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Use of force again ruled out

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The authorities have again ruled out use of force to rescue the three Europeans abducted and held hostage by an armed tribal group in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) for the last 18 days, highly placed sources said in Dhaka yesterday.

The deadline given to the abductors by the authorities earlier for release of the hostages expired yesterday.

"We are preparing for a protracted negotiation to free the hostages despite new complications arising out of sudden change of decision by the abductors who have reverted to their demand for ransom", an official monitoring the hostage crisis said.

His remarks followed disruption in negotiations conducted by Kalparanjan Chakma, Minister for CHT Affairs.

The minister told newsmen at Rangamati on Sunday that all positive developments regarding release

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M J Akbar

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MCCI seeks tax slab system for small corporate units

China promises new reforms to double GDP by 2010

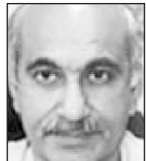
Holiday Notice

The offices of The Daily Star will remain closed on March 6, 7 and 8 on the occasion of Holy Eid-ul-Azha.

Therefore, there will be no issue of the newspaper on March 7, 8 and 9.

Announcement

Starting today, the Chief Editor of the *Asian Age*, M.J. Akbar, joins our panel of columnists with his well-known commentary:



BYLINE

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 6		6.04 pm
Mar 7	6-16 am	

Prayer Timings

March 6		
	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

Hostage drama may drag on

Negotiations to start afresh, says Kalparanjan

MORSHED ALI KHAN AND ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD, From Rangamati

British High Commissioner Dr David Carter and Danish Charge d' Affaires Finn Thilsted arrived at Rangamati yesterday amid continued uncertainty over the fate of three European hostages held by armed tribal abductors for the last 18 days.

They held prolonged closed-door meetings with CHT Affairs Minister Kalparanjan Chakma and other authorities.

Kalparanjan, the main mediator in the crisis, last night said all developments for release of the hostages have been jeopardised.

He blamed some newspaper reports for disruption in the negotiation and said it has to be started afresh.

Reports in some newspapers on Sunday said that Tk one crore had been paid as ransom for release of the hostages.

Kalparanjan said he would again hold a public meeting in Kutubchhari

Bazaar area and appeal to local people for help to secure release of the hostages.

Asked about health condition of the hostages, the minister said he did not know if they were "dead or alive". He said army action for release of the hostages may be considered later.

Throughout the day yesterday, the authorities and the foreign delegates waited for developments, but nothing happened.

Meanwhile, army has lifted its cordon from a two-kilometre stretch between Kutubchhari Bazaar and Bhuiadampara in Kalapahar area to facilitate safe passage of the abductors after release of the hostages.

They also hoisted red and yellow flags to demarcate a possible site for release of the hostages. The steps were taken after Kalparanjan said earlier that the hostages would be released by Monday.

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Stampede kills 35 during stoning ritual at Mina

AFP, Mina (KSA)

Thirty-five Hajj pilgrims were crushed to death in a stampede during the "Stoning of Satan" ritual yesterday near the holy city of Makkah, in the first such tragedy in three years, Saudi officials said.

The stampede on the first day of the three-day stoning ritual which coincides with the feast of Al-Azha (sacrifice) left an unspecified number of other pilgrims injured, the

Saudi civil defence service said.

It said 23 women and 12 men of different nationalities died as a huge crowd rushed toward one of the three giant pillars representing the Satan in the Mina valley near the birthplace of the Prophet Mohammad (SM) in Makkah.

It was the first such deadly incident at the annual Hajj pilgrimage since April 1998, when at least 118 pilgrims died and more than 180 were injured in a stampede

during the Mina ritual.

"Because of heavy congestion and jostling between pilgrims, many pilgrims, especially the elderly, tripped and fell, leading to the deaths of 35 pilgrims of different nationalities," the civil defence said.

"Some of them suffocated to death while others were trampled," before security forces restored order, it said, adding that the latest tragedy to hit the annual gathering

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Cashing in on the mad rush of homebound people, launch owners have resorted to the old habit of loading the passenger-carriers beyond their capacity. There is a ban all right; but neither the passengers nor the launch owners care while the authorities remain indifferent as ever.

Court order goes unheeded

Launches still carry passengers beyond their capacity

NAIMUL HAQ

All launches leaving the city's Sadarghat terminal in the last two days were seen carrying passengers much beyond their capacity despite a recent court order to the authorities to prevent this.

Thousands of people, mostly bound for the southern districts of Barisal, Patuakhali, Pirojpur, Bhola, Barguna and Khulna, crowded the vessels. This correspondent saw that most of the three-deck vessels which can carry 1200 to 1500 passengers were carrying about twice their capacity or even more.

With the Eid-ul-Azha tomorrow, homebound people thronged the terminal from early in the morning and boarded launches even six to eight hours before their scheduled departure. They were seen hiring small country boats to reach the launches anchored in the middle of the river Buriganga.

As per rules, passengers should not be allowed to board vessels before berthing at the terminal. But launch operators allegedly allow this taking a 'fee' of Tk two from each passenger.

No official or employee was present at the terminal to stop this. Only two persons seating in a small tin-shed room on the pontoon were keeping an estimate of the vessels leaving the terminal or berthing there.

There was also no checking if the launches were plying without the

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Eid-ul-Azha tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Holy Eid-ul-Azha, the second biggest religious festival of Muslims, will be observed in the country as elsewhere in the world tomorrow (Wednesday).

On this day, Muslims sacrifice animals commemorating Prophet Hazrat Ibrahim's (RA) bid to sacrifice his son to the will of Allah.

This year's Eid holiday will turn into a five-day vacation with two weekly holidays added to it. City dwellers have already started leav

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Ershad's bail order stayed till Mar 18

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Vacation Bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday stayed the bail order for Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad till March 18 upon hearing a prayer from the government.

"This move is unexpected and unprecedented," Ershad's lawyer Khandker Mahub Hossain told The Daily Star.

Jatiya Party Secretary General Nazim Rahman Monjur said that the party would continue the legal battle.

Earlier on Sunday, the High Court granted Ershad an ad interim bail and asked the government to show cause as to why the one-month detention order of the jailed former president should not be declared illegal.

Lawyers led by Additional Attorney General Mahbube Alam yesterday submitted a prayer, seeking a stay on the High Court order for the interim bail at the residence of Justice Md Ruhul Amin.

The government has information that if Ershad were freed law and order across the country would deteriorate, read the prayer.

In his argument, Khandker Mahub Hossain asked whether the country's law and order situation was any better over the last three months with Ershad in jail.

People were killed by gunslingers unleashed by a ruling party MP and even a police constable was murdered during this period, he added.

The argument that Ershad's release would cause deterioration of law and order was based on a false premise, he said.

In his turn, Mahbube Alam wondered how anyone could pray for Ershad's bail, when the government didn't even specify the ground for his detention.

The order should not be termed illegal as yet, he observed.

Upon hearing both sides, Justice Ruhul Amin stayed the High Court order till March 18 and told the lawyers that a hearing would take place before the full bench of the Appellate Division on that day.

Meanwhile, in anticipation of Ershad's release, leaders and activists of the Jatiya Party faction loyal to him assembled at the entrance of

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Angry associates of Mizanur Rahman (inset), a truck drivers' association leader who was shot dead Sunday night, with his body in the city's Tejgaon area yesterday (top). They later went on a rampage damaging vehicles (bottom). Mizan's body was recovered from a lake at Begunbari.

Rivalry over control of fish market

Truck drivers' assoc leader shot dead at Tejgaon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Armed men shot dead a leader of a truck drivers' association at Begunbari in the city's Tejgaon area on Sunday night.

Police recovered the body of the victim Mizanur Rahman alias Dano Mizan at about 9:30 yesterday. There were marks of bullet injuries on the forehead and back of the victim, police said.

He was the son of late Nurullah of the area.

Mizan's supporters later ransacked a transport association office at Tejgaon truck stand and blamed its president Ledu for the killing.

Sources said the killing was also the result of rivalry over control of

Karwan Bazaar wholesale fish market. Ledu tried to control the market but failed because of Mizan. They also said that the incident could be sequel to the killing of another man Pichhi Hannan at Karwan Bazaar about eight years ago.

Mizan's supporters said three young men Harun, Mony and Masum recently snatched away Tk 18,000 from the shop of one Ziauddin at the wholesale fish market.

On Sunday, Mizan caught Harun from Karwan Bazaar area and pressed him to return the money. Harun confessed having snatched the money and said two others Mony and Masum were also

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Road mishaps kill 7 in 2 dists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Seven persons were killed and at least 40 injured in three road accidents in Sirajganj and Habiganj yesterday.

In Sirajganj, three persons were killed and at least 30 injured in a road accident near the Bangabandhu Bridge.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred at 8:45am when

the driver of the Chapainawabganj bound coach "Sathi Paribahan" from Dhaka lost control and the bus fell into a ditch a few metres off the west end of the bridge.

Israfil, 25, son of Chanu Mia of village Moharajpur under Chapainawabganj district died on the spot while Saiful Islam, 32, of Chapainawabganj succumbed to his injuries on way to hospital. The third victim's identity could not be

known yet.

Of the injured, 16 were admitted to Sirajganj General Hospital in critical condition.

Police seized the vehicle. The driver and helper of the coach managed to escape.

A case was lodged in the Bangabandhu Bridge west police station.

UNB from Habiganj adds: Three

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