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Lanka dismisses threat of war crime charges

24,000 soldiers killed in long conflict with LTTE

AFP, PTI, Colombo

Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse yesterday brushed off calls for an investigation into alleged war crimes committed by government troops in their offensive against Tamil Tiger rebels.

"There are some who tried to stop our military campaign by threatening to haul us before war crimes tribunals," Rajapakse said in a speech to tens of thousands of supporters outside the national parliament.

"They are still trying to do that, but I am not afraid," the president said.

"The strength I have is your support. I am even ready to go to the gallows on your behalf."

Sri Lankan Army lost nearly 24,000 personnel in its three-decade long conflict with the LTTE rebels, including over 6,200 in the latest offensive which began in late 2006, a senior official said yesterday. Defence secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, said the Army paid a heavy price in militarily vanquishing the LTTE. The final offensive began in August 2006 with the troops retaking a Tiger seized irrigation canal.

"Since then the security force, including the Army, Navy, the Air force, police and the civil defence force have lost 6,261 soldiers killed and 29,551 wounded,"

Rajapaksa, brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa was quoted as saying by the state TV. "We made huge sacrifices for this victory," he said. The total number of troops killed since 1981 when the offensive began was 23,790, he added.

The United Nations has estimated that nearly 100,000 people may have been killed in the near four-decades long ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The Defence Secretary, however did not give the casualty of the LTTE cadres killed in the conflict.

The Tamil Tigers had late last year admitted that they had lost over 22,000 cadres in its fight against the Sri Lankan troops.



Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan organises a boat-rally yesterday protesting pollution of and encroachment on the Buriganga. This photo was taken from beneath the second Buriganga Bridge at Babubazar. Story on page 15.



DU hands over martyr Barkat's certificate after 58 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fifty-eight years after his death, Dhaka University (DU) authorities yesterday handed over the graduation certificate and mark sheets of language martyr Abul Barkat to his family member.

DU Vice-chancellor AAMS Arefin Siddique handed them over to Barkat's cousin M Taha at the VC's office.

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Season change could spread swine flu in Asia-Pacific: WHO

The virus to hit the poorest harder

AFP, Manilla Geneva

The change of seasons in the Asia-Pacific region could make it easier for swine flu to spread, World Health Organisation (WHO) officials warned yesterday.

"The southern hemisphere is about to enter its influenza season," officials at the WHO Western Pacific office said, warning that the "factors that contribute toward the spread of (ordinary seasonal) influenza will also enable the spread of A(H1N1)."

The greater prevalence of ordinary flu will also make it harder to detect swine flu, said the officials in a briefing at the WHO regional office in the Philippines.

WHO infectious diseases expert Julie Hall warned that vaccines against seasonal influenza did not appear to protect people from A(H1N1).

Some Asian countries are better equipped to deal with an outbreak of swine flu, thanks to precautions taken during SARS and bird flu alerts over the last few years, Hall said.

"The health systems are a lot stronger than before. The investment that went into preparing for bird flu and SARS are starting to yield the benefits," she said.

However she warned that SARS and bird flu were different from influenza A(H1N1) as bird flu was less likely to infect humans while SARS was spread mainly by people who were already showing symptoms.

In contrast, A(H1N1) can be spread by people who do not appear to be infected, she said.

She also cautioned that the new virus was infecting mainly young people, the largest demographic in some Asian countries.

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All because of a flawed list of deserters

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Members of different law enforcement and intelligence agencies are frequently visiting village home of Aiyub Ali, Nayek Driver of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), to arrest him who is already in jail.

As BDR authorities declared him deserter members of intelligence agencies are hunting him down while his wife, family members and relatives have visited him twice in Kashimpur jail since his arrest in February last.

BDR Director General (DG) Maj Gen Md Mainul Islam, however, admitted that the deserters' list is erroneous.

Talking to The Daily Star, Mainul said, "The list will be corrected and we will delete

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Shattered, bewildered they return empty-handed

PORIMOL PALMA

Migrant workers forced to return home empty-handed after losing their jobs abroad are all at sea in facing the harsh reality of their situations.

Most of them are unable to even pay back the interests on the loans they took out in order to get their jobs abroad, and now see no hope from any quarter.

Masud Rana used to have no idea of the ongoings in the world financial markets - his simple dream was to work hard and improve his living conditions back home, and finally bring a smile to the lives of his poor parents.

Less than three months after arriving in Singapore, Rana faced the reality of the

shrinking shipping and construction sector job markets. Rana's employer Imran Hasan of Damas Technologies Private Ltd, a labour supplying company, sacked him saying

his post no longer existed. "I was able to work only for five to six days and earned nothing for that," 25-year old Rana, from Chatmohar in

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PHOTO FILE

Workers forced to return home show their passports and other documents to journalists at Zia International Airport.

As Ctg mayor sees press

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury yesterday made disgraceful comments about journalists and said journalism is a profession that recently emerged as an unethical business for making money.

Castigating journalists indiscriminately he said they go to different organisations and business firms and look for irregularities and if there are any irregularities, they realise money by threatening to make defamatory reports. They sell their principles and bother little to receive even Tk 200 to Tk 300 bribe, he added.

He made the comments while addressing as the chief guest at the inaugural ceremony of a three-day laptop fair at the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh (IEB)

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BNP DISTRICT COMMITTEES Grouping for key posts blamed for delayed decision

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP failed to announce its district unit convening committees last week because of grouping and lobbying by top-level leaders for key posts, causing resentment among the party's district unit leaders.

A number of grassroots-level leaders requesting anonymity told The Daily Star that some top party leaders are out to 'do business' over the posts causing delay in announcement of the committees.

Asked whether it is true, BNP standing committee member Lt Gen (ret) Mahbubur Rahman said such accusations 'may not be baseless' and further delay in announcing the committees might give rise to suspicion among party men.

"The committees should be announced soon to prevent grouping, lobbying and nepotism," he said.

Mahbubur pointed out the illness of party's Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain as a major reason for the delay. The committees will be announced after the secretary general signs the necessary papers.

He, however, said the party has already finalised some instructions for the new committees.

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Khoka-Abbass war of words

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of Khoka faction and Mirza Abbas faction of BNP yesterday embarked on a war of words in a meeting for finalising the programmes for marking the death anniversary of the party founder, late president Ziaur Rahman.

A committee, headed by convener MK Anwar, formed for observing Zia's death anniversary discussed related issues in the meeting held in the party headquarters in Naya Paltan of the capital with Anwar in the chair.

In the meeting, Abdus Salam, former general secretary of the party's Dhaka city unit committee, proposed that the programme be co-ordinated by Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and pro-BNP city ward councillors.

Protesting the proposal, former lawmaker Salahuddin

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CID LOSES WAY IN CPB BLAST CASE

Held Huji men tightlipped

SHARIFUL ISLAM

The case of bomb blast on a rally of Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) at Paltan Maidan has put investigators into a state of confusion as Harkatul Jihad al Islami (Huji) operatives have stopped divulging any further information about their link to the blast.

Officials at the Criminal Investigation

Department (CID) which is investigating the case said they were hopeful about making a breakthrough in the investigation a couple of years back as some Huji operatives hinted that the outfit had a link to the blast.

Investigators, on the basis of information gleaned from arrestees, started their reinvestigation and the final report was submitted in 2003. The report failed to

mention names of masterminds behind the grisly attack.

Eleven Huji operatives including its operation commander Mufti Abdul Hannan were shown arrested in the case in 2006 and interrogated intensively in remand.

Investigators, however, failed to get enough information from arrested

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UK to help consolidate democracy

UNB, Dhaka

Britain assured Bangladesh of support towards consolidation of democracy, good governance and development in future as Foreign Minister Dipu Moni held talks with Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs David Miliband on Thursday.

Describing bilateral ties between Bangladesh and UK as 'comprehensive', Dipu Moni appreciated the British understanding and support to Bangladesh over the years.

Dipu Moni, now on a personal trip to London, briefed Miliband about measures being taken by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government to achieve a modern, economically progressive and technology oriented country as envisaged in the 'charter of change'.

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"Rabbir Ham Huma Kama Rabba Yani Sagira"



Marhuma Afsari Rahman
wife of Marhum Rezaur Rahman of Siddique Manjil, Comilla

This day you left us to join your husband for eternal peace in Jannath. You are out of sight for year but never out of mind. We feel both of you in our every moment of life. May "Allah" bless both of you eternal peace in Jannath. Ameen.

Justice Mamnoon Rahman
Kohinoor Rahman
Maisha
Maha

Dr. Masroor Rahman
Dr. Farhana Rahman
Muntaha
Minnah

OnlinePoll

The government is working on approval of coal policy, open-pit mining at Barapukuria and resettlement of affected people. Do you think the govt should go for open-pit mining at Barapukuria?

Yes 188 (60.45%)
No 110 (35.37%)
No Comments 13 (4.18%)

Total votes: 311

TODAY'S POLL

Do you think Bangladesh will qualify in the super eights of the next month's ICC World Twenty20 tournament?

Please cast your vote at www.thedailystar.net

BankUnited FSB shut

AFP, Washington

US regulators on Thursday shut down BankUnited FSB, an ailing Florida lender, in the largest American bank failure this year.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) said the bank's assets had been acquired by a newly chartered federal savings bank, BankUnited.

"BankUnited, the successor institution, will be the largest independent bank in Florida, as was its predecessor (BankUnited, FSB)," FDIC said in a statement.

BankUnited's 86 offices will be open Friday during normal business hours.

Bank United FSB had assets of 12.80 billion dollars and

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BA suffers record full-year loss

AP, London

British Airways yesterday reported its biggest full-year loss since the former national airline was privatized in 1987, mainly due to soaring fuel costs and weaker demand in recent months.

The company lost 375 million pounds (\$595 million) in the year ending March 31, compared with a profit of 712 million pounds in the previous year. That is its worst result in over two decades of business, the previous low point being a 200 million pounds loss in 2001-2002.

British Airways consequently said it would not pay any dividends to shareholders or bonuses to managers for the year.

"The prolonged nature of the global downturn makes this the harshest trading environment we have ever faced and, with no immediate improvement visible, market conditions remain challenging," said Willie Walsh, the airline's chief executive.

Revenue rose 2.9 percent to 8.99 billion pounds during the fiscal year, but fuel costs jumped 45 percent to 2.97 billion pounds.

In its fourth quarter, British Airways said revenue slumped by 8.4 percent to 1.9 billion pounds, resulting in an operating loss of

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Prayer Timing

May 23		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-05	4-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-40	6-45
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation