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PRAN for health

BSF kidnaps 7 Bangladeshi fishermen

From Our Correspondent SATHIRA, Jan 12: Seven Bangladeshi fishermen were kidnapped by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) from Bangladesh side of the river Ichhamati yesterday.

The BSF personnel also took away their boats and nets.

The kidnapped fishermen were identified as Israfil, Yaqul and Aziz of village Godakhali and Arshad, Ashraf, Hakim and Bachchu of village Komorpur in Debhata thana.

The seven were kidnapped while fishing in the river, BDR sources said.

When contacted, commanding officer of the 12 rifles battalion said, a protest note has been sent to the BSF of Soladana Border Outpost (BOP) in West Bengal.

BDR did not get reply till filing of this report.

BDR-BSF flag meet on Muhurir Char postponed

FENI, Jan 12: The scheduled flag meeting between BSF and BDR to resolve the 27-year-old dispute over demarcation of Muhurir Char was not held today, reports UNB.

The BSF has reinforced border patrol as the dispute took a new dimension following the Indian refusal to hold the meeting.

The sector commander level meeting was scheduled to be held at the BDR checkpoint at Majumdar Hat in Porshuram thana. Acting rifle battalion 2 commander of Joylaskara Major Wahid said that the flag meeting for finalising a draft memorandum of understanding on construction of working boundary was postponed at the last moment.

The 45th flag meeting between BDR and BSF drafted the MOU on December 28 last year.

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Condition of CEC deteriorates, admitted to CMH

By Staff Correspondent Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena was admitted to the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka yesterday as his condition deteriorated.

He will leave Dhaka for the United States on January 24 for treatment, family sources said.

The CEC went on leave for one month on November 30 last year on medical ground and was operated upon in Singapore in December.

Back home, he was exposed to certain complications due to operation. On the advice of his doctors, Hena extended his leave for another month from December 30.

ANNOUNCEMENT
The Daily Star will not be able to bring out its regular Weekend Magazine on Friday, January 14 due to Eid holiday. We regret inconvenience to our valued readers.

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Prayer Timings

January 13		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-18	5-25
Zohr	12-45	1-20
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-35	5-40
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Judge halts treason case against Sharif

Presence of intelligence men, army personnel in courtroom protested

KARACHI, Jan 12: High Court Justice Shabbir Ahmed refused today to hear a case of treason and hijacking against deposed premier Nawaz Sharif protesting the presence of a large number of intelligence agents and army personnel in his courtroom, report agencies.

Several intelligence agents were arrested, while others fled the courtroom, said eyewitnesses.

Ahmed's refusal to hear the case against Sharif is a major setback for the army-led government which filed treason charges against the ex-premier and six other men.

Ahmed ordered the arrest of plainclothes intelligence officials and said he was handing back the case to a lower-ranking judge.

"I refuse to hear this case in such circumstances," the judge said.

I send back the case to Rehmat Hussain Jaffri," he said, referring to the anti-terrorism court judge who first heard the case.

Some eight plainclothes officials were sitting in the courtroom, near Sharif and his six co-accused, when the hearing opened early today.

The judge first dismissed an earlier defence application questioning the court's jurisdiction but within minutes the crowded room erupted into shouting and the judge ended the hearing.

Sharif and his co-accused were brought to court in armoured personnel carriers, surrounded by dozens of paramilitary rangers and policemen. Ahmed objected to the strong show of paramilitary troops and policemen.

One of the accused Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, the former chairman of Pakistan International Airlines, was the first to complain about the presence of intelligence agents in the courtroom, said eyewitnesses. He told Ahmed that his conversations were being monitored and recorded.

Ahmed immediately ordered the intelligence agents who were present in the courtroom arrested. The others fled.

"I cannot provide a fair trial in these circumstances," Ahmed said.

"It is very obvious that the government wants to overpower the court," Sharif told reporters.

Sharif and his co-defendants, who include his brother Shabbaz, have still not been formally charged.

"The decision was abrupt and unacceptable," chief prosecutor Raja Qureshi told reporters. "The motive was engineered," he said.

Qureshi admitted the eight men were intelligence officials but said they were in the courtroom for security reasons. He said the prosecution was ready to lay formal charges against Sharif and his co-defendants.

The next hearing is due on Monday.

The case against the former premier relates to the night of the coup, when Sharif is accused of preventing a Pakistan International Airlines flight carrying Musharraf and nearly

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Save the Buriganga
Buriganga is shrinking fast, courtesy of encroachers who seem to have a free run. The picture shows encroachments in Kamrangirchar Area. —Star photo

Fresh move to speed up Rohingya repatriation

By Reaz Ahmad

Bangladesh and Myanmar officials will meet in Yangon tomorrow to expedite repatriation of Rohingya refugees.

The first official level talks on the refugee issue since February 1997 are expected to clear all obstacles to speedy repatriation of Rohingyas from Bangladesh.

The talks are taking place at a time when high birth rate in refugee camps has almost surpassed the rate of repatriation, official sources said.

Relief Secretary Azad Ruhul Amin will lead the seven-member Bangladesh delegation which include senior officials from home and foreign ministries. A deputy minister in charge of immigration will lead the Myanmar side.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Amin said that Bangladesh was hopeful of raising the number of refugees to be repatriated in each batch.

At present, hardly 50 go back per week.

Some 21,000 Rohingyas living in two refugee camps — Nayapara and Kutupalong — in Cox's Bazar are part of around 2,50,000 who had fled their homes in Arakan state of Myanmar to escape persecution by the military junta in 1991.

Myanmar suddenly stopped the repatriation process in July 1997 after the return of refugees. Later, it agreed to take back 7,000 more — 50 in a batch per week — from November 1998.

In the following six months, only 378 Rohingyas returned home in 18 batches. Officials in Dhaka and sources in the office of UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) pointed out that the repatriation process gradually slowed down over the months.

The last bilateral talks at

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Killers of Nikunja will be brought to book: Nasim

Home Minister Mohammad Nasim told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday that he sensed a heinous plan to destabilise the situation in the country by terrorist acts, reports UNB.

Making a statement on the killing of Nikunja Bihari Nath, joint secretary of the government, by muggers on the Dhaka University campus on Tuesday morning, the Minister said the terrorists became active when the political situation was stabilising.

Terning the killing as 'very sad and unfortunate' Nasim assured the House that the government would bring the culprits to book.

"Four terrorists have already been arrested and others will be rounded up soon. The killers will be given exemplary punishment," the minister said.

He said the government has taken steps to arrest the killers. "Actions will also be taken against any police official found negligent in this regard."

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4 held in Nikunja Debnath murder case

SI suspended: Culprits yet to be arrested

By Staff Correspondent

The sub-inspector who was in command of the police patrol near Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University where a top government official was killed by muggers Tuesday morning was temporarily suspended yesterday for negligence of duty.

Nikunja Bihari Debnath, 55, joint secretary of Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) Ministry was stabbed to death by a gang of muggers near the 'Swadhinata Sangram' (Struggle for Independence) sculpture at the road intersection between SM Hall and Jagannath Hall. He was returning to his Azampur Government Colony residence from Kamalapur railway station in a rickshaw.

Sub-inspector Arman Ali of Ramna thana and his team were a few yards from the spot where Debnath was stabbed at about 6:30 in the morning, police sources said. A patrol team always remains deployed there.

Ramna police so far picked up 56 suspects from Palashi, Babupura, Nilkhet, Kataban and the Jatiya Press Club areas. Four of them — Din Islam, 28, Barun, 22, Hossain, 23 and Alamgir Hossain, 25 — were shown arrested and produced before the CMM's court, which placed them on three days' remand. They were being interrogated, police said last night.

Rickshawpuller Matin, in whose rickshaw Debnath was returning home, was taken to the four arrested persons to identify the killers, but he could not ascertain their involvement in the incident, police said. Matin was released yesterday.

Talking to this correspondent, relatives of some of those released alleged that police arrested some innocent people in connection with the killing to cover their negligence and released them after realising money.

DMP Commissioner AKM Samsuddin told The Daily Star that the arrested four were suspected to be members of a gang known as 'Ohi Group', involved in snatching and other crimes in the area. "We are hopeful of arresting the gang members involved in killing," he said.

But other sources claimed

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Matiur Rahman New DMP commissioner

Authorities yesterday transferred the Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) apparently for Tuesday's murder of a top government official in the city, reports UNB.

Some changes were also made in the key posts of the police force, sources said.

DMP Commissioner and DIG AKM Shamsuddin has been transferred to the Special Branch (SB) while Additional IGP Nurul Alam posted as commandant of the Staff College.

DIG of Dhaka range Matiur Rahman has been made DMP Commissioner while DIG of the Special Branch Abu Kashem Hawladar made DIG of Dhaka Range.

Rafiq's resignation accepted

President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday accepted the resignation letter of Minister Rafiqul Islam, a Cabinet Division notification said, reports BSS.

The President, as per Article 58(2) of the Constitution, accepted the resignation submitted earlier by Rafiqul Islam, minister without portfolio.

Victim of assault at TSC gives statement in court

By Staff Correspondent The victim of assault at TSC during the New Year's Day celebrations made a statement before the CMM's court yesterday.

In the statement, she said that Mamun and Muktar, along with 15 youngsters, followed her. When she along with her two companions arrived at TSC, the youngsters stripped her and took her to the Art Institute premises and assaulted her.

The lady was taken to the Metropolitan Magistrate's Court.

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Intl confce on environment from tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent A two-day international conference aimed at forging concerted efforts to check environmental degradation begins in the city tomorrow.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is likely to inaugurate the conference at the Osmany Memorial Hall at 10:00 am.

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleida Zia will be the chief guest at the concluding ceremony on Saturday at 6:30 pm.

This was announced at a press conference yesterday at the Jatiya Press Club. Convenor of the conference preparatory committee Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury of BUET, Member-Secretary Abu Naser Khan, Editor of the Prothom Alo Motiur Rahman, Prof Nazrul Islam and Muhammad Jahangir addressed the press conference.

The conference on environment split in 20 technical and two general sessions — all open to members of the public — is being sponsored by 70 organisations. These include Paribesh Rakha Shapath, Bangladesh Environment Network, BUET, Coalition of Environmental

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Some 30 dwelling houses and small factories were gutted in a devastating fire at Bashpatti in Aganagar under Keraniganj thana on Tuesday night. The fire originated from an electric short-circuit. —Star photo

Smuggled cigarettes from Myanmar flood market

Distribution centre set up near border!

By Staff Correspondent

Smuggled 'LONDON' brand cigarettes from Myanmar have flooded the market causing losses of crores of taka to the national exchequer and local cigarette companies.

With a very efficient underground distribution network, the comparatively cheaper cigarettes have reached markets in remote parts of the country, forcing local companies to slash prices amid plummeting sales.

Most of the smuggling is done through Teknaf by road and through sea ports under the cover of bilateral border trade with Myanmar, official sources and cigarette manufacturers said.

Manufacturer of 'LONDON' brand cigarettes, the Rothmans of Pall Mall Myanmar Private Ltd, opened a huge distribution centre close to Bangladesh border last year, sources in local companies claimed.

During a visit to wholesale markets at New Market and Chawk Bazar yesterday, traders told this correspondent that they could supply 'any quantity' of this cigarette any time. Many of them nodded when this correspondent asked whether they could supply 500 cartons from ready stock.

The price of each carton (200 sticks) of LONDON was between Tk 220 and 270 in the wholesale market. The wholesalers said 'parties' deliver the cigarettes at their shops. They declined to name the 'parties' or persons behind the smuggling, but hinted that there were warehouses in Chittagang, Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna.

"LONDON is a hot business now and it is greatly affecting sale of local cigarettes whose prices are between Tk 1 and Tk 2 per stick," said a wholesaler at Chawk Bazar.

British America Tobacco (BAT), the highest tax payer among local tobacco companies with a payment record of Tk 980 crore in the last financial year, has cut prices of two of its popular brands by nearly Tk 10 each. A BAT official said they were forced to slash prices as sales fell sharply after 'invasion' of the market by 'LONDON' brand cigarettes.

"Consequences of this un-

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\$ 157m ADB loan for Dhaka Power System Project

By Special Correspondent

Bangladesh and Asian Development Bank (ADB) yesterday signed a 157 million US dollar loan agreement for Dhaka Power System Upgrade Project (DPSUP), according to a message received in Dhaka from Manila, reports BSS.

The balance 143 million US dollar of the 300 million US dollar project would be provided by Bangladesh government and executing agencies.

Ambassador Rezaul Hossain and ADB President Tadao Chino signed the agreement on behalf of Bangladesh and ADB respectively.

ADB's assistance comprises two loans. The first loan of 75 million dollar is from its concessional Asian Development Fund. The second loan of 82 million dollar is from ADB's ordinary capital resources. This reflects a hardening of terms for the power sector, in support of its commercialisation.

Under the project greater Dhaka's distribution and transmission system will be extended and the power sector will

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Hijack alert: 11 held in Calcutta freed

By Special Correspondent

Security has been beefed up in all airports in the country following Tuesday's hijack alert involving a Dhaka-bound Biman flight before its take-off from Calcutta airport, highly placed sources said here yesterday.

Passengers are being carefully checked and all Biman and Civil Aviation officials and employees have been ordered to wear badges and keep identity cards while on duty.

Messages requesting for extra vigilance have been sent to all foreign airports where Biman aircraft land, the sources said.

Meanwhile a BBC Bangla Service broadcast at 10:30 last night said the 11 foreigners detained at Netaji Subash Bose Airport in Calcutta by Indian immigration following the hijack alert 'were being released' after ascertaining their identities and nationalities. But BBC did not mention their nationalities clearly. It said some of them are Iranian passport holders and some Israeli passport holders, all of Afghan origin.

BBC said the Indian authorities have asked Biman to fly them to Dhaka as they have Biman tickets.

They were barred from boarding a Biman flight (No. BG092) and detained following intelligence reports that they were planning to hijack the aircraft for release of the convicted killers of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, now in jail.

But the sources here said the Biman authorities are yet to get any official report on the whole episode either from Indian authorities or from Bangladesh mission in Calcutta. They are yet to officially know the identity of the foreigners. "We are checking the whole thing," one source said.

The 11 persons had report-

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AL activist killed in BCL-Shibir clash in Comilla

COMILLA, Jan 12: A ruling party worker was killed and 11 others were injured in a violent clash between Chhatra League and Shibir activists in Choudhagram thana late Tuesday, reports UNB.

Anwar Hossain, 25, of Laxmipur village, an activist of Awami League and night guard of Laxmipur Bazaar, succumbed to bullet injuries at Choudhagram Thana Health Complex at 11pm.

Police said the BCL and Shibir activists clashed at Laxmipur Bazar Tuesday afternoon.

Additional police force from the district headquarters joined Choudhagram thana to bring the situation under control.

The injured were admitted to thana health complex and other clinics.

The local unit of Awami League in a meeting at Laxmipur Bazaar today protested the killing.

FLY EMIRATES Emirates

Bangladesh no match

From Al-Amin

COLOMBO, Jan 12: Bangladesh surrendered meekly to favourites India who ran away with a resounding 122-run victory in the group B opener of the Second World Youth Cricket Championship at Moratuwa Stadium here today.

The match pitted in to a no-contest as Bangladesh, chasing an impressive Indian total of 235 for five in the 50 overs, were bundled out for a meager 113 in 34.5 overs.

Bangladesh's dream of shocking the mighty Indians received a big blow when skipper and opening batsman Hannan Sarkar returned for a first ball duck. From then on, it was a tall tale of boys trudging back to the dressing room. And any hopes of Bangladesh making a match out of it was over once they were six down for 67 by the 22nd over.

Although there was no evil in the wicket, the inexperienced Bangladesh batting was vividly exposed against a disciplined Indian attack. Only Rajin Saleh, making the highest 27, stood tall in the rubbles. The second highest score of 22 came in the form of extras. Kuntal Chandra (17), Mahfuz (13) and left-handed opener Nahidul Haq (10), were the others to make it to double figures.

The inexplicable batting that succeeded some wayward bowling and bizarre fielding was perfectly summed up by In-

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