



Army men install Bailey bridges on the Turag yesterday so that devotees can cross the river during the three-day Biswa Ijtema, scheduled to start on January 27 in Tongi. PHOTO: STAR

5-tier security planned for Biswa Ijtema

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law enforcers will set a five-layer checking system on Biswa Ijtema ground in Tongi to keep at bay troublemakers during the second largest congregation of the Muslims beginning on the bank of the Turag on January 27.

A 22,000-strong force from police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Bangladesh Rifles, Armed Police Battalion and ansar will be deployed during the three-day congregation.

Besides checking devotees at five points, there will be patrolling on the roads and waterway and choppers will hover to ward off any subversive activities.

"We're going to take extra security measures for obvious reasons," State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar told reporters yesterday. He however did not detail the reasons as he came out of a meeting on law and order during Biswa Ijtema.

Every individual will have to go through checking at five points before entering the Khitta (a block on the Ijtema ground). There will be as many as 24 such blocks on the ground.

"There will be a normal checking at the outer periphery of the ground, checking at different checkpoints, random checking on the road to a Khitta and double checking by police and Rab at

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14-party demands removal of CEC, new commissioners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 14-party opposition yesterday staged demonstrations in the capital and elsewhere in the country demanding immediate removal of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and the two newly appointed election commissioners.

Several thousand opposition activists gathered at Muktangan in the city with banners and placards and chanted slogans for immediate resignation of the CEC and new election commissioners Justice Mahfuzur Rahman and SM Zakaria.

The opposition combine marched in a procession after a brief rally at Muktangan to the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh through Paltan intersection, Bijoy Nagar and Kakrail intersection.

Awami League General Secretary and 14-party convenor Abdul Jalil said they would not allow an election under the incumbent CEC and until their demands for electoral reforms are met.

He urged the people to forge a united movement to oust the BNP-Jamaat-led government to put an end to the coalition's "misrule".

"We'll never take part in the election until the government meets our demands for reforms in

the caretaker government system and Election Commission and removes the CEC and two politically appointed commissioners," Jalil said.

"Not only us, the people will also refrain from taking part in any election of conspiracy," Jalil said. "The CEC must resign and the voter roll must be according to the High Court directives."

Jalil said when they are demonstrating for the reforms, the prime minister appointed such a 'controversial person' as the CEC. The CEC has turned the EC into 'a centre for political gossips' by ignoring the HC directives, he added.

He urged the people and opposition activists to make the countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal on January 22 and a rally the next day a success. He also called upon all to join the long march towards Dhaka on February 5.

Bimol Biswas, Abdus Samad, Abdur Razzak, Matia Chowdhury, Pankaj Bhattacharya, Zakir Hossain, Obaidul Quader, Nurul Islam, Mukul Bose, Mofizul Islam Khan Kamal, Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya, among others, attended the demonstration.

RAJSHAHI

The 14-party took out a procession and held a rally in Shaheb Bazar zero point in Rajshahi city

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NEW LADEN TAPE

Attacks on US being prepared

AFP, Dubai

al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden warned that new attacks are being prepared on the United States, according to an audiotape attributed to him and broadcast on Al-Jazeera television yesterday.

Bin Laden had previously not been heard of since a December 27, 2004 audiotape in which he anointed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Iraq's most wanted man, as al-Qaeda's leader in the war-torn country.

In December last year, Al-Jazeera aired a videotape it said dated back to September showing al-Qaeda number two Ayman al-Zawahiri claiming that bin Laden was still alive and leading "jihad" or holy war against the West.

US govt wants Dhaka to respond vigorously to religious violence

Says Nicholas Burns

UNB, Dhaka

US Undersecretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns said the US government wants the Bangladesh government to respond vigorously to violence and religious extremism.

"In Bangladesh, we'd like to see the government to respond vigorously to the challenge of violence and of religious extremism that have been all too evident in Bangladesh over the last several months," he told the press at the American Centre in Mumbai on Wednesday.

Burns, now in India as part of his South Asia tour, said, "We find India to be a very effective and very reliable partner in trying to work together to promote stability in South Asia."

He said, "Both of us are concerned about the situation in Nepal. Neither of us wants to see a return

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India, US talks nuke cooperation

PTI, New Delhi

India and the US yesterday held talks in New Delhi on implementation of the July 18 nuclear deal besides various other issues of mutual concern.

Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran and US Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns held restricted meeting followed by a delegation-level meeting, official sources said.

Apart from discussions on the road-map for implementation of the nuclear cooperation agreement, the meeting was also expected to take up Iran's nuclear issue.

Ahead of the two-day meeting, Burns said the two countries had "ventured into a unique international diplomacy in our bilateral atomic relations."

He said in Mumbai on Wednesday that India and the US

have committed to try and achieve civil nuclear agreement between the two countries."

According to him, it would take around six to eight months to "decide on how best to proceed" and put that into a bilateral programme that President George W Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh could agree upon finally as the way ahead.

At the last meeting between Saran and Burns in Washington in December, the Indian side had unveiled its plan of separating civilian and military nuclear establishments as required under the deal. The plan would be put up before the US Congress for endorsement.

New Delhi expects a response from Washington to its plan at the meeting.

The Prime Minister has maintained that the deal was based on

"strict reciprocity" as per which India will present its plan for separation and simultaneously the Bush administration should approach the Congress for endorsement.

The US government has been insisting that it would approach the Congress when it felt India's plan was "credible".

Burns said on Wednesday that apart from the nuclear issue, the US was also keen towards agricultural research, energy needs, infrastructure development space and higher education.

"We want to explore whether both the governments could do more in agricultural research with combined involvement of our universities and Indian technical institutes," he said.

Significantly, prior to the meeting, several US MPs have voiced support for the deal.

11-party won't take part in polls under present EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The left 11-party will not participate in the next general election under the present Election Commission (EC) as, it observes, the appointments of the new election commissioners have destroyed the possibility of a fair election taking place.

In a resolution adopted at a meeting yesterday, the left leaning 11-party described the appointments as a shameful effort of the BNP-Jamaat alliance to politicise the EC.

The meeting held at Workers Party office also observed that the commission has been turned into a 'nationalist EC'.

The real character of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz has been exposed now with the new appointments, the resolution said, adding: "This all is being done to implement the ruling alliance's blueprint for election engineering."

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia along with BNP top brass offers munajat at the grave of party founder and late president Ziaur Rahman on his 70th birth anniversary yesterday. PHOTO: PID

Bar sends resolution to president for CEC's removal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) yesterday forwarded a copy of its meeting resolution to the president urging to form the Supreme Judicial Council to remove the chief election commissioner (CEC) for 'gross misconduct' over preparing voter list.

"We have sent a copy of Wednesday's meeting resolution to the president and requested him to take action against the CEC and also against two other election commissioners through forming the Supreme Judicial Council," SCBA Secretary M Enayetur Rahim told reporters yesterday.

"We hope the president will

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CTG PORT

Probe body finds seized guns 'fake'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A probe committee in its report on the recovery of 11 guns at the Chittagong Port said the guns were decoration objects and they were not real firearms.

However, Deputy Director (Security) Lt Commander Shahed Karim, head of the three-member Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) probe committee, did not mention who were behind the import of the goods with false declaration.

The committee put forward some suggestions to strengthen the port's security to make sure such incidents do not occur in future.

Sources said the committee in its suggestions asked the authorities to introduce scanning system of the containers and stressed for enhancing surveillance and increasing manpower in key areas of the port.

Prayer Timing		
January 20		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-05
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-43	5-47
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Nepal cracks down on politicians

Cellphone service snapped, 70 detained ahead of anti-king rally; EU, India worried

AFP, Kathmandu/ New Delhi

Nepal's royalist government yesterday rounded up 70 activists and cut mobile phone services in a major crackdown aimed at thwarting a planned mass rally against the king, officials said.

"A total of 70 people have been arrested from around Kathmandu," a senior police officer said on condition of anonymity, one day before the protest.

The arrests came on the orders of the Home Ministry, the officer said.

The detainees are being held at a police training camp and various district police offices around the capital, he added.

No charges have been brought and the officer said he had "no clue" how long they would remain in detention.

Mobile phone operators said they cut off services early Thursday in accordance with a government order. Shrish Shumshere Rana, Minister for Information and Communications, confirmed the shutdown.

"The government is heighten-

ing its preparation for agitation, as the Home Ministry has said that there is a high possibility of violence during the demonstration on Friday," the minister told AFP.

Rana declined to say how long mobile telephone coverage would be cut. "We will see the situation and act accordingly."

Leaders of seven opposition parties sidelined when King Gyanendra seized power nearly a year ago called the rally to demand a restoration of democracy and to publicise their call for a boycott of municipal elections due on February 8, which they have labelled a "sham".

The rally was announced in defiance of a ban on public gatherings announced earlier in the week by the government, which also imposed a late-night curfew on the capital Kathmandu.

The government said it feared the protest would be infiltrated by Maoist rebels, who carried out a series of deadly attacks around the capital last weekend.

Maoist leader Prachanda said in a statement Wednesday the rebels

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SUNDARBANS

Criminals rule as forest outposts undermanned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Forest guards in the Sundarbans with undermanned outposts and outdated arms are struggling to rein in the law and order situation in the area as they continue to fight against well-equipped criminals and pirates.

A senior official of the Sundarbans Forest Division (SFD) alleged that the rangers of 77 forest

outposts are also not provided with adequate arms. There are only 200 obsolete rifles for the 36 forest outposts under the western wing, he added.

There is also a severe shortage of manpower as only three-four personnel can be assigned to guard each outpost, he said adding that they are also constantly threatened with attacks by groups of 20 or

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