

Indo-Pak troops trade heavy fire in Kashmir

BSF set for redeployment at borders

AFP, Srinagar

Indian and Pakistani troops yesterday exchanged ferocious artillery and mortar fire along the *de facto* border of disputed Kashmir.

In what police called the fiercest exchanges between the arch-rivals in recent months, Pakistani troops resorted to "unprovoked firing" that targeted Indian military positions in southern Poonch district of the Indian-controlled side of the Himalayan region.

"The shells have hit frontier civilian villages," a police officer told AFP. He said Bandi Chechyan village has been hit the most.

"So far there have been no casualties," the officer said. Indian gunners returned fire in exchanges that continued along the Line of Control (LoC) — the ceasefire line

that divides Kashmir between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

Each nation claims Kashmir and controls a piece of it. Since their independence from Britain in 1947 the two ever-hostile neighbours have fought two of their three wars over the scenic high-altitude area.

The officer said the firing prompted front-line residents to temporarily abandon their homes.

India and Pakistan frequently exchange fire along the 742-kilometer LoC since the eruption of an armed anti-Indian rebellion in the region in 1989 that has so far killed 37,500 people.

New Delhi accuses Islamabad of opening fire along the LoC to provide cover to infiltrating rebels. Pakistan denies the charge.

PTI adds: The Centre has decided to redeploy the Border

Security Force at the borders and utilise the services of Central Reserve Police Force for internal security duties in Jammu and Kashmir, BSF Inspector General GS Gill said here on Sunday.

"Government of India has taken a policy decision whereby CRPF has been selected as the main force to fight insurgency and BSF to guard the borders to further strengthen the frontiers of the country", Gill told reporters after unfurling the national tricolour at the historic Lal Chowk here.

He said the process will be set in motion this year but it had not yet been decided in which sector BSF will be reintroduced first.

Official sources said initially eight battalions of CRPF will take over from BSF to fight insurgency in the state. Later, it will gradually relieve

BSF from internal security duties and don the mantle to fight insurgency in the state. The process will take few months time, he added.

Expressing satisfaction over the peaceful passing off of Republic Day celebrations, Gill said apart from the usual militant threats, this year there were specific warnings about vehicles being prepared for fideyeen (suicide) attacks.

"In fact we even reacted to two or three specific reports and in one case actually recovered an IED (improvised explosive device) which was supposed to be in a car but was found on the roadside", the IG BSF said adding "we have taken all the threats seriously and have managed to keep the day peaceful".



PHOTO: STAR

The Bangladesh Mahila Parishad form a human chain in the city yesterday, demanding an increase in women's reserved seats in the Jatiya Sangsad and direct elections to them.

St Martin's declared ecologically endangered

UNB, Dhaka

Saint Martin's island, the country's lone coral island, has been declared ecologically endangered.

The Ministry of Environment and Forest took the decision to protect the bio-diversity and excellent natural beauties of the island, said an official release yesterday.

An official gazette notification said ecosystem of the island has been endangered and it might worsen further in the future owing to the unplanned activities in the coral-rich island.

"Under the circumstances, the ministry will set up a marine park and eco-tourism centre there to protect the island," said the release.

In an effort to maintain the island's ecology, the ministry has banned collection of sand and coral rocks, construction of any infrastructure without official permit

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Malibagh case Iqbal's bail petition rejected

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Speedy Trial Tribunal, Dhaka Division yesterday rejected the bail petition of former Awami League (AL) lawmaker Dr HBM Iqbal, the main accused in connection with the killing of four persons by gunfire on a BNP procession at Malibagh Square on February 13, 2001.

Judge Shahed Nooruddin passed the order upon a petition by lawyers seeking bail for Iqbal who was elected to parliament in 1996 on AL ticket from Tejgaon.

The same court on January 22 rejected Iqbal's bail petition and sent him to the Dhaka Central Jail after his surrender to the tribunal.

The court however adjourned till February 2 the hearing on charge-framing against the 24 accused including Iqbal following a time petition by Iqbal's lawyers who said they did not get the necessary documents related to charge hearing.

Shawkat Hossain Nannu, Jasim Uddin and Ziaul Haque Shameem, the three other accused in the case who were earlier granted bail by the High Court, surrendered to the court and sought fresh bail. The court granted them bail upon a bond of Tk 30,000 with two guarantors.

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 28		5-42 pm
Jan 29	6-41 am	
Prayer Timings		
Jan 28		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-45	6-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-46	5-52
Esha	7-15	7-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		

UP polls violence hurts 50 2 abducted young men murdered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Violence broke out in 10 out of 20 upazilas where voting took place on the third day yesterday of the Union Parishad polls.

According to sources in district administrations, at least 50 people were injured in election-related violence in Patuakhali, Bagerhat, Faridpur, Sherpur, Rajbari, Rangpur and Joypurhat districts. Election was held in 82 Union Parishad yesterday.

Meantime, police recovered bodies of two young men who were abducted on January 18 in Pabna over rivalry in the UP polls.

Osman, 50, and Abdul Wahab, 32, were said to be supporters of Tripura's state capital Agartala and launched an attack on the meeting.

"The militants went on the rampage, firing indiscriminately with automatic weapons on a group of people assembled inside a house for election campaigning," a senior police official told AFP by telephone from Agartala.

Six people died on the spot,

upazila. He lost the election, held on Jan 25, to Abu Sayed, a listed criminal who contested from jail. In Patuakhali, at least 20 people were injured, 11 of them critically, in a clash between the supporters of two chairman candidates at Palpara Bazaar in Sadar upazila on Sunday. The violence erupted when supporters of a candidate attacked a projection meeting of the other. Police arrested four people in this connection, our correspondent reported.

Supporters of a chairman candidate ransacked election office of his rival in Morelganj upazila of Bagerhat lead to violence that left at least 10 people injured. The condition of four of them was critical.

In Nilphamari, police arrested 14 people from different polling centres while they allegedly tried to upset

the election atmosphere and snatch ballot box.

Meanwhile, Union Parishad elections will be held in the following unions today.

Patuakhali Sadar: Lohalia, Kamalpur, Jainkathi, Kalikapur, Chotobighai, Barabighai, Marichbunia and Oulpur.

Barisal Sadar : Jagua, Raypasha, Karipur.

Chapainawabganj Sadar: Islampur, Debinagar, Sundarpur.

Natore Sadar: Madhanagar, Biprabelgharia, Piprul, Brahmaputra, Khajra.

Panba Sadar: Malanchi, Gayeshpur, Hemaetpur, Daputnia .

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Rebels rake CPM election meet in Tripura: 11 killed

AFP, Guwahati

Tribal separatists raked an election meeting in India's troubled north-eastern state of Tripura with automatic gunfire, killing 11 people including five women and a three-year-old girl, police said yesterday.

Eight other people were seriously wounded in the attack late Sunday, a police spokesman said.

He said heavily-armed militants of the outlawed National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) entered the village of Mandai, 18 km east of Tripura's state capital Agartala and launched an attack on the meeting.

"The militants went on the rampage, firing indiscriminately with automatic weapons on a group of people assembled inside a house for election campaigning," a senior police official told AFP by telephone from Agartala.

Six people died on the spot,

while five succumbed to injuries early Monday morning in a hospital in the capital city, he said.

"Thirteen people were brought to the hospital, five of whom died. Four of the eight injured are battling for survival with multiple bullet injuries," said local doctor B. Deb.

All the victims were members of Tripura's ruling Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM).

Tripura goes to the polls on February 26 to elect a 60-member state legislature.

"As is the practice, our leaders were on a house-to-house election campaigning drive when the NLFT attack took place," said CPM party spokesman Gautam Das.

"The attack is nothing but an attempt to create panic and fear among our party workers and supporters by the NLFT at the behest of opposition political parties."

The NLFT, fighting for an inde-

pendent tribal homeland, currently operates out of bases inside adjoining Bangladesh to carry out their hit-and-run guerrilla strikes on Indian soldiers.

During the past month at least a dozen senior CPM leaders have been killed and five kidnapped in separate incidents by the NLFT.

At least 200 people have died in separate rebel attacks during the past year with the NLFT and another frontline group, the All Tripura Tiger Force, wreaking havoc, kidnapping and extorting money in remote areas.

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar said the militants were taking advantage of the state's 856 km unfenced border with Bangladesh.

More than 10,000 people have lost their lives to insurgency in Tripura in the past two decades.

Music stops at police intervention

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police prevented organisers from holding a scheduled concert at the international trade fair venue at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city yesterday, which led to a brief confrontation between the two sides.

The fair however continued uninterrupted.

Popular band groups LRB, Dhaka Band and Nightingale and folk singer Kiron Chandra Roy were to perform at the concert from 3:00pm. The band show was scheduled to be held everyday till February 6, organisers said.

Rora Security, the company officially assigned to maintain peace and ensure security at fair, is the organiser of the concert.

Police and Rora officials came up with totally conflicting versions of the incident.

Talking to journalists at the venue, Rora officials alleged that police drove away about 100 of their men on duty and about 80 volunteers and baton-charged a number

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PHOTO: STAR

Police guard a stage at the Dhaka International Trade Fair at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city yesterday after they prevented a pop concert for security reasons.

Closure of sick jute mills saves Tk 150cr

RAFIQ HASAN

The recent closure of a number of sick jute mills including the Adamjee Jute Mills Ltd. would reduce the loss of the government by Tk 150 crore this fiscal, said a high official of the jute ministry.

According to a government estimate, the loss of the state-owned Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC), which runs the jute mills, is likely to come down to around Tk 150 crore from Tk 300 crore of last fiscal.

The Adamjee was closed down on June 30 last year and over 20,000 workers were retrenched.

Eight other sick jute mills including Nishat Jute Mills in Tongi and Daulatpur Jute Mills in Khulna were closed down recently. There are now 23 jute mills under the BJMC from the previous 32.

The jute ministry official said the closure of AJM has brought about

discipline in the jute sector as the number of workers and employees under the corporation has reduced to around 70,000 from over one lakh.

"The workers and the Collective Bargaining Agents (CBA) leaders who were the main trouble-mongers in the mills are now very conscious about their actions after the shut-down of the largest jute mills (Adamjee) in the region," he observed.

The 23 jute mills under the corporation already suffered around Tk 80 crore in loss in the first six months of the current fiscal. The total loss at the end of the fiscal in the month of June is projected at around Tk 150 crore, said another high jute ministry official yesterday.

According to sources, the export already fell behind the target by around Tk 90 crore. Set to earn Tk 400 crore in the first half of the current fiscal, the

corporation fetched around Tk 310 crore by exporting jute goods abroad during July-December '02 period.

The total earning during the previous fiscal stood at Tk 650 crore and 2.26 lakh tonnes of jute goods were exported during the period.

The sources said the government has decided not to subsidise the jute sector this year. Last year however it gave around Tk 100 crore in subsidy. The commercial banks provided Tk 120 crore loan this year to the jute mills for procurement of raw jute during the harvest season.

According to sources, the price of raw jute was also much lower this year than the previous year's. The raw jute was sold at Tk 300-400 per mound against Tk 500-550 last year.

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One to die for killing college girl

BSS, Narsingdi

District and Sessions Judge of Narsingdi yesterday sentenced a young man to death for killing a college girl.

The judge also fined the convict Taka one lakh.

Judge Mohammad Mofizul Islam convicted Mainuddin, son of one Afsar Uddin under Women and Children Repression Prevention Act after examining 15 witnesses, court sources said.

The case history in brief is that Ummeh Kulsum, a student of Narsingdi Government College had rejected the love offer of Mainuddin, which made him furious.

Mainuddin and some of his hired goons set Kulsum on fire pouring

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PHOTO: STAR

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed (R) and Awami League leader Tofail Ahmed at a talk on the Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity in the city yesterday.

Saudi daily compares Bush with Hitler

AFP, Riyadh

A Saudi newspaper yesterday strongly criticised the United States for threatening to destroy Iraq, comparing US President George W. Bush with Nazi leader Adolf Hitler and the Congress with the Reichstag.

"When the use of force is compounded with low culture and lack of awareness, it becomes similar to the acts of the warlords of history, from (Rome's) Nero to Hitler, and from (Israeli Prime Minister Ariel) Sharon to Bush," Al-Riyadh newspaper said in a front-page editorial.

"So long as goals are achieved by force, ignoring ethics and morals

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Moudud, Tofail cross swords over indemnity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed and opposition Awami League (AL) leader Tofail Ahmed yesterday engaged in a war of words over the Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance 2003 and human rights issues.

Moudud said all of the persons who died during the Operation Clean Heart did not die of heart attack.

"This is not right and I will inform the Parliament how many people died and how they died during the last joint drive," the law minister said.

He added that the indemnity ordinance was promulgated to keep

armed forces above all criticism 'for greater interests'. "I will elaborately inform the parliament of the necessity of indemnify them."

Tofail retorted the government engaged the army to kill and harass innocent people and then resorted to the ordinance to save the skin of the persons who ordered the operation.

He said the ordinance embarrassed the armed forces and tarnished their image.

Moudud and Tofail made the observations at a talk titled, "Human Rights and Good Governance" at the "Meet the Reporters Programme"

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Tribunal Act HC rejects petition challenging legality

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday summarily rejected a petition challenging the legality of the Speedy Trial Tribunal Act.

The rejection came upon a petition filed by DCC ward commissioner Shahidur Rahman, one of the 18 accused in the advocate Habibur Rahman Mondol murder case.

A top terror of Dhaka City, Shahid is now in prison and faces trial in a number of criminal cases.

On August 20, 2000, advocate Mondol was gunned down near his residence in the old city.

Cabinet okays drafts of two bills

BSS, Dhaka

The cabinet yesterday approved the draft of the Code of Civil Procedure-1908 (amendment) bill-2003.

The approval was given at the regular meeting of the cabinet with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in the chair at the cabinet committee room in the Prime Minister's Office.

The cabinet also approved the draft of the Gram Sarkar Act-2003.

Members of the cabinet, state ministers in charge of the concerned ministries, cabinet secretary, principal secretary to the Prime Minister and concerned secretaries were present.

DCC launches city cleanup drive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has launched a massive clean up programme in the city following directives of the city mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka.

Starting last Tuesday, the DCC has already removed hundreds of banners and festoons from the city streets and filed at least 20 cases with the magistrate court of the DCC, sources said.

Executive engineers and officers of 10 zones of the DCC are supervising the clean up programme with help from ward commissioners.

Solid waste has been accumulated for disposal in many areas with the help of the local stakeholders and community leaders, sources said.

Officials of the DCC said during the first phase of the drive, they will be removing banners and a massive drive to remove illegal billboards will shortly follow.

The conservancy department of the DCC has already cleaned up building construction materials and solid waste piled on the Elephant Road, Mirpur Road, Pantha Path, North South Road, Airport Road and Sher-E-Bangla Nagar area.

Moreover, regular cleaning programme in these areas will be

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