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Logging at liberty at lush hill forest of Lathitilla

Deep inside Kulaura, near the border in Sylhet, lies the lush hill forest of Lathitilla -- accessible only through miles of roads through isolated tea gardens. This less known Lathitilla forest was once the feeding ground of wild elephants and a host of smaller mammals. But unscientific logging, authorised allegedly by the Department of Forest itself, has led not only to rapid deforestation but also driving out of wildlife from here. Contractors are licensed to fell only specific trees but they take the liberty to cut down any tree of their choice, local people said. A major portion of these trees is, as seen in the pictures, roughly seven to eight years old and not yet suitable for logging. Ironically, a number of tamed elephants are engaged to drag the logs. New roads are being built through the tea gardens for easier access to the forest and it seems the loggers will not rest before wiping the whole forestscape. The hills, once lush green, are now mostly bare. Some saplings have been planted but it will take years to replenish the forest. The pace of deforestation in these unmonitored hills makes it unlikely that these hills will ever regain their green lustre they once had.

Photo & caption: Shahriar Khan

India, Pakistan redeploy troops to borders

Bush urges Vajpayee, Musharraf to reduce tension

AFP, REUTERS, Guwahati

Thousands of Indian troops are being redeployed from counter-insurgency duties in the country's troubled northeast to the western border with Pakistan, as tensions escalate between the rival neighbours, officials said yesterday.

A senior army official said there had been a "heavy" transfer of forces from the northeastern states of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur to join the troop buildup on the Pakistan border.

"India's prime concern now is its national security and hence the movement of troops from the region to the western sector," the official told AFP.

Railway authorities in Assam have cancelled three daily passenger trains to carry soldiers and ammunition.

At least five troop trains have left the region in the past four days.

In Pakistan, the military began thinning out troops patrolling its western border with Afghanistan in search of Osama bin Laden on Saturday as it

bolstered its forces on the eastern border with India.

"We have received orders to move," one soldier said when asked why they were leaving the Afghan frontier. "You know what's going on there or what may happen," he said, apparently referring to the troop build-up on the border with India and fears of war.

India and Pakistan have reinforced their joint border with troops and equipment, including tanks, fighter jets and artillery in the biggest such build-up in almost 15 years.

Pakistan Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar however denied that Islamabad had pulled troops from its border with Afghanistan to shore up defences against India but did not rule out the possibility.

Sattar said Pakistan had already deployed "very large forces" along its eastern border with India without reducing troops along its border with

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100-day programme PM happy over progress

UNB, Dhaka

Expressing satisfaction over the progress in implementation of her government's first 100-day agenda, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday asked concerned authorities to complete the various programmes within the stipulated time.

"We don't have any scope for complacency over the extent of success that has been achieved till date in the implementation of the 100-day programme. It's desirable for us to implement the programme in due time to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the people," she said.

She was addressing a meeting held to review the progress of implementation of the programme at her Secretariat office in the afternoon.

Cabinet Secretary Dr Akbar Ali Khan, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Siddiqui, political secretaries Haris

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AL to protest price hike of fuel, gas Jan 3

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) will hold demonstrations and rallies across the country on January 3 to protest against the rise in prices of petroleum products, gas and water.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) last night. The party also threatened to go for tougher programmes unless the government rescinds its price hike decision.

Acting AL chief Abdus Samad Azad chaired the meeting held at the party's central office at Bangabandhu Avenue.

The AL will hold a rally at the city's Osmani Uddyan on January 3

and announce fresh programmes.

Azad told reporters that the meeting expressed deep concern at unabated repression on opposition workers and police inertia in taking up cases.

He alleged that candidates nominated by the party for the January 17 parliamentary by-polls are being barred from visiting their constituencies by the BNP activists.

Azad also said the government is now using the so-called 'Bangabandhu Andolon' issue as a pretext to oppress the minority community.

To boost the morale of party workers, senior party leaders would also take organisational tours across

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Barricade at Satraasta as MP's son beats up two

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agitated people put up a barricade at Satraasta on Tongi diversion road in the City's Tejgaon area, disrupting communication on the road for almost an hour, yesterday evening following a clash with the employee of a lawmaker.

The incident took place after Rizvi, son of BNP MP Manjurul Ahsan Munshi (Comilla-4), along with some men came to set up a road sign in the area at about 4pm. An employee of the BG Press nearby protested the move and tried to bar them from fixing the sign-

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BNP decides to revamp party activities

Khaleda issues stricture on top leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP has finally decided to revamp its organisational activities.

BNP Chairperson and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has instructed to ministers and others enjoying same rank and status to actively participate in all party activities.

She had earlier noticed that

excepting party Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and city BNP President and Fisheries and Livestock Minister Sadeque Hossain Khoka, no other ministers visited party offices since the October 2 elections.

She also came to know that most of the leaders and activists spend a good chunk of their time at the

Bangladesh Secretariat to lobby for various deals.

As a result, party activists feel neglected and distanced from the activities of ministers and other frontline leaders. The PM was also briefed that most cabinet ministers are busy with their jobs at the secretariat and don't take care of party

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'BAC almost ineffective with low credibility'

UNB, Dhaka

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) has become virtually an ineffective body with very low credibility and a high rate of pending cases.

A survey report says that only four per cent of the accused are convicted, 5.2 per cent acquitted, while remaining 90.8 per cent corruption cases remain pending for years with the BAC, which is governed by the Prime Minister's Office.

Some 65 per cent people think that the ruling party always uses the BAC to repress the opposition or want to repress them through the BAC, while 47 per cent think that the bureau is incapable of maintaining its neutrality.

The findings were disclosed in a

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Constitute independent anti-corruption body

Speakers at TI dialogue in city demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Politicians, civil society members, academicians and representatives of different professional bodies yesterday reached a consensus that the country needs an independent anti-corruption commission to establish rule of law and root out the widespread corruption from society.

They also expressed the optimism that the government would move a bill seeking setting up of such a commission, mandated like the Election Commission by the Constitution, at the next session of the Jatiya Sangsad.

They were speaking at a discussion meeting in the city, organised by the Bangladesh chapter of

Transparency International (TI).

The discussants also urged the political parties to work together to wipe out corruption. They noted that almost all the major political parties during campaigns in the last parliamentary election pledged to set up an independent commission to combat corruption.

At the meeting, the TIB released a report on its findings on performance of the Bureau of Anti-Corruption under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

It also placed a structure of the proposed Independent Anti-Corruption Commission (IACC), on which the speakers gave their views and suggestions.

The report said, due to delay in

getting permission from the PMO for filing case, evidence is "often ruined", for which action can not be taken against corruption. There are instances that PMO's permission was available in nine years regarding three complaints, in five years regarding one and in four years in case of three complaints.

Its survey covered 31,746 complaints between 1994 and 2000. The TI report said the average rate of "settlement" of complaints is 41 per cent and that of pending complaints 59 per cent.

The TIB proposed that the IACC would be headed by a Chief Commissioner and there would be two commissioners, all appointed

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PMO yet to clear FIRs, cases may be filed today

STAR REPORT

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is yet to give the Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) the go-ahead for filing four more graft cases against the former Awami League government's two ministers, an MP and a number of bureaucrats.

Some 20 officials of BAC were kept waiting for 12 hours from 9:00am yesterday to know whether the cases were going to be filed.

The PMO officials however scrutinised copies of First Information Report (FIR) of the four cases drafted by BAC yesterday. This is for the first time that the PMO has

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Fireworks cache explodes at downtown shop

227 killed in Lima blaze

AP, AFP, Lima

A cache of fireworks exploded at a shop near a street market in downtown Lima, swiftly spreading a fire through four blocks of apartments and stores and killing at least 227 people and wounding 160 others.

Civil Defence officials said another 35 people remained unaccounted for in one of the deadliest fires to hit the Peruvian capital.

The initial blast ripped through a fireworks shop at about 8 pm, Lima Fire Chief Tulio Nicolini said. Flames rushed through the three- and four-story buildings as firefighters and volunteers dragged people from the burning structures.

Bodies charred beyond recognition were scattered in the streets and in buildings. Police carried badly

burned victims stripped to their underwear in makeshift stretchers made of plastic sheeting.

One firefighter rushed from a burning building with a baby in his hands as people stumbled out into the smoky street, where flames had gutted parked cars.

At one point, a dozen people trapped behind security bars on the second floor of a building pushed their arms through broken windows and screamed to be rescued.

Civil Defence chief Juan Luis Podesta said 77 bodies were found by early yesterday and 115 people were being treated for burns in several hospitals. One hospital near the site of the blaze said it was treating 35 people with severe burns.

Podesta said most of the bodies were found in the streets and build-

ing entrances, and firefighters feared more victims could be buried beneath rubble deeper in the build-

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| | Sun Rises | Sun Sets |
|--------|-----------|----------|
| Dec 31 | | 5-22 pm |
| Jan 1 | 6-42 am | |

| Prayer Timings | | |
|----------------|-------|--------|
| Dec 31 | | |
| | Azan | Jamaat |
| Fajr | 5-30 | 6-00 |
| Zohr | 12-45 | 1-15 |
| Asr | 3-45 | 4-00 |
| Maghrib | 5-25 | 5-30 |
| Esha | 7-15 | 7-45 |

Source: Islamic Foundation