

Over 90 rebel camps

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He said the remaining Shanti Bahini insurgent elements, who had not surrendered in 1998 and stayed back in India, together with someone who had rejoined them after surrendering, were getting organised under the banners of two insurgent groups-- United Peoples' Democratic Front (UPDF) and Jana Sanghati Samity (JSS).

Gen Chowdhury said that these insurgent groups were conducting terrorist activities against Bangladesh with assistance from Indian intelligence outfits.

"The remnants of the Priti group together with the wife of Manabendra Larma were carrying out anti-Bangladesh activities from across the border in the Chittagong Hill Tracts," he said.

The BDR chief said two more extremist groups, the so-called Banga Sena led by Kalidas Baidya and Bir Banga led by Chittaranjan Sutar, were also carrying out insurgency in Faridpur, Barisal and Khulna areas.

These two extremist insurgent groups were also trying to foment communal tension in various areas of Bangladesh, he said.

The Chakma insurgent outfits, Bangladesh officials said, printed in Kolkata over 5,000 anti-Bangladesh propaganda booklets to fan the fire of insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

They said in the booklets the insurgents painted imaginary pictures of "brutal and ruthless attacks on Jhum villages in Mohalchhari of Khagrachhari by Bangali settlers."

Gen Chowdhury was talking to the waiting reporters from print and electronic media at the North Block as he was coming out of the chamber of Indian State Minister for Home S Chinnmayanand after paying a courtesy call on him.

BSF DG Ajay Raj Sharma accompanied Gen Chowdhury during the visit.

Asked whether Sharma had given him a list of Indian insurgent camps in Bangladesh or their locations, the BDR DG said, "From where he would give such a list or location as there is

none?"

Gen Chowdhury said that even if a single camp could be shown, "we shall destroy it."

Bangladesh, he said, would in no way allow any such camps to operate against neighbouring India.

At the border talks, Gen Chowdhury reiterated that the Bangladesh-India joint border guidelines should be followed in letter and spirit in resolving any problem cropping up along borders of the two neighbouring countries.

BSF DG Ajay Raj Sharma, according to a BSF press release, said that the complex problems along the India-Bangladesh border could be resolved through correct identification and 'coordinated, comprehensive action.'

Sharma, according to the press release, said that the 'evil designs' and 'threat from a microscopic minority consisting of various militant groups who believe in the cult of violence and have no respect for human lives and values' must be put to 'an end' by 'joining our hands and pooling our resources together to fight this menace in all its dimensions.'

The BSF press release said the relations between the two countries have improved since the last DG level border meeting held in Dhaka in April 2003.

The two delegations yesterday exchanged drafts of a Joint Record of Discussions to be signed Friday.

Gen Chowdhury is leading a 20-member Bangladesh team at the talks, which began here on January 6, while Sharma is leading the Indian side.

Both the delegation leaders said that the talks were taking place in 'a cordial atmosphere.'

The BSF DG hosted a reception for his Bangladesh counterpart and the BDR DG hosted a return reception for his Indian counterpart yesterday evening.

Some of the Indian print media published the news briefing of Gen Chowdhury on India harbouring anti-Bangladesh insurgents. A number of TV channels also carried these news.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia addresses a public meeting at Kadamtali Square, west of the second Buriganga Bridge, in Keraniganj yesterday.

Nazmul Huda

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BNP Joint Secretary General Ahsraf Hossain and senior leaders Mirza Abbas, Selima Rahman, prime minister's political secretary Harris Chowdhury, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, Nazrul Islam Khan, Redwan Ahmed, Salahuddin Ahmed, SA Khaleque, Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, Abdus Salam, Kazi Abul Bashir, Mojibar Rahman, Khairul Kabir Khokon, Babul Ahmed, Mosharrar Ahmed Thakur, Shajahan Mia Samrat and Nesarul Haq were present at the meeting.

Meeting sources said most participants strongly criticised BNP Vice-president Huda for supporting Jamaat's role against Bangladesh's liberation.

The leaders asked him to make his position clear if he stood by the speech.

They remarked that if the minister owned his speech to the conference of ICS, backed by the coalition partner Jamaat, it would undermine BNP's pride that its founder Zia 'proclaimed the Liberation War.'

The BNP would not take the responsibility of Huda's remarks, a leader said.

The meeting also finalised a 10-day central programme to celebrate Ziaur Rahman's 68th birth anniversary.

19 leaders

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of Sathkira, one BNP and two AL leaders of Jessore, two BNP leaders of Magura, one AL leader of Narail, one BNP leader of Jhenidah, one BNP and one AL leader of Kushtia and one BNP leader of Chuadanga. A union parishad chairman of Magura district is also on the list.

"The names of the leaders on the hit-list should not be disclosed. We have taken all possible security measures for them," said a senior police official on condition of anonymity.

Sources in two intelligence agencies also confirmed the information given by Raju.

Power crisis

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sector visited various plants on Thursday in a bid to gear up the process.

Last year, sudden shut-ups at some big plants caused major disruptions in power supply. The PDB wants to avert a recurrence of such a situation in the coming summer, sources mentioned.

PDB Chairman Syed Abdul Moyeed said they are trying hard to commission Siddhirganj plant right on the scheduled date -- March 31. They have asked the Russian firm engaged in its construction to complete its task in time, he added.

Dhaka and its peripheries require about 50 percent of power generated in the country.

Phenomenal growth in multi-storey apartment blocks and modern shopping malls resulted in a rapid rise in the capital's power demand, sources said.

Power crisis in summer could be minimised if consumers take up power austerity measures and peak-hour load management is efficiently done, they said.

Rupsha bridge

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because of some problems with the piling work of the bridge. The project consultant is yet to assess how much time it will take to complete some necessary treatment to the piling of the bridge, according to sources.

The Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC) has been providing Tk 373.87 crore out of the total Tk 521.74 crore for the 1,360-metre-long bridge project.

The government is providing the rest mainly on land acquisition and import duty and taxes of the raw materials.

The bridge will connect the second seaport of Mongla with Khulna and the rest of Bangladesh. After completion of the Rupsha Bridge, Mongla would also be connected by road with Dhaka through the Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge.

The Rupsha Bridge is also vital for reviving Mongla seaport, as it will establish direct road link with neighbouring Nepal and Bhutan.

RPC power project

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the ADB questioned the transparency in signing the contract with Lahmeyer and observed that the Savar project appeared to be an exception among all independent power projects in Bangladesh.

Citing the transparency in bidding of Meghnaghat and Sirajganj power projects, the ADB said: "It appears that such transparency in bidding, pricing and setting output parameters is lacking in the case of the DNPP."

The Savar bid document prepared by the consultant (Lahmeyer) invites "only original manufacturers of gas turbines (no licensees or EPC contractors or joint ventures) to submit bids for the design and other services."

"This clause violates all norms of international procurement including that of the KfW which dictates wider participation of qualified power developers as per certain standards. Ironically, the KfW professes to keep its credits untied, meaning no strings attached," observes an insider source.

In addition, the tender terms require the bidder to also include a bid from an operation and maintenance (O&M) company for a 15-year O&M contract. Although the O&M contract is separate, the RPC requires the O&M contractor to be a "sister" company from the "same country" as the bidder's.

Sources at the RPC and its parent company Rural Electrification Board (REB) said the KfW itself imposed two conditions -- that Lahmeyer be the consultant and that only the original manufacturers of gas turbines be allowed to submit bids.

The KfW is providing 40 million Euros as 'untied' grant -- meaning there is supposed to be no conditions tagged with the fund. The major portion of the fund will be derived from nine REB cooperatives.

"The cooperatives will provide up to Tk 250 crore for the project with the assurance that they will get at least 15 percent dividend," said a REB source.

All PDB projects undertaken through open tenders -- including the Meghnaghat or the barge-mounted ones -- have been built either by consortiums, licensees or through EPC contracts. The O&M contracts are typically carried out by either PDB experts or through separate maintenance agreements.

According to industry experts, there are only a handful of 'original' turbine manufacturers suitable for such projects. Most turbine manufacturers, even licensees, are interested in selling their turbines and not acting as contractors.

The RPC contract terms also impose other hard conditions to rule out competition.

For instance, while the PDB requires bidders to have experience in two similar size projects with one outside its home country, the RPC bid requires experience in four such projects.

Insiders pointed finger at the local agent of Lahmeyer, who is also the agent of Siemens and was an unofficial agent of Alstom in RPC's Mymensingh power projects.

The agent virtually controls all tender processes of the RPC and the

operation and maintenance contracts, said an insider, alleging that the person might be linked with siphoning out huge funds through overpriced contracts.

REB Chairman Ziaul Islam Chowdhury ruled out any influence over RPC affairs by outsiders or the agent of Lahmeyer.

Lahmeyer executive Serajul Islam also rejected the allegations, saying the company was not involved in any overpriced contract or in any manipulation.

The RPC was originally formed in 1996 as a private-public enterprise with the REB owning 51 percent of its share while select Rural Power Cooperatives the rest.

The company has so far set up three power units in Mymensingh -- each with 70 MW capacity. Allegations of corruption and excessive project cost were also made against all the projects, but neither the government nor the donors intervened.

The Savar power scheme earlier created uproar because it did not fit into the Power System Master Plan of the government, meaning that Savar is not identified as a viable power project site because there is no appropriate gas pipeline.

"I don't agree with the allegations of corruption," comments Ziaul, adding, "We are faced with the reality of loadshedding and KfW is helping us build this power plant. The KfW is closely monitoring the project, so there is no scope for corruption."

He however pointed out that the conditions of appointing Lahmeyer as a consultant without bidding and also the bidder's qualifications were set by the KfW.

RPC Managing Director Abdus Sabur says, "We are pursuing the project as per the KfW guidelines and there is no irregularity. If we see that the bidders are asking for excessive price after the tender is opened, we can raise questions. Our present estimate of 150 million Euros is standard."

Serajul Islam, director (technical) of Lahmeyer International Pally Power Services Limited, also refuted the allegations of corruption.

"We are not doing any overpriced consultancy for the RPC," he said. "As a financier, the KfW has set two conditions and there is nothing wrong with it."

Lifeline

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three years ago.

While receiving the monthly allocations of wheat, Arati took a micro-credit loan and leased a small shop at the local bazaar to set herself up as a seamstress. With her son sitting for his SSC exams next year and a younger daughter attending high school, Arati smilingly said: "My children benefit from my efforts. I am also getting a chance to do something that fulfills me."

The fulfillment of once-struggling Arati and Kaushola through their own management skills was aided by the allocation of a single card. And their courageous success shows the path to go beyond the circle of making a hand-to-mouth living and the chances to reap the benefit of prosperity.

AL too weak: PM

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programme undertaken during BNP's previous term, she alleged that the AL does not want people to be educated. "They introduced mass cheating at examinations ... They ruined the economy."

Presided over by Keraniganj unit BNP convenor Alhaj Mohammad Nazimuddin, the meeting was also addressed by Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Khandakar Mosharrar Hossain, Communications Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda, Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and State Minister for Labour and Employment Amanullah Aman.

During her tour of Keraniganj across the Buriganga, the prime minister laid the foundation stone of Dhaka Industrial City at Sonakanda on the northern bank of Dhaleshwari.

Small and Cottage Industries Corporation will implement the project on 26 acres of land at a cost of Tk 12.29 crore.

Some 159 small and big indus-

trial units in four categories would be set up in the industrial zone which is expected to create more than 10,000 jobs.

The prime minister also laid the foundation stone of Jinjira Hospital and inaugurated a fire service station built at Korakhola at a cost of Tk 1.75 crore.

The entire Keraniganj wore a festive look on the occasion of the prime minister's visit with men, women and children standing on two sides of the road holding banners and waving flags and colourful festoons to greet the prime minister. The Hindus, who constitute a large part of the constituency, sounded the traditional 'Ulu' (ululation) to welcome her.

Band parties played music at different points, schoolgirls showered flower petals and supporters of BNP and its front organisations chanted welcome slogans. The entire 16-km road from Buriganga Bridge to Sonakanda was decorated with gates, festoons and banners.

Ahmadiyya books

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Hindus, Buddhists and Christians practise theirs -- provided the Quran was not misinterpreted or wrongly translated.

"Who are we to say whether a person is Muslim or not? Only Allah can judge it," he said, accusing the government of contravening fundamental rights and non-discrimination principles.

By contrast, State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharef Hossain Shajahan told BBC Radio the government took the decision to save the minority community, adding: "There was fear of bloodshed and we found no alternative to avoid it other than banning Ahmadiyya publications."

"Although it restricts Ahmadiyyas' rights, we thought it good for the time being," he added.

Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law Khondoker Mahbubuddin Ahmad said: "From the point of law, the government may proscribe any publication or statement, which hurts religious beliefs of others and hampers the peaceful atmosphere of society."

"The constitution allows freedom of expression and religious practice to all citizens simultaneously giving the government the power under the jurisdiction of law to proscribe publications if they hurt other beliefs," the ruling BNP lawmaker said.

Motiur Rahman Nizami, amir of Jamaat-e-Islami, a coalition partner, and industries minister, told BBC his party was in favour of branding the Ahmadiyyas as non-Muslim but was not with the ongoing agitation.

But Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid described the ban as a wrong decision and said: "No matter how small a religious community (Ahmadiyyas) may be, they have the right to religion -- a constitutionally guaranteed right."

Such an action against Ahmadiyyas Hamid fears may create an excuse for similar infringements of religious rights of Hindus, Buddhists and Christians and other religious minorities.

"The ban alarmed us as the government caved in to communal fundamentalists and extremists," said Mujahidul Islam Selim, general secretary of Communist Party of Bangladesh, adding: "It will ignite communalism and lead to an extremism situation."

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon identified the move as a fatal mistake and said: "It is a threat not only to Ahmadiyyas but also to people of other sects of Islam and other religions."

"We cannot accept such infringement of religious beliefs," said Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu.

The South Asian People's Union against Fundamentalism and Communalism condemned the ban

Road accident

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the covered van and five passengers of the minibus -- three women and two children -- on the spot and left 50 passengers injured. The identity of the dead could not be known.

Of the injured, Khadija, Ratan Kumar, Fakhrul and Ayesha were admitted to Manikganj Sadar Hospital, while the rest to Dhamrai Health Complex and clinics at Savar.

A case has been filed with Dhamrai thana.

Blast kills 6

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and Dohuk, are in a neighbouring hotel.

One security guard described four men jumping out of an Opel car and firing two RPGs before speeding off.

A loud explosion was followed by several bursts of machine gun fire and then a second blast. A witness claimed the men were masked.

AFP from Washington adds: A US Air Force C-5 cargo plane carrying 63 passengers and crew was apparently hit by a missile Thursday as it took off from Baghdad airport, a senior US defense official said.

One of its engine exploded, but it managed to land safely, officials said.

Debt management

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But sources said the DC offices were not adequately cooperating with the CGA office, saying this kind of accounting did not go with the terms of references under which they operated. The issue was raised at the finance ministry that is now working on how to resolve the differences.

The government presently has an internal debt of over Tk 50,000 crore, which compels it to spend 20 percent of its revenue budget just to pay the interest.

The government collects loans through banks and savings instruments and its bank borrowing is handled by the central bank. This procedure sometimes creates mismatch with and confusion about the government's intention and results in putting excessive burden of interest on it.

To avoid such pitfalls, from this fiscal year, the Finance Department will directly deal with the bank borrowing through the DMU.

The FMRP, which has five com-

as breaching UN charter on human rights and the country's constitution in a statement signed by its President Professor Kabir Chowdhury and General Secretary Shahriar Kabir.

"They (government) did it in the name of Islam to satisfy fundamental terrorists involved in mass killing, rape and violence," the statement said.

The statement added: "Those who opposed the freedom of Bangladesh are now in power and busy destroying the achievement of the Liberation War."

The organisation asked all pro-liberation political parties, socio-cultural and rights organisations to unite against all fundamentalist, anti-liberation and anti-human rights activities.

Badruddin Omar, Faizul Hakim, Hasibur Rahman and other leaders of Gonotantrik Biplobi Jote (GBJ) said the ban was a clear patronisation of religious reactionary forces.

"The government action will tarnish the country's image of communal harmony on the international front," says Odhikar, a rights group, in a statement signed by its Director Masud Alam Ragib.

Salma Sobhan Nagorik Smaransabha Committee and Jatiya Mukti Council also condemned the decision and demanded its withdrawal.

Welcoming the ban, Khatme Nabuwat Andolon demanded immediate declaration of Ahmadiyyas as non-Muslim and a ban on burial of the sect members in Muslim graveyards.

Ramos praises Dhaka's role in peace process with Moros

UNB, Dhaka

Former Filipino president Fidel Ramos last night praised Bangladesh's contribution to the peace process initiated through the signing of accord

with Moro Liberation Front in the Philippines.

He also praised Awami League chief and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina for establishing peace by signing peace accord with the hills guerillas, ending bloody insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

"I do share the same honour of Unesco peace prize Sheikh Hasina received for establishing peace," he told a dinner hosted in his honour by Awami League's International Affairs Secretary Syed Abul Hossain MP at Hotel Sonargang.

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina, ambassadors and high commissioners, top AL leaders, former bureaucrats and the elite attended the dinner.

Ramos, who ruled the Philippines 1992-98, said both Bangladesh and the Philippines have many things in common as both the countries are democracies and believe in empowerment of the people.

SKOP strike

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istry signed on behalf of the government while the SKOP was represented by its Coordinator Dr Wazedul Islam Khan and others.

A press release of the SKOP yesterday said all obstacles would be immediately removed to help form trade unions in privatised enterprises and garment industries.

According to the agreement the government will take steps to implement the existing labour laws and help secure appointment letters for the garment, road transport, river vessel, construction, hotel and restaurant workers.

The government and the SKOP will form a high level committee to formulate mechanism to run laid off industries and make sick industries profitable.

The government is to form a salary and wage commission soon with representatives from the SKOP, the press release said.

ponents, aims at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the allocation of resources through an accountable and transparent institutional management.

The first FMRP component is to deal with strengthening auditing practices and information of improved parliamentary scrutiny of public financial management.

The second component is to develop a regulatory framework for financial and performance management.

The third one is to increase resource allocation and utilisation and financial, resource and performance management capacity in line ministries.

The fourth and the fifth components are to help the government enhance financial management capacity and build the capacity of a financial management academy.

The Department for International Development (DFID), UK and Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) are financially supporting the FMRP.

DHAKA TODAY

Film show

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy will screen a film titled 'Golapi Ekhon Traine' by Amjad Hossain. Venue: Theatre hall of the academy, Segun Bagicha. Time: 6.00pm.

Musical evening

Students United for Research in Musical Activities (SURMA) organises a musical evening titled 'Moromi Ganer Mala' composed by Poet Sabir. Venue: Natmondol auditorium, Dhaka University. Time: 6.30pm.

Convocation

The 4th Convocation ceremony of the American International University, Bangladesh will be held. President Iajuddin Ahmed will preside over the ceremony. Venue: Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre, Sher-e-Banglanagar. Time: 10.30am.

Open day

British Council will hold an open day for parents, teachers and students for information regarding various courses and studying in the UK. Venue: British Council Teaching Centre, Satmasjid Road. Time: 9.30am.

Film show

Academy Film Society will screen a French thriller titled 'Irreversible'. Venue: Society auditorium, 21/C, Jigatola. Time: 6.30pm.

Prize giving ceremony

The prize giving ceremony of annual

literary and cultural competition of Khanbahadur Ahsanullah Teachers Training College will be held with Vice Chancellor of National University Prof Aftab Ahmed as chief guest. Venue: College auditorium, Shyamoli. Time: 3.00pm.

Discussion

Bangladesh Chhatra Federation will hold a discussion on the 'Role of the student community in the struggle for national emancipation' to mark its 19th founding anniversary. Venue: Federation office, Purana Paltan. Time: 3.00pm.

Workshop

The inaugural session of a judicial training workshop for assistant judges, organised by Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA), will be held. Venue: BILIA auditorium, Dhanmondi. Time: 9.30am.

AGM

The annual general meeting of greater Moymensingha Jubo Samity, Dhaka will be held. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 5.00pm.

Rotary Dhaka Central

Weekly meeting of the Rotary Club of Dhaka Central will be held. Venue: Dhaka Club, Shahbagh. Time: 1.30pm.

Rotary Dhaka North West

Weekly meeting of the Rotary Club of Dhaka North West will be held. Venue: Dhaka Club, Shahbagh. Time: 5.30pm.