

Directive to take action against old vehicles in city

UNB, Dhaka

Communications Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda has asked BRTA and Dhaka traffic police authorities to take stern action against the banned old vehicles plying the city streets with facelift.

He directed the authorities to take necessary steps to stop the movement of all outmoded vehicles, including buses, minibuses and trucks, to ease the city's traffic congestion and protect the environment.

The minister made the directives while addressing a function marking the distribution of 115 motorbikes, 100 walkie-talkies, and 287 helmets among traffic police at Rajarbagh police auditorium.

Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) is procuring motorbikes, walkie-talkies and helmets under a programme jointly sponsored by the government and World Bank to strengthen the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Division.

DTCB under Dhaka Urban Transport Project has procured equipment worth Tk 3 crore for this purpose, said an official release.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain

Thai PM

FROM PAGE 12

and Dubai.

Bangladesh and Thailand, both members of the regional forum BIMSTEC, recently expressed interest to open sea and air links between the two countries through Myanmar to boost bilateral trade.

Thai Prime Minister was quoted as telling the local press recently that Chiang Mai had great potential to become Thailand's new centre to serve Thai and foreign tourists.

Chiang Mai is the home constituency of the Thai Prime Minister.

Chowdhury, State Minister for Home Mohammad Lutuzzaman Babar, Deputy Minister for Communication Asadul Habib Dulu, DTCB Executive Director Mahatabuddin Ahmed, IGP and World Bank Representative also addressed the function with State Minister for Communication Salahuddin Ahmed in the chair.

Shihab murder

FROM PAGE 12

certificate, he was below 16 and should be tried in juvenile court.

Public prosecutor Abdullah Mahmud Hasan opposed it arguing that the certificate is not a public document.

Observing Abu Sayeed standing in the dock, Judge Hossain Shaheed Ahmed rejected the defence plea.

No defense counsel on behalf of Liton was present during charge-filing.

Hearing of the case will start on May 19.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 12

freedom fighters' certificates to get jobs under the quota.

They, in collaboration with the PSC chairman, had collected and submitted the certificates stating that their fathers were freedom fighters. They were also allowed to make some corrections in their application forms even after many days of submission of the forms, it was alleged.

The white paper said that the applicants in the form had first written "no" to the question if they were children of freedom fighters. But after collecting the certificates, they erased the "no" and wrote "yes".

Police raid RMC hostel, recover arms

BSS, Rajshahi

Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) yesterday recovered four firearms and some explosives from Pinku Hostel of Rajshahi Medical College (RMC) during a raid.

Sources said DB office of RMP led by its Assistant Commissioner (AC) raided the hostel from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm and recovered two revolvers, one pipe-gun, one shot-gun, 10 cocktails, six bombs, five bullets and some other lethal weapons from the roof-top of the hostel.

A case was recorded with Rajpara thana.

Pak 'militants'

FROM PAGE 12

She praised Musharraf for his "brave choice" to join the US-led war on terrorism after September 11, and said Wednesday's attack only strengthened France's resolve.

"We have to fight terrorism till it's eliminated," she said.

Alliot-Marie was flanked by scores of heavily armed Pakistan Naval Police as she visited the wounded French engineers at the Aga Khan hospital in the heart of Karachi before their departure.

Baby dies

FROM PAGE 1

nately, A bullet hit the baby.

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

Tarek Hossain is now under treatment at DMCH.

Police could neither trace the killers nor arrest any one in connection with the incident. At about 7 pm, the duty officer at Badda thana said the OC and other officers went to the spot after the incident and they were yet to return.

Dhaka, Delhi

FROM PAGE 12

agreed to allow duty-free access to Bangladesh's 40 products under 16 categories. However, Delhi is yet to take necessary actions to make the offer effective.

This time Dhaka will focus on India's duty-free access to at least 121 high-potential and potential items under 25-category, a demand that it has been pursuing for the last four years.

Meantime, Dhaka has finalised a draft of the agenda of the talks.

Dhaka's agenda include zero-tariff access of its products to the Indian market, removal of para-tariff and non-tariff barriers, opening of trade missions in northeastern Indian states and also facilitation of banking facilities for Bangladeshi exporters to those states.

The revision of the bilateral trade agreement will also come up for discussion in the talks, the sources said. The agreement was signed in 1980 for three years and was later renewed in October 2000 for six months.

Earlier, Bangladesh proposed to have a new bilateral trade agreement with a wider scope as the existing one did not serve the interest of the country.

However, the trans-shipment and border trade issues will not come up for discussion this time as it was agreed during the April talks that these would be discussed at the joint economic commission meeting.

PMO

FROM PAGE 1

ment officials also reportedly interfere in administrative activities and get involved in business deals.

Sources said files coming from different ministries for the prime minister's decision get stuck at the PMO for days together due to shortage of manpower and lack of competent officials.

They said in many cases, the ministries have to constantly remind the PMO to clear important files.

Some senior officials at the secretariat alleged that they even needed to talk to very junior officials at the PMO over telephone to clear urgent files.

Sometimes the ministers themselves contact the private secretaries and assistant private secretaries for early disposal of files. Sources said a number of influential persons at the PMO do not come to office before 11:00am.

Even BNP leaders now feel that the officials at the prime minister's personal wing, press wing and administrative wing have become 'very powerful' and always try to impose their authority on ministers, senior bureaucrats and party leaders.

A cabinet minister, who wanted not to be named, told The Daily Star yesterday that the attitude of a section of officials and political appointees at the PMO is offending and they often interfere in administrative activities.

Annoyed cabinet ministers have told the prime minister that such activities were hampering the government's image. The chain of command and performance of different ministries were also being hampered.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia speaks at a special session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, US, on children on May 8.

Khaleda urges world

FROM PAGE 1

"Let us not forget that millions of children still continue to suffer in different parts of the world, including Bangladesh, due to poverty, malnutrition, disease, conflicts and wars," she told the world leaders at the summit meet.

To overcome the grim situation, the prime minister made a strong plea for eradicating poverty of children and parents in the vulnerable groups as a beginning, and increased investments on health and nutrition of mothers and children.

Khaleda also underscored education of the children, especially of the girls as she said access to quality education is vital for grooming children as worthy adults of the days ahead.

Recounting the commitments made at the World Summit on Children of 1990 on children's survival, development and protection rights, the prime minister made a 'self-searching' query: "are our children better off today than they were ten years ago? If not, we must ask what more needs to be done to improve the condition of our children."

However, Khaleda apprised the world leaders of actions taken by Bangladesh to fulfil its commitment to secure children's rights.

She mentioned the national plan of action for children and the work of the National Council overseeing the programmes related to survival of children, their protection against killer diseases and improvement in the nutritional status of mother and child.

The government has increased budget allocations for primary, secondary and girls' education, primary healthcare and social development, she said.

Expressing satisfaction with the increase in enrollment of children in primary schools, she said steps were taken to give free tuition and scholarships to girls up to higher secondary levels of education. This, she hoped, would have a positive impact on the 'age of marriage and health of women and children.

Khaleda noted that Bangladesh achieved a substantial improvement in immunisation, control of diarrhoeal diseases, vitamin "A" supplementation, iodised salt consumption and nutrition.

Other programmes include a multi-pronged approach to ensure a safe motherhood, halt trafficking in children, reduce child labour, implement programmes for disabled children, projects on birth registration, early childhood development and children having problems with

City corp

FROM PAGE 12

pointed out that the process is yet to begin.

Moreover, the EC usually avoids elections during the monsoon.

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, after administering oath to the newly elected ward commissioners of Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi city corporations, told newsmen that the government would like holding of elections in Barisal and Sylhet corporations within one and a half months.

Candidates belonging to the BNP-led four party alliance easily won the recent elections in three city corporations as the Awami League kept off the electoral race. The main opposition party boycotted the polls alleging that Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed has political bias.

Election to Chittagong City Corporation was held in 2000 and the polls in Barisal and Sylhet would complete the process of election in all the six cities.

Rice traders

FROM PAGE 12

the council, told this correspondent yesterday.

"The police could not recover a single bag of looted rice though such incidents are rising since 1980", he said.

According to rice traders here, at least five truckers were killed and 19 trucks loaded with foodgrains were looted on roads in the country in eight months since August 30 last year. All the trucks had started from Naogaon.

In three separate incidents on the night of May 7, one truck driver was killed and three loaded trucks, all starting from Naogaon, were looted in Shirajganj, Laxmipur and Narayanganj districts.

Inspector General of Police Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury also visited Naogaon and Bogra late last month and assured the traders and truckers of steps to check such incidents from May 1.

Following the assurance, the traders withdrew their ultimatum.

"After the May 7 incidents, we see even the IG's assurance does nothing", said a rice traders' leader at Par Naogaon.

He however said a section of traders, truckers and policemen could be involved in such incidents.

When contacted, Naogaon SP Mustafizur Rahman said, "Nothing serious happened in my area... We have nothing to do with incidents in other districts".

World Cup quiz

FROM PAGE 1

Daily Star will be present at today's draw for the round two.

Following the draw, a dinner will be hosted by The Daily Star for the elite of the city at 7:30pm at Hotel Castle Salam.

22 bodies

FROM PAGE 1

on Friday night.

The district administration and local people recovered the bodies, mostly of men.

Later, those were buried in a mass grave at Mohonpur in Matlab upazila of Chandpur. A large number of people took part in the burial.

Israel to strike

FROM PAGE 1

and defence minister to decide upon operations against terrorist targets," a government statement said.

Sharon convened his security cabinet, grouping top ministers including the defence and foreign ministers, after cutting short a U.S. visit to fly home to handle the situation.

BETHLEHEM SNAG

In Bethlehem, barriers removed in preparation for the evacuation of the Nativity church were reinstalled and a military crane was brought back to Manger Square as the sides met to iron out the latest glitch in the deal.

Under the deal, 26 Palestinian militants and all civilians were to leave the shrine while 13 wanted militants slated for exile would remain until a country agreed to host them.

But one of the 13 militants said the group would reject the accord unless guarantees were provided to ensure a European Union envoy stayed in the church to safeguard them from Israeli troops.

"If this guarantee is not given we will reject the agreement and nobody will leave the church," one of the militants said.

"This morning, again and again after the agreement was reached, people inside blocked the implementation by making more requests, more demands," said Olivier Rafovicz of the Israeli army which continued to ring the site holy to Christians.

"It really seems like they are

Arthakantha

FROM PAGE 12

give further exposure to your reputed company."

Some businessmen contacted The Daily Star Thursday and said when they refused to sponsor the event, the Arthakantha threatened that they would be 'negatively exposed' to the public.

Contrary to the claim of the Arthakantha editor, the letters obtained by The Daily Star add, "The occasion will be fully covered by Ekushey TV as we have already talked to (the) ETV authorities in this regard. This will also heighten your company's image and reputation further."

Meanwhile, the ETV authorities have rejected outright the Arthakantha's claims. "We have never been contacted by anyone of Arthakantha in this connection," a high official of ETV told The Daily Star. "We are not covering any such award giving ceremony."

The Daily Star stands by its report.

Kidnapped businessman yet to be rescued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Businessman Abdul Kadir, kidnapped for ransom on Sunday in the city, is yet to be rescued.

Kadir, owner of a shop at the Town Hall market at Mohammadpur, was kidnapped while he was going to his residence at Moulibazar in the old part of the city, his family said on Monday. He had Tk two lakh with him when he was kidnapped, they had said.

At about 11pm on Monday, the kidnappers telephoned the family and demanded payment of more Tk 2 lakh within 24 hours for his release and threatened to kill him for non-compliance, they said on Tuesday.

The family lodged a general diary (GD) with Mohammadpur thana in this connection.

Bombing in Russia

FROM PAGE 12

terrorist attack, nobody is in any doubt," the Russian leader said.

"Such crimes and cruelty cannot but cause emotions. These emotions must not prevent us from carrying out a thorough investigation of this crime," he added. Moments earlier, Putin had attended a Victory Day parade in Moscow's Red

The bastards who staged this attack will be wiped out," Magomedov said.

Chechen rebels, who want to declare an Islamic republic in Chechnya that is independent from Moscow, have repeatedly made incursions into neighbouring Dagestan, where Muslim fundamentalism is banned.

As Russian prime minister, Putin launched the military intervention in Chechnya more than two and a half years ago following a rebel insurgency into Dagestan, though another pretext was a wave of bombs that killed around 300 people across Russia.

Sixty-four people, including 23 children, were killed on September 4, 1999, when a bomb destroyed an apartment building used by the families of Russian army officers in the Dagestan city of Buinaksk.

A wave of suicide bombings killed 44 Russian servicemen when separatist rebels hit military targets across Chechnya in July 2000. Twenty-eight people were killed in co-ordinated bomb attacks on three Russian cities in the North Caucasus on March 24, 2001.

More than 3,500 Russian troops have been killed in the 31-month war in Chechnya, according to official figures, although unofficial estimates put the death toll much higher.

River drifters

FROM PAGE 12

for this roughly 50 years ago.

"The rivers devoured our ancestral homes," a sun burnt Sufia in her seventies told the correspondent who talked to this band of drifters at the confluence of two rivers -- the Meghna and the Tetulia -- near Maishsha Gagaria Char in Sirpur under Mehediganj upazila in Barisal late last month.

The first generation drifter Sufia is the most senior of the band that moves from Barisal to Chittagong on a fleet of about 50 boats.

Sufia's band is self-sufficient by its own standards. They fish and, with the earnings, they buy bare essentials, fishing nets, clothes and boats.

By any other standard, however, they are leading a subhuman life -- crammed inside small boats. Even a cursory glance at their children will tell you what they are missing. All children below two are naked, as their parents cannot afford clothes. Others are poorly dressed.

The boats have too little, but the people living in the boats need everything. One can name their belongings, barely pausing for breath: an earthen stove, some utensils, fishing nets, rods and some worn-out clothes. Parents and children share the same space to live in. When a family broadens, the elder son gets a new boat and moves out. Or, the elder daughter marries someone of the community only to move out.

Yet, there are also brave widows like Sufia who live alone as her children grow up and move in boats.

Unlike others, Sufia does not

have any time to think about the nuances and subtleties of life. Sufia was preparing for the second round of fishing at 9.00am when The Daily Star correspondent met her.

A day before, she caught only two hilshas that she sold at Tk 45 in Barisal. "It's not possible to catch fish every day because of the weather. Wholesalers buy fish at Sirpur Bazaar,"

The band catches different types of fishes, including hilsha, shrimp, ritha and pouwa. The daily income per head is about Tk 50 to 60.

"We catch fish but we can't eat them because we have to sell it to buy essentials. Wholesalers take advantage of low price," Sufia said.

They face a lot of difficulties in building a boat or buying a new fishing net, as they never have enough money. Worse, no bank or rural moneylender gives loans to people without any address.

Jamal says he inherited the boat from his drifter father who died long ago in the rivers. His father had told him that they came from Bhola. They were farmers. They lost their lands to river erosion, and when new lands emerged in the river, the jotar deprived them of their right to land. Oppression and deprivation led his father like others to settle for a life on rivers.

When the correspondent met this band, they were camping in a shoal without crops. They would shift away when they feel that there are not enough fishes to catch in the water. Surprisingly, if this group is traced in Munshiganj one day, it may be spotted in Chittagong a month later.



Buddhist students demonstrate in the city yesterday demanding arrest and trial of the killers of Buddhist monk Gyanajyoti Mohasthobir in Raozan in Chittagong recently .

SOFA still on agenda

FROM PAGE 1

envoy said she had not yet raised the matter with the government. But, she added, "certainly we like to pursue some arrangement with the new government to rationalise the arrangement for military cooperation".

The United States had first made the proposal for signing SOFA with the previous Awami League government. But it could not proceed in the face of a storm of controversy and protest in political circles.

Peters, however, made it clear that "it is not a basing agreement. It has nothing to do with any American desire to establish some kind of military base in Bangladesh."

Karl Fritz, Director of the American Centre, Paul Poletes, Deputy Director, Lt. Col. Bob Wilkinson, US Defense and Army Attache and Information chief A A Ahmed Ali were present at the briefing session.

Referring to controversies over the alleged corruption involving C-130B aircraft Bangladesh received from USA last year, the ambassador said the US government under the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) programme delivered four C-130B aircraft as a "gift" to Bangladesh.

Under the EDA, the recipient country is to bear the costs of transportation, refurbishing, training and spare parts. The cost to Bangladesh for these services was around 31 million US dollars, which is less than the cost of a single new C-130B of over 50 million US dollars.

Peters said the four C-130B airplanes were given on the basis of grants -- not sold to Bangladesh -- for enhancing the country's capability of peacekeeping operation, exercises or any other operation by the Bangladesh Air Force.

She said successful introduction of these aircraft into BAF inventory enhanced its interoperability in any future military exercises and improved Bangladesh's capabilities for transporting its armed forces and supplies in support of relief and peacekeeping missions.

In reply to a question about alleged corruption in acquisition of the aircraft, the ambassador dismissed the notion straightaway saying that there is no way that anyone here can interfere in the procedures set in the EDA or make money out of it.

The Bangladesh government, she said, paid for the incidental costs directly to the US government and there is no room for any manipulation or making money.

US Defense Attache Bob Wilkinson said earlier Bangladesh had also received 12 T-38 jets under the EDA for training the cadets of BAF.

He informed the newsmen that Bangladesh and USA would co-sponsor a multinational Platoon exercise in September involving platoons of six nations and observers from 12 countries.

Apart from military affairs, Mary was asked to comment on domestic politics, human rights, law-and-order situation and export of natural

gas since her country is a major business partner of Bangladesh.

About the much-talked-about export of gas and apparent US interest in the committee report on it by June, she said it is a decision to be taken by the people of Bangladesh because potential benefits out of its exploitation in many ways will accrue to Bangladesh, not to USA.

She observed there had been debate on the levels of proven reserve of gas. Quoting geologists and expert opinions, she said actual reserve of gas here would be much higher than the proven reserves.

About the functioning of democracy now that a new government is in office here, the US diplomat said, "Since no democracy is perfect, everyone would agree that Bangladesh is not a perfect democracy."

Making an observation on law and order, she said everyone here would recognise that the situation could be improved.

On the more delicate issue of human rights, she would not make any comments in detail. She pointed to a country paper issued by the United States last March explaining the situation.

The ambassador, however, had a word of praise that there had not been any echo in Bangladesh of the horrible religious violence in the Indian State of Gujarat though the percentage of minorities in both India and Bangladesh is almost same.

FROM PAGE 1

day trip to Washington, D.C.

The US trip will also take him to New York to hold discussions on peacekeeping with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and senior officials of the UN Headquarters. Khan will be in Canada on May 30 and 31 to hold talks with the foreign minister of that country.

Ahead of his US tour, the foreign minister will leave Dhaka on May 12 to attend the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) meeting in Botswana that among other issues will discuss the issue of suspension of Pakistan and Fiji from the Commonwealth.

Speaking to members of Diplomatic Correspondents Association of Bangladesh (DCAB) at the press club yesterday Khan said besides bilateral matters, "more current and wide-ranging issues concerning our mutual interests relating to security, regional and global matters would also be discussed" during his talks with his US counterpart.

He explained that terrorism was the common concern of the 21st century and Bangladesh would stand by the US in condemning it.

The foreign minister rejected suggestions that Dhaka would convey assurance on the matter of oil and gas export or the Chittagong port as speculated widely.

On gas export, he said, "We have never said yes or no about the export of gas. Our position is clear. We have set up two committees to assess our reserves and make

recommendations. Till their report is out, we have nothing to discuss on the (oil and gas) issue."

As for increased access of garments to US market, Morshed Khan said, "I am not going to make specific requests. What I am going to tell them is about the support and cooperation we have extended to the US as its trusted ally. It is for them to meet our expectations."

Asked if the US wanted Bangladesh to sign the Status Of Forces Agreement (SOFA) turned down earlier by the former government, he said if any suggestions are made, it will be decided at a political level after considering the situation on the ground.

From the US capital, the foreign minister will proceed to New York where he will visit the UN and hold talks with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and also senior officials of the UN Peace Keeping Department.

He will be in Canada at the end of the month to discuss bilateral, regional and international issues with his counterpart.

The foreign minister told the correspondents that he would be visiting the Bangladesh troops in Sierra Leone in June. Some 4500 troops from Bangladesh, he said, were there as peacekeepers. Bangladesh soldiers, he said, share meals with the local people, help them with things like writing letters and are much liked by the people as they have managed to become a part of their social fabric.