

Saudi securitymen on alert as pilgrims start arriving

REUTERS, Riyadh

Thousands of Muslim pilgrims are gathering in Saudi Arabia for the annual Hajj pilgrimage amid tight security in the wake of the September 11 US attacks.

Saudi security forces, worried that some Islamic militants might use the event as a political platform following the attacks, said yesterday they were keeping a close watch on pilgrims arriving by land, air and sea.

Airport officials said more than 150,000 Muslim pilgrims have arrived in the kingdom, of more than two million pilgrims, mostly from outside Saudi Arabia, who perform the five-day Hajj every year.

The kingdom is the birthplace of Islam and home to its two holiest shrines, the Grand Mosque in Makkah and the Prophet Mohammad's (SM) Mosque in Medina. Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam.

Washington has said the 19 suicide hijackers who crashed jets into US landmarks were Muslim militants and that 15 were Saudis. The man it holds responsible for the attacks, Osama bin Laden, was born in Saudi Arabia.

Bin Laden has demanded the removal of about 5,000 US troops from Saudi Arabia and has said that attacks on the United States were aimed at forcing them out.

"We have not taken any extraordinary measures for this year's Hajj in connection with the September events, but we are monitoring matters closely to prevent any outflows from sneaking in for the Hajj and spoiling it," a security official

said. Tensions have been high in the area, following the September attacks and subsequent US military strikes on Afghanistan. US and Western forces have been combing Gulf waters for suspected bin Laden supporters who might have fled Afghanistan.

A Kuwaiti newspaper recently quoted intelligence sources as saying some bin Laden supporters who might have escaped Afghanistan might try to enter the kingdom during the Hajj season, which starts in mid-February.

"Our security measures are clear. The Hajj season is one of worship and not for political statements or slogans aimed at distracting pilgrims from their duties," the official told Reuters, adding that signs, pictures or effigies are banned.

Saudi Arabia usually urges pilgrims to refrain from any political activity during the annual pilgrimage.

Hajj must be performed at least once in a lifetime by every able-bodied Muslim who has the financial means. Muslims believe those who perform it with a sincere heart will become as pure as the day they were born.

Autorickshaw

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The leaders said that without taking any alternative measures, the decision would push the drivers and owners of the vehicles towards unemployment.

They demanded immediate withdrawal of the decision.

Bus dacoity at Demra

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dacoits took away cash and valuables from bus passengers at Raybagh in the city's Demra area yesterday morning.

A gang of three, in guise of passengers, boarded a Dhaka bound BRTC bus from Narsingdi. When it reached Kutubkhali at around 11 a.m., the gang swooped on the passengers, looted cash and valuables from them.

The passengers of the bus managed to catch one of the gang members. They also handed over the dacoit and the bus driver to Demra police.

Police seized the vehicle and arrested the two for their alleged involvement in the dacoity. Mohammad Amir Hossain, one of the passengers, filed a case with Demra police station in this regard.

AL demands

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ning to send the convicted accused abroad "in the name of treatment."

On January 21, Azad alleged, Sheikh Hasina was barred from attending the Akheri Munajat at Biswa Ijtema at Tongi and forced to take alternate route to attend the prayer after being detained about an hour.

Azad strongly protested the withdrawal of SSF security cover for Sheikh Hasina and urged the government to ensure foolproof security for her.

The press briefing was attended by Awami League leaders Zillur Rahman, Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Abdul Jalil, Begum Matia Chowdhury, Rahmat Ali, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Obaidul Quader, Mostofa Jalal Mohiuddin, Abdul Mannan, Abdul Mannan Khan and Mukul Bose.

Power exchange

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connection. Tala in Bhutan, Anarnami in Nepal and Thakurgaon in Bangladesh are the three other points of the proposed interconnection.

The study also proposed expansion of the Thakurgaon end of the regional transmission line up to Barapukuria in phases.

"The Tala-Shiliguri 400 MW transmission line is already under construction," Raina told The Daily Star.

The study report also suggested two other options for regional transmission interconnection -- one based on limited power transfer of about 50 MW costing about \$9.45 million, while the other aims at moderate power transfer of up to 500 MW utilising a 220 KV system at a cost of \$52.35 million.

About the proposed regional transmission interconnection, a number of local experts told The Daily Star that the price of imported power would be a determining factor as regards implementation of the project.

"We are purchasing per kilowatt hours power from AES Haripur plant at only 2.72 cent while India is purchasing the same amount of power from Nepal at four cent. If the pricing is not acceptable to us, why should we go for importing power

instead of encouraging foreign investment inside the country?" quipped one of the participants from Bangladesh.

Besides, Bangladesh would have to make necessary arrangements to adjust with the higher electricity frequency and fluctuation rates in the Indian power grid, he said, preferring anonymity.

Jamuna bridge

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Statistics Department. Previously, the Population Census Commission was under the home ministry, the Agricultural Census Commission and Agricultural Statistics Department under the agriculture ministry, while the BBS was under the planning ministry.

The Statistical Division having seven wings was formed later with a view to get rid of inter-ministerial tangles

The wings are: Health and Demography Wing, Administration and Management Information System (MIS), Computer Wing, Labour and Industry Wing, National Account Wing and Census Wing.

Sources said the Statistical Division started with about 500 staff and ended up with a workforce of over 4000 officials and employees.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia addressing the members of Bangladesh Army and Air Force after witnessing a joint winter exercise at Maona in Gazipur yesterday.

Prof Anisuzzaman

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"In his letter of 31 December 2001, the Director General of Bangla Academy had humbly requested me to chair the inauguration ceremony of the Book Fair for the year 2002," he wrote.

In the current programme, set at the behest of the government, the role of president of the Academy at the function has been omitted without withdrawing that letter on assigning any reason, he said.

"That, too, I learnt this afternoon on receipt of your invitation that went to me as a member and not as the President of the Bangla Academy," he said in his resignation letter.

He mentioned that no law provides that the President of the Academy should preside over the inauguration, but the longstanding practice made this a convention.

"The incongruous decision taken in disregard of the convention has, in my estimation, undermined the prestige of the President of the Academy. In the circumstances, it would be improper for me to hold on to the post," said the professor in his resignation letter.

Pvt sector

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and Sri Lanka as well as representatives from the USAID and the Asian Development Bank participated in the meet.

Foreign experts said public sector funds alone are not sufficient to solve South Asia's current energy shortfall. They also insisted on establishment of a Private Sector Energy Development Fund.

Energy Minister Mosharruf Hussain said: "We are going to update the energy policy to encourage the private sector. The government is also going to introduce a transparent pricing policy to 'encourage regional co-operation' in the energy sector."

Referring to two committees one working on assessing gas reserves of the country while the other on optimum use of gas resources -- the state minister for energy said: "The reports of the committees will be helpful to create regional cooperation."

According to him, a new gas act will be placed in the parliament soon and a regulatory body for the energy sector is also to be formed.

Mary Ann Peters in her welcome address said the US government would extend all cooperation for regional cooperation in energy sector in South Asia.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said private sector investment in energy sector can create depth in the capital market, something badly needed in the country.

Haji Selim

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others, identified as Solaiman, Monir Hossain, Sultan Mahfuzul Haque and Abdul Berek, have been absconding since the incident.

The court issued warrant of arrest against the four absconding accused in the case.

Mohammad Ilias Miah, CID inspector and investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the CMM's Court, Dhaka, on January 20.

In the charge sheet, 30 people were shown as prosecution witnesses.

The IO submitted the charge sheet dropping the names of 14 FIR-named accused including ruling party MP Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu as the allegations brought against them were not proved.

Selim was chargesheeted in the case although his name was not mentioned in the FIR (First Information Report). Moreover, the complainant of the case, did not accuse Hazi Selim.

Hazi Selim was shown arrested in the case on January 22.

Santi, 32, a BNP leader, was shot dead at Killer More in the city's Lalbagh area on June 9, 1996.

Sakhina Begum, victim's mother filed a murder case with Lalbagh thana the following day, accusing 18 people including Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, JCD leader and the ruling party MP.

Enhance professional skills, PM asks armed forces

UNB, Gazipur

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday assured the armed forces of her government's continued effort in helping them attain higher standards suiting the needs of time.

Appreciating their already-acquired professionalism that has been acclaimed home and abroad, she asked them to enhance their professional efficiency through training.

The prime minister was addressing the members of Bangladesh Army after witnessing a joint winter exercise of Ninth Infantry Division of the Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Air Force here in the morning.

On arrival at the venue near Ashgir Chala village, Khaleda was received by Army Chief Lt General Harun-Ar Rashid, GOC of the Ninth Division and Savar Area Commander Maj General M Masudur Rahman.

After disembarking from the helicopter, the prime minister

boarded an armed recovery vehicle to watch military exercises.

Brigade Commander of the 81 Infantry Brigade Brig Gen Abu Rush Rokonudowla conducted the army's mock war backed up by other support elements, including helicopter and fighter jets of the air force.

Terming the Bangladesh Army a symbol of independence and sovereignty and national pride, the prime minister hoped they would not lag behind in performing the duties.

She also appreciated their contribution to the welfare and development of the country, maintenance of peace and to helping mankind in times of calamities.

"You have earned confidence of the people through your devotion and sincerity to your profession," said the prime minister, who also holds the defence ministry.

Khaleda mentioned that the armed forces of the country now turned into a skilled, efficient, organised and professional force.

Ministers, state ministers, members of parliament, chiefs of the air force and the navy and other senior military officials were also present.

Janatar Mancha

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A number of officials, including Abu Alam Shahid Khan, Obaidul Mukhtar and Ibrahim Hossain Khan yesterday in their reply to the notices declined to have joined the "Janatar Mancha".

The officials also refuted charges of breaching any discipline or public service rules. They said they did not encourage anyone to join the Mancha.

Instead, the officials alleged that a particular political quarter in the administration was victimising them and the serving of show-cause notices is part of malice.

They also asked the establishment secretary to cite specific charges against them in the interest of justice.

Massive manhunt for Tapan

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Police said 360 police teams have launched a manhunt in ten south-western districts for Tapan, reportedly hiding somewhere in Jessore district.

Police Commissioner Ali Imam Chowdhury has declared a reward of Tk 50,000 for information leading to his arrest. So far 200 people have been taken to custody in the 10 districts for interrogation, police said.

Leaflets and posters containing the police commissioner's appeal to people for help in his arrest have been circulated all over Khulna division.

Passport size photos of Tapan have been sent to all police stations of the ten districts and to border guards.

The Bojra police lines of KMP has been kept under 'constant vigilance' by senior officials apprehending trouble by policemen in protesting against arrest of the two constables allegedly for saving GRO of Judges' court SI Pronob Kumar.

The police commissioner has said Pronob will be taken to custody if evidence of his complicity in Patan's escape is found.

Sources quoting unconfirmed statements of the two arrested constables said Pronob, a 'delinquent officer of KMP' had two secret meetings with some armed cadres of PBCP early this month at his residence in the city.

The plan for Tapan's escape was

made at Pronob's his residence at dead hours of night, they claimed.

When contacted, the police commissioner said, "I have got so many reports that SI Pronob is not a good man. You help me with some more credible reports to take stern action against him". But the police commissioner seemed reluctant to go for action against policemen responsible for security lapses in courts and other key points of city where outlaws and terrorists of political parties have set up strongholds.

An witness to Saturday's incident on the court premises said today that he had seen three AK-47 rifles, three SMGs and five sawn-off rifles in the hands of PBCP cadres when they 'snatched' Tapan from police custody.

Asked about the policemen's alleged inaction, DC of KMP Abul Kashem said, "My policemen were ready to meet such an unwanted situation. But they did not open fire as they had no prior permission from higher authorities".

Pronob, when asked yesterday, said he was quite helpless when the 'high drama' was staged. Refuting allegations against him, he said there are only 14 constables for security duty for 14 judges at the judges' court. "I made repeated appeals to my superiors for sanctioning at least 40 constables for security duty. But my appeals have gone unheeded by higher authorities of KMP", Pronob said.

He further said that the hajat khana of the Judges' court can not accommodate more than 30 prisoners at a time but it remains packed with at least 100 every day. "I was not officially assigned to guard Tapan on Saturday", said the GRO who has already been placed under suspension.

An official of the record room at judges' court said there are so many instances that Pronob gave scope to notorious criminals to meet their wives or other girls in solitary places in police custody in exchange of tips. Pronob refuted the allegation.

Plain crash

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crashed, could be on the volcanoes Cumbal or Chiles, Velez told reporters in Bogota.

A Colombian farmer reported hearing a low-flying plane through the fog and what sounded like a crash when he was in area four hours by horseback from Cumbal.

"We felt as though it was flying low, but we couldn't see it because the sky was full of clouds," Javier Escruceria told local Caracol radio. "It seemed like it had gone down behind the mountain."

The TAME jetliner, which was carrying 83 passengers, including seven children, and nine crew members, lost radio contact at 10:23 am. Ecuador's Civil Aviation department said.

It was the second crash this month in the border region.

Suppliers' credit

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concerned are able to pay back the credit fully on their own. The relevant government organisation will have to submit all information relating to its investment structure and profit and loss projections on the basis of the latest audited report. The loan-seeking project must ensure adequate revenue earning in foreign or local currency.

The relevant project would also have to have a minimum investment return ratio (IRR) of 15 per cent and the project design must have a cost recovery mechanism.

Unlike in the past, the government will not provide any sovereign guarantee against such loans. However, if it becomes absolutely necessary, the Finance Division would scrutinise the scheme for next course of action.

An annual ceiling for suppliers' credit would be set considering the country's macro-economic status, foreign loan liabilities and the state of loan repayment. The Economic Relations Division (ERD) will set this ceiling as a percentage of the GDP every year upon discussion with the Bangladesh Bank, Planning Commission and Finance Division.

While considering a scheme on suppliers' credit, the government would follow a certain set of guidelines. Under it, an organisation looking for project finance should first review scopes of foreign grants or soft loan. If that is not available, it may finance the project itself. If that is not possible, too, it may ask the ERD, Finance Division and Planning Commission for direct government financing. In case all these are not applicable, the organisation may propose for suppliers' credit after obtaining clearance from the ERD, Finance Division and Planning Commission.

Upon approval, the authorities concerned would float an open international competitive tender. A special committee would evaluate the tender proposals and send a report along with the evaluation report to the relevant regulatory authorities.

The regulatory body would scrutinise the evaluation report and form an inter-ministerial committee with the ERD, Finance Division and Planning Commission for recommendation on the best suppliers' creditor proposal.

NAM suites for Mps

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hostel is housed. The proposed annex building is likely to be modelled on the annex building of the Indian parliament, said the sources.

The house committee at its first meeting, after the assumption of power by the BNP-led alliance in October last year, felt the MPs have long been facing housing problems and proposed allotment of some NAM flats to the MPs.

It has chosen 272 flats with at least 1,500 square feet each, at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and Nakhlapara.

In line with the committee's decision, the parliament secretariat issued a letter to the housing and public works ministry for flat allotment. The ministry is likely to decide on the issue within one or two days after today's meeting, the sources said.

A highly placed source in the parliament said the Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat is considering a proposal of construction of a parliament annex building at the vacant place once the MPs move to their respective suites to "reduce the existing

pressure on the main building".

"The main parliament building has lost its architectural beauty as many makeshift office rooms have been made to accommodate additional staff in the parliament secretariat over the years," said an official preferring anonymity.

He added that the parliament needs "more office rooms to cope with the changed situation".

The Awami League government had taken nearly a Tk 1,000 crore project to construct some 700 flats at different places in the city to accommodate foreign guests supposed to attend the Non-aligned Movement Summit.

The government had planned to sell out the flats after the summit, and in line with the government decision some of the flats, constructed without Rajuk's environmental clearance, were sold out.

But after the political changeover in October last year, the new government cancelled the hosting of the summit and planned to allot some flats to the MPs and sell the rest.

Al-Qaida

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al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

"The United States will decide if it will bomb the village or not," he said. "The US special forces may join in the attack," he added.

He was also not sure of the al-Qaida members' intentions but his forces would attempt to capture them "and send them to Cuba."

A Washington report adds: Osama bin Laden received kidney dialysis treatment in Pakistan on the eve of the September 11 terrorist attacks, CBS News said Monday.

Citing Pakistan intelligence sources, the network said the suspected mastermind of the terrorist attacks was secretly spirited into a military hospital in Rawalpindi for treatment with the help of the Pakistani military.

"On that night they moved out all

the regular staff in the urology department and sent in a secret team to replace them," the report quoted an unidentified Pakistani medical worker as saying.

Another hospital employee said that at the time of the procedure, he did not know who the patient was.

"Since that time, I have seen many pictures of the man. He is the man we know as Osama bin Laden," the second employee was quoted as saying. "I also heard two army officers talking to each other. They were saying that Osama bin Laden had to be watched carefully and looked after."

Kolkata incident

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Rath said according to their Home Minister, "None has been arrested, so far, in connection with the Kolkata incident, so there is no question of arrest or detention of any Bangladeshis."

The Bangladesh Acting High Commissioner also drew the attention to other media reports on alleged harassment of Bangladeshis travelling to India.

Ismat also reaffirmed the Indian official about Bangladesh's unequivocal position against terrorism and mentioned that "Bangladesh has never allowed and will not allow its soil to be used for any terrorist or subversive activities against any country, including India."

Osmany Udyan

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Chowdhury, Abu Naser Khan, Dr. Bahul Alam Majumdar, Dr. Mehedi Khuda, Ruhul Hossain Prince, Muhr Bishwas and Amit Ranjan Dey.

Later, a BPA delegation led by Prof. Abdullah Abu Sayeed submitted a memorandum to Dhaka city Mayor Mohammad Hanif.

The memorandum demanded formation of a citizen committee to take care of the Osmany Udyan and similar committees for other public parks.

Missing US reporter

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a senior police official in Karachi said on Tuesday. "We are very much hopeful that the findings will lead us to some major clues."

He said various government agencies were coordinating closely and the search for the missing Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reporter was being monitored by the country's "highest authority".

Wall Street Journal's India Bureau Chief Daniel Pearl visited Bangladesh in July last year. He along with his wife Mariane Pearl, a French free-lance journalist, visited The Daily Star office during their visit to Bangladesh.

Mariane, six months pregnant, last heard from her husband when he called her at their Pakistan home to say he would be late for dinner.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said on Monday Pearl had no connection with the U.S. government and should be immediately and unconditionally released.

Pakistani officials have said they were checking possible links to militant Islamic groups, while officials have said they have never heard of the group claiming the kidnap.

His employer said it has received no word of Pearl.

"Danny is still being held. We

have received no word from anyone," said Steven Goldstein, vice-president of WSJ and publisher Dow Jones & Co.

"We have had no contact with anyone holding Danny and we are obviously concerned... For humanitarian reasons, Danny should be released and returned safely to his family," he added.

2 armed cadres

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Khulna Judges' Court. She is wife of arrested PBCP cadre Bitu, one of the accused in S M A Rob murder case.

She went to the Judges' Court to meet her husband Bitu. Bitu was produced in the court of Additional District Judge yesterday during the hearing of a case under Arms Act.

Chandana was arrested from a residence at Banargati under Sonadanga thana on August 19 in 2000. Police recovered two DBL gun and 14 live cartridges from her possession. Later, she was granted bail.

Police quoting some witnesses said Chandana carried some hand bombs exploded on Saturday for snatching PBCP ringleader Abdur Rashid Tapan from District Judge's Court premises. She left the scene soon after Tapan escaped, police said.

Three muggers

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old son Ridoy.

Banna also identified Tapan -- another mugger suspect and friend of Iqbal. She said both Tapan and Iqbal hail from Mushiganj.

The other victim of mob beating - Zinnat Ali -- was also identified by his wife Ismat Ara.

Ismat is the second of Zinnat's three wives. He has three daughters and two sons. Zinnat also hails from Munshiganj.

Ismat claimed that Zinnat was a farmer and came to the city only two days back.

But Motijheel police yesterday said they are sure that the victims were professional muggers.

Police went to a residence in Jatrabari in search of the owner of the motorbike the alleged muggers were riding, but did not find anyone there. The motorbike was registered in 1989, but the documents have never been renewed since then.