

# 14kg heroin haul at ZIA

## Three Pakistani women passengers held in one of the biggest drug busts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three Pakistani women were arrested with about 14 kilograms of heroin stuffed into 176 toothpaste tubes in a bag at Zia International Airport (ZIA) in one of the largest drug busts yesterday, customs officials said.

They said the trio, Noor Jahan Begum, Nazma Begum and Kohinoor Begum, who arrived from Karachi via Dubai by the Emirates Airline were nabbed and handed over to the airport police on charge of drug trafficking, an offence punishable by death.

The drugs carry a street value of Tk 14 crore, they added.

They said the black bag, wrapped in polythene, was left moving on the conveyor belt, unclaimed.

Suspicious of the luggage, customs officials retrieved it and the following scan revealed medicinal content.

As they were about to open the bag, Nazma came forward to claim its ownership and said it contained Sensodyne and Medicam, two toothpaste brands.

But the amount of toothpaste and hardness of the tubes raised the officials' doubt and they opened some in front of representatives of different agencies to find 13.8 kg heroin, 78 grams in each tube.

An addict was brought in to taste the drugs. A chemist of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) also went to the scene and categorised the drug as 'quality product'.

Police believe that Nazma is the boss of the international drug syndicate, operating in South Asia.

The drugs were kept in the customs warehouse.

Customs officials said the three were frequenters to Bangladesh and fluent Bangla-speakers.

The biggest ever drug haul took place on September 20, 1999 when the DNC seized 24.1 kilograms of heroin from a hotel at Kakrail and arrested three Pakistani nationals.

The customs also recovered contraband tranquilliser and cigarettes worth about Tk 12 lakh from the airport on the day.



PHOTO: STAR

**BIG HAUL.....**  
Two of the three women arrested at the Zia International Airport yesterday stand in front of toothpaste tubes they used to carry 14kg heroin.

## HC dismisses writs against Speedy Trial Tribunal Act

BSS, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday dismissed three writ petitions challenging the Speedy Trial Tribunal Act 2002.

A division bench comprising Justice Mohammad Hamidul Haque and Justice Zinat Ara delivered the judgement after hearing the petitions.

Former MP Mohibur Rahman Manik, former student leader Mamunur Rashid Mamun and Sramik League leader Zahangir Alam Chowdhury filed three separate writ petitions challenging the Speedy Trial Tribunal Act.

Earlier, a division bench of the High Court issued a rule in this regard.

Barrister M Amirul Islam and Abdul Baset Majumder appeared before the court on behalf of the petitioners while Attorney General A F Hasan Arif, Additional Attorney General Abdur Razzak Khan and Assistant Attorneys General Zaman Akhter Bulbul and Gias Uddin Mithu stood for the state.

## DB takes over Sultana Panni murder case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Detective Branch of police (DB) has taken over the investigation of the Sultana Khan Panni murder case.

Dhanmondi police yesterday handed over the case docket (CD) and the four people including the three domestic helps arrested in connection with the murder to the detectives.

After receiving the case docket, the DB investigator, inspector Mohammad Qudus, went to the house of Humayun Khan Panni yesterday with a DB team and visited the place of occurrence and its surroundings. The detectives are still investigating the case.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

# Sleaze-laced ledger exposes graft cartel

## BAC raids customs office to find how duty drawback incentive was corrupted

ZAYADUL AHSAN

When an anti-corruption inspector visited the duty drawback and exemption department in Mohakhali on a tip-off yesterday noon, he could not believe what was in wait for him.

It was a simple ledger but chronicled corruption in crores of taka by allowing companies to

illegally draw back about Tk 40 crore in duty against shady exports.

The ledger detailed everything -- right from the names of the companies which used this vice to the list of officials who got kick-backs.

The department carried out transactions worth up to Tk 40 crore with 20 to 25 companies and

received at least Tk 3 crore in bribes from them, Inspector of the Bureau of Anti-corruption (BAC) Rafiquzzaman Rumi, who seized the ledger from the department, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"I have recovered the book from the customs inspector and he admitted that he had written and maintained these accounts himself," he said.

The companies are involved in importing raw materials and exporting finished products. After they export a product made of imported raw materials, they can take an import duty rebate as a government incentive to export.

The companies submitted

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## Cinema halls stay shut to protest piracy

AFP, Dhaka

Several hundred cinema halls across Bangladesh went on strike yesterday to protest film piracy, a leading film star said.

"Cinema halls across Bangladesh will not open their doors today (Wednesday) for two major shows to protest the unabated piracy of the movies we are making," actor-director Ujjal said a rally in the city that was attended by several hundred people involved in the industry.

Last week more than 5,000 members of Bangladesh's film industry took to the streets to press their grievances.

Bangladesh's multi-million dollar film industry, known as "Dhaliwood", releases about 90 films a year.

It says it is facing low cinema audiences because people can buy cheap pirated copies of films to watch at home, as well as the entry of cable television in late 1980s.

# Saifur seeks greater market access to India

BSS, New Delhi

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman and his Indian counterpart Jashwant Singh yesterday discussed ways to step up bilateral economic cooperation as well as trade and investment.

During their formal talks held at a city hotel for over two hours, Saifur Rahman stressed the need to work collectively for poverty alleviation and common good in South Asia, Bangladesh officials told BSS after the meeting.

Home to a fourth of the world's population, South Asia's grinding poverty affecting millions of its inhabitants calls for urgent attention and coordinated action, Saifur was quoted as saying.

During the discussion, the two sides agreed to work together to tackle poverty through possible networking.

Both sides, they said, referred to historical, political and cultural

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



PHOTO: AFP

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman shakes hand with Indian Finance Minister Jaswant Singh before their official talks in New Delhi yesterday.

# Abducted journo rescued after 21 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Twenty-one days after his abduction, Sitakunda Press Club President Atahar Siddique Khosru was freed yesterday.

The kidnappers left Khosru at Chhoto Darogarhat in Sitakunda upazila of the district at around 5:00 am. His hands and legs were chained and locked and his body bore marks of torture.

On information, police rescued Khosru and brought him to the Double Mooring Police Station in the city at about noon. A case was filed and Khosru was produced before court in the afternoon. He

gave a statement there.

Khosru, a correspondent of the Ittefaq, was abducted on April 30 as he was on way to a relative's house at Nalapara from Dewanhat under Double Mooring.

Talking to fellow newsmen at the Double Mooring Police Station, Khosru said Sitakunda upazila BNP General Secretary Nurul Islam was annoyed with him as he used to oppose his leadership and report his 'illegal activities'. This might be a reason behind his abduction.

He described how he was abducted, taken to three places and tortured.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



PHOTO: STAR

Journalist Atahar Siddique Khosru who was kidnapped 21 days ago was rescued yesterday with his hands chained by the abductors.

# Tough shot for ailing NCBs

## MoU with central bank next month to bridle expenses, lending

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) will have to swallow tough conditions to sign agreements with the central bank next month to improve their health.

The Bangladesh Bank has already sent drafts of memorandum of understandings (MoUs) to the banks prepared under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) guidance.

The banks are now working out how much they have to do to achieve the proposed parameters.

According to the conditions, the NCBs will have to bridle the growth of loans and advances to five per cent of their outstanding amounts in 2003.

To prevent concentration of large loans, the banks will not sanction any credit facility, which is more than five per cent of their paid-up capital, to a single client. Any additional loan facility will require syndication with foreign and private banks having a minimum 20 per cent stake in the venture.

Any new loan will not exceed

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4