

Star Magazine

Few people are not fascinated by paranormal phenomena. Ghosts, spirits, psychic experiences are notions that everyone likes to talk about. Skeptics may brush away these ideas as a lot of mumbo jumbo. But is it really all in the mind or are we missing out on a strange reality that surrounds us?

Armed attack on villagers in Feni: 15 hurt

FENI: Jan 3: At least 15 people were injured, six by bullets, in an attack on the villagers by a gang of terrorists at village Sharnakarpura under sadar thana today, reports UNB.

Many villagers fled to Feni town during the attack.

Police and local people said a gang of armed men attacked the villagers at about 9 am as a sequel to Monday's incident at the village.

On Monday, the gang faced a strong resistance from the villagers when they went there for collecting toll.

The bullet-injured are Monwara Begum, 40, Chamna Akhtar, 12, Babu, 10, Miah, 8, Motaleb, 20, and Jashim, 30.

The villagers went to the residence of Joyнал Hajari MP for justice and returned to their village with his assurance.

The attackers were said to be followers of Jubo League leader Azad.

BCL founding anniversary today

By Staff Correspondent

The 53rd founding anniversary of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the ruling Awami League, will be observed throughout the country today.

The JSD-backed BCL and BCL (Kader-Haider) will also observe the day at their founding day today. The BCL has taken elaborate programmes to observe the day, said a press release.

The programmes include placing of wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at zero hours, hoisting national and party flags at its central office at 6 am.

BCL leaders and workers will gather at the Aparajevo Bangla on the Dhaka University campus at 11 am and bring out a colourful rally which will parade different city streets. Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad will inaugurate the rally.

The BCL activists will also gather at the Curzon Hall premises on the DU campus at 12.15 am to light 53 candles and have cake to celebrate the day.

The BCL will hold a reunion for its former leaders and workers in the city at the end of the month. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to attend the function as chief guest, BCL sources said.

Meanwhile, BCL president Bahadur Bepari and general secretary Ajaykar Khokon in a joint statement yesterday called upon the BCL activists to observe the day in a befitting manner.

Housewife electrocuted

A housewife was electrocuted at Circuit House road in the city yesterday, reports UNB.

Family sources said Samsun Nahar, 32, wife of Shah Alam came in touch of a live wire while she was ironing clothes at about 3 pm.

She was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the doctors declared her dead.

Crisis in JCD over new central body

Bhuiyan's 'peace move' yet to yield result as Khaleda refuses to change stance

By Rezaul Karim

A conciliatory move initiated by BNP secretary-general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan to resolve the crisis in Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) following the announcement of its new central committee is yet to yield any result as an adamant Khaleda Zia refuses to bow to the majority demand for removing Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and Shahabuddin Laltu from the posts of President and General Secretary.

Party sources said Bhuiyan's move came in the wake of widespread protests and demonstrations across the country by leaders and activists who argue that selection of Laltu and Pintu, who are non-students and facing criminal charges, will taint the image of both BNP and JCD.

Bhuiyan along with City BNP President Sadek Hossain Khoka and BNP's Student Affairs Secretary Amanullah Aman held a series of meetings with the leaders of the organisation's chapters at Dhaka University, Jagannath College and Dhaka city South and North units as well as other leaders at his residence in last few days to thrash out a solution.

He also held a meeting with the rebel leaders at

his residence last night and asked them to abide by the decisions taken by the party chairperson. But the leaders told him that they would not accept any compromise formula until Pintu and Laltu are removed.

According to sources, there was apprehension of bloodshed in the city on January 1 as both groups announced rallies to mark its founding anniversary at the same time at Muktangan on January 1. Sensing trouble, Bhuiyan alone took the initiative to call the rebel leaders at his residence hours before the rally, keeping them there till 10:30pm to avoid confrontation.

Later, Bhuiyan held a lengthy meeting with the rebel leaders in presence of Khoka and Aman, assuring them that Khaleda Zia may call them anytime to settle the crisis.

Although the BNP secretary-general could not arrange a meeting with the party chief, he was able to talk the JCD leaders into signing a statement that they have total confidence in the leadership of Khaleda Zia and will continue politics under her

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Cargo handling at Chittagong port goes up by 9 pc

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Jan 3: Cargo handling at Chittagong sea port here increased by nine per cent in the last 11 months ending November last year compared with corresponding period of 1999, according to statistics released by the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA).

The port handled 14.6 million MT of cargo between January and November 2000 as against 13.4 million MT during the same period of 1999, marking a growth of 1.2 million MT.

Port officials attributed the growth to rise in import and export trade.

Between January and November 2000, the country's main sea port handled 1,29,61,851 MT of imported goods and 17,33,020 MT of exported goods, while during the corresponding period of 1999 it handled 1,18,39,934 MT of imported goods and 16,16,217 MT of export goods, the CPA statistics show.

Container handling at Chittagong port also marked a 17 per cent increase during the period between January and November 2000 compared

with the corresponding period of 1999.

The port handled 4,20,850 containers during the period, up from 3,60,026 containers handled in the same period a year ago.

Import of goods such as cement clinker, fertiliser, sugar, salt and edible oil marked rise in 2000, while export of jute products, leather goods, tea, garments and frozen goods was higher in the same year, according to the statistics.

Chittagong port handled 1353 vessels last year against 1348 in 1999.

CPA Chairman Commodore Golam Rabbani told newsmen here recently that rise in cargo handling at the port prompted the authorities to take up projects for procurement of container handling equipment and installation of new container terminals.

"We need to modernise the port with more infrastructure facilities to cope with growing maritime trade as eighty per cent of the import and export goods are channelled through it," said Rabbani.



An eviction drive is on at the directive of Dhaka City Corporation to rid walkways in the city's Paltan area of vendors. The footpaths have been given back to the pedestrians all right; but one wonders how long the order would prevail.

-- Star

Five out of 16 iodised salt factories shut in Khulna

Acute shortage of raw materials alleged

From Quazi Amanullah

KHULNA, Jan 3: Five out of 16 iodised salt factories in Khulna zone have already been closed and 11 others are on verge of closure due to acute shortage of raw materials.

Mill owners said TCB was supposed to import two lakh tonnes of raw material (non-refined salt) to meet the need of

the country during current financial year. But it has so far received only 50,000 tonnes.

TCB is yet to be certain about getting the rest 1,50,000 tonnes within the shortest possible time to save salt industries from being closed.

Eleven salt factories have slashed production to such an

extent that there would be no other way but to close them if required raw material is not supplied within next 15 days, the mill owners said.

According to reliable sources, TCB decided to import two lakh tonnes of non-refined salt to meet domestic need during current financial year. An international tender was invited in this regard.

TCB signed a contract with 'Friends Salt Works & Allied Industries' of India in respect of supplying 1,50,000 tonnes of salt through its Bangladeshi agent 'Global Export & Import Ltd' of Dhaka.

As per agreement, the Indian firm supplied only 50,000 tonnes of non-refined salt in two phases. Two ships reached the Chittagong port last month carrying 50,000 tonnes of salt.

The source said that TCB sold the imported salt on 'First come first serve basis'.

Meanwhile, the Indian supplier 'Friends Salt Works & Allied Industries' has already expressed its reluctance to supply the remaining one lakh tonnes for reason yet to be known. Therefore, TCB has cancelled the agreement on ground of violating terms and conditions.

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A flock of whistling ducks flies over the lake at Jahangirnagar University. This year, the guest birds stayed away from the lake and other waterbodies in the city and elsewhere in the country, leaving local ducks a free reign.

Guest birds shun hostile host

Experts hold poachers, shrinking wetlands responsible

By Rezaul Karim

The lake inside the Jahangirnagar University (JU) campus, traditionally a safe haven for migratory birds escaping Siberian cold, is almost devoid of the winged visitors this year. Instead, the wetland is teeming with hundreds of resident birds.

Experts believe that the guest birds have not flocked the lake this year because they are finding the country increasingly hostile. Bangladesh is rapidly losing its lakes, ponds and natural water reservoirs to the pressure of the growing population and birds can no longer find proper feeding grounds. Indiscriminate poaching around the country is also a prime reason why guest birds are staying away, they added.

Except for a few places like JU and the National Zoo at Mirpur, guest birds fall prey to human greed at most of other natural water bodies.

While visiting a couple of lakes inside the JU campus recently, this correspondent observed that there was only one species of resident bird -- sarali hash (whistling duck) -- there. Last winter different varieties of foreign birds could be spotted at the same place.

Sarali hash, which lives on plant seeds, is available in the country but the particular sort at the JU also comes in numbers from India during winter. The whistling duck can also be seen at the

National Zoo, Durga Shagar in Barisal, Nil Shagar at Nilphamari and Tanguar Haor at Sunamganj.

JU students claim that they, with co-operation from the authorities, have successfully prevented hunting of birds in two lakes inside the campus -- one in front of the vice-chancellor's office and the other behind the Registrar's Building. In 1997, conscious students demonstrated against leasing out of the lakes and formed a Bird Preservation Committee. Since then, the authorities prohibited hunting of birds in the two lakes.

There are about a dozen different types of lakes inside the JU. Except these two, the others are leased out on annual contract. As no provision to check poaching is incorporated in the contract, observers allege, bird hunters carry on with their mindless act with impunity.

That the migratory birds have stayed away has also surprised and disappointed the authorities at the Mirpur Zoo. Its staff has had the hyacinth cleared from the lake earlier than usual to attract the birds. However, members of the Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh (FEJB) found no trace of guest birds on a visit there a few days back.

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Wife burnt to death by husband

By Staff Correspondent

A young housewife was killed in Dharmapur in Keraniganj yesterday after her husband allegedly set her on fire following a family feud, police said.

The deceased was identified as Romana Akhter, 25, daughter of Abul Kashem.

Romana's husband, Monir Hossain, returned home from Saudi Arabia recently. Monir allegedly developed illicit relationship with his sister-in-law, sources said.

Romana had an altercation with her husband over the issue on Tuesday night. At one stage, Monir poured kerosene on Romana's body and set her on fire.

Romana died on the spot. Keraniganj police recovered the body and sent it to the Mitford Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Romana's father filed a case with Keraniganj police station, but none was arrested till filing of this report last night.

Dacoit beaten to death in Feni

From Our Correspondent

FENI, Jan 3: A dacoit was killed and four others were injured in a mob beating at Pathannagar in Chhagalnaiya upazila of the district on Tuesday night.

The dead was identified as Mohammad Ismail, 40, of village Izzatpur under Chhagalnaiya upazila.

Police and witnesses said a gang of dacoits looted valuables from the passengers of 30 vehicles, including buses and tempos, at gunpoint at Chanpur Bridge on Feni-Chhagalnaiya road and fled away by a hijacked car.

Some of the passengers who lost their belongings identified the dacoits at Pathannagar Bazaar and caught five of them at about 11 on the night. The passengers along with the local people beat up the dacoits mercilessly.

Police rescued the dacoits and sent them to Feni Sadar Hospital where Ismail succumbed to injuries this morning.

The injured were identified as Kafiluddin, Nizamuddin, Osman and Shahjahan.

Villagers alleged that police took away arms and money in cash from the dacoits.

14 stranded deportees Chinese embassy to repatriate 12

By Special Correspondent

The Chinese Embassy in Dhaka will repatriate 12 of out of 14 Chinese arrested on Tuesday after they remained stranded at Zia International Airport (ZIA) since December 17.

The decision was taken after a First Secretary of the Embassy visited the group at Cantonment thana yesterday and identified the 12 as Chinese nationals.

Sources said the Embassy gave them travel documents and arranged their repatriation by a Dragon Air flight of to Hong Kong, scheduled to leave at 1:30 am today.

The group included four women. Two of the 14, all aged 22 to 26, are Taiwanese nationals. The Chinese Embassy declined to accept their responsibility.

But the government has decided to deport them. The two identified as Wong and Ms Lian, who speak English, told human rights lawyer Ms Alina Khan that the other 12 had procured Taiwanese passport from a racket in Bangkok. They were going to Vienna as tourists.

The Chinese are suspected to have been victims of an organised racket of human traffickers.

They arrived in Dhaka from Bangkok by Thai Airways in batches of two in late November and early December and went to Calcutta by Bangladesh Biman and then to New Delhi. They availed a flight of Austrian Airlines for Vienna from Delhi. But Austrian immigration forced them back to Delhi after seizing their documents.

The Indian authorities later forced them to board a Dhaka bound Biman flight from New York, threatening that it would not be allowed to take off unless they were taken to Dhaka, Biman sources said.

Worried students throng bookstalls for old edition of textbooks

By Staff Correspondent

While availability of new textbooks for primary and secondary levels is still uncertain, worried students have started thronging bookstalls for old editions as classes of the current academic year have started.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) and its nominated firms are yet to start supply and distribution of textbooks for about 2.5 crore students of class one to class ten in the country.

The NCTB had awarded the job of printing 8.12 crore textbooks to three concerns of Beximco GroupPustaka, Suktara and Free Pressallegedly in violation of rules.

Many of the schools in the capital and elsewhere have planned to use books of edition as an end to the textbook crisis is still not in sight.

Authorities of many schools have advised students to deposit old books with them for distribution among the students needing those now. Besides, the students and their guardians are also collecting old books on their own initiative.

"New books would definitely contain changes and students would have to follow those. This would definitely be a problem but still we have to start taking classes by using the old books," said a teacher of the Government Laboratory High School in the city.

A guardian said, "What can we do if new books are not available .The best option now is using the old books. Otherwise students would not be able to cover the syllabus," said.

Rafiqul Islam, another guardian, said, "It is a burden on us as we have to buy two sets of books for our wards in an academic year."

NCTB sources said new books are likely to be available in market by the end of this month.

Meanwhile, a section of book sellers are taking advantage of the situation by charging higher prices for the old editions.

"We have to go Banglabazar wholesale market every day to collect books as those are not available in bulk. Besides, we have to keep in mind that the old editions would be replaced by new ones," said a bookseller at Nilkhet market in the city.

A wholesaler said, "We are selling from our old stocks which would last only a few days more and full sets of books for any class is not available with us."

BRAC school, 3 houses torched in Cox's Bazar

COX'S BAZAR, Jan 3: A group of terrorists torched a BRAC-run school and three nearby houses at Masterpara in Chokoria upazila, leaving 10 people injured on Tuesday night, reports UNB.

Police said the terrorists numbering about 50 also looted valuables worth about Tk 2.5 lakh after setting fire to the school and the houses at 11 pm.

Two of the injured were hospitalised.

According to the victims, the gang attacked their houses, as they were involved in constructing the school.

Khursheda Begum, one of the victims, filed a case in this connection.

Mufti Amini, Moulana Azizul Huq sued

COX'S BAZAR, Jan 3: Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini and Moulana Azizul Huq of the Islami Oikya Jote were today sued for declaring two judges of High Court 'Murtad' (atheists) for their verdict on fatwa, reports UNB.

General Secretary of District Reporters' Unity and Bhorer Kagoj correspondent Mohammad Ali Zinnat filed the case with the Magistrate court.

Magistrate M Tajul Islam referred the matter to the officer-in-charge of sadar thana for investigation and legal action against the accused.

Justice Golam Rabbani and Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana in a suo moto case declared fatwas by unauthorised persons illegal and hilla (interim marriage) of women wrong.

Israeli military shells guerilla hideouts in Lebanon

KFAR CHOUBA, Lebanon, Jan 3: Suspected guerillas fired rockets and mortar shells at three Israeli military outposts in a disputed border territory in southern Lebanon today, triggering Israeli shelling of suspected guerilla hideouts, Israeli and Lebanese officials said, reports AP.

There was no immediate word on casualties from the 7 am (05.00 GMT) attack across a UN-demarcated border line on the Israeli positions in the Chebaa Farms area where the borders of Lebanon, Syria and Israel meet.

Israeli artillery retaliated by shelling suspected guerilla hideouts in hills on the outskirts of the village of Kfar Chouba, the officials said.

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