

Gunmen ambush UN convoy in Darfur

AP, Khartoum, Sudan

Gunmen ambushed a United Nations convoy in Darfur in the first attack against the peacekeepers since their mission began this month, the UN said yesterday.

A Sudanese driver was wounded and in critical condition after the UN road convoy was attacked late Monday in a volatile area near Sudan's border with Chad, the UN mission, known as UNAMID, said in a statement.

A fuel tanker truck was destroyed by the assailants, and an armored personnel carrier was damaged, the UN said. Peacekeepers said they did not return fire and that no UN staff was injured.

The ambush occurred after night-fall between the West Darfur towns of Tine and Kalbus, an area where both Darfur and Chadian rebels as well as the Sudanese army are suspected of operating.

The statement did not indicate who was suspected in the attack but said the UN leadership "is in direct consultations and discussion with Sudanese authorities... over the matter."

Sudan's military was not immediately available for comment Tuesday. "This is the first time UNAMID is attacked, and we hope it will be the last," mission spokesman Nouredine Mezni told The Associated Press. "We are in Darfur to bring peace, not to fight."

The UN mission is the latest international attempt to quell the violence in Darfur, where more than 200,000 people have died and 2.5 million have fled to refugee camps in nearly five years of fighting between the Sudanese government and local rebels.

A previous African Union force was

unable to end the chaos and suffered dozens of casualties.

Under a compromise with the Sudanese government, the new UN force incorporates the African peacekeepers already deployed and is to remain predominantly African.

The mission is due to number 26,000 peacekeepers and police, but the deployment is far behind schedule and Western countries have so far failed to commit heavy fighting equipment such as helicopters.

Lanka minister

FROM PAGE 16 known to make sharply varying casualty claims.

On Sunday, security forces also conducted a major search operation in the entire Western province, which covers the capital and airport area — questioning tens of thousands of people and arrested nearly 200.

The killing of the minister also came five days after a similar roadside bomb in Colombo targeted a military bus, killing five people. The authorities blamed the LTTE for that attack.

The Tigers are yet to formally respond to the government's decision to pull out of the truce. The rebels, however, have already said they believe peace talks with the island's ethnic Sinhalese majority are a waste of time.

The government now believes it has the upper hand over the rebels and is in a position to capture the north.

Tens of thousands of people have died in the 35-year-old conflict, one of Asia's longest-running wars.

Cops claim progress

FROM PAGE 1 The robbers paid Tk 70,000 as rent for the rooms at Hotel Nidmahal housed on the upper floor of the bank.

"Nobody is beyond suspicion," said Shibly Noman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Mohammadpur Police Station.

The robbers tunneled into the bank's locker room cutting through the ceiling sometime between Thursday night and Saturday night and made off with gold ornaments and other valuables, primarily estimated at several crore of taka.

Meanwhile, the value of the looted gold ornaments and other valuables could not be determined as of yesterday as many of the locker renters are yet to assess the quantity of gold ornaments they kept in the lockers.

Bursting into anger yesterday, affected locker renters blamed the bank authorities for not ensuring enough security at the bank branch.

Gulam Azam, an affected renter, said he kept the valuables in the locker after the bank authorities had assured him of having proper security system with CCTV and an effective alarm system. But they did not setup those.

The affected locker renters yesterday held a press conference at the National Press Club demanding immediate compensation from the bank.

BANK TO COMPENSATE Meanwhile, the BRAC Bank authorities yesterday gave assurance that they would compensate the affected customers if the law enforcers fail to recover the looted gold ornaments and other valuables within the next 90 days.

The bank authorities yesterday sent letters to all the affected customers to inform them about it. They also requested the locker renters to sub-

mit the estimated value of the looted gold ornaments and other valuables.

Abedur Rahman Sikder, head of marketing and corporate affairs of BRAC Bank Ltd, said "If the booties are recovered, the police not the bank authorities will handover those to the clients."

He also said if the law-enforcers fail to recover those, the bank authorities will give compensations.

Replying to a query, he said, "Since we have no document about the gold and valuables kept in the lockers, police will justify the claims. We hope that the customers will not make false claims."

BB MEETING Bangladesh Bank (BB) yesterday morning held a meeting to discuss the issue.

The BB also sent a letter to the chief executive of BRAC Bank asking him to provide it with an explanation.

Sources said, the BB also decided to examine the security measures taken for lockers and ATM booths of all the banks.

RRC for online

FROM PAGE 16 to give people easy access to government documents.

"I am expecting that details about government rules and regulations will be put on the website within February 21 this year," he said.

The proposed rules and regulations will be made public for three weeks for getting opinion from people. After scrutinizing their opinion, the government will formulate the rules and regulations, he said.

The RRC chief also sought suggestions and recommendations from all quarters in the country for smooth functioning of the commission.

He mentioned that this government was facing many problems including food crisis and price hike of essentials. There was also no significant improvement of power situation, fertiliser crisis persisted, foreign investment came down and several jute mills were closed down. Besides, the government was embarrassed due to the remarks of one of the four advisers who have resigned, he added.

"The government should be very careful in selecting the new advisers," Hafizuddin said.

Sultana Kamal, another former adviser to caretaker government, said any one in a government is free to resign. "I cannot comment on the resignation of the four advisers as I do not know the reasons behind that."

Sultana Kamal, who is one of the four advisers who resigned from the immediate post caretaker government, said, "We resigned because we thought we could not play our due role."

Economist Atiur Rahman told The Daily Star the government should immediately announce a specific deadline to hold elections to reduce the political and economic uncertainty worsened by yesterday's resignations.

Resignation of the advisers is a direct result of high food prices, rice shortage and fertiliser crisis, he said.

The government should now step up efforts to complete preparations for polls so that the whole nation gets into an election mood, Atiur said.

Transparency International, Bangladesh, executive director Iftakharuzzaman hoped that those who become advisers now will make the government more capable and dynamic.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) Administrator Syed Manzoor Elahi said resignation of the advisers is not a major factor. What the government should now do is to realise the ground reality and act accordingly.

"The government can reshuffle itself any time," he said, adding the national elections should be held as per the declared timeframe.

HR body

FROM PAGE 1 police force should adopt transparency and respect for human rights, and should focus more on public service.

She said real issues of human security must be addressed otherwise human rights and democracy will be rendered meaningless.

"Too often, state security seems to trump human security," said Irene adding the people's daily concerns are not addressed enough.

She warned, "An apathetic electorate is a tyrant's dream," adding there must be an understanding that the government is the people's right bearer.

The AI head also said if the government wants change it must include civil society and other stakeholders along with politicians to debate and discuss reforms.

She hoped the government would pass the right to information legislation before it leaves office as she is deeply concerned at reported restrictions on the media and human rights activists.

She said she received reports of internet service providers being asked to name people who access 'certain websites'.

Economist Wahiduddin Mahmud told the audience that the government must hold debates with all stakeholders to create a citizens' charter in order to reduce all political uncertainty, which in turn will effectively reduce economic uncertainty.

He said there is no shortcut to achieving a sustainable democracy and it is a long process which will go beyond the tenure of the current caretaker government.

Former attorney general Hasan Arif said the rule of law must be established in order to further the prospects of democracy.

Prothomo Alo Editor Matiuur Rahman and The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam also spoke.

Altarf Chy

FROM PAGE 1 In the FIR (first information report), it was mentioned that Altarf kept the wealth in his own name and the names of his wife Suraiya Akter and daughter Jubaida Akter.

In the wealth report submitted to the ACC, Altarf mentioned low price of the assets he purchased in his own and his wife's names.

The FIR said Altarf gave false information about loans and did not mention anything about the five firearms worth Tk 2 lakh, which he purchased between 1974 and 2002.

He also concealed information about three savings accounts with Standard Chartered Bank.

Altarf in his wealth statement said he had lent Tk 14 lakh to his wife Suraiya, but she said that her husband lent her Tk 17 lakh. Altarf also said he purchased a jeep at Tk 8 lakh while the real price of the vehicle was Tk 20.17 lakh. Besides, he showed low price of the car he purchased in his wife's name.

Altarf also said he took loans of Tk 68.27 lakh, adding that a loan of Tk 5.16 lakh was taken from Standard Chartered Bank in his own and his wife's names.

The former home minister submitted his wealth statement to the ACC on July 25 last year, saying that he has wealth worth Tk 3.25 crore.

Now defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) had filed four graft cases against him during the Awami League rule, but the cases were withdrawn following an order of the BNP-led alliance government.

DU teachers

FROM PAGE 1 witnesses and set tomorrow for next hearing of the case. Investigation officer (IO) of the case Babul Bhuiyan will give statement the same day.

In the statement, Shahed Kabir told the court that he recorded what the three witnesses said about the violent incidents on the DU campus during the investigation of the case.

Shafiqul and Rubel said the IO seized a CD at the TV office in their presence after the violent incidents occurred.

The four teachers, who are in jail custody, are Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) President Prof Sadul Amin, its General Secretary Prof Anwar Hossain, Science Faculty Dean Prof Harun-ar-Rashid and Applied Physics Department Chairman Prof Neem Chandra Bhowmik.

DU student Moniruzzaman Sardar, who was arrested earlier, is also behind bars.

The four accused teachers were permitted to sit on a bench in the dock in the courtroom during yesterday's hearing.

A case was filed against some 6,000 unnamed students and teachers of DU and outsiders on August 22 for violating the EPR, vandalising public and private properties, obstructing the police from discharging their duties, and assaulting law enforcers on the campus and its adjacent areas.

However, the police pressed charges against four teachers and 15 students of DU on September 9 for inciting violence on the campus and in the Shahbagh area on August 21 and 22.

Hearing of another case filed against the same accused will be held today.

Mainul, Tapan

FROM PAGE 1 instance of advisers leaving their office en bloc.

The incumbent administration came after the one headed by President Iajuddin Ahmed had failed to create an atmosphere conducive to holding the ninth parliamentary election as per the constitutional provisions.

Amid growing political violence and public displeasure, Iajuddin stepped down as the chief adviser and dissolved the advisory council on January 11 last year, declaring the state of emergency and cancelling the ninth parliamentary polls scheduled for January 22.

Immediately after coming to power, the present government launched a crackdown on 'corrupt political bigwigs and businessmen'. Its anti-graft drives were greeted with popular acclamation but some of the measures led to panic among the business community.

Its failure to contain soaring prices of essentials put a dent in the public support it has been enjoying. Some of the advisers soon appeared to be a lightning rod for controversy and it did not help things either.

People's frustration over the interim regime became obvious after the recent crisis of food grains. It has been widely speculated in the past few days that the council of advisers might be reshuffled at any moment.

Sources close to the policymakers said Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed might address the nation on January 12. In his speech, he would seek to assure the people that his government is committed to mitigating their sufferings and achieving the goal to have a free and fair election held by this year.

Resignations of the advisers would help him avoid his words being perceived as empty rhetoric, added the sources.

Antics saw 'em off

FROM PAGE 1 inaugurated Police Week 2008.

When Mainul was attending a meeting with officers of the law enforcement agencies there, he was called over telephone from the chief adviser's office. Mainul then went to his ministry around 1:30pm and left the office an hour later.

Sources said Mainul sent his resignation letter by a messenger and then left the office for his residence in Baridhara.

The adviser for the ministries of information, law, justice and parliamentary affairs, housing and public works, and land is often accused of making outrageous, sarcastic and controversial comments on political matters.

Over the last few months, he blasted politicians on different occasions, obliquely saying that they are out to push the government into trouble.

He also made inconsistent remarks on formation of the national government, but the army chief later brushed aside the possibility of formation of such government. His disclosure of the government move to send former prime ministers Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia into exile also earned the government a bad name in home and abroad.

Mainul took public flak for making statements when the issue of war criminals' trial was raised. He also drew huge criticism from journalists, press workers and employees for awarding a faulty wage board.

Adviser Tapan Chowdhury drew criticism for failing to tackle the crisis of food items, the prices of which have doubled since the caretaker government took charge on January 11 last year.

Apart from the food and disaster management ministry, Tapan was also at the helm of the ministries of power, energy and mineral resources, science, information and communications technology, and youth and sports.

His recent comment that the government has nothing to do with checking the skyrocketing food prices earned him the biggest blow. Finance Adviser AB Mirza Azizul Islam strongly opposed his statement the next day.

On his last day in office, Tapan

added, observed that it would still be difficult for the government to improve the overall situation.

Faced with the task of running the country for around two years, the caretaker government had tried before to expand the council but failed for what was described as constitutional obligation not to have more than 11 advisers including the chief adviser.

The policymakers are now considering appointing assistants to the advisers to reduce the burden of task ahead, sources said.

The first time the caretaker government saw resignation of its advisers was in December last year when four advisers—Akbar Ali Khan, Lt Gen (ret'd) Hasan Mashhudi Chowdhury, Sultana Kamal and CM Shafi Sami—stepped aside protesting the then chief adviser's role perpetuating the political bickering.

None of the caretaker governments formed in 1996 and 2001 had to reshuffle its cabinet, and they successfully discharged their duties by extending all-out support to the Election Commission for holding the parliamentary polls within the stipulated timeframe.

But the current government, which came at the end of the constitutionally specified time limit for holding the polls since dissolution of the eighth parliament, began its journey with tenure not set.

Fakhruddin Ahmed was sworn in as the chief adviser on January 12 while his advisers later. Mainul, Geeteera and Tapan took oath of office on January 13 and Matiuur on January 16.

In an address to the nation, Fakhruddin declared that the government would have a credible national election held by December 2008.

talked with reporters at the power ministry and said the government is trying to ensure necessary supply of power for irrigation during the coming Boro season.

Geeteera Safiya Choudhury, who was in charge of the ministries of industries, textiles and jute, social welfare, and women and children affairs, came under severe criticism for shutting down several jute mills in Khulna.

Already criticised for underperformance, Geeteera last November described the ongoing fertiliser crisis as a 'myth', sparking nationwide protests.

ASM Matiuur Rahman, adviser for the ministries of health and family welfare, water resources, and religious affairs, was also criticised for poor performance, especially for the mismanagement in sending hajis to Saudi Arabia for performing Hajj.

Prior to his resignation, Matiuur addressed a high-level meeting at his office to evaluate hajj operations and find out the shortcomings yesterday, acknowledging mismanagement in hajj operations and causing immense sufferings to the pilgrims.

He, however, initially denied that he resigned and requested reporters not to ask him 'embarrassing' questions.

"Do not ask me this question. I have not resigned. I am busy with the bird-flu issue," he said around 3:15pm when the media had already circulated news about his resignation.

But later, emerging from his health ministry office at about 5:15pm he told reporters, "What you have seen on television is true."

Asked about the reasons for his resignation, he said, "Power does not last forever." He said he has performed his responsibilities and would do it if entrusted with in future.

Earlier on December 26, education and cultural affairs adviser Ayub Quadri resigned in the wake of a huge public outcry over the theft and destruction of two Paris-bound Vishnu statues.

Mainul Hossain, Geeteera Safiya Choudhury and Tapan Chowdhury took oath as advisers on January 13 last year. Matiuur Rahman and Ayub Quadri took oath three days later.

When ends don't meet

FROM PAGE 1 Education expenses as well as house rent especially marked a sharp rise.

According to Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB), the house rent has increased at least 10 percent in different areas of the capital with the starting of the new year.

"My landlord has increased the rent by Tk 1000 from this month. Now I have to pay Tk 11,000," Anisul Islam, working in a private company, said.

"Admission fees of my son was Tk 13,000 last year but these have become Tk 17,000 this year. Other school expenses like school van charges, tuition fees, tiffin, VAT, added up to around Tk 4000 monthly earlier, but now it is over Tk 5000," Anisul said who is also considering to enroll his son to another school to manage the expenses.

"My income has not increased. How can I afford so much," said a distressed Anisul.

Besides, prices of school uniform, books, notebook, pen and other education materials have increased by 10 to 50 percent, he

Political parties

FROM PAGE 1 reaction to the resignation of four advisers.

"Resignation or induction of four-five new advisers will bring no solution to the current crises. The only way to solve the problems is to hand over power to the people's representatives by holding polls quickly," acting AL President Zillur Rahman told reporters at his Gulshan residence in the capital.

BNP Standing Committee Member Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman said, "We want to see a people's government as early as possible. The state of emergency will have to be lifted to create a congenial political atmosphere for restoring democracy soon," Mahbub told The Daily Star in his reaction to resignation of the advisers.

There is no reason to be concerned over their resignation, nor the government is facing any crisis due to this, he said.

Mahbub, a former army chief, said the caretaker government's various pledges have raised expectations about giving back people's power to the people. And they now want it to do this by holding free and fair elections after creating a healthy political atmosphere, he said.

He also demanded early implementation of the already announced electoral roadmap.

Jatiya Party acting Chairman Anisul Islam Mahmud asked the government to initiate dialogue with political parties so that the existing crises including skyrocketing prices of essentials could be solved through discussions.

On the resignation of four advisers, he said it is a matter for the government to exclude or include advisers for its smooth functioning.

In his reaction, Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain said the government thought it needed a change in the advisory council, and for this it has made the change.

AL Presidium Member Abdur Razzak said the four advisers certainly had their failures that forced them to resign.

Tofail Ahmed, another AL Presidium Member, said the caretaker government has taken the right decision by excluding law adviser Mainul Hossain as he never acted neutrally and tried to make the political parties opponents of the government.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu hoped that resignation of the four advisers would end misunderstanding between the government and the political parties.

Both Tofail and Inu urged the government to take political parties into confidence and start dialogue with them. They also urged it not to induct any controversial persons as advisers.

Bangladesh Islami Oikya Jote Chairman Misbaur Rahman Chowdhury and Secretary General Moniruzzaman Rabbani in a statement expressed satisfaction at the resignation of four advisers.

Govt urged

FROM PAGE 16 Dr M Abdul Matin, general secretary of Bapa, said the present caretaker government should give its attention to the issue and take stern action against the grabbers.

Mahidul Haq, treasurer of Bapa, said some vested quarters always try to capture common property submitting false documents and bribing the authorities concerned.

Amnesty chief

FROM PAGE 1 in Rajshahi, said the victims of JMB militants want to return to their own houses but they could not go back out of fear. Now, of course, they feel secured, she observed.

About Rajshahi University teachers, she said although they were pardoned, they must be acquitted of the cases filed against them under the emergency rules.

Irene, however, would not comment about the arrested Dhaka University teachers and students.

On human-right situation, the AI secretary general said although statistics regarding the extra-judicial killings look good, AI wants the number of extra-judicial killings to come to nil.

Appreciating the government move to establish a national human rights commission, she hoped that a neutral and competent commission will be set up by the caretaker government.

Irene also welcomed the institutional reforms done by the present caretaker government.

Open market

FROM PAGE 1 Filling Station (Beribadh) at Mohammadpur, Sher-e-Bangla Community Centre at Agargaon, Shah Ali Mazar at Mirpur, Paikpara, Padma Garments at Mirpur, Nikunja-2 Park at Uttara, Hazi Camp near Airport and Banani Park at Banani.

The outlets will remain open every day from 8:00am to 5:30pm, except on Monday. BDR will also sell highest 3 kg of rice to an individual at the rate of Tk 25 per kg.

A correspondent from Benapole adds: Around 2,000 metric tons of rice was imported from India through Benapole Port yesterday.

US, Iraq launch

FROM PAGE 16 dramatically in recent months, an improvement attributed to a combination of 30,000 extra troops sent into the Baghdad area; the work of U.S.-backed predominantly Sunni tribal groups who turned against al-Qaida in Iraq; and a cease-fire declared by radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr for his Mahdi Army militia.

Extremists have been pushed out of their former stronghold in Anbar province west of Baghdad to the east and north, and appear to be concentrated in the province of Diyala to the northeast of the capital and in Mosul to the north.

"Al-Qaida in Iraq is attempting to regain strength and establish new support areas in northern Iraq," said Lt. Col. James Hutton, a spokesman for the U.S. military.

Few details were given on the operation, which will go beyond military activities and focus as well on providing basic services and improving local governance and economic life for Iraqis, the statement said.

Despite the general reduction of violence, attacks against civilians, members of U.S.-backed armed groups mainly known as "awakening councils," and Iraqi security forces continue to kill scores.

On Monday, a double suicide bombing in Baghdad's northern Azamiyah district killed 12 people and wounded 28, including former police Col. Riyadh al-Samarrai, a key leader of the local awakening group.

That attack came days after Osama bin Laden condemned the new American allies in an audiotape released Dec. 29, and said they would "suffer in life and in the afterlife."

The switch of allegiance by insurgents in Azamiyah was one of the most significant in a series of similar moves across Baghdad's Sunni neighborhoods. Azamiyah is home to Iraq's most revered Sunni shrine, the mosque of Imam Abu Hanifa, and many in the area served as officers in Saddam Hussein's army and security agencies.

U.S. military spokesman Maj. Gen. Kevin Bergner said last week the recent attacks were the "clearest indication" that al-Qaida in Iraq believed to consist mainly of Iraqis but to have foreign leadership was worried about losing the support of its fellow Sunni Arabs.

Monday's bombing occurred at the entrance of a Sunni Endowment office, a government agency that cares for Sunni mosques and shrines, and near an Awakening Council office in Azamiyah, which had been a stronghold of Sunni insurgents and a safe haven for al-Qaida in Iraq.

Sunni Endowment leader Ahmed Abdul Ghafur al-Samarrai who is from the same tribe as the former colonel, blamed bin Laden for the attack.

"Those criminal gangs fled from al-Anbar province to Azamiyah neighborhood for bloodshed and to abuse the dignity of the people," he said.

On Tuesday, banners erected by the local awakening council bearing words of condolence hung on walls and at intersections in Azamiyah. A three-day funeral was planned for al-Samarrai.

In a separate attack, police said on Tuesday that gunmen kidnapped eight members of a newly-formed U.S.-backed Shiite armed group in northern Baghdad's Shaab neighborhood,

one of the capital's most dangerous areas and a center for outlawed Shiite fighters.

The men were manning a checkpoint when they were kidnapped Monday night, a police officer said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to release information. Last Sunday, the head of the group, Sheikh Ismael Abbas, was shot to death in Shaab.

Elsewhere in the capital Tuesday, the head of the municipality of Baghdad's primarily Sunni neighborhood of Yarmouk was killed when a bomb attached to his car exploded, a police officer said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to release information.