

MPs to get Nam flats

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not furnished.

A 21-bed hospital with modern facilities will also be set up at two blocks of the MP Hostel area and the rest of the MP Hostel buildings will be allocated for use by the parliament secretariat.

"The committee agreed to accept the flats in their current condition because the ministry failed to decorate the flats due to fund crisis," Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain, chairman of the committee, told newsmen emerging from the meeting held at the Sangsad Bhavan.

"But the ministry assured again that a letter had already been sent to the finance ministry seeking funds to purchase furniture. If the finance ministry grants money they will do the furnishing," the chairman added.

According to the rules, Tk 600 is payable for an 1800sqft and Tk 400 for a 1200sqft accommodation in service charges by the members of parliament.

"A sub-committee headed by Khandakar Delwar Hossain will receive the flats within a week," Shajahan Khan, a member of the house committee and an Awami

League lawmaker, told The Daily Star.

The flats will be allocated to lawmakers of different political parties, once they are received.

A member of the committee said at the meeting that lawmakers of India received residential facilities without paying for anything. The same system should be introduced in Bangladesh, too, he felt.

The remuneration and privileges of the lawmakers were hugely hiked only in July last.

Khandakar Delwar Hossain presided over the meeting, with committee members and officials concerned attending.

PM urges

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man are in the process.

Chief Justice KM Hasan said everywhere in the world, particularly in Bangladesh, position, skill and even honesty of the judges are being called into question.

"So it is the responsibility mainly of the judges to give a befitting answer to this question so that such question never arises," the chief justice told the judges.

Tannery town land

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According to the project, the government will bankroll 60 percent of the project cost and mobilise the rest in loan or grant from foreign sources.

Officials said the government, which has been trying to find foreign lenders for the project, is ready to fund the rest in case of non-availability of any foreign sources.

The government has also asked the authorities to take effective steps for quick implementation of this project to cut down on environmental pollution in the capital where the industries have thrived over the last 50 years.

Officials said the government is firm to relocate the industries to the town.

Hazaribagh tanneries spew nearly 21,600 square metres of waste into the Buriganga river on average.

The tannery industry manufactures 7 million square metres of leather a year that fetch Bangladesh Tk 1,500 crore to Tk 1,600 crore.

Officials said the relocation of the tanneries could boost the industry and help it attract foreign investment.

Legislator LK Siddiqi, Land Secretary Azad Ruhul Amin, Housing and Public Works Secretary Aminur Rahman and high officials attended the allotment committee meeting.

The committee also approved

acquisition of more land for the construction of government facilities and institutions including a women's university, Ansars-VDP barracks and a youth training centre.

The committee approved acquisition of 208,1997 acres in total, including 2.38 acres for the establishment of the Asian University for Women at Jalalabad in Chittagong, 1.50 acres for the Youth Training Centre at Narayanganj, two acres for an orphanage at Rugganj in Narayanganj, 1.63 acres for Ansar-VDP barracks in Barisal and 10.175 acres for Gulbagh Housing Cooperatives Limited at Savar.

The land minister at the meeting stressed proper utilisation of the land, saying: "We must ensure that not a single inch of land remains unutilised."

Non-govt school

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increased house rent, pension, service rules and reinstatement of sacked teachers and employees.

The National Front of Teachers and Employees in a press release yesterday urged all non-governmental teachers and employees to make today's strike programme a success.

The front also urged the teachers to stage demonstrations at district headquarters on January 8 and bring out torch processions in all districts and upazilas on January 14.

3 die in road mishaps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three people were killed in as many road accidents in the city in a span of 11 hours ending at 7:30am yesterday.

Mohammad Badal, 45, sustained serious injuries when a vehicle hit him near Farmgate overbridge early in the morning as he was crossing the road.

A passer-by took Badal to Orthopaedic hospital at Agargaon where he succumbed to his injuries at about 8:45am.

Later in the afternoon, Babul Shikder, 25, a truck driver, died on the spot when his vehicle rammmed a stone-laden truck parked in front of Matuati Madrasah.

In the other incident, Rafiqul Islam, 18, died instantly when a truck crushed him and his bicycle in front of Haji Kudrat Ali Market at Pallabi at about 8:30pm on Friday night.

4 top criminals nabbed, arms recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested four listed top criminals of Mohammadpur Police Station from Savar Friday night and recovered three firearms and some ammunition.

Of the four, Sohel Riaz alias Pappu, ringleader of Pappu group in Mohammadpur and his aide Lallu Uddin alias Lallu are accused in 20 cases of those, 10 for murders -- filed with different police stations in the city.

Pappu and Lallu are accused in the killings of Imon, Milton, Mintu, Mizan, Roby, Ashraf, Mottakin, Noor-e-Alam, Sagir and Niaz, Mohammadpur police said.

Ashraful Islam and Jasim Uddin, other arrestees, are Pappu's operatives, police said.

Acting on a tip off, a team of Mohammadpur police raided Abu Taher's house at Kaundia Madhyapara at around 11:00pm and arrested the four with a nine mm pistol.

Following their statement, police raided an abandoned house near the Mohammadpur Housing Estate the following morning and recovered two revolvers and nine bullets.

Three killed in Comilla road mishap

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

Three people were killed and seven others injured in a road accident near Palki Cinema Hall at Chandina on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway in the early hours yesterday.

The accident occurred at about 2:30am when a Chittagong-bound night coach from Dhaka collided head on with a microbus coming from opposite direction.

Three passengers of the microbus died on the spot and seven others injured. The dead are micro-bus driver Shahin, 28, Roushan Begum, 60, and Raju Miah, 20.

The injured were admitted to Chandina Health Complex. Their identity could not be known.

New crackdown

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"Steps are underway to take stern action against outlaws having links to policemen and political leaders," a senior police official claimed.

Eight outlawed organisations operating in the region are Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP--M-L), PBCP (Janajuddho), Biplobi Communist Party, Ganobahini, Sarbahara Party, Gano Mukti Fouz and Banglar Communist Party. Their operatives possess huge illegal arms and ammunition and are widely believed to be harboured by political godfathers.

4 troops killed

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fired at the Bulgarian base hit a nearby university instead, injuring some people.

Iraqi witnesses said a water truck contained one of the bombs, and that coalition soldiers sprayed it with gunfire as it drove toward a military base beside the university and exploded. Casualties were removed in stretchers, and soldiers fired in the air to disperse the crowds.

Stasinski said a logistics base where soldiers of different nationalities serve was also targeted. No Poles were killed, he said. Thai soldiers also operate in the area, but Jakrapob Penkair, a government spokesman in Bangkok, said there were no reports of Thai casualties.

Witnesses said smoke and fire rose from the mayor's office after a mortar attack. They reported a car bomb at the university.

Karbala is a holy Shia city south of Baghdad. Ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, who was captured by US forces on Dec. 13, conducted a bloody crackdown on residents of Karbala and other Shiite areas in 1991.

Shanto's parents numb in loss

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parents of Hasibul Islam Shanto, who went missing since Wednesday afternoon only to be found dead in an abandoned house in Goran Friday afternoon, were numbed at the loss of yet another offspring.

Tania Begum and Mojibur Rahman, parents of six-year-old Shanto, are yet to recover from the loss of their elder son Rajibul Haq Azim nearly two years ago, sat motionless at their East Goran residence after Shanto's burial at a local graveyard yesterday.

After suffering from prolonged illness, Azim died in hospital on January 19, 2001 at 8.

Shanto, a student of Golden Heaven Kindergarten School, was the third among two brothers and two sisters.

Hugging his surviving daughters Sima, 8, and Babuni, 4, Mojibur said, "I could never imagine my innocent son would be killed."

Meanwhile, Shanto's uncle Khandakar Monir Hossain received the body from Dhaka Medical College Hospital after autopsy at about 2:00pm.

The killing of their second son shook the parents to their core and they only went to lodge a case with Khilgaon Police Station on Saturday night, more than 24 hours after the body was found.

In the FIR (first information report), Mojibur said unknown criminals murdered his son, sources said.

The schoolboy went missing while returning home from his father's workplace, hardly 150 yards away from their house. Mojibur works as an assistant at the office of Ward Commissioner ABM Enamul Haq Quiyum.

Newspapers lack proper policy, says Latifur

BSS, Dhaka

Former chief of the caretaker government Justice Latifur Rahman has said the newspapers in the country cannot contribute up to the expectations since they lack a proper policy.

"The press in Bangladesh is absolutely free. But they are not guided by a proper policy," he said while inaugurating the two-day biennial conference of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) at the National Press Club in the city.

Information Minister Tariqul Islam spoke on the occasion as the special guest, said many newspapers are making money but are reluctant to give better wages to journalists.

"We have discussed the formation of the 6th wage board for the journalists, but some of the owners editors did not respond positively." He, however, said negotiations were underway to give newsmen a new wage structure.

BFUJ President Gias Kamal Chowdhury presided over it.

Latifur said the newsmen, despite many odds, have been playing a key role in society to educate people and mould their opinion on national and international issues.

He, however, said there are some who have been practising yellow journalism, but their number is not big. "I humbly request all the newsmen to prepare reports

Chemical engineers

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form for our professional graduates to exchange ideas, experiences and research findings in different areas of this branch of knowledge," he said.

The department and Chemical Engineering Alumni Association jointly organised the function. The conference will be a unique opportunity for both industrialists and academics from home and abroad to discuss issues and prospects of a new generation of chemical and process industries in developing countries.

"Two-thirds of our graduates are working in fertiliser, gas, petrochemical, pharmaceuticals, paper and pulp, cement, basic chemical, sugar and food and allied industries in the country. Presently, one-third of the graduates are employed abroad," Dr Mahmud told The Daily Star.

During the 1950s and '60s people did not understand the need for chemical engineers in running an industry. Traditionally, applied chemistry and mechanical engineering were the first choices for such industries then. Later on, chemical engineers were able to demonstrate their skills in planning and installation of the chemical industries.

Currently the transition from the largely state-funded enterprises to units built on private initiatives has presented new areas of opportunities as well as challenges for the chemical engineers, he added.

"In the private sector, chemical engineers have taken the initiative

"Having been busy in office, I bought peanuts and an egg for Shanto and told him to go home alone," said the aggrieved father.

"I would have never left him alone if I knew this could be a fatal day out for him," Mojibur said trying to check his tears.

Receiving an unanimous phone call at 5:00pm on Friday, police recovered Shanto's dumped body and Mojibur identified his son later. The body bore bruises in the ears, head and face.

However, police could not make any headway in the killing till the writing of this report at 7:30 last evening.

"The victim's parents are shocked and they are not in a position to provide any information to us right now," said Arman Ali, officer-in-charge of Khilgaon Police Station.

"We'll get leads to the murder once the parents give us some information," he added.

Criminal Iqbal nabbed in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday nabbed an alleged leader of a criminal gang with his four alleged operatives at Panirkal in Paharoli.

Raiding a house on information, police held Mohammad Iqbal, alleged chief of Raozan-based criminal gang Iqbal Bahini, and four others at about 6:30pm, police said.

However, police could not name the four other arrestees immediately.

Iqbal, accused in over 100 cases including murder, abduction and extortion, and the others were being quizzed, police added.

A case was lodged with Paharoli Police Station.

based on facts," he added.

Citing the caretaker government's role in ensuring press freedom in 1991, he said former chief adviser of the caretaker administration Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed had paved ways by repealing articles 15, 16 and 17 of the Special Powers Act.

Tariqul also said the newspapers have been using the press freedom in a negative way. "If you take any newspaper, you will find them flooded with negative and frustrating news items," he said posing a question about whether newspapers should make people feel frustrated instead of optimistic.

Criticising the trend of advertisement culture in the press, the information minister said the publishers are compelling the readers to swallow whatever they publish. A newspaper, he said, is bought surely not to see the pages riddled with commercial advertisements, which occupy even the front and back pages.

Referring to the propaganda by a major political party and a few journalists abroad, the minister said such false and fabricated campaign would not yield anything. The alliance government is not rootless, he said in an oblique reference to the main opposition Awami League.

The BFUJ leaders demanded immediate formation of the sixth wage board, 60 percent dearness allowance and a national policy for newspaper industry.

CHT delegation submits memo demanding peace, safety

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 14-member delegation from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) yesterday submitted a memorandum to the parliamentary standing committee on the CHT affairs placing 18 demands, including ensuring safety and security of the CHT people.

The delegation also warned that if the demands were not met by January 16, 2004, a tougher action programme would be undertaken to drive their demands home.

The Parbatya Gana Parishad (PGP), a platform of the Bangla-speaking settlers in the three hill districts, met the standing committee in context of the recent rise in retaliatory abductions by the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) and the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF).

In last week alone, nine activists of the pro-peace accord PCJSS and eight others of the anti-accord UPDF were allegedly abducted by rival operatives in Rangamati and Khagrachhari.

Led by Jalal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury and Moniruzzaman Monir, president and secretary of the PGP, the team also included Obin Chandra Chakma, president of Khagrachhari chapter of Hindu Bouddha Khristan Oikya Parishad, and Monilal Tripura, a leader of the indigenous people of Mairanga. The meeting was held in the Jatya Sangsad Bhavan.

"We are feeling insecure. Both the groups demand toll from us. If we refuse to pay, we are tortured by them," Jalal Uddin told the parliamentary committee. The PGP team requested the parliamentary body to take immediate actions to disarm both the groups.

Thrown out

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Mirpur and Mohammadpur, and in Kamrangirchar, Savar and Paikpara. But a large number of them are still staying there hoping for a High Court injunction on the eviction.

"The ward commissioner's men threatened that will be driven away by any means," said Manashi, a 50-year-old widow from Nilphamari. Her only son, a rickshawpuller, deserted her as the eviction started.

Ain O Salish Kendra, the Coalition for Urban Poor, two non-governmental organisations, and two residents of the bustee filed a writ with the High Court on December 24, saying the eviction was carried out without lawful authority.

A High Court vacation bench of Justice Mahmud Hossain heard the writ yesterday and fixed today for further hearing. Dr Kamal Hossain and Advocate Ranzan Ali Shikder represented the petitioners.

The eviction started at a time when rehabilitation of 3,000 slum dwellers at Sreepur in Gazipur awaits a final approval of the land ministry, some victims said.

In 1994, the HBRI attempted to evict the slum people without any prior notice and Modhumala, a garment worker living in Section-2 of the slum for 15 years, filed a writ with the High Court. The court prohibited forced eviction without prior notice and proper rehabilitation of the slum dwellers.

Laid-off factories

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Privatisation Rules, prospective buyers will not be liable for any debt of the privatised factories and the government will resolve or waive debts through negotiation with banks or other parties concerned.

It also offers a rebate up to 35 percent for any buyer who would pay the whole price of a factory in one instalment and an additional five percent in foreign currency.

In September last, a six-member committee was formed headed by the Privatisation Commission chairman to formulate the draft rules.

There are presently over two dozen laid-off mills and factories while the government plans to privatise another 75 state-owned enterprises within the next three years.

Haji

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Although not mandatory, the discount is important for market competition, travel agents said.

Some 1,200 of 1,700 travel agencies in Bangladesh are Atab members. Of them, 600 agencies are presently active. Haab members number 157.

Waiting in tears

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mother asked his younger son Nazmul Arefin.

The shock of the loss stole the voice of his wife, who sat numbed in a corner.

"We first received the unofficial news from relatives in the morning," said Nazmul, fighting back tears.

At 9:30am, the army headquarters sent a messenger saying the Benin crash killed all 15 Bangladeshi army personnel on board.

The family's doubt over not getting his body added to its woes.

"As the Boeing plunged into the Atlantic Ocean, we are doubtful about the recovery of the body," said Nazmul.

He referred to an unofficial information that the bodies were retrieved from the ocean, but looked in a fog of disparate information trickling in.

The army could not confirm the report, saying the operation was still on.

Mental hospital robbery

Insider connection suspected

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The doctors and staff of Pabna Mental Hospital have termed the mysterious robbery at the store a case of pilferage by a section of staff.

Locals and most of the doctors and staff alleged that some doctors and staff are involved in Thursday night's incident, in which robbers allegedly took away medicines and cash said to be worth about Tk 31 lakh.

Police arrested storekeeper Zillur Rahman and cashier Abdul Gafar.

Sources said a hospital ambulance was used without permission from the authorities at the time of the alleged robbery. The stolen drugs and money were carried away on board the vehicle, they added.

Benin plane crash

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arrive in Dhaka today.

This is the biggest casualty for Bangladeshi peacekeepers overseas. Accidents and mine explosions have killed 24 other army personnel since 1992.

The news of their death reached the army headquarters in Dhaka Friday night. A Bangladeshi peacekeeping team deployed in Sierra Leone has already left for Benin to identify the dead. Their bodies were being recovered till yesterday.

Operated by Union des Transports Africains (UTA), the Boeing with 151 passengers and 10 crew botched its takeoff and skidded down the runway, smashing into a building before tumbling nose down into the Gulf of Guinea. Aviation officials suggested the plane was overloaded or unbalanced.

Lebanese army divers recovered the final piece of fuselage from the Boeing Friday. Till yesterday, the death toll was estimated at 119, most of them Lebanese expatriates heading home for the holidays. Twenty-two people were injured.

The president, prime minister and chief of army staff expressed condolences at the death and deep sympathy for the bereaved families.

The ISPR requests family members and relatives of the deceased

Hospital Director Dr AKM Abdus Samad Mia said Zillur took the ambulance to Tangail for personal use without permission from any authorised staff. He said they are probing the matter.

Zillur is accused in several murder, abduction and medicines robbery cases and was freed on bail. He illegally enjoyed all government facilities while on bail for the last one year.

Samad, however, said they knew nothing about him.

A hospital source said the robbery was stage-managed to avert an inspection of the auditors from the health ministry to probe pilferage from the store.

The doctors and staff demanded of the district administration and health ministry to run an investigation in to the matter, although the authorities are yet to form a probe committee.

to contact GSO-1, Military Operation Directorate and Army Head-quarters. The contact phone numbers are 011807073, 0171395419, 8829186, 9870011-20 with extensions 2046 and 2056.

In recent past, four army personnel were killed in two road accidents in Sierra Leone -- a corporal died in one accident in February last year and another in March killed three non-commissioned officers. "The death toll in Sierra Leone stood at eight until the plane crash," said Lt Col Nazrul.

Bangladesh, which has the second largest number of UN peacekeepers, now has about 4,500 troops deployed in nine missions in Africa, Asia and Europe.

The army has sent a total of 30,091 troops to 28 missions since 1992.

Vajpayee

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Riaz Khokhar told a news briefing in Islamabad.

Musharraf stunned Vajpayee by crossing the podium to shake hands with the Indian leader at the last Saarc summit in Kathmandu, in January 2002.

Saarc groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Iran quake

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has admitted Iran cannot cope on its own. The official IRNA news agency quoted Iran's Interior Ministry as saying assistance would be welcome from every corner of the globe other than Israel.

Swiss rescuers with sniffer dogs were the first foreign team to start hunting for trapped survivors, Iranian television said.

Reuters witnesses said the city's graveyards were crammed to overflowing with fully-clothed corpses and a stench of death was beginning to pervade the streets.

The International Red Crescent has advised people to wear gloves and facemasks because of fears of an epidemic.

Fatemeh, 35, was burying her two children, "I am burying myself in this grave," she said.

Taher, 50, was inconsolable, sobbing "wake up, wake up" to the corpse of his teenage son Farzad.

About 70 per cent of Bam, a popular tourist spot some 1,000 km (600 miles) southeast of the capital Tehran with an historic citadel and other centuries-old buildings, was leveled.

Exhausted, dust-covered rescue workeromid Alipour said his team had dug out only three injured people during the night.

"We don