

Abductors up ransom for Jamal to Tk 1cr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The abductors have raised the amount of ransom to Tk 1 crore from Tk 50 lakh for releasing businessman and BNP leader Jamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury, family sources said.

They doubled the amount of ransom reportedly on the plea that filing of a case, news reports and subsequent massive police raids "raised the costs" of holding the victim, sources said.

They said Jamal Uddin was making contact with his family

members over phone, but has stopped doing so since Monday last.

The businessman kidnapped on July 24 could not be rescued till yesterday (Saturday).

The joint rescue operation by police and the BDR, however, continued in different remote places of Patikchhari and adjoining areas.

With the ongoing joint rescue operation producing no results, a negotiation with the abductors was on to secure the release of the abducted businessman, sources

said.

Meanwhile, Chittagong Nagarik Forum's programme of laying siege to the Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) commissioner's office and forming a human chain demanding immediate rescue of the abducted businessman was not held yesterday due to hartal. It will now be held today.

The programme also includes a dawn-to-dusk hartal in Chittagong on August 21 if Jamal Uddin was not rescued by then.

The Chittagong Chamber of

Commerce and Industry will also hold a meeting at its auditorium at 3:00pm today to discuss the alarming law and order slide in the port city and possible ways of countering it.

Meanwhile, two of the four police officials, who were transferred from Chittagong, received another order for leaving their stations for new postings in the Rajshahi range, sources said.

They are officer-in-charge (OC) of the Kotwali Police Station Ruhul

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IMF team due Tuesday to assess NCB reforms

NAZMUL AHSAN

A four-member team of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will arrive in Dhaka Tuesday to assist the government in reforming the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), officials said yesterday.

The team leader, Warren Coats, Assistant Director, Monetary Affairs and Exchange Department, IMF will arrive on August 19 and the three members on August 23, sources said.

Sources at the Bangladesh Bank (BB) said the IMF team would evaluate the government's initiatives taken so far to reform the NCBs.

The cabinet committee on eco

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Gas export meeting shelved indefinitely

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A meeting on the gas sector scheduled to take place at the Prime Minister's Office today has been postponed indefinitely.

State Minister for Energy Mosharraf Hossain earlier said a decision on gas export to India might be taken at the meeting likely to be chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and attended by senior cabinet members.

Petrobangla and the Hydrocarbon Unit of the energy ministry were supposed to make separate presentations on the status

of gas sector development and gas resources.

"We were not supposed to say anything on gas export," said a top Petrobangla official, adding, "We do not know if the ministers and the prime minister were supposed to discuss the issue."

"The meeting will be held some other time," Mosharraf told the BBC yesterday.

"An important meeting came up in the prime minister's schedule to replace the meeting on gas. The meeting on gas is not that important that it can not wait for a few more days."

"I don't think it was postponed because of political opposition to export. The meeting may take place soon," the state minister said.

He claimed he discussed the gas export issue with senior ministers and none opposed the idea.

But a couple of policymakers said majority of them and party leaders opposed the export.

"We have to consider public opinion to run the government," said a senior minister, requesting not to be named.

"We are aware that majority of the people oppose it. And if we take

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Hartal passes off quietly

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal called by the Awami League (AL) was observed yesterday peacefully barring some stray incidents of violence in the city.

Police rounded up 49 activists, mostly women, from the AL central office premises at Bangabandhu Avenue and other areas for enforcing the hartal disrupting normal life in the capital and other major cities and towns.

As women activists started assembling at the party office at around 5:30am in support of yesterday's hartal, police picked 38 and detained them at the Motijheel Police Station, the AL leaders said. Two other female activists were picked up from in front of Golap Shah Mazar later.

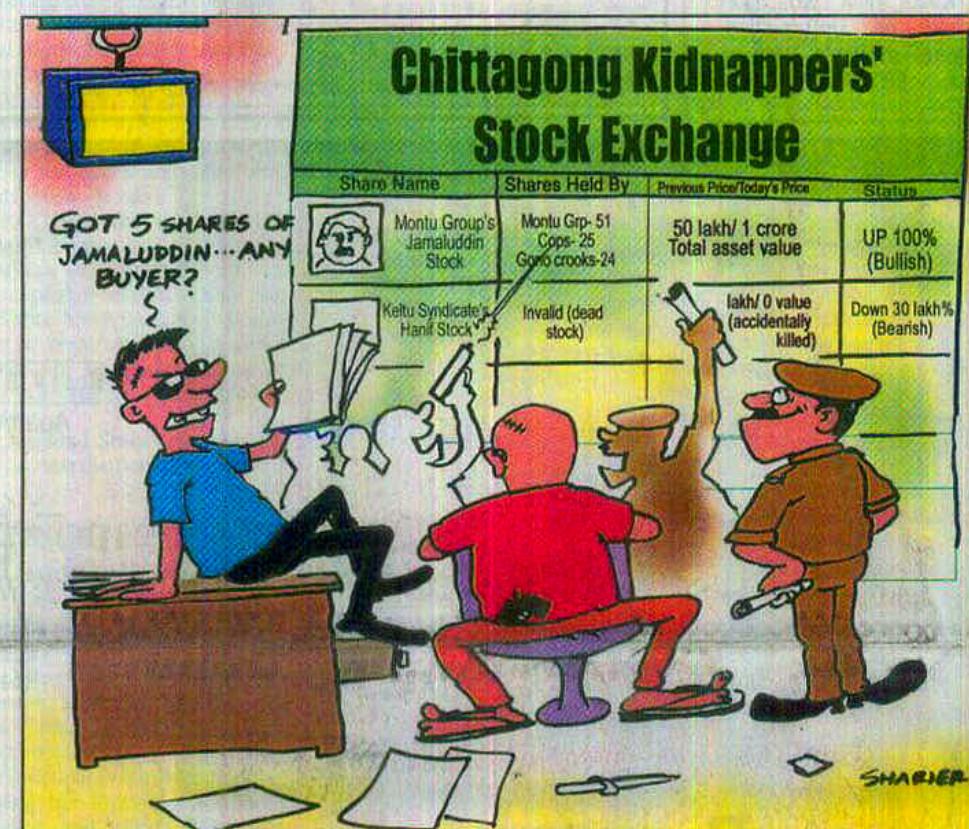
However, the female activists were released in the evening.

At least 25 were injured in police action while picketing at different points of Dhaka city, witnesses said.

Police clubbed to disperse pro-hartal workers at Atish Dipankar Road in Sabujbagh as they were damaging passenger buses, witnesses said.

AL workers staged pickets in

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Befitting for eve-teasers

UNB, Barisal

Two activists of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) were roughed up and their motorbike was set on fire by angry medical students for harassing female students in front of a women medical students' dormitory there Friday night.

Police arrested the two, Badal, 26, and Prince, 27, identified as students of BM College and cadres of the JCD, from the spot at 1:30am.

Sources said a group of JCD cadres gathered in front of the female students' dormitory for some time and teased its residents. But when they came back again on Friday night, medical students from

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No major headway in Joypurhat

Looted arms, ammunition not recovered; 5 suspects held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Joypurhat police could not recover the arms and ammunition looted by operatives of an Islamist militant outfit a day ago, but arrested five suspects and were conducting a massive manhunt for the key accused yesterday.

Operatives of the Jama'atul Mujahidin, an outlawed Islamist

group, looted three shotguns and 60 bullets in an early morning fierce fire fight at the house of Montekar Rahman at Uttar Maheshpur in the district Friday.

"We've directed police to recover the looted arms and ammunition at any cost with no second objective at this moment," said Superintendent of Joypurhat Police Abdul Jalil Mondol.

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Tk 52 lakh gold seized at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials at Zia International Airport (ZIA) seized 7.15 kilograms of gold chains estimated at about Tk 52 lakh from a Biman aircraft Friday night.

Tipped off, Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Abdur Rouf along with his team searched the Biman Bangladesh Airlines aircraft (flight No. BG-085) from Singapore as soon as the passengers got off. Inspector Azad found three packets of gold chains.

The team inquired the cabin crew and other employees of the aircraft about the owner of the packets, but he could not be traced. The customs sources said an organ-

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US, Canada in search of blackout cause

REUTERS New York

New York City's subway stopped in its tracks by this week's historic power failure, resumed service yesterday, and a US-Canadian task force searched for the cause of the blackout.

The White House announced the cross-border task force Friday on the crisis that plunged as many as 50 million people in the Northeastern United States and the Canadian province of Ontario into darkness.

"We need to take a look at what went wrong, analyze the problem and come up with a solution. We don't know yet what went wrong but we will," President Bush said during a visit to California.

"I view it as a wake-up call," the president told reporters, describing the worst blackout in North American history as "an indication we need to modernize the electricity grid."

Bush, who discussed the crisis for the first time with Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien, said investigators must find out why outages spread so quickly to New York, Detroit, Cleveland, Ottawa, Toronto

and a host of smaller cities. Chretien had suggested earlier that the cause of the power collapse lay in the United States, but some U.S. utility officials insisted the problem started in Canada.

In New York, subway trains halted for nearly 36 hours started running again early on Saturday. In a recorded announcement, the city's transit authority said all but two subway lines were operating.

Power returned to the city late Friday, but transit crews needed time to test trains. New York City's subway and bus system carries about 7 million passengers on a normal weekday, making it the largest in the country.

Thousands of air travelers crowded into airport terminals in New York, Cleveland, Detroit and Toronto on Friday, but airlines had canceled hundreds of flights.

In Manhattan, lights shone from the Empire State Building, Times Square reclaimed its garish neon luster and Broadway theaters opened for a full schedule of performances.

New York Mayor Michael

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Ecnecc okays Tk 176cr tannery relocation plan

STAR REPORT

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnecc) yesterday approved a Tk 175.75 crore project to set up a tannery town at Savar by December 2005.

The tannery town will be set up on 200 acres of land having 195 industrial plots of four types -- 80,000 square feet, 40,000 square feet, 20,000 square feet and special size.

The project to be implemented by the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation will

create about one lakh jobs.

At a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, the Ecnecc decided to relocate all tannery industrial units to the tannery town.

According to the Project Proforma (PP), the government will bear 60 per cent of the project cost and the rest will come in loans or grants from foreign sources.

The Economic Relations Division (ERD) is trying for foreign funds for the project.

The Ecnecc also decided that the government would fully fund it if the

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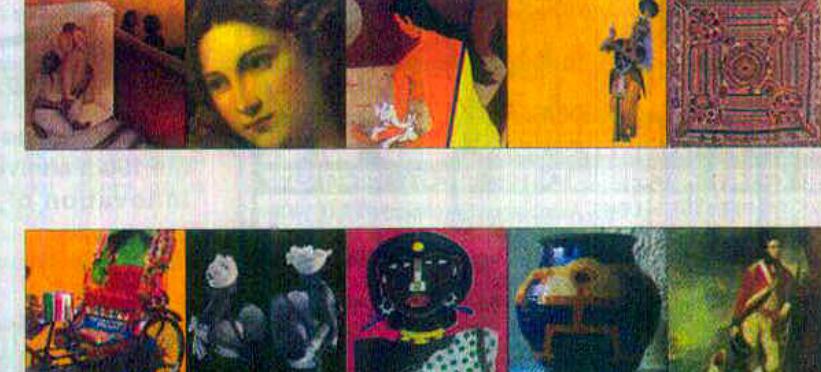
Three children drown in pond in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Three children drowned in a pond at village Palongkhali in Ukhia Upazila yesterday.

They are Asiya Begum, 5, daughter of Kamal Hossain, Nurul Islam, 4, son of Nurul Islam and Nurul Kabir, 3, son of Syed Ahmed.

The incident occurred at noon when the children were taking bath in the pond along with their mothers. Local people recovered the bodies and later buried them.



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