

# Taliban defiant as Afghans flee ahead of assault

AFP, Kandahar

Nato commanders called on the Taliban to surrender as troops dug in yesterday for a major assault on one of the last insurgent strongholds in southern Afghanistan, sending thousands of residents fleeing.

The Taliban remained defiant as civilians of the Marjah plain accused the militia, which is leading an eight-year insurgency, of massing fighters and arms for a bloody battle in Helmand province expected to start this week.

Taliban fighters "prefer to stay and fight," Yousuf Ahmadi, a purported Taliban spokesman, told AFP by telephone from an undisclosed location.

"Afghan and foreign forces have come to the Marjah area and our Mujahideen forces are also in the area firing rockets at them," he said.

Brigadier General Eric Tremblay, spokesman for Nato's International Security Assistance Force, called on the militants to lay down their arms, and said the aim of the operation was to "separate the insurgents from the population."

"From a strategic perspective it would be better but they are under very high instructions from their senior leadership to stay and fight, and they are still under the impression that they are winning," he

## Soccer gold

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With only three gold up for grabs on the final day today -- two in table tennis and the other in men's marathon -- India once again established their supremacy with an overwhelming tally of 88 gold, 53 silver and 28 bronze.

Pakistan stayed second with 19 gold, one more than third placed Bangladesh. Sri Lanka took the fourth position with a collection of 16-33-51.

The 11th edition of the regional spectacle which started with a flurry on January 29 is all set to draw its curtain with a lot of fanfare in what promises to be a spectacular closing ceremony at the Bangabandhu National Stadium this evening.

# Roads blocked

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Gazipur police and administrations contacted Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) leaders and the factory authorities. The workers removed the barricade around 1:00pm following negotiations conducted by BGMEA leaders and factory authorities.

Vehicular movement was normal about an hour later.

Gazipur Superintendent of Police Nuruzzaman told The Daily Star, "The workers were not paid their salaries and overtime allowances in three months."

"The main problem is, no one is claiming ownership of the factory. Police did not go for action apprehending mass unrest among the garment workers of the area."

The SP said they were trying to resolve the issue with the help of BGMEA leaders and government high-ups.

Talking to The Daily Star, BGMEA President Abdus Salam Murshedy said they called for a meeting to resolve the matter. He said the workers would be paid their dues before February 21 and the dispute over the ownership might be solved legally.

Sources said BGMEA Vice-President Faruque Hassan sold the factory to Hasan Saiyeed and Nawshad Hasan, two brothers, in 2007. But after the sale, the two brothers alleged that Faruque Hassan did not follow some conditions of the sale. The brothers declined to takeover the factory.

Faruque Hassan told The Daily Star that he had handed over the ownership of the factory to the new owners on December 2, 2007. "I am not involved in the management of the unit after the sale of my share."

He claimed that he has not been paid in full for the sale as the new owners have already caused a lot of liabilities for the factory.

In Ashulia, at least 30 armed-cadres on five microbuses stormed the Crystal Composite Ltd around 2:00pm and started firing in the air. They vandalised the

## Muggers stab couple

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of four muggers stabbed a couple while snatching their mobile phones and money in the city's Rampura last night.

The victims, identified as Shahnaz Begum, 20, and her husband Johurul Islam, 26, are garment workers at Sumona Fashion in Merul Badda.

They were admitted to Dhaka Medial College Hospital.

Johurul said they were attacked at knife-point on the way to their residence at Rampura. As his wife resisted the muggers, they stabbed the couple indiscriminately.

The muggers fled the scene after snatching two mobile phones and their salary Tk 3,100, which they drew yesterday.

## New CJ

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list of the lawyers rendering this noble service, he said.

He added it is a collective shame for the nation that it has failed to ensure access to justice for every citizen regardless of their race, sex, religion and financial standing even after the first decade of the twenty-first century.

"The goddess of justice has eluded us and shut her mighty doors on the face of the poor, wretched, destitute and the disabled," the chief justice said.

He was speaking at a function on the occasion of his felicitation accorded by the Attorney General's Office and the SCBA at the chief justice's courtroom of the SC after he took oath for the Office of the Chief Justice.

Justice Fazlul Karim said the democratic institutions should be nurtured and strengthened in order to establish rule of law and justice.

"Our democracy requires constant vigilance from our leaders across the political spectrum, media and the civil society," he said.

Attorney General Mahbub Alam and SCBA President AFM Mesbahuddin in their speech placed glorious works done by Justice Fazlul Karim in his life.

Judges and lawyers of the SC were present at the function. Earlier in the day, Justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim was sworn in as the 18th chief justice of the country.

President Zillur Rahman administered his oath at about 11:15 am at Bangabhaban.

Deputy Leader of Parliament Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, former chiefs of caretaker government Justice Habibur Rahman and Justice Latifur Rahman, outgoing Chief Justice Md Tafazzul Islam, cabinet members, advisers to the prime minister, deputy speaker, state ministers, former chief justices, judges of the Appellate and High Court divisions of the SC, chiefs of three defence services, secretaries, attorney general, senior lawyers and other civil and military officials were present.

## SC stays

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army, navy and air force chiefs, the HC ruling had created an abnormal situation.

He said the district judges are no constitutional office-holders; they are the servants of the republic.

If the HC verdict remains in operation, continuity of the precedence in the offices of the republic would be damaged, argued the chief law officer of the state.

Rokanuddin Mahmud, counsel for District Judge Md Ataur Rahman who challenged the order of precedence, said the HC had delivered the verdict legally and rightly.

## No autopsy

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are run by the college's forensic department. He declined to make any more comments.

Dr Rafiqul Akhtar, principal of the medical college, said there was no doctor available in the forensic department then. Five out of six posts in the department have been vacant for last couple of years. The only doctor Rezaul Haque in the department is on leave.

"We have reminded the higher authorities several times about the acute shortage of doctors in the department but to no avail," said Dr Rafiqul.

# Deported workers

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during a strike in July 2008.

Following the strike, Kuwait police arbitrarily arrested and deported over 1,100 Bangladeshi nationals, most of who were working in the cleaning sector.

After the incident, which drew the attention of the media worldwide and was censured by the human rights organisations, Kuwait set the minimum wage for cleaning workers at 40 KD (1 KD = Tk 258).

The country, hosting about 2.5 lakh Bangladeshis, stopped hiring workers from Bangladesh since late 2006 citing criminal activities by the workers and malpractice in the recruitment process.

However, Kuwaiti MPs criticised the government's lack of control over the cleaning companies.

Kuwait lawmaker Saleh Ashoor told a local daily The Arab Times that demands put forth by the protesting labourers on July 29 were legal. He also slammed the employers' inhumane practice of keeping the employees' bankcards and paying them far less than they were actually contracted for.

Meanwhile, the workers also alleged brutal tortures on them at the detention camps. Many of them were found with bruises on their bodies when they arrived at Zia International Airport.

Leaving the blame game

## BCL men

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university around 7:00 am and hung a signboard, claiming ownership of the land.

Murtaza soon came to the spot with a number of employees of the university and resisted the BCL activists. At one stage, the BCL activists beat up Murtaza and four others, leaving them wounded.

Locals soon rushed to the spot and chased the invaders. The BCL activists retreated in fear of mob attack.

While retreating, the activists took away construction materials worth Tk 5 lakh kept there for extension work of the campus, said Engineer Mahmudur Rahman of the university.

He said police were informed but they came to the spot after the activists left the scene.

# Licensed to break

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As stated in Motor Vehicle Rules, 1984, it is illegal to cover any part of a licence plate with any material including clear or colourless material that affects the plate's visibility or reflectivity.

The registration number has to be written in Bangla script and any illustration or written materials beside the licence number are also strictly prohibited. The plates must be 524mm x 112mm in size for a car.

However, cars with number plates of various sizes, fonts and designs along with ornamental adjustments are virtually everywhere on the streets.

New cars bought from showrooms come equipped with flashy number plates. Some have the numbers painted in reflective typefaces while others have metallic chains as borders.

Many car dealers and company cars also tend to use their logo in the licence plate for their promotion, which is a blatant violation of the rules. The logos, designs also tend to be eye-catching, making the registration numbers less visible.

Some cars are also seen on the streets with the licence plates illuminated with neon borders. While this practice is illegal and impracticable, it makes the plates virtually unreadable during night.

Disproportionately larger sized licence plates are also seen on the streets. This is gross violation of the rules that mandate that number plates of normal cars must have a measurement of 524mm x 112mm.

However, Monsur Hossain, a metal engineer from a metal engineering work store in Bangla Motor told The Daily Star that he could make a licence plate of any size as long as it fits on the car.

"Each type of car usually has a specific size of licence plate appropriate for it. But we can make it bigger or smaller if the customer wants," said Alam, adding that he can add patterns and designs on the borders and fonts used in the plates.

According to regulations, licence plates must have the licence number in Bangla script, painted on flat steel or aluminium plate, following a specific colour code based on the type of the vehicle.

Car plates should have

aside, Bangladesh embassy there talked with the Kuwaiti authorities about the arrears and belongings of the deported workers. The country's labour department assured them of arranging the arrears for payment to the workers through Bangladesh embassy.

The BMET made a public announcement asking the workers to submit their passports and legal documents needed for working in Kuwait.

"After they submitted the documents, we sent those to the Bangladesh embassy in Kuwait, which approached the Kuwaiti authorities concerned. But till today no progress was made in this regard," BMET Director Nurul Islam told The Daily Star yesterday.

As Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is visiting Kuwait, the issue has been included in her discussion agenda, he said.

Abu Shaker, brother of deportee Saiful, said his brother has an arrear of Tk 3 lakh.

"We have tried to get the money from the manpower bureau (BMET) several times but returned disappointed. Now we are struggling to pay the debt we took to send Saiful to Kuwait," said Shaker.

## Contempt rule

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the firm, to explain within 10 days why the proceedings should not be brought against him on charges of misquoting an HC order.

The HC bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik and Justice Borhan Uddin came up with the rule upon filing of a contempt of court petition by Rajuk Chairman Nurul Huda.

Nurul Huda on Sunday filed the petition with the HC against Shamim for submitting two appeals to the Rajuk chairman misquoting the court's order.

On February 3, the HC in an order summarily rejected a writ petition challenging a Rajuk notice that asked Jamuna Builders Ltd to demolish the unauthorised top four floors of the 10-storey Jamuna Future Park Shopping Complex.

Shamim Islam the same day submitted two appeals to the Rajuk chairman against the Rajuk notice, stating that he submitted the appeals as per the HC direction.

Advocate AFM Mesbahuddin appeared for the Rajuk chairman while advocate Ahsanul Karim argued for Shamim Islam.

## Grassroots

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Nasim, who is in charge of looking after the party activities in Barisal division, and central leader Afzal Hossain, Barisal City Corporation Mayor Shawkat Hossain Hiron, AL lawmakers Talukder Mohammad Yunus, Monirul Islam Moni, and Pervin Talukder and leaders of city, upazila, municipality units and associated bodies also spoke at the meeting.

The meeting started around 11:00am and continued till 5:30pm without any break.

Addressing the meeting Barisal City unit AL Convenor Hiron demanded party councils of the district, city and upazila units.

Hiron said change in the leadership is necessary to avert debacle in the next election.

Barisal city AL leader Anisuddin also demanded new leadership in all tiers.

Yusuf Mollah, president of Agailjhara upazila AL, demanded punishment to the BNP men who tortured AL men while the BNP-Jamaat coalition was in power.

AL leaders of Uzirpur and Banaripara upazila units criticised local lawmaker Moni for not involving them in party activities.

Babuganj upazila AL leader Farzana Binte Wahab, who is also the vice chairman of Babuganj upazila parishad, alleged that the local AL lacks proper coordination.

Bahauddin Nasim directed the local leaders to bring an end to the misunderstanding among the party leaders and to remain united to strengthen the organisation.

Nasim said the contribution of the grassroots level leaders would have to be evaluated. He also directed the party men not to get involved in tender manipulations.

Afzal Hossain urged all to remain cautious about the anti-government propaganda by the main opposition.

Hasanat Abdullah directed the local leaders not to get involved in criminal activities.

## Robber

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team rushed to the spot. Sensing presence of the police, the robbers attacked the police. The police retaliated for their safety and killed a robber on the spot.

Rest of the robbers, however, managed to flee the spot with possessions of the commuters worth Tk 5 lakh, sources said.

Earlier on Friday night, Birampur police detained at least four robbers with 500gm explosive substances while they were preparing for robbery.

## UZ chairmen

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randum to the prime minister on that day.

An agitation programme may be announced giving a 10-day ultimatum on the day of submitting the memo if the demands are not met, meeting sources said.

About 80 chairmen and vice-chairmen from all over the country attended the meeting after visiting the shrines of Hajrat Shahjalal (RA) and Shahporan (RA) in Sylhet. Chairman of Sunamganj Sadar Dewan Zainul Zakerin presided over it.

They said the programmes have been taken to strengthen the local government institutions through establishing actual powers of upazila chairmen and vice chairmen.

They are ready to take any course of actions to meet the demands, they added.

A 31-member committee of the parishad was formed with advocate Abdul Mazid as its convener. The Sylhet Divisional chapter of the parishad was also formed with Dewan Zainul Zakerin as its convener.

Other demands include keeping provision of announcing separate budget for upazila parishad, reorganisation of zila parishad by enacting laws and preparing five-yearly and annual development plans.

## 8 arrested

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Mohammad Ali, Abdul Jalil, Harun-ur-Rashid, Abdur Rahim, Nazmul Hossain, Abu Sufian and Sohrab Hossain.

ASP Shahidul Islam of Rab-2 told The Daily Star that Akhter Hossain and his associates had been running the recruiting agency without licence and government approval.

"The agency is also cheating with the people who paid money for going abroad," the ASP said.

Akhter Hossain admitted that he had been running the business since last two years without licence. But he claimed that he had applied for licence three months before.

# Nepali Maoists set free all child soldiers

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kathmandu

Assisted by the UN and its partner agencies, Nepal's former Maoist guerrillas Monday finally released the last of the child soldiers they had recruited in the course of their 10-year war to overthrow the royal dynasty.

The discharge of nearly 3,000 child soldiers and other illegally recruited combatants ended Monday in Rolpa, the remote western district that had been the cradle of the Maoist insurgency, with a farewell ceremony attended by Maoist chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, top Maoist leaders and UN officials as well as EU envoys.

The discharge process started Jan 7 and ended Monday after covering seven cantonments where the Maoists' Peoples Liberation Army soldiers have been barracks since the end of the revolt in 2006.

"You who are now leaving the cantonments are no longer in the Maoist army chain of command," said Karin Landgren, chief of the UN Mission in Nepal that has been supervising the PLA cantonments. "The period of your life dedicated to armed struggle is now in the past. You have a role in helping make Nepal a country that is just, equitable,

## BDR men

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they were tortured in custody during interrogation to give confessional statements.

During the hearing, the petitioners were produced before the court and they described what they went through during their remand period.

Earlier, 177 BDR men submitted similar petitions on different days.

Criminal Investigation Department had so far arrested a total of 2,190 BDR members including 30 civilians for their alleged involvement in the carnage.

BNP leader Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and Awami League leader Torab Ali were arrested in the case.

Of them, a total of 2,151 members were remanded while 521 gave confessional statements.

At least 74 people, including 57 army officers deputed to the paramilitary force, were killed in the February 25-26 bloody mutiny at the Pikhana in the capital.

# 25 lakh ultra poor

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The programme would cover 10,000 families in all the wards under Dhaka City Corporation and 25 adjacent unions, 5,000 families of 25 wards under each of the rest divisional cities and 10,000 families of each district headquarters.

The Department of Food in consultation with the local members of parliament and ward commissioners will prepare the list for the programme.

The decision was made at a meeting of Food Planning and Monitoring Unit under the food ministry. Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury and the high officials of the ministries concerned were present in the meeting presided over by the food minister.

"We have monitored the market for 15 days but did not notice results as expected. Therefore, we want to increase the supply in market," Abdur Razzaque said.

The government on January 20 started OMS in the capital and areas in Narsingdi, Narayanganj and Gazipur where mostly the labourers live. Initially, it stabilised rice prices, but gradually prices, especially of fine rice, started going up.

According to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh, price of coarse rice was Tk 26 to Tk 28 a kg even a month ago. But, prices of medium quality rice, which was Tk 30 to Tk 33 a kg a month ago, went up at Tk 33 to Tk 37 yesterday.

Prices of fine rice also went up at Tk 35 to Tk 44, which was Tk 32 to Tk 44 per kg a month ago.

Retailers said the millers, mainly of Kushtia, Chapainawabganj and Naogaon, were stocking rice because of rising prices in the international market.

There might be various reasons for the price increase, the food minister said, adding that rice usually sells in India at lower prices than that of Bangladesh, but this year price of rice there is higher.

democratic and peaceful."

The UN, donors and the government are offering rehabilitation packages for the discharged soldiers, many of whom feel let down and were close to tears.

# US battles to restore power to thousands of homes

AFP, Washington

Hundreds of emergency crews battled yesterday to clear snow-clogged roads and restore power to thousands of homes across the US east coast before a new storm hits.

But despite their best efforts, the US capital remained largely paralysed, with the federal government announcing it will remain closed for at least one more day and scores of schools and local businesses remaining shut down.

An early morning freeze on Sunday, which had turned partially cleared highways into icy skating rinks, gave way to warmer temperatures helping the big melt to get underway, but officials warned travel was still hazardous.

# Blast at US power plant kills 5

AP, Middletown

Fire marshals yesterday were preparing to start their investigation into a massive explosion that rocked an under-construction power plant where gas lines were being tested, killing at least five people.

A dozen or more others were hurt in Sunday's blast, which was so powerful it alarmed residents who heard the boom and felt tremors in their homes miles away from the Kleen Energy Systems plant in Middletown, about 20 miles south of Hartford.

The explosion left huge pieces of metal that once encased the plant peeling off its sides. A large swath of the structure was blackened and surrounded by debris, but the building, its roof and its two smokestacks were still standing at the site, which is near Wesleyan University on a wooded and hilly 137-acre parcel of land overlooking the Connecticut River.

# Besides, rice prices in Thailand and Myanmar are also as high as India, he noted.

"We have 8.67 lakh tonnes of rice in stock and need only 1.5 lakh tonnes for the programme. We do not need to import rice," Abdur Razzaque said.

Asked what difference the new programme will bring when similar quality of rice is sold at Tk 22 a kg under the OMS, Razzaque said, "Production cost of rice is high. So, you cannot lower food prices as you wish. But, we want to increase the supply to make the market stable."

## Little mags

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is experiencing good sale so far. Sellers of little magazines however expressed their grievance over the space allocated for the corner.

They said the space is not enough for 28 magazine stalls and the corner has become too congested.

Abida, a master's student of Jagannath University, said she is a great fan of little magazines and getting lots of copies from this corner in the fair.

Another fan of magazines Rumel from city's Uttara said alongside little magazines many stalls are selling books, which is not acceptable.

Such trend is destroying the atmosphere of the corner, he added.

Meanwhile, the premises saw an average crowd on a working day yesterday with a goodsale at the stalls.

As many as 101 new titles hit the fair yesterday covering a wide range of genres, including novels, poetry, essays, histories, jokes and children books.

The new titles included-- Esamotir Apar Opar by Abdul Mannan Syed, Grandfather of Jokes by Ahsan Habib, Muktiuddher Golpo by Selina Hossain, Charon Dhoni by Al Mahmud, Jatiyatabader Orthony O Onnaya by Mozaffar Ahmed, Amader Charagulo Chhote Jhake Jhake by Aslam Sani.

As per regular programme, a discussion on the history of Language Movement was held on the premises in the afternoon that was followed by a cultural session.