

The Daily Star

COMMITTED TO
People's Right to Know

REGD. No. DA 781

Vol. XI No. 44

DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 28, 2001

FALGUN 16, 1407 BS

ZELHAJ 3, 1421 HIJRI

16 PAGES PRICE: Tk 6.00

www.dailystarnews.com

Abductors rule out direct talks Kalparanjan, Dipankar designated for negotiations

MORSHED ALI KHAN And ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD From Rangamati

The abductors have ruled out the possibility of a face-to-face dialogue for an end to hostage crisis, saying the authorities would have to find an "alternative" to open talks, sources said.

The kidnappers, led by one Amulyadhan Chakma, 24, insisted that the authorities "leave them alone" after the hostages are set free and wanted a 'guarantee' in this regard.

The authorities, currently led by Minister for CHT Affairs Kalparanjan Chakma, received a six-day-old letter from one of the hostages on Monday evening. The letter was written on 20 February by Danish hostage Torben Mikkelsen to his wife and children.

In the letter Torben said that they had received new sets of cloth and put

them on after a wash in a stream. He said that they were well looked after but were tired of "outdoor life". The letter is about 200 words.

Sources said that they also received another letter but failed to elaborate or add. Kalparanjan Chakma said that his men were trying to find a solution to free the hostages.

Sources said in a top level meeting yesterday at the Rangamati Circuit House it was decided that Kalparanjan and Dipankar Talukdar MP would alone conduct the negotiations. None of the top officials went to Bethchhari army camp. But Kalparanjan with his own men went around the "Kalapahar" area and met some of the villagers near Mahalchhari.

When asked whether the authorities would exempt the abductors from charges after the release of the hostages, a top official reiterated the govern

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Australia alerts its citizens in Bangladesh

STAR REPORT

With the incident of violence on the rise in recent times, the Australian High Commission here has issued a travel advice to all its citizens asking them to exercise 'a high degree of personal security awareness' at times while in Bangladesh.

The High Commission said because of the recent kidnapping of three foreigners in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Australians should shelve all travel plans to that region until further notice.

The travel advice noted that criminal violence and armed robbery of individuals are common in Bangladesh. In particular, unaccompanied females face the highest risk of robbery, but all travellers should avoid wearing expensive jewellery in public places. Thieves also prey upon tourists travelling by rickshaws, and bag snatching even in broad daylight is common.

The High Commission has further noted that politically motivated violence can occur any time, particularly in major cities, and has intensified in the lead-up to elections. It also mentioned that strikes are usually accompanied by violent confrontations between police and political activists and gunfire on the streets normally marks such confrontations.

Australians have been strongly advised to avoid political gatherings and demonstrations as violence may erupt without warning.



Faulty vehicles spewing black smoke make mockery of traffic rules and concern for health and environmental hazards. As authorities remain inexplicably indifferent, one wonders what's the point having traffic and environmental rules.

Smog shrouds city sky

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Dust and smoke mixing with cloud created a haze in the city sky yesterday, blanketing the sun for most of the day.

"It indicated the dangers of air pollution on a moisture free and less windy day," a weather expert said.

Although clouds gathered over the city for the last few days, there was no rain as a 'high pressure ridge sucked away the moisture.' Lack of wind helped the haze gather strength with dust and smoke going up, he noted.

Dhaka is one of the most polluted cities in the world, says a recent UN report on climate change.

Auto-rickshaws which use a dangerous cocktail of engine oil with petrol in their two-stroke engines of vintage technology are mainly responsible for this. The authorities introduced lead free petrol in July 1999, but auto-rickshaw smoke continues to remain a threat to public health, environmentalists say.

A government plan to convert auto-rickshaws into CNG powered vehicles and gradually phase out the vintage vehicles remains in limbo. Besides, smuggling in of auto-rickshaws is making it

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Diseases due to air pollution kills 25000 a year in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pulmonary and cardiovascular diseases caused by air pollution claim some 25,000 lives in the city annually.

A paper presented at a seminar on "Eco-Transport Assistance in Dhaka" made this alarming observation yesterday, quoting a survey by the Department of Environment.

Ambient air quality in the Dhaka city proves that the air is polluted to the extent of causing deadly diseases to its residents, of whom children are most vulnerable.

Prepared by Khandaker Azadur

Rahman, additional chief engineer of the Roads and Highways Department, the paper pointed out that "emission of hazardous smoke from motorised vehicles is a major cause of air contamination in the city."

"Severe pollution occurs due to high content of lead in gasoline, high sulphur in diesel, a large number of highly polluting vehicles and contaminated fuel." Out of the total polluting gases in the air of Dhaka, 70 per cent are from motorised vehicles.

Two-stroke engine vehicles such

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A top-level meeting (left) at the Rangamati Circuit House decided yesterday that CHT Affairs Minister Kalparanjan Chakma and Dipankar Talukdar MP alone would negotiate with the kidnappers. The Bethchhari army camp (right) wore a deserted look after the meeting.

INSIDE TODAY

ARTICLE 4

Next caretaker government: The other task

KAS Murshid

BUSINESS 6, 7 & 8

Excess spending, increasing fiscal deficits worry ADB

DSE, CSE price quotations

Notice

We publish from today excerpts from the main report of the Hamoodur Rahman Commission of Inquiry as declassified by the Government of Pakistan.

Please look up on page 5.

Monjur to pay Ershad's fine?

ZAYADUL AHSAN

The Jatiya Party faction loyal to HM Ershad has initiated a process to have the former president released from jail on payment of nearly Tk 2.75 crore in fines within the next couple of days.

The Treasury of the Deputy Commissioner yesterday passed a deposit receipt for Tk 2.75 crore. The receipt would now be deposited with the Bangladesh Bank and its copy would be placed before the court. The court would then order release of Ershad.

According to JP sources, Nazir Rahman Monjur, secretary general of the faction, is alone financing Ershad's release.

Monjur earlier sent letters to all presidium members, who had committed to provide funds to secure Ershad's release, asking them to deposit their share by evening today.

None has responded so far, Monjur told The Daily Star yesterday. However, Monjur claimed that he had already collected 75 per cent of the money required on his own. When asked how, the JP leader retorted, "Am I a poor man? Don't I have enough white money?"

Monjur apart, no one in the party knows how this fine money would be raised and it has created dissatisfaction amongst senior leaders, JP sources said.

Some disgruntled JP leaders didn't rule out the possibility of an understanding reached between the government and Ershad.

"Why wasn't any such attempt made before to free Ershad on payment of fine?" asked one JP leader while talking to The Daily

Star. Monjur, according to some leaders, doesn't even bother to respond to these queries.

"Monjur is telling us, 'You are not giving any money. Then what's the point knowing the source of the fine money?'" a JP Presidium member said. "We don't know how such a huge amount of money is being shown as white."

According to another JP source, Rowshan Eshad has also raised some money for her husband's release during her visit to the United Kingdom and the United States. Monjur is now insisting that she deposit the money into the Ershad Release Fund. Monjur hopes that Ershad's family would provide the rest.

Official version is that the money is being collected through the Ershad Release Fund, created back in last November after Ershad had

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Reforms in election process EC plans dialogue with BNP, 8 other parties after Eid

NAZRUL ISLAM

Against the backdrop of a positive dialogue with the ruling Awami League (AL), the Election Commission (EC) has listed nine other parties for talks with them after the Eid to reach a consensus on its proposals for reforms in the election process.

The Commission sent a letter to BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan on Monday requesting his party to participate in the talks tentatively scheduled for mid-March, a senior EC official said yesterday. "Besides, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed had telephonic talks with the BNP leader," he added.

The AL appreciated the EC's reform proposals at the discussion

with it last week.

The Commission decided to have talks with only those parties having representation in the Jatiya Sangsad. But it listed a total of 10 parties for the dialogue as some small parties wrote to the EC expressing their interest in the proposed reforms, the EC official said.

The five parties which have representation in parliament are Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD). Four other parties Gano Forum, Ganatantri Party, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and Left Front—have been listed for invitation.

The EC initiated the process of

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Confrontation over religions issues worries ADB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has expressed concern over failure of the government and the opposition to reconcile their differences and their confrontation on religious issues.

"The confrontation between government and opposition on religious issues, in particular, is conveying disturbing signals," the ADB said in its Quarterly Economic Update on Bangladesh.

The Update prepared by ADB's Resident Mission in Dhaka was released yesterday.

"The failure of the ruling party and the opposition to reconcile differences through dialogue and well established democratic norms continues to deepen the political impasse," it said.

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Ctg carnage Order to attach movable property of 18 accused UNB, CHITTAGONG

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court in Chittagong yesterday issued arrest warrants against 18 chargesheeted absconding accused in the eight-murder case in the port city.

The court also ordered attachment of their movable property.

The order came on the day of hearing on the acceptability of the chargesheet of the case yesterday. The next date for hearing has been fixed on March 17.

Metropolitan Magistrate Abdul Hakim was given the responsibility to examine the papers of the case.

Eight Chhatra League activists were killed in firing allegedly by the Chhatra Shibir cadres at the city's Bahaddarhat area on July 12, 2000.

CID ASP Abdul Kader Khan

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US sees serious HR abuses in Bangladesh last year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In its annual country report, the US State Department has said that the Bangladesh government's human rights record remains poor in many significant areas and although it generally respects the rights of the citizens, it continues to commit serious abuses.

The section on Bangladesh in the State Department Human Rights Report 2000 was formally released in the capital yesterday morning.

John Kincannon, Director of the United States Information Service, Dhaka handed over the report to reporters at USIS office at a simple ceremony.

The report portrays gross violation of human rights in Bangladesh in the year 2000.

It highlighted extra-judicial killings by the law enforcers, political repression and obstruction, repression on political opponents under arbitrary acts, death and rape in safe custody, filing of false cases against

opposition activists, use of police for political purposes, corruption in the police and the judiciary, curbing of the people's and opposition's fundamental and human rights, rise in forcible arrest, denial of justice, obstruction on the opposition to hold peaceful meeting and ruling party's attacks on opposition with the cooperation of police and intra-party clash among political parties etc.

It said the government encourages violence by calling for retaliation against opposition members. Last year, the government filed numerous criminal cases against opposition leaders and activists and in at least some of the cases, the charges likely were false.

The report said the government frequently uses the police for political purposes, and there are widespread corruption and lack of discipline in the police force. Police officers committed numerous human rights abuses. Police searched homes without warrants and the government forcibly re-

located slum dwellers.

It said police committed a number of extra-judicial killings and some persons died in police custody under suspicious circumstances. Police routinely used torture, beatings and other forms of abuse with interrogating suspects. The government rarely convicts and punishes those persons responsible for torture or unlawful deaths.

The State Department report quoting official figures said 134 people died in prison and police custody during 2000. According to an independent human rights organisation, 70 people died in police, prison, court custody and army camps during the year.

It observed that most police abuses go unpunished and the resulting climate of impunity remains a serious obstacle to ending police abuses and extra-judicial killings.

Citing extra-judicial killings, the

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