

Anti-smuggling drive goes slow in Ramzan

By Masud Hasan Khan

The countrywide anti-smuggling drive is moving at a snail's pace with the beginning of Ramzan, concerned officials indicated.

They said that the campaign during Ramzan would continue in a less vigorous way.

The much-publicised drive that began January 1, is officially still on. However, reports from different parts of the country said that contraband items have returned to the local markets because of a slackening of the drive by the government agencies.

In the capital, most of the items declared banned by the government besides saris and cigarettes have reappeared in the city shops and sales centres.

However, Indian saris, both cotton and silk, are now being found at the consumers' doorsteps.

Officials involved in the drive said that the campaign that went into a brief hibernation during the Union Parishad elections in January was not revived in the districts even after the polls.

The drive was still continuing in the capital, they said.

National Anti-Smuggling Task Force (NATF) officials also said that contraband goods were entering through the "highly porous borders of the country" and some of the border markets have again been flooded with those goods.

They emphasised that the complete sealing of the borders was not possible with the present government's resources.

Adequate manpower, transport and other logistic supports were required for a successful campaign, they pointed out adding that, particularly, the law-enforcing agencies and the Customs officials had to take part in the drive in addition to their normal duties.

When contacted, chief of the NATF and member of the National Board of Revenue Shah Abdul Hannan said "the drive is still on and there is no reason to suspend it."

When his attention was drawn to the allegations of a section of the trading community that contraband items were still available in the markets of the capital and elsewhere, Hannan said "That is the reason why the drive should continue."

He suggested that the local political leadership could help create social awareness against smuggling and sale of contraband items in the country.

There were some other factors for the reappearance of smuggled goods in the country, shopowners said. They argued that the wholesalers were not making advance payments to the local manufacturers who in turn failed to market their commodities for the lack of funds and few materials.



Police on guard at the City Corporation office main gate during the strike by the employees in demand for implementing pay scale yesterday. —Star photo

City Corpn workers on strike

Some 120,000 employees of country's four City Corporations and 96 Poursavas started an indefinite strike from Monday demanding a separate pay scale consistent with the National Pay Scale.

The newly-formed 'Poua Federation' called the strike which affected the cleanliness and sewerage works in the cities and towns. In some parts of the city streets remained dark last night.

The authorities, however, have taken alternative measures to maintain emergency services from today (Tuesday).

A spokesman of the Federation told The Daily Star that the strike was observed in all the Corporations and Poursavas.

In Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) some 13,000 employees demonstrated in front of their office in support of their demand until the office hour was over.

The DCC office remained under heavy police guard since Sunday night.

Only Mayor's office was

By Staff Correspondent

open during the strike, eyewitness said.

The Federation spokesman said that nearly 300 garbage carriers of the DCC were garaged at the DCC's Sayadabad garage as the drivers and cleaners were on strike.

"Bad stench will vitiate the capital's air as more than 3,000 dustbins are now filled with garbage," the spokesman said.

A DCC source said that some 3,000 tons household waste are dumped everyday in different litterbins around the capital.

The Federation spokesman alleged that the authorities' intransigence forced us to go on an indefinite strike.

The Mayor declined to talk with our leaders on the issue and that worsened the situation," the spokesman alleged.

Meanwhile, the Mayor held a meeting with 10 regional chiefs and other officials and decided to take alternative measures to run the emergency services of the corporation.

"DCC will hire trucks and sweepers to keep the city clean and the engineering section will maintain the street lights," an official of DCC told The Daily Star.

The source said that some 250 officers of the DCC would supervise the hired workers to avert any breakdown.

Our Staff Correspondent from Khulna adds: The street lights of the Khulna City Corporation were off on Monday night as the employees joined the indefinite strike which called by the Poua Federation.

Garbage remained littered near the dustbins, throughout the city.

Some 2,500 employees demonstrated and held rallies in front of the Corporation in support of their demand of pay hike.

No negotiatory meeting was held between the authorities and the leaders of the employees as Mayor Sheikh Toyabur Rahman is sick and now under treatment at Dhaka, a Corporation source said.

Rao survives first test of strength

NEW DELHI, Mar 9: Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao on Monday survived the first test of strength of his minority 8-month-old government, reports AP.

The present crisis started after the Bharatiya Janata or Indian People's Party, opposed a traditional address to Parliament last month by the president, who is a constitutional figurehead.

Hectic lobbying JU VC's post

By Staff Correspondent

Hectic lobbying by different groups is on to get 'the person of choice' selected as the Vice-Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University from the panel elected on Sunday.

Education Ministry sources say, Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar, Education Minister, is favouring Prof M Imamuddin who became third by securing 40 votes.

BNP sources say, the move by the Education Minister has annoyed some of his colleagues for favouring a candidate whose political identity is well-known. Cabinet members opposing Prof Imamuddin's selection, sources say, are favourably disposed to the two other candidates, Prof Kazi Saleh Ahmed, the incumbent and Prof Khandaker Mustahidur Rahman.

Meanwhile, Jatlyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) Jahangirnagar University unit yesterday brought out a procession on the campus and chanted slogans against fundamentalist forces.

In a meeting after the procession the JCD leaders expressed their determination not to allow any fundamentalist force to engage in any political activity on the campus.

Campus sources say, the rally was a sequel to the move by the Education Minister.

Incidentally, students of the Jahangirnagar University have banned the activities of Islami Chhatra Shibir from the campus since the killing of Kabir, a JCD leader, in August, 1988.

Farook Sobhan

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In this connection, the name of a senior BNP cabinet member, who may be dropped from the cabinet, has been mentioned.

However, the Foreign Ministry is still very keen that the post should go to a career diplomat.

City fire

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Fire brigade control room said, firemen had to keep their vehicles about 600 yards off from the spot to carry out the operation due to unplanned and hazardous construction.

Director General Brigadier (ret'd) Nurul Islam Lashkor and other high officials of fire brigade visited the area just after the incident.

Another reports from Rajbari adds: 10-year-old boy was burnt alive and another five people were injured as fire broke out at a jute-godown and four grocery shops at Pangsha in early hours on Monday.

The victim Nasir died on the spot while Ramzan Mia, Selim, Azmal and Nizam sustained severe burn injuries. They were sent to the Pangsha Upazila Health Complex.

The fire ensued at about 3 am was extinguished by local people at about 7 am

Allotment of residential plot

Ershad formally charged, Rahmatullah exonerated

Former president H M Ershad was Monday formally charged with corrupt practices while in office as head of state to derive illegal financial benefits either for himself or for others through the allotment of 49 residential plots to different persons in capital's four posh residential areas, violating established rules, reports BSS.

Special Judge A T M Fazole Kabir of the Special Court while pronouncing the charges against Ershad said the former president when he was in power in 1988, 1989, 1990 favoured the 49 persons by allotting Rajuk plots at Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani and Uttara in

violation of government rules either himself directing the concerned authorities to allot the land or making recommendations for the same.

The beneficiaries included five ministers under Ershad, 13 government officials and 31 private citizens, the charge said.

The charge was framed after two days of charge hearing made on February 25 and March 3 when the Judge heard both sides pleading their cases.

The Judge said the lands were allotted in violation of Clause 13(A) of the Town Development Act of Rajuk and Ershad himself received application forms other than the prescribed one. The accused in some cases made recommendations in violation of law. Judge Kabir observed in doing so, the former president had committed punishable offence under Section 2 of Clause 5(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1947. Former chairman of Rajuk S M Rahmatullah, the lone co-accused in the case was exonerated from the charges by the Judge after finding the allegations against him by prosecution to be 'baseless'.

ALWC

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meeting sources, urged party general secretary Sajeda Chowdhury to ask Montu not to hold Dhaka district committee meeting at the party office.

Meanwhile Mostafa Mohsin Montu received a two-paragraph letter signed by the party general secretary yesterday asking him to show cause as to why he would not be expelled from the party.

Talking to The Daily Star, Montu said that the letter did not bring any specific accusation against him.

The letter, according to Montu, accused him of involving himself in the 'anti-organizational activities' and 'tarnishing the image of the party', without 'any specific charges'. He has been asked to give reply to the letter within 15 days from receipt.

Replying to a question Montu told the Star, 'How can I give a reply to the letter when no specific charges have been brought against me?'

Meanwhile, Mohammad Nasim, AL publicity secretary and Chief Whip of the Opposition in parliament, addressing a public meeting at Goran in the city yesterday afternoon, called upon the workers of the different wings of Awami League to resist the terrorists belonging to both the ruling party and the Awami League.

"Democracy and terrorism can not go together," Nasim said, adding "resisting the killers of Badal was no way less important than resisting killers of Mujib right now."

He also made an appeal to the leaders of both BNP and AL, not to provide shelter to the hooligans in their respective parties for the sake of flourishing democracy in the country.

The ALWC will meet again to discuss the proposed economic policy of the party soon. According to sources, AL chief was scheduled to have a discussion on the proposed policy with renowned economist of the country Dr Rehman Sobhan yesterday afternoon.

Student's death halts public transport

From Our Correspondent

GAZIPUR, Mar 9: Dhaka-Mymensingh highway communication remained suspended for four hours today when people staged a demonstration to protest death of a local school student.

Angry schoolmates, relatives and neighbours put barricade on the highway and sat

for four hours to protest the death of Mohammad Manruzzaman, the first boy of Class Five of the local Ashraf Textile Mills High School, who was knocked down by a speeding truck last night.

Manruzzaman died late night at the Dhaka Medical

College Hospital after being shifted there from the Tongi Masimpur Hospital.

On Sunday evening Manruzzaman was run over by a Dhaka-bound truck from behind when he was going to mosque for Tarabi prayers. Manir was sent to the Tongi

Hospital in a comatic condition.

When the news of his death reached the locality, hundreds of students came out of the school and blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway. They were joined by the relatives and the neighbours of Manir. The angry people also smashed



The students of Tongi Asraf Textile Mills High School blocking Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway after the death of a school student yesterday. —photo M A Matin

The Midnight File

2 Soviet emigres arrested with uranium

MUNICH, Mar 9: Two Soviet emigres were arrested for trying to sell a kilogram (2.2 pounds) of slightly enriched uranium pellets for 1.9 million marks (dflrs 1.1 million), Bavarian state police said Monday, reports AP.

Yeltsin faces first mass strike

MOSCOW, Mar 9: Russian leader Boris Yeltsin is facing the first mass strike movement of his presidency following today's call by trade unions in the Key Kuzbass Coal region for an unlimited general strike from Wednesday. Strike committee Chairman Gennady Mikhailets said he expected one million workers belonging to the regional federation of independent unions to come out, reports AFP.

KAFCO

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funds for the development of gas fields and gas pipeline projects that would be essential to supply gas to the factory site in Chittagong. Bakhrabad Gas Systems Ltd, the main supplier, would not be able to meet the huge requirements of KAFCO, 24 million 'thousand cft' annually.

When asked why the Government allowed the timing of the KAFCO renegotiation to coincide with the final stages of preparations for Aid Club meeting as well as discussions over financing of Jamuna Bridge, a policy maker requesting anonymity said, "There was no way out at this stage."

According to a highly-placed official source, Japan recently gave a letter to Bangladesh authorities asking for an early solution to the impasse.

The letter, from the Japanese Deputy Prime Minister, is learnt to have prompted the cabinet decision.

The KAFCO crisis has already led to the postponement of the World Bank-sponsored meeting on the Jamuna Bridge scheduled for March 16 in Washington.

According to authoritative sources, Japan has also threatened to stay away from the IMF meeting.

Defending the decision, a Minister told this correspondent that Bangladesh would have lost a possible legal battle with KAFCO.

Diplomatic sources say the KAFCO cabal had gone for an 'all-out campaign' in the diplomatic circles to put pressure on Bangladesh policymakers.

According to a diplomatic source, an influential Western ambassador had advised KAFCO's top executives that the Company "conduct and present a full risk analysis study to show that the combination of LG's and volatile urea/gas prices do not create too great a risk on the GOB (Government of Bangladesh)."

The question that remains unanswered by officials is what would be the production cost of urea and ammonia per ton with the cost over-run and the agreed gas price at \$1.00.

A senior official last night failed to give the figures. Raktubuddin Ahmed, the Chairman of BCIC, said that he could not give those "off hand."

The BCIC represents the Bangladesh government in the KAFCO Board and Ahmed is a member of the Board of Directors.

Ahmed, however, informed that these calculations had already been made when this correspondent referred to a letter from Tore Feuk, the KAFCO MD, seeking an appointment with the former to discuss "the funding of the unavoidable extra costs"

"The letter, at one stage, reads: 'I feel that the BCIC, be-

ing the largest shareholder in KAFCO, should become more involved and informed about the present situation."

A Government handout issued last night said, "The Government has reluctantly agreed to issue letter of guarantee against the export credit for the KAFCO project."

Referring to the concessions, the handout said, "In spite of all these, however, the project still appeared to remain far from being satisfactory from the point of view of fully safe-guarding Bangladesh's interests and yet, in consideration of the recent developments and possible legal complications as also in the interest of maintaining friendly relations internationally and promoting foreign investment in the country, the Government felt obliged to agree to issue the letter of guarantee against export credit for the KAFCO project."

The Finance Minister is likely to address a press conference on March 11 where the KAFCO issue is expected to figure prominently, Ministry sources said.

US options

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wheat sought by India because of its reported rice deal with Cuba and the fact that India is not a traditional wheat importer.

"We have conveyed our concern to the US government," Chidambaram said, stressing that the United States had not refused to sell the grain to India.

The minister's comments followed an uproar in parliament over opposition allegations last week that New Delhi had buckled under US pressure and refused to sell rice to Cuba. The government promised a statement today.

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Menachem Begin dead

TEL AVIV, Mar 9: Menachem Begin, the fiery former Prime Minister who was wanted as a terrorist during Israel's fight for independence but years later won Nobel Prize for making peace with Egypt, died Monday. He was 78, reports AP.



Menachem Begin dead

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