

Transport strike planned for Jan 5-6 called off

UNB, Dhaka

Transport owners and workers yesterday withdrew their strike called for January 5-6, following a negotiation with the government.

Bangladesh Road Transport Owners-Workers Unity Council President Abdul Gaffar Biswas announced the decision after a meeting with the Communications Minister Nazmul Huda.

In the meeting, the minister assured the transport leaders of implementing the agreement

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Reports on arrest of Indian militants in Dhaka false: home ministry

UNB, Dhaka

The home ministry yesterday rejected as baseless and fabricated some reports ran by a section of local and Indian media that some Indian militants were recently arrested in Dhaka.

"We would like to categorically state that the reports are false, baseless and concocted and have been fabricated to strain the friendly relations between Bangladesh and India. No such incident took place in

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Harsher law to fight land grabs proposed

REZAUL KARIM

The secretary committee on recovery of occupied land has recommended major changes to the existing law to make it tougher to stem the tide of land grabbing.

Headed by Cabinet Secretary Sa'adat Hussain, the committee observed that although the law had provisions to punish illegal encroachers, it lacked proper guidelines and bite to resist encroachment and recover grabbed lands.

The secretary committee saw articles 427, 447, 448 of the criminal procedure code (CrPC) that deal with punishment to land encroachers outdated and called for making the articles tougher.

The body proposed to rename the law as the Government, Local Authority and Private Lands and Buildings (Recovery of Possession) Ordinance and an increase in jail terms to five years from two years and fines from Tk 1,000 to Tk 50,000 for land and building grabs by individuals.

In case of land or building grabs in an orchestrated way by organised gangs, the committee recommended jail terms from five to 14

years along with a fine of Tk 10 lakh.

It also recommended for introduction of non-bailable and non-settleable clauses to Section 7(1) of the ordinance.

The body suggested amendments to Section 9 (1) of the ordinance, giving trial courts the powers to fix and realise compensations from the offenders and give them to the affected people.

The 11-member secretary committee was formed on October 4 last year at Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's meeting with secretaries that pegged land grab as a national problem.

The recommendations have already been sent to the authorities concerned asking them to bring amendments to the Government and Local Authority Lands and Buildings (Recovery of Possession) Ordinance, 1970.

The committee identified dishonest real estate companies, organised gangs of frauds, criminals and cheats, forest bandits, pirates and landowners as the real culprits.

Unscrupulous shrimp farmers, industry owners, political activists and a number of trusts and organi

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PHOTO: AFP

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, left, waves while holding Pakistani Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali's hand upon arrival at Islamabad International Airport yesterday.

GI killed in Iraq mortar attack

US raids Baghdad mosque, worshippers angered

REUTERS, Tikrit, Iraq

One US soldier was killed and two injured in a mortar attack on a US army base near the town of Balad, northwest of Baghdad, a military spokesman says.

"A soldier was killed yesterday just after 5:00pm at a forward operating base near Balad," Sergeant Robert Cargie, a spokesman for the 4th Infantry Division, said.

"The base came under mortar attack and one GI (general infantry) was killed by shrapnel, while two others were wounded."

Cargie said US forces had detained six people in connection with the attack, but gave no further details.

The death of the soldier raises to 329 the number of US troops killed in action since Washington launched the war to overthrow Saddam in March. Of those, 214 have been killed by guerrilla attacks since major combat was

declared over in May.

The US military meanwhile raided a Sunni mosque in western Baghdad and said it had seized arms and explosives in an operation that sparked an angry Muslim protest after Friday prayers.

More than 1,000 worshippers at the al-Tabool mosque denounced Thursday's raid in an emotional demonstration and accused US troops of trampling on the Quran.

"American soldiers entered the mosque with their shoes on and with machine guns in their hands," the imam, Abdulsatar al-Janabi, told Reuters, adding the raid had lasted five hours.

"They trampled on the holy Quran, beat up some of the worshippers and stole computers and a donations box," he said. Others claimed that a page was torn from the Quran.

Protesters screamed and cried, chanting: "God is great" and "

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2 journalists of Barisal injured by alleged BNP cadres

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Two correspondents of Bangla dailies Prothom Alo and Ittefaq were seriously injured on the Patuakhali University of Science and Technology (PUST) campus in an attack allegedly by cadres of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) yesterday noon.

PUST correspondents Rahat Mahmud Khokon of Prothom Alo and Hasib Muhammad Tushar of Ittefaq were rescued by teachers and taken to the university medical centre.

The attackers also ransacked their room (number 303) at Shahid Ziaur Rahman Hall on the campus.

The victims said the attack was carried out in revenge for publication of an Ittefaq report about the alleged corruption of PUST Vice-chancellor Dr Hannan and a Prothom Alo report on factional fights within the JCD (Jatiyatabadi Chhattra Dal), the ruling BNP's student wing.

Barisal Reporters' Unity and a forum for protection of rights of journalists of the southwestern region condemned the attack and demanded immediate arrest of the culprits.

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Prayer Timings		
January 4		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-45	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-30	5-35
Esha	7-00	7-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		

MADHUPUR ECO-PARK

2 Garos shot dead for construction protest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

At least two Garo youths were shot dead and 25 others, including women and children, injured in the Madhupur forest, 50 km north of Tangail town yesterday noon.

The incident occurred when a large number of agitated ethnic Garos carrying sharp weapons obstructed construction of a patch of wall in the forest.

The forest department undertook a project, 'Forest Conservation and Eco-tourism' for

construction of fence around 3,000 acres of forestland at the end 2000.

The agitating people were from Shadhurpara of Shulakuri union, Kakraghuni, Joynagasa, Sataria and Bijoypur Gathe at Gaina village.

Locals alleged police and forest guards opened fire when the agitated Garos put up a strong resistance to the construction work. In the ensuing clash between policemen and the ethnic mob, Utpal Nokrek, 20, son of Pritom Sangma of village Bedhuria and Piren San, 20, son of Nezen Nokrek of village

Joinagasa, died on the spot and 25 others including women and children received injuries.

The local ethnic people consider the project a threat to their livelihood and have been protesting it. The forest department suspended the work last July. However, the forest officials along with policemen and forest guards started building the fence yesterday.

The deputy commissioner and the superintendent of police visited the spot.

Much-expected cabinet meet in Ctg uncertain

NURUL ALAM, Ctg

The much-awaited cabinet meeting in the port city faces uncertainty as it was deferred once again, sources said.

The meeting scheduled for January 13 was supposed to take some important decisions on developing the infrastructure of the commercial capital, the sources added.

Preparatory meetings in this connection were held with representatives from all departments

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Delhi mulls Dhaka request for crocodiles

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, from New Delhi

India is pondering on a request from Bangladesh for sending 40 crocodiles, a rare species which is on the verge of extinction in that country.

"The request is being considered. We are in favour of marsh crocodiles, as it will help efforts of international Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) preserve the reptile there," said PR S i n h a ,

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