

Naga rebel leaders to meet Indian PM next week

REUTERS, Guwahati

Two exiled leaders of a powerful rebel group in India's restive northeast will hold talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to try to end a decades-old revolt, officials and a rebel spokesman said yesterday.

Chairman Isak Chishi Swu and General Secretary Thuingaleng Muivah of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) arrive in New Delhi on Sunday from Bangkok and will meet Singh and India's home (interior) minister next week.

The two rebel leaders live in Thailand.

The NSCN has been fighting for an independent homeland for an estimated three million Naga tribesmen for over four decades. The revolt has killed more than 20,000 people.

"They are coming to Delhi with an aim to solve the problem; as you know the peace process has been going on for the last seven years," said NSCN spokesman Kraibho Chawang from Dimapur, the commercial centre of Naga-dominated Nagaland state.

In 1997, New Delhi and the NSCN signed a ceasefire pact which has held. The two sides have had several rounds of talks in Thailand and Europe but the dialogue has not produced any breakthrough.

Muivah and Swu met Indian officials in New Delhi in 2003 for the first time but talks stalled over India's refusal to agree to their demand to unify all Naga-dominated areas in the remote northeast into a "Greater Nagaland".

"These talks are important, not only for the people of Nagaland but also for the fact that other insurgent groups will be looking to see how this dialogue progresses," K Padmanabhaiah, the government's key negotiator, told Reuters. "We are wishing for a breakthrough," he said without elaborating.

India's largely mountainous northeast is home to over 200 ethnic and tribal groups.

More than two dozen insurgent groups operate in the region, fighting for independence, more tribal autonomy or statehood.

Fatikchhari

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Rab sources said Sajal was caught in crossfire while trying to flee. He died on the spot.

According to the UNB, Sajal was a Juba Dal cadre and arrested along with a Chinese rifle and ten bullets.

Twin attacks kill 30

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Fourteen people were killed and 19 others were wounded, according to the Numan hospital. Azamiyah was a major center of support for Saddam Hussein.

Initial reports had suggested that the bomb targeted a nearby police station. However, if the mosque was in fact the target, it could have been a bid by the Sunnis to stoke civil strife in the area.

In the Amil attack, gunmen stormed a police station near the dangerous road to Baghdad International Airport, killing 16 policemen, looting weapons, releasing detainees and torching several cars. Police Capt. Mohammed al-Jumaili said. He said several policemen were wounded.

US military spokesman Lt. Col. Jim Hutton said the battle began when gunmen in 11 cars attacked the station with rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire. He said a US military Humvee was also damaged. There were no American casualties.

Detainees being held at the station were also hurt, al-Jumaili said. There was no word on the insurgents' casualties.

The rebels had first shelled the station with mortars. Thick black smoke rose from the burning vehicles after the attack.

Meanwhile, two city councilmen from Khalis were ambushed and killed by gunmen Friday, officials said.

The two were driving from Khalis, 50 miles north of Baghdad, to Baquba, the capital of Diyala province, to attend the regional meeting on the country's Jan. 30 elections, said deputy governor Ghassan al-Khadran. He said a third councilman was injured in the attack.

The claim from al-Zarqawi's group said 30 people were killed in the Amil attack and only two escaped. The group also claimed to have attacked two police patrols in the western Baghdad area of Nafiq al-Shorta, killing everyone, but that could not be verified.

The attacks were the latest against Iraq's police and security services, which have been targeted throughout central, western and northern Iraq in recent weeks.

The US Embassy on Thursday barred employees from the dangerous highway.

Also Thursday, insurgents killed an American soldier in the restive

The groups accuse New Delhi of taking away the region's resources like oil, tea and timber and neglecting the local economy.

India, Pakistan to reopen second rail link

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan and India agreed yesterday to restore a second rail link which was severed nearly 40 years ago, in the latest of a series of peace moves.

The route from Munabao in India to the southern Pakistani town of Khokhrapar was suspended in September 1965 when the two countries went to war over the disputed Himalayan territory of Kashmir.

"Both sides agreed to an early resumption of the rail link between Khokhrapar and Munabao," Indian and Pakistani railway officials said in a joint statement after two days of talks in Islamabad.

The railroad, which could take up to two years to resume service, is part of a slow-moving peace process between the nuclear-armed neighbours, who have fought three wars since independence from Britain in 1947.

In January a train service resumed between Pakistan's second largest city Lahore and the Indian border town of Atari following a two-year break, also caused by tensions over Kashmir.

The second rail link, just 10km long, will have no commercial value but is mainly aimed at reuniting divided families in Pakistan and India and improving bilateral relations, officials said.

The two sides agreed to take steps "to undertake specific activities including laying of railway track and other related infrastructure to operationalise the rail link," the statement said.

"They would hold a further meeting at a mutually agreed date, it said, adding the talks were "cordial and constructive".

The negotiations were led by Pakistan Railway Board secretary Zaem Chaudhry and Indian railway ministry official L.R. Thapar.

Chaudhry said Thursday that the railway link offered no financial benefits but was "just a good gesture... a sort of a gift from one country to another to bring the divided families together."

Pakistani officials said India had proposed reopening the route by October next year, but the timeframe is regarded in some quarters as unlikely.

Ijtima

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many people participate on the opening day of the three-day congregation," observed Moulana Abdul Huq from Narayanganj, who claimed to have attended every Ijtima held so far.

Explaining the unusually high attendance Mohammad Zubair from Chudanga said, "Most of the people who usually participate in the concluding prayer on the final day this time have come on the first day with a view to take part in the Friday prayers."

Except those who had arrived earlier, the congregants started to come in thousands since early morning yesterday from across the country and abroad turning the area some 30km off the capital into a human sea.

Maulana M Mostakim from New Delhi, India delivered the 'Aam Boyar' (principal sermon) after the Friday prayers. Throughout the day, discussions on various aspects of Islam took place, including lectures by Maulana Ismail Sudair from Pakistan, Maulana Jobayerul Hasan and Maulana Sha'd, interspersed with the regular prayer sessions held en masse.

EVENT MANAGEMENT
The ground prepared since early last month has over eight thousand tents, 10 thousand electric bulbs and three thousand loudspeakers powered by four power generators.

More than 15 thousand security personnel including 6,500 police brought in from the districts, 1,000 troops of Rapid Action Battalion, 500 members of Armed Police Battalion and 300 Ansars were deployed in the area.

Sources at the Police Control Room said except for a few arrests no untoward incident has been reported from the venue.

A total of 29 makeshift medical camps have been set up near the control room of Tongi Pourashabha in the venue where basic healthcare, check up and limited curative services are available for the Ijtima participants free of cost.

The Tongi Pourashabha authorities are supplying drinking water at different points, while places have been designated for large-scale cooking and a makeshift market for the participants to buy food and other necessities.

Twelve mobile courts have been formed and assigned to ensure that the food sold to the devotees are fresh and hygienic. "Today we've fined nine people a total of Tk 27,000 for selling stale food here," said one magistrate leading a court, refusing to give his name.

Traffic police and Military police were posted along the entire Dhaka-Tongi stretch of the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway to regulate the huge number of vehicles pouring in by the minute. Plying of non-motorised vehicles on the highway from Tongi Bridge to Board Bazaar has been suspended from Thursday afternoon.

Bangladesh Railway has arranged special train services for transporting devotees to Tongi from different areas. State-run Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation is also providing additional services for the Ijtima-goers.

The Ijtima, organised annually by Tablighi Jamaat, will end on Sunday morning through Akheri Munajat with President Iqbaluddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina and other government high-ups attending.

DEATH, INJURIES
An unidentified man of about 56 years died yesterday apparently of cardiac arrest in the Ijtima ground.

At 9:15am three people, all of them coming from Noakhali, received serious burn injuries while cooking, as a kerosene stove suddenly burst.

Of the three, M Billah Hossain, 30, who was said to have suffered at least 23 percent burn, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital while the other two were admitted to Tongi Hospital.

The pourashabha CEO said, "Forty participants have been sent to the 50-bed Tongi Hospital but the number of sick people is much higher. Most of them are getting private treatment or being sent elsewhere."

Myanmar

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serious happening inside Myanmar and hence a full alert (has been) sounded all along the border to prevent infiltration of rebels," said the commander, who requested anonymity.

The rebel leader said the NSCN has at least 50 camps with some 5,000 guerrilla fighters entrenched in fortified bunkers in the Sagaing Division of Myanmar.

At least four other militant groups from India's northeast, where numerous tribal and ethnic groups are fighting for greater autonomy or independence, have training camps in northern Myanmar's thick jungles -- all of them sheltered there under the patronage of the NSCN.

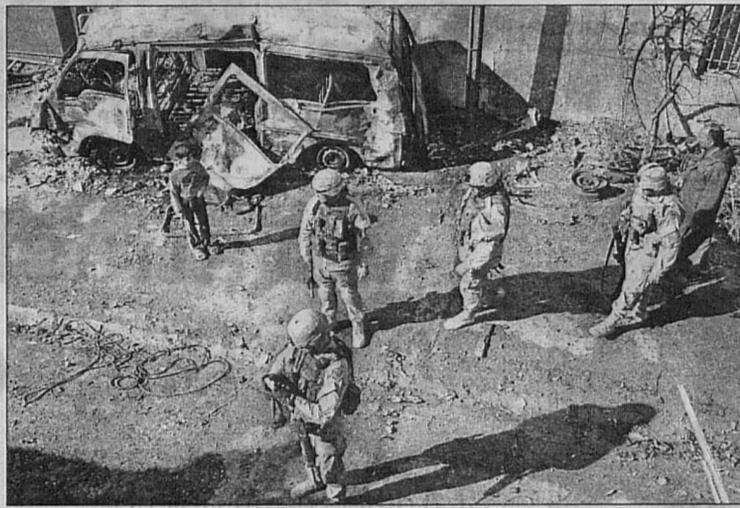
Mulaton said that all top leaders, including chairman S.S. Khaplang, are safe.

"We are not going to leave Myanmar and shall fight and repulse the Myanmar forces. In many places we have planted landmines and timebombs to prevent the army from advancing."

The rebel leader claimed at least 5,000 tribal Naga villagers living on the periphery of their camps have fled their homes since the operation began.

"The Myanmar troops have now surrounded several villages, with the civilian population fleeing for safety and taking shelter in the adjoining jungles," the NSCN leader said.

The NSCN's Khaplang faction has been observing a ceasefire with New Delhi since 2001 although peace talks are yet to begin.



US soldiers inspect the site of a car bomb explosion outside a Shiite mosque in Baghdad's northern Al-Ahmediya district yesterday. Fourteen people were killed in the blast.

Bandarban border

FROM PAGE 1
Law enforcers also seized machinegun shells, grenades, a huge quantity of powerful explosives and anti-tank mines in different operations.

Naikhang Battalion Commanding Officer BDR Lt Col Hasinur Rahman said thousands of Rohingya refugees residing in Naikhangghari and surrounding areas are linked to arms smuggling. Law enforcers seized huge firearms and explosives in their operations but the criminals escaped arrest on advance information from the refugees about the raids.

"We could not unearth identities of the arms smuggling gangs and their motive as they managed to elude security dragnet," he said.

An increase in the number of BOPs would greatly help contain smuggling of firearms and explosives, he thought. BDR sources said they had written to the home ministry long ago requesting the government to increase the number of BOPs on Bangladesh-Myanmar border but no such step was taken as yet.

Deputy Commissioner of Bandarban Sheikh Alauddin said he is not aware of the need for increasing the number of BOPs. The problem is yet to be solved due to lack of coordination between the civil administration and security forces, he mentioned.

Sources mentioned although Naikhangghari upazila is in Bandarban district, Naikhangghari BDR zone is under the control of BDR Chittagong sector. Moreover, as per security policy, Chittagong Hill Tracts is under Bandarban army region. This is creating security anomalies on the border.

Bangladesh and Myanmar authorities

ties had taken initiatives to complete demarcation of their border by forming joint border teams in 1984 and 1998 but the teams postponed their activities after some mines planted along the border by Myanmar authorities exploded, they pointed out.

JCD calls strike

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around 7:30pm. They were chatting behind a women's dormitory not yet named when the attackers chopped both of them with Chinese axe and machete and fled the scene.

They were rushed to a private hospital from where Sohag was shifted to MAG Osmani Medical College and Hospital with injuries to his head and legs.

As the news spread, JCD leaders and activists marched in procession and went on the rampage. They ransacked the TV room and cafeteria of Shah Paran Hall and then moved to the market opposite the Sust main gate.

Police rushed to the spot, brought the situation under control and removed the barricades from the road after one hour.

Locals and Shahjalal Varsity Gate Byabosavee Samity yesterday held a rally at the Sust main gate protesting the vandalism by what they said were so-called students. They demanded punishment of those responsible for the rampage and compensation for the losses.

The JCD, on the other hand, blamed Islami Chhatra Shibir, student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, for the attack on the two students and demanded punishment of the attackers.

Additional police were deployed on the campus. Tension is prevailing.

Madrasah guard commits suicide in the capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A madrasah guard yesterday allegedly committed suicide inside his working place at Kazipara in Kafrul.

On information, police recovered the body of Rafiq Faraji, 48, hanging with a rope from the ceiling of a classroom on the first floor of Kazipara Siddiqia Senior Madrasah building at 9:00am.

Madrasah Principal Nur Mohammad filed an unnatural death case with Kafrul Police Station.

Meanwhile, Faraji's son Aminul Islam Farhad claimed the death to be a murder and said, "The death is mysterious as my father did not have any family problems and he did not have any reason to commit suicide."

Father went out of our East Kazipara house at 7:00am to open the gate of the madrasah. He was doing some repair work in the house and told my mother that he would return home right after opening the gate," Farhad told reporters.

DOCTORED RESULT Ctg Bar to take action against 10 more lawyers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chittagong Bar Association (CBA) will ask Bangladesh Bar Council to take necessary action against 10 more Chittagong-based lawyers that it finds to have allegedly doctored the LLB mark sheets.

A general meeting of Chittagong Bar last month decided to send the list of those lawyers to Bangladesh Bar Council, the statutory body of law practitioners that is responsible for taking action against professional misconduct of lawyers.

Earlier on November 8 this year, the CBA sent a list of 30 lawyers, accused of tampering with results, to the Bar Council in Dhaka for taking necessary action against them.

President of Chittagong Bar Advocate Ibrahim Hossain Babul yesterday told The Daily Star, "We will soon send the second list that we've prepared through investigations."

"We are ready to comply with the Bar Council's decision regarding those lawyers," he added.

The bar president said though abstained from practice, the accused lawyers come to the courts regularly. The CBA initiated investigations after a certificate scandal involving High Court Judge Faisal Mahmud Faizee and 110 other lawyers had broken raising widespread criticism.

ACC in Barisal

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science and technology affairs of district Awami League and ex-chairman of Bakerganj municipality Mahbul Alam, municipal staff Md Tazel Hossain, Sarder Mahbubur Rahman and Md Nuruzaman Khan, and contractors M/s Talukder Enterprise, HS Enterprise, Nipa Enterprise, Maruf Enterprise, Happy Begum, Badrunnesa Begum, and Alauddin Howlader.

Fumaun Kabir and Altaf Hossain, two assistant inspectors of ACC, lodged nine cases against them with Bakerganj Police Station on November 30 and December 1, 2004 under section 5(2) of the anti-corruption acts of 1947.

In the cases, it was alleged that the accused have misappropriated Tk 2.8 lakh in different development and construction works of Bakerganj municipality.

RAB VICTIM ARRESTED
Police yesterday arrested a rape victim and sent her to safe custody in Barisal.

The arrestee, wife of a rickshaw-puller of Bherudua under Babuganj upazila, lodged a rape case with Kotwali Police Station on November 16.

In the case, she alleged that when she was passing the Jagadish Ashram at Natun Bazar area, Biplob Das and Ripon, two local youth lured her to the monastery and raped her.

Police arrested the accused and sent them to jail.

The complainant absconded immediately after filing the case. Police arrested her from the Chawkbazar area of the city on Friday night.

The arrestee said she went into hiding in fear of harassment and reprisals for filing the case.

No down payment

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regime, the recent government steps including exempting the garment units from Vat (value-added tax) and the reschedule facility of default loans in case of stock lots will help the exporters increase their competitive edge in the global market," Annisul Huq, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), told The Daily Star.

Small factories would be most vulnerable in the quota-free regime, he said, adding it would also be a risky situation for them if they are stuck with stock lots.

Huq said, "So, allowing them to reschedule their default loans without down payment will help them survive in the post-MFA era," adding, "BGMEA has been working for a long time on these issues to protect the interests of the small factories."

The BGMEA president felt the Vat waiver and loan rescheduling facilities would also help reduce their business costs.

The government from November 20 has exempted all 100 percent export-oriented industries from Vat on handling charges of freight at port and on clearing, forwarding, shipping and insurance.

The export-oriented industries will also enjoy Vat waiver on utility

bills -- 80 percent for gas, 60 percent for water and 80 percent for electricity.

Cold waves

FROM PAGE 12
2.8 degrees Celsius at Srimongol in 1968.

Three kinds of cold waves -- mild with eight to ten degrees, moderate with six to eight degree, and severe with below six degrees Celsius temperature, sweep across the country from December to mid-February, said an weather expert.

Gaibandha

FROM PAGE 12
riding a motorcycle died on the spot when a BRTC bus hit them from behind.

In Dhaka, an unidentified youth was killed in a road accident in Motijheel.

Witnesses said a Kamalapur bound bus ran over the youth, clad in green lungi and white half shirt, while he was crossing the New Circular Road at about 1:30pm. Police recovered the body and sent it to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Police seized the bus, but its driver managed to flee.

Rights for disabled

FROM PAGE 1
He told the rally participants that the government has decided to reserve 1 percent seats in the Bangladesh Civil Service examinations for the disabled.

Kazi Monarul Haq, secretary of the social welfare ministry, said though disabled people generally face much inconvenience yet disabled women are subjected to more discrimination. They are more neglected in society and family than their male counterparts.

Hafizur Islam Mian, director general of Social Service Department, said policymakers should try to ensure equal opportunity for the disabled.

"All of us have some sort of disability but God looks on us equally, and following that we should ensure equal opportunity for all," he said.

The government as well as different organisations observed the day through seminars, discussions and

colourful rallies in the capital and across the country.

Action on Disability and Development (ADD), a non-governmental organisation, brought out another colourful rally in Badda in the capital in which more than 25 organisations including Ain O Salish Kendro and over 350 disabled people joined.

The ADD also held a discussion meeting where speakers urged all to create awareness and come forward to eliminate violence against disabled women.

Shyamoli Rani, representative of Disabled Nari Parishad, said separate ticket counters at railway stations, bus terminals, airports and ferry terminals should be set up for the disabled.

Newspapers published special articles while state-run Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television broadcast special programmes to mark the day.

Where has money gone

FROM PAGE 1
Bank (ADB) at a concessional rate of interest to pay Desa the public sector's electricity bill arrears. The Desa will also borrow from the ADB to pay its unpaid bills to the PDB, he added.

"Only then we'll be able to overhaul the PDB infrastructure," hoped the state minister who claimed credit for reducing the national systems loss in power from 30.3 percent in 2001 to 25.4 percent and raising bill collection efficiency from 84.3 percent in 2001 to 97.2 percent now, besides reducing annual load-shedding hours from 1,100 hours in 2001 to 700 hours in 2003.

Iqbal expressed dismay at power thefts by many bulk consumers saying many of them are getting away with paying for only one-tenth of the power they consume.

On power bill default by the public sector bodies, he said different government offices have accumulated unpaid power bills of Tk 120 crore and some jute mills owe the Desa and the PDB Tk 150 crore in arrears.

On bringing the power bill defaulters to book, the state minister said the mild punishments provided in the Electricity Act of 1910 are not effective any more. "In the model of the stringent laws in the Indian states of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, we're going to table a new electricity act in parliament within the next six months," he announced.

About the current demand and supply status of electricity in the country, Iqbal said, against a 4,000 MW demand, "We have the capacity now to generate a maximum of 3,600 MW."

Countering the criticism that his ministry has generated almost no additional power since he took over office in late 2001, Iqbal mentioned the 250 MW Siddhirganj power plant

the prime minister will inaugurate on December 18 and the 100 MW one in Tongi to be commissioned in January 2005. He also named a few other power plants expected to be operational within the next few years.

"When I took over, I understood that only additional power generation will not help us improve the country's power scenario, rather we require to better the dismal situation in distribution. So I took a move to enhance the efficiency in distribution lines, besides going for massive maintenance and overhauling, which raised power generation by over 400 MW by the existing plants," Iqbal explained.

On reform issues, the state minister said, since the country's independence, "We've never calculated how much money we invested and what's the return. PDB employees thought they were here to make money for themselves and the subscribers thought they don't need to pay."

In 1986, he recalled, the World Bank raised the alarm, saying, "You can't run it [the power sector] as a charity. Then the reform started with the formation of Desa in 1991. But again, we had no alternate proposals; we did what the donors prescribed. The reality is the Desa is just a chip of the PDB -- old wine in a new bottle."

"In 10 years Desa has lost Tk 10,000 crore to widespread thefts and failed to pay the bills of PDB, handicapping the latter in refurbishing its old power units. That again gave rise to yet more problems," Iqbal lamented.

He said the demand for new power connections is rising by 22 percent a year and the sector requires \$18 billion in investment up to 2020 to help the economy achieve a double-digit growth rate.

The able disabled

FROM PAGE 12
Tanvir's ambition is to be a doctor. He sought help from all quarters of the society to help him get treatment to overcome the physical handicap.

"If a physically handicapped person gets help and sympathy from the society, it makes it easy for him to live," said the boy.

Lack of vision failed to discourage Sumi from completing primary schooling.

Like the majority of the visually challenged in Bangladesh, she would like to continue her studies through secondary to higher levels.

But a blind student here has to pay a hefty sum to hire someone to recite and record the chapters onto audio-tapes or to have the chapters read out so he/she can put them in the Braille format.

Tanvir and Sumi were among some 200 physically handicapped people gathered in a small building in the city's Mirpur who took out a

rally organised by Blind Education and Rehabilitation Development Organisation (BERDO) to observe International Day of Disabled Persons.

"Physical disability does not eliminate the potentials of a person, as, like others, a handicapped person too can do many creative things, if provided with the required facilities," said Saidu Huq, executive director of BERDO, who lost his vision to typhoid at the age of six.

Saidu, an Ashoka Fellow, did his master's in Philosophy at Dhaka University and is leading quite a successful life like any person.

Saidu cherishes a dream to set up a Braille press to print books and publish a monthly Braille magazine for the visually impaired.

He said the affluent section of the society should come forward to help the physically handicapped out of social obligations.