

BDB slams govt for sedition charge threat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) President Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury yesterday said the government, being failed to curb militancy, is now threatening to bring sedition charges against the persons who point out the militant activities in the country.

"The government can not understand that opposing the government and sedition are not the same thing," he said at a dialogue with Bangladesh Workers Party organised by the BDB at KC Memorial Clinic in the city.

The prime minister's speech on Wednesday's grand rally in the capital has frustrated the countrymen as she did not give any direction to curb militancy, Prof

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Rumsfeld announces US troop cut in Iraq

REUTERS, Baghdad

Guerrillas stormed an Iraqi army post yesterday, killing 10 soldiers and wounding 20, as Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told US combat troops their numbers would fall as Iraqi forces were trained to take over.

While Rumsfeld made a pre-Christmas visit to a Marine base in the subdued rebel stronghold of Falluja, west of Baghdad, gunmen launched a mass assault on the roadside outpost near Adhaim, north of the capital, that lasted all morning.

By the end, police said, 10 soldiers were dead and 20 wounded in the bloodiest attack since last week's parliamentary election.

There was no account of casualties among the gunmen. A civilian motorist was killed and another wounded in crossfire.

The brazen attack after dawn, using heavy machineguns and rocket-propelled grenades, ended a period of relative calm across Iraq over the past 10 days -- a calm bought at the price of draconian election security measures and helped by an informal truce by some Sunni Arab insurgent groups.

The area, 70 km north of Baghdad on the main road to the flashpoint city of Kirkuk, is violent -- 19 Iraqi troops were killed there on December 3 when a joint patrol with US forces was ambushed. Both al-Qaeda-linked Sunni groups and

more secular, nationalist groups have been active in the region.

Rumsfeld announced a slight realignment in US forces, citing progress in the training of local security forces.

US combat forces in Iraq would be reduced by two brigades by early in the new year, while troops involved in training Iraq's new military would be increased, he said.

He gave no specific numbers. Commanders have said troop levels should fall from a high of around 160,000 for the election -- achieved partly by overlapping troops on rotation -- to closer to the 138,000 seen previously over the coming months.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

HAJJ PILGRIMS Chartered planes asked to make extra flights

REAZ AHMAD

Failing to charter a third aircraft for ferrying thousands of hajj pilgrims, the state-run Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday pleaded lessors for two other previously chartered planes to operate extra flights, said sources.

Biman sources told The Daily Star the national flag carrier was expecting the third aircraft -- a 485-seater Boeing chartered from Thai Orient Airlines -- to land at Zia International Airport today as per the contract schedule.

But Orient authorities at the last moment informed Biman the aeroplane developed technical faults at Jakarta and is unable to operate the flights.

Amidst foreign airlines' negotiations of operating hajj flights at the government-fixed \$1,050 fare per

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



PHOTO: STAR

Demonstrators of an alliance of several organisations march the street from the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday, protesting against the recent spate of bomb attacks across the country.

Con cooperative swindles thousands

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some unscrupulous people in the name of a multi-purpose cooperative society misappropriated about Tk 50 lakh savings from several thousand poor members.

The organisation, Pan Islamic Multi-purpose Cooperative Society was established in 2003, police said.

Headquartered in Mohammadia Housing Society area of Adabor, they have four branches in and around Mohammadpur in the capital.

Adabor police arrested guard Sohel and peons Foysal and Russel from the cooperative society head office on Thursday and brought them under one-day remand for interrogation.

Chairman Momtaj Khan and five directors would run the cooperative that employed a notable number of field workers who used to go door-to-door to woo people to be its members.

The cooperative offered household utensils at easier premium for its members and 15.5 percent annual interest against their

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



PHOTO: ZAKIR HOSSAIN

FROM FRYING PANTO OVEN: A Barn owl, weak at sight in daylight, was attacked by crows near the Jatiya Press Club yesterday. As the bird took shelter in a tree, a transport labourer captured the rare species.

Gas explosion kills 42 in China

AFP, Beijing

A gas explosion inside a highway tunnel under construction killed 42 people and injured 11 others in southwest China's Sichuan province, the government said yesterday.

The explosion is the latest in a series of deadly industrial mishaps that critics blame on China's rapid economic growth. Two coal mine blasts and a mine flooding in the past five weeks killed nearly 300 people.

The gas explosion happened at 2:00pm (0600 GMT) Thursday, less than 100km northwest of Chengdu, at an intersection of a highway being built to link the smaller cities

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

15 sailors die as Tigers blow up navy convoy

AFP, Colombo

Suspected Tamil rebels blew up a navy road convoy in Sri Lanka yesterday killing at least 15 sailors and wounding 15 more, a defence ministry official said as the guerrillas warned of more strikes.

The carnage in the northwestern district of Mannar was the worst since the rebels and the government agreed a Norwegian-brokered ceasefire in February 2002, officials said.

"We have recovered the bodies of 15 sailors who were travelling in a

bus that was part of the convoy," a defence ministry official told AFP. "A truck that was providing escort to the bus was also hit."

At least 15 sailors were taken to hospital in critical condition as helicopters flew to the area, 310 kilometres (195 miles) by road from the capital, to evacuate casualties, the official said.

He said the military suspected that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas may have used a Claymore type surface mounted explosive device and also fired a rocket-propelled grenade at

the convoy.

The attack was in the same area where three Sri Lankan sailors were killed in a sea battle with rebels on Thursday, the official said.

The upsurge in violence came as Tamil Tiger political chief S. P. Thamilselvan warned that there could be more clashes with the navy unless truce monitors made arrangements for the LTTE to have safe passage using sea lanes.

He said the LTTE had repeatedly asked the Scandinavian truce monitors known as the Sri Lankan

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Rab releases Olama Dal Bhola chief

UNB, Bhola

Chief of local Olama Dal, held by the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) early Thursday, was released in the evening the same day.

A Rab team caught Mufti Abu Noman Mohammad Shafiqullah, president of district

Olama Dal, from his Dakkhin Dighaldi residence at about 3:00am and took him to Barisal Rab camp.

The members of the elite force also rummaged through his house but nothing objectionable was found.

Shafiqullah, also chairman of Dakkhin Dighaldi Union Parishad under the Sadar upazila, was released as allegations brought against him, including that of terrorism, were not proved after interrogation, Rab sources said.

Local people gave the Olama Dal leader a rousing reception as he returned to his area yesterday morning.

Uttara Lake turns into a sewer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Uttara Lake has become a dumping ground for industrial and household wastes and excreta of more than one lakh people living in Uttara Model Town by the lake.

The lake water is filthy where mosquitoes breed. Some Uttara residents now intend to save the lake for their own sake.

"Now we want to save the lake. We are planning to organise a movement to save it," said Asadullah Khan, a resident of Uttara.

The lake has become a headache for the Uttara residents. It is the main source of mosquitoes and fish cultivation has become impossible there, said a local resident.

The five-kilometre lake, which was once a natural canal connected to the Turag River, has been polluted by indiscriminate dumping of wastes into it by the residents. Uttara Model Town was developed in the 1980s and people started to live there in 1981. But the city authorities did not develop any

sewerage system for the area.

Over the last 24 years Uttara residents, mostly those residing by the lake, have been dumping their excreta and household liquid wastes into the lake through drains and pipelines. New house builders dump debris from their construction sites into it too. Some small dyeing and textile industries also dump their liquid wastes into the lake, local residents said.

During a visit to the lake a couple of days ago, the Star correspondent found a thick layer of green substance on the water and the stench was overwhelming. The condition of the lake is so filthy that scavenger birds like crows, pied mynas, and kites were gathering by the lake.

Some residents have been demanding diversion of the underground sewers to some other directions. They are also demanding setting up of a waste treatment plant, dumping of the treated wastes into the Turag River, and dredging of the lake.

Vessel capsizes with 500-tonne of salt near Ctg port

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

A trawler with 500 tonnes of salt capsized in Chittagong Port channel as another over-loaded lighter vessel rammed it from behind on Thursday.

Witnesses said the accident occurred at the channel's Gupta Canal point when MV Jewel-2 carrying goods above its capacity was sailing towards a jetty around 2:30pm.

The lighter vessel lost control and hit the trawler MV Sayera, which was awaiting offloading of the salt imported from Myanmar, they added.

Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Militant outfit Ahab demands Galib's release

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Leaders of militant outfit Ahle Hadith Andolon, Bangladesh (Ahab) yesterday demanded release of Ahab chief Dr Asadullah Al Galib, denying allegations of their links to international terrorist organisation al Qaeda and banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) as well as their secret activities in a peacekeeping mission of Bangladesh army abroad.

"Whatever be the allegations, we are not involved anyway in militancy," acting Ahab chief Dr Md Muslehuddin claimed said at a press conference in the city.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1



PHOTO: STAR

International Khatme Nabuwat Movement, Bangladesh members vandalise a bus during a clash with police in Paltan in the city yesterday.

Prayer Timing		
December 24		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-25	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-24	5-27
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation