

Andhra govt begins talks with Naxalites

PTI, Hyderabad

The first-ever direct talks between Naxalites and Andhra Pradesh government commenced yesterday.

Top Maoist leaders of People's War and Janasakthi organisations, who are staying in a government guesthouse for the last three days as 'state guests', were escorted to Dr MCR HRD Institute in Jubilee Hills where the parleys began at 10:30 am.

The talks signal a new phase in the three decade long, blood-soaked history of Naxalite movement in the state.

The state PW Secretary Ramakrishna, a school teacher turned revolutionary who once carried a reward of Rs 12 lakh on his head, the Secretary of Andhra-Orissa Border Special Zone Committee Sudhakar, member of North Telangana Special Zone Secretary Ganesh and Janasakthi leaders Amar and Riaz are participating in the talks.

The state Home Minister K Jana Reddy is leading a nine-member team, comprising ministers and Congress leaders, on behalf of the government.

Besides, a team of mediators headed by retired IAS official SR Sankaran is also assisting in the negotiations.

A thick security blanket has been thrown around HRD Institute where talks are being held.

Land distribution to the poor, putting an end to 'World Bank dictated economic policies', democratic empowerment, separate state for Telangana and total prohibition from the core of Naxal agenda during the talks which have generated enormous public interest.

However, there are no indications of any dramatic outcome in view of revolutionary parties' repeated assertion that they would not give up armed struggle, a proposition unacceptable to the Government.

With the Congress government offering them a safe passage and full police security, top Naxalite leaders surfaced from a 20-year long underground life recently and are now put up in a government guesthouse.

In a tactical move a day before the crucial talks, the PWG and Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) announced their merger to form Communist Party of India (Maoist) as part of their efforts to further their cause.

After inviting extremist organisations for talks in tune with its poll promise of reviving dialogue with Naxalites, the Congress government has, however, made it clear that parleys would be held within the framework of the constitution.

The government team representing in the talks comprises Jana Reddy, ministers D Prasad Rao (Revenue), K Ranga Rao (Municipal Administration) and Reddyannaik (Social Welfare) and Congress leaders Kesava Rao, M Shashidhar Reddy, T Purushotham Rao, Karunakar Reddy and P Venkat Rao.

The Naxalite organisations' reiteration of their goal to 'liberate people and capture power through armed struggle' has put severe limitations to the dialogue process.

"Through talks, we want to force the government to address some of the pressing problems of people.

50 structures

FROM PAGE 12 Kamrangirchar PDB Tower to Sikdar Medical College along the river.

He said if the BWDB does not start the construction work of the embankment in the upcoming dry season, illegal occupants might again go for grabbing the areas.

Drug peddler

FROM PAGE 12 The river police took the arrestee to Paturia camp and then sent him to Shibhalaya Police Station where he died at about 6:30 am yesterday.

Police said Mannan committed suicide by hanging himself from a ceiling fan in the hajat.

Newsmen from Manikganj district headquarters went to Shibhalaya Police Station to gather information and took photograph of the body, but they were obstructed by the on-duty magistrate and policemen.

The body was sent to Manikganj Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

Police superintendent of Manikganj told the private news agency UNB that a three-member departmental committee has been formed to investigate the incident.

Holy month

FROM PAGE 1 people of Bangladesh, hoping that Ramadan will bring continued peace, progress and prosperity for the country and greater unity among Muslim Ummah.

The messages received so far were from Sultan Qaboos Bin Said of Oman, King Abdullah-II of Jordan, Amir Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani of Qatar, Heri Apparent to the State of Qatar Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Prime Minister of Qatar Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, and Prime Minister of Bahrain Khalifa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa.

We do not believe that the suffering masses can be liberated through negotiations. Our ultimate goal is to capture power through armed revolution," Ramakrishna had said on the eve of talks.

While agreeing to address public issues being raised by Naxalites, the government has, however, made it clear that the democratic and constitutional framework was non-negotiable.

With 'Land to the Tiller' emerging as a key issue on the agenda, the government is likely to set up an independent commission to identify land for distribution among the poor, official sources said.

"While we are prepared to solve people's problems raised by Naxalite organisations, they should adhere to the law of land," the sources said when asked how far the government was willing to go in addressing the issues brought forward by left extremist groups.

A 40-member strong contingent of Maoist leaders including 35 belonging to People's Guerrilla Army (PGA), a military wing of PW, are put up in 'Manjeera', a government guest house at Begumpet in the heart of the city.

Breakthrough in quest for malaria vaccine

AFP, Paris

Scientists on Thursday announced a major advance in the war on malaria, reporting promising results from a test vaccine which could slash the toll of death, sickness and poverty inflicted by this disease.

In an intermediate trial among Mozambican children, the vaccine reduced the risk of falling sick from malaria by nearly 30 percent and more than halved the risk of contracting severe malaria, which is potentially fatal.

Researchers, pharmaceutical executives and campaigners behind the prototype stressed it is not the Holy Grail of a totally effective vaccine against malaria.

And they cautioned that -- if all goes well in further trials -- the product is unlikely to be available before 2010 at the earliest.

Even so, they were jubilant. They described the results as the first clear success in a decades-long quest for a vaccine, and one that could dramatically help sub-Saharan Africa, home to 90 percent of the world's malaria victims.

"Today we are facing an important milestone in humankind's battle against malaria," Jean Stephenne, president of GSK Biologicals, a unit of the pharmaceuticals giant GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), which engineered the vaccine, said in a teleconference with journalists.

"This is a scientific breakthrough," declared Melinda Moree, director of the Malaria Vaccine Initiative (MVI), a programme backed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to bring private- and public-sector resources together against malaria.

"These results are far better than anything that has been seen before," she said. "This is a vaccine that could have a significant impact on public health."

Malaria is caused by a tiny parasite that is passed on when a female mosquito of the Anopheles gambiae strain draws human blood for a meal.

The parasite, still in its early stage of development, heads to the liver, where it grows and then swarms out, infecting red blood cells and destroying them. The consequences are fever and anaemia and, in severe cases where blood supply to the brain is affected, cerebral malaria.

US unprepared

FROM PAGE 1 protect the right of all Americans to vote," said Representative Henry Waxman, a Democrat from California.

"The Justice Department does not have the systems in place that are necessary to respond to reports of voters being turned away from the polls on Election Day," he said.

Another top Democrat, Representative John Conyers of Michigan, said the lack of preparedness by Justice Department officials could result in a full-blown post-election crisis.

"In what appears to be another razor-thin election, the Justice Department appears woefully unprepared, and once again has left us vulnerable to another crisis in democracy," he said.

"The fundamentals of election protection are clearly not being met," he said.

Low over Bay

FROM PAGE 1 "We have advised the maritime ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Mongla and other internal river ports to lower signals," he added.

Squally weather is now unlikely over the North Bay, the met official said.

The met office forecast rain with gusty wind in many places in Chittagong, Barisal and Sylhet divisions and in some places over Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna divisions today.

Narail terror Jewell killed in 'crossfire' with police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A top terror was killed in 'crossfire' with police in Kalia upazila of Narail district at midnight on Wednesday.

Jewel, 32, was arrested by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) at Adabar under Mohammadpur thana of Dhaka on Tuesday night. The elite force handed him over to Kalia police Wednesday evening.

According to the officer-in-charge (OC) of Kalia Police Station, some PBCP armed cadre opened fire on police when they took Jewel to Bidurhia village at midnight to recover illegal firearms. Police returned fire, leading to a gunfight between the two sides.

The outlaw was killed during the shootout, but his accomplices took away the body as there was no electricity in the area at that time, the OC said.

Police said Jewel was the ring-leader of the Khulna-Jessore unit of outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddho) and an accused in six murder and six other criminal cases.

The body of the PBCP leader could not be recovered till 3:30pm yesterday. Police recovered a shutter gun and a pipe gun from the spot.

Police superintendent of Narail told The Daily Star yesterday that Jewel succumbed to bullet injuries after he was taken away by his accomplices taking advantage of darkness.

Rickshaw strike

FROM PAGE 1 (licence) is legal or illegal," he said.

Officials of the DCC Wheel Tax Department said renewal of rickshaw licences will resume soon after the Ramadan.

The union called the strike to press home its six-point demand that includes fixing licence renewal date and issuing new licence for rickshaw-pullers, building rickshaw lanes on VIP roads and executing all the signed agreements.

Police seized 334 unlicensed rickshaws since Wednesday after the Tuesday deadline to withdraw all illegal non-motorised vehicles from the city. Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) gave the deadline on October 6.

Police seized the rickshaws from New Market, Science Laboratory, Kakrail, Mouchak, Fulbariya, Shyamoli, Darus Salam and Abdullahpur areas, sources said. The DMP in association with the DCC has appointed eight teams each led by a traffic sergeant for the drive.

Considering non-motorised vehicles a major cause of traffic congestion in the city, the DMP has taken this move to ease the traffic jam during the Ramadan.

The DCC said they have so far registered 80,000 rickshaws in the capital. But according to Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB), about 4 lakh illegal rickshaws ply the city streets.

Cable service

FROM PAGE 12 "One and a half years ago, Mannan won two years' contract for supplying satellite cable service. It enraged the six other contestants, who were desperate to bag the deal," she added.

She said an unknown caller, who claimed to be a local of Gandaria, threatened to kill Mannan, a resident of Shyamapur.

Police could neither ascertain the motive for the murder nor could arrest anyone till 6:30pm yesterday.

At Gandaria in Sutrapur, at around 1:00pm, two muggers forcibly took Raihanul Islam to a quiet corner by Gandaria Adarsha Academy High School. As the class nine student of the school, Raihan, resisted the criminals' attempt to snatch, they stabbed him and ran off with the chain.

Raihan, 15, now under treatment at the DMCH, received stabs in both of his hands and the right leg.

Warne

FROM PAGE 12 114th Test match -- 23 more than Muralitharan who is out injured at the moment.

Muralitharan first claimed the record when he beat Courtney Walsh's tally of 519 wickets, against Zimbabwe in Harare. He then raced on to 527 wickets, with a six-wicket haul in Bulawayo. Warne then matched the feat, picking up seven wickets against Sri Lanka in Darwin. The Lankan however has not played a Test since August after suffering a shoulder injury and now Warne has two Tests after this one in which to stretch the lead.

Warne's coach Terry Jenner, a former spin bowler himself, said: "I think the highlight for us in the spin bowlers' union is to see two spin bowlers at number one and two.

"For many years, Lance Gibbs was our only representative among all those pace bowlers."

Jenner added on Sky Sports: "It's a reward for Shane, for what has been a magnificent service to spin bowling."

Green tealeaves

FROM PAGE 1

Instead, the government served a notice in July on private tea-growers in Panchagarh in 2001.

Bangladesh Tea Research Institute (BTRI) has been providing cutting plants to develop gardens in Srimangal, but it did not provide the tea gardens of Panchagarh a single plant, alleged some growers.

"We have to bring the cutting plants from Srimangal to develop the gardens although the BTRI could do it very easily," said an employee of a garden, requesting anonymity.

According to the last survey of Bangladesh Tea Board, 188 small and medium growers have taken initiatives to cultivate tea in Panchagarh district.

Among 20 big and medium tea growers, only Qazi and Qazi Tea Estate has a tea-processing plant of its own.

"Over 1,000 workers work in these gardens and the owners have to pay them wages regularly, but we do not have any income from these gardens," said Mizanur Rahman, owner of Dahuk Tea Estate Limited.

Some farmers, who turned up to five acres of their cultivable land into small tea gardens, are the worst losers.

The government, with the logistics support of the EC, however, is extending special loans for the tea garden owners at 10 percent interest rate.

House committees

FROM PAGE 1

its October 7 meeting claimed law and order is much better now than at any other time in the past although 15 homicides and 350 other crimes on an average day do not justify the claim.

The House body on the commerce ministry at a meeting on October 10 supported the ministry's version on unusual price hike of essentials.

The ministry had justified the unusual price spiral of essentials citing the recent floods and heavy rainfall, and said the prices will come down at government initiatives.

Lawmakers of the main opposition Awami League (AL) were finally included in different standing committees on September 16 before the prorogation of the 13th session of parliament.

Committee chairmen, mostly representing the BNP, believe the main opposition members' joining the bodies' meetings would enable them to discharge their duties in line with the constitution and parliamentary rules.

Over the last one year, 40 sub-committees were formed with the ruling coalition lawmakers heading them to probe alleged corruption and irregularities in the activities of the ministries but most of them failed to submit reports to the standing committees, sources said.

Twenty-three standing committees on various ministries and issues met last month and some of them witnessed quorum crisis as only 112 out of 196 alliance members of the bodies attended the meetings, Parliament Secretariat

Encouraged by the survey finds, many growers started tea cultivation in Panchagarh in 2001.

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The AL has two posts in each of the 10-member standing committees on ministries while the other opposition Jatiya Party (Ershad) has one post each in some committees.

Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid told The Daily Star they (AL lawmakers) have not yet decided on joining the committees. "Some committee chairmen telephoned me requesting us to participate in their meetings," he added.

He thought the parliamentary committees have become worthless as they neither sit in time nor discuss corruption and irregularities in the ministries.

"It is true that some ruling BNP lawmakers do not dare to raise any allegation against ministers, who are also top leaders of the party," chairman of a standing committee said requesting anonymity.

Most of the standing bodies were formed in July last year, and according to rules, each one should have held 14 meetings till now. But except a few, they did not.

Sources said only five bodies on the ministries of law, justice and parliamentary affairs, agriculture, religious affairs, power, energy and mineral resources and primary and mass education sat regularly until last month.

The committee on the law ministry sat 32 times in the last one year, the highest among all the standing committees.

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar also did not ask the committees to sit regularly though the rules of procedure empowers him to do so.

Khilgaon Flyover

FROM PAGE 12 recently included construction of surface-level footpath, drainage divider, road overlaying and relocation of utility services as incidental components.

They said the inclusion of the bridge and road has not been approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec), which is time consuming.

The LGD suggested handing over the two projects to Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), which is currently carrying development works for beautification of the capital.

According to the LGED officials, almost 82 percent work of the 2,505-meter long flyover has been done. It has three wings connecting Khilgaon, Rajarhat and Syedabad.

However, LGD officials said at least 21 out of the 36 loops of the girder and 16 loops of deck slab along with three ramps are yet to be constructed.

Officials of both LGD and LGED admitted that the construction has been hampered mainly because of inefficiency of the officials, extortion by local influential hoodlums allegedly led by the younger brother of a cabinet minister and delay in the recovery of illegally occupied lands.

The completion of the project was also delayed because of slow disbursement of funds, although officials said funds are now available.

Sources said land acquisition took longer than usual, as the hoodlums obstructed to relocation of shops on railway land. The contractor had to pay the hoodlums and also construct shops for the shop-owners, who illegally occupied railway land with the support of local pro-BNP leaders.

Moreover, officials said, 0.44 acres of land belonging to the Public Works Department (PWD) waits for transfer to the LGED. A six-storey building on

7 killed

FROM PAGE 12 Five of the injured were identified as Dipali Das, 35, Rahim Khatun, 40, Kazzal Das, 12, truck driver Shibu Das, 40, and Alam, 23. Identity of the rest could not be known. Locals rescued the victims and took them to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Grenade attack

FROM PAGE 1

Hossain Chowdhury told The Daily Star that 30 district unit councils have so far been complete and the rest would be complete during Ramadan.

Assigned to complete the councils in Dhaka, Saber, also political secretary of the leader of the opposition, said: "Thirteen of 17 councils in Dhaka have been complete and we will complete the rest during Ramadan."

Although a number of district councils have been complete, a few districts have full-fledged committees: most councils only elected the president and general secretary and the names of other office-bearers were not declared largely because of internal feud.

The situation in upazila units is also the same, although fresh committees of 450 upazila units were formed in one and a half years.

But Saber says "The party's organisational strength is more than the pre-August 21 period as its leaders and workers are more active to protest the attack."

"Large-scale participation in the September 22 human shield from Gazipur to Narayanganj through the capital and the October 3 grand rally proved that Awami League leaders and workers are not idling away time and are determined to oust the government," Saber said.

But some AL leaders believe AL's movements against the coalition rule -- even the protest against the August 21 attack -- failed to gather speed because of poor organisational cohesion and sagging enthusiasm among grassroots leaders and activists.

"Mindful of the next general election in two years, we will inject life into organisational units and kickstart the antigovernment movement in winter," a top AL leader said.

World opinion

FROM PAGE 1

The Australian research, conducted by ACNielsen, showed most Australians disliked Bush and that their opinion of the United States had deteriorated during his presidency.

The poll of 1,417 respondents showed 54 percent of Australians supported Kerry while only 28 percent backed Bush.

The Australian poll came on the heels of last week's national elections in which Prime Minister John Howard, a close friend and ally of Bush, won a fourth term with an increased majority.

Research in July showed 55 percent of Australians thought the Iraq war was not justified, although opposition to the war and Australia's decision to join the US-led coalition played little part in the election.

However the poll showed Australians remained strongly committed to the alliance with the United States, with 92 percent favouring continuing good relations with the United States.

The poll for the Guardian in Britain showed that despite the so-called "special relationship" between London and Washington, and Prime Minister Tony Blair's strong support for Bush, the US leader is a deeply unpopular figure in Britain.

The poll, conducted for The Guardian by ICM research, showed Kerry would be backed by 50 percent of Britons, against just 22 percent for Bush.

Fake documents

FROM PAGE 1 from Japan, and the DA initiated an investigation.

The DA sources said the JCP then produced several documents and arranged a meeting with Ain Medicare high officials from Malaysia but failed to prove the FSC was genuine.

The FSC from Japanese Drug Administration, attested by an official of Bangladesh Embassy in Tokyo, is a forged document, and the JCP cannot obtain registration under the rules, the sources mentioned.

When contacted recently, Director of the DA Prof Habibur Rahman said, "When we granted registration to JCP based on the attested copy of the FSC from Japan, we could not have doubted its authenticity. But we are now investigating the matter."

Asked to give a copy of the FSC, he said, "I cannot give anyone copy of the FSC as it is a classified document."

There are allegations the JCP managed to obtain the registration bribing some DA high-ups. But the DA officials denied the allegations.

Meanwhile, the DA contacted the Japanese drug administration through the foreign ministry to know if Ain Medicare's products are registered in Japan. But it is yet to get any response more than four weeks into its query. Ain Medicare was not bound on the official list of the companies that manufacture or market artificial kidney dialysis fluid in Japan.

JCP finance director Dr Rahat Hossain said, "We have not submitted any fake document to obtain registration. Our FSC from Japan is genuine as it is attested from our Embassy in Tokyo." But he refused to give a copy of the FSC.

US admits its borders are not 'dirty bomb' proof

AFP, Washington

The US government has admitted its network of border radiation detectors designed to prevent the smuggling of a "dirty bomb" could be fooled, in a conclusion that lends credence to charges voiced by Democrat John Kerry during the presidential campaign.

The Department of Homeland Security said, in a report by its inspector general, that the performance of its detection equipment installed at ports and border crossings "is reduced by certain factors."

"The analysis described the distances beyond which the detection equipment would no longer detect the radiation source," Inspector General Clark Kent Ervin said in a thoroughly sanitized report, an unclassified version of which was released Thursday.

Specific findings about the system's flaws will remain secret to avoid tipping off potential terrorists, officials said.

The investigation was launched at the request of two high-level congressional Democrats, John Dingell of Michigan and Jim Turner of Texas, alarmed by recent media reports indicating that despite all efforts by the administration of President George W. Bush to shore up border security, the nation's borders remain porous -- even to smuggled nuclear devices.

The outcry first erupted two years ago, when ABC News managed to successfully bring into the country nearly seven kilograms (15 pounds) of depleted uranium in a suitcase.

The uranium, purchased in the former Soviet Union and stashed in a cylinder shielded with lead, was first brought by train to Austria, then shipped to Istanbul, Turkey, where it was loaded onto a US-bound cargo ship and successfully made it to its destination.

According to the report, the US Customs Service failed to detect the radioactive material despite the fact

that the crate, in which it was travelling, was classified as a "high-risk" shipment.

The department did not explain the reasons for the failure, but pointed out that the uranium was placed in the middle of a large container filled with huge vases and Turkish horse carts.

The sting operation was repeated in August 2003, when ABC News placed a similar uranium-filled cylinder into a teak trunk and sent it to the United States from Jakarta, Indonesia, in a container full of furniture.

As it the first case, the uranium arrived undetected.

In a subdued tone, the report accepted the department's responsibility, saying "the protocols and procedures that ... officials followed, at the time of the two smuggling incidents, were not adequate to detect the depleted uranium."

The inspector general assured that technological and procedural improvements have since been made.

But Congressman Turner, the ranking member of the House homeland security committee, remained skeptical.

"It is hard to see how the government can