

Army on standby to crackdown on crime

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The army has been kept ready to be called out anytime to crack down on criminals across the country.

The policymakers were supposed to okay army deployment in yesterday's cabinet meeting. But till filing of this report at 10:10pm, law and order was not discussed as the leaders were busy dealing with the upazila rejuvenation issue.

But sources said some 40,000 army personnel would be deployed across the country in a day or two to check crimes and recover illegal arms. The issue that is pending now is whether to give magistracy power to the army while in crackdown operation.

The army will do the combing operation without any police or BDR personnel accompanying them, different agency sources said. However, information about criminals would be gathered from the police. How long the army will be in operation is still unknown.

The army was kept on alert for possible movement into the city from evening. Intelligence agency reced different parts of the capital to identify deployment points.

Earlier, rounds of talks were held among the government high-ups, who felt that police have totally failed to improve the situation.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia sat with her senior leaders including Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda and others.

All the leaders favoured the idea of taking help of the army as they felt that the 'only weak point' of the government right now is the deteriorating law and order. Investors and businessmen are feeling insecure and have ventilated this view at a number of seminars recently.

On the other hand, the government is under pressure from the business community and donors as well to improve the situation. The World Bank has observed that weak law enforcement severely undermines personal security and encourages pervasive extortion besides being major obstacles to any development activities.

On the other hand, the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), the country's leading business body, has said a survey of 23 leading entrepreneurs shows that they are 'concerned over the law and order situation'.

Since the four-party alliance came to power about a year ago, 325 people have been killed and 301 raped every month till September 30, according to an independent estimate. Four Dhaka City Corporation ward commission-

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PHOTO: STAR

A stretch of the road on the eastern side of the Sayedabad bus terminal looks like a water-filled pond. The laid-back attitude of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has left many city roads in disrepair.

Cabinet meeting draws blank on upazila

REZAUL KARIM

The cabinet failed to decide on rejuvenation of the upazila system after a lengthy and heated debate at a special meeting late last night.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda and Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman launched a salvo against a cabinet committee proposal for upazila rejuvenation.

Huda, who played a vital role in 1991 towards abolition of the upazila parishad, introduced by the military regime of HM Ershad, again opposed the concept in yesterday's meeting.

The system would create a conflict of interest between MPs and upazila chairmen, he is learned to

have argued.

Huda also cautioned that upazila would split up political parties and ultimately disrupt democracy.

The meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, then decided to take up the issue at another meeting. LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan placed the proposal at the special cabinet meeting last night. The proposal aims at further decentralisation of the administration for development and empowerment of people at the grassroots.

Earlier on September 14, the cabinet committee on upazila parishad, headed by the LGRD minister, finalised a proposal for rejuvenation of upazila after holding

of seven meetings over the last 10 months.

The committee also recommended measures to remove the possibility of any conflict between the lawmakers and upazila chairmen.

Mannan Bhuiyan, also the secretary-general of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), refuted Huda's argument saying upazila revival was an election commitment of the BNP and had become a national demand.

It would further strengthen local government and people would get great benefit through decentralisation, he is learnt to have told the meeting.

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Union Parishad election from Jan 11 to Feb 27

BSS, Dhaka

Union Parishad election across the country will be held from January 11 to February 27 next year.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Election Commission yesterday with Chief Election Commissioner M A Sayeed in the chair.

Election Commissioners M M Munsef Ali, A K Mohammad Ali, Secretary of the EC Secretariat S M Zakaria, IGP Modabber Hossain Chowdhury and representatives of Home Ministry and Local Government division were present at the meeting.

The meeting laid emphasis on taking all-out measures to keep the law and order under control for holding the elections in a fair, neutral and peaceful atmosphere.

'Rebels' still control Ctg JCD office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The faction of Chittagong City unit of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) opposed to the unit's newly announced convening committee kept the city JCD office at Nasimon Bhaban under its control for the third consecutive day yesterday.

In continuation of their agitation programme, the activists of the faction held separate rallies and processions at Nasimon Bhaban premises, Polytechnic College and Bakolia in the city yesterday demanding immediate cancellation of the committee. They also vowed to continue their agitation and announce greater programmes until their demand is met.

The faction however postponed until tomorrow its press conference scheduled for today on the occasion

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Use surface water as much as possible: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Against the backdrop of alarming fall in groundwater level, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday called for optimum use of surface water in irrigation for the country's sustainable development.

"Like many other countries in the world, the groundwater level in Bangladesh is falling gradually due to excess lifting. It will be beneficial for us if we can ensure the best use of surface water in agricultural work as quickly as possible," she said.

Inaugurating a countrywide programme here marking the World Food Day 2002, Khaleda described

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Foreign secretary terms Time report 'baseless'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Secretary Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury yesterday termed the New York-based Time magazine report on Bangladesh 'fictitious, baseless and imaginative'.

"This is an orchestrated campaign designed to malign the country's international image as a liberal democratic country," Chowdhury said while briefing journalists about the report published in the current issue of the magazine.

The Time report titled "Deadly Cargo" said "signs abound that Bangladesh has become a safe haven for Islamic jihadis-including Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters fresh off the boat from Afghanistan."

Quoting an unnamed member of the Harka-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI), reporter Alex Perry said some 150

Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters from Afghanistan entered Bangladesh on December 21 last year by a ship named MV Mecca with sophisticated AK-47 rifles and ammunition.

Calling it extremely irresponsible and sensational journalism, Chowdhury said the Time report is a figment of wild imagination. "It seems that a vested group of people here have fed misinformation (to the reporter) only to tarnish the country's image," he said, adding that such a move should be unilaterally resisted.

The foreign secretary said the report is not substantiated and the information does not attribute to any specific source.

Asked if the reported story of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters land

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Foundation of Newmooring terminal to be laid today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia lays the foundation stone of the Newmooring container terminal at the Chittagong port today.

Security has been stepped up in and around the city for the function. "With the installation of Newmooring container terminal, the efficiency of Chittagong port will increase and so will be able to cope up with growing traffic here," port officials said.

Once this project is completed, at least five container vessels will be able to take berth for loading and unloading container cargo, port sources said.

The container terminal will have a 1000-metre berth with capacity to handle 300,000 TEUs containers annually, they added.

The Tk 750 crore project was undertaken in 1996 to keep up with rapidly growing number of con

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PHOTO: STAR

Businessmen and workers demonstrate in the Narayanganj town yesterday against the spiralling trend in robbery and other crimes. For instance, a shop was looted at B Das Road in Nimtali area Tuesday night.

India to bring troops back from Pak border

AFP, New Delhi

India announced yesterday it would withdraw troops deployed for nearly a year on its frontiers with Pakistan but would maintain the full build-up in the divided region of Kashmir.

In a major step toward de-escalating tensions in nuclear-armed South Asia, Defence Minister George Fernandes said the armed forces had been "asked to redeploy from positions on the international border with Pakistan, without impairing their capacity to respond decisively to any emergency."

But he added: "There will be no lowering of the vigil in Jammu and Kashmir," giving the formal name for the Indian state.

He did not specify the number of troops to be withdrawn. Fernandes also ruled out any resumption of dialogue with Pakistan "until cross-border terrorism stops completely."

The statement said India's Cabinet Committee on Security had decided to ease the standoff as the army had "achieved the objectives assigned to them."

The statement cited specifically the four-round assembly elections that ended October 8 in Indian Kashmir.

India has about 700,000 troops deployed at its shared borders with Pakistan. The standoff was triggered by a December 13 attack on India's parliament by gunmen New Delhi claims were sponsored by Islamabad.

The arch-rivals have come to the brink of war after a series of massacres in Kashmir, including attacks on a slum and an army residential camp near the state's winter capital of Jammu.

A series of Western envoys have tried to defuse the standoff. In June, India said Pakistan had promised the United States it would crack down on Muslim militants.

The withdrawal decision followed a day of high-powered meetings including a rare joint meeting of India's security cabinet, the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and the Strategic Policy Group - in essence, the entire security establishment. It was chaired by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The last time the three groups met jointly was in 1999, when nuclear-armed India and Pakistan came dangerously close to a third full-scale war over Kashmir following the infiltration of Pakistani troops into mountains in the Kargil zone of Indian-administered Kashmir.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Oct 17		5-31 pm
Oct 18	5-57 am	

Prayer Timings		
Oct 17		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-00	5-25
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-37	5-42
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation