

Fingers pointed

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Development and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, at her office and asked them to make efforts to contain the prices during Ramadan.

The commerce minister was also present.

Khaleda directed the authorities to bring the wheeler-dealer businesspeople engaged in hoarding essentials to book.

Sources said the premier came down hard on the performance of the commerce minister and asked him to monitor the market himself.

She reminded the commerce minister that his predecessor under the past government monitored market every week and expressed doubt whether Khosru visited kitchen markets once in the past two years, sources said.

Official sources said at a joint meeting at the commerce ministry Khosru asked the home ministry to control markets, a proposal rejected outright by the home ministry.

Home ministry officials said law enforcers would intervene in case of market manipulation only.

The meeting identified extortion apart from hoarding a cause

for price spiral and asked law enforcers to give special attention to key points of import and transport of essential items.

State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar also had a meeting with Mannan Bhuiyan and discussed price rise and law and order in the month of Ramadan.

Talking to The Daily Star, most ministers held the commerce minister responsible for the market crisis which was eroding the image of the government.

"Instead of managing the market, he is busy with foreign trips," one of them said.

"It was a totally wrong decision to give the important portfolio to a complete businessman. I think the prime minister should correct the wrong," said a key policymaker of the government.

1,500 cops to curb Ctg crime

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Additional 1,500 police personnel will be deployed in the port city from today to curb crimes during Ramadan.

A Chittagong Metropolitan Police meeting yesterday decided to post the additional forces, mostly in riot gear. Special patrol teams will be posted to 154 important locations of the city, including shopping malls and commercial areas.

Besides, surveillance will be stepped up to avert any unprecedented incident during shopping hours, officials said.

The commissioner of Chittagong division, deputy commissioners and senior police officials attended the meeting, sources added.

Incidents of smuggling, looting and other crimes increase in the port city every year during Ramadan and Eid shopping, police said.

Biman staff

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They paraded through streets and later held a rally.

They said influential officials are targeting those who protest corruption in Biman and sought the prime minister's intervention.

Biman Steering Committee said if the suspension were not withdrawn in 72 hours, it would go for more protests.

Nasimul who joined Biman in 1978 is one of the senior pilots.

On October 21, the Directorate of Medical Services of Bangladesh Airforce, which conducts medical checkup of all Biman pilots every six months, declared him unfit due to diabetes.

Nasimul was first diagnosed diabetic two years ago, but the airforce cleared him as his physical problem was under control.

Under the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) guidelines, pilots with controlled diabetes can fly.

Talking to The Daily Star, Nasimul alleged that his suspension was motivated.

"As I dare to disclose corruption, some high Biman officials involved in malpractice want to have me removed from the pilot list," he said.

Bush

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the near simultaneous bombings.

Britain led a chorus of outrage among staunch US allies but vowed there would be no backing down from the drive to rebuild and restore stability to oil-rich Iraq, where US-led forces come under almost daily attack.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair "utterly condemns these evil and wicked attacks," his spokesman said.

"The terrorists and criminals responsible for them are obviously the enemies of the Iraqi people inasmuch as they are deliberately targeting those organisations who are helping to build towards a free and stable Iraq.

"But that work will continue," Blair's spokesman said.

France, a leading anti-war campaigner, also condemned the attacks but emphasized the importance of restoring sovereignty to Iraqis as a means of stopping the bloodshed.

"Faced with such acts of violence, there is now more than ever an urgent need to launch a political process based on the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty, mobilizing all forces with a view to rebuilding the country," foreign minister spokesman Herve Ladsous said.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell conceded Sunday he had been surprised by the intensity of the attacks.

In Brussels, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said bluntly "the situation is not very good" and said he hoped the US-led occupation force could regain "the control which is necessary for...security."

Saddam

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Iraq," the deputy minister added.

"I am telling you that we are waiting for him and his supporters."

For about half an hour, Ibrahim inspected the devastated bomb site in central Baghdad where 12 people died.

Son to die for killing father in Savar

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced one Borhanuddin to death for killing his father at Yearpur village under Savar upazila five years ago.

Judge A H M Mustaque Ahmed of the Court of First Additional District and Sessions Judge, delivered the verdict in absence of the convict.

The punishment of the convict will be effective from the date of his arrest or surrender.

According to the procession, Borhan chopped his father Sultan Mia to death at their house at about 9:00am on October 9, 1998. Borhan committed the gruesome murder as his father rebuked him for not saying his prayers regularly.

Victim's brother Nasiruddin filed a murder case with Savar Police Station, accusing Borhanuddin the same day.

The investigation officer of the case pressed charge against Borhanu on November 19, 1999.

Nine prosecution witnesses were cross examined during the trial.

Ramadan begins

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autonomous organisations have been announced. From Saturday to Wednesday, office timings will be from 9:30am to 3:30pm while on Thursday from 9:30am to 2:30pm. There will be a 15-minute break for Zohr prayers from 1:15pm to 1:30pm everyday.

However, institutions rendering essential public services such as commercial banks, post offices and hospitals will follow their own schedules.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina have greeted the countrymen on the occasion, issuing separate messages.

Red tape

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working for development projects, measures for prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, purchase of healthcare equipment including those for safe blood transfusion and safe motherhood programme and construction of new sub-health centres across the country.

Sources in the family planning directorate said more than 90 per cent of the union-level family welfare centres have run out of drugs, usually distributed among clients.

Meanwhile, Joint Chief of the health ministry's planning cell Dr Abdul Wahed Khan met the development partners on Thursday to discuss a possible bailing out of the current fund crisis and also to find out alternative ways of funding the next health programme likely to be launched in January next year.

Health Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain admitted the fund crisis but said, "We have enough stock of drugs and there is no shortage of drugs in health centres anywhere."

He explained, "The delay in budget approval is nothing new. The Planning Commission usually takes a few months to review the budget proposals but we hope to get approval soon."

Damien Personnaz, spokesman for the UN Children's Fund, said it's not surprising because it's happened before, at the UN headquarters in Baghdad.

Agencies said it's unlikely that they will scale back their operations after the latest attack, because they have already done so.

Meantime, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw says he's shocked and outraged at the Red

Rajuk orders halt to Aziz cooperative complex construction

Probe finds 'massive anomalies' in building designs, approval

UNB, Dhaka

Rajuk, the capital development authority, has challenged the authenticity of architectural plan of the 14-storey Aziz Cooperative Shopping-cum-Housing Complex at Shahbagh.

In an order issued on October 22, Rajuk has asked the real estate company which developed the complex at Shahbagh to halt construction and submit all original copies of its building designs and permission documents in seven days.

In a preliminary investigation on the Aziz Cooperative project, Rajuk found anomalies in designs and other documents including official approval of the architectural plan.

Rajuk started the investigation after Aziz Cooperative Flat Owners and Inhabitants Welfare Society in a petition complained about the anomalies and questioned the legality of the architectural plan of the building.

Contacted by telephone, Abdul Latif Hilali, the authorised officer of plan approval section of Rajuk who signed the order sent to the devel-

oper concerned, confirmed that the preliminary investigation revealed massive anomalies in construction of the complex.

Rajuk in its letter also asked Aziz Cooperative to stop the ongoing extended construction work on a planned 18-storey medicine market on the project land and warned of legal action if the developer failed to comply with the order.

Beside, Rajuk has asked the developer to immediately provide some facilities like staircases to the flat owners.

According to the flat owners, the Industrial Promotion Services and Aziz Cooperative Housing Society signed an agreement in 1984 and started registration, construction and allocation of shops and flats to the owners.

There are some 160 flat owners and 650 shop owners in the complex.

Contacted, AK Mohammad Hossain, president of Aziz Cooperative Flat Owners and Inhabitants Welfare Society, told the news agency that they were subjected to harassment by the developer.

Red Cross

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slightly injured inside the compound, Westphal said.

"The ICRC certainly condemns this attack in the strongest terms and expresses its heartfelt sympathy with all the victims and their families, not just our two employees who were killed," Westphal told AFP.

"Any deliberate attack causing death and injury among civilians is prohibited by international humanitarian law and does negate the most basic principles of humanity," he added.

"We will also reassess our conditions in Baghdad over the next few days; there will be no immediate decision taken on that, we need to take stock," Westphal said.

"Such an attack is a major blow for us," Westphal told The Associated Press. "It's a big shock. It is obviously impossible to move onto a normal day's business, so we really have to step back and take stock."

In Geneva, United Nations aid agencies said they were shocked by the bombings, but not surprised.

But they said it was unlikely their operations would be affected: They already had cut back to skeleton staffs because of the August 19 truck bombing of UN headquarters in Baghdad.

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Meantime, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw says he's shocked and outraged at the Red

Cross bombing in Iraq.

Prior to entering a European Union foreign ministers meeting in Brussels, Straw also called the security situation in Baghdad "unsatisfactory." Still, he said the overall situation in Iraq is getting better. He said the coalition will not be deterred.

He said ICRC officials in Baghdad and at the Geneva headquarters were reviewing operations.

"It's too early for us at the moment to say how this attack will impact on our activities," Westphal said. "We will have a fairly clear idea within the next few days how we want to proceed."

Laden's hideout located

ANI, Lahore

The world's most wanted terrorist Osama bin Laden is hiding in the difficult terrain of mountains northeast of Kabul, an intelligence report prepared by the International Security Assistance Force has said.

The classified intelligence document said Laden is living with the Guzer tribe, "which is providing military support to him".

"Bin Laden could hardly ask for a better hiding place. It's impossible to access the area where he is hiding," The Daily Times quoted the report as saying while referring to the mountains covered with shrubs and smugglers' trails.

Bin Laden has been on the run since the US-led coalition entered Afghanistan in 2001 after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Baghdad bloodbath kills 35

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Baghdad, witnesses said US troops opened fire, killing at least four Iraqi civilians, after a roadside bomb exploded as a US military convoy passed. The US command did not immediately confirm the incident or any US casualties.

At the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross in central Baghdad, witnesses said a suicide bomber drove an explosive-packed vehicle, apparently an ambulance, right up to security barriers outside the building at about 8:30 a.m. and detonated it, blowing down the Red Cross's front wall, devastating the interior and blowing shrapnel and debris over a wide area.

The ICRC said at its headquarters in Geneva that 12 people were killed, including two of its Iraqi employees. Baghdad ICRC spokeswoman Nada Doumani said she believed the employees were security guards.

Then, through the morning, four other vehicles exploded at police stations in the Baghdad area. Ambulances, sirens wailing, criss-crossed the city all morning.

"From what our indications are, none of those bombers got close to the target," Hertling said. But the explosions outside police stations led streetscapes of broken, bloody bodies and twisted, burning automobiles. Iraqi police reported some 27 people killed in those attacks, including 15 Iraqis at the ad-Doura station in southern Baghdad.

One US soldier was among them, and other Americans were wounded, said Lt. Sarmad al-Hakim, an ad-Doura officer. The US command did not immediately confirm those American casualties. Teams of US military police have been stationed at Baghdad police

stations in recent months.

At a fifth police station in central Baghdad, officers stopped a suicide bomber before he could detonate his Land Cruiser. "He was shouting, 'Death to the Iraqi police! You're collaborators!'" said police Sgt. Ahmed Abdel Sattar.

Hertling said about 10 Iraqis were killed and 10 others wounded at the Red Cross bombing. Dr. Allawi Attiyah of the Ibn al-Nafeez hospital also put the toll at 10 dead, and said 12 were injured. Nada Doumani, Baghdad spokeswoman for ICRC, said she believed one or two of the Red Cross's Iraqi guards were killed.

Hertling said he believed the attacks may have been timed with the start of Ramadan in order to heighten tensions during the fasting month, when Muslims abstain from food and drink during daylight hours and religious feelings run high.

Near the three-story ICRC building, cigarette vendor Ghani Khadim, 50, said he saw an Iraqi ambulance pass by his stand and approach the small compound some 100 yards away. It suddenly exploded, he said, and the blast blew out windows and injured his wife and daughter in his house behind his stand.

The vehicle had stopped some 60 feet in front of the Red Cross headquarters, "at a line of barrels we have had in front to protect the building," one Red Cross employee, who would not give his name.

The blast blew down a 40-foot section of the ICRC front wall, demolished a dozen cars in the area and apparently broke a water main, flooding the streets. The inside of the building was heavily damaged, littered with shattered glass, doors blown off their hinges, toppled bookcases and collapsed ceilings. A

gaping crack had opened in a back wall, some 100 yards from the blast site, where a crater some five yards across quickly filled with water.

The Red Cross staff member said someone began firing off an automatic weapon immediately after the explosion "100 bullets or more." He said he believed it was a gunman somehow associated with the bomber "who wanted to scare people more."

Spokeswoman Doumani said more than 100 workers would normally be at ICRC after 9 a.m., but staffers said only about one-quarter that number were present at 8:30 a.m.

"Of course we don't understand why somebody would attack the Red Cross," she said. "The Red Cross has operated in this country since 1980, and we have not been involved in politics." Asked whether the organization would remain in Iraq, she replied: "I don't even know what we're going to do."

Two buildings away, the explosion devastated the interior of the Al-Rasheed Hotel, where Nawal private polyclinic operated by Dr. Jamal F. Massa, 53, who had been planning to open it as a full-fledged hospital next month.

"We feel helpless when we see this," he said. He said he couldn't understand why the Red Cross would be attacked, since it had even reduced its foreign staff recently. "This only hurts guards and other Iraqis."

The Red Cross and other international aid organizations had reduced their Baghdad staffs after the car bombing of UN headquarters in Baghdad on Aug. 19, in which 23 people died in what appeared to be a warning against international support for the US occupation.

The US general Hertling said Monday was "a great day for the

Conciliation of Disputes Board Act draft okayed

UNB, Dhaka

The cabinet yesterday approved the draft of a new law styled "Conciliation of Disputes (Municipal Areas) Board Act 2003".

It replaces the Conciliation of Disputes (Municipal Areas) Ordinance 1979.

The approval was given at a regular meeting of the cabinet held at the Prime Minister's Office with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair.

A report on the statistics of the existing ponds and tanks and road-side water-bodies in public and private sectors across the country was presented in the meeting.

The meeting decided to send the statistics to Local Government Division for formulating a work plan for "proper use of these waterbodies under a supplementary programme for poverty alleviation".

Reports on implementation of the decisions taken in the cabinet meetings during the last two years were also presented before the cabinet.

Besides, an obituary reference on the death of Durre Samad Rahman, wife of Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, was adopted by the cabinet meeting.

Cabinet members and State Ministers for concerned ministries attended the meeting. Cabinet Secretary, Principal Secretary to the PM office and concerned secretaries were present.

Diarrhoea

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of Communicable Disease Control at the health directorate.

Most of the upazila health centres in the districts are overcrowded with patients mainly suffering from the water-borne diseases, a senior health official said. "We are very much concerned at the rising attacks especially in the northern districts," he added.

Another official said the 31-bed and 50-bed upazila health centres are mostly unable to handle the rush of diarrhoea patients and are sending many serious cases to district hospitals.

Director General of Health Services Prof. Md Mizanur Rahman said, "We are aware of the situation and have sent a special medical team to all the affected districts. The team will suggest fresh strategies to tackle the situation."

Intravenous cholera saline and oral saline are commonly prescribed for the affected. Most of the serious patients have been attacked for a second or third time in less than a week. They appeared malnourished, reports said.

Price bull mauls

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his salary increased Tk 240 to Tk 4,263 a month.

"But my landlord increased rent by Tk 200 and I have to spend Tk 200 more a week on grocery," he said. "I live in Gandaria and have to pay Tk 5 in fare instead of the previous Tk 2."

A private employee said his salary did not increase in the last five years, while his house rent alone increased Tk 1,000.

Prices goes higher

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import duty, at least 14,000 tonnes of imported onion bought at a lower price during the past one week should have reached the market by now," the additional secretary said.

The commerce ministry, however, announced a week back that a kilo of imported onion should not cost more than Tk 18. That price was calculated taking all possible costs into account, the commerce ministry official said.

According to a monitoring report of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB), imported Indian onion at Shyambazaar wholesale market was selling at Tk 18 a kilo.

The monitoring report that the commerce ministry received on October 25 said a kilo of Indian onion sold at Tk 24 to 25 in the retail market, Salam added.

"It's true that the fall of onion prices on the retail market is not upto the desired level," said the additional secretary, "it is a bit baffling why the difference between wholesale and retail prices is so wide."

A TCB source said the corporation has nothing to do with price-fixing: it just collects market information, makes an analysis and sends a daily report to the commerce ministry.

Citing statistics of the Department of Agricultural Marketing, the source

said the annual demand for onion in Bangladesh is 600,000 tonnes against 140,000 tonnes of domestic production.

On the kitchen market yesterday, tomato sold at Tk 50-52 a kilo, up from Tk 34, brinjal at Tk 22-32 from Tk 18 and green chilli at Tk 40 from Tk 16 three weeks ago. A kilo of bean sold at Tk 50-60 from Tk 25, cucumber at Tk 25-35 from Tk 12.

"With the price hike of all essentials, we are facing a tremendous pressure on our monthly budget for kitchen market shopping," said Nurjahan Begum of Mirpur-1 while shopping at Karwan Bazar kitchen market yesterday.

Ruhul Amin of Mohammadpur area bought bitter gourd at Tk 36 per kilo from a market on Sadek Khan Road Tuesday.

Nizamuddin of Shahinbagh bought onion at Tk 26 a kilo from the wholesale market of Karwan Bazar the same day.

Usually, the TCB is supposed to import commodities to ease market crisis. But the state-run corporation has not been doing its job for long.

"Though it is TCB's chartered duty to handle such situation, it is side-tracked due to the government's policy," a commerce ministry source said.

Khilgaon OC

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protesting the death of Shakil Ahmed Chowdhury Sumon, who was a resident of the locality, in Khilgaon police custody. They demanded punishment to the officer-in-charge (OC) and others responsible.

Shopkeepers in ward No. 26 (Meradia, Shepahiabagh and Goran) of Dhaka City Corporation kept their shutters down from 8:00am to 1:00pm to press their demands.

During the hartal hours, the locals took out a protest procession.

Sumon's family reiterated that they would file cases against Entejar Rahman and some other policemen of Khilgaon Police Station on charge of torturing Sumon to death.

"We'll definitely file the cases soon. I won't spare the killers of my son," said Sumon's mother Noorjahan Begum.

Khilgaon police arrested Sumon and four others during an alleged robbery attempt at house Kna/20 at Malibagh Chowdhury para Thursday night. The four were allegedly carrying three firearms and some lethal weapons.

Police claimed that Sumon

jumped to the ground from the roof of a six-storey building to escape arrest and a mob beat him and others up. But, an autopsy report prepared by a medical board did not find evidence to corroborate the police version that the young man died from wounds he had suffered due to the jump.

Sumon's parents alleged that the OC and some other policemen tortured their son to death as they failed to pay the policemen Tk 1 lakh, which they had demanded. The OC denied the allegation.

Main opposition Awami League's Organising Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury visited the Meradia house of Sumon and consoled his family members.

A three-member delegation of AL lawmakers will also visit the residence of Sumon this morning.

Question leak

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"We are working to prepare another set of questions for the test," the DIG said.

One thousand and five hundred constables of Dhaka Metropolitan Police were to sit for the test at Rajarbagh Police Line.

8th JS limps

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cotted most sittings, the House met on two-thirds of its total workdays without the AL lawmakers.

Legislators of the AL staged 36 walkouts on 51 workdays they attended the Jatiya Sangsad.

The sitting parliament began its journey on October 28, 2001 with the main opposition boycotting the House, rejecting poll results and alleging widespread persecution of its leaders and minority communities in the wake of the October 1 ballot.

The AL joined the House in the third session on June 24, 2002 and maintained the run until the eighth session when a junior minister's remarks against Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina incensed its deputies, who staged a noisy walkout never to return to the next session.

And the AL is yet to make its mind on joining the Jatiya Sangsad.

Yet the current parliament will go down in history for 'creating some rare precedents' including the 'removal of an elected president by a parliamentary party resolution' in June last year.

AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury tendered his resignation from presidency after the parliamentary party of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the coalition leader, asked him to step down.

"There is no doubt about it that we need to change the rules of engagement with these people," al-Rabii told CNN. "The rules of engagement now are too