

9 killed in road accidents

STAR REPORT

At least nine people were killed in separate road accidents in Dhaka, Feni, Brahmanbaria and Tangail yesterday.

Our Staff Correspondent reports: Three people were killed in separate road accidents in the city and Savar early hours of yesterday, police said.

Md Kamruzzaman, 27, member of Ansar, was seriously injured when a vehicle hit him from behind at Satmashjid Road in the city at around 12:15am yesterday.

Locals rushed Kamruzzaman at Shaheed Suhrawardi Hospital where he died.

Md Farid, 23, an electric mechanic, was run over by a vehicle at around 12:10am near Joar Shahara police box under Khilkhet Police Station.

Meanwhile, an unidentified man was killed when a speedy vehicle crushed him under its wheels on Dhaka-Aricha highway Near Modhumati Model town early hours of yesterday.

Police, however, could not give details.

BSS from Feni adds: Two people

were killed and four others injured in a road accident on Feni-Kajirhat road under Sonagaji upazila yesterday.

Police identified the victims as Azizul Haque, 35, and Abul Bashar, 42, a school teacher.

The accident took place when a passenger bus collided head-on with a tempo coming from opposite direction, police said.

Azizul Haque died on the spot while Bashar succumbed to his injuries at a local clinic.

Bdnews from Bhranmanbaria adds: One person was crushed under the wheels of a speedy bus yesterday on Dhaka-Sylhet highway at Khariala bus stand in Bhranmanbaria.

The deceased was identified as Abdus Sattar of Panishwar village under Sarail upazila.

Our Correspondent from Tangail reports: Three people were killed and four others seriously injured in two separate road accidents at Delduar and Sadar upazilas on Wednesday night and yesterday.

Of the dead, two were identified as Nayeb Ali, 45, and Saiful Islam, 35, of Delduar upazila. The identity of another victim could not be known

immediately.

The first accident took place at around 10:30pm on Wednesday when a Delduar-bound passenger-laden tempo from Pakulla lost its control and fell into a ditch after head-on collision with a goods-laden hackney carriage drawn by horse from opposite direction at Lawhati Bazar area under Delduar upazila, leaving tempo passenger Nayeb Ali dead on the spot and seriously injured five others, including the tempo driver, police and witnesses said.

Local people rushed to the spot and sent the injured to Tangail General Hospital where tempo driver Saiful Islam succumbed to his injuries at around 10:00am yesterday.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka-bound speedy bus from Tangail crushed an unidentified passer-by under its wheels when he was crossing the Dhaka-Tangail highway at Taratia in front of the BISIC industrial area under Sadar upazila, leaving him dead on the spot.

Police sent the body to Tangail General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

FM in Bali to attend D-8 Summit

BSS, Bali

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan arrived in Bali in Indonesia yesterday to attend the fifth Developing Eight (D-8) Summit.

He was received at the Bali Ngurah Rai International Airport in a traditional welcoming ceremony. He will represent Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at the Summit to be held here on Saturday.

Morshed Khan's schedule upon arrival in Bali included participation at the D-8 council meeting, which deliberated and prepared the Bali Declaration and recommended for its approval by the Summit.

During the Ministerial Meeting, Bangladesh's role as the lead nation for rural development sector was highly appreciated by the D-8 members. Bangladesh's offer to host a D-8 workshop on rural development in Dhaka this year was also praised.

During his interventions, Morshed Khan shared information with the members of D-8 on Bangladesh's experiences in its development efforts.

He said other member countries can benefit from Bangladesh's successes in implementing home grown ideas for rural development. He said empowerment of rural women through encouraging self-employment is something that many countries of the world are replicating.

Earlier, Indonesia assumed the Chairmanship of the Ministerial Meeting succeeding Iran. The meeting also discussed organisational aspects of the D-8 and ways and means for strengthening its Secretariat.

On the sidelines of Ministerial Meeting, International Trade and Customs Minister of Turkey Kursad Tuzmen held discussion on bilateral and international issues with Morshed Khan.

The Turkish minister said Khaleda's visit to his country will contribute positively to enhancement of the existing relation between the two countries.

Morshed Khan said the Prime Minister's visit will effectively be followed up to further strengthen bilateral economic cooperation between the two countries.

In this context, he requested the Turkish Minister to propose an early date for holding the Joint Economic Commission meeting.

D-8 is an economic forum of eight Muslim countries namely Bangladesh, Egypt, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Turkey and Nigeria.



President Iajuddin Ahmed speaks at the first convocation of Southeast University at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city on Wednesday.

BIRD FLU Bangladesh might be affected if timely measures not taken

UNB, Dhaka

A recent population-based study by ICDDRB said if appropriate measures are not taken in time, Bangladesh could be affected by the new strain of influenza A virus H5N1 commonly known as bird flu.

It said two strains of influenza A virus, H3N2 and H1N1, have already been circulating among the children in the country which made the probability high of breaking out 'bird flu'.

According to the ICDDRB study, the two strains of influenza A virus and two of influenza B virus that are circulating in Asia are also circulating within Bangladesh.

Between April 2004 and November 2005, ICDDRB conducted a surveillance on 44, 256 children under five at Kamlapur area in the city. Of them, 5129 children were found affected by acute infectious respiratory illness.

The study shows that 14 per-

cent of Bangladeshi children with acute infectious respiratory illness had influenza virus and the incidence of influenza virus infection was 84.5 episodes among every 1000 children a year.

A 58 percent of isolates were influenza A (H3N2 and H1N1) and 42 percent influenza B (Shanghai and Hongkong) virus, the ICDDRB surveillance shows.

This suggests that if H5N1 strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza A, commonly known as bird flu, circulates among poultry in Bangladesh, there is an opportunity of human co-infection with human and avian influenza strains, the study said.

Other strains of influenza may also be causing human disease in the country.

Since 1996, influenza A (H5N1) has been identified in domestic poultry.

2 children drown in Jessore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Two children drowned in a pool created by rainwater at Chhoto Sheikhhata village on the outskirts of Jessore town yesterday.

Locals said, Zisan, 4, son of Atiar Rahman and Nayan, 7, son of Mohammad Liton of the village drowned while they were wading through the rainwater in a nearby field. At one stage, they fell into a hole.

Local people rushed the two children to Jessore General Hospital where the attending doctor declared them dead.

Our Correspondent from Cox's Bazar adds: One person drowned and at least 8 people went missing when an engine boat sank in the river Bakkhali in Cox's Bazar.

A Cox's Bazar bound engine boat, with about 20 passengers, was returning from Moheshkhali on Monday night and it sank in the Bakkhali River, local sources said.

Local people saw a body of a man floating in the river yesterday.

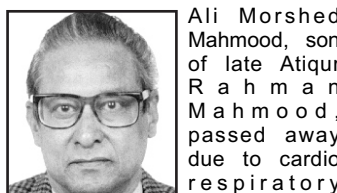
The man was identified as Mohammed Hossain, 25, son of Zalal

Ahamed, of Monsher Daiel village in Moheshkhali Upazila.

Police recovered the body and send it to Hospital morgue for autopsy.

A case was filed with Moheshkhali Police Station.

Obituary



Ali Morshed Mahmood, son of late Atiqur Rahman Mahmood, passed away due to cardio respiratory failure yesterday at the age of

73, says a press release. Morshed, also managing director of Bangladesh Trading and Construction Company Limited, left behind his wife and one daughter to mourn his death.

His qulkhwan will be held at the Azad Mosque, Gulshan after Asr prayers on May 15.

Friends and relatives are requested to attend the qulkhwan.



Nagorik Sanghati stages a hunger strike in front of the Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University yesterday demanding adequate supply of water for city dwellers.

Reading Zone opens at Boibazaar

Boibazaar, the Book Distribution House of Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), yesterday opened a Reading Zone for the general public to encourage reading habit as well as marketing of books.

First in Bangladesh, the reading zone will offer opportunities to the intending buyers and people interested in books to go through and have an idea before finally deciding to buy any book from a rich stock of about 50 thousand titles in the House from home and abroad.

No fees will be charged for the service and there will be no compulsion of being a member.

DAM book distribution is a service and not only a business to earn a profit as such it has continued to make the Boibazaar interesting and attractive to the book lovers of all ages.

The Boibazaar, located at House No 1/A, Road No. 13 (New) of Dhanmondi beside Mirpur Road, delivers books in the city in 24 hours and anywhere in the country in 7 days of placing orders over telephone or internet.

The Boibazaar has also a Kid's Corner for the young visitors.

BLOCK RAID IN CTG Most detainees opposition leaders, activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP), after a long break, began block raid on Wednesday night and detained 80 people, mostly leaders and activists of opposition parties, till early yesterday.

Of the detainees, city unit Jubo League General Secretary Mashur Rahman, Kotwali thana Awami League leader Moshirur Rahman Rokon and Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leader Pulak Khastagir came out on bail yesterday afternoon after they were produced before a court.

Later, Jubo League organised a rally on Central Shaheed Minar premises protesting police action and detention of its leaders and activists. The leaders demanded release of other opposition men immediately.

Sources said all the twelve police stations of the CMP started the block raid from late Wednesday night and detained 80 'suspected' people under section 54. Double-mooring PS detained highest 33 people. Bandar PS held 10 followed by Panchlaish 7, Halishahar 7, Bayezid Bostami 5, Chandgaon 4, Karnaphuli 4, Kotwali 3, Pahartali 3, Patenga 2, Khushi 1 and Bakalia 1, they said.

Duty officer of Kotwali PS, sub inspector Ruhul Amin said Mashur, Rokon and Pulak were detained under section 54 and as per references of old cases.

'The raid was conducted as per instruction of police commissioner',

he said adding that no case was filed against the three.

City Jubo League President Chandan Dhar told this correspondent in the afternoon that the three leaders have just obtained bails from the court.

Four girls kidnapped in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Four teen-aged girls were abducted from Khulna city and Dakop upazila on Wednesday.

The abducted girls were identified as Shampa Baishna, 17, daughter of Nani Gopal Baishna of Khulna city, Popy Shil, 20, daughter of Govinda Shil, Rupa, 18, daughter of Abdur Rashid and Babli, 20, daughter of Abdul Hamid of Dakop upazila of Khulna district.

Nani Gopal lodged an FIR this evening with Khulna City Police Station in connection with abduction of his daughter Shampa.

On the other hand, three similar FIRs were lodged separately with Dakop PS yesterday noon in connection with abduction of Popy Shil, Rupa and Babli.

They were kidnapped when they were going to school on Wednesday.

Dutch envoy for regional coop on water

BSS, Dhaka

Dutch Ambassador Kees Beemsterboer to Bangladesh yesterday stressed the need for regional cooperation for economic growth by making the best use of water on equitable basis.

'Treat water as a regional resource. Its development and management should be done in a rational, efficient and equitable way, also across borders,' he said while addressing a three-day International Water Media Conference here yesterday.

'Not only for sustainable flood mitigation but also to reap mutual gains, such as hydropower, the Netherlands is ready to support any initiative regarding regional cooperation on water that contributes to economic growth in the regions concerned. This offer stands, also in the context of Bangladesh, but it is up to local actors to take their responsibility and make use of this offer,' he said.

Recalling last year's two separate occasions, he said the Dutch embassy had brought together eminent representatives from Bangladesh civil society, and invited them to participate in a dialogue project to promote regional cooperation on common rivers.

'The overall idea is to link this to a similar initiative in India,' he told the journalists who attended the gala occasion as participants giving their respective opinion on rational use of water for equitable benefit of all countries in regions.

For sustainable poverty reduction, Kees called for media support and underscored the need for integrated water resources management in regions.

'There is a global recognition of the need to adopt an integrated approach towards the management of water resources, as a response to the growing water crisis and its direct impact on poverty,' Ambassador Kees added.

But, he said, implementation of integrated water resources management needs more effective stakeholder involvement. The media need to play a pro-active role.

He also stressed the need for poverty alleviation and linking it with the Millennium Development Goals and said integrated water resources management plans have been drawn up in many countries to reach the MDGs. Poverty alleviation requires that they be linked with other development efforts, including integrated rural development, he added.

FROM PAGE 1 and foreign aid disbursement, will put the caretaker government in an extremely difficult position."

COMPLETE INTERVIEW

The Daily Star (DS): What are the present economic challenges?

M Syeduzzaman (MS): There are several macroeconomic challenges at this moment. These relate to keeping the budget deficit and overall fiscal deficit including the losses of the state-owned enterprises under control, meeting the public investment targets in critical areas, managing the balance of payments, and the rate of inflation.

Other challenges that pose threat to growth and macroeconomic stability relate to meeting the energy needs of the economy and keeping the food availability situation satisfactory.

Changes in the macroeconomic parameters are nothing new. These undergo changes every year, though some may change more than others may and some may change more in some years than in others.

This year the imbalances seem to have become particularly acute. But the real challenge is to achieve the annual and three-year targets adopted under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDG is now a recognised framework of development, both national and international, and relates to social progress achieved through economic growth. Achievement of social goals under the MDGs should be at the centre of public policy, along with improvement in governance. There are risks of slippage in these areas.

DS: There appear to be a number of bad indicators in the economy. Why does the economy take such a bad turn in the final year of every government?

MS: It's not very clear what you mean by 'bad indicators', unless you mean the pressure on balance of payments, the energy crisis -- a threat to agricultural and industrial production, and the rate of inflation.

You are right in that political governments in their final years are prone to taking some populist and some irrational decisions, which weaken the macroeconomic framework. This happens in other developing countries too. Some examples [of such decisions] are ambitious public expenditure programmes, populist revenue expenditure to benefit party apparatus, reluctance to make adjustment in prices of publicly produced or procured goods and services, procurement of unessential hardware in the public sector -- all of which weaken the budget balance and put pressure on the balance of payments.

DS: What is the way out of the economic problems prevailing in the

country?

MS: Austerity and quality control in public expenditure should be of high priority. Sacrifices have to be made by all sections of the society, and the [adverse] impact on the vulnerable groups has to be minimised.

We need prompt decision on energy pricing, as every day delayed deteriorates the situation. We also need sharp scrutiny and pruning of revenue expenditure, and ADP projects financed with local money, and freezing expenditure of budgetary resources through political party apparatus. Besides, the use of foreign aid in the pipeline has to be accelerated and all public procurement of hardware with foreign exchange, except foreign aid, frozen.

A measure, which deserves high priority, is to mobilise medium-term credit lines from the Opec countries in the Middle East who are running historically high surplus in their balance of payments.

DS: What economic challenges may the coming caretaker government face?

MS: It will be a problem for the next caretaker government if too many issues -- routine and policy-related -- are left unresolved by the outgoing government. Examples are energy pricing, firm arrangements for installation of new power generation plants, and ensuring satisfactory food supply.

We have to remember that the next caretaker government will be in office during the traditional 'lean period', when the food and employment situations come under severe strain. The outgoing government must fulfil all time-bound commitments to international financing organisations (IMF, IDA, ADB etc) and bilateral donors, if any, to ensure a smooth flow of aid funds. An ambitious budget, without the backing of a realistic revenue flow and foreign aid disbursement, will put the caretaker government in an extremely difficult position. Economic activities may slow down, unless the macroeconomic balances improve by the end of June.

Any 'unusual' release of funds from the revenue and development budgets in the first quarter of the budget for 2006-07 must be avoided.

DS: You are aware that Bangladesh economy is run as per the IMF prescriptions. How much result do you think the IMF-prescribed policies have yielded so far?

MS: IMF advice and support have been useful for Bangladesh in the 70's and 80's, and also in the early 90's. In the second half of the 90's, our relationship with the IMF was minimal except for the emergency assistance after the 1998

floods, where there were very few conditionalities.

I presume you have in mind the IMF prescriptions in the most recent years. At the moment, our relationship with the IMF, as far as I am aware, is financing of the PRSP [Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper] through the PRGF [Poverty Reduction Growth Facility]. For release of each tranche or instalment of the PRGF, there are some performance-criteria. To the best of my knowledge, these relate to maintaining a minimum net foreign exchange reserve, a ceiling on the net domestic assets of the Bangladesh Bank (relating to money/credit creation), collection of revenue, and net domestic borrowing by the central government.

These have forced the government to tighten its fiscal, monetary and balance of payments positions at periodic intervals in the last two years. It has often created uncertainties in the money and foreign exchange markets, adversely affecting the private sector. On some occasions, the government had to seek waiver of commitments.

On the question of interest rate, while the Bangladesh Bank opted for 'moral-suasion' (some say 'arm twisting') with the commercial banks either to lower or to raise interest rates, the IMF has publicly tendered their advice on such matters (in the opposite directions) within a short span of time! This seemed to be a departure from the IMF's past practices and created confusion in the minds of the market operators and investors.

My greatest frustration was when the IMF forced the government to opt for free-floating exchange rate, without being satisfied about backing lines of credit in foreign exchange to support the system, without realising the dynamism of the private sector of Bangladesh and the capacity of the textile sector to mount investment on the eve of the MFA phase-out. Only a few months after that, pressure to reduce interest rates, which was supported by the IMF, led to massive pressure on the foreign exchange reserves and sharp depreciation of the taka.

DS: How are fuel prices influencing the economy and how can this problem be addressed?

MS: Fuel prices are affecting the economy through higher costs of transport, irrigation and industrial production, and unsettling of family budgets. These problems have to be addressed in the short run by a combination of factors: Raising prices, drastically reducing unessential government expenditure to meet any subsidy that may be contemplated, taking rational measures for energy saving and conservation, prompt and transparent



Reading circle
Green Force Bangladesh organises a reading circle on environment. Venue: Save Environment Movement office. Time: 4:00pm.

Discussion on hajj
A discussion on 'Learn about hajj' will be held. Rules of hajj will be presented through audio, video and animation. Venue: Spectra Convention Centre. Time: 4:30pm.

Roundtable
Ulumul Quran Foundation organises a roundtable on 'Millitancy and terrorism in the name of Islam: Origins and remedies'. Venue: National Press Conference. Time: 3:30pm.

Discussion
Bangladesh MuktiJoddha Kalyan Foundation will hold a discussion to mark the first death anniversary of Gen Jagajit Sing Aurora. Venue: Cirdap auditorium. Time: 4:00pm.

Mahfil
Weekly Ashke-e-Rasul (Sm) mahfil will be held. Venue: Babe Rahmat Dewanbagh Sharif. Time: 10:00am.

Rally
Save Environment Movement will hold a rally and form a human chain demanding an end to use of chemicals in all kinds of food items. Venue: In front of Institute of Fine Arts. Time: 10:30am.

Cultural evening
Dawn Grammar School organises a cultural evening with Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, as chief guest. Venue: Russian Centre of Science and Culture. Time: 5:30pm.



Rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at a few places over Rajshahi, Khulna, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions and at one or two places over Barisal and Chittagong divisions in the next 12 hours till 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said in a forecast.

Highest temperature 35.4 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 20.6 degree Celsius at Dhaka.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:33pm today and rises at 5:17am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	34.2	20.6	67	87
Chittagong	33.0	24.0	80	78
Rajshahi	33.5	21.1	77	77
Khulna	34.5	22.5	74	74
Barisal	33.5	22.6	80	87
Sylhet	30.2	23.5	75	88
Cox's Bazar	32.4	25.0	78	81