

Naogaon rice traders stop supply, ask for protection

ANWAR ALI, From Naogaon

Rice traders in Naogaon stop supply of rice and paddy to other parts of the country from today, demanding security of their merchandise and truckers on roads.

The decision was taken on Wednesday by the coordination council of seven associations of rice traders and truck brokers in the district following 'alarming rise' in incidents of looting rice and paddy loaded trucks and killing of truckers on roads in different parts of the country.

Last month, the council gave a seven-day ultimatum to the government to stop such incidents and threatened to stop supply after a truck driver and a helper were killed and their rice loaded truck was snatched in Salanga in Shirajganj April 18.

"We are compelled to stop supply to other districts because of police inaction to ensure security of our life and merchandise on roads," Nirod Boron Shaha Chandan, convener of

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PSC rejoinder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former chairman of the Public Service Commission (PSC) Prof. Mostafa Chowdhury has vehemently denied the allegations against him in the recently published white paper and condemned the government for trying to publicly disgrace the PSC questioning its neutrality and bringing false and motivated charges.

"As the former chairman, I want to strongly say that I discharged my duties neutrally and always kept myself above all sorts of government and non-government influence and motivation, and selected the candidates according to their merit and quality," said Prof. Chowdhury.

He said the government was out to tarnish the image of the constitutional institution through bringing false, baseless, fabricated and motivated charges of corruption and irregularities in the white paper against the former chairman and members.

In the white paper released by the BNP-led four-party government on May 3, it was said that under the quota for freedom fighters' children, the PSC recommended appointment of nine applicants in administration, police, medical and family planning cadres.

The reports also said that the nine applicants had later obtained

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Arthakantha's protest, our reply

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Editor of the Arthakantha Qazi Jahangir Alam protested a report of The Daily Star on May 4 headlined "Award trap", denying that business personalities were being asked to contribute Tk 1 to 2 lakh to get nominated for the "Businessman of the year" award.

"We also like to mention that no specific name of electronic media is made in our nomination letter to cover the occasion," he claimed. "It is totally baseless that businessmen who have been approached by the Arthakantha to sponsor the occasion are being threatened with negative exposure," he said in a written protest.

However, copies of the letters sent to different businessmen which were obtained by The Daily Star clearly state, "It is estimated that a total of Tk 2,00,000 lakhs (in some other letters it is Tk 1 lakh) would be required for successful holding (of) such (an) occasion. May we earnestly request your honor to sponsor such a programme which would

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
May 10		6-32pm
May 11	5-18 am	

Prayer Timings		
May 10		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-30	5-00
Juma	12-15	1-20
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-36	6-41
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

34 killed in war parade bombing in Russia

AFP, Mosco

A landmine blast ripped through a World War II anniversary parade on Thursday in a Russian territory adjacent to Chechnya, killing at least 34 people, including 12 children, and injuring some 130.

The targets were a detachment of Russian marines and a military band in the town of Kaspiysk in the republic of Dagestan. Neighbouring Chechnya has been the scene of vicious warfare between local separatists and Russian forces.

It was the deadliest single attack in Russia since Moscow launched a clampdown against Chechen rebels in October 1999 and killed at least 19 servicemen, 12 children and three adult civilians, the emergency situations ministry told Interfax news agency.

No one had claimed responsibility as of late Thursday. President Vladimir Putin denounced what he called the "Nazi-like scum" behind the attack. Estimates late on Thursday put the injured at some 130. Earlier reports had spoken of as many as 150.

TV pictures showed Lenin Street, the main thoroughfare in Kaspiysk, stained with blood and strewn with fragments of drums and musical instru-

ments. The explosion occurred as the marines marched past a bus taking a military band to a ceremony for the 57th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe, an interior ministry spokesman said.

The death toll continued rising as emergency services rushed the wounded to hospital in the aftermath of the landmine explosion, which happened at 9:45 am (0545 GMT), an interior ministry spokesman told AFP. Putin, who had just finished delivering a Victory Day address in Moscow's Red Square, immediately denounced the perpetrators of the attack as "scum... whom we have the right to regard as being like Nazis".

The mine was hidden in shrubbery around 300 metres (yards) from the main square of Kaspiysk, around 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of the Dagestan capital Makhachkala, and exploded just before a wreath-laying ceremony, the emergencies ministry said.

Putin immediately called an emergency meeting with senior ministers and dispatched security service (FSB, ex-KGB) chief Nikolai Patrushev to take personal charge of the investigation.

Putin said it was necessary "in the shortest time to identify, convict and punish the criminals", RIA Novosti news agency reported. "That this was a

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PHOTO: STAR

Officers of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) ride motorbikes at Rajarbagh Police Lines yesterday. The motorbikes were procured to strengthen the DMP.

290' militants' caught after Pakistan blast

AP, Karachi

Hundreds of suspected members of outlawed Islamic militant groups were arrested yesterday as US and French investigators joined Pakistanis in looking for possible links between al-Qaida terrorists and a bombing that killed 14 people, including 11 French engineers.

A top Interior Ministry official, Tasneem Noorani, said "a number" of activists belonging to groups banned by the military ruler, President Pervez Musharraf, last January have been arrested in cities across the country.

"We are expecting more arrests as the raids are still in progress," he said, declining to elaborate.

However, Interior Ministry officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said at least 290 suspected members of Jaish-e-Mohammed, Sipah-e-Sahaba, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and other groups have been picked up in the crackdown, which will continue for several days.

The arrests were not "random" but aimed at tracing "those involved in recent acts of terrorism and sectarian killings," one official said.

After Musharraf's ban, more than 2,000 militants were arrested but later released. Officials said those militants who had been cleared were not being re-arrested.

Many Islamic militants inside Pakistan have close links to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida organisation. They have vowed revenge for Musharraf's banning of five militant groups after he abandoned Afghanistan's Taliban regime and sided with the United States in its anti-terrorism campaign post-September 11.

In the port city of Karachi, three FBI agents spent 90 minutes sifting through the twisted charred hull of a Pakistan Navy shuttle bus blown apart Wednesday by what Pakistani police believe was a suicide bomber in a nearby car.

French Defence Minister

Michele Alliot-Marie, who arrived Thursday to consult with Pakistani officials in the wake of the attack, said French investigators were already in Pakistan helping with the investigation as well.

Twelve French naval workers wounded in the attack were flown back to France on a German military jet. The bodies of those killed were to be repatriated later after post-mortems, she said.

The engineers all were in Pakistan to help with construction of a French submarine bought by the Pakistani Navy -- work that Alliot-Marie said would continue despite the attack.

While stressing it was too early to say who was behind the bombing, the French minister said the bombing was "part of the larger terrorist movement against which the international coalition is fighting."

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EC against govt protocol to MPs, ministers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission has asked the authorities concerned not to extend government protocol to entertain ministers, MPs or persons equivalent to their status during their stay in the Pourashavas where elections are taking place on May 13.

The commission in an official release yesterday also directed them not to allow any influential person including ministers, state ministers, and deputy ministers inside polling stations. Only persons carrying official accreditation are to be allowed in the polling centers, the release said.

Besides, it instructed the officials to ensure that the contenders and their supporters follow the code of conduct laid out in 1998.

Thai PM may visit Dhaka in July

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister of Thailand Thaksin Shinawatra is likely to visit Bangladesh in July to sign a number of bilateral trade and investment agreements, diplomatic sources said.

A major highlight of the trip will be opening of direct flights between Chittagong and Chiang Mai, Thailand's tourism hub. There is also a plan to make Chittagong and Chaing Mai twin cities through regular links.

Bangladesh ambassador to Thailand Hemayet Uddin recently handed over an invitation letter from Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to the Thai premier to visit Bangladesh.

High officials from Thailand recently visited Chittagong to see infrastructure facilities in the port city.

Chittagong airport, renovated with Japanese assistance last year, has excellent facilities. International flights have connected Chittagong with Singapore, Yangon, Bangkok

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Shihab murder Charges framed against six

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday framed charges against six persons in the sensational Shihab murder case.

The chargesheeted persons are Monir Hossain Liton, Abu Sayeed, Md Faisal Shareef Raju, Emran Hossain Sabuj, Mahbulul Haque Rubel and Md Nasim Sheikh.

Liton and Abu Sayeed are in custody and the rest are absconding.

Khondokar Shihab Ahmed (13), a student of class seven at Motijheel Model High School, was abducted and killed on February 7. The killers slashed his body into pieces and dumped those at several places in the city.

Abu Sayeed's lawyers yesterday submitted an age certificate to the court and argued that as per the

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PHOTO: STAR

Performers in a dance sequence at a cultural function arranged on the 141st birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs at the National Museum yesterday.

Dhaka, Delhi to talk trade again in June

SHAHRIAR KARIM

Bangladesh and India will sit for another round of trade talks in New Delhi in June.

Dhaka has agreed to Delhi's proposal to hold fresh trade talks and proposed June 25-27 as the tentative date, according to highly placed commerce ministry sources.

"We received the proposal for talks, though an informal one, from the Indian high commissioner in Dhaka. The date is yet to be fixed. Hopefully, we will sit sometime in

June," a high official of the commerce ministry told The Daily Star.

New Delhi's proposal for fresh talks came just a month after the secretary-level meet in Dhaka held from April 8-10.

This time India proposed to meet in a small forum and discuss the revision of the bilateral trade agreement, which will expire in June.

However, Dhaka said with a yawning US\$ 1.1 billion trade deficit with Delhi any trade talks should focus on bridging the gap.

"The date will be fixed once both

sides finalise the agenda," another official of the commerce ministry said.

Delhi's proposal to sit for another round of talks in such a short span of time came as, many believe, the Indians are keen to pursue Bangladesh into lifting its ban on yarn and sugar imports through land ports. According to sources, Bangladesh imports yarn worth Tk 2000 crore from India annually through land ports.

During the April talks, India

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Elections to two city corporations not soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The election authorities think it is not feasible to hold election in two other city corporations soon although the government wants the polls in the next one and a half months.

Election Commission (EC) sources said it would take more than two months to complete necessary formalities for holding elections in Barisal and Sylhet city corporations.

"It would be better to hold elec-

tion in the two remaining metropolises in October or November," said Election Commissioner M Munsef Ali. He noted that only the laws were enacted to announce Barisal and Sylhet towns as metropolises but no other step in this regard has been taken so far.

The previous Awami League government enacted the laws making the two towns city corporations, but infrastructure in these cities were hardly improved. Now

the government needs to frame necessary rules and settle delimitation issues to pave the way for elections there.

"Framing of rules, fresh delimitation of common wards and reserved wards for women, and other administrative formalities would take more than two months once the process starts," said a senior EC official. He however

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Round 2 Draw in Khulna Today

see you at **Zia Hall, Shib Bari at 4pm**

Best wishes for you, but, in case you miss out, there's always Round 3 starting today.

see rules and coupon on page