

FLIGHT SHORTAGE

Hajj still uncertain for thousands of pilgrims

SURANJITH DEABNATH

Hajj performance of around 4,000 prospective non-ballottee pilgrims will become uncertain even if the national flag carrier arranges additional hajj flights of its own, unless foreign airlines also agree to do so.

The number of ill-fated prospective pilgrims may rise to 12,000 if Bangladesh Biman also fails to operate additional flights for three more days.

The civil aviation and tourism ministry tried to persuade seven foreign airlines to share the additional burden due to what

Bangladesh Biman called its incapacity.

The ministry on December 10 asked seven foreign airlines Qatar Airways, Gulf Air, Saudi Arabian Airlines, Kuwait Airways, Emirates, Etihad Airways and Singapore Airlines -- to operate extra hajj flights for non-ballottee pilgrims, who perform hajj under the management of different private hajj agencies, but the authorities of the airlines expressed their inability to do so, Biman sources said.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Biman has been trying to get additional landing slots for its own flights in

Jeddah Airport.

The civil aviation and tourism ministry applied to Jeddah airport authorities for 11 additional slots for Biman's hajj flights for the period of December 23 to 25, but the clearance has not come yet, the sources said adding that they will know about it tomorrow. The original schedule for Biman's hajj flights has been from November 26 to December 22.

The crisis emerged when Bangladesh Biman had to cancel 20 of its hajj flights from November 31 to December 4 because the Saudi

SEE PAGE 19 COL 1

Kamal's counsel contradicts UNB report

UNB, Dhaka

The counsel for Dr Kamal Hossain contradicted a UNB report published yesterday that the High Court bench on Thursday felt embarrassed in accepting his application for hearing in a sedition case.

According to a rejoinder issued by Dr Kamal Hossain and Associates, "The report published on December 15 mistakenly states that the court did not give the permission because before filing the application one of the defence lawyers for Dr Kamal telephoned Justice M Raisuddin, a co-judge of the division bench, for granting the application."

The rejoinder, signed by Supreme Court Advocate Sara Hossain, said Salahuddin Ahmad, counsel for Dr Kamal Hossain,

SEE PAGE 19 COL 3

Hamas accuses Fatah of trying to kill Haniya

Bodyguard killed, son injured in attack on PM

AFP, Gaza City

The ruling Palestinian Hamas movement accused its Fatah rivals yesterday of trying to assassinate Prime Minister Ismail Haniya as the duelling factions clashed in the West Bank.

Tensions escalated after a late-night attack on Haniya's convoy at the Rafah border crossing in the Gaza Strip left one of the Hamas leader's bodyguards dead and his son injured.

Hamas, which has accused a strongman in the Fatah party of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas of being behind the attack, responded by deploying hundreds of masked gunmen in the otherwise deserted streets of Gaza City.

In the main West Bank city of Ramallah, 26 Palestinians were injured when police, swinging truncheons and firing rifles into the air, clashed with Hamas sympathisers.

The latest flareup comes amid rapidly escalating cross-faction

violence ahead of a speech by the moderate Abbas Saturday in which he is expected to call early elections despite protests from Hamas.

The attack on Haniya's convoy happened Thursday night as he crossed through Rafah after waiting hours at a border checkpoint that had been shut by Israel to prevent the Islamist premier bringing tens of millions of dollars into Gaza after a regional fundraising tour.

"It is an assassination attempt carried out by traitors led by Mohammad Dahlan," Hamas spokesman Ismail Radwan told a press conference in Gaza City, referring to a powerful security figure in Abbas's once dominant Fatah.

"Mohammad Dahlan bears personal responsibility for this assassination attempt."

Hamas has also blamed Abbas's own presidential guards, who are responsible for security at the Rafah terminal, for the attack, which occurred after Hamas gunmen stormed the border.

Dahlan, long one of Hamas's harshest critics, was quick to deny the charge, as were other prominent Fatah leaders.

Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina denounced the "arbitrary and irresponsible charges against the presidential guard and certain Palestinian leaders."

Hundreds of masked Hamas gunmen, brandishing AK-47s and anti-tank rockets, took up positions along Gaza City's central thoroughfares following the pointed accusations.

Abbas, at loggerheads with Hamas since it took power after a shock January election win, said he "regretted" the attack on Hamas, the Palestinian WAFA news agency reported.

But Israeli Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh said his initial regret was that the gunmen had missed their target.

He was asked by public radio if "when you heard that someone

SEE PAGE 19 COL 7

Japan creates defence ministry for first time since 1945

AFP, Tokyo

Japan yesterday created a full-fledged defence ministry for the first time since World War II, when the United States stripped the defeated country of its right to a military.

The upper house voted, with support from both the ruling coalition and main opposition, to create the defence agency. The lower house had earlier passed the bill, meaning it becomes law, a parliamentary official said.

Post-war Japan has had a "Defence Agency" with lower standing than full-fledged ministries as the 1947 constitution declared the country to be pacifist.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the first Japanese leader to be born after the war, has put a top priority on creating a defence ministry and eventually rewriting the constitution.

The reform would give Defence Agency Director General Fumio Kyuma the title of defence minister, although Japanese troops would still be called the "Self-Defence Forces".

SEE PAGE 19 COL 3

Jubo Dal leader shot dead in Narsingdi

UNB, Narsingdi

A Jubo Dal leader was shot dead by unknown assailants in Ghoshpara area of the town early yesterday.

The dead was identified as Badal Khan, 38, a member of the executive committee of Jubo Dal district unit and general secretary of ward no 7 of Jubo Dal Narsingdi Municipality unit.

Witnesses said the assailants entered the victim's house by breaking open the door at about 3:30am. They shot him point blank and left the scene. Badal died instantly.

JP to resist polls if Ershad barred

Clashes at many places; hartal called for tomorrow in 5 northern dists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders and activists of Jatiya Party (JP) yesterday vowed not to let the next general elections be held if their chairman HM Ershad is not allowed to participate in the election.

The JP declared a dawn-to-dusk hartal in five northern districts of the country for tomorrow in protest against what the JP leaders termed

"an injustice to Ershad".

Meanwhile, police arrested 50 JP leaders and activists following and during a clash between the law enforcers and the JP activists.

The JP held a rally in front of its Topkhana Road office in the capital yesterday. They later brought out a procession when a number of people vandalised three minibuses on the street. The police charged against what the JP leaders termed

SEE PAGE 19 COL 2

One burnt alive, 100 shanties gutted in Ctg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

One person was burnt alive and over 100 shanties were gutted in a devastating fire in the port city early yesterday.

Fire Service sources said the fire originated from an electric short circuit at a shanty at Tulatali slum in the city's Rajakhali area under Bakalia Police Station at around 2:20am and soon engulfed the adjacent shanties.

The victim, Mohammad Shahabuddin, 48, was burnt alive, as he was asleep at a shanty during the incident.

SEE PAGE 19 COL 8

Bombs hurled at TV producer's vehicle: 1 held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A gang of criminals threw three bombs on a microbus of Raju Alim, programme producer of Channel i, and later set it on fire in the city's Siddheshwari area yesterday morning.

Police said a gang of four threw the bombs on the microbus parked beside the Channel i office at Siddheshwari at around 8:15am.

Locals, however, managed to capture one Bachchu Malik of the gang while the rest fled the scene after spraying bullets on the car. He was later handed over to the police.

SEE PAGE 19 COL 6

Printing press owners asked to submit voter list by tomorrow

UNB, Dhaka

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday asked the owners of the printing press to submit the printed copies of the electoral roll by tomorrow.

The decision came from a meeting between EC officials and representatives of 38 printing press held at the Election Commission office with EC Secretary M Abdur Rashid Sarker in the chair.

The representatives of the printing press were also asked to submit

SEE PAGE 19 COL 1

Prayer Timing

December 16

	Azan	
Fajr	5-20	5-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-22	5-25
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation