

# Rebels kill 48 in Assam multiple attacks

REUTERS, AFP, Guwahati

Separatist rebels in India's restive northeastern state of Assam killed 48 people, mostly labourers and traders, in a series of coordinated overnight attacks, police said yesterday.

Police said heavily armed United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) guerrillas gunned down at least 12 people in one remote village in Tinsukia.

Guerrillas wearing army uniforms bound the hands of 13 kiln workers and fishermen and killed them in a pre-dawn raid Saturday in Tinsukia district, 590km east of Assam's main city of Guwahati, officials said.

"The militants tied the hands of

the people and shot them dead from close range with automatic weapons ... raining bullets on them," Tinsukia district magistrate Absar Hazarika told AFP by telephone.

Saturday's killings near Ghormori Chapori village came hours after rebels carried out nine attacks in the oil- and tea-rich state late Friday that left 29 people dead.

"The massacre took place in an inaccessible area and the victims are mostly brick kiln workers and milk sellers," a senior intelligence officer told Reuters in Guwahati, the state's main city.

The rebels also gunned down eight traders in a crowded market in Tinsukia's Doomduma town, police said, adding another nine people

were killed in separate attacks in the district.

A further 13 labourers, including a woman, were killed in two separate strikes in Dibrugarh district.

"There were about 10 militants in each group and they attacked the labourers when they were preparing their dinner," VK Ramiseti, a senior police official in Dibrugarh, said.

Another person was killed when militants triggered a blast in Sivasagar district.

"Witnesses told police that attackers came with their faces covered, and they tied the hands and legs of the victims before they were shot dead," a police officer,

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## Poll results to be meaningless due to boycott Says EIU

UNB, Dhaka

The UK-based Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has said the decision by several opposition parties to boycott the January 22 polls suggests the result will be meaningless and the political outlook is therefore highly uncertain.

The EIU in its latest report on Bangladesh said it is possible that, as in 1996, another election will be held following constitutional reform to assuage opposition concerns about bias in the present system.

"Some form of military intervention is also possible," it said, adding two predictions can be made with reasonable confidence, however: the institution of a caretaker government is unlikely to survive the crisis, and the transition to the next government will involve more violence.

The report said main opposition Awami League (AL) leader Sheikh Hasina fulfilled a longstanding threat on January 3 by announcing that her party would boycott the

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PHOTO: STAR

Mothers with their infants suffering from cold through the outdoor section of Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday as a severe cold wave sweeps the country.



PHOTO: STAR

A car is being refilled with petrol at a filling station near Bijoy Sarani intersection yesterday as most filling stations in Dhaka experienced scant supply of octane.

# FBCCI for emergency if deadlock continues

Other business bodies yet to endorse call

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country's apex trade body yesterday urged the caretaker government to declare a state of emergency if it fails to persuade the two major political parties to reach a consensus within 24 hours to break the deadlock over the upcoming election.

But top business leaders said they are yet to endorse the call of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) for declaring a state of emergency to save the country from political confrontation.

Criticising the chief adviser for failing to maintain neutrality, the FBCCI leaders said the chief

adviser alone is responsible for the political impasse as he did not implement the package proposal.

There is no way but to declare emergency to save the country from chaos, confusion and confrontation, the FBCCI leaders said at a press briefing in the capital after a board meeting of the trade body.

They also said before declaring an emergency the chief adviser can seek the Supreme Court's reference for taking more time to hold the national election with participation of all parties.

"We businessmen want an election where all political parties take part, including the two major parties," said Mohammad Ali,

acting president of FBCCI. "If there is no way to hold such an election, please save the country from any kind of confrontation by declaring an emergency," he urged the chief adviser.

He said the country's economy has been greatly suffering because of the political deadlock for the last couple of months. "The standoff is not only hampering the country's image abroad, it has also forced the country towards a confrontation," he added.

"If the situation continues, the transport system will collapse, ports will remain idle, factories will shut down, and entrepreneurs will

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## JP urges army, law enforcers not to carry out CA's orders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) yesterday urged the law-enforcement agencies and the armed forces not to carry out orders of President and Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed that goes against the people.

Termining the present agitation against the CA 'national movement', the JP leaders also vowed to resist the January 22 polls at any cost.

"We are sure that the armed forces and other law enforcers would not turn against the people," JP Presidium Member Kazi Zafar Ahmed said at a press briefing at the Banani party office.

"If needed we will sacrifice our blood but we will not allow hold any election under the jurisdiction of partisan CA Iajuddin Ahmed," he said adding that those who dream of holding the election on January 22 and therefore go to power, are pipe-dreaming.

The JP leaders demanded immediate resignation of the CA and declaration of fresh poll schedule. They also asked the party activists to observe the countrywide blockade with a tough mood.

The time of the blockade will be extended if needed, they added.

Blasting BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia for her comments on Ershad, Kazi Zafar said that she sent her son Tareq Rahman and former home minister

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# Republicans join Democrats in opposing more US troops for Iraq

AP, Washington

President Bush's plan to send more troops to Iraq is running into trouble on Capitol Hill, with Republicans joining Democrats in raising eyebrows before the president even has a chance to make his case.

Next week Bush will unveil a new Iraq strategy that entails political, military and economic steps to win the war. The military solution, which has attracted the most attention and scepticism from Congress, is expected to include an increase in US troops, possibly 9,000 additional troops deployed to Baghdad alone.

Bush also reshuffled his military commanders, taping fresh faces to lead the war effort.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-California and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nevada, shot down the suggestion of more troops within a day of gaining control of Congress.

"We are well past the point of more troops for Iraq," the two wrote in a letter to Bush. Instead, Pelosi and Reid urged Bush to begin pulling troops out in four to six months.

Bush told more than a dozen senators Friday that he would settle on the option only if the Iraqi government offered certain guarantees, according to senators who

attended the meeting.

While lawmakers said they were willing to wait and see the entirety of Bush's plan before dismissing it entirely, members including some Republicans said they remained deeply sceptical about sending more troops.

"My conclusion was that it would be a mistake to send more troops to Baghdad. I think the sectarian violence there requires a political, not a military, solution," said Sen Susan Collins, R-Maine, who had not had a chance yet to meet with the president.

Rep Heather Wilson, R-New Mexico, an Air Force veteran and member of the House Intelligence Committee, said she would not support increasing troop levels "to do for the Iraqis what the Iraqis will not do for themselves."

"I also have not seen a clarity of mission, and I think that's the greatest weakness that we have right now," Wilson said. "We're talking about goals in lofty terms that are not vital American national interests. American troops should only go in harm's way to protect America's vital interests."

Even Sen John McCain, a Republican who advocates sending more troops in Iraq, said he wouldn't support sending in the additional forces unless the number

was adequate enough to finally tamp down the violence.

"I need to know if it's enough or not," McCain said.

McCain, R-Arizona, and Sen Joseph Lieberman, I-Connecticut, said they think at a minimum another three to five brigades should be sent to Baghdad and one more to Anbar province. About 3,500 troops are in a brigade. About 140,000 US troops are in Iraq now.

Sen Ben Nelson, who was among the small group of senators who met with the president Friday, said he felt Bush was aware of the high stakes and knew he would have to sell any plan to the American public. Bush suggested to the senators there would be "the expectation of the Iraqis carrying out their part of the deal 'or else,'" said Nelson, D-Nebraska.

But Nelson said he and others remained reluctant to endorse any plan that would further stretch the military.

"I don't think there was anything partisan about the scepticism," he said.

Briefings with lawmakers were expected to continue through next week, culminating in a meeting with bipartisan leadership Wednesday, according to lawmakers and aides.

To implement his changed

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## Grand alliance plans non-stop blockade from next week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) led grand alliance plans to enforce a country-wide non-stop blockade next week in a bid to resist the January 22 parliamentary election and refrain people from the electoral process.

AL President Sheikh Hasina will formally announce the agitation programmes from a rally at Paltan Maidan on January 10. Major components of the AL-led grand alliance will also announce their own fresh programmes, sources said.

Meanwhile yesterday, the alliance added another day to its already announced blockade programme for today and tomorrow. The alliance will also lay siege

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## Robber lynched in Satkhira

UNB, Satkhira

A robber was lynched by a mob at Khariadanga village in Sadar upazila on Friday night.

Locals and police said a gang of robbers stormed into the house of Dipak Master at the villager at midnight. When the members of the family cried for help, their neighbours rushed to the spot and surrounded the bandits.

They caught four of the gang and beat up them, resulting in death of one named Azizur Rahman, 40, who hailed from Matiadanga village. The three others--Abul Kashem, Hasan Biswas and Latif Biswas--were admitted to Satkhira Sadar Hospital in critical condition.

Meanwhile, Kolaroa police arrested three robbers with arms and ammunition from Khordo Bazar. They are Ibrahim Hossain, Abdul Aleem and Shahidul Islam.

## BSF abducts Bangladeshi

UNB, Panchagarh

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) kidnapped a Bangladeshi farmer from Kazipara frontier in Tentulia upazila yesterday morning.

Locals said Saiful Islam, 35, of Sardarpara village lost his way amid dense fog yesterday morning and reached near the border pillar no 442.

A BSF patrol party of Haftiaganj outpost trespassed into Bangladesh territory and abducted Saiful at gunpoint. They took him to their camp.

Being informed, BDR protested the incident and asked its Indian counterpart to release the Bangladeshi farmer.



PHOTO: STAR

The authorities ignore the dying trees at one part of Osmani Udyan in the capital while beautification continues at another part of the park.