

Lankan troops take key Tiger sea base

Tamil group to free child soldiers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan troops yesterday captured a key Tamil Tiger naval base as part of an offensive to dismantle the rebels' northern fiefdom, the defence ministry said.

Security forces leading a major offensive to capture the Tamil Tiger political capital of Kilinochchi had opened another front in the neighbouring Mullaitivu district where the Tigers maintain their main military facilities.

Troops entered the sea Tiger bastion of Alampil, located about 10 kilometres (six miles) south of Mullaitivu (town) this morning," the ministry said in a statement.

It gave no details of casualties, but said the guerrillas had used Alampil as a key sea port to land supplies.

"Mullaitivu has become untenable as the fall of Alampil would facilitate the assault on Mullaitivu," the ministry said.

There was no immediate word from the Tigers, who are known to operate a fleet of vessels to smuggle in weapons. Last year, Sri Lanka's navy claimed it had destroyed at least 10 ships of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Meanwhile fighting raged in the north of the island as its troops maintained their advance on Kilinochchi.

The ministry had said last week that the fall of Kilinochchi, 330 kilometres (200 miles) north of Colombo, was imminent, but government troops have since been slowed down by monsoon rains and flooding.

More rains were expected on Thursday and Friday, according to Sri Lanka's meteorological office.

The LTTE has admitted losing ground to government troops but their leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has vowed to fight on.

The guerrillas, who began their struggle for a separate Tamil homeland in 1972, are facing the Sri Lankan army's biggest ever offensive.

Meanwhile, a government-backed Tamil militant group in Sri Lanka has pledged to release 62 child soldiers from its ranks, the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) said on Thursday.

The TMVP party led by former Tamil Tiger Vinayagamorthy Muralitharan, better known as Colonel Karuna, signed an agreement with Unicef and the Colombo government to release the underaged soldiers by the end of the year.

"This agreement shows a clear political commitment and is a very important step in putting an end to the recruitment and use of children by the TMVP," the Unicef representative in Sri Lanka, Philippe Duamelle, said.

However rights groups accused the TMVP of not honouring similar pledges in the past.

Unicef figures showed that there were 133 outstanding cases of child recruitment by the group at the end of

October.

Of those, 62 were still under 18 years of age while the remaining 71 were now above 18, but had been recruited when they were children.

Human rights groups and UN officials have often accused the TMVP of recruiting boys and girls with the alleged support of government troops and police. The Sri Lankan government denies involvement.

The TMVP was created after Colonel Karuna broke away from the main Tamil Tiger separatist movement in 2004 and began cooperating with government forces in a military campaign against the main Tiger guerrilla group.

The UN agency said there were another 1,500 outstanding cases of child soldier recruitment by Tiger guerrillas.

The agency estimates that its figures reflect only a third of the actual number of children enlisted.

In September, the government ordered UN agency staff out of rebel-held northern regions, citing safety reasons, as the military moved to dismantle Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) strongholds in the north.

"As a result, Unicef has since been unable to receive and verify cases of child recruitment since that time," the agency said.

Tens of thousands of people have died since the LTTE launched a separatist campaign in 1972 to carve out an independent state for minority Tamils in the north and east of the Sinhalese-majority island.

Mohiuddin

FROM PAGE 16
allowed panel mayor M Manzurul Alam to function instead.

An HC bench comprising Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana and Justice Md Rezaul Haque also issued a rule upon the government to explain why its order debaring the petitioner from functioning as mayor while allowing the panel mayor to function as mayor should not be declared illegal.

Counsel for the petitioner advocate Hari Sadhan Deb Brahman yesterday told The Daily Star that there is no legal bar to Mohiuddin's functioning as mayor following the HC order.

A senior assistant secretary of the LGED ministry passed an order on October 13, this year which debarred Mohiuddin from his mayoral function as he is on bail in some criminal cases.

It also allowed the panel mayor Manzurul to discharge mayoral duties of CCC until further notice.

Mohiuddin recently filed a writ petition with the HC challenging the legality of this order.

Barrister M Amir-Ul Islam appeared for Mohiuddin.

Mayors barred

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polls as they hold office of profit.

Following the HC judgment, the mayors of six city corporations cannot contest the upcoming parliamentary election, the lawyers concerned said.

Khoka's Counsel Advocate Khandaker Mahbubuddin Ahmed said he did not receive any instruction from his client to file appeal with the Supreme Court against the High Court verdict.

The EC on November 17 decided that mayors are not qualified to contest the national election since they enjoy financial and other benefits from statutory authorities like city corporations and municipalities.

According to the decision, a person shall be disqualified for contesting the parliamentary election if he holds office of profit.

To run in the election race, the mayors will have to resign from their posts before filing of the nominations, it said.

On November 23, Khoka filed the petition with the HC challenging the decision and seeking a stay on its operation.

The HC on November 25 stayed the operation of the decision. It also issued a rule on the EC to explain why its decision, debaring the city mayors from contesting the general election should not be declared illegal.

Following similar writ petitions, the HC later stayed the decision restricting Chaitagong City Corporation (CCC) Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury and Khulna City Corporation (KCC) Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleque to contest the national elections.

Shahdeen Malik stood for the EC during the hearing of the petition yesterday.

Fema denied

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The Representation of People Order (RPO) contains a provision saying an organisation is disqualified from monitoring polls if its top officials involve in politics.

EC officials however said if Feroz resigns from Fema, the commission might consider allowing it to monitor the election.

Meanwhile, the EC will sit with 137 organisations tomorrow to finalise plan for deployment of polls observers.

A total of 319 organisations applied to the EC seeking permission to monitor the upcoming polls. Scrutinising the documents submitted with their applications, the EC primarily selected 138 organisations, and published their names seeking objections, if any.

Meanwhile, Awami League and BNP have alleged that at least 20 polls monitoring agencies are linked to different political parties. And complaints against two more organisations were lodged by individuals.

The EC heard the allegations made against 22 organisations through November 23-24 and came up with its decision yesterday.

6 burnt alive

FROM PAGE 1
60, Akhter Hossain, 25, and Sumi Begum, 14.

None could say how the fires started.

Almost all the buildings there house factories or store-rooms on the first floor while people live on the ground floor. Most were electric cable and plastic utensil factories.

Witness to the second fire Marjina said, "A nearby sponge sandal factory caught fire and the fire spread to the entire area in no time reducing factories, houses and goods to ashes."

On the first fire incident at East Islambagh, landlord Nur Begum, said the fire destroyed all her valuables.

The fire victims are staying under the open sky.

Bail denial

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After holding a long hearing on a writ, the HC bench of Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Md Abdul Hye delivered the judgement.

The lawyers said the accused can now move to the courts for bail in the cases filed under EPR. The HC can grant bail to the accused during proceedings of the cases and stay the conviction against the accused during the pending of the appeals following yesterday's verdict.

They said the accused can get these facilities unless the Supreme Court stays the HC judgement.

The lawyers said the HC declared illegal the provisions and rules on grounds that the delegated authorities cannot restrict the peoples' rights to access to the court for bail, though granting bail to the accused is the discretion of the court.

Counsel for the petitioners Barrister M Amir-Ul Islam and Barrister Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, an amicus curiae (friend of the court) of this case, said the Constitution has empowered the HC to consider the bail prayers of the accused and these powers cannot be curtailed by enacting any laws.

The EPO 2007 and EPR 2007 are not beyond the Constitution and those went beyond the Constitutional limits, they said.

The president promulgated the EPO, 2007 on January 12, 2007 aiming at ensuring security of the state and its people, protecting law and order and keeping economic activities unhindered.

In light of the ordinance, the caretaker government issued the EPR on January 13.

On June 5, former caretaker government adviser and Ain o Salish Kendra Executive Director Sultana Kamal, New Age Editor Nurul Kabir and Dhaka University Assistant Professor Sheikh Hafizur Rahman Karzon jointly filed the petition as public interest litigation with the HC challenging legality of the EPO sections 3 (Kha) and 5 and the EPR rules 11 (3), 19 (Gha), 19 (Uma).

The petitioners said these provisions are against the fundamental structure of the country's constitution and suffer from "unreasonableness and bad faith".

Attorney General Salauddin Ahmed argued for the government.

Nurul Islam

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injuries at Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in the capital.

Nurul Islam, a nominee of the Awami League-led grand alliance for the upcoming parliamentary election for Noakhali-1 constituency, suffered burns in a mysterious fire at his Lalmatia apartment around 3:30am on Wednesday. His son Tamohar Islam Puchi was burnt alive in the blaze.

CMH sources said Nurul Islam succumbed to his injuries at 4:35pm yesterday.

He was kept at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) under the treatment of Brig Gen Dr Harun ur Rashid and Col Dr HM Delwar Hossain.

With 40 percent of his body burnt and respiratory organ affected, the Ganotantri Party president was shifted to the CMH from the Burn and Plastic Surgery Unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) Wednesday afternoon.

Meanwhile, Nurul Islam's wife and daughter were scheduled return from US last night, and the father and the son would be buried today, said the late leader's brother-in-law BM Hasan. "We want to bury them in a graveyard in Dhaka. His wife and daughter will however take the final decision in this regard," he added.

Relatives and political associates of Nurul Islam suspect that the fire at his apartment might have been an arson, and political rivals or Islamist militants could have a hand in it. They also said the crime might have been committed to 'foil the election'.

The Awami League-led 14-party alliance yesterday termed the incident an 'act of sabotage' and asked for a proper probe into it to bring the culprits to book.

A three-member committee headed by Masudur Rahman, deputy assistant director of fire service, was formed to investigate the matter and submit its report within three days.

The body of Nurul Islam was sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue last night for autopsy. Contacted, Mahbubor

Rahman, DMP deputy commissioner (DC) of Tejgaon zone, said, "The reason behind the fire will be known when we get reports from the fire service and experts of the Criminal Investigation Department."

Meanwhile, the Election Commission will defer polling in Noakhali-1 constituency.

Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda told reporters yesterday that as per electoral law, rescheduling of election in the constituency would be announced soon.

AL TERMS IT SABOTAGE
The AL-led 14-party combine yesterday said the fire that killed Nurul Islam and his son was an act of sabotage and asked for investigating it properly to bring the culprits to book.

The alliance at a meeting at the political office of AL President Sheikh Hasina observed a minute's silence in memory of the Ganotantri Party leader.

Briefing newsmen later, AL presidium member Abdur Razzak said Matia Chowdhury, another presidium member, received a letter from banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). The letter and a CD sent by JMB's media wing contained arguments seeking to justify their militant activities.

Razzak said, "The government is silently tolerating such acts of militancy. It is merely calling for resisting those but it is not taking any effective steps in this regard."

Earlier on the day, Matia told reporters that her party would accept the results of the upcoming parliamentary election if it is free and fair.

"We'll accept whatever the results of the election if it is held in an atmosphere which is free, fair and acceptable to all," she said in response to US Senator John McCain's call to all to accept both victory and defeat.

Inaugurating a training session for Jubo Mohila League polling agents at the AL central office, Matia also said if voted to power, her party would ensure good governance in the country.

Scrutiny serves AL

FROM PAGE 1
"If we have no candidates in a constituency due to cancellation of nomination, we will nominate an independent to fill the gap," AL Presidium member Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

AL-led grand alliance's nomination of JP leaders Abdul Jabbar of Pirojpur-3 and Golam Habib Dulal of Kurigram-4 lost their candidature for defaulting on loan repayments. The candidature of Mujibur Rahman of Munshiganj-3 was cancelled as he is the incumbent mayor of Munshiganj Municipality.

A number of nominations were cancelled as candidates filed their nomination papers with party nominations but failed to submit the party's final nomination forms. AL candidates Habubur Rahman of Pirojpur-2, Abdul Hakim of Comilla-8 and Khorsheed Alam Sujon of Chittagong-10 lost their candidature among others for this.

BNP Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan said, "Some candidates were declared unfit only for making simple mistakes." He said their candidates faced problems due to the cancellation of the Representation of the People Order.

The nominations of former BNP lawmaker Mostafa Kamal Pasha and independent candidate Mostafa Kamal Pasha Babul for Chittagong-16 were also cancelled due to defaulting on loan repayment. BNP leader Nurul Mostafa, who submitted nomination as an independent in the same constituency, lost his candidature for the same reason.

Election officials cancelled candidature of BNP leader Rafiqul Islam Jamal in Jhalakathi-1. BNP, however, has central Jubo Dal leader Rejaul Karim in the race there to fall back to since he filed his nomination as an independent.

BNP nominee Abed Raja lost his candidature for Moulvibazar-2 but former BNP lawmaker MM Shaheen is still in the race as an independent. He had failed to get the party ticket.

Anwar Hossain Bulu of Naogaon-6 lost the candidature due to defaulting on loan repayment. District BNP President and independent candidate Jalal Ahmed Bakul is likely to get the BNP support there.

BNP had nominated two people for Dhaka-11, Shahabuddin and MA Hashem, but both of them lost their candidature. Party insiders said BNP leader Anwaruzzaman Anwar, an independent candidate, may get their support.

BNP leaders Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and DCC councillor Kazi Abul Basher got party tickets for Dhaka-6 but both of them were declared ineligible. A High Court order barred mayor's participation in the polls while Basher was identified as a loan defaulter.

BNP leaders Majeda Ahsan of Comilla-4, Sharif Khasruzzaman of Narail-2, Shahidul Alam Talukder of Patuakhali-2 and Dipen Dewan

of Rangamati also lost their candidature as they were identified as loan defaulters.

Independent candidate and BNP leader Faruk Ahmed Talukder is now trying to get the party support in Patuakhali-2.

The candidacy of BNP's Giasuddin Kader Chowdhury for Chittagong-5 was cancelled as he defaulted on loan repayment.

Former lawmakers Atnaur Rahman Angur of Narayanganj-2 and Muhammad Giasuddin of Narayanganj-4 were declared unfit to contest the polls but BNP already had Badiuzzaman Khasru and Shah Alam as additional candidates in the seats.

BNP had nominated Abdus Salam Pintu for Tangail-2 but officials cancelled his candidature as his name came in second on the list his party gave to the returning officers. His brother Sultan Salauddin Tuku is now the party candidate for the constituency.

Hospital

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Confessing to The Daily Star that they are not MBBS doctors, Shakil and Atiar claimed they had received paramedical training at an institution in Gabtoli in Dhaka.

Not only the doctors, new staffs of the hospital were also fake. The staffs including male nurses and medical technicians do not have any training from any government-approved institution.

The stunning information about deception in the name of providing treatment was revealed during a six-and-a-half-hour raid by Rab-4.

The Rab personnel found at least one real doctor in the hospital -- Dr Md Mohitor Rahman -- who is one of the owners.

The elite force seized all the movable property of the hospital, while two fake doctors were fined Tk 2 lakh each, Mohitor Tk 3 lakh and nine staffs Tk 50,000 each.

"The people have been fined for cheating patients and unhygienic atmosphere in the hospital, while the owner is fined for cheating people with fake doctors and unskilled technicians," said Anwar Pasha, magistrate of the Rab team.

They would have to serve three months behind bars if they failed to pay the fines. "The hospital is being run since 2004 by 11 owners," said Dr Mohitor claiming that experts visit the hospital in the afternoon regularly.

Acting on a tip-off, a Rab team launched the raid at 11:30am that continued till 6:00pm. During the raid Rab asked 11 patients undergoing treatment at the hospital to shift elsewhere.

Anwar Hossain, 35, a construction worker, was sitting on a chair on the ground floor of the hospital. He told The Daily Star with a sigh, "I got admitted on November 9 with problems in the spinal chord and underwent an operation on November 20."

"Earlier I used to feel pain only in my back but after the operation I cannot move my left leg easily."

Body formed

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Aziz and President of Biswa Sahitya Kendra Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed are the members.

The committee has been formed as per Article 14(2) of the recently promulgated Right to Information (RTI) Act as parliament is not functional now, a PID handout said yesterday.

The committee will take necessary measures to select the chief information commissioner and two information commissioners from among those who have vast knowledge on law, justice, journalism, education, science, technology, information, social work and management or public administration.

Names of two persons will be recommended to the president against each post for appointing the chief information commissioner and the two information commissioners.

The information ministry will provide secretarial assistance in carrying out functions of the committee, says the handout.

2 pvt milk

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Jahangir Alam, Md Abdul Mannan of Pran Dairy Ltd milk collection centre and milk suppliers Sushanto Ghosh of Santhia upazila and Md Atnaur Rahman of Demra Bazar.

The complainants said it was found in the lab tests that the milk samples collected from the milk collection centres and the two suppliers are not pure as those did not contain the required proportion of fat.

"At least 10 percent of fat need to be therein milk. But the test reports showed that the collected milk samples contain just 3 or below 10 percent fat," District Sanitary Inspector Md Nazrul Islam said.

Sources said preparations are underway for filing three more cases against milk suppliers on the same charge.

Discard corrupt

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December 9 is fixed as the international anti-corruption day but Transparency International Bangladesh and Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) shifted the day this year as it coincides with the vacation of Eid-ul-Azha.

Hasan Mashhud said the rally has been arranged to make a promise of building a corruption-free country in this month of victory and to uphold the fact that people always stand against corruption.

Hundreds of people, including students, NGO activists, government employees, civil society members, journalists and even the disabled, thronged on the parliament building premises since morning holding placards and banners and wearing badges and ribbons with anti-corruption message.

In observance of the day, both TIB and ACC will be holding a weeklong anti-corruption campaign across the country to create awareness among people about corruption ahead of the election.

Abbas, Babar

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also sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment in two tax evasion cases. The court also directed the authorities concerned to confiscate their properties.

Meanwhile, Babar, arrested on May 28 last year, was freed after over 18 months of imprisonment.

He was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment in an arms case.

Earlier, the government issued three months' detention order against Mirza Abbas and Babar following the recommendations from various intelligence and law-enforcement agencies.

The jail authorities took punitive measures against Abbas and Babar several times for violating jail codes during their stay in prison.

Former BNP lawmaker MAH Salim, accused in over 15 cases including eight extortion cases, was released after over 18 months of imprisonment.

BNP activists gathered in front of the jail gate to greet them, witnesses said.

BSF

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He said the BSF has sought hovercraft and several medium-size vessels, which can carry 20 personnel each, for patrolling the riverine borders along the Brahmaputra river.

The BSF is also procuring more speedboats as the floating border outposts have turned out to be less effective because of recurring floods in Assam.

Pakistan vows

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Mumbai that stoked tension between the nuclear rivals.

"Pakistan needs to act with resolve, urgency. They need to cooperate fully and transparently and they need to keep the line of communication open between their country and India," said spokeswoman Dana Perino.

The new alert that warned of possible airborne attacks focused on three major airports New Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai but security was stepped up across the country. No details about the threat were released.

"This is a warning which we have received. We are prepared as usual," India's air force chief, Fali Hori Major, told reporters Thursday.

Heavily armed guards from India's Rapid Deployment Force manned roadblocks outside airports, while others patrolled inside airport buildings among passengers.

Several extra layers of security were set up and some passengers had bags scanned with devices to check for explosives before entering terminals.

"Passengers have been asked to pass through six-stage security checks," said Brij Lal, a senior police official organizing security at the airport in the northern city of Lucknow.

Nirmala Sharma, a passenger who flew from New Delhi to Lucknow, said her bags were checked half a dozen times and she went through a metal detector three times. "Sometimes it seemed tedious, but it seems to be the need of the hour," she said.

Meanwhile, officials continued to probe the attacks.

Evidence collected in probes so far has pointed to two members of outlawed Pakistani group Lashkar-e-Taiba as masterminds in the attacks, according to two Indian government officials familiar with the matter.

The men, Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi and Yusuf Muzammil, are believed to be in Pakistan, the officials said. Lakhvi was identified as the group's operations chief and Muzammil as its operations chief in Kashmir and other parts of India.

The lone surviving gunman in the assault, Ajmal Amir Kasab, 21, told police Lakhvi recruited him for the operation, and the assailants called Muzammil on a satellite phone after hijacking an Indian vessel en route to Mumbai. During the attacks, the gunmen used mobile phones taken from hotel guests to place calls to the Pakistani city of Lahore.

The Indian officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorised to talk publicly discuss the details.

Kasab told police that he and the other nine attackers had trained for months in camps in Pakistan operated Lashkar.

The revelations added to the growing evidence linking the attacks to Pakistani-based militants, and came as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with leaders in Islamabad Thursday after visiting India's capital part of a US effort to pressure Pakistan to share more intelligence and pursue terrorist cells believe rooted in the country.

ACC okays

FROM PAGE 16
about Tk 5.98 crore illegally and hiding information of wealth worth about Tk 5.07 crore in his statement submitted to the commission.

LGRD ministry
A team comprised of secretary and joint secretary of LGRD, chief engineers of LGED and public health and managing director of Wasa during a meeting with ACC officials informed them about the measures the ministry has taken recently to prevent corruption.

Short-term, mid-term and long-term measures will be taken to prevent corruption. It includes technological upgradation, website upgradation and ensuring transparency and accountability of its staffs.

The monitoring cell, headed by a director general, will regularly monitor the ministry's field level works, look into whether any corruption is taking place in any of its projects, monitor newspaper reports regularly regarding corruption in LGRD ministry and collect allegations from people. It will also scrutinise and investigate the allegation and recommend for action against the persons involved.

The information collected by the monitoring cell will be used in NILG cell, a cell that conducts research under the ministry. The NILG will review the existing organogram and laws.

"I have found a Pakistani government that is focused on the threat and understands its responsibilities to respond to terrorism and extremism," she said after meeting Zardari.

In the meeting, Zardari "reiterated that the government will not only assist in (the) investigation but also take strong action against any Pakistani elements found involved in the attack," his office said in a statement.

He said Pakistan was "determined to ensure that its territory is not used for any act of terrorism," the statement said.

US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mike Mullen, who was pushing the same message as Rice in Pakistan on Wednesday, was to meet with officials in India during his trip.

Last week's attacks were carried out by 10 suspected Muslim militants against upscale hotels, a restaurant and other sites across Mumbai.

Government security forces have come under intense criticism they missed warnings and bungled their response to the Nov. 26-29 attacks.

On Thursday, police said an unexploded hand grenade was found outside a hospital that was the scene of an attack during last week's siege on the city. The grenade may have been left by the gunmen, but an investigation has not yet been completed, said Senior Police Inspector