



Awami League President Sheikh Hasina addresses a public meeting at the Paltan Maidan yesterday, calling upon people to intensify agitation and demanding withdrawal of 'false cases' and release of political detainees.

## RAT arrests 11 from ZIA, recovers \$1400

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Team (RAT) arrested 11 persons yesterday from the Zia International Airport and seized 1400 US dollars and seven international passports from their possession, sources said.

The arrested, who are members of the so-called 'Tana Party', were identified as Kabir, Abdul Latif, Abdur Rahim, Lutfur Dipu, Belayet Hossain, Hamid Hossain, Delwar Hossain, Hashem Ali, Tariqul Islam, Mohammad Mostafa and Mohammad Delwar.

In another raid, RAT also arrested one Mosharrif, a listed criminal of Pallabi area in the early hours of yesterday from the city's Mirpur area.

## Bomb, armed attack in Rupsha BNP leader shot, 7 others injured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Eight people, including Rupsha BNP leader Mohiuddin Shaikh, were injured in bomb and armed attack by miscreants at Bagmara village under Rupsha upazila at about 2 pm yesterday.

Mohiuddin Shaikh, also general secretary of Rupsha-Bagerhat Bus Owners Association, was shot in the back and legs.

He was admitted to the Khulna Medical College Hospital while seven others to Khulna General Hospital with bomb injuries.

According to witnesses, three unidentified miscreants fired shots at the BNP leader while he along with devotees was coming out of Bagmara Darus Salam Mosque after Juma prayers.

The gang exploded crackers, leaving seven devotees, including three children injured.

They are Abdul Mannan, 40, Sheikh Rafiqul Islam, 50, Rumana, 7, Raju, 8, Rumi, 7, Mohammad Ali, 56, and Kubbat Ali, 62.

Immediately after the incident, police arrested two persons named Billal, 24, and Juman, 22, as suspects from Rupsha area.

Police said the arrestees belong to the outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP).

Security forces have been SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## Bangladesh, 4 other countries for free-trade agreement

AFP, *Colombo*

Commerce ministers from five countries around the Bay of Bengal yesterday called for a free-trade pact to boost regional economic cooperation.

The ministers from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand set up a group of experts to work out the details and ensure a framework treaty by February next year, Sri Lanka's Commerce Minister Ravi Karunanayake said.

"We are positive that we can move towards an FTA (free-trade agreement)," Karunanayake told reporters after the one-day ministerial meet.

"We are looking to the future and we see a lot of possibilities."

The BIMST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation) ministers also agreed to look at relaxing visa restrictions for businesspeople travelling between member states.

They will also ask their ambassadors to work closely in Geneva to ensure a common position on World Trade Organisation issues, Karunanayake said.

## Barisal polls Kamal expelled from BNP for indiscipline

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP yesterday expelled its rebel mayoral candidate Ahsan Habib Kamal for contesting the Barisal City Corporation polls without approval of the party.

Kamal was expelled in line with the article 5 (Ga) of the party constitution for breaking discipline, says a press release signed by Office Secretary of the BNP Nazrul Islam Khan.

The acting Barisal mayor was removed from all positions in the party, including president of the Barisal city BNP and vice-president of the Barisal district BNP.

Subsequently, his primary membership of the party has also been cancelled. The decision will take an immediate effect, the release added.

Kamal sought nomination from the BNP for the polls, but the party high command nominated Whip of the Jatya Sangsad Mujibur Rahman Sarwar.

The expulsion came after his refusal to withdraw his candidature despite request from the BNP high command, sources said.

Meanwhile, Kamal told our Barisal correspondent that the decision was undemocratic b e c a u s e

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

## 30 injured as villagers clash in Faridpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Magura*

At least 30 people were injured, ten of them seriously, in a clash between two groups of villagers at village Kamarkhal in Madhukhali upazila of Faridpur district yesterday morning.

The two groups -- one led by Khwaja Fakir and the other by Salam Fakir -- clashed over establishing their supremacy at the village.

## JCD attacks BCL procession at Netrakona, 15 injured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Netrakona*

Fifteen people were injured as JCD cadres attacked a BCL procession in Netrakona town yesterday morning.

BCL took out the procession at about 10 am marking the historic March 7.

When the procession reached near district BNP office at Chowtabazar, a group of JCD armed cadres swooped on the procession, leaving 15 BCL activists injured.

They also (JCD cadres) ransacked some shops and vehicles in the town.

The injured BCL men were admitted to the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH).

None was arrested in connection with the attack till 6 pm yesterday.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

ASM NURUNNABI

Community centres have proliferated in many areas of Dhaka City and have almost become part and parcel of life in the megalopolis. Nowadays, social functions like weddings, birthday parties, marriage anniversaries etc., are, for the most part, no longer held at residential houses due to space constraint and the hosts of such functions usually prefer to rent community centres which can generally accommodate a large number of guests.

The large number of community centres dotting the city speaks volumes of their great demand. Most such establishments are privately owned although some centres owned by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) are also in operation. Some community centres, particularly in localities like the Dhanmondi Residential Area, are well-known and draw business throughout the year.

The peak season, however, is during the winter months and business is usually slow during the month of Ramadan. Many community centres are equipped with air-coolers, which attract customers during the hot and humid days. In a densely populated

## DOWN TO EARTH Community centres now a booming business

lating city like Dhaka, there is always a steady demand for such places, so much so that it is necessary to book quite early, often months in advance, particularly if you want to rent the places that have a high demand.

Usually, these centres can be rented either for functions during the day or night. Rental charges for night is somewhat more because of illuminations that are usually part of nighttime arrangements. In general, the basic rent for community centres equipped with air-coolers ranges between Tk 12,000 and Tk 15,000 a day. Plus, charges for furniture, crockery, catering and other services add up to Tk 20,000 to Tk 30,000.

Many of these community centres are large enough to

accommodate more than 500 guests and also provide parking space. Also, there are a number of community centres owned by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) in different DCC wards. However, these buildings have a relatively small capacity and facilities there are rather poor. Some of these places have even fallen into disuse as community centres and are now used as offices, warehouses and rickshaw garages.

Nonetheless, the low rent charged by the DCC-operated community centres is affordable by people from low-income groups.

There are also a number of community centres near residential government colonies in the city where the rent is cheap and

moderate facilities are available. Their customers are mostly residents of government colonies but others also rent them to avail themselves of the low cost.

Although community centres serve an important purpose, some of them however do create nuisance due to their location in the heart of residential areas and disturb the peace of residents of nearby buildings.

The community centre business has thrived over the years, and given the ever-increasing number of social functions in a growing city like Dhaka, it continues to be a steady and lucrative business. Because of its profitability and quick return, many entrepreneurs are keen to invest in this area of business.



Encroachers have set up two tin-sheds in the children's park in Sayedabad to turn the open space into a hawkers' market.

## Ex-UP member murdered in Sirajganj

UNB, *Sirajganj*

A former UP member was murdered allegedly by the members of outlawed Sarbahara Party in Raiganj upazila on Thursday night.

Police said Tofazzal Hossain, 50, former member of Damainagar Union Parishad, came under attack at about 9pm while he was returning home from nearby bazar.

The assailants stabbed Tofazzal in the chest and abdomen. He died on the spot. They gang left the place chanting slogans in favour of the outlawed party.

The body was sent to hospital morgue for autopsy. A case was filed with Raiganj police.

## Robbers kill cow trader

A CORRESPONDENT, *Bogra*

A cow trader was stabbed to death and three others were injured by a gang of robbers at Kathom on the Bogra-Rajshahi Highway under Nandigram upazila in the early hours of yesterday.

They also looted 10 cows worth about Tk 70 thousand.

The dead was identified as Jhalu Mia, 30, son of late Ishaque of Taragonia village under Doulatpur upazila of Kushtia.

Sources said four cow traders -- Jhalu, Yeada Ali, 40, Arjed, 50 and Lakim, 35 -- purchased 10 cows from Fulbari Bazar under Sariakandi upazila in Bogra district.

They hired a truck and left for Kushtia with the cows aboard at about 2:00 am.

When they reached Kathom, a gang of robbers stopped the truck and

swooped on the cow traders. The gang stabbed the traders and fled the scenes with truck and cows.

Hearing screams, local people rushed to the spot and sent the injured cow traders to Bogra Mohammad Ali Hospital where Jhalu succumbed to his injuries at about 4 am.

## Sylhet jail in shambles

## Buildings worn out, shortage of staff

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, *Sylhet*

The 85-year-old Sylhet Central Jail has long been caught in a web of problems like run-down buildings and shortage of medical staff and wardens.

Rainwater leaking through the roof of the administrative building damages documents and files, sources said.

Although the jail authorities got funds for repairs several months ago, the work has not yet started.

A plan was taken up to shift the jail to the outskirts of Sylhet city and 54 acres of land was earmarked for construction. But the authorities gave up the plan to avoid additional spending.

However, the inspector general (prison) has recently visited the jail and decided to construct

buildings on the old premises, if necessary, instead of relocation, the sources said.

The post of deputy inspector general (DIG) (prison) has remained vacant since the jail was upgraded. The DIG (prison) of Comilla supervises the Sylhet Central Jail.

The posts of deputy superintendent, consultant physician and assistant surgeon are also vacant.

The 1,200-capacity jail has become home to 2,500 prisoners -- convicted or on trial. Only 222 warders cannot deal with the prisoners. At present, 11 posts of warder are vacant.

The 162-bed jail hospital, declared unusable by the public works department, has six general wards and a leprosy ward.

The only TB hospital for prisoners in Bangladesh, housed in

the same compound, has three wards.

But shortage of medical staff hampers healthcare: only one medical officer, six ward boys and an assistant cannot cope with the rush of prisoners.

The prisoners suffering from tuberculosis are sent to the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital or the Sylhet Chest Diseases Hospital for checkup.

Constructed in 1917, the jail, one of the two central jails of the then Assam-Bengal, was downgraded to district jail sometime after 1947.

Although it was upgraded to central jail again on March 3, 1997, its condition did not change, said the sources.

## A day at Bhomra land port border Smugglers scurry in and out

MORSHED ALI KHAN, *from Satkhira*

The borderline from Bhomra to Tolaigachha resembles a highway of ants scurrying in search of food.

Hundreds of people carry merchandise on bicycles. Women walk through paddy fields, with small sacks smartly balanced on head. Among the smuggled items, sugar is most popular.

The human highway in and out of India keeps the millions' worth of 'informal trade' vibrant every day.

"Police, customs and immigration officials and the BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) benefit from it," said a local man in Satkhira.

Customs officials at the Bhomra Land Port were whiling the time away on Wednesday noon. Only one official was

standing on the road to check a handful of travellers.

People were lazing around on the Indian side at Ghozadanga. Some Indians walked into Bangladesh, with the officials around, to talk to their friends.

Half a dozen travellers were sitting on a bench at the tin-roofed immigration office.

Suddenly, a man in lungi, carrying a small sack on head, bounded into the Bangladesh territory, only 100 feet away, and disappeared.

The arrival of the correspondent set the officials on edge. One of them yelled at a local man, "Ask your men to stop now!"

No building was constructed to accommodate officials since the port was built in 1953. A run-down building houses the customs office.

The check post is allowed clear a few items like oil cake,

fruits, maize and wheat for import from India and cotton and river fishes exported by Bangladesh, say officials.

The officials are unable to check and verify the imported or exported items due to lack of equipment.

"When a truckload of items comes here, we cannot check contents or weight. We don't have any warehouse either," said Dilip Kumar Majumdar, superintendent of customs excise and VAT (value-added tax) at the port.

The officials claimed that they had already surpassed the current fiscal year's target of Tk 5.17 crore in revenues. They earned Tk 7.29 crore, they say.

"If the port had been well-equipped, the revenue earnings would have increased manifold s "

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Aerial spray to start within a fortnight

## Work order today, says mayor

REZAUL KARIM

Aerial spray of insecticide to eradicate mosquito from the city will begin within a fortnight.

Work order for procurement of spray equipment will be given today and those will reach the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) in less than two weeks, Mayor Sadequa Hossain Khoka told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We have completed all preparations and formalities and hope to start aerial spray within a fortnight."

The DCC has already stocked insecticides and more worth Tk 1.90

crore will be procured this week, he told this correspondent at his official residence.

Insecticides will be sprayed in ultra low volume (ULV) concentrate to kill flying mosquitoes also.

The decision-making process was cumbersome as so many ministries and departments were involved, he said.

Earlier, there was a decision to hire airplane from abroad for aerial spray. Finally, at the instruction of the prime minister, it has been decided to purchase only the equip

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7