

Political parties hail

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AL President Sheikh Hasina hailed the army chief, who said the nation has failed to recognise father of the nation even after 36 years of independence.

"Truth shall prevail and the entire Bangladeshi nation heard these words from Gen Moeen," she told her party leaders and workers on her arrival in Florida from Washington DC on Tuesday evening, as reported by a Washington-based news agency.

Admitting failure on the politicians' part, Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil welcomed the army chief's speech, saying that it will inspire the nation.

"This speech will generate hopes in the nation when we have failed to show due respect to father of the nation and national leaders," he said.

Jalil thinks implementation of the army chief's suggestions in his speech can move forward the nation and build a hunger-free, prosperous Bangladesh.

AL presidium member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim said the army chief's speech will uphold the spirit of the Liberation War and strengthen democracy.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon thanked the army chief for his truthful and courageous speech that reminded the people of their duties.

"Distortion of the glorious history of our Liberation War has caused divisions among political

parties and destroyed our achievements," he said, adding that the nation has stepped back from non-communal and democratic process only for this split.

About corruption in politics, Menon said his party has raised its voice against the criminalisation of politics.

He noted that the nation would have to fight against corruption and to remain cautious so this vice does not stage a comeback.

The renowned student leader of the 60s, however, termed "sweeping criticisms" against politicians unfortunate. He said that political activities had been absent for 15 years when corruption and criminalisation got institutional structure. "We all have to fight to get rid of this situation."

ISD president Hasanul Huq Inu also welcomed the army chief's speech, saying that it is self-realisation to honour the great leader, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Inu hoped that the prolonged debate on the glorious history of the Liberation War would end after the army chief's remark, as he paid due respect to all the leaders who had led the nation in the struggle for independence.

He deplored that the history was changed at different times with the changes in power. "For this reason, our young generation has been deprived of knowing the true history," the ISD president said.

Saudi king slams 'illegitimate foreign occupation' of Iraq

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi King Abdullah, whose country is a close US ally, yesterday slammed the "illegitimate foreign occupation" of Iraq in an opening speech to the annual Arab summit in Riyadh.

"In beloved Iraq, blood is being shed among brothers in the shadow of an illegitimate foreign occupation, and ugly sectarianism threatens civil war," Abdullah said.

He also said that Arab nations, which are planning to revive a five-year-old Middle East peace plan at the summit, would not allow any foreign force to decide the future of the region.

In the past, Saudi leaders including Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal have often criticised US policy in Iraq but have never described its presence there as "illegitimate."

If Arab leaders recover trust in each other and regain their credibility, "the winds of hope will blow on the nation, and then, we will not allow forces from outside the region to determine the future of the region, and only the flag of Arabism will be raised on Arab soil," Abdullah said.

Arab foreign ministers meeting ahead of the summit agreed on Monday to call for an amendment of Iraq's 2005 constitution to give Sunni Arabs a greater share of power in the war-ravaged country and prevent its breakup.

But Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari responded by saying the government did not need a "dictat" from the Arabs on how to amend its constitution and boost national reconciliation.

The Iraqi government has initiated moves to review a de-Baathification law in a bid to woo former members of the regime of executed dictator Saddam Hussein back into politics and government jobs.

Under a controversial de-Baathification law, tens of thousands of members of Iraq's former ruling Baath party were stripped of their posts in government, at universities and in business after the 2003 US-led invasion.

The law has been a major source of grievance for the minority Sunnis, who have waged a deadly insurgency against US troops and the Shiite-led American-backed government in Baghdad.

Suicide attack

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road. Parts of what appeared to be the attacker's body were wrapped in a plastic bag, an AFP reporter witnessed.

"In the attack, four innocent civilians were martyred and another 12 civilians were wounded. The intelligence director survived the attack," said an intelligence service press statement read over the phone to AFP.

The bomber targeted Kamaluddin Khan Achikzay, an intelligence director who was driving to work. Achikzay and his guards escaped the attack unhurt, the statement said. Kabul criminal investigation police chief General Ali Shah Pakiawali, speaking from the scene of the attack, blamed the bombing on "enemies of the people."

Afghan officials often use the phrase to refer to Taliban militants who were ousted from power in late 2001 by the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and have since waged a bloody insurgency.

Achikzay, a director with the National Directorate of Security -- the Afghan secret service -- was the former intelligence chief of insurgency-hit southern Kandahar province, where the Taliban were spawned.

He is an influential tribal leader in Kandahar and was a former anti-Soviet fighter during the 1980s.

The intelligence service statement said he had recently been following "enemy activities" in Quetta, a southwestern Pakistani city near the Afghan border.

Afghan authorities accuse Pakistan of turning a blind eye to Taliban training and recruitment facilities on its soil. Pakistan has strongly rejected the claims.

Sealdah-Joydevpur

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cross-border train is expected to bring in.

As per the proposal, the train was to run between Sealdah and Joydevpur, 35-km off Dhaka. All customs, immigration and security checks were to be done at Gede station in 24 Parganas district.

At present, only goods trains run between Gede and Darsana in Bangladesh.

Eastern Railway General Manager NK Goel said the railway officials visited Gede station on Tuesday to finalise a plan of action.

But the station, he said, needs upgradation for setting up customs and immigration offices. The Gede station has little facilities at present.

The proposed train with 10 coaches will cover a distance of 330-KM with 117-KM from the Indian side. No decision has been taken on route timing and train fare, according to the officials.

Admin working

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He compared present Bangladesh with a derailed train and said the nation needs an efficient administrator to bring it to the right track for ensuring progress and prosperity.

The army chief reminded the officials of the situation under which emergency was declared on January 11. Hartals and blockades had paralysed the nation. Economy was jeopardised. Political chaos and disturbances affected normal life and endangered the security.

He recalled the incidents of fire in garment factories and questioned who were behind it? For whose interest the destructive action was carried out? This has to be found out, he said.

General Moeen said expatriates working abroad have sent billions of taka. Despite that there was hardly any economic progress. It is because a section of people funnelled out the country's wealth in billions.

He said the emergency gave a respite to the people. It has provided an opportunity to the administration to work unitedly with the people. People are happy with the

actions of the joint forces in coordination with the administration.

"Time has come to fight against injustices, corruption and terrorism and above all to free politics from the curse of corruption. Nobody is above law. Those who have involved in corruption and injustices will not be spared," assured the army chief.

He told the officials that the opportunity provided by the emergency should be fully availed of to build a sound base for the posterity. "You must carry out your responsibilities with honesty and sincerity."

Political influence and bribe in recruitment in government offices should be stopped once for all. Hartal and blockades that retarded progress should be totally discarded, he added.

Senior army officers, deputy commissioners, police superintendents and senior officials of various departments were present at the meetings. Senior officials apprised General Moeen the situation prevailing in the districts and also exchanged views.

The army chief had also separate meetings with army personnel deployed in the districts.

Power Crisis

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has landed the country's power sector in such a mess that as of February 2007, the Power Development Board (PDB) owes the independent power producers (IPP) about Tk 550 crore. Yet majority of the IPP power sold to the PDB is very cheap.

The PDB is set to lose over Tk 1,200 crore in the current fiscal because the PDB's average power purchase rate stands at Tk 2.6 per kilowatt-hour while it sells the same at Tk 2.1.

The WB notes that there are 1,000 MW of over-priced and under performing public sector power plants, another 2,500 MW of plants remained incomplete due to bad procurement practices, \$ 1 billion in un-serviced power sector debt, at least \$ 150 million are annually leaked through corruption.

Alan Townsend added that to bailout the power sector from this situation, the government needs overall financial restructuring.

"The balance sheets should be restructured to clean up debts that will never be paid," Townsend pointed out, "efficiency will have to be improved to ensure 100 percent collection and zero theft."

Emphasising on tariff adjustment, he said while doing so, the government should increase the tariff while making it suitable for vulnerable groups. He observed that presently 80 percent of energy subsidy goes to the rich.

"The World Bank is concerned about transparency in generation procurement. The WB will not take part in tenders that do not follow transparent process," he added.

He suggested that the government should appoint international and local credible advisers for large power projects. Otherwise, tenders will continue to fail.

The World Bank is now preparing a paper titled Political Economy of the Power Sector. Draft of this paper will be completed within April.

The paper would accommodate views of stakeholders analysing political and economic issues that drive policy-making in the sector and affect the quality and quantity of power supplies, identify changes in incentives that could help improve power sector outcomes and utilise this analysis to develop a programmatic response that government can implement with assistance from its donor partners.

Power to fight graft

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of the home ministry, has approved the draft that is likely to be placed before the council of advisers on Saturday for its nod.

When the interim government okays it, the president will promulgate an ordinance amending the Emergency Power Ordinance-2007, the sources said.

This will be the first amendment to the ordinance promulgated by President Iajuddin Ahmed on January 12 following the state of emergency declared on January 11.

The ordinance aimed at ensuring security of the state and the people, protecting law and order and keeping economic activities unhindered will remain effective as long as the emergency continues.

"Under the emergency power ordinance, the government has already framed rules to fight corruption and also made amendments to these. But the emergency ordinance is being amended to avoid certain difficulties facing the agencies engaged in curbing corruption," a senior official pointed out.

Besides, the issue of formulating rules to curb corruption has not been specified in the emergency ordinance, and this might give one a scope to challenge the authority of this government to frame rules to check graft, the official noted.

Meanwhile, the government on March 21 amended emergency power rules, suspending the rights

to appeal for bail and seek redress from a higher court until a case is disposed of in a trial court.

The amendment also gives sweeping powers to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to investigate, arrest or seize property without the permission of the government, or to any officials appointed by the government to do so.

The government has also formed a high-powered National Coordination Committee to step up the crackdown on the corrupt.

The crackdown was launched on February 4, and a number of influential political leaders, former ministers and lawmakers have been arrested during the drive.

The ACC has made public a list of 50 top graft suspects and is now filing cases against those who submitted wrong wealth statements responding to the ACC's notice. Another list of corrupt suspects is underway.

Govt mulling

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resolved." Law Adviser Mainul Hossain told reporters yesterday. Asked whether the government would make any move to recognise the father of the nation, he said, "Of course the government will think about it."

The government intends to recognise late president Ziaur Rahman for his proclamation of independence on behalf of Bangabandhu in 1971. Moreover, to eradicate longstanding controversies, other national leaders contributing to the country from 1952 to 1971 would also be recognised, sources said.

On Tuesday, referring to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Army chief Lt Gen Moeen U Ahmed said, "Think about it, we haven't even given recognition to the father of the nation."

"In the 36 years since independence, politicians have not given anything good. They have even failed to give due recognition to the national leaders," said Moeen.

Asked to comment on the remarks of the chief of army, the law adviser said the army chief through his speech proposed the recognition of father of the nation to the government.

The law adviser said all of us should work together and, the same spirit worked during the liberation war.

About the move to retrieve smuggled out money from abroad, the law adviser said it is a very difficult task. "Assistance might be sought from international experts to retrieve the smuggled money."

Australia surge

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Marlon Samuels (four), also trying to hit McGrath of his renowned accurate length, skied a wild slog high in the air and Andrew Symonds, one of Australia's best fielders, made no mistake with the catch at cover.

Lara pressed on to a 62-ball fifty with seven fours before losing Hogg for six over long-off.

Away in Georgetown, South Africa were thriving on 115 for 2 in 22 overs after Charl Langeveldt claimed five wickets to restrict Sri Lanka to 209 all out in their match against South Africa at the Guyana National Stadium.

Captain Greame Smith struck a belligerent 59 off 62 balls that included seven fours and a six, before being stumped by wicketkeeper Kumar Sangakkara off Muttiah Muralidaran.

Earlier, AB de Villiers was out in the first over off a beauty from left-arm seamer Chaminda Vaas for a duck. Herschelle Gibbs joined one-down Jacques Kallis at the crease. Kallis was unbeaten on 39 off 43 balls while Gibbs also raced to 11 off 14 balls.

Earlier, Tilkeratne Dilshan (58) and Russel Arnold (50) were mainly responsible for Sri Lanka's total, putting on 97 for the sixth wicket after their sides slumped to 98 for five.

But after Dilshan was caught at third man off Makhaya Ntini, who took two for 26, Sri Lanka lost their last four wickets for one run, with Langeveldt taking three wickets in his final over all to attempted big hits.

Sri Lanka made a rapid start with left-handed opening batsman Upul Tharanga and Sanath Jayasuriya seemingly targeting South African opening bowler Shaun Pollock.

Langeveldt, who replaced Pollock, claimed the wickets of Jayasuriya, who top-edged an attempted square cut to point, and captain Mahela Jayawardene, who was caught at cover off a leading edge when he tried to play to leg.

Poor women

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union under Shaghata upazila of Gaibandha district.

Halima, 40, wife of Azizar Rahman of the same village, also told a similar story.

Once suffering from hunger, the woman, with the help of previous VGD programme, can now have three meals with her kids. She has two rams and five hens, and a house to live in. Besides, she is able to send her son Asadul, a student of class nine, to school regularly.

The VGD programme for the next cycle was meant to help hundreds of thousands others like Shefali and Shaida, who along with their kids are now passing days half-starved.

Tarique, Mamun

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businessman filed two extortion cases against Mamun, former BNP lawmaker Khairul Kabir Khokon and five others with Gulshan and Kafrul police stations in the city.

Sources said investigators already received enough evidence and information from Tarique regarding extortion and siphoning off a huge amount of money to foreign banks while he was quizzed during a four-day remand recently.

Mamun, now on a five-day remand, is also being questioned extensively at the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC).

Tarique and Mamun will also be sued for taking a huge amount of money helping people illegally win tenders in power, shipping, transport and other sectors, the sources said.

They may also face charges of making money by influencing transfer of government officials of their choice to lucrative posts, they hinted.

Associates of Tarique and Mamun will also be accused in the cases to be filed against them, the sources added.

TUESDAY'S CASES

Khan Mohammad Aftab Uddin, managing director of Reza Construction Ltd, in the case he filed with Kafrul police on Tuesday, complained that Mamun, Khairul Kabir and the five other accused extorted Tk 16 lakh from him in 2005.

In the case filed with Gulshan police, Aftab alleged that the seven accused including Mamun and Khairul had earlier extorted Tk 1.32 crore from him. He mentioned that he could not file any case at that time fearing reprisal as the BNP-led alliance was in power.

The other accused in the cases are Obaidul Karim alias Soheli, Mamun's APS Kamruzzaman, Mahbub, Hablu and Mota Tarique.

On Tuesday, Harun Ferdousi, managing director of Judge Distilleries Ltd, filed one case accusing five persons including Tarique and Mamun of forcing him to pay them Tk 81 lakh.

The other accused are Tarique's associates Babul Kazi, Enamul Haque and Giasuddin Quaiyum.

Of the Tk 81 lakh, Tarique took Tk 45 lakh, Mamun Tk 35 lakh and the three others shared Taka one lakh.

Tarique, now in jail on a one-month detention, is already facing a Tk 1 crore extortion charge filed by Amin Ahmed, owner of Al-Amin Construction, while Mamun is now on remand in an arms case.

Life reeking of toxic

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work with it just two decades ago. But now we have to buy drinking water from Wasa (Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority)."

Some others present there echoed what they said.

And their views reflected the sufferings of around 2.5 lakh people of 12 villages situated along the dying Devdholai river and equally polluted Narai canal that flows into it at Trimohini ghat. The area is hardly six kilometres from the capital's zero point.

Domestic, industrial and various other wastes from different parts of the burgeoning city having a population of around 12 million flow into Narai canal at Rampura bridge point. The polluted Devdholai joins the Balu river, which flows into the Shitalaksha, contaminating their waters too. And no one bothers.

People of the villages along the banks of the Devdholai and the canal hesitate even to touch their pitch-black water emitting extremely foul odour. They have to depend on the Wasa water for drinking and other domestic uses.

Dhaka Wasa had set up two pumps at nearby Nandipara and Meradia in the face of repeated demonstrations by the local people demanding drinking water. People of the 12 affected villages including Nasirabad, Daserkania, Barogram and Kayetpara clamoured for Wasa-supplied water as their tubewells dried up with the Devdholai gradually dying.

Wastes from Malibagh, Basabo, Goran, Kamalapur, Motijheel and other areas flow into Narai canal. Besides, untreated wastes from Tejgaon industrial area, Gulshan, Banani, Rampura and Karwan Bazar find their way into the canal and Balu river.

"Wasa has installed deep tubewells for people of Madetrek and Nandipara areas. It is pumping out ground water, leaving our tubewells dry," said Abul Hashem at Trimohini ghat.

Residents of the 12 villages first protested at the growing pollution of the river and canal about five years ago. The city mayor attended a protest rally in the area in 2003 and assured the locals of necessary steps. But nothing has been done so far.

BURIGANGA, TURAG

Besides the Shitalaksha and Balu rivers that encompass the city's eastern and north-eastern parts, the Buriganga and the Turag rivers on its south and south-west have also virtually turned into flows of household and industrial wastes. Their waters are now highly toxic and stinky.

The Buriganga once was the main source of drinking water for

Dhaka residents, and in the upstream not that from the capital, its water is still crystal clear. Many people living in this city still recall with pride that considering the strategic location of this river the Mughals had made Dhaka the capital of the then Bengal in 1610.

According to the Department of Environment (DoE), more than 21, 000 tonnes of tannery waste flows into the Buriganga alone daily. Illegal structures and encroachments along the banks have narrowed the Buriganga and Turag adding to the dirt while various watercraft release burnt oil into their waters.

A Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) report on 'Study on Waste Management in Dhaka City', there are 6,919 factories around the city, many of those situated just by the rivers around it. These include textile, leather, wood product, chemical, paper, metal and other factories. Many of these discharge their liquid waste directly into the rivers. Moreover, hospitals and private clinics also dump their waste into the rivers.

The level of pollution of their water is so high that aquatic species cannot survive in it. And the situation is getting worse day by day.

A recent World Bank (WB) report contained results of a study by the Institute of Water Modelling (IWM) which says dissolved oxygen (DO) level in these rivers fall far below the accepted level during the seven dry months.

The DoE in a report in January said there was no oxygen in the Buriganga water at nine points.

It conducted tests at many points of the river and found level of oxygen 1.8 percent at five points and zero at the other points. The level of oxygen should be at least more than six percent for the survival of aquatic life.

At the three points of the Balu river, the level of oxygen was 3.8 to 4.1 percent.

Moreover, Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD), that means acidity, was much higher than the accepted level, the report mentioned.

When contacted, a high official from the DoE said they could not take necessary measures in this regard due to shortage of staffs. Only three of the 207 staffs are entitled to inspect polluter industries.

Back in November 2003, the government had formed a task force to recommend steps to save the rivers around the capital as part of a Tk 4,000 crore project. The task force, comprising officials from four ministries, two directorates and civil society representatives submitted a report. But the matter seems to have ended there.

Poll campaign

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Candidates in parliamentary elections.

Once the reforms are implemented, two major political parties -- Awami League and BNP -- will not be allowed to use images of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and late President Ziaur Rahman in their election campaigns.

Similarly, Islamic political parties including Jamaat-e-Islami will be barred from using religion in their election campaigns.

The EC will also make stringent provisions for punishing any political party or candidate if they violate the electoral code of conduct.

"The father of the nation and national leaders are assets of the nation. They cannot be properties of any individual political party," Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hossain told reporters referring to the EC's move to impose the restrictions.

"No political party or candidate will be allowed to use portraits of national leaders on election campaign posters," the election commissioner said adding that the move has been initiated to keep national leaders above controversy.

A political party or a candidate however may use his or her party chief's portrait, his or her own portrait, and the election symbol on the campaign poster, he added.

"A candidate will be punished with a fine of up to Tk 20,000 or

cancellation of the candidature if he or she is found guilty of violating the electoral code of conduct," Sakhawat said adding, "We are now thinking about a set of proposals in this regard."

The election commissioner said the EC will initiate steps three months prior to the announcement of election schedule to monitor whether the electoral code of conduct is being violated.

Election Commissioners Sohul Hossain and Sakhawat Hossain yesterday held a meeting and discussed the possible reforms to the electoral code of conduct. The commission will finalise the proposals for reforms after the chief election commissioner returns home from abroad.

Talking to reporters yesterday Election Commissioner Sohul Hossain said the EC will start the task of preparing the voter list as soon as possible.

Election Commissioner Sakhawat said the national election and elections in local government bodies will be held after creating a voter list with photographs. "Priorities might be given to voter lists in city corporations and municipalities areas so that elections in those local bodies can be held on time," he said.

Sri Lanka

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Eelam (LTTE) base, the army said in a statement.

"Marking one more milestone in the army's forward march to secure the besieged eastern areas from LTTE clutches, valiant troops this morning completely brought Kokkadicholai under their control," the statement said.

It gave no details of casualties, but the statement suggested that the Tigers may have abandoned the area without putting up any resistance.

The army said it found a large amount of "warlike items that had been hurriedly left behind by fleeing Tiger terrorists in the face of advancing troops."

The guerrillas had left behind a distillery which had been used to manufacture alcohol for sale in the coastal district, the army said. "It has been a local money-spinner for the terrorist organisation," the army said.

There was no immediate comment from the Tamil Tiger rebels, who on Monday staged a daring air attack against the main base of the Sri Lankan army.

The dramatic twist to the long-running conflict involved two single-engine planes flying over the main

Bird flu continues

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said they got instructions from the head office to carry out a survey of birds and chickens within a kilometre radius of the infected farms.

"Our manpower is too limited. We need two more days to complete the survey," he said. After completion of the survey, they will take necessary measures in line with the directions their central office in Dhaka gave them, he added. He however said all the farms around the infected ones are under watch.

Our correspondent from Gazipur reported that district livestock officials so far carried out surveillance in 434 farms where the number of chickens is 7,20,024. The surveillance team found 25 dead chickens so far.

Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association conducted a workshop on Avian Influenza there.

Meanwhile, prices of eggs and chickens are showing signs of normalisation there, the report said adding that the price of a hundred eggs was Tk 340 and a broiler chicken was Tk 75 per kilogram there yesterday.

Our Tangail correspondent reported that the livestock department of the district kept the poultry farms in 12 upazilas there under close supervision after detection of Bird Flu Virus in a farm under Bhupur upazila on Tuesday.

Medical teams led by livestock officials are visiting poultry farms of the district and examining the fowls. But they could not find any more Bird Flu affected poultry farm till filing of this report at 6:30 pm.

DLO of Tangail Dr Abdur Rashid told The Daily Star yesterday that they already opened control rooms in upazilas and in the district headquarters to prevent an epidemic.

"We have taken measures to prevent spread of the virus," he said.

According to the district livestock department, there are 2,476 poultry farms in 12 upazilas of the district and there is also a poultry hatchery under Ghatail upazila.

Dr Akhil Chandra, upazila livestock officer in Bhupur, told The Daily Star yesterday that they have

kept the Bird Flu affected poultry farms in Routbari village quarantined. "We have taken necessary measures and held motivational programmes among the poultry farm owners in the upazila," he said.

On information, about 2,000 fowls and over 4,000 eggs were buried in presence