

Firing erupts over push-in bid

BDR opens fire as BSF tries to send 50 in

STAR REPORT

The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and the Indian Border Security Forces (BSF) yesterday evening exchanged fire at the Shamanta border point in Jhenidah over a push-in attempt.

As the BSF tried to push some 50 Bangla-speaking Indian nationals into Bangladesh at around 6:30pm,

the BDR opened fire to foil the bid. The BSF also retaliated.

BDR Commanding Officer at Jessore Sector No. 1 Col. Momimul Islam said, "We have received information about the firing, but we don't know about any casualty yet."

Till the last report at 8:00pm, the firing was still going on.

Meantime, the BSF has assembled

over 200 Indian Muslims at Jorhabridge and Bansbaria areas of Putkhali border to push them into Bangladesh.

Reliable sources have confirmed that a dusk-to-dawn curfew has been imposed in the Indian border areas adjoining Jessore, Satkhira and Jhenidah districts to help the push-in.

Four hundred people brought from different parts of West Bengal

and Maharashtra states on Sunday morning to the Raghunathpur BSF camp could not be seen after 5:30pm on the same day.

Villagers said they had been pushed in under the cover of night.

Ashraf Ali, 42, who fled from the Raghunathpur BSF camp and enter

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Biman's bizarre security lapse

STAR REPORT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines has serious security lapses and is also hostage to passengers' whims, the airlines' own confession reveals.

In a rejoinder to a recent The Daily Star report on a delayed flight, Biman admitted that one of its flights left Jessore Airport on January 22 one hour two minutes later than a rescheduled time.

But Biman's reason for the delay is curious. It said the flight was delayed to accommodate a group of 65 passengers.

The question that stems from the explanation is: Why was it necessary to wait for the missing passengers?

The answer that Biman gave is even stranger and shows how it is

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UN inspectors find no nuke activity in Iraq

Blix says it illegally imported 300 rocket engines

AFP, United Nations

UN weapons inspectors have found no evidence of prohibited nuclear activity in Iraq, but further inspections are needed along with more pro-active cooperation from Baghdad, IAEA chief Mohammed ElBaradei said yesterday.

"No prohibited nuclear activities have been identified during these inspections," the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) told the UN Security Council.

There was to date "no evidence" that Iraq had revived its nuclear weapons programme, he added.

However, UN chief inspector Hans Blix told the Security Council that Iraq has illegally imported 300 rocket engines that could be used for missile propulsion.

He pointed to "imports which have been taking place during the last two years of a number of (banned) items, despite the sanctions, including, as late as December 2002... 300 rocket engines" which may be used for a missile programme.

Blix told the Security Council about the imported engines on January 9, stating that the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) would determine whether they were intended for missiles in that category.

All military sales to Iraq are banned under council resolutions adopted after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

The resolutions also bar Iraq

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Image crisis your own making: US envoy

SHAHRIAR KARIM

Bangladesh itself has to be blamed for its image crisis abroad due to bad governance, US Ambassador Mary Ann Peters said yesterday.

Refuting businessmen's concern that the US decision to include Bangladesh in the US terror-risk list countries would damage its image, she said some recent developments including providing indemnity to the joint forces have worsened the country's image.

Peters made the observations when a five-member business delegation met her at the US embassy yesterday morning to express their concern over the inclusion of Bangladesh in the

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Trade resumes thru' Benapole

STAR REPORT

Border trade with India through the Benapole land port resumed yesterday afternoon after truckers across the border called off their strike.

The six-day strike was called off following a meeting between officials of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and truck owners, drivers and C&F agents.

Truck drivers at Petrapole in the Indian State of West Bengal went on strike to protest the killing of fellow trucker Santosh Biswas, 50, who was allegedly beaten to death by the Indian Border Security Force last Wednesday.

Some 1000 cargo-laden trucks on the Petrapole side and around 200 on the Benapole border remained stranded due to the deadlock, causing the exchequer a revenue loss of Tk 7 crore, revenue officials of Benapole land customs station said.



PHOTO: STAR

Eyes gouged out, three of yesterday's mob attack victims lie unconscious on a stretcher at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Eyes of 5 criminals gouged out as police look on

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The eyes of five alleged criminals were gouged out in the presence of police at Pallabi in the city yesterday.

Two of the victims, who are BNP workers, said the crime was committed by the Awami League (AL) and Jubo League activists.

One of the victims, Noor-e-Alam said they were arrested and taken to the Pallabi Police Station Sunday night for their suspected involvement in the murder of a Jubo League leader. The following morning, police took them to Baunia police outpost to recover firearms.

The victims said at 8:00 in the morning, hundreds of people sur-

rounded the police outpost and police allowed some AL workers to enter. They alleged police pinned them down to the ground and let the outsiders gouge out their eyes with sharp weapons.

Noor-e-Alam said police took them to Baunia outpost telling them that they were to be taken to hospital. He also named Sekander, Abul, Khalil and Munna as attackers.

The duty officer at the Pallabi Police Station told The Daily Star that locals caught some criminals and gouged out their eyes and that police rescued the criminals from the angry crowd.

The five are Zakir Hossain, 25, Noor-e-Alam, 30, Billa alias Bush, 28, Munna, 25, and Jahangir, 28. They were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

However, police could not arrest any of the attackers.

Another police official

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BSTI accused of harassment over condensed milk ban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The banned condensed milk companies yesterday accused the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) of harassment.

They also described the move to revoke their licences as intentional.

"We did not see the BSTI so active before...everything took place in three to four days. The institution made a hurried announcement in Chittagong to seize the condensed milk brands," Aziz Al Kaiser, vice-chairman of Partex Group, said at a press briefing at the Hotel Purbani in the city. The Partex Group is the owner of Danish Condensed Milk Bangladesh Limited.

Referring to a comment by an office bearer of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB), he said the CAB has an ill motive as his comment reflects.

Kaiser urged the Ministry of Industries to form a committee to investigate the harassment by the BSTI and let people know facts.

"Who are active in the CAB and who are its president and secretary?"

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Market does not echo minister's claim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Choudhury said at a press conference at the secretariat yesterday afternoon that although prices of a very few essentials like rice and eggs have increased, those of most essentials including soybean oil, potato, onion, garlic, ginger and sugar have not shot up as in the previous years.

But a visit to some kitchen markets in the evening revealed that prices of most of the essentials were higher than what was claimed at the press conference.

The minister said edible oil prices have increased 50 per cent in the international market, but the government has increased those by 35 to 37 per cent. This has caused the

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BGMEA holds foiled polls today

Trade bodies slate Sunday's police interference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has decided to go ahead with its biennial elections today amidst growing concern among candidates and voters.

Meanwhile, six major trade organisations yesterday condemned police interference in the BGMEA elections.

"We strongly condemn such police actions to seal offices of the BGMEA and foil election on the pretext of a lower court injunction," said the joint statement.

"We believe that such role of police has disrupted democratic process of the trade organisation and stood in the way of the government's move to establish good governance, which is undesired."

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CEC cries for army again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the face of widespread violence and rigging in the ongoing Union Parishad elections, the Election Commission (EC) yesterday again requested army deployment.

The commission decided to ask the government for troops on polls duty at a morning meeting and sent a letter to the Armed Forces Division in the afternoon.

"Reports of killing, violence, intimidation and security lapses have embarrassed the commission,

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