

PM: Security alert

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and are taking measures to ensure a foolproof security for the prime minister.

"We are always alert, since attempts were made on her life in the past," Sohel Taj said during a telephone interview with The Daily Star last night.

Meanwhile, Hasina and her family yesterday moved into the state guest house, Jamuna, from her Sudha Sadan residence in Dhanmondi, which was being considered unsafe for her by her security officials since her party's landslide victory in the recent parliamentary election held on December 29 last year.

Sources said the prime minister will be staying in the Jamuna for about six to seven months until the Gono Bhaban is renovated and readied for her use.

Security officials, especially of the Special Security Forces (SSF), which is responsible for the security of the prime minister, her family members, cabinet colleagues, and her party leaders, has been suggesting her not to stay in Sudha Sadan.

Government high officials said the fresh threat came after the Awami League-led government expedited its efforts to try the country's war criminals, which was one of the major election pledges of the prime minister's party.

"Trial of war criminals is our commitment to the nation, and it is also the people's expectation. The threat on the prime minister's life was issued after we had initiated the move to try the persons who had committed genocide in the country during the war of liberation in 1971," Faruk Khan said.

A section of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami leaders, who are known to have been involved in war crimes during the liberation war, are also said to maintain close connections with Pakistan and some Middle Eastern

Hasina

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Bangladesh to create employment facilities and alleviating poverty.

"During the trip, she is also likely to explain the issue of trying the war criminals and try to seek their understandings," a senior minister told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

"She is expected to request the Saudi government to take special measures so that no militant outfit in Bangladesh get fund from any Saudi organisation or individual," he said, adding that Hasina will also seek cooperation to root out militancy from Bangladesh.

Earlier on February 3, Commerce Minister Faruk Khan said, "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will go to Saudi Arabia within a few days and discuss with the Saudi government on the issues related to trade."

Sahara slates

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Asked about the measures the home ministry would take in removing terrorism in the educational institutions, Sahara said her ministry is taking necessary steps in this regard.

"We are trying and I said times and again that we want to get to the root of the problems," she added.

Action would be taken against terrorists irrespective of their party affiliation, she said.

Addressing the programme as the chief guest, the home minister sought cooperation from people of all strata of society to build a peaceful Bangladesh by eliminating corruption, terrorism, militancy and extortion.

"We need your cooperation and suggestion. I can promise that I would try to root out terrorism, militancy and extortion even if I have to put my life on the line if you cooperate us," she said.

Every educational institution and even the administration were politicised during the tenure of the BNP-led four-party government, she said adding, "We want everything to be run on the basis of merit."

ASM Ali Kabir, secretary to the establishment ministry, inaugurated the concluding ceremony. He gave prizes away to the contestants of over 50 events.

College principal and guardians also spoke on the occasion.

countries.

Saying that attempts were made on Sheikh Hasina's life at least 21 times, Faruk Khan added, "We will foil any attempt on her life with the support of the people."

Hasina was warned by security and intelligence agencies of possible attempts on her life by Islamist terrorist groups including banned Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI), and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), a couple of weeks ahead of the recent ninth parliamentary election as well.

Earlier, Indian intelligence agencies also informed Hasina that a suicide squad of a militant group, trained by an intelligence agency of a South Asian country, planned to assassinate her before the December 29, 2008 poll.

Sources said names of HuJI and JMB were categorically mentioned to Hasina as sources of the threats.

While HuJI was the one to make attempts on Sheikh Hasina's life before, JMB also poses danger to everyone and everything standing up for secularism and progressive ideals.

AL to offer

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should head a little over three committees. But they can demand four chairmanships, and Jatiya Party too can stake claim to as many," he added.

Out of a total 48 committees, 37 are to be constituted on different ministries and the rest on matters relating to parliament.

The House has already formed two committees on parliamentary affairs.

Shahid also said the BNP-led four-party alliance government did not give the opposition a single chair in the eighth parliament. Still, the AL government has decided to allow four opposition members as standing committee chairmen to make parliament effective.

Asked about the ruling party initiative, Joyal Abedin Faruk, chief whip of the opposition, yesterday told reporters that their parliamentary party will consider the matter only after receiving a formal proposal.

Expressing doubts, he said, "Earlier they [ruling party] had announced they would have deputy speaker from the opposition, but that didn't happen. That's why we don't really trust them to carry out what they are saying now."

Trans-Asian

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said Nurul Amin, general manager (East) of the BR.

Gundam point will be a railway junction from where a track will extend to Cox's Bazar town to facilitate tourist movement and another towards Chittagong.

The TAR would connect Bangladesh at three points from the Indian state of West Bengal, and have a single exit point at Gundam. The track passes through industrial centres in the north and south-west of the country, and through the capital's outskirts of Joydevpur and into Chittagong.

The first entry point of the TAR is at Gede, India, and it runs through Darshana, Iswardi, Jamuna Bridge, Joydevpur, Akhaura, Chittagong and Dohazari, and Gundam, sources said.

The second entry point of the track is at Singabadi, India, and then it passes through Rajshahi, Iswardi, Jamuna Bridge, Joydevpur, Akhaura, Chittagong and Dohazari, and Gundam.

Much of the railway network already exists but some significant gaps in it remain.

Earlier, the government had conducted a feasibility study from 1999 to 2001, which said Bangladesh will be benefited if it goes for the TAR.

On building the new track, Nurul Amin said, "We submitted the proposal to the Planning commission in 2002 with an estimated cost of Tk 1,400 crore."

But the expenses will now increase as the proposal was submitted seven years ago. The government will implement the project with its own resources, sources said.

The then BNP-led alliance government did not consider the proposal submitted in 2002. Then the interim government took an initiative in this regard but it could not do much about it, the sources added.

Mashrafe

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but the figures skyrocketed with the Kings XI Punjab also wanting him. They stayed hot on the heels of Knight Riders but the Kolkata side had the last laugh offering 12 times higher than the floor price.

The 25-year-old Bangladesh vice-captain, number eight in the ICC ODI rankings for bowlers, will be playing beside the likes of former Indian skipper Sourav Ganguly, Australian captain Ricky Ponting, West Indies' Chris Gayle and New Zealand wicketkeeper-batsman Brendon McCullum.

It is the first time Bangladesh players have been put to the IPL auction after left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak signed for Bangalore Royal Challengers after negotiations in the first version of the million-dollar Twenty20 competition.

Surprisingly, no buyer showed interests to Tigers' star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, the world's number one all-rounder in ODI rankings, while dashing opener Tamim Iqbal, the other Bangladeshi cricketer in the auction, also remained unsold.

England's Kevin Pietersen and Andrew Flintoff were sold for US\$ 1.55 million each making them the highest-paid cricketers in the competition.

Ekushey fair

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culture and tradition. Unfortunately, I am yet to find any children's book that does it and I can give it to my children," said Rafiqul Islam, who brought his four-year-old boy and six-year-old girl from Uttara.

Most of the children's books available at the fair are based on famous cartoon characters--the Superman, Spiderman and Tom and Jerry--and foreign TV serials and computer games.

"There is no one to think what types of book we are giving to our children at the fair," Islam said in disappointment and strongly opposed allowing such books at the Ekushey Boi Mela.

There have so far been hardly any new books of poetry, rhyme and story for children, which reflect the culture and tradition of the nation.

Salesmen at different stalls said these books are not selling well.

Several hundred children took part in an art competition yesterday.

The crowd was the largest in the evening on the sixth day of the fair yesterday, the first weekend of the month.

A total of 232 new titles arrived at the fair yesterday. These include 35 novels, 46 story collections, 11 essay collections, 51 poetry collections, 18 children's books, four autobiographies, three science fictions, three books on politics, four travelogues and six books on the Liberation War.

The new titles include "Ek Tukro Lal Sabuj Kapor" by Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, "Motku Mamar Goyenda Abhijan" by Anisul Haque, "Kabir Okobita" by Kabir Chowdhury, "Alak Pulak Shiharan" by Al Mahmud, "Shesh Bikeler Chithi" by Syed Shamsul Haq, "Megh Rong Bhalobasha" by Ali Imam, "Bangladesher Chalachitr Ruprekha" by Anupam Hayat and "Megh Roddur" by Kamrun Haque.

Karnaphuli

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relevant matters would be made after discussing with locals, lawmakers and other beneficiaries. He, however, said the tunnel could be somewhere near the third Karnaphuli bridge.

The process for the tunnel construction would start immediately after the inauguration of the third Karnaphuli Bridge in mid September, he said, adding that the construction of the bridge is set to finish ahead of schedule.

Construction of the bridge started in August, 2006, under a Tk 590-crore project. China Major Bridge Company got the work order to build it within 38 months. The 0.95km long and 24 metre wide bridge is being built with the financial assistance of Kuwait fund.

Chinese Ambassador Zheng Qing Dian accompanied the communication minister during his visit. Roads and Highway Department Chief Engineer Nihar Mia, Bangladesh Railway Director General Belayet Hossain, Deputy Commissioner Ashraf Shamim of Chittagong and Project Director Mohiuddin Ahmed were also present.

The minister also visited some possible sites for the tunnel.

ISI behind attacks

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Pakistan in the name of fighting terrorism, saying it was like selling "whisky to an alcoholic."

The United States has been one of Pakistan's key military backers, including providing F-16 fighter jets in return for political support for its operations in Afghanistan.

Pakistan will announce the results of its investigation into the Mumbai attacks next week, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said Friday.

Gilani said last week his government was investigating what India has called evidence linking "elements" in Pakistan to the November attacks on its financial capital, in which 10 gunmen killed 165 people during a 60-hour siege.

"The investigation report will be presented to me by Monday which will be made public on the same day or the next day," Gilani told reporters in the eastern city of Lahore, where he was on a private visit.

Meanwhile Pakistan's oldest English-language newspaper, Dawn, reported that investigators probing the Mumbai attacks for the government in Islamabad had uncovered evidence implicating a banned Bangladesh-based militant organisation, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami (HuJI).

The report, based on unidentified sources, also mentioned the possibility that one of the gunmen was of Bangladeshi origin.

The probe "is likely to indicate that the Mumbai attack was the handiwork of an 'international network of Muslim fundamentalists' present in South Asia and spread all the way to Middle East," Dawn said.

"Although the Bangladesh connection has emerged quite prominently in the investigations, there are also clear indications that some of the planning for the attacks was done in Dubai and there is also an element of local Indian support," it added.

Soya bean

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markets in the city yesterday while super palm oil was selling at Tk 56-60 and palm oil for Tk 50-52.

A trader of Karwan Bazar said the price of brand soya bean oil had reached its zenith in July last year. Brand soya bean oil was then sold between Tk 620 and Tk 630 in the retail markets.

Non-brand soya bean oil had also spiralled up to Tk 120-130 while super palm and palm oil prices were Tk 105-112 during the same period.

In the retail markets, a kg of potato was selling for Tk 13-15, which had been sold for Tk 18-20 a week ago.

Delwar Hossain, a trader of Bikrampur Traders at Karwan Bazar wholesale market, said adequate supply of potatoes in the last few days contributed to the price fall.

He said a kg of potato was selling for Tk 9-11 in the wholesale markets. It was sold for Tk 18-20 two weeks ago, he added.

The price of local and imported onions experienced a fresh hike in the last week, which was being sold yesterday for Tk 28-32 and Tk 26-30 per kg respectively. A week ago, domestic onion was sold for Tk 23-27 per kg while imported ones for Tk 22-25 per kg.

DIG-Prisons

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daily, the Prothom Alo, on February 2 published a photograph showing Maj Haider having a laugh with convict Dipjol and three women inside Dhaka Central Jail, which prompted the authorities to transfer Haider, to Khulna-Barisal division from Dhaka the same day.

The accompanying news report said Maj Haider allowed 200 visitors to Dipjol within 52 days. Dipjol is sentenced for 41 years in connection with a plethora of crimes including possession of illegal arms, and amassment and concealment of illegal wealth.

IG-Prisons Col Dr Ashrafur Islam Khan said he received the probe report and will talk to the home ministry about the findings and the recommendations.

The sources said the report also mentioned that Maj Haider had allowed dozens of visitors including a number of women inside the jail to meet Dipjol, violating the jail code.

Maj Haider in a statement to the committee however said he did not violate the jail code knowingly, and if there was any violation he is sorry about that, the sources added.

The report recommended proper punitive measures for

There was no immediate official Pakistani confirmation of the Dawn report.

HuJI has been blamed for a series of attacks in Bangladesh, including the 2004 grenade blasts at a rally in Dhaka at which the current Premier Sheikh Hasina was speaking.

It was also accused of responsibility over a series of synchronised bomb blasts across the northeast Indian state of Assam in November in which nearly 80 people were killed.

The group's chief Mufti Abdul Hannan was sentenced to death late last year after he was found guilty of master-minding an attack on British ambassador to Bangladesh in 2003.

Bangladesh said Friday it was unaware of any evidence implicating HuJI in the Mumbai assault.

"First of all we don't have any information. If anyone has any information, share with us. We are ready to cooperate," Foreign Secretary Tuhid Hossain told AFP.

More doctors

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spokesman Khalid Al-Mirghlani on February 2 reported that there is a demand for doctors in 43 such hospitals in the country.

The spokesman said the recruitment plan of the health ministry is geared to serve the health needs of the Kingdom's increasing population.

General physicians, consultants, specialists and surgeons are required at hospitals across the Kingdom's 20 health regions, he added.

Al-Mirghlani said the ministry will appoint a panel to travel abroad to recruit the health staff. The panel, he said, would include medical experts.

He added that the panel would ensure the academic qualifications of new recruits as per regulations and standards set by the Saudi Council For Medical Specialists. Prospective candidates would be asked to sit for written and oral tests prior to their selection.

The 43 new and renovated hospitals will have a capacity to house 4,270 beds, ranging from 50 to 400 beds at each facility.

Another Arab News report on February 5 said Saudi doctors reportedly started abandoning hospitals, which offer low salaries and benefits and do not have adequate facilities.

"If it is the reason, then this may also bring opportunities for Bangladeshi doctors in getting jobs there," said an official at the expatriates' welfare ministry.

ABM Badrul Amin, managing director of Career Overseas Consultants Limited, said it is surely a good news for Bangladeshi doctors that Saudi Arabia will recruit doctors for public hospitals from Bangladesh.

Saudi Arabia is the major labour market for Bangladesh. Around 15 lakh Bangladeshis, mostly low-skilled and semi-skilled, are working in the country while around 6,000 to 7,000 are working there.

The Middle Eastern country, however, significantly reduced the number of unskilled and semi-skilled workers from Bangladesh since February last year.

Trade accord

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international communications.

He said if the decision to give India 250 mile corridor in the name of transit is taken without discussion, review and proper scrutiny of security related issues, it would be suicidal and put the country's sovereignty at stake, hamper its economy and create political crises.

Delwar said an atmosphere for discussion on this critical issue could be created after establishing confidence by resolving issues of movement in enclaves, demarcation of maritime boundary, distribution of the Ganges water, growing incidents of killing of Bangladeshis by Indian Border Security Force, and unilateral construction of barbed wire fence along the common border.

He said the bilateral agreement with India the government is going to sign will also cause many socio-political problems.

"If the corridor is given to India, Bangladesh products will lose market in India and the existing trade deficit will widen further," Delwar added.

"The Awami League government wanted to give India the corridor in the same way during its 1996-2001 tenure but could not implement it because of public resistance," he said.

Delwar said the government's allegation that the BNP government gave India transit facilities under Sapta in 1993 is not true. "Sapta is a multi-dimensional cooperation treaty, a component of the Saarc. The corridor pact under the guise of transit is out-and-out a bilateral issue," he said.

The BNP secretary general alleged that the present government has taken the initiative to give corridor to India in the name of transit through more than one road route across Bangladesh.

Waterway

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conduct a study to give recommendation on the waterway project proposed an increase in excavation rate from Tk 95 to Tk 140 for per cubic metre and the revised DPP has been prepared based on the suggestion, he said.

The bureau also suggested increasing the width of the channel from 120 feet to 150 feet, he said.

The proposal was sent to shipping ministry in November 2008. The steering committee of the ministry headed by its secretary at a meeting on January 18 asked BIWTA to recast the DPP.

"We are rearranging the DPP and it will shortly be sent to the planning commission through the ministry for approval," he said.

BIWTA, however, recovered three canals and excavated the canals by their own dredgers under phase-II by this time, said the official.

"We've already recovered and excavated one-km of Sutibhola canal, 7-km of Badda canal and 4-km of Gobindapur canal," he said.

Three kilometres more excavation work in Gobindapur canal is also going on, he said.

Besides, the BIWTA have also done land acquisition work for three acres of land in Tongi to construct a terminal, he said.

Under the phase-II, other work includes construction of three landing stations at Kanchpur, Ichapur and Kayetpara.

The Japan Debt Cancellation Fund, which will finance the project to be implemented in four years, has already released Tk 7 crore in the current fiscal, he said.

BNP to help

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prayers at Pagla mosque in Kishoreganj.

"The present government is leading the country towards havoc and it snatched our first-row seats in the parliament," he said, adding that they did not boycott the parliament.

"We will continue our movement against the government inside and outside the parliament," he added.

He urged local BNP leaders to coordinate and evaluate grassroots leaders who played important roles during the crisis period of the party.

Local BNP leaders Akhtaruzzaman Ranjon, Habibur Rahman Bhuiyan, Khondaker Shahjahan and Alamgir Kabir were present during his speech.

Later Salaududdin joined a discussion in Banagram union of Katiadi upazila on late BNP leader Zillur Rahman.

Kyrgyz govt orders closure of US base

AFP, Bishkek

The Kyrgyzstan government's decision to order the closure of a US base that serves as a vital route for supplies to Afghanistan is "final", a government spokesman said yesterday.

"The government of Kyrgyzstan has taken its final decision about the closure of the American airbase," government spokesman Aibek Sultangaziev told AFP.

"The issue is now with parliament which must cancel the agreement on the base with the United States. The Kyrgyz foreign ministry is exchanging views with the US embassy on the time-frame for the base's closure."

The US military base at Manas -- used by coalition forces to support tens of thousands of troops in neighbouring Afghanistan -- is considered vital and US reaction to the closure has been decidedly negative.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the decision "regrettable" on Thursday but said US operations in the region would continue to be effective, no matter what happened.

"With respect to the base, the defence department is conducting an examination into how else we would proceed," Hillary Clinton told

reporters after talks with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner.

"It will not affect whatever decisions we make. It is regrettable. This is under consideration by the government of Kyrgyzstan and we hope to have further discussions with them."

The Manas base, operated by about 1,000 troops including small French and Spanish contingents, was set up to support coalition forces fighting to oust the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

The closure of the base would strain US supply lines at a time when US President Barack Obama is preparing to nearly double the 36,000-strong force in the country.

Thai PM

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countries to cooperate in handling the issue.

Indonesia Friday said it would consider granting refugee status to them, overturning the government's previous line that they were economic migrants.

The Oxford-educated Abhisit, who took office in December, was on a three-day visit to Tokyo accompanied by six ministers in a bid to reassure investors. He later met with Prime Minister Taro Aso.

52 militants killed

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Feroze Khel in Khyber," a senior security official involved in the operation said.

Another security official said the death toll was "at least 52 and could be more." Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity.

The tolls were impossible to verify independently in the remote and dangerous region, where Pakistani troops are battling Taliban militants to secure the Khyber for trucks carrying supplies to Nato forces in Afghanistan.

US officials say northwest Pakistan has become a safe haven for al-Qaeda and Taliban militants who fled after the 2001 US-led invasion of neighbouring Afghanistan, in the semi-autonomous Khyber tribal district.

A Taliban spokesman claimed responsibility for the attack and threatened to shut down the Nato supply route for good unless the Pakistani government halts military operations against the group.

Traffic was suspended on the crucial road across the militant-infested Khyber into Afghanistan on Tuesday after Taliban militants blew up a bridge.

The bulk of supplies and equipment required by Nato and US-led forces battling a Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan is shipped through US ally Pakistan, which offers a shorter route than other neighbouring countries.

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