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Zakat stampede kills 37

70 more hurt as people jostle for money, clothes in Gaibandha

STAR REPORT

At least 37 people, 33 women and four children, were killed and 70 others injured yesterday in a stampede when several thousand poor people jostled frantically to collect Zakat clothes and money at Godown Road in Gaibandha town, some 190 kilometres northwest of Dhaka.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reports that the stampede took place at 6:30 in the morning at the gate of an abandoned jute mill where thousands of poor people had queued up to collect the clothes and money.

As the impatient crowd forced the donors to open the mill gate and begin distribution well ahead of the 10:00am schedule, those up front were pushed from behind, fell onto the ground and were trampled. As many as 33 women and four children died on the spot while 70 others sustained injuries.

Police however admitted to death of 30 people. Twenty of the injured were admitted to local hospitals.

Zakat is a mandatory annual Islamic donation system in which the well-off give the poor a portion of their wealth ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr. As it often leads to chaos, the government encourages donations through a recently established government Zakat Fund. However, most people do not go by the government system.

The victims are Kasiron, 60, Somali, 3, Rahima, 40, Morjina, 25, Jesmin, 2, Jamiron, 40, Morjina, 30, Acia, 50, Amiron, 50, Hajera, 55, Amina, 45, Jamina, 50, Fazilatun, 80, Rahima, 40, Moiful Bala, 40, Kasiron, 50, Bewya, 55, Amena, 34, Tohora, 30, Kalpana, 2, Jamila, 50, Amiron, 65, Karimon, 40, Khuki, 45, Khuki Bewya, 50, Amiron, 40, Sulekha, 2, Nijima, 35, Suraton Nessa, 55, Hasina, 35, Halima, 30, Helen, 25, Morium, 30, Lucky, 20, Saiful Bala, 40, and Sabbani, 30.

Police said the mill gate was scheduled to open at 10:00am for the Zakat. SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



Two women mourn over the bodies of their relatives, killed in a stampede at Gaibandha yesterday. At least 37 people were killed and 70 others injured when jostling for Zakat money and clothes resulted in a stampede. PHOTO: AFP

Bush praises Dhaka for its stand against terrorism

BSS, Dhaka

US President George W. Bush yesterday applauded the government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for its stand against terrorism.

"As we have both commented in previous correspondence, the ties that bind our two countries, are multi-faceted, but I especially value your support in the war on terrorism," remarked Bush in a message sent to Khaleda Zia on the eve of the holy Eid-ul-Fitr.

He wished her success in this endeavour.

The US president also appreciated the Bangladesh government's desire to contribute to Afghanistan's reconstruction and said it is "in keeping with the spirit of the season".

Bush extended his best wishes to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her government.

BB discards redundant wings

INAM AHMED

As part of its reforms programme, the Bangladesh Bank (BB) yesterday merged four divisions with others and transferred nine general managers.

The agriculture loan division, project loan division, and industrial loan division have been merged together into a new agriculture loan and special programme division.

The problem bank monitoring division has been merged with the department of banking operation and development.

Justifying the merger, the BB said there were seven banks being monitored by the division as problem banks. But two of them have already graduated from the status and a few more are on their way out.

As such, the workload of the monitoring division has diminished to a large extent, which does not justify its independent existence.

On the other hand, the BB has abolished the system of directed agriculture loans. Except Bangladesh Krishi Bank and Rajshahi Krishi Unnyan Bank, recapitalisation against agriculture loans has also been abandoned.

At the same time, the industrial and agricultural loan programmes financed by the Asian Development Bank and the IDA have ended and, as such, the credit guarantee division does not have any work. Therefore, the departments needed to be merged.

Because of the mergers, the nine general managers have been transferred to different departments. However, the BB did not take any decision on the surplus manpower the reforms have created.

BNP activist picked up by army dies at KMCH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An activist of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), who was picked up by an army team from the Noornagar WAPDA colony in Khulna Saturday, died at the Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) yesterday morning.

Tipu Biswas, 30, stepbrother of the Khulna city BNP vice-president and former MP, Abdul Gaffar

Biswas, was arrested drunk.

But local army sources said Tipu, also a businessman, was caught extorting near the Khalispur guest-house at about 8.40pm.

The army took him to several spots on information to recover firearms. But no firearm was found.

During the search for firearms, he told the army team that he was feeling sick and was rushed to the

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Tipu Biswas



A little girl looks on as relatives of Tipu Biswas break down on hearing the death of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) activist in Khulna yesterday. PHOTO: KAMRULHAHAN

Writs filed against arrest of foreign journalists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The two foreign journalists and their local guide, arrested on a sedition charge, yesterday filed three separate writ petitions with the High Court challenging their 'illegal' confinement and detention and to be produced before the court within 24 hours.

Lawyers of Italian Led Poldo Brono Sorrentino and British Zaiba Naz Malik of Channel-4 TV network of Britain, and Moniza Pricilla Raj, their local guide, moved the writ petitions.

The lawyers of Saleem Samad, the Bangladesh representative of the Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontiers, also filed a writ petition.

The division bench of Justice Amirul Kabir Chowdhury and Justice Nizamul Huq partly heard the petition moved by the counsel of Saleem Samad. Hearing on the petitions that remained inconclusive will again resume today.

In the petitions, the lawyers alleged that the police did not allow them to see the documents of the case on the basis of which the four persons were arrested. Police did not also allow the counsels to meet their clients, they said.

They further submitted that the detainees were not allowed to meet their relatives.

Earlier on Thursday the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, directed the investigating officer of the sedition case to allow one lawyer and four officials of British and Italian embassies to meet the two journalists and their local guide. But the police violated the court order.

Prior to adjournment, the court asked the Attorney General to appear tomorrow with the FIR in connection with the case along with the forwarding reports and relevant papers.

One of the counsels of Saleem Samad, Tania Amir, told The Daily Star that they have filed a petition challenging the legality of the arrest, detention and remand of Saleem Samad. They have also prayed to the court to serve a notice upon the government to produce him before the court within 24 hours.

"The petition was filed so that the court could be informed that he has been detained illegally and he could be freed," she added.

Sorrentino and Zaiba were arrested on Nov 25 while crossing the Benapole border. Police seized videocassettes from their possession. Guide Moniza was picked up from Goalando while returning to Dhaka after accompanying the two foreigners to Benapole. Salim Samad was held from a house at Uttara in the early hours of Friday.

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Bangladesh skipper Khaled Mashud stretches out before yesterday's practice session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium ahead of today's one-day match against the West Indies. PHOTO: AFP

Shah Cement

Second ODI today

SPORTS REPORTER

After a rained-out first match in Chittagong, the one-day international series moves to the capital today, with both the West Indies and the hosts Bangladesh hoping for a day out under bright sun.

And weathermen say rain will stay away from the Bangabandhu

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Grammen Phone

102 bodies to sniff out arms licence flaws

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has formed 102 committees to investigate if licences of arms and ammunition were issued in compliance with the law.

An official estimate says that there are 1,89,265 licences of arms issued to individuals, shooting clubs and financial institutions.

The committees were formed, as a large number of licensed arms were not deposited till the November 21 deadline.

Briefing reporters on the anticrime operation, Principal Information Officer (PIO) Khandker

Manirul Alam said the committees were instructed to submit reports by January 9.

They will examine whether the rules were complied with in issuance of licences and collection of arms and ammunition.

Everything will be examined seriously, as there are many allegations of the criminal use of licensed arms and ammunition, Alam said.

The PIO said that 27 committees were formed for Dhaka, including 16 for 22 police stations in the Dhaka metropolitan area, five for others of the district, one for the arms deposit

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Odhikar report 202 killed by BSF, Indian criminals in last 2 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Incidents of human rights violation by the Border Security Force (BSF) and some criminals of India have accounted for death of 202 Bangladeshis in the last two years.

Besides, 302 people were injured, 170 arrested, 187 abducted and 30 people were missing during the period. Moreover, the BSF and the criminals were responsible for 22 incidents of looting cattle and crops, according to a report published by Odhikar, a human rights organisation.

The report is based on media information on violation of human rights.

The report says 102 Bangladeshis were killed, 52 injured, 110 arrested, 117 abducted, 30 missing from January to November this year. Also, they were responsible for 12 incidents of forcible grabbing of cattle and looting of crops during the same period.

In the last year, the Indian border guards and the criminals on the other side of the border killed 94 Bangladeshi citizens, injured 244, arrested 60, abducted 45, and raped one woman. Ten incidents of forcible grabbing of cattle and looting of crops also took place during the period.

They killed six, injured as many and abducted 25 Bangladeshis only

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Prime Bank