

They oppose both applying force, paying ransom

STAFF CORRESPONDENTS
from Rangamati

People in this hill district not only condemn kidnapping of the three foreigners but also oppose paying ransom and applying force to free the hostages.

While talking to these correspondents, they alleged that criminal activities have increased since the signing of CHT peace accord between the government and the Shantibahini in 1997 and criticised the authorities here for 'failure' to check this trend. Incidents of abduction for ransom, robbery and extortion have increased alarmingly, they said.

Former regional director of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) Nirmalendu Tripura said people from all walks of life in this region

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Hostages will be freed on Monday : Kalparanjan

Villagers fleeing Kalapahar area fearing Army action

MORSHED ALI KHAN AND ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD, from Rangamati

Minister for CHT Affairs Kalparanjan Chakma said last night he was informed that the abductors would release the three hostages on Monday.

"We have succeeded in contacting the abductors and as per our information, the hostages are in reasonable health," he said.

A messenger met him at around 8 last night and gave the information, the minister added.

When contacted, a top official at the Crisis Centre set up at the local Circuit House declined to comment on the minister's statement.

The authorities had earlier issued an ultimatum to the abductors of three foreign consultants - Torben Mikkelsen, Nils Hulgaard and Tim Selby--

to release them by Sunday morning or face a massive military offensive. Kalparanjan gave the ultimatum at a meeting at Betchhari army camp Thursday afternoon.

Meanwhile, people in Kalapahar area were seen fleeing their villages yesterday, fearing army action to release the hostages.

Scores of men and women with children and some belongings were seen leaving the 'red zone' for safer places. They apprehended that clashes might break out on expiry of the deadline if the hostages were not freed, they told newsmen.

Some village heads at Betchhari said people of Purnanpara, Tripurachhari and Kengachhari in Betchhari area have also stepped up their efforts to locate the abductors and the hostages.

Many villagers sent their families to safer places following the ultimatum, they said.

There were also unconfirmed reports that villagers saw a group of men with three foreigners on February 25 at around 9:30 pm near Hazachha village.

As the hostage crisis entered its third week yesterday, the authorities got information about the hostages after eight days.

Jhon Geddes, press officer of the British High Commission, said that they were encouraged by a large participation at the meeting at Betchhari on Thursday. He hoped it would lead to immediate release of the hostages.

"Primary concern remains the safety of Torben, Tim and Nils. They have now spent 14 nights away from their families," he said.

Khaleda asks govt not to pull out army from Betchhari area

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition leader Khaleda Zia yesterday asked the government not to pull out army from Betchhari area, bowing to illogical demand of the kidnappers of three foreign nationals.

"Withdrawal of army under pressure of the kidnappers will prove irresponsibility to independence and sovereignty of the country and push the people of that area into deep uncertainty," she said in a statement yesterday.

The BNP chief, however, blasted the government for its failure to rescue the hostages even after 15 days of their abduction by gunmen.

Khaleda, the former Prime Minister who had negotiated peace with the tribal insurgents during her rule but could not strike a deal, set aside government's claim of establishing peace in the hill districts.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Accused in Taraj Uddin Murder Case dies: Torture alleged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mohammad Borhan, one of the accused in the Taraj Uddin murder case, died yesterday.

Dhaka Central Jail authorities said that Borhan fell ill in the morning and was shifted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital at about 10am where the attending doctor declared him dead.

Victim's parents Eskander Ali and Alekjan Begum however alleged that Borhan died from severe torture at the Uttara thana. They said on the night of his arrest, Borhan who worked as a tailor in Asian Tailors at Ramna Bhaban for about ten years, was beaten up by four policemen as soon he reached his Chairmanbari house in a baby taxi after the day's work.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

INSIDE TODAY

ARTICLE 4

Who is on the crest of the roller coaster ride?
Mozammel H Khan

LITERATURE 9

Essay: Tempest is not all fury; and Exploring adolescent reproductive health

BUSINESS 6, 7 & 8

Harkin vows legislation to outlaw US import of Myanmar textiles
IMF to set up new unit to spot crises earlier
Malaysia won't allow new foreign banks till '07

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 3		6.02 pm
Mar 4	6-19 am	

Prayer Timings

March 3		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fazr	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-10	6-15
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation



One of the British experts putting up a poster at a Mahalchhari bus stop, urging local people to help free hostages (left) while the other expert (right) is returning to Rangamati from the army check-post near Lichungi Bridge.

Pvt cargo operators allowed to use 3 domestic airports

RAFIQ HASAN

Private cargo operators have been given the go-ahead by the government to operate international cargo flights from three domestic airports via Dhaka, according to Civil Aviation Ministry sources.

The private operators from now on will be able to conduct flights from Chittagong, Sylhet and Jessore. Earlier, only two companies Bismillah Air Lines and Best Aviation Ltd were allowed air freight operation from Zia International Airport (ZIA).

The permission was given at a high-powered inter-ministerial conference last month which called for more liberal policies so that the demand and supply of local goods in the international market remain competitive. Civil Aviation Secretary C M Mohsin presided over the meeting. Managing Director of Biman Bangladesh

Airlines Air Commodore Khasrul Alam and Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority M Iqbal Hossain were also present.

Sources say that the move, which will definitely encourage more air freight firms to come into operation, was taken to accelerate transportation of local exports to the Middle East, Europe and other countries of the globe.

Talking to the Daily Star, M A Mannan, Managing Director of Bismillah Air Lines, said that the business community of Sylhet in particular have been demanding direct cargo flights from their city for long. But it was not possible as they didn't have the government's clearance.

Mannan added that the new directive will come as a blessing for the entrepreneurs in Sylhet as the Sylhetis have the biggest expatriate

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Seven killed as trucks collide near Bangabandhu Bridge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Seven people were killed and 13 others injured in a road accident on Dhaka-Dinajpur highway, 3 km west of Bangabandhu Bridge yesterday morning.

Police said the accident occurred when a Dhaka-bound truck loaded with cattle collided with another truck at Saidabad at around 7 am.

Of the dead, Dhulu Mia, 42, Anisur Rahman, 35, Azizur Rahman, 45, Abdul Jalil, 40, Alal, 45, Izzat Ali, 45, died on the spot while Jaribuddin, 49, succumbed to injuries at Sirajganj General Hospital soon after admission.

The bodies of the victims were handed over to their relatives after autopsy. Police seized both the vehicles, but the drivers managed to flee the scene.

A case was filed with Bangabandhu Bridge west thana in

this connection.

In another accident on Thursday, three people were killed and 45 others injured when a Sirajganj-bound bus from Nagarbari collided head on with a truck at Nalka, 12 km west of Bangabandhu Bridge at around 11-30 am identified as Ali, 35, of Balashabari under Ullapara upazila of Sirajganj district and Hosna Khatun, 30, of Bhangura upazila in Pabna district.

The identity of another victim could not be known.

Our Staff Correspondent adds: Three people were killed in separate road accidents in Dhaka city yesterday.

Hasan, 25, was killed when a speeding truck hit three people at Faridabad in the city's Sutrapur area at about 1.30 am.

Hasan along with two others Janu, 25, and Kazi, 28, was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



With Eid-ul-Azha only a few days away, people have started to throng train, bus and launch terminals in the city to go home. These homebound passengers were photographed at Kamalpur Railway Station yesterday.