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REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XVI NO. 2

DHAKA SUNDAY JANUARY 15, 2006

MAGH 2, 1412 BS

JULHAJ 14, 1426 HURI

16 PAGES PRICE: TK 7.00

www.thedailystar.net

Dense fog continues to wreak havoc on life

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dense fog continued to disrupt road, river and air communications across the country yesterday causing sufferings for passengers returning from Eid vacation.

Flight enquiry at Zia International Airport (ZIA) said arrivals and departures of all international and domestic flights had been suspended for about 10 hours since Friday night due to dense fog.

When the fog started to disappear at 10:30am yesterday, the flights were rescheduled.

Five international flights of Bangladesh Biman were forced to land at Shah Amanat Airport in Chittagong due to prevailing foggy weather at ZIA.

A British Airways flight had to be diverted to London.

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COLD WAVE

21 including 5 babies perish in the north

STAR REPORT

Twenty-one people including at least five infants perished in the last 48 hours in four northern districts alone from the freezing cold wave sweeping across the country for the last nine days, impeding farming, traffic movement and normal life.

Particularly children and the elderly in hundreds were admitted to hospitals with cold-related diseases in the poverty-stricken Gaibandha, Thakurgaon, Kurigram and Dinajpur districts.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reports: The severe cold, which

intensified further yesterday, has claimed three lives in the last 24 hours in Gobindaganj Upazilla of the district. The victims are Moksed Ali, 45, Nurul Islam, 55, and Mozam Mia, 65, of Kamorpur and Fulbari villages.

Throughout the last week, the sky remained overcast, with a dense fog hindering road traffic and train services.

The biting chill also badly affected the Boro seedlings in the fields and delayed their transplantation.

UNB says: The icy weather has claimed the lives of 15 people in Kurigram and Thakurgaon districts

in the last two days. Of them, 11 people died of cold-related diseases in Kurigram and the remaining four in Thakurgaon.

Those who died in Kurigram include Meser Uddin, 82, of Pourasava College Para, Bijli, 3, Kandura, 40, Kaluram, 35, and Bishadu, 55, of Hatia Anantapur Village, Rahmat Ali, 65, of Saheber Alga Village, Rahiman Beowa, 75, of Fuluar Char, Abul Hossain, 70, of Narayanpur, Nishat, 3, of Kazipara in Sadar Upazilla, Jafar Munshi, 80, of Harikesh Village, and Chhatku Masud, 98, of Tapurchar Village.

UNB Kurigram correspondent reports: The severe cold, which

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Cold brings sufferings for infants

PORIMOL PALMA

With the shivering cold sweeping across the country, thousands of children, especially the newborn infants, are suffering from various cold-related diseases such as pneumonia, meningitis, bronchiolitis, asthma, fever, cough and cold.

The sufferings of the children and their parents intensified as most doctors in the private and public clinics and hospitals went on five-day vacation until yesterday to celebrate the Eid.

The child wards at the hospitals were full of children, but many of their parents sought alternatives due to lack of doctors and attendants. Most of these children suffer from the cold-related diseases, which cause breathing problems and even death.

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A mother nebulises her pneumonia-stricken child at Dhaka Shishu Hospital yesterday. A rush of sick children has overcrowded the hospital in the wake of ongoing cold wave.

PHOTO: STAR

Burns drops Dhaka from S Asia visit

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US Undersecretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns, who is starting his South Asia tour this week, has dropped Bangladesh from his tour itinerary.

He was expected to visit Dhaka on Tuesday, but he will not be coming this time, an official of the US embassy in Dhaka said yesterday.

Earlier, both Bangladesh and US sides gave strong hint that Burns would be coming to Dhaka on a two-day visit prior to going to India.

Reason for excluding Bangladesh from Burns' South Asia tour could not be known. However,

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VOTER LIST CONTROVERSY

Execution of court directives uncertain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Implementation of the High Court's (HC) directives on voter list appears to be uncertain as the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat continues preparing a fresh roll, ignoring the HC's order for revising the existing one.

The EC Secretariat has not sent any guidelines to field-level manpower for preparing the roll in light of the HC's directives. The EC also failed to hold an immediate meeting in the last 10 days to decide the next course of action in the wake of

the HC directives. The HC directives asked the EC on January 4 to revise the existing roll and stressed holding an immediate meeting. But Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz has not convened a meeting.

The two election commissioners, M Munsef Ali and AK Mohammad Ali who are in favour of implementing the HC directives, cannot make a decision without an EC meeting.

The CEC, who is commissioned to convene meetings, fell sick on January 8 and is unlikely to attend

office today, the first workday after the Eid vacation, as he is yet to recover.

"His (CEC) health is not good. I don't think he can attend his office tomorrow," wife of MA Aziz yesterday told The Daily Star over telephone yesterday.

She could not specify any date when the CEC will be able to join office. Asked to hand over the phone to the CEC, she replied, "He can't talk to you right now."

If the CEC does not join office, there will be no scope for holding

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Khaleda, Hasina shocked

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia expressed her deep shock at the deaths of 362 hajj pilgrims in a tragic stampede at Jamarat in Mina on January 12. The stampede left 11 Bangladesh nationals dead.

In a message of condolence yesterday, she prayed to Almighty Allah for the salvation of the departed souls. The prime minister also expressed her heartfelt condolences to the members of the bereaved families.

Awami League president Sheikh Hasina also expressed her extreme shock at the death of 11 Bangladeshi pilgrims in Mina, reports UNB.

In a condolence message yesterday she expressed sympathy to the bereaved families and prayed for

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MINA STAMPEDE VICTIMS

Govt discloses names of 11 Bangladeshis

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Government yesterday confirmed the deaths of 11 Bangladeshi pilgrims in Thursday's stampede in Mina in Saudi Arabia.

A foreign ministry news release yesterday also said 11 Bangladeshi pilgrims were still missing and four others were being treated at hospitals.

According to the latest reports received from the Bangladesh missions in Saudi Arabia, 362 pilgrims died in the accident. Twenty-five of them could not be identified yet.

DEAD PILGRIMS

1. Kasem Uddin Ahmed, son of Jafar Mohammad, Thakurgaon Sadar, passport No. PP992486 (went from Bangladesh to perform the Hajj)
2. Mohammad Lokman Khan, son of Fazlur Haque Khan, Fatikchhari, Chittagong, passport no. PP065218 (went from Bangladesh)
3. Mohammad Ali, son of Fazlur Rahman, Bhola Sadar, passport no. PP323027 (went from Bangladesh)
4. Ruhul Amin, son of Mojibul Haque, Manpura, Bhola, passport

no. PP323044 (went from Bangladesh)

5. Mohammad Musa, son of Azizur Rahman, Raujan, Chittagong, passport no. PP0692905 (went to perform the Hajj from Abu Dhabi, UAE)

6. Abdul Mannan, son of Abul Khair, passport no. 0938211, Iqama No-2158137071 (expatriate Bangladeshi in Saudi Arabia)

7. Belal Hossain, son of Abul Kashem, passport no. 1856006, Iqama no. 216133374 (expatriate Bangladeshi)

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PHOTO: STAR

A peasant joins in the toil with his buffaloes to prepare an IRRi field at Ashulia on the outskirts of the city. The picture was taken yesterday.

Pressure on DU to recruit teacher with poor records

HASAN JAHIID TUSHER

Dhaka University (DU) authorities are under pressure from a section of pro-government teachers to recruit a Chittagong University (CU) professor in the Department of Development Studies although his academic qualifications are below those of his competitors.

DU sources said the pro-government teachers' group has already forced the top university authorities to form a selection committee involving like-minded teachers to make the recruitment easy. There are also allegations that the committee does not have any expert on the subject concerned.

Current DU Proctor Prof AKA Firoz Ahmed, who was promoted as a professor only six months ago, is on the committee although the selection committee for professors is generally comprised of senior professors. The other members of the selection committee are Prof AH Ahmed Kamal of history, Prof Abu Ahmed of economics and Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, research associate of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

The development studies department is a new department with bright prospect but the

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Road mishaps rooted in slack laws, vigilance

Study reveals

PINAKI ROY

Weak laws and lack of vigilance by the government agencies are causing several thousand accidents claiming nearly four thousand lives every year and injuring more than ten thousand.

The annual report of Bangladesh Manabdhikar Bureau revealed that 3,437 people were killed and 15,742 were injured in 3,122 accidents in 2005. But the unofficial number of deaths is three times higher than the official one, Bangladesh Accident Research Centre sources said.

A tragic accident happened on Friday in Savar killing no less than 20 people as a bus fell into a roadside ditch.

"I never heard of any driver being punished for reckless driving. Vehicle owners also always

remain safe from prosecution, which encourages inexperienced and irresponsible drivers to driver on highways," said Md Sahamsul Islam, a resident of Savar who was present at the scene during the accident on Friday.

Under section 304-B of the Bangladesh Penal Code, a driver may be imprisoned for up to seven years for reckless driving that leads to a death. But almost no driver or vehicle owner face punishment for such accidents.

"So far I know of only one case that went on trial in the Speedy Trial Tribunal where a driver dragged a woman for a kilometer leading to her death on the airport road," said an advocate practicing at a lower court.

"When a vehicle is in an accident, the police confiscate the

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Rejoinder, our reply

The Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources in a rejoinder has differed with some points of a news story on Chandpur power plant headlined 'Cabinet body nods to disqualified bidder' run by The Daily Star on January 3.

The ministry said, "The Council Committee on Government Purchase has considered the tenders for the 150 MW Chandpur power plant strictly according to the provisions of the PPR [Public Procurement Regulation] 2003" and as per the recommendations of the tender evaluation committee (TEC). It claimed the bid is not flawed and the bidder is not disqualified.

According to the rejoinder, the purchase committee's decision has not made the PPR 2003 ineffective but "has discarded and corrected the erroneous decision of the PPR Review Panel".

It said the PPR Regulation 53 (6) demands that "the Review Panel is supposed to advise the procuring entity if it had taken any action contrary to its obligations under the PPR. But in this case, violating the regulation the Review Panel rejected the recommendations of the TEC, declared the lowest responsive bid as informal and void, and issued directives to the procuring entity to negotiate and

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Cable TV operator gunned down in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unknown assailants gunned down a cable TV operator at Mohakhali in the city last night while playmates stabbed a youth in the city's Jurain area following a brawl over a game of badminton.

A gang of four around 7:30pm attacked Jahangir Kabir, 35, as he was talking to his cousin Iqbal Kabir in Iqbal's medicine shop near TB Gate in Mohakhali, witnesses said.

"One of the criminals held a gun on my forehead while the rest shot my cousin one by one," a Sub-inspector of Gulshan Police Station quoted Iqbal as saying.

The criminals left the spot on foot as Jahangir, the owner of Friends Cable TV Network and a car rental business, fell on the ground taking four shots in the body.

Locals rushed Jahangir to Sikder Medical College and Hospital in

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Bhola sinking into Meghna abyss as dyke plan sleeps

SURANJITH DEARNATH

Soil erosion in Bhola has turned severe rendering thousands of people homeless while the government continues to delay the approval of a proposal to set up a permanent embankment on the country's biggest island.

Uncertainty looms over the proposed Bhola District and Town Protection Project Phase-2 due to bureaucratic red tape in the Planning Commission and the indifference of the water resources ministry.

In absence of a permanent embankment, the river Meghna has been continuing to devour Bhola, especially the north-eastern side of it, since 1965. Researchers and the Bhola District Town Rakha Sangram Committee (BDTRSC) leaders have cautioned that the island would completely disappear into the river over the next four decades if the erosion continues at the present rate.

"If the erosion continues at the same rate, the island will completely disappear over the next four decades," said Mohammad

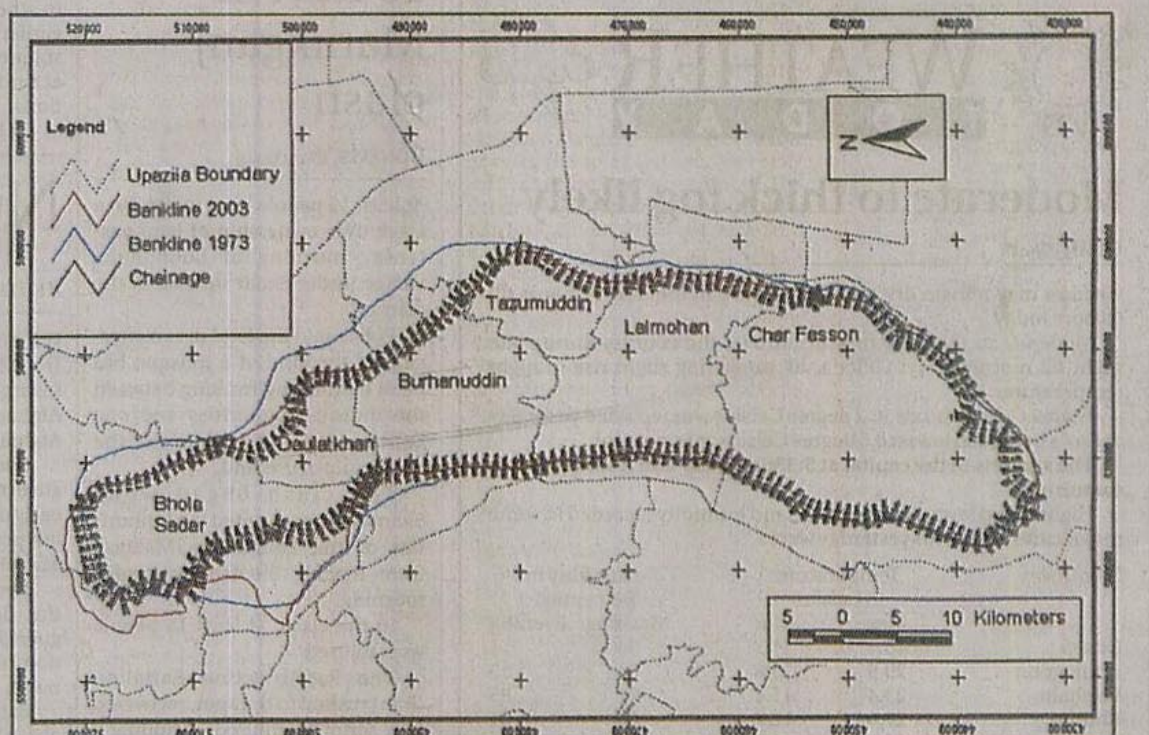
Shamsuddoha, who carried out a research for the Dhaka-based non-governmental organisation, The Coast Trust.

The central Water Development Board (WDB) submitted the Bhola District and Town Protection Project Phase-2 to the water resources ministry in June 2004 after receiving recommendation from the Bhola WDB. The ministry forwarded the proposal to the Planning Commission for evaluation.

A water ministry source said now it waits for the commission to recommend the project to the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecneec) for approval. WDB sources said the ministry did not take any step to persuade the commission to forward the proposal to Ecneec. The commission has been sitting on the proposal of the project worth Tk 86 crore for the last year and a half. Ecneec has the final say on the fate of the proposal.

Water Resources Minister M Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, also the legislator of Bhola-3 could not be reached despite repeated attempts.

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Bank line shifting during the period 1973-2003

Islamabad condemns US airstrike

AP, Damadola, Pakistan

Pakistan yesterday condemned a US airstrike on a border village that officials said unsuccessfully targeted al-Qaeda's second-in-command, and said it was protesting to the US Embassy over the attack that killed at least 17 people.

Thousands of local tribesmen, chanting "God is Great," demonstrated against the attack, claiming the victims were local villagers without terrorist links and had never hosted Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Two senior Pakistani officials told The Associated Press that the CIA acted on incorrect information in launching the attack early Friday in the northwestern village of Damadola, near the Afghan border.

Citing unidentified American intelligence officials, US news networks reported that CIA-operated Predator drone aircraft carried out the missile strike because al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's top lieutenant, was thought to be at a compound in the village or about to arrive.