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PM apprises President of her 3-nation Euro-tour

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday afternoon to apprise him of her official visit to three European nations, reports UNB.

The Prime Minister, who recently visited Italy, Germany and Switzerland, termed her discussion with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder as 'very fruitful'.

The German Chancellor has supported my proposal for duty- and quota-free access of Bangladeshi products to the European market," she told the President.

Hasina also apprised the President that Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato had proposed to sign an agreement so that Bangladeshi people could go to Italy and work legally.

President Shahabuddin appreciated her successful visit to the three European countries and said trips would help widen bilateral relations with the nations.

SPGRC leaders sending abroad 'fake stranded Pakistanis'?

Case against 7, three including Naseem Khan 'absconding'

By Raziur Rahman

Top leaders of the Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC) are allegedly involved in sending people abroad by issuing falsified documents that certify them as stranded Pakistanis.

Sources said the SPGRC leaders and their accomplices took large amounts of money from people in exchange for issuing false identity certificates. Many people have already travelled to Sweden, France, Germany, Italy and the USA and sought political asylum in those countries posing as stranded Pakistanis by using these fake certificates, they said.

A Daily Star investigation found that anyone could 'buy' such a certificate for a specified amount of money from the city's 'Geneva Camp' headquarters of the SPGRC.

Documents available with The Daily Star show that the SPGRC leaders have sent people abroad using these fake identity certificates. These leaders have connections with an official of a USA based international organisation that deals with refugees from different parts of the world.

Police are investigating the allegations against the committee leaders after Shajahan Talukdar, a retired soldier who lives in the city's Pallabi area, filed a case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court on October 30 accusing them of swindling Tk 5.4 lakh from him.

The case accuses seven people, including the SPGRC chief patron Naseem Khan and his two sons Mahmood Khan and Harunur Rashid of masterminding the scheme. Presently, the Detective Branch (DB) is investigating the case.

A DB official told The Daily Star that Naseem Khan, Mahmood Khan and Morshed, another accused, have been absconding since the case was filed. Mahmood Khan is the assistant secretary general of the SPGRC.

Harunur Rashid and three other accused were granted bail by the CMM's Court after they surrendered before the court on November 27 this year.

Some other victims have already recorded their statements before the DB where they alleged that following assurances from Naseem Khan, they gave Mahmood Khan money for sending their relatives abroad.

Tuhin Khan, a businessman of the city's Mirpur area, alleged that the SPGRC leaders had taken a total of Tk 1.45 lakh from him promising to send his younger brothers abroad.

Sources said that the SPGRC leaders even cheated a number of people of their own community. Munna and Javed are two such stranded Pakistanis who allegedly lost their money after giving money to Mahmood Khan.

While visiting the SPGRC headquarters at 'Geneva Camp' in the guise of a stranded Pakistani certificate buyer, this correspondent could not find any of the accused SPGRC personnel there.

According to sources, the office now mostly remains closed after See page 11 col 1

BNP fails to make headway in resolving disputed issues

By Nazmul Ashraf

Despite widespread speculation, the main opposition BNP yesterday failed to make any headway in resolving the growing discord in the opposition camp over its much talked about out-government agitation after the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Leaders of the BNP-led four-party opposition alliance at a meeting on Tuesday also could not resolve the "contentious issues".

An emergency meeting of BNP's highest decision-making body -- the National Standing Committee -- had several hours of discussion on the disputed issues at the party's Banani office yesterday.

But no decision could be taken after lengthy deliberations that focused on the planned anti-government agitation, preparation for the next general elections, resolving inter-ethnic conflicts in the party and its front organisations as well as the long-unresolved issues in the opposition alliance, meeting sources said.

Chaired by BNP chief and Leader of the Opposition in parliament Khaleeda Zia, the meeting heard conflicting suggestions on launching a tough street agitation after the Eid, preparations for the next elections, return to the Jatiya Sangsad and opposition lawmakers' resignation.

The meeting was adjourned till after the Eid, the sources said.

At the meeting, most of the speakers spoke for intensifying the anti-government agitation side by side with election campaign while others emphasised more on out-government movement to force it to step down.

Possible strategies for the planned agitation and an electoral alliance also came up for discussion against the backdrop of the ruling party's plan for an early election.

The meeting also stressed the need for strengthening organisational activities of the party and discussed a post-Eid visit by the party chief to northern districts. However, it did not decide schedule for the visit.

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Hemayet goes scot-free

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) leader Hemayet Hossain who opened fire during a clash with shop owners in Nikhet area adjacent to Dhaka University campus on December 14 is still moving freely in the city.

One person was killed and several were injured when BCL leaders and activists clashed with shop owners following the High Court's split verdict in Bangabandhu Murder Case.

Sources concerned said that the BCL leader went into hiding for several days since his photograph was published in some newspapers on December 15. But now he is seen here and there, even doing Eid shopping at New Market.

BCL insiders said police could not arrest him because of pressure from influential leaders of the ruling Awami League. Some top leaders of the ruling party's student front are also trying to save him.

Police however said they were looking for the culprit since his photograph was published in newspapers.

Photograph of the young man brandishing arms was identified as that of Hemayet Hossain, general secretary of Ziaur Rahman Hall unit of BCL. The incident created sharp reaction

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Overcrowded launches leave terminal under the nose of spl security teams



With the Eid-ul-Fitr just round the corner and people anxious to go home, there is an exodus from the city that has filled public transports beyond capacity. People don't mind being herded on the deck of a steamer for a risky journey.

Rush of flights cripples ZIA customs handling

Customs checking system at Zia International Airport virtually collapsed yesterday morning as seven flights carrying some 2,100 passengers landed at the main gateway of the country within only 100 minutes, reports UNB.

Officials at the airport said seven flights from different countries landed at the ZIA between 8:10 am and 9:49 am. Another airplane with over 300 other passengers on board landed within another hour.

The rush was still on when a Thai flight landed at the ZIA at 12:24 pm, causing untold sufferings to hundreds of passengers and their friends and relatives who came to receive them.

"The airport is incapable of handling 2,400 passengers within three hours. So, it is not unnatural that normal operations were disrupted," an official at the ZIA said.

He informed that most of the flights were deferred from their original destination in view of foggy skies that the airport has been witnessing for last few days.

As soon as the flights started landing at the airport, the queues at immigration and customs became longer and longer. The on-duty officials were helpless, unable to tackle such a huge rush.

"All the flights, able to carry 280 to 320 passengers each, were packed as there is a rush of expatriates who are coming to the country to celebrate Eid," said an official at the Immigration.

Passengers alleged their sufferings heightened as the conveyor belt had some trouble during the rush hour and the luggage carrier did not work for quite a long time.

Some of the passengers termed the non-functioning of the conveyor belt for some time as mysterious. But Airport officials dismissed the allegation and said they did their best.

"The officials at immigration, customs and unloading employees worked hard so that the passengers can come out at the earliest," said a senior official at the ZIA.

But many passengers said the earliest time was three hours. "It's terrible. It's horrible. I had to wait for three hours after journeying two days," said one passenger coming from USA.

"What better can we do? We had to struggle to clear the rush of passengers with limited numbers of immigration counters, conveyor belts and

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Two alleged terrorists, teenage girl shot in city

By Staff Correspondent

Launches and steamers overloaded with home-bound people are leaving the city's Sadarghat terminal despite deployment of special teams comprising BIWTA men and security personnel to check this ahead of the Eid festival.

The teams were deployed on Tuesday.

BIWTA Chairman Muhammad Abdul Huq earlier told The Daily Star that the teams would keep a "round-the-clock vigil" to ensure safety of passengers and to make sure that no overloaded launch or steamer leaves the terminal.

Overloading is the main cause for accidents of river vessels in different routes, killing hundreds of people every year. The risk increases during the two Eid festivals - Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha.

The BIWTA chairman had also said that the teams would scrutinise fitness, registration and other relevant documents of vessels leaving the terminal and check safety and security arrangements on board.

Launch owners have been directed to keep adequate safety equipment on board," he said.

The BIWTA chairman admitted that many vessels, especially the multi-decked ones, were not at all concerned about passenger safety.

Taking the advantage of a lax attitude by the authorities concerned, launch owners are now cashing in on the heavy rush of home-bound people, betraying their commitments made at a recent meeting with BIWTA officials.

Top officials of BIWTA and the Bangladesh Launch Owners Association (BLOA) recently held a meeting on safety of passengers during the ensuing Eid-ul-Fitr.

At the meeting, BLOA President Alhaj Kalimullah had assured the BIWTA officials that they would take necessary steps to check overloading.

"We will not allow overloading and keep adequate life saving instruments on board," a leader of BLOA had said after the meeting.

But the launch owners made no mistake to take chance of the rush of passengers and charge fares almost double the normal rates. Almost all the launches and steamers which left the terminal yesterday were loaded way beyond their limit, exposing passengers to mortal risk.

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The tall Virgin bottle now at a low price.

An official press release from Global Beverages today announced that the price of the 1.5 litre Virgin PET bottles would henceforth cost Tk. 40/-.

The same product used to cost Tk. 45/-. This means a drastic price reduction of Tk. 5/-.

Global Beverages is the company behind the popular soft drink Virgin. Virgin Drinks was established in the UK by Mr. Richard Branson. Mr. Branson, CEO of Virgin Drinks congratulated Global Beverages for keeping the competitive price for the consumer. He hoped that this move would help Virgin Drinks establish a strong foothold in the market.



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By Dilara Choudhury
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Business

Ctg Chamber for speeding up quota transfer advice process
OPEC output cut on the cards
US economic slump may create new trade tension with Japan
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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Dec 23		5.16 pm
Dec 24	6-37 am	

Prayer Timings

December 23		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-13	5-19
Zuhr	12-45	1-20
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-14	5-22
Esha	7-00	7-30

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Sehri, Iftar timings			
Ramadan	Dec	Sehri	Iftar
26	23	5-18	5-21
27	24	5-13	5-21
28	25	5-14	5-22