials were given extension more than once, the sources added.

The BNP-led four-party coalition government gave a wave of

repeat extensions, blocking the promotion of mid- and entry-level officials and making the officials on contract far outnumber regulars. Two of them are CSP (Civil Service of Pakistan) officials in secretarial positions.

In line with the new decision, the government did not extend the appointments of some top bureaucrats, including Planning Commission Member Shah Mohammad Farid, Privatisation Commission Member Karar Mahmudul Hasan and Parliament Secretary Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed, whose contracts expired last month.

Only Cabinet Secretary Dr Saadat Hussain was given a one-year contract last month.

Contracts of President's Secretary Anisul Haq Chowdhury, Education Secretary Shahidul Alam, Local Government Secretary AYBI Siddiqui, Power Secretary SM Shamsul Alam, incumbent Parliament Secretary Khandaker Fazlur Rahman, Primary and Mass Education Secretary Tehmina

Hussain, Chairman of Rural Electrification Board Ziaul Islam Chowdhury, Director General at the PMO Abdul Majid, Director General of NGO Affairs Bureau Shahjahan Majumder, Chairman of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation Harunur Rashid and Nasirul Haq of the Public Administration Training Centre expire this month.

Official sources said contracts of about a dozen secretaries and additional secretary level officials, including Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, Communications Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat, Environment and Forest Secretary Sabihuddin Ahmed, Fisheries and Livestock Secretary Muhammad Abdul Haq, Housing and Public Works Secretary Aminur Rahman, Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Secretary Mohammad Nurunnabi, Director General of National Institute of Local Government Shamsul Haq and Director General

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PHOTO: STAR

Dancers perform at a function at the Fine Arts Institute in Dhaka yesterday, marking Nabanno (the harvest of rice) under the auspices of Jatiya Nabanna Utsav Uddjapan Parshad.



PHOTO: STAR

Three alleged criminals pose for photograph at Gulshan Police Station in Dhaka yesterday after their arrest with arms and ammunition in a sweep near the forest department headquarters in Mohakhali. The arrest led to the seizure of a foreign-made rifle and about 800 bullets.

BNP taking steps to put house in order

REZAUL KARIM

Ruling coalition leader Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is embarking on a set of organisational programmes soon to put its house in order and face probable anti-government agitation by the opposition.

Sources said the party, dogged by intra-party squabbles and growing frustration over top echelon's indifference to party affairs, will kick off conferences in some districts ahead of party national conference sometime next year.

"The conferences will inject dynamism and greater cohesion into the party erasing inertia and long-running feuds in its ranks," said a top BNP leader.

BNP sources said the party leadership fixed the August 31 deadline to complete formation of 75 organisational district committees, but only 30 were completed by the time.

The committee formation ran

into a roadblock in Ramadan and the party leadership is in favour of holding conferences in remaining units in next couple of months.

Sources said the BNP leadership is highly annoyed that leaders assigned to complete formation of fresh committees of thana and district units by August failed to finish their tasks despite repeated instructions.

Constitution of thana committees is largely complete by now and the remaining will be formed by December, BNP sources said.

They said the BNP high command has asked leaders to start committee formation in remaining thanas and districts after Victory Day on December 16 and complete the task in a month.

"I think it won't be possible to complete constitution of remaining district and thana committees in a month, but the central committee will keep constant pressure on

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Shun malpractice or face action, minister warns Desco men

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Power Iqbal Hassan Mahmood has asked officials of Dhaka Electric Supply Company (Desco) to give up 'malpractice' and warned them of proper action for their poor services and involvement in corruption.

"The overall situation in this sector has gone beyond an acceptable level. Desco could not take off. People have serious reservations about it and I have also received complaints of corruption by its officials," he said.

The state minister was speaking as chief guest at the inaugural session of a workshop on "Evaluation of ADB's (Asian Development Bank) Assistance to Bangladesh Power Sector" in Dhaka yesterday, jointly organised by the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources and the ADB.

Iqbal said it takes two to three months for Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (Desa) and Desco to send electricity bills to consumers and then payment of bills also takes time, making the entire process

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Dark shadow dogs AL in godfathers' former bases

REAZ AHMAD

The Awami League's efforts to enhance its image ahead of launching an anti-government movement by erasing the dark shadow of godfather-famed former party leaders have been facing resistance in the pockets where their tentacles still extend.

The leaders of the key opposition party say the godfathers who earned the last AL government 'bad name' are trying to re-emerge in party ranks after its activities to put its own house in order by holding long-overdue party unit councils gathered pace.

The general secretary of the party's Fatulla thana unit in Narayanganj, Md Shahid Ullah, resigned from the post yesterday in what political analysts in Dhaka say was a fallout of the godfather syndrome.

On Wednesday, central AL leaders including General Secretary Abdul Jalil suffered humiliation in Laxmipur when the

alleged sidekicks of Abu Taher vandalised the local circuit house where the council was taking place.

The attackers blamed the central leadership for announcing a committee without election, an accusation shrugged off by frontline central leaders who said the votes of 192 councillors could put 'the godfathers' men' on the committee.

"After a glaring media coverage of the godfathers' activities during the Awami League rule (1996-2001), we can't allow known troublemakers to get berth in any party unit," an AL policymaker said.

Wednesday's trouble was a reminder of the May 31 attack on an extended Feni district unit meeting allegedly by the supporters of former lawmaker Joinal Hazari who was apparently earned most of the party's disrepute.

The AL's expulsion of some Hazari sidekicks and commissioning of a probe headed by Syed

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AL to join next JS session if atmosphere congenial: Jalil

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) general secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday said his party is ready to join the next session of the Jatiya Sangsad if the government ensures proper atmosphere in the House befitting the main opposition.

"It's the government's responsibility to make sure that there is a healthy atmosphere in the House where ruling and opposition lawmakers will discuss freely national issues abiding by rules and procedures," Jalil said in an instant response to an appeal to join parliament by senior leader of the ruling BNP and Minister for Health and Family Welfare Khandaker Mosharaf Hossain.

Both the leaders were at a discussion at Teachers and Students Centre (TSC) roundabout of Dhaka University on the occasion of the 13th death anniversary of Shaheed Dr Shamsul Alam Khan Milon, organised by Dr Milon Sangsad.

Dr Milon was gunned down on November 27, 1990 while leading a

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C'wealth seeks to avert Mugabe split at summit

AFP, Abuja

Commonwealth leaders open a summit here seeking to avert a damaging rift between African nations and their wealthy cousins over how to deal with Zimbabwe and its isolated President Robert Mugabe.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, making her first visit to Nigeria since independence in 1960, will formally open the four-day gathering and host President Olusegun Obasanjo is hoping leaders will move beyond Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth and forge through a wide-ranging agenda.

"President Obasanjo does not want the issue of Zimbabwe to dominate the summit, there are so many other issues that matter," Obasanjo's spokeswoman Remi Oyotold AFP.

But President Joachim Chissano of Mozambique, current president of the African Union, re-

opened the debate by regretting Mugabe's absence and calling for him to be readmitted to the global body of mostly former British colonies.

"We are disappointed that Mugabe is not here. We think that things will go for the better. Next time, hopefully he will be with us. We don't think that isolation is the best way if we want change in any country," he said.

Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon admitted that member states had not changed their positions significantly in recent months but said he felt they would agree to insist on further progress in Zimbabwe before ending its isolation.

Zimbabwe was expelled from the Commonwealth in March last year after Mugabe was re-elected in a poll marred by violence and fraud, and the veteran leader has pointedly not been invited to this weekend's meeting.

McKinnon said most

Commonwealth leaders want to see real progress in talks between Mugabe's ZANU-PF party and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) on finding a plan to rebuild democracy in a country riven by political and economic turmoil and menaced by famine.

But such a reconciliation seems a far-off proposition, and the summit could still be marred by a split between some African countries seeking a more gentle tone, and the tough line of the so-called "white Commonwealth".

Lower-level ministers are preparing a report on suspension of both Zimbabwe and Pakistan for the meeting of 40 heads of state and government and 12 top-level national representatives.

McKinnon said that while Pakistan was "very busy building democracy again" Zimbabwe had not got much closer to satisfying

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CNG conversion looks set to miss Dec deadline

RAFIQ HASAN

The government's move to convert all petrol-powered public vehicles into compressed natural gas (CNG)-run ones is not progressing because of opposition from drivers who pilfer fuel.

Many driver and employees earn a lot of money every month selling fuel from government vehicles at several points in Dhaka and its suburbs in collusion with local gangs, official sources said.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in a recent letter to secretaries and heads of government organisations and agencies expressed dissatisfaction at slow progress in CNG conversion.

The letter referred to a previous order that gave the December 31 deadline for the conversion.

Fourteen of 450 government vehicles have so far been converted into CNG-powered ones, while most of several thousand others under autonomous and semi-

autonomous bodies and development projects still remain unconverted.

The principal secretary to the prime minister in the letter asked all ministries, departments, directorates, government and semi-government organisations and autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies to go for quick conversion.

The letter mentioned that the government issued orders to the

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Prayer Timings		
December 6		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-15	5-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-15	5-21
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

2,500 Bodo rebels to surrender today

AFP, Guwahati

One of the main rebel groups fighting Indian rule in northeastern Assam will disband this weekend under a peace accord that grants autonomy to the Bodo tribe, officials said yesterday.

Indian Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani is expected to attend the mass surrender by the 2,500 militants of the Bodo Liberation Tigers today in

Kokrajhar district, 235km west of Assam's capital Guwahati.

"It could be the beginning of a new era of peace and hope in Assam," the state's leader, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, told AFP.

At least six other ethnic separatist groups continue to fight in Assam, where more than 10,000 people have been killed in insurgency in the past two decades.

At least 2,000 deaths have been attributed to the campaign of the

Bodo Liberation Tigers, which was formed in 1996 and is blamed for several explosions on trains.

But unlike most rebel groups, the Bodo Liberation Tigers were not fighting for outright secession from India but for a separate administration for the Bodo tribe, which accounts for 1.6 million out of Assam's 26 million people.

A peace agreement signed in February between the rebels and the Indian government establishes

the Bodoland Territorial Council under which Bodos will be granted executive and legislative powers in parts of the state.

Several top rebel leaders will be sworn in Saturday as members of the council.

"The challenge before us is immense as we have to work for the overall uplift of the Bodo community from now onwards," rebel chief Hagrama Basumaty said.

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