

Security scurry for X-mas, New Year's eve

REZAUL KARIM

The government has taken massive preparation to tighten security across the country, particularly in the capital, on the eve of Christmas and the New Year's night.

A highly placed source at the home ministry said police have been ordered to deploy extra forces at all churches in the wake of recent bomb attacks in cinema halls.

He said there is an apprehension that the terrorists may go for such heinous acts in public gatherings and religious programmes to create lawlessness.

Plainclothesmen would assist the uniformed policemen to avert any untoward incident in churches.

On the New Year's night, extra police forces would be deployed like previous years in strategic areas in the city, specially in the posh diplomatic zones of Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara.

Security measures have also been taken to control unruly revellers in the streets, guesthouses, bars and hotels.

Sources said some 20 check-posts would be set up at all the entry points to the diplomatic areas from the evening of December 31 to January 1, 2003.

There would also be check-posts in the Dhaka University area. Police would also be deployed in women's colleges and dormitories of girls.

Officials said 17 special police squads would patrol the city.

Police may also raid some hotels, bars, warehouses, guesthouses and party centres in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Mohakhali where hard drinks are offered illegally.

Police have also asked 13 party centres in Gulshan and 15 guesthouses and bars not to serve hard drinks as they do not have licences.

Relatives again not allowed to see Shahriar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Brother and daughter of writer-journalist Shahriar Kabir had to face harassment when they came to meet him at the Chittagong Jail yesterday, although the High Court had given them the permission to see Shahriar Kabir in jail.

They later expressed their resentment over the role of administration in this regard.

Kalandiar Kabir and Arpita Shahriar Mumu, brother and daughter of Shahriar Kabir, had to wait for more than three and a half hours in front of the jail gate, before they were finally allowed to meet and see the imprisoned writer-journalist at around 1.00pm.

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Jail authorities asked to bring Enamul to court Dec 30

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka yesterday directed the jail authorities to produce Reuters stringer Enamul Haque Chowdhury before it during the hearing of his bail prayer on December 30.

Magistrate Mamun-Ai-Rashid issued the order upon a petition submitted by lawyers of the accused.

The court also directed the Dhaka Central Jail authorities to allow Enamul's wife to meet him twice a week and allow one of his lawyers, M Sajwar Hossain, to meet him (Enamul) at the jail gate as per the Jail Code.

In two other petitions submitted earlier, the defence lawyers said Enamul was mentally and physically tortured and was forced by Detective Branch (DB) of police to

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Iraq opens doors to CIA to prove US wrong

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq has labelled as lies US and British claims it has weapons of mass destruction and was prepared yesterday to open its doors to the CIA to prove the point in a bid to halt massive US war preparations.

Baghdad's latest barb, delivered by a top aide to President Saddam Hussein, came as Saudi Arabia warned Washington against going it alone, while also hinting it might cooperate in a UN-sanctioned war.

But US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, a noted hawk, insisted Washington has not decided on war and is still looking for a peaceful solution.

Iraqi General Amer al-Saadi said Sunday night that after nearly a month of UN arms inspections covering "practically all the sites" named in US and British reports and after the submission of Iraq's December 7 declaration on its weapons programmes, the "lies and baseless allegations have been uncovered".

They had convinced "UNMOVIC (the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission), the IAEA (the International Atomic Energy Agency) and the whole world to believe they have ironclad evidence that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction and promised to provide the evidence."

He was referring to a dossier published several weeks ago by British Prime Minister Tony Blair and one by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The Blair report was "long on allegations and short on evidence," he said. "The report was a hodgepodge of half-truths, naive short-sighted allegations and lies. The CIA report was much the same."

"The true part of the half-truths appears in detail in our declaration," said Saadi, who is Saddam's top adviser on weapons.

"Now... we have (British Foreign Secretary Jack) Straw and (US Secretary of State Colin) Powell declaring that we are in material breach" of UN Security Council Resolution 1441, which toughened the inspections regime.

The resolution, adopted on November 8, required Iraq to present "a currently accurate, full and complete declaration of all aspects of its programs to develop chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and other delivery systems".

Being in material breach of it would expose Iraq to the risk of a UN-sanctioned military attack.

Saadi said Iraq had no more documentation to support its claims "but we are ready... to work and cooperate with UNMOVIC to find ways of resolving the remaining disarmament issues, provided also that an assessment is made of the significance of those remaining issues."

To drive that home, Saadi said Baghdad was prepared to allow US experts, presumably from the CIA, to come to Iraq.

"We have no problem with the American intelligence services coming to Iraq and pointing out to the inspectors the sites that they should inspect," he said.

The official press also lashed out at US President George W Bush and Blair, with the ruling Baath Party daily Ath-Thawra charging they were waging

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is received with a bouquet upon her arrival at the Beijing Capital Airport yesterday on a five-day official visit to China with a 91-strong entourage (Story on page 1).

Campaign for key AL posts hots up

NAZRUL ISLAM

With the triennial council only two days away, the Awami League central office on the Bangabandhu Avenue in the city is now abuzz with overt and covert campaign for key party posts.

Notwithstanding the police cordon, a huge number of leaders and activists have frequented the office over the last couple of days or so, as speculation over replacement for the incumbent party general secretary intensifies.

Former commerce minister and presidium member Abdul Jalil yesterday formally announced his candidature for the post. On the other hand, his possible contender, former state minister for youth, sports and cultural affairs Obaidul Quader, has been campaigning for weeks now.

However, the question remains

whether there would be any elections at all.

"It is still uncertain. If the councilors demand, the election commission of the party will conduct an election," said a member of the commission, who would not be named.

Head of the commission and former education minister ASHK Sadique yesterday told the press there would not be any printed nomination paper for the elections. "A councillor can propose a candidate with two seconds. The proposal can be in writing or oral."

Meanwhile, an Awami League Central Working Committee meeting yesterday approved the draft of a mourning proposal and the general secretary's report for the council.

With Hasina in the chair, the meeting also discussed preparations for the council and adopted its

agenda.

Heads of different organising subcommittees and most of the central committee members were at the meeting, which was adjourned till 11:00am today. Today, the meeting will discuss the general secretary's report and various amendment proposals brought by the subcommittees.

Earlier in the morning, the constitution sub-committee at a meeting finalised the proposals for amendment to the party constitution and manifesto for the working committee meeting.

Chaired by Abdus Samad Azad, the meeting was attended among others by AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman, Syeda Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak, Abdul Jalil, Professor Abu Sayed, AKM Jahangir Hossain and Nuh-ul-Alam Lenin.

Khosru refutes Indian press report on transit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday brushed aside Indian press reports that Dhaka is 'ready to fulfil Delhi's wish list' including transit facility and access to Chittagong port if Bangladeshi products are allowed 'zero tariff' access to Indian markets.

The Times of India in a December 21 report headlined 'Bangladesh offers conditional challenge to Chittagong port' said, "From transit rights to access to Chittagong port, Bangladesh is ready to fulfil India's wish list, provided the Bangladeshi demand for access to Indian markets at zero tariffs is allowed."

"Bangladesh commerce minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury made this clear at a press conference in Kolkata on Friday," the newspaper claimed.

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Partial ban on cigarette ads on private TV

UNB, Dhaka

The government has banned advertisement for cigarettes on private television before 10:00pm as an interim measure before slapping a total ban.

Information Minister Tariqul Islam yesterday directed the authorities concerned to take steps so that "no cigarette advertisement is telecast on private television before 10:00pm", pending a final embargo.

"The government is considering completely banning cigarette advertisement on television," he told a meeting with private TV authorities.

The directive came after elaborate discussion on cigarette advertisements on private TV channels in the meeting held at the Information

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Arms case Charge-framing against ex-Whip and his three sons today

A CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The Speedy Trial Tribunal, Barisal Division, is scheduled to frame charge today against ex-chief whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah and his three sons, accused in an arms case.

Earlier, Judge Abdul Kuddus on Sunday passed an order fixing the date for charge framing after the case was placed before him.

Moin Abdullah and Ashik Abdullah, two sons of Abul Hasnat on Sunday appeared before the tribunal and prayed for bail.

After hearing both sides, the judge granted ad-interim bail to the accused.

Meanwhile, members of the joint forces recovered two guns and 174 bullets from the city's Kalibari road residence of Abul Hasnat Abdullah on October 22.

ADB sees higher growth GDP may grow by 5.4pc this fiscal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The GDP growth rate in Bangladesh might rise to 5.4 per cent this fiscal from 4.2 per cent in FY02 due to 'a measured recovery' both in external and domestic demands, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has said.

"The government needs to continue addressing domestic constraints such as infrastructure bottlenecks to gain faster recovery. Faster progress in poverty reduction remains the central development challenge in Bangladesh," Country Director of the ADB Toru Shibuchi said at a press conference in the city yesterday.

Higher growth in agriculture is expected to be 'led by a good food crop' assuming favourable weather continues, Shibuchi said. The export-oriented manufacturing sector will 'rebound' provided the recovery in external demand is sustained.

Bangladesh will need a sustained annual GDP growth rate of 7 to 8 per cent to meet the 'income poverty reduction target' (a 50 per cent reduction by 2010) of the poverty reduction partnership agreement between the Bangladesh government and the ADB. The estimates is based on the simulation results of a macroeconomic model developed to determine the responsiveness of poverty reduction to economic growth, the country director said.

He mentioned that the ADB has earmarked five firm lending programmes involving US\$ 560 million in 2003. Of this, \$260 million are concessional funds and \$280 million are from LIBOR-based lending facilities. This indicates ADB's expanding cooperation with the Bangladesh government and supporting its efforts to promote higher and sustainable economic growth and reducing poverty, he

added. The 2003 lending programme also includes two standby projects - small and medium enterprise development and export expansion and secondary towns integrated flood protection -- involving a total of US\$110 million from ADB's concessional sources of funds.

In 2002, ADB approved five development projects for Bangladesh, involving US\$299.8 million, to support development and reforms in key areas of the economy, he mentioned.

The ADB will also support regional cooperation through its South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) programme, he said.

Responding to a question, ADB economist Rezaul Karim Khan said inflation in the country is still under control and that it was 4.2 per cent on point-to-point

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Riot police mount guard when over 500 activists of the Awami League pass by in a procession in the city yesterday, shouting slogans against 'harassment of their leaders and other activists by the government'.

Frantic search for two 'missing' cargo ships

Mongla customs sues owners, importers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A frantic search is going on in all river routes including those in the Sundarbans to locate the two missing cargo ships -- MV Mina and MV Malon, sources said.

As per documents, these were Bangladeshi and not Indian ships, carrying "rice" from India, imported by K K Corporation and Millenium Paper House of Dhaka, according to Mongla customs authorities.

Warrants of arrest have been issued against the two captains of the ships, their owners and import-

ers of the "rice" following filing of two cases with Koira thana on Saturday, the OC of the thana said.

Messages have been sent to all police stations concerned to seize the ships, he said.

The frantic search began because of suspicion whether the ships were carrying rice or any other item, the sources said.

The customs officials said that as per documents, the ships were to berth at Mongla port to unload the cargo.

But MV Mina and MV Malon halted at Anghithara checkpoint at

Koyra upazilla on August 13 and August 23 respectively. Those are missing since then.

Neither customs nor BIWTA officials checked the ships after they had unscheduled halt at Anghithara check post without giving prior intimation, the sources said.

BIWTA had permitted the cargo ships to enter Mongla port because, as per documents, they were carrying imported Indian rice.

MV Mina was carrying 700 tonnes of rice worth Tk 63,50,595 and MV Malon 869 tonnes worth Tk

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Dec 24		5-18 pm
Dec 25	6-39 am	

Prayer Timings		
Dec 24		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-22	5-28
Esha	7-30	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation