

# Massive crackdown in Assam after massacre

GUWAHATI, India, Dec 8: Army and paramilitary troops launched a massive crackdown in two far eastern Indian states today following the overnight massacre of 30 people by separatist rebels, officials said, reports AFP.

P.C. Saloi, the police chief of Assam state's Tinsukia district, said the operation against the outlawed United Assam Liberation Front (ULFA) guerrillas was also being backed by the regional police force.

Saloi, in charge of the joint crackdown, said the military operations launched late Friday aimed to smash six ULFA strongholds in Assam and in the adjoining state of Arunachal Pradesh, which borders Myanmar.

Saloi described the operation as "massive" but did not elaborate on the number of personnel deployed or its likely duration.

Saloi also said a 10-member ULFA hit-squad from Arunachal Pradesh staged Thursday's massacre in Assam of Hindi-speaking traders.

The bloodletting was the latest in a series of attacks on the migrant business community in Assam which have claimed more than 100 lives in the past six weeks.

Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was in New Delhi on Friday for talks with

Home Minister L.K. Advani and requested security reinforcements to counter the wave of attacks.

"We need additional security forces to curb the violence and also want the central government to initiate dialogue with Bhutan to bust militant camps there," Mahanta said before leaving the state capital Guwahati.

Mahanta's government has also blamed the ULFA for the massacres.

This violence is a deliberate ploy by the ULFA to destabilise the government before the state elections in February," he said, citing intelligence reports that the group was planning further attacks over the New Year period.

Thursday's massacre took place in an isolated, forested region of eastern Assam, where suspected militants waylaid three trucks carrying about 100 Hindi-speaking traders before gunning 30 of them down at close range.

The incident sparked panic within the Marwari business community from the northern Indian state of Rajasthan and people from the eastern state of Bihar, who have been the main targets of the recent campaign.

Both communities control the bulk of trade and commerce in oil and timber-rich Assam, where their presence is long established.



Samajtantrik Sramik Front activists took to the city streets yesterday demanding Eid bonus prior to the festival and trial of those involved in the killing of labourers at Mongla port. -- Star photo

# Maoist rebels shut down thousands of schools across Nepal

KATMANDU, Dec 8: Maoist rebels ordered thousands of schools across Nepal to shut down today after the government failed to meet their deadline for changes in the education system, reports AP.

The closure was enforced by the All Nepal National Free Student Union-Revolutionary, the student wing of the outlawed Nepal Communist Party (Maoists), who want higher government grants for schools, lower fees and a government takeover of private schools.

An estimated 7 million students stayed home Friday as school authorities announced they would close schools for fear of rebels' attack.

"We were compelled to shut down our school due to inadequate security arrangements. The issue should be resolved

through dialogue by the government," said Rajesh Kadka, chairman of the Private and Boarding Schools Organisation of Nepal.

The ANNSFU-Revolutionary had presented Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala with the demands last week, but the government failed to respond by the Thursday deadline set by the rebels.

The group then ordered all schools to shut down, and they complied, because of the rebels' reputation for violence.

"These people have been extorting money from over 90 per cent of the private schools in the capital city, threatening to blow up the schools and have repeatedly physically abused teachers," said the principal of a school in Katmandu, who did not want to be identified.

The Maoist rebels, who model themselves after Peru's Shining Path guerrillas, began a campaign in 1996 to end Nepal's constitutional monarchy and dismantle the feudal structure that remains in parts of the country.

# Gas export before polls: PM

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recruitment of women in active armed forces.

Replying to another question on the population explosion Sheikh Hasina expressed the hope that "globalisation will take that problem away." Globalisation in its truest sense should not have any boundaries, she added.

The Prime Minister requested President Clinton for speedy finalisation of the extradition treaty to bring back three convicted killers of Bangabandhu hiding in the USA. Replying to a question the prime minister said she has requested President Clinton to grant duty and quota-free access of Bangladeshi products to the United States. She also said Bangladesh should have been rewarded much earlier in recognition to its leading role in eliminating child labour.

both New Delhi and Islamabad in 1998 soon after the two countries exploded nuclear bombs in a bid to reduce tension in the region. She said, "Despite globalisation and our open-market policies and liberal investment programmes, the region has been unable to attract capital and foreign investment because of the tension."

Replying to a question on globalisation, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, "We are trying to create an environment that will help participation of most LDCs in globalisation, and reform to attract investment." She, however, said all these measures will not be "effective if developed countries don't allow our products into their markets." The Prime Minister expressed the hope "the US can take the lead in demonstrating a firm and unequivocal commitment to opening markets for exports of the LDCs."

# Tayeb condemned

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decision given to our leader Sheikh Tayeb Rahman in Dhaka," said one of the five leaders who received show cause notices. "Our mission was to stem the rot and still we insist on it within the fold of party. We are not going to take any responsibility for the Mayor's remarks about the party secretary general. He did not make the remarks in our presence," Shaharuzza Martuza further said while speaking on behalf of three of the leaders. He was acquitted in the Ratan Sen murder case during the rule of Khaleda Zia.

According to BNP insiders, leaders of Razzak-Tayeb group have been maintaining link with some local leaders of the ruling party since early this year. The Mayor is a close relative of AL whip Mostapha Rashid Shuja and also of Shaikh Razzak Ali. "If the two leaders do not return to the right path, regretting their anti-party activities in the past, they would have no place in BNP politics here," one insider said.

# Sundarbans

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tion to this effect, the official added. The East Sundarbans will be covered by 2 lakh 33 thousand 239 hectares of land with entire Bagerhat district within its jurisdiction.

Entire Khulna district will fall under the West Sundarbans division with 3,44,016 hectares of land.

The Bay of Bengal will connect both East and West Sundarbans.

# Near

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trouble. Your reverse driving skills may be tested here, as you have to keep reversing until a suitable spot is found for the two vehicles to pass each other without tipping into the ditch.

Further ahead you have two one-vessel ferries over Dhaleswari and Ichhamati rivers. By the time you arrive at Nawabganj you have spent at least three and a half hours for this short distance.

But there may be some good news. The second Buriganga Bridge is fast nearing completion. The government has a project to build a very wide road from Zinzira to link up Maoa road in the south. Only then the long journey from Dhaka to Nawabganj could be shortened considerably.

Thousands of professionals from Nawabganj live in rented houses in Dhaka. If the road communication is improved these people could easily commute everyday from their village homes.

# Dolly Sayantani

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Mohammad Salimullah Sarkar, uncle of the victim, filed a murder case accusing Dolly with Badda Thana. Police later arrested Dolly in connection with the case. After furnishing the bail bond, Dolly was released from the court hazat at about 4 pm.

# Recognition of indigenous people demanded

From Our Correspondent

NETRAKONA, Dec 8: CHT Regional Council Chairman Jotirindro Bodhipriya Larma alias Shantu Larma has called upon the government for constitutional recognition of the indigenous people.

He was addressing a gathering of the Bangladesh Garo Students Forum at Birishri High School ground in Netrakona today.

The former Shantu Bahini chief expressed solidarity with the students who are pressing their demand for constitutional recognition of indigenous citizens.

"Today is the day to launch a greater movement in our favour. I feel very proud that the people of CHT and greater Mymensingh are united today," Shantu Larma told the gathering.

Hindu Boudha Oikya Parishad leader Dr. Neem Chandra Bhoomik, Workers Party leader Rashed Khan Menon, Nirmal Sen, Rafiq Azad, Sanjib Drang and Mamunur Rashed addressed the meeting among others.

# Russian Duma

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381 votes to 51. The idea has provoked anger among liberals and revived memories of the country's bloody history.

The tricolour flag was approved by 342 members of the 450-seat chamber while 343 members backed the double-headed eagle coat of arms. Both symbols date from the Tsarist era.

The rousing anthem, which Putin wants restored with new words, had generated the most controversy. It was originally composed by Alexander Alexandrov in 1943 while much of European Russia was under German occupation. It was personally approved by Communist dictator Josef Stalin.

# Furnace of brick

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of three environmentally pristine villages on the bank of the river Ichhamati.

The licence of the kiln was suspended, then revaluated and again suspension was ordered following demands from the villagers. The Daily Star carried a news item on Thursday under the headline "Stop this destruction of rural Bangladesh Brick kiln destroying villages".

A tense situation is prevailing in the three villages Algechar, Balmantachar and Bakshaganar as Abdus Salam Mia, owner of the 4.5 lakh capacity brick kiln, lit its furnace with logs and coal. Sources in the villages said that in the absence of any official action, angry villagers might stage demonstrations any time leading to untoward incidents.

# US civil rights body takes up Florida's vote irregularities

WASHINGTON, Dec 8: The US Commission on Civil Rights is examining whether black voters in Florida were prevented from voting Nov 7 because of intimidation, discrimination, fraud or other alleged improprieties, reports AP.

The organisation's general counsel, who went to Florida to investigate the allegations, was reporting to the commissioners today. Although the eight-member panel can hold hearings and subpoena witnesses, it has no enforcement power and is considering no action that could affect the presidential race between George W Bush and Al Gore.

"We are as aware as everyone else in the country that there have been allegations about irregularities in the voting...so the question is: Were these simply efficiency issues or were they discrimination issues or were there fraud issues involved?" commission Chairwoman Mary Frances Berry said Wednesday.

The fact-finding agency is independent and bipartisan. Established under the Civil Rights Act of 1957, it investigates complaints of voters being deprived of their rights because of race, colour, religion, sex, age, disability, national origin or because of fraud.

If it finds laws were broken, it refers evidence to the Justice Department, which can prosecute. Justice Department representatives are already in Florida to gather information about alleged voting irregularities, although the department has not started a formal investigation.

Meanwhile Florida's Legislature is convening its Supreme Court deliberating and George W Bush and Al Gore are watching and wondering as America's presidential election adventure nears a climax.

"Obviously, time is getting very short," Gore's lawyer, David Boies, said Thursday as he implored the state's high court to grant the selective manual recounts that could yet revive Gore's hopes of winning the White House.

"We'll see what happens there," Bush said with a seeming nonchalance that belied the stakes. The Florida high court offered no hint of when it would rule, although the seven justices moved with unusual speed a little more than two weeks ago in an earlier recount-related case. This time, if anything, the time pressure is even greater, since Dec 12 is the deadline for appointment of the state's 25 presidential electors.

At the same time, two other judges in the state capital of Tallahassee weighed Democratic requests to throw out thousands of absentee votes, a move that also could tip the balance to Gore. Republicans made clear that they were ready to appeal any unfavourable ruling, possibly returning to a federal appeals court in Atlanta.

"We have always had to prepare for every contingency... We are prepared to file appeals and briefs," Bush attorney Barry Richard said late Thursday on CNN.

The courts aside, the Republican-dominated legislature was beginning a special session in Tallahassee, ready by all accounts to appoint a slate of electors loyal to Bush. The Legislature's heavily outnumbered Democrats charged the Bush campaign was pulling the strings from Texas.

The speaker of the Florida House, Tom Feeney, acknowledged he has received advice from Bush intermediaries but denied the campaign was calling the shots. Such allegations from Democrats were "out of touch" with reality, he said. Depending on the outcome of Gore's appeal, the electors legislation could set up a contest between the two rival Florida states when the Electoral College votes are cast on Dec 18 and then counted in Congress on Jan 6. That, in turn, could ratchet up the controversy even further in the month after an election so close that neither Bush nor Gore had enough electoral votes to win. Florida will make one man the president-elect and the other a loser in one of the closest races in history.

# Release of 15 PCP, HWF men demanded

From Our Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Dec 8: Fahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) and Hill Women's Federation (HWF) jointly held a protest rally and brought out a procession in the port city today demanding unconditional release of their 15 leaders and activists including two central leaders of PCP.

Chaired by HWF chairperson Kabita Chakma, the speakers alleged that leaders and activists were arrested by security forces without any provocation when they gathered to observe the first death anniversary of Mongabe Marma, a tribal leader, at Manikchhari Bilpara in Khagrachhari on December 3.

They also demanded autonomy in greater Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) for permanent peace.

# Pak intellectual

From page 1  
that whatever happened was wrong and it speaks to the humanity of the wronged, creating a hope for friendship in the future."

Dr Rahman argued that "there is no reason why the ordinary Pakistani should bear the burden of the guilt of the military action," an action "taken by an elected government" (of General Yahya Khan) which was later declared illegal by the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

This the writer said makes it "easy to distance the state from the actions of this (meaning Yahya) government."

The intellectual in the article further stated that ordinary people did not do anything and "even they did not know what was happening in Bangladesh in 1971) and they were duped by the propaganda of their military government of Pakistan."

Referring to the recent development of a diplomatic row between the two countries, Dr Rahman opined that the government of Pakistan took a "wise decision" when it decided to recall its Deputy High Commissioner Irfan Raja from Bangladesh.

He said the diplomat in question "had apparently made remarks which hurt and annoyed his hosts." The action of recalling Raja, Dr Rahman hoped "will improve the somewhat strained ties between Pakistan and Bangladesh."

The relations between Dhaka and Islamabad took a nose dive after Raja while taking part at a seminar on foreign policy of Bangladesh here on November 27 made "audacious and derogatory" remarks about the War of Liberation and role of Awami League. Being pressed by Bangladesh, Pakistan decided to recall its "errant" diplomat on November 30.

The diplomat Raja is yet to leave even after Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad demanded his departure.

# Collapsible gate

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and children. Black smoke from the fire darkened all the floors, terrifying the workers," the report quoted Abdul Kader, machine in-charge of the factory, as saying.

Security in-charge Abdul Jalil locked the collapsible gate. This caused the suffocation and stampede," the report said quoting Kader, an eye-witness.

The report quoted Jalil as saying that he locked the gate at the instruction of the authorities apprehending looting.

Sewing machine operator Abdus Samad who was injured said, "Finding no way to get out, I took a risk. I broke the window besides the stair and escaped through the pipe. I was seriously injured."

Abdus Samad said he can not pay for his treatment as he did not get salary for last two months.

The report said there is only one stair in the four-storey building that houses the Chowdhury Knitwear although law provides for two stairs in a factory 60 feet in length and 42 inches in width.

The stairs of the emergency exit of the factory are too narrow and weak, unable to bear the load of 30/40 people, Odhiker said.

Around 350 child workers were employed in the factory, it claimed.

# India releases 48 Pakistani fishermen

BOMBAY, Dec 8: The Indian coast guard said today it had released 48 Pakistani fishermen caught in Indian waters as a gesture during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, reports AFP.

In the early hours of Friday the coast guard ship Vighraha patrolling off the Gujarat coast apprehended five Pakistani fishing boats," said coast guard spokesman Manoj Badkar.

Badkar said the Pakistani boats with 48 fishermen were on the "peripheral waters" of India, close to the international boundary line between the two countries.

"In the normal course we would have brought these boats to the nearest Indian port and they would have remained in our jails for about four or five years."

But Badkar said the coast guard had decided to release the fishermen as a Ramadan goodwill gesture.

"We warned them not to come again into Indian waters. The boats were back in Pakistani waters by day break."

Fishermen from both countries routinely stray into each others' waters and are often arrested and jailed.

# Help set up deep seaport

Hasina urges Hamburg mayor

HAMBURG, Dec 8: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged the Mayor of Hamburg, Ortwin Runde, to help set up a deep seaport in Bangladesh, reports BSS.

She made the call yesterday at a meeting with the Hamburg Mayor at the historic City Hall, shortly after her arrival in Hamburg.

Runde expressed his earnestness to look into the matter as the call came from the Bangladesh head of government and also in the light of the viability of a deep seaport in Bangladesh.

The Prime Minister apprised the Hamburg Mayor of the lucrative investment facilities offered by her government and sought cooperation for direct investment or setting up joint venture projects by the Hamburg business houses and entrepreneurs.

The mayor assured Sheikh Hasina of all support to Bangladesh in its drive to set up industrial units and attract more investment.

He said that the bond of friendship and cooperation between Bangladesh and Germany specially with Hamburg was historic and expressed the hope that it would grow further in the coming days.

A big Bangladesh national flag was hoisted atop the main entrance of the 1200-year-old magnificent City Hall to mark the

visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister which drew the attention of the Hamburg dwellers and tourists.

# Appeal to deny asylum to killers of Bangabandhu

UNB adds: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued an international appeal not to give asylum to the fugitives condemned for Bangabandhu murder to escape justice.

She also sought help from foreign governments in sending the convicts back to Bangladesh for facing the course of law for staging the August 15, 1975 carnage.

"We would urge all the governments of friendly countries not to allow the fugitives involved in the murder to escape justice and find asylum in their territories," she told a dinner party hosted by President of Hamburg Parliament Dr Dorothee Stapelfeldt at the city hall Thursday night.

Hasina made the appeal as 11 of the 15 army officers sentenced to death in the Bangabandhu Murder Case are hiding in foreign countries and trying to obtain asylum.

She deplored that the self-proclaimed killers of the country's founding father were given immunity from law and sent abroad on diplomatic assignments.

About her government's socio-economic and political agenda, the PM said the government is trying to give democracy an institutional shape and working hard to strengthen democratic institutions. So that autocrats can never seize power in Bangladesh. She said sovereignty of parliament is ensured by making it the hub of all activities.

Hasina, who was in Germany on a 3-day official visit seeking investment and economic cooperation, reiterated her call for the business leaders of Hamburg to come to Bangladesh and explore enormous economic potential.

"We have undertaken some positive steps that ensure lucrative business and profitable investment opportunities for foreign entrepreneurs," she said, announcing a special offer for the German businesspeople.

"The potential is enormous, as a special gesture to the people of this great city I would like to give you my personal guarantee that henceforth all businessmen and investors from Hamburg and elsewhere in Germany will be treated as special guests."

The President of Hamburg Parliament Dr Ms Dorothee Stapelfeldt said she felt that it is their duty to assist Bangladesh as an advocate and partner of development and strengthen the existing relations between the two countries.

# Change global policies

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widened as have inequalities within countries."

Werner continued, "The neoliberal political and economic policies are made by a small group of powerful governments and international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization."

These policies, together with unregulated activities of transnational corporations, have seriously affected the lives and livelihood, health and wellbeing of the people."

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia who was chief guest at the closing ceremony termed the meet a "great achievement and a rare advancement".

She said, "This will be a milestone in history. Health for All was a dream but this happy dream could not be brought into reality."

Begum Zia added, "Minimum healthcare services is not ensured in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, healthcare has now been turned into a costly commodity. This not acceptable. This situa-

tion must be changed. If we form government, we would ensure Health for All."

Dr. Zafrullah Choudhry of Gonoshasthaya Kendra said, "Without poverty alleviation, 'Health for All' will remain a far cry. So, it is poverty alleviation and social development that we are seeking here from the movement. How many times we walked together? This is a chance to march forward and demand implementation of our rights."

"We are positive that the movement meets again in three years. We would continue to establish network and perhaps expand it as much as possible so that all walks of life are represented as time passes. We must point out to the fact that many, even democratic governments, are failing to deliver services to the poor and establish basic rights."

Before leaving, a delegate from Mexico said, "There was a tremendous spirit of solidarity. We were energised by the presence of so many people for the movement. The nicest thing I have witnessed here was the unending hospitality of Bangladeshis."

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# 66 Myanmar fishermen arrested from Bay of Bengal

BAGERHAT, Dec 8: Navy personnel have arrested 66 Myanmar fishermen from number-1 signal post near Neel Kama in the Bay of Bengal, reports UNB.

Police said the Myanmar nationals were arrested when fishing in Bangladesh waters.

Later, the arrested were sent to the district jail bariat.

The navy men fired 80 blank shots while chasing the fishermen.

# 7 Palestinians

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intense battles with Israeli troops. A gun fight also erupted in the town of Hebron, with Israeli soldiers shooting from the border of the downtown area they control at gunmen hiding in narrow alleys in the Palestinian sector. A 15-year-old Palestinian was critically wounded in the head.

Earlier today, Palestinians sprayed an Israeli van with gunfire, killing a school teacher and a driver, and wounding another passenger. The van was on a bypass road used by settlers traveling around the West Bank city of Hebron, near the entrance to the Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba.

# Rokeya Day

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national dailies will bring out special supplements highlighting the significance of the day.

Hena Das, President of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad and educationist Dr Malha Khatun have been nominated for the Begum Rokeya awards for the year 2000.

The award will be formally handed over to both the septuagenarian ladies later in a special ceremony.

Bangladesh Mohila Parishad will hold a discussion titled "Twenty-first century and thoughts of Begum Rokeya for women liberation" at Sufia Kamal Bhaban at 10:00 a.m. today.

Noorjahan Murshid and Ayesha Khanom will take part in the discussion while Sarah Zaker, Lucky Inam and Rupa Chakraborty will read out from the writings of Begum Rokeya.

Hena Das, President of Mohila Parishad will preside over the function.

Nariyakkho will release its report on a two-year long study titled "Pilot Study on Violence against Women" at Women's Voluntary Association (WVA) auditorium at 2:00pm on the occasion.

# Motia returns after attending confce in Paris

Agriculture Minister Begum Motia Chowdhury yesterday returned home from Paris after attending the ministerial conference on WTO Negotiations: Agriculture and Developing Countries held on Wednesday, reports BSS.

During her stay in Paris, the minister addressed the plenary session highlighting the preferential access of Bangladeshi products to developed countries including EU market, continuation of export subsidy for Bangladeshi goods.

She urged the developed countries as well as the multilateral donors to come forward with funding support to improve LDCs agriculture in accordance with the WTO requirements.

Citing the conflict between the conditions of multilateral and bilateral donors and WTO provisions, the minister said Bangladesh's domestic support for agriculture is about 3 per cent which is below the URAA.

But many developed countries including multilateral donors imposed restrictions on providing subsidy or support to Bangladeshi farmers while providing project assistance.

These need to be reviewed by WTO and LDCs are to be protected from such restrictions, she added.

The minister also had a meeting with Franz Fischler, the member of European Commission for Agriculture and Fisheries and discussed matters of mutual and bilateral interest.

# Foundation of bridge laid in Faridpur

FARIDPUR, Dec 8: Environment and Forest Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury laid the foundation stone of a 30-metre long bridge at Binokdia-Lakkhandia at Nagarkanda upazila here today, reports BSS.

The bridge is being constructed by the Local Government Engineering Department at a cost of Taka 32.60 lakh.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister said the government has undertaken different steps for the development of rural