

Foreigners under watch

NSI also keeping an eye on some local journalists

REZAUL KARIM

The government has strengthened surveillance on foreign visitors to check 'spying' in guise of journalists or any other profession.

Highly placed sources in the government said the surveillance decision was taken in the wake of several reports in international media, linking Bangladesh to al-Qaida network.

They said after the arrest of two foreign journalists who entered Bangladesh in disguise the government was 'forced to up' surveillance on foreign nationals.

Home ministry sources said the National Security Intelligence (NSI) has been assigned to watch foreign nationals and keep the ministry informed about suspicious visitors.

The NSI is also keeping an eye on some local journalists, who are allegedly involved in dispatching important information to foreign agencies. The government has arrived at this conclusion from the confessional statements of the two arrested foreign journalists. He said the government has no plan to impose any restriction on or obstruct foreign journalists and a local one.

However, Information Minister Tariqul Islam told The Daily Star that the

government has no plan to impose any restriction on or obstruct foreign journalists if they come under genuine identity.

Foreign ministry sources said instructions have been given to Bangladesh missions abroad never to refuse any visa seekers, but their purpose of visit must be clarified.

The information minister said nearly 40 teams of foreign journalists visited Bangladesh in the past one year and many are now in the country. But none of them were obstructed in carrying out their professional duties.

"The foreign journalists are free to visit anywhere in the country...they are meeting with ministers, opposition politicians and general people without any obstruction," said a high official of the information ministry.

However, a home ministry official said legal action would be taken if anyone is found involved in spying or activities that may destroy the country's image.

Some ministers said a section of the international media, particularly the Indian press, is engaged in campaigns against Bangladesh to ruin its image with an ulterior motive.

Referring to the arrest of two foreign journalists, the information minister

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Channel-4 gives identity of 2 journalists

UNB, London

The media authorities concerned in UK launched a vigorous move towards freeing the two Channel-4 journalists detained in Bangladesh and furnished their real identity to the country's mission here.

It was disclosed that the two were on assignment to do stories for "Unreported World" strand of Channel 4 hiding their identities on advice of Mentorn Midlands, an independent production company appointed by the TV channel.

Executive Producer of the company Emonn Matthews disclosed this to the Bangladesh High Commission and made a plea for their release.

High Commission sources said Mentorn sent journalists Zaiba

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PHOTO: AFP

West Indian power-hitter Ricardo Powell looks back at his wickets left in a disarray by an Ehsanul Haque delivery in yesterday's second one-dayer against Bangladesh at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Foreign journalists Govt likely to drop sedition charges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is likely to drop sedition charges against Zaiba Naz Malik and Leopoldo Bruno Sorrentino, a source said yesterday.

The foreign journalists arrested on suspected involvement in anti-Bangladesh activities may be freed soon as protest against their detention is mounting, the source added.

However, the authorities would go for further investigation to know about the motive of the two foreigners who had concealed their identities while coming to Bangladesh.

In another development, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) last night took over investiga-

tion into the sedition case filed against Malik and Sorrentino.

According to sources, the CID may go for fresh remand of the two foreign journalists and their local guide.

Meanwhile, Malik and Sorrentino and their local guide Moniza Priscilla Raj were yesterday sent to the Dhaka Central Jail following a Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court order.

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The magistrate issued the order before the defence lawyers could plead for bail of their clients who were produced before the court at the end of a five-day police remand.

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HC refuses to accept writ petitions

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday refused to entertain the writ petitions of two foreign nationals and their two local aides challenging their arrest and subsequent detention on sedition charges.

The court, however, disposed of the petitions with directives to the government to allow the accused persons to consult with their lawyers twice a week and meet their representatives and relatives for supplying food and water.

The court also ordered not to maltreat the detainees during interrogation.

A division bench comprising Justice Amirul Kabir Chowdhury and Justice Nizamul Huq passed the orders after hearing both sides.

Earlier, Attorney General AF Hassan Ariff submitted the FIR and relevant papers and documents of the case as directed by the court.

Italian national Led Poido Brono Sorrentino and British citizen of Pakistan origin Zaiba Naz Malik working for Channel-4 TV network of UK, Saleem Samad of Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) and guide Moniza Priscilla Raj moved the petitions.

Sorrentino and Zaiba were arrested on November 25 when crossing the Benapole border. Police seized videocassettes from their possession. Guide Moniza was picked up from Goalonda while returning to Dhaka after dropping the two foreigners at Benapole while Salim samad was held from a house

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Stampede: 6 sued in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Police yesterday filed a case accusing six people for the deaths in a stampede during Zakat distribution in Gaibandha town on Sunday.

The accused are owner of the Nahid Cotton Mills M A Wahed, his uncle Moku Talukder, sister Feroza Begum, two brothers Ranju and Masud, and night guard Moizuddin. Police also seized 700 pieces of Saria evidence.

Deputy Commissioner of Gaibandha M A Sabur meanwhile admitted that the death toll in the incident is 37. Earlier, the administration admitted deaths of 30 people.

At least 37 people -- 33 women and four children -- were trampled to death at a purchasing centre of the now closed down Adamjee Jute Mills at Godown Road in the town on

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PM offers Lailatul Qadr prayers at Masjidul Haram

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia offered Lailatul Qadr prayers overnight at Masjidul Haram at Makkah Sunday night, along with hundreds of Muslim devotees, seeking divine blessing for her country and countrymen.

During the prayers on the holy night, a night when the Qur'an was revealed upon Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM), Khaleda Zia also sought peace, progress and prosperity of the entire Muslim Ummah.

Earlier, the prime minister took

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Sarwan powers Windies

SPORT REPORTER

Ramnareh Sarwan scored his maiden hundred to power the West Indies to a comprehensive 84-run victory over the hosts Bangladesh in the second one-dayer of the Coca-Cola Series at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The 22-year-old batsman from Guyana, later adjudged man of the match, struck an unbeaten 102, helping the visitors recover from a sluggish start to pile up a commanding 266 for four.

The home side was shot out for 182 in 48 overs with only Mohammad Ashraf showing real character on a wicket that was keeping low and slow.

The young sensation scored an authoritative 44 before slashing leg-spinner Mahendra Nagamootoo to Wavell Hinds at point.

The only entertainer for the 20,000 home crowd in the day-night affair, Ashraf won his second battle with fast bowler Jermaine Lawson, who conceded 20 runs in two overs before being taken off the attack.

Ashraf helped himself to 16 runs from the two-over blitz that featured a

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Offices down with Eid fever

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Most government and semi-government offices are already in an Eid mood, with the bulk of staffers taking French leave.

Offices will witness stagnancy in activities until about a week after the Eid-ul-Fitr. Be it a bank, a registrar's office, a post office, a hospital (!) or the Bangladesh Secretariat, all register a low attendance of staff.

As today is a government holiday for the Lailat-ul-Qadr, all offices will be virtually deserted for a long Eid holiday with employees and officials bridging the remaining working days up to the Eid day.

Moreover, as the Eid approaches, (if the moon is sighted on Thursday the Eid will be observed on Friday, if not, on Saturday) thousands of people, especially from the lower income groups, are leaving the capital for their village homes. Buses, trains and vessels are already busy shuttling the home-bound people.

Government officials are becoming increasingly hard to locate in their official seats. Ramadan office hours are between 9am and 3pm, with a short break for the Zohr prayers at around 1pm.

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PHOTO: STAR

The 30-kilometre flood-protection embankment from Lalbagh to Aminbazar in Savar suffers land erosion and subsidence largely due to government sluggishness in implementing the green belt project.

Greening embankment still on drawing board

JULHAS RIPON and NICOLE MEIER

Government inertia has left the green belt project on the 30-kilometre flood-protection embankment from Lalbagh to Aminbazar in Savar hanging in the balance for the last nine years.

Non-implementation of the project has already taken its toll in the shape of frequent land erosion and subsidence at different sections of the embankment. Lack of plantation has also heightened the possibility of floodwater leakage.

According to sources, the project could not be implemented due to lack of co-ordination between the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Forest and Environment.

The project was designed to protect the embankment from land subsidence and erosion, strengthen its

base and maintain adequate humidity in the city air, the sources said.

Officials of the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) said construction of most parts of the embankment was complete before 1990. The embankment protects nearly 150 square kilometres of the western part of the city from floodwater during the rainy season.

Sources said, in the 1993-94 fiscal, the government initiated a five-year 'Urban Afforestation Project' for tree plantation in the city, under which the green belt project was supposed to be implemented. The Department of Forest was in charge of implementing the project.

Under this project, in 1995-96 about 32,000 saplings were planted along the embankment from Ashulia to Mirpur Botanical Garden, which covered only nine

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BNP hawks want Hasina sued for 'sedition'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hardliners in the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) are pushing for sedition charges against Sheikh Hasina for her 'remarks against the country' during her recent trip overseas.

However, most of the policymakers are against the idea and believe that a media campaign should be launched instead against the leader of the opposition in parliament.

A decision in this regard will be

taken upon Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's return from Saudi Arabia, sources in the party said. She is expected back tomorrow after performing the umrah.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's Office has instructed the Bangladesh missions in the United States, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Bangkok and India to send press clippings on Hasina's statements during her visit.

According to official sources, the Ministry of Information and the

External Publicity Wing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have already collected the newspapers that carried reports on Hasina.

Side by side they have also collected clippings of leading news dailies and magazines and also copies of Hasina's speeches abroad.

Official and party sources say that several BNP policymakers are examining whether or not the press reports are sufficient to bring sedi-

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