

# Thousands protest Pope's Turkey visit

AFP, Istanbul

Chanting Islamist slogans and brandishing banners against Western intervention in the Middle East, thousands of people have rallied here in protest against Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Turkey, which starts on Tuesday.

The demonstration, organized by the Islamist Felicity Party (SP) and entitled "The pope is not welcome," attracted about 15,000 people, almost all of them party sympathizers, far below the one million the party predicted and even the 300,000 other sources estimated.

Hundreds of security forces, including riot police, were on guard at the venue, Caglayan square in central Istanbul.

The mix of religious and political slogans reflected widespread suspicion among nationalists and Islamists here that the four-day papal visit is part of Western designs to subdue the Muslim world rather than an effort to reconcile religions.

The leader of the Roman Catholic Church triggered uproar across Muslim countries in September when he linked Islam and violence in quoting a Byzantine emperor who said the Prophet Mohammed brought "things only evil and inhuman."

"You must first apologize to the Muslims and then come to these sacred lands," SP leader Recai Kutun told the rally, calling Benedict XVI "a representative of grudge and hatred" and "an envoy of global imperialism."

"Show respect to the prophet, pope!" one banner read. Others said: "Ignorant pope, read your own history!" and "Pope, go home!"

"Allahu Akbar," the protesters chanted, followed by others who shouted "Down with Israel" and "Down with America." Some waved Palestinian and Chechen flags.

Under photographs of Iraq war victims, one banner asked: "Who did it?"

Another read: "Who is responsible for terrorism: the USA, Israel and the EU, or Iraq and the Palestinians?"

Many brandished banners that said: "No to the crusaders' alliance" -- a slogan endorsed by the SP for the demonstration.

Opponents of the visit say the pontiff's scheduled talks with Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Istanbul-based spiritual head of the world's Orthodox Christians, is aimed not only at healing the centuries-old schism between the two churches, but at sealing a Christian alliance against Islam.

The rally highlighted another sensitive point the pope's program here has touched -- his planned visit to Hagia Sophia, the sixth century Byzantine church converted to a mosque in 1453, when the Ottomans conquered Istanbul, then called Constantinople. It was transformed into a museum in 1935.

"Break the chains, open Hagia Sophia," the protesters chanted, echoing Islamist desire for the edifice to be re-opened as a mosque.

Opponents say the pope's planned visit Thursday to the building, one of Istanbul's architec-

# Parties challenge

FROM PAGE 1 including the chief adviser, to explain under what authority he "holds or purports to hold the office of the Chief Adviser".

The cabinet secretary has been made the other respondent in the petition while Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury has been made the pro-forma respondent.

The petitioners alleged that the assumption of the office of chief adviser by Iajuddin Ahmed is a violation of article 58C of the constitution.

They argued that the attempt of the president's military secretary to scuttle for a letter of refusal/embarrassment from Justice Chowdhury suggests that the president was in "no doubt" that Chowdhury was the constitutionally legitimate claimant to the post of chief adviser.

They concluded that the constitution designates Chowdhury, and not the president, as the chief adviser since he is the last eligible chief justice to have retired before the last retired chief justice -- KM Hasan, who refused to take the office.

The petitioners are AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon, Gonoform Presidium Member Pankaj Bhattacharya, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu, LDP Secretary General MA Mannan, Gonoantree Party President Nurul Islam, Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua, IOJ Chairman Misbahur Rahman Chowdhury, Zulfiqar Party General Secretary Munshi Abdul Latif, JP President Member GM Quader, and Islamic Front Chairman Syed Bahadur Shah.

Earlier on November 20, Adnan Anwar, a businessman and a nephew of late president Ziaur Rahman, filed a writ petition to issue a rule to the president to show cause under what authority he is holding the office of the chief adviser.

In another petition, the eleven political leaders asked the court to issue a show cause notice to the chief adviser asking why he should not be directed to refrain from exercising any executive authority if he does not act on the advice of all the advisers to the caretaker government as stated in the constitution.

The petitioners also asked the court to direct the chief adviser to place before the council of advisers the chief election commissioner's letter of leave that was sent to him on November 22. The petition added

## Yemeni editor

FROM PAGE 16

The defense team appealed the verdict, while Olfi said the court had ignored the defense's argument that his newspaper had reproduced the drawings with a view to "defending the Prophet, not mocking him."

But attorney general Abdullah al-Olfi ordered the release of the journalist two hours after the court passed the sentence, effectively reducing the penalty to closure of the newspaper and a six-month writing ban.

The move came after a meeting with the journalist's defense team.

Both Al-Rai Al-Aam and the English-language weekly Yemen Observer were suspended for about six months by the Yemeni information ministry earlier this year for reprinting the cartoons.

The editor of Yemen Observer is still being tried in connection with the case.

## Hu

FROM PAGE 16

because the East Asian giant offered it a counterweight in dealings with India, and continued to supply arms in the 1990s, when the United States shunned Pakistan because of its nuclear weapons programme.

China has its own territorial disputes with India, and two nations are still trying to overcome decades of mistrust going back to a border war in 1962.

The authorities have prepared extraordinary security measures for the pope's visit, which will take him to Ankara on Tuesday, to Ephesus and the home of the Virgin Mary in the western province of Izmir on Wednesday and to Istanbul the same evening, where he will conclude his visit Friday.

The planned security measures are tighter than those taken for US President George W. Bush during a NATO summit in Istanbul in 2004, Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah

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tural landmarks and a major tourist attraction, is an indication of Christian ambitions to reclaim it as a church.

On Wednesday, police detained 39 nationalist Islamist militants at a wildcat demonstration at Hagia Sophia after they held evening prayers inside the building in defiance of its status as a museum.

"I have Christian clients and I respect them," Munir Ozel, a butcher in the upscale Nisantasi district, told AFP at the rally. "We have churches and priests here and we respect them. But they too should respect us."

The SP, a small movement not represented in parliament, changed the title of the rally from "The sly and ignorant pope is not welcome," reportedly after the authorities warned them to avoid offensive slogans.

Women participants, the overwhelming majority of them wearing the Islamic headscarf and black chadors, stood in a separate section from the men.

The rally ended without incident.

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rever linking impractical

Says Chidambaram

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Finance Minister P Chidambaram said here yesterday that interlinking of rivers to resolve the country's water woes would affect India's ecology.

"Somewhere we tend to see interlinking of rivers as the only solution for the water problem that India faces today. It has got nothing to do with the political problems between the states," the minister said while addressing the India Economic Summit Sunday here.

"It is not possible to link all the rivers due to geographical and technological obstacles. The study itself will cost almost \$50 million and it will take 3 years," Chidambaram said.

"We need to find more local solutions like desalination of coastal waters and deployment of better technology."

An ambitious proposal to interlink the country's rivers was mooted during the previous government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, but could not be taken up as it faced opposition from several quarters. Bangladesh too objected, as it feared depletion of its own water resources as a result.

Two other security guards, Tajul Islam and Aslam, joined Khaleq at this point. Khaleq was seen describing the break-in procedure to the men. Then he went out of the building for a while and returned with three other unidentified men with tools seemingly to be used in the burglary. Soon after this, the burglars disconnected the CCTV cameras.

Morning shift security guards of the mall arrived at 8:00am only to find an unconscious Mizzan with the package of Tehari. Mizzan was later admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Police later seized the CCTV footage from the market authorities. Police also detained the manager of the security service provider Jahan Cleaning and Security Service and two other security guards employed by an electronics showroom and a bank located in the shopping centre.

General Secretary of the market Imdadul Haq Babul filed a case with Badda Police Station accusing seven people.

Babul said the robbers stole 420 totas of gold ornaments worth Tk 67.5 lakh from Maayer Doa Jewellers, Roop Jewellers and Sharmin Jewellers located on the first floor.

The burglars also looted 320 cellular phone sets worth Tk 15.50 lakh from 3G Communication and 60 cell phone sets and other accessories worth Tk 3 lakh from Sim Fair located on the second floor of the market, Babul added.

Police raided the houses of the identified robbers without any success as of last evening.

## Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1

"They (AL) know it's not possible as per constitution and everybody knows that the only duty of the caretaker government is to do day-to-day work and help the Election Commission hold an election in a free and fair manner," she said.

Criticising the AL-led 14-party alliance, she said, "They do not want to see development in the country, they don't even want elections and democracy. They only want chaos, as they know they would never win the elections but the elections must be held within the stipulated time."

Describing the development works in education sector in the last five years, Khaleda said the AL created a chaotic situation in the education sector, as they did not think of the nation and its future. BNP has done a lot of work in this sector and the BNP stopped the copying culture in public examinations.

Selim Bhuiyan presided over the meeting where former minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Osman Farruk, MK Anwar, Abus Salam Pintu and teachers' leaders Jashim Uddin Ahmed, Mohammad Mostafa and Fatema Akther Hena also spoke.

In a statement issued yesterday, Bhuiyan urged all to thwart a 'conspiracy' to foil the next election and put an end to public sufferings, anarchy and chaos caused by the AL-led alliance.

He also reiterated demand for announcement of election schedule immediately.

# EC leaves mistakes

FROM PAGE 1

of information collected by the field level staff, the updated voter list ended up with a staggering number of 9.30 crore voters, a number which is 17 lakh higher than what was on the nullified draft of the fresh voter list.

At that time, about three lakh staff of the EC, who made door to door visits for over a month, received some 45 lakh applications for deletion of names from the existing voter list. But the updated voter list that came up with the staggering number of voters allegedly has a large number of fake voters on it.

This updated voter list shows at least 1.28 crore unaccounted voters if one goes by the 2001 census report of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), which shows 8.02 crore people as eligible to be registered as voters.

On the allegation of having a large number of fake voters on the updated voter list, EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar said they will take actions if they receive any specific allegation. "We are willing to correct any mistake on the voter list. So, we are urging people to inform us about the mistakes," he said at a news briefing.

Amid a growing demand for making the updated voter list credible, the EC came up with its decision which is nothing more than an explanation of the existing laws regarding preparation of a voter list.

According to the directives of the EC Secretariat, one will have to visit the local election office either to apply for registering his or her name or to delete a name from the list.

"Updating the voter list is an ongoing process. His or her name will have to be registered on the list if he or she applies using the prescribed forms -- 7 and 2," the EC Secretariat's directive said.

For inclusion of one's name on the voter list, one will have to apply first to a registration officer or assistant registration officer with the required documents and then one will get Form No-2 to have his or her name listed as a voter. But had the EC sent its staff to door to door visits, people would not have to follow such an elaborate process.

The EC Secretariat however yesterday directed the field level election officials to launch a massive campaign urging people to come to their offices to register with the package of food.

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## Rejoinder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ehsan Ul Fattah, secretary, food and disaster management ministry, in a rejoinder to the report "Secret meet of admin bigwigs at ex-energy adviser's office" ran on November 25, 2006 in The Daily Star claimed that he did not attend the meeting and was not even aware of it. At that time, he was at a Dhanmondi mosque to take part in a quirkhwanai of one of his relatives.

"Only the applications which will be resolved through examination before the announcement of the election schedule will not require approval of the Election Commission," it asserted.

The task of printing the updated voter list has yet to be completed. The secretary however claimed that the task will be completed by November 30.

Rejoinder to the query, the secretary said, "We are prepared to announce the election schedule by November 30."

## CG should take

FROM PAGE 1

president's post is perpetual and it should remain above all controversies.

He said the chief adviser is accountable to the advisers in the caretaker government system. Similarly, the advisers are accountable to the chief adviser and both the chief adviser and the advisers are accountable to the president.

Akbar delightedly said both BNP and Awami League claimed victory after MAAziz decided to go on a leave. "It is a rare incident in Bangladesh that both the major parties expressed similar reaction on an event."

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