

Defence deals

FROM PAGE 1 directed against any third country," he told a questioner.

China will provide 110 million RMB for construction of a bridge on the river Dhaleshwari, the sixth Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge, he said about another deal to be signed. Under a previous agreement, China had agreed to provide 50 million RMB for the construction of the bridge.

Under other planned deals, he said, the Bangladesh-China Conference Centre in Dhaka would be gifted to Bangladesh by waiving Chinese loan of about 24 million dollars for construction of the centre.

Dhaka attaches "great importance" to Khaleda's China visit, a follow-up of the Chinese premier's visit to Bangladesh in January, the foreign secretary said.

The two PMs will hold official talks tomorrow. Besides, the Bangladesh premier would also meet Chinese President Jiang Zemin, National People's Congress (parliament) Chairman (speaker) Li Peng and newly elected Chinese Communist Party Secretary General Hu Jintao.

"In the official talks, the two leaders would discuss increasing cooperation in various fields," Shamsheer told the press briefing.

On trade and commerce, he said, Bangladesh would ask for greater access of its products to the Chinese market. "We want to increase our export to China and it will be the main thrust in trade talks." The PM is leading a high-powered delegation that includes six ministers and state ministers, four secre-

aries and other senior government officials as well as political and business leaders.

They include Finance and Planning Minister Saifur Rahman, Foreign Minister Morshed Khan, Telecommunications Minister Aminul Haque, State Minister for Communications Salahuddin Ahmed, State Minister for Agriculture Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, State Minister for Health Amanullah Aman.

A 29-member business delegation, led by Board of Investment (BOI) executive chairman Mahmudur Rahman, is also visiting China as part of the PM's entourage. The business delegation will have separate meetings with the Chinese business leaders to be organised by the China Council on Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT).

The two sides would discuss terms and conditions for setting up a 210-megawatt power plant in Khulna under Chinese assistance for which an MOU was signed during the Chinese premier's Dhaka visit, the foreign secretary said.

Khaleda Zia's visit to China assumes special significance as it takes place soon after the conclusion of the landmark 16th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, which has heralded important and significant changes in Chinese leadership.

She will spend a day at Hainan Island and another in Kunming town before coming back to Dhaka on December 27.

Two power plants

FROM PAGE 1 were the main architects of the Khulna Barge Mounted Power project when they were at Coastal Power.

Globeleq was formed as the CDC Group's fully owned subsidiary, which is in turn 100 per cent owned by the British government through its Department of International Development.

The CDC Group took part in partial financing of development projects, including power projects, around the world.

The CDC Group, now claimed by CDC Globeleq, has a worldwide net equity investment of 1218MW in 21 projects. If the AES deal gets a go-ahead, Globeleq will add 810MW to its current portfolio.

To date, Globeleq has the majority stakes in only one power project - 71.9 per cent of a 22MW project in the Dominican Republic.

The PDB sources said Globeleq proposed retaining all staffers of the AES plants to ensure uninterrupted operation of the projects.

The sources cautioned that the government should carefully consider the fact that Globeleq has never operated a large power plant and nor invested or owned a single gas-fired combined cycle power plant.

With the Globeleq takeover, the AES projects will no longer be private power projects due to the British government's ownership.

A top PDB official said, "As long as the deal does not affect the PDB as the buyer, I see no problem."

If the AES-Globeleq deal becomes successful, it will be the biggest transfer of ownership of an American concern in the country's power sector.

Previously, the US oil company

Occidental sold out its Bangladesh concerns to Unocal and got away without answering the government about what it would do about the Magurchara blowout compensation.

Unocal is refusing to pay the government for the damage to the Magurchara gas structure, showing various clauses of the agreement between Occidental and Petrobranga.

DMC dissolves

FROM PAGE 1 in the morning in favour of the strike. They also barred sales of admission forms.

Later, after police intervened, admission seekers could collect and submit forms without any extra payments. There was a huge deployment of police in the DMC area.

Meanwhile, police arrested an intern doctor, Solaiman, from a hall of residence yesterday morning allegedly for involvement in Saturday's incident.

Solaiman is allegedly an associate of Javed and Noman, vice-president and general secretary respectively of the DMCSU.

Police are also looking for Javed and Noman for leading Saturday's rampage of the administrative building and locking the principal's room after he had refused to budge to their demands for test fee hike.

Meanwhile, talking to The Daily Star last night over mobile phone, Javed said the decision to dissolve the students union is illegal.

About Saturday's incident, Javed, also a member of the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), said he along with students of the college had just protested irregularities of the authorities and their protest had no links with test fees.

case. Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru moved the case on behalf of Talukder.

Meantime, police are still looking for another NGO worker Mainul Islam Khan in connection with the two foreign journalists. Different agencies questioned his family members and his wife and mother are worried about the safety of Mainul.

32 criminals

FROM PAGE 12 and members Sultan Ahmed, Abdus Salam and Hazrat Ali were arrested on charge of extortion and involvement in other crimes and Mukhles, Faruk and Salam for smuggling diesel.

In the Lalmonirhat town were held four people, including three leaders of the Jatiyatadabi Sramik Dal. The arrested leaders are Moazzem Hossain Dulu, the district Jatiyatadabi Sramik Dal president, Abdul Matin, general secretary and Masud Parvez, joint secretary.

Meanwhile, the police headquarters in a press release yesterday said that 1,293 people, including eight identified criminals, were arrested and five firearms seized across the country in 24 hours until 6:00am yesterday. Of the arrestees, 737 were wanted in different cases and 583 in connection with under-investigation cases.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) arrested 196 people, 22 of them wanted criminals, in the capital in a special police drive, says a press release.

Life draped in fog

FROM PAGE 1 Many flights that were supposed to land at Zia International Airport (ZIA) on Saturday night had to land yesterday afternoon.

The first flight to take off from ZIA was a Biman flight to London via Dubai at 11.22am, and the first landing was a Kuwait Airways aircraft at 11.42am.

Buses and launches to and from Dhaka were also delayed, and ferry services were suspended due to poor visibility.

Our Gaibandha Correspondent reports: The dense fog seriously hampered rail and road communications with the capital Dhaka from northern districts during the last three days. Trains were unable to maintain time schedules owing to the foggy weather and ferry services were also disrupted.

Meantime, an UNB reports from Thakurgaon says the cold wave sweeping across the region from Friday last, claimed the lives of two poor people.

Of the dead, Samiron Bawa, 70, of Modhupur village in Sadar upazila died on Friday, while Sushil Kumar, 52, of Jaogaon village in Ranishankail upazila died on Saturday.

Another report from Kurigram adds: About five lakh poor people, including 2.5 lakh victims of river erosion, are passing their days on the embankments and high lands amid the shivering cold. Diseases are spreading alarmingly in the region, particularly in the 'char' areas.

A message from Sirajganj says that the prices of warm clothes here have shot up abnormally with the sudden fall of temperature. And the poor people in the northern region are passing through a crisis, as the food-for-work programme has not started yet. People in the char areas are the worst sufferers.

Drug trafficking

FROM PAGE 12 drugs like Phensedyl and Tidigesic injection, they added.

Almost 99 per cent of the drug addicts in the country are male, said Mohammed Salam in his paper. At least 66 per cent of the total drug addicts fall within the age range of 21 to 30 years, he added.

The unemployed people are found to be more addicted than others, the paper said.

However, Salam noted that most figures do not represent the national scenario because they are based on the survey confined to some drug rehabilitation centres across the country.

The speakers focused on various ways of addressing the drug abusing problem and stressed the need for proper treatment and rehabilitation of the addicted population.

Medicinal drugs or pain killers can have a long term damaging effect on the addict, both mentally and physically, noted Clark R. N. Carr, president, Narconon International. He stressed on pain free drug withdrawal process utilising specific nutrition and other assists.

The seminar was chaired by Prof. Samir K Saha, advisor, CSDR. Khondker Mahbuddin Ahmed, member of parliament, spoke as the chief guest in the occasion.

Road accidents

FROM PAGE 12 Momotaj Begum, 60, Masud, 22, and one unidentified youth on the spot.

Four of the injured, identified as tempo driver Harun, 25, passengers Yakub, 40, Jharna, 12, and Noor Hossain, 20, were admitted to Noakhali General Hospital.

Three others were released after first aid.

In Feni, three people were killed and 11 others wounded in two separate road accidents here yesterday and Saturday night.

Police said a bus driver was killed and nine passengers were injured when two buses collided near Feni bypass on Dhaka-Chittagong highway yesterday morning.

Driver of one of the buses, Abdur Razzak, 38, died on the spot and nine passengers sustained injuries in the accident.

Of the injured, six were admitted to Feni Sadar Hospital in critical condition.

In another accident on Saturday night, two people were killed on the spot as a private car skidded off the road and fell into a roadside ditch at Dulamia on the Feni bypass.

The deceased were identified as police sergeant Muhammad Ali, 48, and his younger brother Shawkat Ali, 45.

Driver of the car, Razu, 25, and 11-year-old Siam, son of Shawkat Ali, were injured seriously. They were admitted to Feni Sadar Hospital.

Passport

FROM PAGE 1 be Rs 300 and Rs 150 respectively.

Earlier in May, the government almost doubled the new passport and the renewal charges by several times.

International passport fee was raised to Tk 5,000 and Tk 2,000 for urgent and normal delivery respectively.

Fees for normal and urgent renewal was made Tk 1,000 and Tk 300 from Tk 220 and Tk 60 respectively.

The fee for special passport was raised to Tk 2,500 from Tk 1,250 for urgent cases and Tk 1,000 from Tk 350 for normal cases.

The renewal fee for special passport shot up to Rs 500 from Rs 220 and Rs 300 from Rs 110 for urgent and normal cases respectively.

Over the last 20 years or so, passport fees have been increased fivefold. In 1981, the fee for international passport was Tk 1,000 and special passport Tk 400, that too for urgent delivery.

After the latest hike, the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment made an observation that the renewal charge was exorbitant and inconsistent with other fees.

Later, it sent a proposal to the Ministry of Home Affairs, seeking revision to passport renewal fees, which was forwarded to the finance ministry. The proposal has recently been approved.

Some 1.1 million passports are issued annually at home and from the Bangladesh missions abroad.

AL council of change

FROM PAGE 1 increased. Two new posts - youth development secretary and environment secretary - will be created.

To boost organisational activities, the party is considering creation of six posts of organising secretary.

The 67-member central committee would be increased to 73 or 77.

Apart from these, 50 more members will be added to the party's 101-member national committee. Proposals have also come up for increasing the number of posts in district level committees.

Although there has been an adverse political situation for the opposition, leaders at different levels of AL and its front organisations have started strong lobbying for party posts.

Meanwhile, barring a few, the party has finalised its district level committees.

Party sources said some senior leaders are still opting for election to



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at an event on distribution of Rokeya Padak 2002 at Osmani Memorial Hall in the city yesterday (Story on page 12).

designate a "dynamic secretary" for the party while others think the council would give the power to AL chief Sheikh Hasina to nominate an acceptable secretary.

A three-member 'election commission' has been formed to hold the election, if needed, in which nearly 6,000 councilors may cast vote.

Now, the number of councilors is almost double that existed during the last council held in 1997.

A special council in 2000 had extended the tenure of the present committee for two more years.

One of the members of the 'election commission' said if councilors demand election, then the commission would conduct it. If there is consensus among councilors, election will not be needed.

Meanwhile, only one senior leader is campaigning for the vital post of general secretary. Former state minister for sports and culture Obaidul Qader has announced his

candidature for the post among his close circle.

Although none else among other senior leaders is campaigning for the post, AL workers are talking about some prospective candidates. They are former commerce minister and AL presidium member Abdul Jalil, former food minister and presidium member Amir Hossain Amu, former industries minister Tofail Ahmed and former water resources minister Abdur Razzak.

This time, many of the presidium members would be in the party's proposed advisory council while some secretaries would be incorporated in the presidium, sources said.

The AL council preparatory committee sent invitations to leaders of other political parties including ruling BNP, diplomats, members of the civil society and others to attend the council. No foreign guest has been invited this time.

Transport dearth

FROM PAGE 12 of a new taxicab service at Jatiya Press Club yesterday, the minister also suggested people to walk short distances, instead of using rickshaws, which are being phased out.

The new service will start with 20 taxicabs.

Abu Musa Md. Fakrul Islam Khan, Deputy Commissioner of the Traffic Department, said that the existing public transport system was inadequate.

The situation is turning critical during the peak hours.

Thousands of people were seen yesterday waiting at different bus stoppages along the Mirpur Road. Their problem was compounded by the fact that there is virtually no movement of public transport along the Panthapath. Some people waited for hours for a transport to

reach their workplaces and some others were forced to walk, as movement of rickshaws has been banned on the main roads to ease traffic congestion.

As Friday was the public holiday, the sufferings of the people started from Saturday. Office goers had to wait for even an hour to get a public transport yesterday. People were seen waiting for vehicles at different points of the Mirpur Road from Gabtali to Kalabagan during the peak hours.

Officials have said that 32 double deckers (Gabtali to Gulistan via Panthapath), 12 metro link minibuses, 60 minibuses on route 7

(Gabtali to Gulistan via Newmarket), 150 minibuses on route 8

(Gabtali to Jatrabari) and some other smaller vehicles are plying the

Mirpur Road. Furthermore, 160 minibuses move to Dhamrai and 60 to Manikganj from Gulistan along this road.

Fifty metro link minibuses will be introduced on this road on January 31, 2003, as the alternative to rickshaws. At present, a total of 32 BRTC double deckers are plying along the road from Gabtali to Gulistan via Panthapath, but that is not enough to deal with the rush of passengers.

Several commuters talked to this correspondent about their sufferings. "Women are the victims of rickshaw eviction from the Mirpur Road," said Shefali Begum. She waited for half an hour near the City College to get a bus, but failed.

Gazi Nasir Uddin, another commuter, works with an IT firm in Dhanmandi. He said that the authorities should have provided enough vehicles for the passengers of this road before implementing such a decision.

Abu Musa Md. Fakhrul Islam Khan said that several minibus owners were trying to get the route permit, but the authorities are yet to issue the permit, as they want to avoid unwanted traffic hazards. He said that the problems would be discussed today at a meeting of the traffic managers.

20 armymen

FROM PAGE 1 there is a continuous monitoring system in the army and various types of departmental action are usually taken after departmental investigation.

"It's purely a departmental matter and not at all related with the so-called custodial deaths," he said.

The punishments include jail, demotion, curbing seniority, tongue-lashing etc.

Asked whether the army will make public the reports of different inquiry committees formed during the anti-crime drive, he said a decision is yet to be taken on this.

According to reports published in newspapers more than 38 people died in custody since the Operation Clean Heart began on October 17. But the government each time denied any death in army custody.

The PIO said the recent recovery of about three tons of explosives in Narsingdhi is being investigated. "It (recovery) is unprecedented."

He claimed that those explosives could be used for major acts of sabotage.

It was pointed out that such explosive materials are usually used for making fireworks and that the area is known for this. The PIO said no trade license was found with any of those engaged in making fireworks there.

He informed that 1,770 firearms and 28,873 bullets were recovered and 9,843 people including 2,180 "listed criminals" were arrested since launch of the anti-crime drive. The arrested people also include 7,404 "non-listed criminals" and 259 suspects.

To another question, Wahiduzzaman of home ministry said inquiry into the death of Kala Faruque in police custody is now at the final stage.

Why are our writers

FROM PAGE 1 'confessional' statement, see report on her release) by the present government which is established on law, elected through free and fair elections and professes to uphold democracy. Do we really need others to malign our image when we ourselves seem to be working overtime to do the job?

While Pricilla enjoys freedom on bail, historian, author and columnist Professor Muntasir Mamun, writer and social activist Shahriar Kabir and freelance journalist and writer on development issues Saleem Samad suffer in prison for nearly three weeks under vague charges of "sedition" and section 54 of the CrPC. (Samad's bail petition hearing started in the High Court yesterday and an order is expected today). We waited patiently all this while for the government to tell us why these eminent writers and social activists of our country are in prison.

What are their crimes for which they are being so brutally treated? They have no criminal record. They have never been known to have violated any established law of the land. Their professions are among the most respected in society and in the world. And YET they are denied bail as if they are such notorious elements and such a menace to society that their continued freedom must be prevented at any cost, even by bending or violating the law if necessary.

Is there any action in their past which cannot entitle them to a treatment of dignity, respect and civility? Are they such dangerous a group that they cannot be out on bail while the government conducts the necessary investigation? Why have they been treated like common criminals? Why did they need to be interrogated by so many different intelligence agencies of the state? Why were they denied the due process of law, deprived of timely access to lawyers and not given "division" in jail which their profession, past record, public esteem in which they are held, and general eminence entitle them to.

Above all, no plausible charges could yet be brought against them after nearly four weeks in prison and yet they continue to rot in jail and their bail petition continue to be almost automatically rejected without assigning any serious reason.

In the latest act of harassment Professor Muntasir Mamun has been shifted to the Dinajpur district jail and Shahriar Kabir first to the Kashimpur Central Jail in Gazipur and then only yesterday to the Chittagong jail. This has been done, we think, to make contacts with lawyers and family members difficult, infrequent and logistically burdensome and expensive.

Let us refresh our memory a bit about their cases. In doing so, we have been deliberately a bit elaborate to prove the point how law was bent or violated and the arrested persons were deprived of the true process of law. Professor Muntasir Mamun and Shahriar Kabir were both picked on December 8, the day after the terrorist bomb blasts in the four cinema halls of Mymensingh. Having no specific charges against them, they were arrested under section 54 of the CrPC. Predictably bail was refused and they were sent on a three-day remand for questioning. Along with the same order the CMM's Court also asked that none but the investigating officer was to question them. Violating this court order both were taken to the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC), a body composed of the CID (Criminal Investigation Department), SB (Special Branch), both belonging to the police, and the NSI (National Security Intelligence) under the home ministry. The DGF (Directorate General of Forces Intelligence) belonging to the armed forces sometimes sits among them but never officially.

On December 10 the High Court cancelled the remand order of both Mamun and Kabir and ordered that both be sent to jail. The police ignored this order. On December 11 Kabir was implicated in the same sedition case brought against two Channel Four foreign journalists though Shahriar's name did not appear in the FIR (First Information Report), the initial report that is submitted by the police following initiation of any investigation.

On the following day, December 12, both Mamun and Kabir were given one-month detention under the Special Powers Act (SPA). Till date no report have been submitted to the court as to what has been found, if anything, during interrogation while on remand. On December 14 the High Court issued a rule nisi on the government asking them to show cause why their detention order should not be declared illegal and why they should not be given compensation. On December 18 the High Court Division Bench approved anticipatory bail for them for the future. The present position is that both Mamun and Kabir have been given bail for the cases under section 54 and "sedition". But as they have been given detention under the SPA they are not being released. The hearing for the SPA detention will be held on January 5 when the High Court will open after vacation.

In one of their court appearances Kabir said that following his arrest for long 25 continuous hours he was given nothing to eat or drink. He was blindfolded for days and repeatedly interrogated by the JIC. He was not allowed to sleep for five nights. He was not given clean water to drink and had to drink bathroom water.

In his statement to the court Mamun said that he was kept blindfolded for two days and repeatedly interrogated. He was made to sleep on wet, cold floor in spite of his frail health and made to sleep in the same room with a notorious criminal.

Saleem Samad's story is even more horrific. He has been arrested on November 29 and taken on a five-day remand following which he was produced before a court on December 4 but was transported to prison without giving him a chance to move a bail petition. While being spirited out he shouted from the prison van to waiting journalists on the court premises, "I have been subjected to inhuman torture". The bail was heard in his absence and predictably rejected. On December 14 bail was once again moved in absentia and was again rejected. So from December 4 till date, he has been rotting in prison. Till today Samad has had no chance to properly appear before the court, make any statement before the court or has not been allowed proper and regular access to lawyers.

It may be recalled when the two Channel Four journalists came to do a documentary on Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh and the possibility of existence of the al-Qaeda network here he acted as their contact persons. When it was discovered that they came on a wrong visa -tourist, instead of journalist - and that they had wrongly mentioned their professions - one a teacher and another an architect - they were arrested for entry under false pretence and charged with "sedition" and put in jail. Samad and Pricilla were arrested at the same time (with a few days difference) and also charged with "sedition".

What were the crimes of Samad? The visiting journalists used Saleem as a local contact. It is a most common practice. Journalists being a global fraternity, national contacts are expected to help visiting journalists do their story. Often visiting journalists come to newspaper offices requesting use of their files, emails, Internet, computer and sometimes even a desk to work from. On occasions we even assign one of our reporters to take them around and help out with the language. We extend this courtesy because we expect them to do the same when we are in their country. Can anybody imagine working in France, Spain, Portugal, Norway, Sweden, South Korea, etc without a translator or a local contact? We have deliberately chosen examples from developed countries to prove that local contact is not a developing-country phenomenon as the information minister derisively referred to our journalists doing all this for a "few dollars".

The constitution, which guarantees our rights and limits the power and authority of the government, the laws that regulate our lives, and practices that forms our legal tradition all hold personal freedom to be sacred. All laws of our land guarantee our individual freedoms, which can be curbed only under specific conditions and after a very elaborately laid out legal process have been fulfilled.

It is this core value of our legal system that our government appears to be flouting at will. The attitude seems to be "arrest first, and look for proof later" or better still "use what has happened to punish those who write against us". Otherwise how can one explain the arrest of Prof. Muntasir Mamun within hours of a bomb blast in Mymensingh. Prof. Mamun has never been known to have participated in any activism remotely linked to anything violent in nature. Dhaka University has known many violent clashes both among students and teachers. Prof. Mamun's worst enemies have never linked him to any violent act. So how could he be among the prime suspects in the most horrendous of terrorist act in the recent past?

The same holds true for writer-activist Shahriar Kabir. We recall here his arrest more than a year ago charged with "sedition" and set free by higher court when the government failed to produce any evidence of his "seditious" actions. His documentary films, which were supposedly to have denigrated our country, were never shown to the public or to the media, which Kabir challenged the government to do.

We conclude with the clear demand that prove their guilt or set our writers and journalists free. The detention under the SPA, a black law, which the BNP is pledge-bound to scrap, only makes the government look oppressive.