

Indian team in city to work for protection of Sundarbans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An 11-member delegation from India arrived here yesterday to work on conservation of the bio-diversity of the Sundarbans under a UNDP-sponsored project.

The Sunderbans, the largest mangrove forest, covers both Bangladesh and India, but the majority of the forest belongs to Bangladesh.

The UNDP, which took up a massive project "Bio-Diversity Management in the Sundarbans World Heritage Sites: An Integrated Two-Country Approach", has arranged a tour by officials and experts of Bangladesh and India to build a regional cooperation in bio-diversity management of the forest.

The UNDP arranged a briefing at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel yesterday evening.

As per schedule, the Indian delegation led by three ministers of the West Bengal government along with the officials of Bangladesh and the UNDP will jointly take up programmes for protection of the forest.

Under the project, the two-country team consisting of experts is working to develop a full document of the project to be implemented by the governments.

Briefing on the project, Resident Representative of the UNDP in Dhaka Jorgen Lissner said the two neighbouring countries need closer cooperation for each other's development.

Assistant Resident Representative of the UNDP in Dhaka Shireen Kamal Sayeed briefed on the whole project and informed that the UNDP took up the project when it found almost similar proposals both from Bangladesh and India.

She said the project involves US\$ 3 million to be equally shared by both countries.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister-in-charge for forest of the West Bengal government, Jogesh Barman, underscored protection of the Sundarbans by the two countries.

State Minister for Forest of the West Bengal government M Murmu said that although the majority portion of the forest is in Bangladesh, but both countries should come forward to protect the bio-diversity of the Sundarbans.

However, both West Bengal ministers expressed their ignorance about the project and its aims and said the UNDP suddenly proposed a visit by them to Bangladesh.

Environment Secretary Sabihuddin Ahmed said Bangladesh feels proud of the Sunderbans and is committed to conserving the largest mangrove forest.

Officials of the Ministry of Environment and Forest and UNDP were present on the occasion.

According to sources, Bangladesh's main problem is salinity in the Sunderbans, while the problem facing West Bengal is encroachment.

The UNDP in New Delhi controls the financing of the project, although the major portion of the Sunderbans is in Bangladesh.

He explained car parking had been arranged outside the tunnel (leading to the main entrance) because the modern plastic explosives, if carried in cars, could damage the main building of the parliament. But he assured the House of a better parking system soon after treasury bench lawmaker Joyнал Abedin Faruk described his plights of car parking.

The deputy speaker further said handbags are now being checked with metal detectors as the scanner had gone out of order. But it would be repaired soon, he said and thanked the lawmakers for accepting the security hazards.

Petition

FROM PAGE 1

after the bench felt embarrassed to hear the case.

Earlier the division bench, comprising Justice Syed Amirul Islam and Justice Sikder Maqbul Haque, felt embarrassed yesterday to hear the contempt petition, when Barrister M Amirul Islam, appearing on behalf of Sheikh Hasina, made some comments on political intentions of the contempt petition during the hearing.

The bench had sent the matter to the chief justice for necessary orders.

This bench has been hearing the case since filing of the petition by Advocate Syed Ziaul Karim for some reported adverse comments of Sheikh Hasina on the judiciary published in an interview with New York-based weekly 'Thikana' during her recent visit to the USA.

The court may pass an order on this matter today, court sources said.

Robbers loot gold, cash from houses in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Gold ornaments weighing 30 bhari and Tk 9 lakh were robbed in separate dacoity incidents within 72 hours till early Sunday morning at Raipur upazila in Sirajganj.

Police said a group of robbers looted 30 bhari gold ornaments and Tk 5 lakh from seven houses of Pulla village of Raipur upazila at about 2:00am on Sunday.

They said the robbers armed with rifles and other weapons broke into the houses of Entaz Ali, Abdul Gafur, Abdul Mannaf, Abdul Hai, Abdus Samad, Hafizur Rahman and Abdus Samad, and mercilessly beat up the inmates before making off with the loot. Ten injured persons were admitted to the Raipur General Health Complex.

In two other dacoity incidents on Friday night, robbers looted Tk 3 lakh from Raipur Sonali Bank and Tk 1 lakh and two motor cycles from the BRAC office in the same area.

Three people were arrested for their alleged involvement in the bank robbery.

Three separate cases were filed with the Raipur police station in connection with the robberies.

Tasadduk appointed acting secy of information ministry

BSS, Dhaka

The government has appointed Mirja Tasadduk Hossain Beg as acting secretary of the Ministry of Information, an official handout said yesterday.

Armed JCD cadres

FROM PAGE 12

ened their hold on Zahurul Haq Hall, ousting supporters of the Asad faction.

Besides, the Pintu group and the Laltu group, two arch-rivals of the JCD, went on a shooting spree on February 3 in front of Surya Sen Hall and traded around 20 rounds of gunshots, leaving a student injured.

Following the gunfight, police launched another raid on Surya Sen Hall and arrested Sayeed, organising secretary of the hall unit of JCD.

On February 4, the Detective Branch of Police arrested Ahsan Uddin Khan Shipon, general secretary of the Jasim Uddin Hall unit of JCD, for gunfight.

However, there are at least 100 firearms, including some sophisticated ones, possessed by JCD activists in 11 male dormitories, campus sources said.

The Laltu group has taken control of Zahurul Haq Hall and Jagannath Hall, the Asad group of Ziaur Rahman Hall, the Monir group backed by Asad group and Sultan Salauddin Tuku of AF Rahman Hall, Mohsin Hall and Shahidullah Hall, the Benzir Ahmed Tito group supported by Pintu group of Bangabandhu Hall, Mostafizul Islam Mamun backed by the Pintu group of Surya Sen Hall and Salimullah Hall.

The Monir group and the Laltu control Jasim Uddin Hall and Fazlul Haq Hall.

When contacted, Monir Hossain,

Road accident kills 2 in city

UNB, Dhaka

Two people were killed and at least six injured as a bus rammed into rickshaws in city's Kakrail area yesterday evening.

One of the dead was identified as Shahnaz, 35, a resident of Nayapaltan area, while the other unidentified man aged about 25.

UNB medical correspondent said a bus running from Kaliakoir in Gazipur knocked a number of rickshaws while taking a turn on the Kakrail crossing, killing the two on the spot.

Injured Shelly, 6, daughter of Shahnaz, Ayub Ali, 35, Mojid, 28, Sona Mia, 26, Abdul Mojid, 36, and Miraz Mohammad Saju, 20, were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Condition of the injured was stated to be "critical".

13 sentenced to life-term RI in Barisal for murder

UNB, Barisal

A court here yesterday sentenced 13 people to life-term rigorous imprisonment in a murder case.

The convicts are Abul Kashem, 55, M Abul Kalam, 40, M Sultan Ahmed, 40, Rubel Sharder, 23, Sohul Sharder, 18, Yunus Sharder, 40, Anwar Hossain Sharder, 15, Siddique Sharder, 19, Moiruddin Mohuri, 39, Abdul Kader, 48, Sultan Biswas, 42, Musharraf Biswas, 38, and Harun Biswas, 15.

The court also fined them Tk 5,000 each, in default, to suffer one more year of RI.

According to prosecution, the convicts kidnapped M Farooque Hossain, an HSC candidate and son of Mofizuddin in Sadar upazila, on Sept 7, 1997 and chopped him indiscriminately. He later died from his wounds at the hospital.

After examining the records and witnesses, the Additional District and Sessions Judge handed down the verdict.

Prime suspect in Rahim murder arrested

BSS, Dhaka

Mirpur police yesterday arrested the prime suspect in the killing of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activist Abdur Rahim from the city's Kalayanpur area.

Acting on a tip off, a team of police, led by Sub-inspector Humayun Kabir, raided a house at road number one at Kalayanpur and arrested Lavlu, prime suspect in the killing.

Police also arrested Delwar Hossain, an accomplice of Lavlu from the same house.

Police said Lavlu along with some other terrorists shot dead Rahim at his house.

The gang also murdered the elder brother of Rahim nearly one year back in the same area, police said adding that the killers are now threatening to kill another brother of Rahim.

Lavlu was also accused in more than 10 criminal case, including murder, police added.

Smuggled diamond worth Tk 50 lakh seized in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs Surveillance and Intelligence on Sunday seized smuggled diamond ornaments worth over Tk 50 lakh from a jewelry shop at Baitul Mokarram market in the city's Motijheel area.

Aided by Motijheel police, a team of Customs Surveillance and Intelligence raided Al-Meem Jewelers on the first floor of Baitul Mokarram market number 4 at about 2:30pm and seized 154 pieces of diamond ornaments hidden in the back of the shop.

A customs press release yesterday said after scrutiny the confiscated jewelry would be deposited in the central bank.

A departmental case was field in this regard.

Death of Indrani

FROM PAGE 12

The OC of Mollahat thana said, "Yes, opportunists and political touts are out to fish in troubled water centring Indrani's unnatural death."

Meanwhile, a section of local people are agitating against the school teacher and another section of them are trying to save Mithu Lal.

"Indrani's suicide has been made a political issue both by BNP and Awami League men, making it difficult for police to go ahead with proper investigation," said an elderly man. Many other local people expressed similar views.

On the other hand, schoolmates of Indrani are demanding exemplary punishment of the culprit responsible for her suicide.

Edn in shambles

FROM PAGE 1

The survey analysed the data in terms of the average number of competencies achieved. It showed that on an average, the children achieved 16.1 competencies or 60 per cent of all competencies.

Students of non-formal schools, urban students and boys achieved higher averages than their respective counterparts in other categories.

At the national level, students showed 'poor performance in three competencies, mediocre in nine, satisfactory in 12 and excellent in only three.'

The study said access to primary education has increased. About 80 per cent of the children of primary school age are now enrolled in school. Gender gap in primary school enrolment has almost disappeared. One out of five children, however, is 'yet to cross the threshold of the school'.

It revealed that socio-economic background and educational facilities had significant relationship with achievement of the students.

The study mentioned that classroom practices are not much favourable for attaining competencies. Even the existing evaluation systems do not cover the competencies specially. Very poor classroom environment was found in rural private schools, which was better in non-formal schools.

It recommended 'rationalising the allocation of resources on a per student basis' and distribution of facilities to reach the more deprived social groups.

The basic teaching skill of teachers at primary level was not up to the mark, it noted.

The budgetary allocation for education is poor in terms of Gross National Product (GNP) but most of it is spent on other than quality improvement.

The CAMPE recommended doubling the GNP share for education to five per cent in the next five years and allocate new resources for quality management measures.

Students and their parents have lost the motivation as the previous co-relation between education and

the possibility of getting a job on the basis of education no more exists due to shrinking job market, Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury said.

There is a lack of monitoring on education system and the present monitoring is absolutely centred on administration, said Prof Muzaffar Ahmed of the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) of Dhaka University.

"The process of recruitment of teachers is not transparent and those being recruited have no commitment as teacher."

Prof Ahmed called for social mobilisation and motivation of the students, teachers and guardians.

Robbers attack villagers in Gazipur: One killed, 10 hurt

UNB, Gazipur

A man was killed and nine others were injured when armed robbers attacked the villagers at Baroibari in Sadar upazila early yesterday.

Police said a gang of 15 robbers stormed into the house of Firoz Master at dead of night and looted cash Tk 1.5 lakh and 20 tolas of gold ornaments.

Villagers, hearing the hue and cry of the inmates, rushed to the spot and chased the dacoits.

The robbers opened fire on the villagers and attacked them with lethal weapons, injuring 10, three with bullets.

Of the bullet injured, Montu Khan, 32, succumbed to his injuries later.

Police arrested Asgar, Alam, Kazimuddin and Monir from neighboring Ishadi village for their alleged involvement in the dacoity.

Power Reforms

FROM PAGE 1

principle the proposals for reallocating the responsibility of power supply and re-demarcating command areas between Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) and Rural Electrification Board (REB).

According to officials PDB will have to hand over some of its rural service areas to REB as per the draft reform act.

Border tension

FROM PAGE 12

rescheduled date for holding the border talks.

DG of BSF Gurbachan Jagat was due to arrive in Dhaka for a three-day visit beginning January 6 to hold dialogues with his Bangladesh counterpart BDR chief Major General Rezzakul Haider.

It would have been the first meeting between the chiefs of border forces of the two countries after the worst border skirmishes at Boraibari last year which left 16 BSF and 3 BDR men dead following intrusions there.

Border chiefs of the two neighbouring countries normally meet every other year to discuss border problems in an effort to take precautionary steps to maintain a peaceful frontier.

Bangladesh and Indian forces have intermittently engaged in cross-border exchanges and have sometimes beefed up forces beyond normal deployment building tension in many bordering neighbourhoods.

BDR sources said there has been an increase in firing incidents since last September when on several occasions, BSF men reportedly opened fire on Bangladesh civilians.

Around a dozen Bangladeshis civilians have died while several others have been injured due to firing from across the border, the sources said.

Abductors 'press' businessman for 'dues'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Mirpur businessman, who was abducted on way to his shop in Gulshan in November last year and released after payment of part of the ransom, came under renewed threat by the same abductors yesterday.

The victim, Ekramul Haque Babul, told The Daily Star that the same hoodlums allegedly led by Anis, Shamsu, Faruk, Jewel, Babu and Emanuel of Kazipara are threatening him on a mobile phone, No. 017 533129.

He said when he was abducted the hoodlums had demanded Tk 2 lakh for his life.

"I managed Tk 20,000 and got released after telling them that I would pay Tk 1.8 lakh by the evening. But I sought police help and got some of these hoodlums arrested," Ekramul said.

After the incident, he shifted his residence from Mirpur and rented another house elsewhere.

Ekramul said the hoodlums yesterday threatened to kill him and his family members.

When this correspondent rang on the mobile phone, someone identifying himself as an assistant at a shop, said, "You better ring up Tapu Mama on 017 48 5442. He knows everything." The number could not be reached.

Ekramul said he informed police immediately about the renewed threat on his life.

5 forest officials suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkhira

Five forest officials of the Sundarbans were suspended yesterday for their alleged involvement in smuggling timbers, evading tax payment and negligence of duty.

The suspended officials are Abdul Huq, Range officer and Delwar Hossain, Station officer of Buri Goalini Range, Anil Banarjee, Kalagachhia camp In-Charge, Selim Khan, officer of Parankop Range, and Ismail Hossain, Jobeki camp In-Charge under Parankop range.

Sources said the BDR on February 9 seized 67 boats carrying timber weighing approximately 1 lakh maund, which was being illegally smuggled out of the Sundarbans.

Following the confiscation, a departmental case had been filed against the responsible officials and the suspension order came as a result of that.

Ansari yet to confess to US Cultural Center attack

AP, New Delhi

An alleged mob boss has yet to confess that he planned an attack on a US cultural center, investigators said yesterday, as they prepared to confront him with leads they believe would link him to the funding of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States.

Aftab Ansari was extradited to India on Saturday, after New Delhi authorities called on the Gulf emirate of Dubai to hand him over. Police in Kolkata said Ansari, who also goes by Farhan Malik, had confessed to the Jan. 22 shooting attack on the American Center in Kolkata. Five police officers at the center were killed by gunmen on motorcycles.

A senior official at the Central Bureau of Investigation, India's equivalent of the FBI, said Ansari had yet to confess. Speaking on condition of anonymity, the official told The Associated Press that Ansari had, however, acknowledged close links with Ahmad Omar Saeed Sheikh, the British-born Islamic militant accused of sending funds to Mohammed Atta, the suspected ringleader in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

American and Pakistani officials believe that Saeed is also behind the abduction of Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter who disappeared last month in Pakistan.

In two days of questioning, Ansari, 32, has confessed to gun-running and the abduction of businessmen for extortion, the CBI source said. He said authorities believed he would eventually acknowledge his involvement in the shooting attack against the American cultural center.

Police say Ansari worked with Islamic militant groups backed by Pakistan's spy agency in the attack on the US center. Pakistan has denied any role in the attack.

Indian Interior Ministry officials say Ansari runs a cell of gunmen in the eastern state of Bihar in connection with the attack.

Cattle trader

FROM PAGE 12

day-labourers were returning home after completion of construction work at Chaudhagram in Comilla.

When they reached Sayedabad, they were offered 'Banaji Haluya' local drinks. On their way to Mohakhali, they fell unconscious and a gang of thieves took away Tk. 50,000 from the businessman, hospital said.

Gulshan Police later rescued them from the bus and sent them to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where they still lay unconscious till writing of this report last night, hospital sources said.

Gulshan police said the victims were being treated at the hospital but couldn't provide further details regarding the incident.

Ctg port workers

FROM PAGE 12

Port Authority (CPA) and leaders of CBA and non-CBA organisations attended yesterday's meeting. Chairman of CPA Commodore Golam Rabbani was in Dhaka till filing of this report.

BSS adds: After the meeting, CPA secretary ANM Momin told BSS, "According to directives from the Shipping Ministry, they will get additional bonus for seven days. Leaders of all trade union bodies have agreed not to go for strike on February 13 as their major demand has been met. Rest of the demands will be resolved through talks, he said.

A memorandum of understanding was signed between the CPA and trade unions after the meeting, held at the board room of Bandar Bhavan with M M Shahadat Hossain, Acting Chairman of the CPA, presiding.

Alleged killer of Toaha arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police on Sunday night arrested a person accused in more than thirteen cases including those involving murders and extortion.

A team of Sabujbagh police aided by Demra thana police raided Sayedabad and arrested Billal Hossain alias Billal. Police claimed that Billal is the killer of Abu Nasir Mohammad Toaha, general secretary of Inter-district Bus Owners' Association, who was gunned down in front of his Sabuj Kanan residence on February 3.

Billal is also an accused in cases under terrorism and explosives act, police said.

FIFA ban

FROM PAGE 1

Sultan replaced Harunur Rashid, who was a ruling party lawmaker during the tenure of Zia's predecessor Sheikh Hasina.

FIFA's decision to lift the ban came after Bangladesh sports authorities followed FIFA's directive to reinstall the sacked committee.

Bangladesh officials last Thursday met with representatives of the Asian Football Confederation, the region's soccer governing body, which is based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Following the meeting, the AFC said it would recommend that FIFA lift the suspension.

Due to the ban, Bangladesh stood to lose thousands of dollars from FIFA under its 'Goal Project' to develop soccer -- the country's most popular sport.

The ban also forced organizers last month to postpone a regional South Asian Football Tournament slated to be held in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka.

Freight operators' strike

FROM PAGE 1

after a deal between the government and the bus owners association, in which the association agreed to keep about 50 buses on-stream for city commuters in exchange for their own parking lot.

Recently, the plying of long-distance luxury buses in the city was banned for traffic nuisance they created. Moreover, the city also witnessed a severe crisis of buses after the government banned the rundown vehicles.

The Traffic Department of the DMP sided with the bus owners association. The police moved in on February 9 to relocate hundreds of trucks, covered vans and trailers from the area known as Titipara-Basti. The police then handed over the land to the luxury bus owners association.

The Covered Van Association, Bangladesh Truck Owners Association and Long Trolley Trailers Association enforced the strike, which put a lid on almost all freighting activities at the ICD, including customs clearing, cargo handling and its transportation.

Associations of trucks, trailers and covered vans have long been demanding a terminal for hundreds of vehicles, which load and offload imported goods arriving directly on railway waggons from Chittagong port.

The leaders of the three associations said their vehicles had long used the open space near the Kamlapur ICD for freighting. They have the right to use the land and will push ahead with the strike until the government allocates the space to them.

Any immediate solution to the problem is there in sight.

The Dhaka City Corporation's project to construct an independent bus terminal at Syedabad will not be completed till June 2003.

No move was initiated by the government on the second day of the strike to reach a negotiation with the freight handlers, sources in the ICD said.

The immediate past Awami League government following several rounds of talks with the freight handlers had decided to allocate the land to them, as they have to load and offload goods in daytime but operate at nighttime.

"Traffic rules do not allow us to use the city roads in daytime. We load and unload containers in daytime and drive at night. So, we need a place to park hundreds of vehicles," said SM Bakhtier, a leader of the freight operators association.

"Owners of the luxury coaches had to pay Tk 2 lakh each for permission to park their vehicles at that place," alleged a disgruntled freight handler preferring anonymity.

The immediate past Awami League government levelled Titipara slums to make room for hundreds of heavy vehicles engaged in freighting activities.

Call money rate

FROM PAGE 1

These reserves are used by the BB as a mechanism to control the bank's investible fund as well as an insurance against any payment failures.

However, the measure taken following suggestions by the IMF is expected to have a major impact on budget balancing in the teeth of heavy government borrowing from the banking system, sources said.

"The measure would naturally bring more local currency to the government, which will reduce its needs to borrow through bonds and treasury bills," said a Bangladesh Bank high official. "And by this way, the government's loan and interest repayment liability will come down."

At the same time, the banks have a high excess liquidity, estimated to be around Tk 4500 crore now. The new measure would suck up a portion of it and this feeling of surplus would go, reflecting the real fund situation. However, this excess liquidity also contains the banks' foreign currency holding as well.

A number of previous actions of the BB as well as the banks' behaviour also prompted it to make the new rule, sources said. The banks used to switch between foreign and local currencies to maintain their CRR depending on which one had better interest rates. When the local currencies had higher interest rates, banks would deposit foreign currency as CRR and vice versa.

But with a new BB circular making it mandatory for banks to deposit 50 per cent of their foreign currency