

Laden alive and well, another US daily says

REUTERS, Washington

Right on cue, another report cropped up in a US newspaper. "Osama is alive, healthy, and safe," said Qari Ahmadullah, the vanquished Afghan Taliban's chief of intelligence.

He said the world's most wanted man had been near the border with Pakistan and that he was in close contact with Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar who had protected him.

In his latest video, probably shot in early December, the millionaire militant bin Laden appeared tired but defiant.

He called the September attacks blessed and urged Muslims to wage military and economic holy war against a fragile America.

"It is very important to concentrate on hitting the American economy with every available tool ... the economy is the base of its military power," said a gaunt, hollow-eyed bin Laden, dressed in a camouflage jacket with a rifle beside him.

Any of his followers caught by US forces are likely to be sent to the US navy base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, which is to serve as a detention centre.

US military tribunals that may then try international terror suspects will require unanimity to impose the death penalty, according to draft procedures reported in The Washington Post.

US forces are currently holding 45 prisoners.

The Americans say they are unconvinced that anyone really knows where bin Laden is or if he is alive or dead.

"We hear six, seven, eight, 10, 12 conflicting reports every day. I've stopped chasing them," Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said.

One beaten to death by terrorists in Feni

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Feni

A man was beaten to death by a gang of terrorists at village Char Shah Bekhari under Sonagazi upazila morning.

Lolite Mohan Das, 50, was forcibly taken out of his house at around 8 pm on Thursday by a group of terrorists.

They beat up Das mercilessly and left the scene.

Local people sent him to Sonagazi Health Complex where he succumbed to injuries at about 8 am yesterday.

A case was lodged with Sonagazi thana accusing Ale Taher, his father Aminul Hoque and eight of their accomplices.

10 injured as rival BNP men clash over collection of toll in Bagerhat

UNB, Bagerhat

At least 10 people were injured in a clash between rival groups of BNP over collection of toll at Chitalmari thana headquarters yesterday.

Police said the clash ensued at about 11am when Kalam brother of the ruling party's local MP, and his supporters chased Chhatra Dal leader Shafiqul Islam Babu and his associates who allegedly demanded toll from a contractor.

At one stage one group took shelter at Chitalmari thana and another group pelted brickbats on the thana building.

Police raided the area immediately after the trouble and arrested four youths along with a revolver and 13 bullets. They were identified as Pavel, Tarikul Islam, Helal and Zakir.

Kabul demands quick end to US bombing

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghanistan gave its clearest sign yet yesterday that it wanted the war on terrorism to move elsewhere, demanding a quick end to US bombing and insisting Osama bin Laden had fled to Pakistan.

Washington also risked fading resolve from its crucial ally Pakistan, whose attention has turned to a worsening crisis with India over the disputed Kashmir province.

The United States pulled diplomatic strings and urged the nuclear rivals to step back from a standoff triggered by a December 13 suicide attack on India's Parliament.

Bin Laden, pursued for allegedly plotting the September 11 attacks on US cities that killed more than 3,200 people, stayed out of America's clutches but taunted his adversary by video.

"The end of the United States is imminent," he said in the tape aired in full for the first time on Thursday on Qatar's al-Jazeera television.

Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said bin Laden had escaped to Pakistan with nearly all his al Qaeda fighters

to seek shelter with allies there, rendering further US bombing pointless.

"Their remaining forces are few in number and may be annihilated in a maximum of three days. Once this is done there is no need for continuation of the bombing," ministry spokesman Mohammad Habeel told Reuters.

"We demand America stop its bombing of Afghanistan after this goal is achieved."

Habeel said al-Qaida, the terrorist networks of Laden, had largely been driven from the Tora Bora mountainous area in the eastern province of Nangarhar. Only limited numbers of its fighters remained there.

"I hope this scattered resistance also will finish in three or four days' time," he said.

The bombing is becoming a sensitive issue now that the former Taliban rulers have been toppled and al-Qaida has been put to flight from Tora Bora.

Many residents say the country's sovereignty is being violated and innocent people are being killed.

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Despite a ban on production and sale of polythene bags in the city from January 1, some unscrupulous traders are still carrying on with the business of recycling discarded polybags. The poor and the destitute are washing bags in the Buriganga (left) prior to spreading them on the riverbank for drying (right). They say they are yet to be told anything about the ban.

Amnesty International chief tells workshop in city World needs a culture of peace, not war against terrorism

UNB, Dhaka

The post-September 11 actions just banded with globalisation as a new rogue to curtail more human rights across the world, says Amnesty International's chief executive.

Inine Z Khan, Secretary General of the AI, world watchdog body on human rights, thinks that the world doesn't need a war against terrorism; it needs a culture of peace based on human rights, justice and sustainable development for a harmonious global order.

She was addressing a training workshop on "Bangladesh Women in International Security" at BRAC Inn Centre Thursday night. Bangladesh Freedom Foundation organised the workshop.

"The human rights debate has been always marked by hypocrisy and selectivity, but in the aftermath of September 11 incident the problem has worsened," said Inine Khan, the first woman and first Asian to

hold the top portfolio.

"In the name of a coalition against terrorism, they are ready to sweep under the carpet human rights abuses by their allies", she told an elite audience here in her first visit to her homeland after being elected Secretary General of AI.

Inine, who visited Pak-Afghan borders recently to see plights of the Afghan people, cited many countries in the West, and also in Asia and Africa, adopting measures curtailing human rights amid a turmoil in a backlash to the attacks in USA.

"Governments around the world, whether they happen to be in the West or the South, in established democracies or emerging ones, have jumped on the bandwagon of anti-terrorism drive that curtails fundamental freedoms."

She said that in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks there has been a severe backlash against human rights. "The campaign

against terrorism has been used to justify increased repression in some countries."

The Amnesty Secretary General described some of the actions in some countries around the world.

In Egypt, people have been arrested for their links with Islamist groups. In China the government has clamped down on Uighur Muslims. In India, anti-terrorist legislation has severely curtailed civil liberties.

In the UK, the government has passed emergency legislation to detain foreigners on mere suspicion, without charge or trial, and has sought to suspend the European Convention on Human Rights first time ever that this has been done by any European government.

In the United States, more than a thousand persons have been

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A S M NURUNNABI

Everyone knows that city traffic is awful and there are as many as 18 railway level crossing in the city. What do they exist for? They are there for the smooth flow of traffic. But their purpose is defeated altogether when we see that they create traffic jams on both sides of the rail gates with duration of three to three and a half hours. Such traffic jams inevitably cause loss of working hours with its implications of financial loss. Traffic jams in the city constitute one of the gravest problems of the metropolis. The suspension of traffic with the closure of rail gates only serves to compound the existing chaotic traffic situation.

The railway tracks run over the main part of the Dhaka city. On the stretch of the tracks starting from the Dhaka (Kamalapur) railway station to the Cantonment station, the number of level crossings, big and small is said to be 18. Of these, ten level crossings are said to be located important areas. The important level crossings include the Khilgaon-Shahjahanpur rail cross-

DOWN TO EARTH Railway level crossings add to traffic chaos

ing, Malibagh rail crossing, Maghbazar rail crossing, Nakhalpara rail crossing, Mohakhali rail crossing, Khilkhet rail crossing etc.

It is understood that everyday 52 outgoing and incoming trains use the Kamalapur railway station terminal. Of these, 26 are inter-city trains, 20 are mail trains and six are passenger trains. Besides these, some freight trains use this stretch of railway track. Of the total 52 trains, 40 trains operate between 8 am and 10 pm. During this period, traffic jams are mainly created. Analysts have estimated that for

every train, at least 10 minutes are required for giving it passage at a level crossing, thus creating traffic convergence at both ends of the gate, with its fallout spreading all over the city. It is estimated by analysts that on these accounts for about three to three and a half hours, traffic is stuck up on two sides of the rail crossing.

According to experts, such traffic jams could be avoided if fly-overs are built at important points in the city. It has been seen in other developed cities of the world that railway tracks are positioned either below or over such fly-overs. This does not

affect the road traffic. Since rail communication facility is vital to serve the interest of city commuters, rail tracks of necessity will have to run through the city. Such is the current picture in all developed cities around the world. They have found answers to chronic traffic mess.

At the present stage of our development such facilities are a mere pipe dream for us on account of resource constraints. Recently, there is a glimpse of silver-lining in the gloom of traffic turmoil when it

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'Food wrapped in polythene causes cancer'

BSS, Dhaka

An estimated 342 crore polythene shopping bags are being dumped in Dhaka city alone per year, posing serious health hazards including blockage of sewerage system of the capital, a report of Environment and Social Development Organisation (ESDO) said yesterday.

Talking to BSS, Executive Director of ESDO and a polythene expert Dr Hossain Shahriar, quoting findings of a research on polythene conducted by the Korean Institute of Health Research, said workers at polythene factories are more exposed to cancer, skin disease and other fatal health problems.

He said polythene-wrapped fish and meat generate a kind of heat that creates radiation which ultimately makes the food poisonous.

Besides, the polythene-wrapped

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'Ctg Mayor not invited to 3 PM's functions'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Absence of Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury from all the three recent functions of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the port city has evoked questioned among many citizens.

The Prime Minister attended as chief guest a passing out parade at the Bangladesh Naval Academy on December 20.

On Thursday, she took salute at a passing out parade at the Bangladesh Military Academy in the morning and attended the inaugural ceremony of the 10th Chittagong International Trade Fair.

Mayor of Chittagong City Corporation Mohiuddin Chowdhury was reportedly not invited to any of the functions, sources claimed.

Talking to this correspondent, many city dwellers said presence of the Mayor was desirable at functions of the executive head of the government because he is part of it and has certain responsibilities in such events.

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Rickshawpuller killed in crossfire in city, housewife murdered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A housewife and a rickshawpuller were killed in separate incidents in the city yesterday.

Abu Sayeed, 25, a rickshawpuller, was killed in crossfire during a shootout between two groups of drug traders near the rail gate at Tejkuinpara in the city's Tejgaon area at about 3am yesterday.

Fatally injured, Sayeed was taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where he died at about 5am yesterday.

Local people said two rival groups involved in drug trade in the area engaged in a gunfight at 9pm, which continued sporadically throughout the rest of the night.

Sources said Sayeed had brought his rickshaw to the owner's garage near the rail gate at Tejkuinpara and was waiting at the garage as both groups fought each other. After a while, he came out of

the garage and headed for home. But shortly afterwards, unidentified gunmen fired shots at him, which hit him in the chest.

The victim lay bleeding at the spot for some time before some local people took him to the DMCH, leaving him at the emergency ward.

Hospital employees admitted him to ward 30 at the hospital where he died at about 5am.

The duty officer of Tejgaon police station however said he was not aware of the incident.

On Wednesday night also, an alleged drug peddler was chopped to death by rivals during a clash in the same area in front of the Railway Colony.

In another incident yesterday, the body of a young housewife was recovered from Kuril Bishwa Road in the city's Badda area yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Aklima Begum, 22, wife of Amir

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Fazle Hasan Abed awarded Olof Palme Prize

AP, Stockholm

Fazle Hasan Abed was awarded the Olof Palme Prize on Thursday for his work as a founder of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, which has taught thousands of refugees to read and write.

"BRAC has played an important role in the transition of Bangladesh from a war-torn society, marked by division and hatred, to an outward-looking society... in which the role of women and girls was improved," Pierre Schori, chairman of the fund, stated in a news release.

In 1972, Abed formed BRAC with the aim of helping the thousands of refugees who returned to Bangladesh after the 1971 war of independence from Pakistan. BRAC today runs about 34,000 schools.

A prize ceremony will be held in Stockholm on Jan 30, Olof Palme's birthday.

The prize, which consists of a

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Clean Dhaka programme from Jan 1

UNB, Dhaka

Police launches a massive programme from New Year's day to relieve city nagging traffic congestion and environment pollution in the city.

Official sources said an elaborate plan has already been charted in this regard.

Under the Clean-Dhaka-Programme, no the streets of buses or minibuses older than 20 years will be allowed to ply the metropolis. Trucks and mini-trucks older than 25 years will also come under the taboo.

Among three-wheelers, no autorickshaws or tempos registered before 1993 will be allowed in the streamlined traffic of the busy metropolis.

Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Traffic) Abu Musa Mohammad Fakhrul Islam Khan said yesterday that police would start seizing old vehicles from

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Armed revolt to topple Mahathir govt 3 Muslim extremists to die, 16 get life term

AP, Kuala Lumpur

Three Muslim extremists were sentenced to hang and 16 others received life in prison yesterday for waging an armed revolt to overthrow Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad's government and replace it with an Islamic state.

High Court Judge Zulkefli Ahmad Makinudin said that the consequences for this moderate Southeast Asian nation would have been unimaginable if the members of the Al-Ma'unah cult had succeeded.

Zulkefli, who found all 19 defendants guilty Thursday of waging war against the king, Malaysia's constitutional monarch, sentenced the leader, Mohamed Amin Mohamad Razali and his two right-hand men, Zahit Muslim and Jamaluddin Darun, to death.

Prosecutors had urged him to sentence all the men to hang, but Zulkefli chose the softer option -- life without parole -- for the rest.

"I find that all the accused either directly or indirectly were involved in the Al-Ma'unah objective, to topple the government through violent means in the name of jihad," or holy war, Zulkefli said.

"I cannot imagine the consequences for the people

in this multi-racial country had the Al-Ma'unah been successful in carrying out this objective," he said.

Sect members posing as army officers in July 2000 stole enough weapons from military armories to start a small war. The cultists later killed two hostages before surrendering in a standoff with security forces.

The crisis triggered the biggest security scare in decades and catalyzed concerns over the dangers of Islamic extremism in predominantly Muslim Malaysia, which has large religious minorities. Most Muslims practice a relaxed brand of Islam.

Though the group appears to have been crushed, the US government, increasingly concerned about Islamic terrorism, recently announced that al-Ma'unah members would be barred from the United States. None is known to have made any attempt to go there.

In court yesterday, more than 30 policemen ringed the dock, blocking the cultists from the public gallery where their relatives sat. Before the decision was read, a police sergeant told the families: "Don't shout. Keep your calm."

Most of the men, including Mohamed Amin, looked impassive, but many relatives broke down. The families

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