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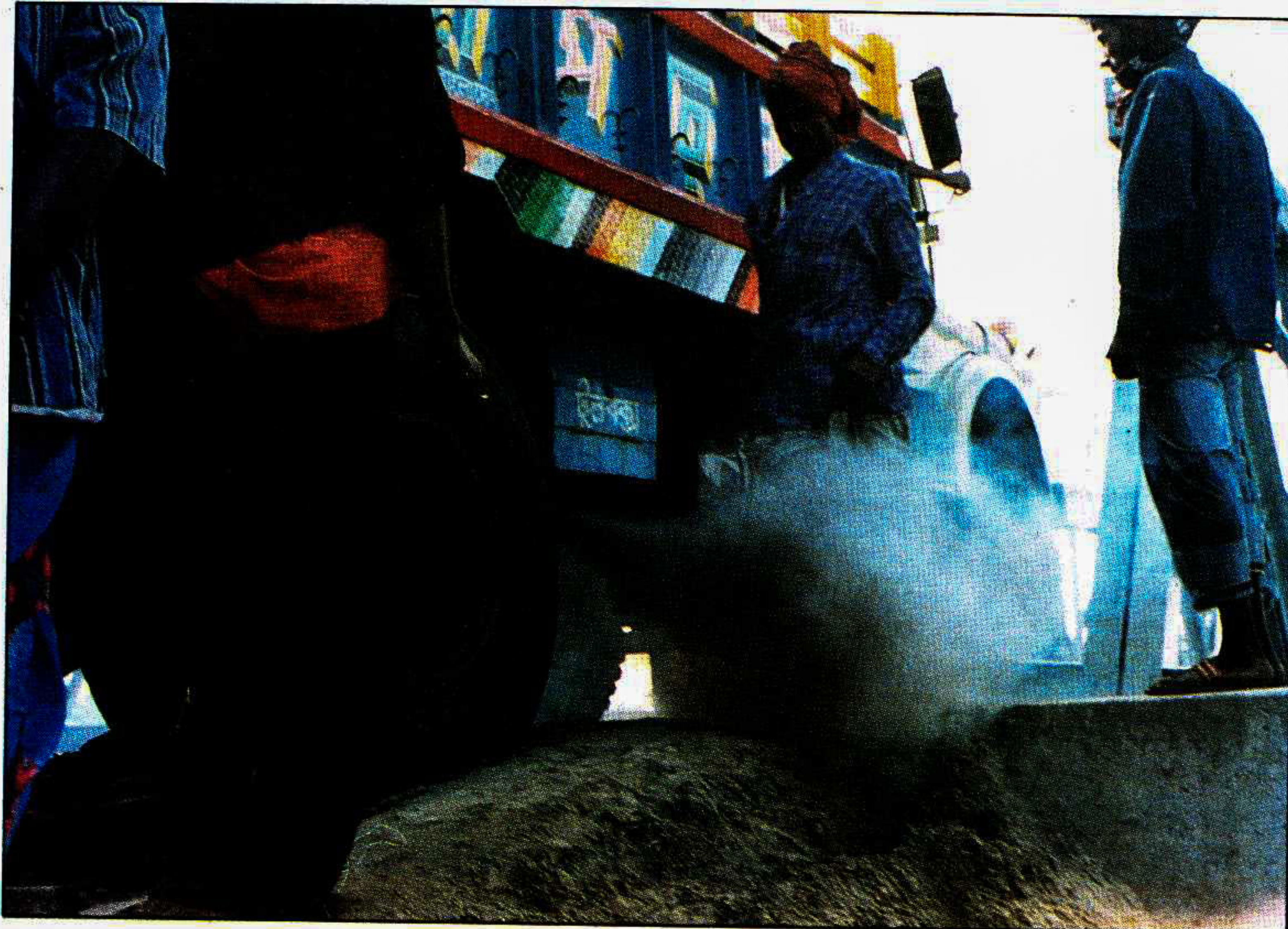
Protest against sexual harassment on DU. Photo feature by Zahedul Khan



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Merchants of death

The law says vehicles spewing black smoke are not allowed on the road. That's what the law says! But who cares about the law? Not the owner of this truck, and many more like him. And the law-enforcers? They couldn't care less either.

— Star photo: AKM Mohsin

Boost for Tejgaon property

Industrial area to be open for all commercial activities

By Morshed Ali Khan

In a reshuffle of the city's zoning pattern, the government has decided to allow almost all kinds of commercial activities in the Tejgaon Industrial Area (TIA), according to works ministry sources.

The 500-acre TIA will now be open for construction of condominiums, apartment blocks, shopping complexes, clinics and so on, according to a notification issued on December 20 by the Ministry of Housing and Public Works.

TIA was created in the early 1950s with a view to establish-

ing service-oriented industries. According to a recent Public Works Department survey, more than 60 per cent of the industries at TIA have either been closed down or lying idle for years.

With the change of industrial pattern over the years, many of the TIA industries became obsolete and were forced to shut down.

After allowing parts of Dhanmondi and Gulshan to go commercial, this is for the first time the government has changed the zoning compound

of a major city area.

The TIA originally consisted of 405 plots, each measuring about an acre. The number of plots has now come down to 354, out of which some 166 are being used for accommodating different government organisations such as the BG Press, the Polytechnic Institute, Medical Store, BRTC, Water Board and the T&T Workshops.

With the government decision, the plot owners would now be able to take up 13 diverse commercial activities. These include construction of shop-

ping malls or complexes, condominiums and apartments, offices of travel agencies, bank and insurance companies, commercial offices, display centres for industrial products, electronics, up to 30-bed clinics but not for infectious diseases, and other commercial use as per need of the local people.

The government order says that small shops could also be set up in the area. For any kind of commercial conversion the owners must seek permission from the authorities.

The Brutus is still there

The story of how the "conscious" conspired

By Staff Correspondent

Ruling party-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) played a key role in forming the "Conscious Students" group to foil the campaign against alleged sexual abuses at Dhaka University, sources close to the group said.

The organisers and participants of the campaign aimed to save the image of the university were junior leaders and activists of BCL, the sources said.

The role of the university authorities centring the sexual harassment issue is also mysterious, the sources said.

Some sources claimed that some top DU administrators played a behind-the-scenes role in organising the group that stood against the students campaigning against sexual harassment of female students.

The Daily Star learnt that the proctor of the university, responsible for maintaining discipline on the campus, brought the group into the scene with the help of BCL.

The proctor first met some top BCL leaders at an informal meeting at the Administrative Building in presence of the Vice Chancellor, the sources said.

They talked the strategy on how the movement could be foiled which according to them was tarnishing the image of the teachers of the university and university itself.

The proctor had also several informal meetings with the BCL leaders to devise a mechanism to foil the movement against the alleged sexual harassment by the teachers.

He allegedly gave the BCL leaders the responsibility to organise an anti-movement on the campus, the sources added.

The BCL leaders then asked their junior leaders to organise the movement through a committee called "Conscious students."

With a view to forming the committee, BCL junior leaders numbering about 25 held a meeting at the Mall Chhatra on the campus at about 11pm on December 22.

Finally, a 21-member committee was formed at the meeting with BCL activists from almost all the halls.

The convenor of the Committee Farook Shikdar is a known activist of Chhatra League.

The joint secretaries of the committee are Atiqul Alam, Jewel, Ruhul Quddus, Shamsul Islam Shaon. They are also known activists of BCL.

Other members of the committee -- De'war, Jahangir, Soleman, Monwar, Halim, Anis, Shimul -- are also "active" BCL workers.

The new group held its first programme on December 24 on the campus shouting slogans confronting the views of the students already agitating against sexual abuses.

Tension gripped the Dhaka University campus on December 26 as the "Conscious Students" warned "Students Protecting Sexual Harassment" (SPSH) planning to burn effigies of teachers charged with abusing their female students.

On December 27, the "conscious" group swooped on the activists of the SPSH injuring at least eight.

The new group at an important meeting at Jasimuddin Hall on December 26 assigned Hemayet, general secretary of BCL Zia Hall unit, and Jewel to launch the attack on the SPSH programme. The Daily Star learnt.

It was also learnt that the proctor asked the "conscious" group not to "attack" the SPSH fearing it could deteriorate the situation.

But the group activists could not contain themselves and attacked the SPSH rally again on December 28 which left another eight, including three female

students, injured.

According to witnesses, the attackers were the active workers of the BCL. Even a central leader of BCL was seen leading the group during the second day's attack.

As the campus turned tense, top BCL leaders held late night meetings at Madhu's Canteen to review the situation in those days.

At a meeting held on December 27, the BCL leaders asked their junior activists not to confront the SPSH activists the next day. But their junior workers did not pay heed to their leaders.

As the things turned against them, the "conscious" group suspended their campaign on December 27 to show respect to the decision of Paribesh Parishad.

BCL leaders then changed their strategy and decided to organise the students of International Relations Department to which the teacher under fire belonged.

They assigned Rezaul, BCL SM Hall unit president and an international relations student, to bring fellow students into the scene.

Rezaul organised the students and brought out a procession on the campus on December 28. A statement was also distributed using the letterhead of the department. Sources said Rezaul managed the letterhead from a teacher of his department.

"Conscious" group insiders admitted that they had been "advised time to time" by the BCL leaders.

Lailatul Qadr tonight

By Staff Correspondent

Holy Lailatul Qadr will be observed by the Muslims all over the country tonight.

Absar's ordeal finally ends

CHITTAGONG, Jan 14: Syed Mohammad Nurul Absar (42), arrested last week on suspicion on being a top international terrorist, was released by the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court here today clearing him of all the charges, reports UNB.

A restaurant worker in London, Absar was arrested on January 8 following a fax message allegedly sent by INTERPOL in London that an internationally reputed terrorist had sneaked into Bangladesh to carry out destructive activities in different strategic establishments in the country.

In the message, Absar was identified as an explosives expert and arms dealer. On receipt of the message, police arrested him from his rented house at Bakulia in the port city early hours on January 8. The next day, he was sent to Dhaka for interrogation.

A joint interrogation cell finally found that the said INTERPOL fax message was a hoax and allegations against Absar were false.

After a check, police found out that the message was faxed from a commercial fax shop in London.

Absar was sent back to Chittagong on January 12 and produced before the CMM court today. The court ordered his release as there was no formal charge against him.

Police sources said all allegations against Absar were found baseless during investigation and interrogation.

Khaleda-Sharif meet in Makkah

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Chairperson and leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia on Wednesday met Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at the Royal State Guest House in Makkah.

Both the leaders are now in Makkah to perform Umrah. A press release of BNP yesterday said they discussed matters relating to mutual interest.

Opposition eyes series of hartals

By Nazmul Ashraf and Rezaul Karim

The major opposition parties have rejected the schedules for pourashava elections and could opt for a series of hartals coinciding with the three polling days as well as the key dates leading to the polls.

In a liaison meeting yesterday, BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote toughened their stance on the forthcoming pourashava polls as the Election Commission came up with the schedules leaving a four-point opposition demand unfulfilled.

The EC yesterday announced

the dates for pourashava elections staggered over three days from February 23.

As soon as the pourashava polls schedules went into circulation, the joint meeting reaffirmed their position to boycott the local elections if held with the demands unmet.

Their decision to boycott the polls aside, the four parties also discussed suggestions to go to the extent of resisting the elections if held without their participation.

They would meet again today to review the proposals for hartals before holding a press

briefing in the evening. They are also expected to draft a common declaration on their future course of action.

Sources indicated that the announcement for some of the programmes might be made to the press today.

But more important would be the clearance from the BNP standing committee, party's highest decision-making body, which will meet in the evening. The liaison meeting will follow.

Similar discussions in other parties are also likely to take place earlier in the day.

BNP secretary general Abdul

Manann Bhuiyan kept party chief Khaleda Zia, now in Saudi Arabia, informed of the developments. He spoke to her by phone in the evening, party sources said.

As preconditions for participation, the opposition parties want the CEC to resign and the EC revamped, among other demands.

According to the four demands, announced by these parties last week, they also wanted use of ID cards in the local government polls and "release all political detainees".

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Municipal polls schedule declared

Hena hangs tough in face of opposition demand for resignation

Election to 143 municipalities across the country, including newly formed 60, will be held in phases on February 23-25, reports UNB.

The Election Commission in a gazette notification yesterday announced the election schedule.

According to the notification, the date for submission of nomination is January 26, scrutiny January 27 and last day for withdrawal of candidature February 3.

The security money for a

chairman candidate is Tk 4,000 while for commissioner Tk 2,000.

This is for the first time the municipal elections will be held under a code of conduct prepared by the Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives Ministry.

Also for the first time female ward commissioners to 453 wards under the 143 municipalities going to the polls will be elected in direct voting. The number of total general wards is 1,359.

Meanwhile, Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena is ready to quit in greater national interest but not under any "undue and unreasonable pressures" from any quarters.

"I'm ready to leave my office for larger interest of the people and the country. But I'll not bow down to any illogical and undue demand," he said after announcing the schedule for February 23-25 municipal elections.

A bold Hena, international-

ally applauded for the 1996 general elections, said, "My position is very clear: I'm determined to continue in my constitutional office as long as I can."

The removal from a constitutional post like the CEC is possible in two ways: 1) If he resigns on his own or 2) found by the President that he cannot run the office for physical or mental incapability or gross misconduct.

Despite the local government polls being non-partisan.

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Stealing food aid meant for the poor

By Rafiq Hasan and Reaz Ahmad

At least 26 per cent of the total allocation of foodgrains for Rural Development (RD) projects is being misappropriated.

In some projects, misappropriation is up to 39 per cent.

These were revealed in a recent study conducted by the Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) under the government's Food Management and Research Support Project.

The RD projects are implemented under the Food for Work Programme (FWP).

The Daily Star earlier reported that some 15 per cent of the foodgrains allocated for Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programmes is being misappropriated.

The RD projects and VGD programmes are the two main outlets of the government to re-

duce rural poverty. Most of the donors' food assistance is being channelled through the two outlets for years.

Around two lakh tonnes of foodgrains are channelled yearly under the RD projects in the country for building and reconstructing rural infrastructures and institutions.

Underpayment of workers, who are generally ignorant about their wage rate, and padding of the work are the two main ways of misappropriating foodgrains under the RD projects, the IFPRI study said.

An earlier study jointly carried out by BIDS and IFPRI in 1982 also revealed a similar picture about misappropriation of foodgrains. The recent study noted that despite repeated efforts for improvement, the sit-

uation remained the same.

Five per cent of the allotted foodgrains is somehow missed during delivery from the local storage depots (LSDs) to the project implementation committees (PICs).

"Rents are paid at different stages of the set-up, supervision and implementation of the project and to assure delivery of the funds. Fees paid to government officials might be 5 to 15 per cent of the value of the project."

The study said that sometimes workers under RD projects are paid in cash instead of giving them wheat. If the market price of wheat is higher than the government rate of the allocated wheat, programme officials make profit on the price difference, the study

noted. If the workers are paid in cash, they get much less in terms of wheat and the quantity of wheat thus "saved" is misappropriated, the study noted.

The study further said that workers work more than eight hours and in many cases, even 13 hours.

As overestimation of work is the major source of "leakage", the study suggested credible pre-work and post-work surveys to check whether the required work has been done.

The study also put forward a number of recommendations including better monitoring and supervision, fixing local salary rates in cash equivalent, and paying only for the work done.

Tough call for home-bound traffic

By Staff Correspondent



With the Eid-ul-Fitr round the corner, lakhs of people who will travel to the country's southern region from the cities to celebrate the festival with their families are facing immense sufferings.

Motor launch is the only mode of transport for them. And they are facing serious hassles.

Booking and reservation of seats in the government-owned BIVTC vessels and those of some private launch companies were closed even one month before the Eid festival.

"When I went for booking a cabin in a Barisal-bound launch on January 1, I was advised to come after January 10. I requested the counter clerk to have my name in their register. But he refused saying they were yet to open any such register," said Munaim Ahmed, one of the sufferers.

"On January 10, the counter clerk told me there is no room to be reserved. Then I requested him for a cabin for January 17. He said it was beyond his capacity. The owner of the launch has taken the register and he will give reservations."

But, Ahmed said, he later found that launch employees were giving reservation slips to passengers at Tk 1,000 to 1,200 against the rate of Tk 600. They did not mention the amounts on the reservation slips to avoid detection by law enforcing agency personnel and legal action.

Ticket touts have also taken homegoers hostage at different bus terminals and railway station in the city, forcing them to buy tickets at exorbitant rates. They are doing this with the help of a section of transport

operators and railway employees.

Private launch owners are giving reservation only to influential people and muslimen for smooth running of their business in future, said Alamgir Hossain, a launch passenger on way to Jhalakathi.

Most of the passengers going to southern districts travel on launch decks. But touts occupy the decks as soon as the launches reach the city's Sadarghat terminal and sell "one seat" for Tk 20 to 30 or more.

Launch owners and law-enforcing agency personnel hardly care to take any initiative to save the passengers from the grip of touts.

Prayer Timings

January 15		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:20	5:26
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	4:00	4:15
Maghrib	5:36	5:38
Esha	7:00	7:15

Source: Islamic Foundation



Schri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Jan	Schri	Iftar
26	15	—	5:36
27	16	5:20	5:37
28	17	5:20	5:38