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Tribal rebels gun down 11 in Assam

GUWAHATI, India, Dec 12: Separatist tribal guerrillas shot dead 11 people belonging to a rival militant group today in India's northeastern state of Assam, police said, reports AFP.

Heavily-armed militants of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) attacked members of Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) while they were in a meeting in Solmora village, 180 km from the state capital Guwahati.

The BLT, a tribal Bodo militant group, had entered into a ceasefire with the Indian security forces earlier this year.

The group has long been involved in a fratricidal war with NDFB, which is fighting for a separate homeland.

Concerned by the fighting between rebel groups, the state government on Tuesday said it had decided to provide security to all the families of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the most prominent militant group.

All possible security will be extended to family members of ULFA leaders as their parents should not be held responsible for what their sons are doing against innocent civilians, a state government spokesman said.

ULFA militants are the main suspects behind a killing spree against non-Assamese people in which more than 120 people have died in the last six weeks.

Most of the victims have been Hindi-speaking traders from the northern state of Rajasthan and the eastern state of Bihar.

Unidentified gunmen have shot dead at least five persons from the families of ULFA militants in retaliatory attacks over the last two weeks. ULFA has blamed the killings on government agents.

More than 10,000 people have died in an insurgency over the last 10 years in the remote north-east state.

Lanka's move to revive SAARC

COLOMBO, Dec 12: Sri Lanka is escalating diplomatic moves to revive a South Asian grouping hit by squabbling between the two biggest members, India and Pakistan. Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said today, reports AFP.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister said he was travelling to neighbouring India later this week primarily to discuss issues relating to the seven-member South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

He said Sri Lanka as the chairman of the regional grouping was keen to ensure the continuity of the movement begun in 1985 and was hopeful of getting at least a foreign secretaries level meeting off the ground.

In the past 18 months there had been no high-level meeting of SAARC. Kadirgamar said as smaller members of SAARC - Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal - pushed for a summit that was delayed by over a year.

The summit due in Nepal has been delayed with India's reluctance to go into a meeting with Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf.

Misceants attack fishermen in Sonargaon: One killed, 20 hurt

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Dec 12: A fisherman was killed and 20 others were injured when misceants hired by a local influential person attacked Noonertek village of fishermen under Sonargaon thana this afternoon.

The dead was identified as Nawab Ali, 45.

Of the injured, four were identified as Sohail, 18, Amir 20, Fad Mia 24, and Babul 18. Sohail was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition while the rest to local health centres and clinics.

The incident took place when Ali Akbar Bhuiyan, the local influential person, allegedly tried to resist the fishermen while they were fishing in a waterbody there this morning.

Armed men of Ali Akbar attacked the village at about 12:30 pm. The fishermen also launched counter attack.

Though police arrived at the village by late afternoon, intermittent clashes were taking place in the village between the two sides till filing of this report at about 9:30 pm today.

According to sources, Nawab was killed on the spot when a spear hit in his abdomen during the clash.

Correction

In the headline of a front page news item published yesterday, the abbreviation for Bangladesh Shipha Bank was inadvertently printed as BKB instead of BSB. We regret the mistake.

Slum dwellers should not be evicted without proper rehabilitation

Speakers recommend low-cost housing for garment workers

By Staff Correspondent

Slum dwellers should not be evicted without proper rehabilitation arrangements and immediate steps should be taken to develop low-cost housing for garment workers, speakers at a roundtable recommended.

Relocation of garment factories should be expedited and industries should give proper attention to the housing facility of their workers, they said.

The roundtable conference titled 'Slum Eviction and Its Impact on Garment Sector: A Dialogue for Reaching Consensus with Regard to Garment Factory Workers Habitation' was held at IDB Bhaban in the city yesterday.

Organised by the Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP) in collaboration with Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers' and Exporters' Association (BGMEA) and The Daily Star, the roundtable was moderated by Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

Quamrul Islam Siddique, Secretary to Ministry of Housing and Public Works, the acting chairman and other officials of Rajuk, The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam, BGMEA vice-president Nurul Haque Sikdar, academicians, NGO representatives and leaders and workers of garment industries were among those who spoke at the roundtable.

Siddique said slum dwellers are not involved in criminal activities; rather it is a section of hoodlums and extortionists with political blessings who use the slums to carry out criminal activities in the name of

different cooperative societies or associations.

NGOs can come forward with specific housing plans for the poor, he added.

The secretary said there are examples where the government allotted valuable lands to the poor, but these were later transferred to other parties at higher prices by giving power of attorney. This problem should be addressed immediately.

Siddique also blasted the World Bank, saying that it usually talks about the poor but extends housing funds for the rich.

Dr Bhattacharya said housing for the workers should be a part of industrialisation.

BGMEA vice-president Nurul Haque Sikdar said his association would make hostels for the workers provided land is available from the government and added that the BGMEA is ready to pay for the land.

Prof Nazrul Islam, Chairperson of Centre for Urban Studies (CUS), said providing housing facility for workers was mandatory in the industrial zone earlier, but the industries in the recent past did not follow this.

Slums are springing up in the urban areas due to absence of employment opportunities in the rural areas. Industry cannot be set up outside the designated industrial zone, he added.

The industries not approved by Rajuk should be relocated outside Dhaka city, he said and suggested that NGOs come forward to developing housing for the poor.

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Traders in the city's Nilkhet area took out a procession carrying sticks yesterday after they chased some alleged terrorists who went there to take possession of a shop illegally. -- Star photo

Three already launched BMTF to assemble 300 military trucks

Star Business Report

The Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory (BMTF) Ltd launched three assembled military trucks named 'Arunima Bolyan' yesterday, three months after it came under the management of Bangladesh Army.

The BMTF will assemble 300 such trucks, which will be bought by the Army.

This is the first step towards attaining self-sufficiency in production of heavy defence equipment, said Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Mustafizur Rahman, who is also Chairman of the BMTF Board. Army technicians assembled the trucks, he said.

Today, in the month of victory, we have launched the trucks with a motive to be self-dependent, he said at the launching ceremony.

He said that the cost for each truck is Tk 20 lakh. The imported parts cost Tk 19 lakh.

By assembling locally, we are getting the trucks at almost half the price.

The BMTF is also producing Tk one crore worth of tools and spares for the Rural Electrification Board (REB). The production started on November 6, he said.

Earlier, BMTF Vice-chairman Maj Gen Mahmuduzzaman gave a background of the factory.

The first phase of installation of the factory was done during the Pakistani period. After independence, the installation was completed in June 1980 at a cost of Tk 135.09 crore. It was turned into a public limited company (PLC) in August 1979.

As the factory continued to incur loss due to poor management, the government signed a contract with a Belgian firm - Fabric National - for its management and training of technicians. But it failed to make it a profitable enterprise.

The factory remained closed since July 14, 1994. The factory was handed over to the Army on July 27 this year, he said.



Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory (BMTF) Ltd assembled three military trucks 'Arunima Bolyan' yesterday, three months after Bangladesh Army took over management of the factory. -- Star photo

Tapan murder Sohail placed on remand

By Court Correspondent

Mohammad Sohail arrested in connection with the killing of BCL activist Azharul Islam Tapan was placed on a five-day remand yesterday.

Sohail, 20, of Sherpur was produced before the CMM's Court, Dhaka yesterday with a prayer for a seven days remand.

After hearing, the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Biman Bihari Barua granted him a five days remand.

Tapan, a Chhatra League activist, was gunned down and another seriously injured near a Jubo League office at TB Gate in the city's Mohakhali area on November 25.

Abdul Aziz, father of the victim, filed a murder case with Gulshan Thana accusing 13 people the same day.

Earlier, another three arrested accused were taken on remand.

Judge to question RSS chief on Babri Mosque

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: A judge today called for questioning the chief of a Hindu nationalist organisation following his claim that a bomb explosion had demolished a 16th century mosque in northern India eight years ago, reports AP.

The destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, on Dec 6, 1992, sparked off riots between Hindus and Muslims that killed 2,000 people across India.

Last week, K Sudarshan, chief of the Association of National Volunteers, or the RSS from its initials in Hindi, tried to absolve the Hindu nationalist of the blame for razing the mosque to the ground by claiming that a bomb explosion had destroyed the structure.

The RSS forms the ideological front of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's right-wing Hindu nationalist party.

Sudarshan claimed that the mosque was destroyed as part of a political conspiracy and then Congress party government, led by Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, had known about it.

He didn't say who had planted the bomb in the mosque in Ayodhya, a town 550 kilometers east of New Delhi.

Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party was the governing party in Uttar Pradesh state where the mosque was located. But the federal government was headed by Prime Minister Rao of the Congress party.

Judge MS Liberhan, chief of an inquiry commission probing the demolition of the mosque, called Sudarshan and some top Indian politicians, including Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani, Human Resources Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi

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20 suffer burn, 15 shops gutted in Patuakhali

PATUAKHALI, Dec 12: At least 20 people suffered burn injuries when a fire gutted 15 shops at Hasandalal Market in Baulal upazila here midnight Monday, reports UNB.

Of the injured Sipon, 25, Azam, 30, Nasir, 30, Mokter, 32, and Dulal were admitted to hospitals in critical conditions.

Fire Brigades sources said the fire originated from an electric short circuit at about 2:30 am, soon engulfed surrounding shops.

Fire fighters rushed to the spot and brought the flames under control after an hour-long effort.

Autorickshaw driver, two teenage boys murdered in city

By Staff Correspondent

Three people were murdered in separate incidents in the city yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Naimuddin Pintu, 30, an autorickshaw driver and son of Shamsuddin Khan of Noyogon in Kamrangirchar thana, Jahangir, 18, son of Shafiqul of Dhalpur area in Keraniganj thana and Rajib, a schoolboy of Gandaria area in Sutrapur thana.

Police said Pintu was stabbed by Jalil and his three accomplices at around 10:30 am.

Jalil is the uncle of Pintu's first wife.

Police said the reason behind the killing was a sequel to family feud between Pintu and his first wife.

Pintu was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the attending doctors declared him dead. The body was sent to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.

Selim, brother of the victim, filed a case with Kamrangirchar police station in this connection.

Police arrested Jalil and Rahat for their alleged involvement in the killing.

Jahangir was slaughtered in the city's Shayampur area yesterday.

Police recovered his body from near a shop in the afternoon and sent it to DMCH for autopsy.

Police quoting family members of the victim said three miscreants called him out of his residence in the early hours of yesterday.

The reason behind the murder could not be known.

Jobeda Begum, mother of Jahangir, filed a case with Shayampur thana, but none was arrested in this connection till writing this report last night.

Rajib, a student of class ten, was shot dead by some miscreants at Gandaria School last night.

Sources said some miscreants took Rajib to the school and shot him. He died on the spot.

The reason behind the killing could not be known.

When contacted the duty officer of Sutrapur police station said that they were aware of the incident.

Police arrested Jalil and Rahat for their alleged involvement in the killing.

The top five killers of under-five children are prenatal diseases (20 per cent) diarrhoeal diseases (17 per cent), respiratory diseases (15 per cent), malaria (seven per cent) and vaccine-preventable diseases (15 per cent), the report said.

The report, simultaneously released elsewhere in the world, said in the first 36 months of a child's life, brain connections multiply and thinking and behaviour pattern is formed. This period is "most crucial", it said.

Governments should give the highest priority to care of under-five children. But it is unfortunate that such children receive the "least attention", Government leaders, policy makers and development agencies seem not concerned about it.

The report called upon governments to give priority to rights of children and their proper development.

It also called for preparing parents for their pivotal role in childcare, building capacities of communities to support them and creating a social environment free from violence and discrimination at all levels.

At the launching, it was disclosed that Bangladesh made progress in reducing under-five child mortality rate and is now positioned after Sri Lanka and Maldives in the SAARC countries.

Internationally Sri Lanka was ranked 135th in 1999 in under-five child mortality. Maldives 55th and Bangladesh 53rd.

Japan, Norway, Singapore, Sweden and Switzerland topped the rank, 187th, in the lowest rate of child mortality.

Late Monday, Barak called Clinton to explain his unexpected decision to resign. The resignation

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Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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Rampura double murder: Another held, placed on remand

By Staff Correspondent

Tarek Iqbal alias Taru, who was arrested on Monday in connection with the double murder at East Rampura in the city early December, was placed on a four-day remand yesterday.

Khilgaon police produced Taru in the CMM's Court, Dhaka yesterday with a prayer for a seven-day remand. After hearing, the Court of Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Abul Kashem granted four days.

A team of Khilgaon police went to Sirajdikhan thana in Munsiganj on Monday and arrested Taru from a village.

A total of 13 cases, including three murders, were filed against Taru with different thanas in the city, police sources said.

Earlier, Khilishpur thana in Khulna following information from Khilgaon police in Dhaka arrested two youths Suman and Liton for their alleged involvement in the killings.

They were also taken on a three-day remand.

During interrogation, both admitted their 'indirect' involvement in the double murder, police said.

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11m children under-5 die a year around the globe

By staff correspondent

Unicef report

About 177 million children get stunted mainly because of malnutrition of their mothers during pregnancy.

Adequate sanitation facilities are crucial for reduction of the deaths, yet 2.4 billion people lack access to such facilities globally, it said.

The Unicef report said the best investment in human resources is the investment in childcare, which needs 80 billion dollars a year globally.

The report, simultaneously released elsewhere in the world, said in the first 36 months of a child's life, brain connections multiply and thinking and behaviour pattern is formed. This period is "most crucial", it said.

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Israel, Palestinians resume high-level contacts

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JERUSALEM, Dec 12: Israel and the Palestinians have resumed high-level contacts to try to quell violence and pave the way for a resumption of peace talks, a senior Israeli official said today, reports AP.

At the same time, Israel sent a stern warning to the Palestinians, saying its security forces would hunt and kill gunmen who target Israelis. On Monday, an Israeli woman was seriously wounded when her home came under fire.

The high-level Israeli-Palestinian meeting took place Sunday evening in Jerusalem, and was attended, among others, by the Palestinian security chief in the Gaza Strip, Mohammad Dahlan. Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami and Israeli negotiator Gilead Sher, said a Palestinian official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Sher confirmed that contacts had been renewed, but would not refer specifically to Sunday's sessions. The meetings are aimed at calming the situation and examining the possibility of renewing negotiations once the situation has calmed down, said Sher told Israel radio.

Sher said he was unaware of a new U.S. initiative to revive negotiations. U.S. President Bill Clinton's Mideast envoy, Dennis Ross, was to meet later Tuesday

in Morocco with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Israel faces elections in early February, and media reports said Barak was pushing to conclude a peace deal before the vote. Barak, who was elected on a peace platform, is trailing badly in the polls, and presenting a peace agreement to the voters is widely seen as his only hope for getting re-elected.

Late Monday, Barak called Clinton to explain his unexpected decision to resign. The resignation

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