

PBCP leaders' widows form suicide squad?

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Security has been tightened in Khulna City and district following an intelligence report that the widows of Purbu Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) leaders have formed a suicide squad to avenge the killings of their husbands in reported encounters with police in the last year.

The suicide squad has prepared a hit list that includes two senior officers of Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) and two of Khulna district police.

Khulna Superintendent of Police (SP) Habibur Rahman said according to reliable sources the squad plans to create anarchy by killing the police officers and other subversive activities.

He named three women -- Keya, Nita and Laizu -- as leaders of the squad comprising some 80 widows of PBCP members killed in encounters with police and Rapid Action Battalion in the violence-prone south-western region in the last 12

months. "We are not at all afraid of the suicide squad, if there is any. No threat will prevent us from containing terrorist activities ruthlessly," KMP Commissioner Javed Patwary told a press conference at the KMP headquarters on Thursday.

He said, "We are committed to ensure security of lives and property of people."

The commissioner said security measures have been beefed up, with policemen kept on high alert. Checkposts have been set up at the vulnerable points in the city and intelligence units strengthened. Special security measures have been taken for the offices of the deputy inspector general (DIG) of Khulna Range, KMP commissioner and deputy commissioners, and Khulna SP and the police stations in the district. Besides, restriction has been imposed on women's entrance to the KMP headquarters and the offices of the DIG and the SP.

British, Thai embassies in Indonesia closed after bomb alert

AFP, *Jakarta*

The British and Thai embassies in Indonesia were closed yesterday after bomb threats that sparked a major security alert in the world's largest Muslim-populated country as it struggled to cope with the tsunami disaster.

The British embassy shuttered its building in Jakarta's central business district and closed a consular facility in a neighbouring office block that is home to several foreign media organisations and near hotels frequented by Westerners.

Police deployed bomb squads and anti-terror teams in force to the area and said they were taking seriously the threat against it and the nearby Thai embassy.

Around 30 police, some carrying rifles, were on guard outside the closed Thai embassy Friday. An armoured vehicle as well as a police bus and truck were parked outside.

10 slain in Kashmir

AFP, *Srinagar*

Ten people, including an elderly Muslim woman and her son, were killed in fresh rebel violence in Indian Kashmir, police said yesterday.

Three soldiers and two Islamic militants died during two days of fighting in the central Kashmir district of Budgam in which the two sides exchanged automatic weapons fire.

"The fighting erupted Thursday evening when troops ringed a residential house on a tip-off that militants were hiding there," a police spokesman said.

Troops shot dead three other rebels during another gunbattle in the southern district of Rajouri, a police spokesman said.

Meanwhile, suspected Islamic militants killed overnight a member of Ikhwan -- a pro-India militant group formed by former separatist rebels -- and his 60-year-old mother in southern Anantnag district, police said.

Saarc summit

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minister of the host country said, "We are not cutting any vital programme of the summit. We are only advancing the closing ceremony by one day."

Replying to a query, Morshed Khan said, "We want to make the summit more businesslike. We want to make Saarc an intensive forum for regional and economic cooperation."

All venues for the Saarc summit would remain unchanged while dinner to be hosted by the president has been dropped. But the banquet by the host prime minister would be held on February 6.

Morshed Khan said all the Saarc member countries have been contacted over telephone and they have given their consents on the fresh dates of the meet.

According to new schedule, the pre-summit meetings will start on February 1 to do the spadework for the South Asian leaders.

Saarc programming committee will meet on February 1-2, standing committee on February 3-4 and council of ministers on February 5.

Morshed Khan said Indian External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh called him on Thursday evening and proposed February 6-7 as the date for the summit. He said he had discussed the new schedule with Pakistan as well.

Dhaka's request

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cooperation, such as hydroelectricity and other diversified sources of energy supply, trade and transit, the Ministers of the three countries agreed that such bilateral issues will continue to be pursued bilaterally.

"In this context, if [the three countries] agreed to recommend to their respective governments the importance of evaluating issues relevant to bringing their nations closer to each other by establishing policy frameworks which will augment practical measures for further economic cooperation and collaboration among themselves."

Talking to media people, Aiyar termed Dhaka's agreement to the trans-national pipeline a 'triumph'. "I think it is a triumph because for the first time in 30 years Bangladesh has agreed to its territory being used for transport of any commodity," Aiyar, who had attended the three-nation talks in Yangon, said.

He said the trilateral agreement constitutes a 'win-win' situation for all, because it involves not only ferrying gas from Myanmar to India but also a broader co-operation under which gas from Bangladesh's gas fields in Sylhet area could be carried by use in petrochemical industries in Khulna or Jessore.

The pipeline agreement came as a major shot in the arm of Aiyar's energy diplomacy blitz in less than a week after India signed a \$40 billion deal with Iran to import 7.5 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas for 25 years beginning from 2009.



Leaders of the Communist Party of Bangladesh take out a procession in the city yesterday protesting the hike of gas price and bus fare, among other things.

3 die in 'crossfire'

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Lalpur police arrested Ali Thursday afternoon at a local bazaar.

Police said, acting on Ali's confession, they took him out to recover some hidden firearms. Soon as they neared Gopalpur graveyard, Ali's cohorts opened fire on them prompting them to retaliate.

Police claimed several bullets hit Ali during the firefight leaving him dead on the spot. His associates however managed to flee.

Police retrieved a revolver and 16 bullets from the spot.

The OC of Lalpur PS said Ali stood accused in 15 cases including some for robberies. He also admitted to being involved in the killing of local Awami League leader Jitendranath Datta last Wednesday.

But, family members of Ali alleged he had been murdered deliberately. They said there had been a few cases against him with Lalpur PS, but those were proven false in police investigations.

Ajmat Ali, the Pabna regional leader of an outlawed Naxalite party, died in a shootout between Rab members and his accomplices at Hideshkholl village under Athgoria upazila early yesterday.

Rab sources said Ali was arrested at Hideshkholl on Thursday. When a Rab team took him to his den at the village at about 3:30am to recover

the hidden arms he had confessed to, his cohorts opened fire on the team, forcing it to fire back.

Rab said Ali was hit by a bullet while trying to escape during the shootout. He was taken to Pabna General Hospital, where he later succumbed to his injury. The body was kept at the hospital's morgue for autopsy.

Rab recovered a shutter gun and two bullets from the spot.

Police said Ali stood accused in several criminal cases including three for murders.

Ctg Rab

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meanwhile received some weapons out of those seized in the haul of 10 truckloads of smuggled arms in Chittagong on April 2 last year, officials said.

Rab began its operation in Chittagong in April last year and nabbed a number of most wanted criminals.

Of them, 21 were killed in 'crossfire' between their accomplices and Rab personnel at different places.

Rab has a list of 80 most wanted criminals in Chittagong, its officials said.

Godfathers of criminals in Chittagong will also be caught on receipt of proper evidence against them, they added.

Plots in wetland

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Rajuk, the body responsible for the city's planning and development, has been anything but proactive in dealing with the issue of protecting the wetlands.

"There are so many people applying for project approval. I cannot remember right now whether they (The Hazaribagh Model Town) got it or not," said Rezaul Karim Tarafdar, member, estate department of Rajuk.

When asked whether they would take any action or not Rezaul said, "Give me their address and location, I will look into the matter."

Taking advantage of Rajuk's indifference to the problem, developers like Hazaribagh Model Town Company have been continuously filling up the wetlands around the city. Some Rajuk sources say a group of officials within the Rajuk have been conniving in the rampant land grabbing.

One employee from the Hazaribagh Model Town Company said the company takes Tk 12 lakh

for a plot. Posing as a prospective client The Daily Star correspondent had recently talked to Md Shahajan, managing director of the Hazaribagh Model Town Company.

He said, "We will hand over the plot to you within a year on receipt of the payment and we will start filling up your plot once the booking is made."

At one stage of the conversation Shahajan frankly admitted to his company's not having Rajuk's approval for filling up the land and selling it to people as residential plots.

But he added, "We will manage to get the approval very soon. We are now processing project in Rajuk. You don't need to worry about it as we have already sold 30 plots."

Shahajan maintained his composure even when the correspondent divulged his identity. He said, "There is no legal bar to filling up this land because it is not a wetland, rather an arable land. And we are doing nothing wrong."

Expatriates remit

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per cent last year compared to the previous year mainly because of some strict measures on sending workers there with lower wages structure. A total of 1.30 lakh workers went to the KSA last year for jobs as against the previous year's 1.49 lakh, the sources said.

The other major importers of Bangladeshi manpower last year were United Arab Emirates recruiting 42,006 workers, Kuwait 36,884, Bahrain 8,410, Singapore 6,307, Jordan 5,395 and Oman 4,025.

The number of overseas employment could have been much higher had Malaysia, a major importer of Bangladeshi manpower, opened its door to overseas workers, said a high official of the expatriate welfare ministry.

Around half a million Bangladeshis were recruited by Malaysia in mid-90s, most of whom came back home on expiry of their job tenure. Around 1.13 lakh Bangladeshis are now working in that country.

recruiting Bangladeshi workers but it is yet to go for this.

Several thousand Bangladeshis who were staying in Malaysia without valid documents returned home last year in the wake of Kuala Lumpur's threat of a crackdown on illegal foreign workers.

The latest deadline for the drive was December 31 and it was extended by a month after the recent tsunami disaster in some countries in the region, sources mentioned.

US 'erodes' HR

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HRW's 527-page annual report covers the developments in human rights in more than 60 countries in the past year.

It found that human rights conditions remained grave in Iraq and Israel, and had deteriorated in Iran, with little sign of improvement in the rest of the Middle East.

And though improvements were noted in several African countries, the report said concerns remained about governments' commitment to protect human rights.

Adulterated milk worth Tk 1 cr seized

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Sylhet*

Sylhet Kotwali police seized two trucks loaded with 1135 bags of adulterated powder milk worth about Tk 1 crore from the city's Shahjalal Upashahar area and arrested the owner of the milk and his son Thursday midnight.

Tipped off, the police seized the trucks when the milk was being unloaded.

Police took the trucks' drivers to the police station for interrogation and recorded their statements under section 164 of CrPc. The police also arrested the owner of the seized milk Habib Miah and his son Redwan Ahmed.

Police suspect the owner of the milk had brought the adulterated item for marketing.

Owner of the milk Habib Miah, however, said he brought the lot from Chittagong after the Starship's godown had burnt, and such abandoned milk is used as poultry feed.

Police are now investigating the matter.

Khatme Nabuwat

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anti-Islamic activities. "We warn you not to play such a role over an issue linked to the dignity of Islam. The government will also face a danger if it continues to remain silent," he added.

The movement's Bangladesh Secretary General Maulana Nazmul Haque said they do not want to occupy or demolish the religious complexes of the Ahmadiyyas. They have just made a 'reasonable' demand to the government that the Ahmadiyyas should be declared non-Muslim because they deny that Hazrat Muhammad (SM) is the last prophet.

"We do not have any complaint against the Christians, Hindus and also Ahmadiyyas but what we want is they (Ahmadiyyas) must live as non-Muslim like people of other religions," he said.

The leaders denied reports that the movement has declared Dr Kamal Hossain as murtad. Some newspapers and electronic media are giving such reports with the motive of creating chaos in the country, they said.

They however regretted that Dr Kamal appeared in court for the 'Kadianis' (Ahmadiyyas).

Noor Hossain criticised Supreme Court Bar Association President Rokanuddin Mahmud's reported remarks at a recent seminar that supporters of Khatme Nabuwat Movement should not be allowed to enter the Supreme Court.

Referring to personalities like poet Shamsur Rahman, Dr Kamal Hossain, Prof Kabir Chowdhury and Shahriar Kabir, he said the nation knows if they are Muslim or non-Muslim.

The rally was chaired by Mufi Maatula Mahmud Rahman, chief of Tejgaon unit of the movement.

BSCIC units

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inch (PSI) against the requirement of 15 PSI.

"There are 500 workers in this factory. But we cannot give them salary regularly due to drastic production cut," Hossain added.

He said the Titas Gas authorities earlier said that the gas crisis would be eased by the end of the year 2004, but the situation has worsened.

Referring to the irregular payment of wages, Nurunnabi, a worker of the same factory attributed the situation to gas crisis.

"I have been working in this factory for the last one and half years on a monthly wage of Tk 1200. But in last few months our wages have become very irregular and now we are afraid that we might lose our jobs any moment if the gas crisis continues," he added.

Tongi BSCIC industrial area houses 90 factories that are run by gas. National Glass Industry, Jupiter Glass Factory, Dhaka Ceramic, Khawja Re-rolling Mill and Northern Corporation are the major gas-run factories.

14-PARTY DEMO TODAY

AL plans fresh programmes with allies

UNB, *Dhaka*

The Awami League (AL) is working out a fresh programme along with its allies to launch a vigorous anti-government movement after the forthcoming Eid.

"We will announce the programme after the Eid-ul-Azha," Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil MP said yesterday, as the AL-led 14-party opposition prepared for countrywide demonstrations today protesting fuel price hike.

Talking to the news agency, the AL leader said the opposition parties are united on their 9-point demand, including resignation of the government for fresh elections.

About the reported differences with the CPB, he said: "We have differences and similarity on some points, but both of us are in agreement on the 9-point demand."

Jalil said the alliance government has shattered all state structures and made public life unbearable. Human-wall programmes were manifestation of people's outbursts against all these.

The AL general secretary said the nation is clearly divided into two camps, one led by pro-liberation and another by anti-liberation forces. He alleged the ruling BNP is leading the anti-liberation forces.

"We are trying to forge the unity of pro-liberation forces," he said and blamed the BNP-led ruling alliance for 'distorting' history and acting against the spirit of the War of Independence.

Palestinian

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Sheerit said on Israel Radio the terminal, a major lifeline for supplies to 1.3 million Palestinians in Gaza, would remain closed until further notice as a result of the attack.

Abbas swept to power with an overwhelming victory in last Sunday's presidential poll in the West Bank and Gaza and will be sworn in on Saturday to replace Arafat, who died on Nov. 11.

The new Palestinian leader has urged a ceasefire in more than four years of bloodshed to allow resumption of talks with Israel on peace and Palestinian statehood, a call rejected by militants he has said he planned to co-opt rather than confront.

In a statement, the Israeli army said that militants had planted a large explosive at a door separating the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the terminal, blasting a hole through which three gunmen went through.

"As a result of the explosion and during exchanges of fire which evolved at the scene, six Israeli civilians and three Palestinians were killed," the army said.

Shortly after the blast, Israeli helicopters fired missiles at a clinic in a Gaza refugee camp run by a charity allied with militants, injuring one passerby, the army and witnesses said.

Top Bollywood singers unite for tsunami benefit

AFP, *Bombay*

Bollywood's top 15 singers will come together this weekend to record a benefit song for India's thousands of tsunami victims.

Noted lyricist and poet Javed Akhtar has penned a new song "Zindagi Pukaarti Hai" (Life Beckons), which he said would be recorded in Bombay and performed live at a movie awards function on January 18.

Popular Bollywood music composers brothers Jatin and Lalit, who only use one name each, have composed the music and the recording will take place at their private studio.

"The song is about keeping a positive outlook to life and calls on people to help society at large," Akhtar said.

"The sales and distribution details are being finalised and after this the music video and CDs would be released," he said. All the proceeds would go to tsunami victims and relief work.

The number of people officially declared dead or missing in India from the December 26 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami is more than 16,000.

Bollywood playback singers Alka Yagnik, Udit Narayan, Shaan, Sonu Nigam and Sunidhi Chauhan are among those involved in the planned recording.

Space probe

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recorder and a lamp to look for signs of surface liquid.

Huygens was expected to reach Titan's surface at 4:30 a.m. PST (7:30 a.m. EST). The first data was expected to reach Earth about 7:30 a.m. PST (10:30 a.m. EST).

Titan, believed to be the only moon in the solar system with an atmosphere, is larger than the planets Mercury and Pluto.

It is believed to have liquid methane and ethane on its surface, but the moon's heavy fog blanket makes it unclear what Huygens will encounter when it reaches its landing site.

The \$3 billion Cassini-Huygens mission, a joint project of NASA and the European and Italian space agencies, was launched in 1997 from Cape Canaveral, Florida, to study Saturn, its rings, its moons and its magnetosphere.

In December, Cassini dropped off Huygens on a three-week journey toward Titan, now culminating in the probe's parachute-assisted plunge to the moon's surface.

The 705-pound probe was supposed to immediately begin transmitting data gathered by its onboard instruments and camera to Cassini.

Scientists will not know whether the instruments worked and the data was sent until Cassini turns toward Earth and begins sending the information back home.

Road accidents in 2 districts kill 6

STAR NEWS DESK

Six people died and 33 others were injured in road accidents in Gopalganj, Bhairab and Rangamati yesterday.

In Gopalganj, a motorbike, carrying five people, crashed into a speeding truck on Gopalganj-Kasiani road at Fakura at about 4:00pm, leaving three of a family dead and injuring two others, according to our correspondent.

The dead are Mustafizur

Enamul

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nipped back and struck him on the backfoot.

Next to depart was Brendan Taylor beaten by a ball that straightened after pitching on leg and middle and was trapped plumb also on the backfoot.

However, Masakadza was unfazed by the team's sudden loss of wickets and continued to excel with the willow. The tall number four struck the ball around the park during a 60-run stand for the fifth wicket with his captain Taibu.

But Tapash Baisya, who was hit for three boundaries in a single over by Masakadza, had the last laugh when the batsman misread a slower and drove straight to Aftab Ahmed at mid-off.

Masakadza's strokeful 43 off 70 balls featured six sweet boundaries.

It was Tapash that also ended the 50-run sixth-wicket partnership between Taibu and Chigumbura when the latter (34 off 76 balls) was caught by Ashraful at point while trying to cut the ball.

Apart from being dropped by wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud with Zimbabwe on 178-5 at tea, Taibu, who hit five boundaries in his 166-ball essay, was lucky to survive two close calls -- an lbw shout and a caught-behind appeal by left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique.

The country's top wicket-taker in both Tests and one-dayers did not pick up a scalp in a marathon 32-over spell that cost 48 runs.

Punish garment units

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factory in Siddhirganj of Narayanganj.

Dr Kamal, also the president of Jatiya Oikya Mancha, said the highest court of the country had ordered the garment factory owners to ensure safety of the workers in all ready-made garment factories. But the owners remain in open violation of the rule, he said.

National Garments Workers Federation (NGWF) organised the rally at Muktangan in the capital. Leaders of Jatiya Sramik Federation, Bangladesh Garment Sramik Federation and Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Garments Workers Federation also participated in the rally.

The workers make an immense contribution towards earning foreign exchange for the country. They are the national assets and they deserve to be well protected, Dr Kamal said.

Dr Kamal alleged that partisan interests have put the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) on the brink of a disaster. BGMEA is a state organisation and the attempts to destroy it must be resisted, he added.

Rahman, 40, his wife Lucky Begum, 30, and their daughter

Suraiya, 8. Seriously injured Mustafiz's daughter, Rubaiya, 2, and his domestic help Morjina, 12, are undergoing treatment at Gopalganj Sadar Hospital. The bodies were sent to the hospital for autopsy.

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

UNB adds: Three people were killed and a pick-up van driver was injured as his vehicle collided with a truck on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway at Narayanpur in Bhairab upazila at noon.

Two of the dead were identified as Muktar Miah, 40, and Rashidul, 30. Identity of the other could not be known.

Pick-up van driver Tutul was admitted to a local clinic and then shifted to a hospital in Dhaka in a critical condition.

At least 30 people were injured, ten of them seriously, as two buses collided on Rangamati-Chittagong road in Kalabagan yesterday.

Ten of the injured were admitted to Chittagong Medical College and Hospital, while others to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital.

Armed Forces

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the defence committee, the proposals say.

In wartime the joint forces headquarters will be provided with additional manpower and logistical facilities, sources said quoting a provision of the draft proposal, which was not finalised at Monday's meeting.

The prime minister at the meeting asked the AFD to continue working on the matter. The government high-ups and the chiefs of armed services will sit again after three months and finalise the plan.