

## Rushing back risking life

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Thousands of passengers returning to the capital after Eid holidays are being ferried across the river Padma from Daulatdia launch terminal on overloaded passenger vessels.

Children, women, elderly people together with their luggage are crammed into small double-decker launches to ferry them over to Paturia, about two kilometers across.

Paturia is an alternative river terminal constructed last year to lessen the distance from Daulatdia to Aricha.

Each boat was seen carrying about 100 to 150 passengers more

than its capacity. The Daulatdia launch terminal authorities made no efforts to stop the overloading.

To make matters worse, buses waiting on the other side, unscrupulously left for the capital leaving behind their passengers who had refused to risk their lives and stayed back for the next boat.

As more buses arrived from different southwestern districts, they were kept waiting at Daulatdia when the boats also refused to return empty from Paturia.

There was complete chaos as the crowd stranded in the narrow muddy, uneven passage was seen quarrelling with officials yesterday afternoon.

When passengers protested

the overloading and delay, officials sitting inside a small room on the pontoon shouted back saying, 'If you are unable to take risks, then find your own way.'

"I have requested the authorities to stop the overloading. They paid no attention," said a bus supervisor from Khulna.

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) leases out the launch terminals to contractors every year. The contractors are responsible for managing and maintaining these for the smooth sailing and ferrying of passengers.

BIWTA officials could not be contacted for comments.

## UP polls violence

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reports from Jhenidah, Kushtia, Khulna, Patuakhali and Narayanganj.

Around 30 people were injured as hired goons of a chairman candidate attacked supporters of his rival candidate in Dashmina, Patuakhali, Saturday night.

Saleha, 45, a pregnant woman, Laiba Bibi, 20, Shamsunnahar Latif, 70, Aziz Dealer, 60, and Mohammad Ali, 35, are among them. They were admitted to the Patuakhali Sadar Hospital.

A clash between two groups of the local BNP in Amghata village in Sadar Upazila, Munshiganj, injured 11, three of them critically, on Sunday.

Over 20 people were injured in attacks by supporters of a defeated UP chairman candidate in Baliati Union in Sattara, Mankiganj, on Sunday.

Meanwhile, BSS reports that one person was killed in election violence at Binnati in Kishoreganj yesterday.

The incident took place when supporters of a chairman candidate opened fire at Awliapara Registered Primary School centre to foil the polling at about 3.30pm.

Police said Fazlur Rahman (38) who received bullet wound in the chest died on the spot.

The unruly supporters of the chairman tried to force their way into the polling booths and had heated exchanges with police and rival supporters. Later they fired several rounds of shots.

Police also fired two rounds to disperse the unruly supporters of the chairman.

Later, BDR personnel rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Election Commission has suspended polling at the centre. None was arrested in this connection. The situation was tense in the area.

## Shaheed Minar

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Minar on February 8. From today, its program will be held at the Dhanmandi Lake open stage.

On the occasion, the Chittagong Hill Students Council held a rally at Dhaka University yesterday and demanded hill people's right to primary education in their mother languages.

It also demanded inclusion of the 'real history and life struggle' of all tribesmen in textbooks. They also submitted a memorandum to the education ministry to press its demands.

## NAM states urged to take anti-war stand

**AFP, Kuala Lumpur**

The Non-Aligned Movement's (NAM) summit in Kuala Lumpur next week should urge the United States and Britain to step back from a threatened attack on Iraq, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

Mahathir, who takes over the chair of the 114-nation grouping of developing countries at the meeting has already said he would refuse to back a war on Iraq even if the United Nations gives Washington a mandate to attack.

He said NAM should add its collective voice to those of ordinary people who demonstrated their opposition to war in protests around the world last weekend. "We have no military or financial strength, but we can join the world movement to oppose war on moral grounds," Mahathir, who is seen as a strong moderate Muslim leader, said on state-run Radio Televisyen Malaysia.

"We do not agree that the government of a country, not suitable to big countries, be changed by military means through a pre-emptive strike. If this thing is allowed to happen, maybe other countries will also suffer the same fate in the future," he said.

Senior officials from NAM begin talks on Thursday, and foreign ministers will meet on Saturday, while the leaders summit is scheduled to take place on February 24 and 25. Middle East crisis.

## Promotion

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Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told the House that the officials were promoted as per recommendations of the Superior Selection Board (SSB) and on the basis of their seniority and annual confidential report (ACR).

Bhuiyan mentioned that promotion of some was held up because of specific allegations against them and that those were being probed.

Industries Minister MK Anwar said the new promotion rules were duly authenticated by appropriate authorities. The opposition should have gone to the Supreme Court if it thought that the promotions were given in violation to the Constitution.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said a careful look into the list of officials promoted would make it clear that the process was fair.

The prime minister's advisor Salahuddin Qader Chowdhury refuted allegations of politicisation of promotions and asserted that had the government wished, it could have promoted 1,000 officials instead of 493.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar then disapproved the issue as a point of order. He pointed out that the Constitution has provisions allowing one to take recourse to law in case of any irregularities in such promotions.

AL lawmaker Shahjahan Khan then raised a point of order and described sufferings of the Muslims due to 'change of date' of the Eid-ul-Azha date this year. He resented that the religious affairs ministry even did not regret this.

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain however was quick enough to point out that the prime minister herself had expressed her anguish at the change of Eid date, causing much inconvenience to people.

Earlier, the day's sitting which began half an hour late witnessed 'question-answer' and tabling of a bill on imposition of travel tax on foreign nationals in Bangladesh.

Besides, discussion on the president's speech in the House took place.

## Bangabazar

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of abduction and extortion of Tk 3 lakh.

Earlier, Nuruzzaman gave confessional statements before the CMM's court disclosing involvement of eight policemen and three army personnel in the extortion. Based on this confession, police arrested two of his accomplices: businessman Dinesh Debnath at Bangabazar and Nitai Chandra Debnath at Shariatpur.

An army captain SM Atiqur Rahman and two soldiers will face court martial for their involvement.



Neighbours look at the destroyed house of Palestinian Ahmed Gandour, a member of the Hamas movement, in the northern Gaza Strip town of Beit Lahia yesterday after Israeli tanks and bulldozers made an incursion into the area.

## Emergency Arab summit on Iraq crisis likely on Feb 28

**AFP, Cairo**

Arab states have reached "a consensus" on holding on February 28 an emergency summit in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh to discuss the Iraqi crisis, Egypt's foreign minister said yesterday.

"There is a consensus for holding the emergency summit on February 28," Ahmed Maher told reporters, adding that a final date will be announced in "the next 48 hours."

He dismissed reports that some of the 22 members of the Arab League had objected to convening a special summit on Iraq during the Arab foreign ministers' meetings here Saturday and Sunday.

"No one has objected," he said.

The foreign ministers' meeting convened to discuss preparations for the summit that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had called for, but no final date for it was announced in its final communique.

Maher said no date was announced because some Arab leaders had plans to attend "international forums," such as the Franco-African summit in Paris from February 19 to 21, and the summit of the Non-aligned Movement in Malaysia from February 20 to 25.

Reuters adds: Arab foreign ministers said on Sunday their countries should deny any support for military action against Iraq, which they said would pose a threat to the national security of all Arab States.

But the call, made in a final communique after a day of often heated debate, fell short of a binding resolution that would pose difficulties for Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar, which host tens of thousands of US troops preparing for a possible war on Iraq over its alleged weapons of mass destruction.

"(The foreign ministers) affirm the necessity for their countries to refrain from offering any kind of assistance or facilities for any military action that leads to the threat of Iraq's security, safety and territorial integrity," the final

communique said.

"The Arab countries reject aggression on any of them or the threat against the security and safety of any Arab country as a threat against the national security of all Arab countries," it said, without specifically mentioning the United States.

Some analysts say the Arab diplomatic manoeuvres have an important domestic component. They say Arab leaders are anxious to convince their people that they have done all they could to avert war and thereby limit any popular backlash.

While all Arab states have said they oppose a US-led war against Iraq, some are in a quandary as traditional US allies which host American troops. The oil-rich Gulf states are in a particularly sensitive position, since many of their citizens are vehemently opposed to the US presence.

Iraq's neighbour Kuwait, which expressed unspecified reservations about the communique, is hosting tens of thousands of soldiers and is expected to be the main launchpad for a land invasion on its former occupier.

Bahrain is the headquarters of

the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, which Qatar hosts the mobile US Central Command headquarters, which has responsibility for the Gulf region. Saudi Arabia is also home to thousands of US troops.

Iraq's foreign Minister Najib Sabri declined to say whether he was satisfied with the talks, but said: "We believe that Arab countries have great capabilities and can use all these capabilities to deter all those who challenge their dignity."

Arab and other states including veto-wielding members of the Security Council Russia, France, China as well as Germany have repeatedly called for more time for weapons inspections. But Washington has said time was running out for Baghdad to come clean on its alleged arms programmes, which Iraq denies it has.

## Foreign visitors

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travelling by air to North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Australia, Far Eastern countries and New Zealand will pay Tk 2,500, the bill proposes.

Passengers travelling in other routes, except the SAARC ones, will pay the levy at the rate of Tk 1,800. Travellers availing air trips to other SAARC countries will pay Tk 600. The tariffs on travel by land and water routes are Tk 500 and 800 respectively.

Criticising the bill, former finance minister and Awami League lawmaker SAMS Kibria said the proposed provision to determine tax rate by any rule is contradictory to the basic principle of tax imposition.

The bill kept a provision for exemption to any person or section of people, subject to government notification.

It also excluded children, cancer patients, blind and disabled people, airline crew, foreign diplomats and their family, pilgrims heading towards Saudi Arabia, transit passengers staying not more than 72 hours and any Bangladesh national serving an airline, who visits abroad without fare or in reduced fare.

## Saber appears in court in Mymensingh

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh**

Awami League leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury, who was shown arrested in Ajanta Hall bomb blast case, appeared before a Magistrate's Court at 12.30pm yesterday.

First Class Magistrate Md. Mosharrif Hossain ordered him to reappear before the court on April 2.

Saber Hossain's lawyers advocates Mahmud-Ai-Noor Tarek, Wazedul Islam, M Zubeed Ali, Monjurul Haq and Zahurul Haq were present.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury was arrested on December 8 without any specific charge and later detained under the Special Powers Act. He was shown arrested on December 28 in the Mymensingh Cinema blast.

## ADAB split

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government denied to interact with the present ADAB leadership, accused of having political links," Mueyed Chowdhury, executive director of BRAC, told The Daily Star. He said Fazle Hasan Abed had tried a lot to keep the NGO community united.

Citing a recent example of successful negotiation with the government on its proposal for formulating an NGO policy, Chowdhury said, "if the NGOs were not represented, the government could have done whatever it wanted to."

The forthcoming NNCC convention will work out a way of narrowing the gap between the government and the NGOs task ADAB could not accomplish. Some 1500 organisations across the country have registered their names for the convention to be held at Mirpur Indoor Stadium, NNCC sources said.

On the other hand, ADAB chairperson Qazi Faruque Ahmed accused the rival group of having reached an unholy understanding with the government. He said the government had victimised ADAB.

"There must be some working relation between the government and the NGOs, since we address development issues, but it never

## UP candidate arrested in Dinajpur

**BSS, Dinajpur**

Abdus Sattar Milon, a candidate for Union Parishad (UP) chairman in Goraghat thana of the district, was arrested for his alleged involvement in criminal activities here yesterday afternoon.

Milon, a former president of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), Goraghat thana unit, was arrested under the Special Powers Act of 1974 and was later sent to jail.

Acting on a tip-off, Goraghat police arrested Milon as he and his accomplices were preparing to carry out 'terrorist activities' at the 'Shaheed Minar Square' there at 5:00pm yesterday.

Police said Milon was accused in several cases including one involving ransacking of Goraghat Thana BNP office on August 31 last year. He had been absconding for a long time.

Earlier, the army-led joint force failed to arrest Milon. After withdrawal of the army, Milon came out of hiding and submitted nomination paper as a candidate for chairman of Goraghat UP-4. He got the 'wheel' as his election symbol.

All the cases filed against Milon are under trial, police said.

## Kuwait shuts 2 oilfields near Iraq

**REUTERS, Kuwait**

Kuwait has shut down production at two small northern oilfields near its tense border with Iraq as a security precaution ahead of a possible US-led war on Baghdad, an oil company official said yesterday.

Badr Zwyer, spokesman for Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), told Reuters the Abdali and Ratga fields, producing a total of about 25,000 barrels per day (bpd), were closed because they were located in a 'risky' area near the Iraqi border.

He said Kuwait hoped to keep overall crude production unchanged by boosting output from its main oilfields in the south of the country.

The OPEC member has limited spare production capacity.

## EU in crisis talks

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court."

Weekend press reports said Britain and the United States were working together to draft a fresh UN Security Council resolution that could open the way for a US-led war on Iraq.

While the papers said the draft could be submitted to the Council as early as this week, Straw declined yesterday to cite a timeframe.

The Security Council on Friday dealt a blow to US war plans, as a majority of the body's members said they wanted UN inspectors to be given more time to test Baghdad's assertion that it has no weapons of mass destruction.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who said Saturday the Security Council might need a new resolution on Iraq but that war could still be averted, will address the EU summit, scheduled to start at 6:00pm (1700 GMT).

Chief UN weapons inspectors Hans Blix and Mohammed ElBaradei are due to submit another progress report around March 1.

The rift in the European Union -- dubbed Europe's worst crisis since World War II by the Rome daily Corriere della Sera -- mirrors an unprecedented split in NATO, which ended in a face-saving compromise on Sunday after weeks of wrangling over the defense of Turkey in the event of war on its neighbor Iraq.

The NATO deal was reached by bypassing France, which along with Belgium and Germany had

blocked US proposals on military planning, arguing that they sent the "wrong signal" while diplomacy continues.

Arab foreign ministers meanwhile adopted a non-binding resolution at an emergency session in Cairo on Sunday rejecting "any aggression against Iraq" and urging the 22 nations of the Arab League "not to provide any kind of assistance or facilities that can be used to threaten the safety and territorial integrity of Iraq."

But the resolution did not threaten any specific sanctions against member states such as Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain, which are hosting the US military buildup for a possible war on Iraq and it made no mention of the United States.

Taking a back seat for the time being to the European positioning over Iraq are Russia and China, which like France wield veto power in the Security Council and also favor continued UN weapons inspections.

The Russian foreign ministry said yesterday that Moscow and the United Nations had reached a preliminary agreement on the deployment of a Russian spy plane over Iraq after Saddam's government agreed to allow overflights by reconnaissance planes.

Meanwhile US war preparations gathered momentum with the arrival Sunday of hundreds of troops in Turkey, ahead of the possible deployment of an invasion force to march on Baghdad from the north.

## PM: Foreign media

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commitment. But this did not change Bangladesh's secular character, she emphasised.

The media in Bangladesh is free, Khaleda said. People here can also watch international television channels which are restricted in neighbouring countries, she pointed out.

The prime minister urged the civil societies and journalists to 'inform, direct and criticise' the government for attaining the common goal of people's welfare.

Temple said suppression of the press only damages a country's reputation both internally and internationally.

Bangladesh is unfortunately among the countries which have some experience of harassment of journalists through such activities are also found around the world, he said.

Print media in Bangladesh is considered relatively free, Temple said. "But, government-controlled electronic media continue to be viewed as entertainment media and

do not have much credibility as an objective source of news".

Bangladesh's press has 'developed a reputation for its vibrancy' and it has become 'a partner with civil society on governance issues', he said. But some century-old laws have stifling effect on people's right to know.

The WB official said, "Abroad, Bangladesh needs to recognise that in today's global environment, a country has to work at defining the image it wants to project and developing messages and channels to do so."

Seventy delegates from 23 Commonwealth countries are attending the conference.

Some cabinet members including Information Minister M Tariqul Islam, CJA Vice President Martin Mulligan and its founding president emeritus Derek Ingram and editors of national dailies were present at the inaugural session.