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## Bush wants to get rid of Arafat

Senior Hamas leader detained, Palestinian houses demolished

AFP, Jerusalem

US President George W Bush told an Israeli journalist that "we must get rid of" Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, the mass-circulation Yediot Aharonot daily said yesterday.

Bush's comments came in a brief exchange with the paper's correspondent during a Christmas drinks party in Washington, several hours after a keynote speech by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon Thursday in which he outlined plans

for unilateral disengagement from peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

The US government has boycotted Arafat with Bush accusing the veteran leader of failing the Palestinian people. Israel has also shunned the 74-year-old, branding him an absolute obstacle to peace and confining him to his West Bank headquarters for more than two years.

Israel's security cabinet approved

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## Israel mulls Iran attack

Arab states push for Israel to disarm

AGENCIES, Undated

Arab states have responded to Libya's pledge to abandon its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes by demanding that Israel to do the same.

Egypt said Israel should elimi-

nate all its weapons of mass destruction, while Iran said Israel should be forced to follow Libya's example.

Israel has never confirmed that it has nuclear weapons, but is widely believed to possess dozens of nuclear warheads.

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## Dhaka rebuts Delhi's rebel camp claim

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh again dismissed reported Indian allegation of insurgency camps in its territory and said the government would swing into prompt action if there is any information about any terrorists or insurgents here.

"There is no room for any kind of terrorist or insurgent in our soil... From day one, we have never allowed any terrorist as we can ill afford this," Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan told reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday afternoon.

Referring to current crackdown on Indian insurgents in Bhutan by the Bhutanese government, he said there were recognised camps of insurgents in Bhutan over the years. And the Bhutanese government

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## BNP men's attack foils AL's Munshiganj council

50 hurt, opposition workers try to break Section 144, BDR help sought

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The triennial council of Munshiganj district Awami League could not be held yesterday as ruling BNP men put up barricades and attacked opposition workers, leaving at least 50 of them injured despite Section 144 clamped to forestall violence.

The attacks were carried out as the AL men tried to break roadblocks to force their way to the council venue, Baur Math, in town where BNP's student chapter Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) timed a protest rally to coincide with AL's programme.

The district administration sought two platoons of Bangladesh Rifles personnel late last night as the wave of violence sparked tempers in town.

Central leaders of the AL failed to reach the town as BNP men halted their cars by placing logs and parking trucks on the road to the council venue close to Bahu Mukhi High School.

Several hours into the roadblock, the frontline AL leaders including Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Abdul Mannan drove back to Dhaka after they addressed an instant rally

at Sipahpara crossing.

Of the injured, Yunus Ahmed Khan, 48, an AL leader, was stabbed and sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with severe wounds.

His family said a gang of 12 beat and stabbed him as he reached the local BNP office shortly before 11:00am.

Section 144 was slapped two days ago when JCD's local unit scheduled its rally at the same venue to protest the stabbing of one of its leader allegedly by activists of AL's student wing Bangladesh Chhatra League on Friday.

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## Iraqi pipelines, storage tanks set on fire

AP, Baghdad

Insurgents attacked pipelines and an oil storage depot in three parts of Iraq, setting fires that blazed for hours and lost millions of gallons of oil, officials and media reported Sunday, as the country faced a critical fuel shortage.

Rebels firing rocket-propelled grenades hit storage tanks in southern Baghdad on Saturday, creating fires that burned about 2.6 million gallons of gasoline, said Issam Jihad, a spokesman for the Oil Ministry.

Also Saturday, a pipeline exploded in the al-Mashhad area 15 miles north of Baghdad, in what Jihad called "an act of sabotage."

"The explosion led to the destruction of (part of) the pipeline and to the leakage of vast quantities of oil products," Jihad said.

He said he had no immediate information about another reported attack on oil pipelines in northern Iraq.

Al-Jazeera television reported Sunday that large fires were burning following attacks Saturday on four pipelines in the area between Tikrit and Beji. But an AP stringer reported seeing four fires blazing from

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PHOTO: STAR

Paltan Maidan has been mindlessly dug out for 150 makeshift toilets on the occasion of Islami Chhatra Shibir's conference from December 29, which threatens to create a public nuisance.

## DFP ads go to fake media

JS committee to probe fund embezzlement allegations

SHAKHAWAT LITON

A parliamentary body has accused the Department of Films and Publications (DFP) of misappropriating public funds by allocating advertisements to fake or nearly non-existent media.

The parliamentary standing committee on the information ministry yesterday was irked when the DFP disclosed to it that there are 730 daily and weekly newspapers across the country.

The committee formed a three-member sub-committee to probe the allegations against the DFP and asked it to submit a report to the next meeting.

The sub-committee will also keep an eye on the DFP activities and try to put its "fingers on the reasons behind its failure to func-

tion effectively. The standing committee accused the DFP of failing to clamp down on what it said was the screening of indecent advertisements specially on electronic media. It asked the ministry to immediately rein such adverts.

It also asked the ministry to submit a report specifying the laws already in place to control indecent advertisements, as the officials of the ministry pointed out that indecent advertisement cannot be controlled as long as loopholes in the laws remain.

The DFP submitted a report to the committee, which said that of the 730 daily, weekly and fortnightly newspapers, as many as 146 national dailies are published from the capital city alone, while 213

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## TIB rejects Sircar's remark

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prof Mozafer Ahmad, trustee member of the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), rejected the speaker's remark on a TIB report, saying the report is based on facts.

"We want the parliament function effectively. So, we have made the report on the basis of information. We did not mention anything out of information," Prof Mozafer told The Daily Star yesterday.

On the speaker's remark, he said, "Since we are not accustomed to practising democracy, we can't tolerate criticism."

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar Saturday dismissed the report released on Thursday on the Jatiya Sangsad as baseless.

On the speaker's threat of putting the TIB in the dock, Mozafer said, "We will be in the dock if we insult the Jatiya Sangsad. But we haven't done anything like that."

The TIB is willing to discuss the matter with the speaker. It did not go for a discussion before the publication because the report was prepared

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## Mirpur double murder Stranded Pakistanis threaten siege to home ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Stranded Pakistanis in Mirpur yesterday threatened to lay siege to the home ministry if police failed to arrest in three days the killers of a salt trader and his son, shot dead in Saturday's morning rampage.

The threat came from a rally, staged by the Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC) amid frayed tempers in protest at the killings of Fakhruddin Ahmed and his school-age son Miraj in Pallabi.

The gory episode that played out during breakfast of the family ended in three minutes and the killers walked away -- unchallenged by a crowd of locals.

The Stranded Pakistanis' Youth Rehabilitation Movement called a half-day hartal for yesterday in Mirpur section-11, but backed out

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## 20,000 bulldozed out of city slum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Housing and Building Research Institute (HBRI) yesterday bulldozed about 20,000 people out of their shanties in Kalyanpur in an eviction drive that prompted protest from rights groups and political leaders.

Two bulldozers rolled into the slum about 2:00pm with back-ups from about 300 policemen led by a magistrate and smashed the shanties on 53 acres where the slum dwellers were living for 20 years.

"I have to pass nights out in the open with my family," said Ramiz Uddin, who migrated to Dhaka before the Liberation War after he lost his house to river erosion in Munshiganj.

Ramiz alleged that the authorities did not issue any prior notice and announced the eviction drive only yesterday that caught the slum

dwellers off-guard.

"The government should rehabilitate us as we have no other place to live in. They forced us into the streets," said Nargis, one of the angry women, who filled the nearby road.

But Rafiqul Islam, director of the HBRI under the housing and public works ministry, said the HBRI owned the land, adding "We have served notices on the slum dwellers and announced our eviction decision before."

Rafiqul, who was present at the site, told The Daily Star that a set of people built illegal houses on government land, rented them out to slum dwellers and pocketed money.

"We have demarcated 53 acres owned by the government to build HBRI infrastructure," Rafiqul said adding, the demolition might continue today.

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## PM sits with top aides on JS issues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP has moved to resolve some crucial issues including reviving the reserved seats for women in the Jatiya Sangsad and bringing amendments to the constitution.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had an unscheduled meeting on Saturday with her six top policymakers -- Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, LGRD and Co-operatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Health Minister Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister

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## State deptt lauds Dhaka for religious freedom, critical of minority rights

UNB, Dhaka

The US praised Bangladesh for generally allowing its citizens to freely practice their religion of choice, but criticised its police forces for often being "slow to assist members of religious minorities who have been victims of crime."

The State Department made this observation in its fifth annual inter-

national religious freedom report that was released recently by its Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

"Police, who generally are ineffective in upholding law and order, often are slow to assist members of religious minorities who have been victims of crimes," the report said in its chapter on Bangladesh.

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