

Inviting Allies a mistake, say Saudi officials

CANBERRA, Feb 8: Several senior Saudi government officials believe it was a mistake to invite Allied forces into their country because their presence was a threat to Saudi culture, the President of the World Council of Churches said today, reports Reuters.

"I was told by the Saudis that they do not want the Allied presence in their country's Metropolitan Paulus Mar Gregorius of India told a news conference at the council's seventh assembly.

"They had asked for it because they were threatened by an invasion by Iraq but now they are convinced that was not the original intention and that they made a mistake but they cannot say that", Gregorius said.

Gregorius, from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India, said he visited

Saudi Arabia and held talks with the country's Deputy Foreign Minister in November.

The visit was part of a Middle East tour which also involved talks with government officials in Iraq and Jordan.

Gregorius said the message he gleaned from his Middle East visit was that many Arabs believed Iraq was becoming too strong in the region and needed to be cut down to size.

"They see Iraq after the eight year war with Iran emerging as the most technologically advanced nation among the Arabs and militarily also the most powerful," he said.

Many Arabs believed the United States used the Gulf crisis to support its armaments industry and to gain a new military presence in the region.

"It is true the end of the cold war brought down the demand in the market for armaments and this in turn has affected the U.S. economy substantially. The way out of the recession was to increase the market for armaments. That purpose has been served by this [conflict]," Gregorius said.

"The Allied Powers, having had dominions in that area in the past, are anxious to get into the act and be there in the Middle East as a major actor and to crush Iraq."

Gregorius called for an immediate Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait linked with an Allied withdrawal from Saudi Arabia and the convening of a Middle East conference.

He said the conference would tackle not only the Iraq-Kuwait problem but also the question of a Palestinian homeland.



Leaders of the Sammito Sangskriti Jote on Friday laying wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar to mark the beginning of their 12-day programme on Ekushey. —Star photo

The Midnight File

10,000 Albanian students strike

TI RANA, Feb 8: Some 10,000 Albanian students went on strike for a second day Thursday calling on the government to resign after failing to meet their requests for better conditions. Students told Agence France-Press that they were short of proper food, heating and lighting.

Nine killed in Punjab

CHANDIGARH, Feb 8: Nine persons, including three militants were killed, three militants arrested and a huge quantity of explosives and weapons was seized in Punjab since last night. Mr D S Mangat, DGIC Punjab, today said he was confident that with the people's moral support, security forces would continue their fight against militants with greater vigour and commitment, reports PTI.

Two shot dead in Assam

GUWAHATI, Feb 8: Two persons were shot dead and a police sub-inspector was injured in different incidents in Assam during the past 48 hours. Official sources said that the Vice president of the Assam Botabari unit, Mr Deb Nath Basumatary, was gunned down by unidentified assailants while he was coming out of his residence Thursday, reports PTI.

Saudis want Indian sacks

NEW DELHI, Feb 8: Saudi Arabia wants to buy three million pieces of jute sacking from India for making sandbags to reinforce bunkers against Iraqi attacks, a newspaper reported Thursday. But the Marxist government of West Bengal state, India's leading jute producer, has opposed the \$80,000 Dollar sale on grounds that it would harm India's neutral status in the Middle East war, the Telegraph Daily said, reports AFP.

Poland allows German convoy

BERLIN, Feb 8: German army trucks with humanitarian aid for the Soviet Union were finally allowed to cross through Poland today after a three-week hold-up at the German-Polish border. The first 25 of the 200-truck convoy were allowed through this morning. They are traveling with a Soviet military escort and loaded with medication and food for distribution by the Russian Orthodox Church, reports AFP.

Fire destroys Colombian forest

BOGOTA, Feb 8: Fire is sweeping through a world-renowned Colombian nature reserve, destroying thousands of hectares of forest which are a haven for many rare animals and plants. The fire, which began last weekend, has now destroyed 72,000 hectares (about 178,000 acres), or about one-tenth of the vast Sierra de la Macarena reserve, and is still burning, officials said, reports Reuters.

Roh sacks key aide

SEOUL, Feb 8: President Roh Tae-woo on Friday fired a key aide in connection with a multi-million Dollar housing scandal. Roh dismissed Chang Byung-jo, 52, a presidential aide in charge of cultural and sports affairs, for alleged involvement in the scandal. A number of government, ruling and opposition politicians also were implicated, reports AP.

Jamuna funds

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1975 autocracy set in, she added.

Bangabandhu took up massive programmes to reform the country and rehabilitate the freedom fighters. He also planned various development projects for national uplift. But the post-75 governments misappropriated the projects' funds, the AL chief alleged and assured that if her party was elected to power all the projects would be materialised.

She reiterated that the people had got the opportunity to exercise franchise under an open atmosphere after long 15 years and called to vote for her party nominees to ensure their basic rights under a parliamentary democracy.

Chaired by the local AL president Motahar Hossen Talukder, the meeting was also addressed by Mohammad Nasim AL publicity secretary.

Forty one leaders of Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD-Mahboob) and Jatya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu), who joined Awami League were also present at the meeting.

The leaders who joined AL recently include Abdur Rouf Pata, Advocate Bimol Das, Sirajul Islam Khan and Golam Kibria of BSD (Mahboob) and Abdul Kuddus and Latifur Rahman of JSD (Inu).

Earlier Sheikh Hasina also addressed rallies at Shahjapur, Ulapara, Salonga and Kamar Khanda. The AL chief also visited the major of the peer of Enayetur.

BSS adds: Sheikh Hasina said her party would take realistic measures to save the country's weavers including those of North Bengal who were on the verge of ruination because of the wrong policy adopted by Zia-Ershad regimes during the last 15 years.

She said because of the wrong policies and corruption of Zia-Ershad regimes the Bangladesh had turned into a den of smugglers leaving be-

hind the weaver community to an unequal competition. Most of the traditional and skilled weavers of the country were forced to quit their ancestral profession because of multifarious constraints created in the last 15 years, she added.

She said Zia-Ershad regimes achieved their coterie interest, sold out thousands of mills and factories in the name of disinvestment at nominal prices. Over fifty-five per cent of the denationalised units were totally closed now and thousands of workers had been rendered jobless. In this connection, she asked for immediate opening of Sirajganj Spinning and Cotton Mills which was kept closed by the owners causing untold sufferings to hundreds of workers.

Turning to the agriculture, Sheikh Hasina said considering the plight of the peasants Bangabandhu waived taxes on 25 bighas of land which was later revoked by Ziaur Rahman who imposed taxes on even one bigha of land. She said the commitment of BNP on the eve of election to waive land tax on 25 bighas did fit in their lips. "Insha Allah we will waive land tax upto 25 bighas, exempt agricultural loans upto 5 thousand taka and write off interests of agricultural loans upto ten thousand taka," she reiterated.

Sounding a serious note of warning against those who traded in religion, Sheikh Hasina said the nation did not forget their role in the country's War of Liberation. She said Jamaat-e-Islami by forming Al Badr and Razakar collaborating with the Punjab occupation forces in killing, looting, raping and arson.

She said that Awami League would uphold the policy of secularism. The secular concept was based on Holy Quran which dictated that every one would perform his or her respective religion.

Tk 18 cr ADB credit for effluent treatment

Mostafa Kama Majumder

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will give Bangladesh Taka 18 crore (five million US dollars) as credit for controlling industrial pollution.

The money will be disbursed among industrial units for installation of effluent treatment facilities, a Ministry of Environment and Forest source says.

The credit is part of the bank's Taka 400 crore (over 100 million US dollars) Second Industrial Programme loan for Bangladesh, the source says.

Disbursement of the funds will be preceded by an ADB-financed study which will determine the rules.

The source said under the same loan funds will also be

made available for relocation of some polluting industries. To start with a total of 150 tanneries will be shifted from Dhaka city to some suburban sites.

The ADB credit for pollution control is mainly to cater for the needs of some major industries which have failed to install effluent treatment plants despite repeated reminders.

The Department of Environment, identified a total of 903 polluting industrial units in 1986 and asked those industries, through a gazette notification, to take corrective measures in three years. Few have complied until now.

Indiscriminate effluent discharge has already heavily polluted rivers flowing beside some industrial towns-the

Buriganga in Dhaka, the Sitakohya in Narayanganj and the Karnaphuli in Chittagong.

ADB is helping Bangladesh also for strengthening institutions to ensure environmentally sound and sustainable development. Under the 'Urban Infrastructure Improvement Project' about Taka eight crore has already been provided for developing environmental standards to control discharges from textile mills, tanneries, chemical and other industries.

The Department of Environment is being strengthened by inducting more scientists, and building more laboratories and other physical facilities with funds from the project, the source said.

Secularists

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and shouted slogans to welcome the BNP chairperson as she arrived here from Comilla town.

A large number of people, including women and children, were also seen standing on roof-top of buildings around the crowded meeting venue to listen to Begum Zia's speech.

Elaborating her party's election manifesto to the people, Begum Zia said her party would introduce market economy to ensure fair competition for achieving development and prosperity.

She said her party always remained faithful to people's cause and would never cease struggle until restoration of a people's government.

Criticising "talk talks" of Awami League, Begum Zia said "BNP's programme is clear-cut: it pledges only what it can fulfil."

She blasted the proponents of secularism saying the government which was in power immediately after the independence had carried out repression on the members of Hindu community and their temples were damaged.

"People still remember those who defiled the temples and grabbed properties of our Hindu brothers through the Enemy Property Act."

Addressing another public meeting at Muradnagar, Begum Zia said any delay in recovering illegal arms and arresting the armed terrorists would harm the country and might jeopardise the coming elections.

She cautioned the interim government that some hoodlums, against whom specific charges have been brought, were still moving freely.

"They are planning to foil the election by using black money and illegal weapons."

Two withdraw in favour of AL candidates

From Our Correspondent

KISHOREGANJ, Feb 8: Two candidates from the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) in the ensuing parliamentary polls today withdrew their candidatures in favour of their Awami League candidates in the district.

Earlier, they were nominated by the Gonolantrik Oikya Jote comprising 8-party and the 5-party alliances.

Advocate Shah Azizul Haq announced his withdrawal at a press conference at 7.30 pm at the local press club in favour of AL nominee Advocate Fazlur Rahman of Kishoreganj-3 constituency.

The other CPB candidate Advocate Amirul Islam in a statement announced his withdrawal in support of the Dr Mizanul Haq.

Both the local CPB leaders said that they withdrew their candidatures with a view to defeating the autocratic, communal and reactionary forces.

3 Ansars

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Dhaka with passengers and armed Ansars who were on duty in the launch. At a place near Lalkharabad station, a group of armed mercenaries, who were travelling in the launch in disguise, attacked the Ansars on duty and opened fire on them.

During exchange of fire between the Ansars and the mercenaries, three Ansars were killed on the spot while ten others including four Ansars sustained bullet injuries. After the attack, the mercenaries escaped from the launch with the looted arms and ammunition.

The injured Ansars Muntir Hussain, Habibur Rahman, Ghulam Mostafa, Abul Kashem and another passenger have been admitted at the Mehendiganj upazila hospital while other injured persons have been released after the first aid.

Ershad

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Ershad be sent to Dhaka Central Jail from his present house internment. While addressing a public meeting at Mirpur Shah Ali Girls High School on Wednesday Dr. Kamal said Ershad who is now an undertrial prisoner facing two specific criminal cases, cannot be interned in a house. People want to see Ershad in jail, not interned in a luxurious house, Dr. Kamal told the meeting.

The Gulshan villa was turned into a sub-jail later and brought under the administrative control of the jail authorities.

With regard to the renovation of Dhaka Central Jail the official further said a two-storey building with a total space of 12,000 square feet was demolished as it was nearly 200 years old. A tin-roofed building was erected in that place to ease congestion in the jail. The work, carried out by the Public Works Department, (PWD), on an emergency basis is nearly complete. The jail source said 1000 prisoners out of nearly 5000 in the Dhaka Central Jail had already been released in pursuance of the government decision in the backdrop of jail riots. The jail can accommodate 2400 prisoners. The school building inside the jail was also reconstructed, the source stated.

Satellite

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Board last year.

T & T Board sources say the contract was awarded to the Cable and Wireless Company of UK without any tender. The deal was made through United Traders Company (UTC), a Bangladesh firm assigned to work as local associate of the foreign company. A local consulting firm was also given consultancy job by the foreign company without floating any tender from among the pre-qualified consultants, the sources say. Preliminary drawings, design and tender documents for the proposed complex have been finalised.

The arbitrary decision was made so hastily that the project remained a top secret one for months and even insiders in T & T Board did not know anything about the deal till the fall of the past regime.

A highly placed T & T official told The Daily Star the British company signed a 19 year agreement with the Board to run the satellite station. Although it is a T & T project, it was placed before the Board of Investment (BOI) as a joint venture project with 51 per cent share to be owned by the British company and the rest by Bangladesh.

Salahuddin Quader escapes attempt on life

CHITTAGONG, Feb 8:

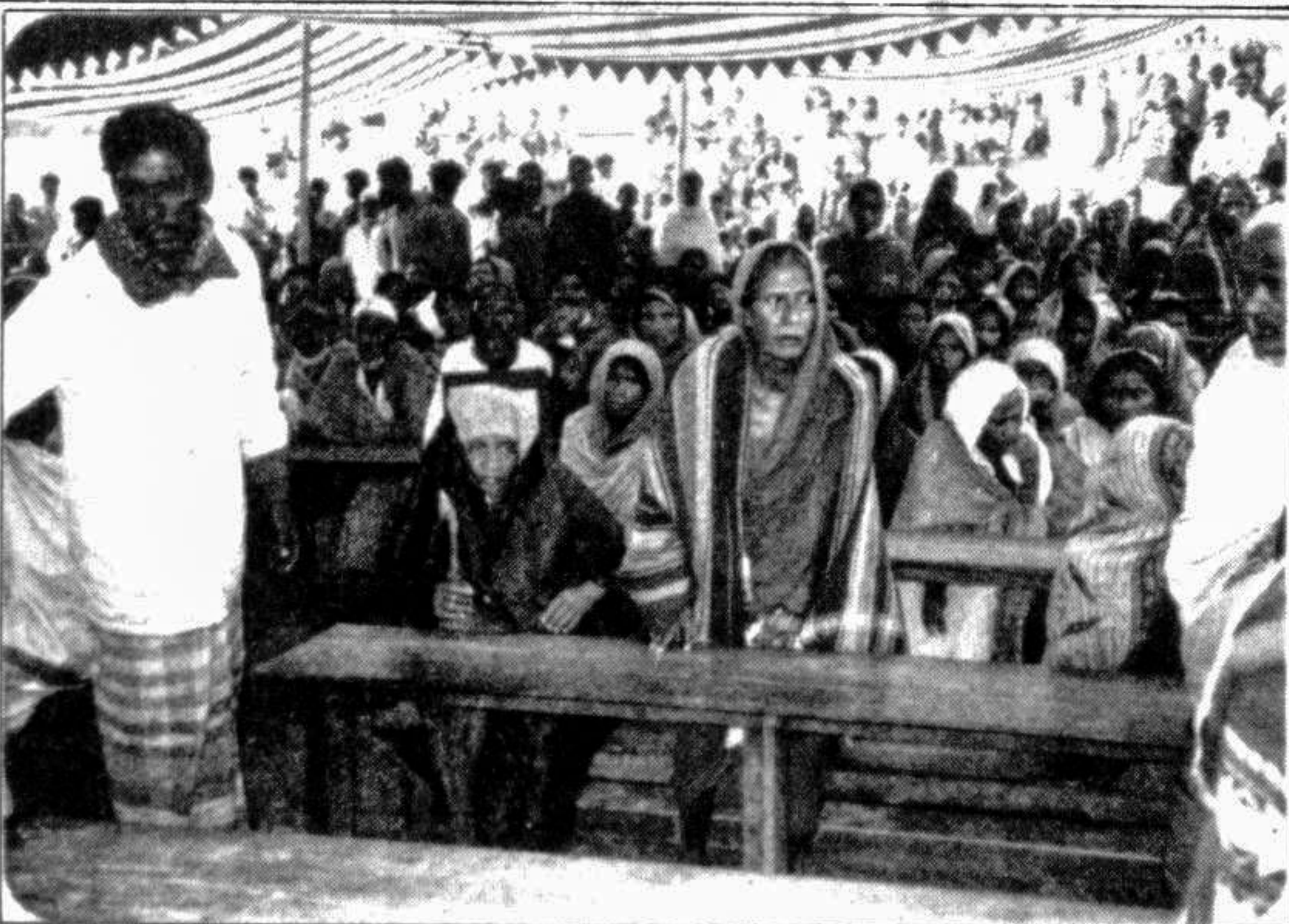
National Democratic Party (NDP) leader Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury escaped an alleged assassination attempt when gunmen opened fire on his car near Amirhat under Raosan upazila here this afternoon, NDP and police sources said, reports BSS.

Three NDP workers received minor injuries in the firing. Salahuddin Chowdhury was going to address a public meeting at Yasin High School ground at Amirhat, Raosan while the gunmen allegedly fired on his car. The attackers fled when NDP supporters returned fire. The later addressed the meeting, party sources said.

NDP lodged an FIR with Raosan police in this connection. Investigation will start soon, police said.

NDP supporters allegedly damaged two election camps of Awami League at Bachayar Dakan and Jalalhat.

Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury is contesting from two constituencies-Cox's Bazar-1 and Chittagong-6.



Settlers at Shalban cluster village. —Star photo

Settlers fleeing CHT

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Many of them have lost their kith and kins at the hands of the so-called Shantibahini which has been continuing armed line in demand for autonomy since 1974.

Many of the Bangladeshis who are now living in well protected cluster villages have resented the unlawful activities of section of tribals.

This correspondent during his recent visit to Khagrachari met the leaders of the Khagrachari District Non Tribals Welfare Association. In this district the Bangladeshis have been shifted to 53 cluster villages for safety.

As they can not go outside the security ring their earning sources have also shrunk making them dependent on relief supplied by the local administration.

Haji Dost Mohammad Chowdhury president of the local Awami League told this correspondent that the Bangladeshis in the Hill Tracts have become expatriates in their own homeland. Now all activities of the Bangladeshis in the hill region have come to a halt for security reasons.

He said the administration has been providing relief to the Bangalee settlers since 1989 when Shantibahini insurgency was stepped up.

Every family used to get 84 kilos of rice per month which has recently been fixed at 36 kg. There is no sanction of relief after March 1991. This has thrown the non tribals into uncertainty. At present there is also no scheme of rehabilitation of the non-tribals.

He said that constitution allows any citizen to settle anywhere in the country but

Invade Kuwait

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ing impatiently for its decisive battle against all the infidel forces," the radio said.

Commentators say there are growing signs that the Western-Arab coalition is now in the prelude to a land-sea invasion to drive Iraq from the oil Emirate.

US Defence Secretary also said Friday keeping American casualties low would take top priority in deciding when to launch a ground offensive against Iraqi troops in Kuwait.

"That has to be the number one priority, and it will figure very prominently in the recommendations we make to the President," Cheney told reporters travelling with him to Saudi Arabia.

The key element in any decision to launch a ground offensive is the unknown factor—how well are Iraq's battle-hardened divisions enduring the onslaught.

Cheney indicated the United States sought an early

Fresh fighting leaves 38 dead in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Feb 8:

Heavy fighting in Sri Lanka's embattled northeast between government troops and Tamil rebels left at least 38 people, including nine soldiers, dead in separate incidents, officials here said today, reports AFP.

Dozens of guerrillas from the dominant Tamil militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), overwhined a small guard post in Welli Oya region late Thursday.

Police raid

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from Zahurul Haq Hall, a stronghold of Chhatra League (H-A). Amanul Haq Aman was taken into custody and the Chinese axe was seized during the raid at Jasmuddin Hall, police added.

The arrested persons were being interrogated at Ramna police station till last night.

Provosts of the respective halls were present during the raid.

On Tuesday, a 17-member DU delegation, comprising Syndicate members, provosts and student leaders led by Vice-Chancellor Prof Moniruzzaman Miah, called on Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and demanded of him to make the DU campus arms-free before the polls.

The move to clog the campus of arms following firing of gunshots during an inner-party conflict of Awami League's student wing Chhatra League (H-A) of Zahurul Haq Hall on Monday.

US may target Saddam

Another report says:

The United States will target Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his inner circle if the Iraqi leader orders the use of chemical or biological weapons against Allied troops, the Washington Times reported Friday, citing Bush administration officials.