

# 1 dies, 200 hurt in tornado

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One person was killed and over 200 were injured as tornado lashed Pabna, Kushtia, Manikganj and Natore yesterday.

In Pabna, tornado hit several villages in Chatmohor upazila in the afternoon, killing one person and injuring 50 others.

The dead was identified as Halima Khatun, 35, of Kuabasi village.

Local administration sources told UNB that Kuabasi, Sohagbari, Pobakhali and Sirinda were among the villages hit by the tornado at 3pm, damaging over 100 houses and uprooting many trees.

Our Correspondent from Manikganj reports: At least 100

people were injured and 300 houses damaged in one-minute tornado that lashed six villages in Sadar upazila at about 2:00pm.

In Kushtia, tornado swept two villages in Daulatpur upazila in the afternoon, injuring at least 30 people.

Residents said the tornado hit Dafadarpara and Golabari of Philipnagar Union at 4:30pm and lasted for 30 seconds. Of the injured, seven have been identified as Shamsher, 80, Rushia, 35, Jalal, 45, Nargis, 11, Qamrul, 10, Jamal, 24 and Jamsher, 5.

UNB Natore correspondent reports: A tornado swept over three villages of Boraiganj upazila yesterday evening, leaving a trail of destruction.

## Information

**FROM PAGE 1**  
those who elected them. In the worst instances, this leads to the 'criminalisation of politics' and the 'politicisation of criminals,' the report adds.

The report says corruption takes root in society because of lack of government accountability and transparency and habits of secrecy and eats away economic vitality of nations.

"Information is not a gift of the government to be bestowed on a whim. Rather, the right to access information simply returns to citizens what has always been rightfully theirs," the report says.

"Much of the failure of development strategies in the Commonwealth is attributable to the fact that, for years, they were designed and implemented in a closed environment – between governments and donors and without the involvement of people."

"Poor people know what they want but are out of the habit of questioning aloof governments. In any case, governments and donors, have not been willing to open up."

The report cites an extreme case that even the parliamentarians in Ghana complained that their Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and crucial decisions to take advantage of the 'Highly Indebted Poor Countries' initiative were not referred to parliament at large.

Focusing on taboo in different countries on defence-related public information, the report says: "While it may not be in the national interest to disclose where a group of new aircraft is to be deployed, there is no reason why, nearly because the Defence Department is involved, citizens should not be given information on how much an aircraft jet costs or the details of the purchase agreement."

The CHRI, founded in 1987 as an independent, non-partisan, international non-governmental organisation, is currently chaired by Professor Margaret Reynolds.

It is mandated to ensure the practical realisation of human rights in the Commonwealth world.

In the report, the CHRI called for introduction of laws to ensure liberal access to information in all Commonwealth countries by 2005 and guarantee of effective access to information.

Giving backgrounds of the culture of secrecy the report says: "Colonial authorities, which owed no duty to subject populations, purposefully used secrecy to signal their power and distance. A culture of secrecy permeated government, and systems to

## Top criminal

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Judge Mohammad Habibur Rahman started reading out important portions of the 22-page verdict in a crowded courtroom 20 minutes before Aslam was produced in the court.

He began reading out the judgement at 12:15 pm and Aslam, an accused in 16 other criminal cases, was brought to the dock at 12:35 pm.

This created a mixed reaction among lawyers, litigants and Journalists who thronged the court room to hear the verdict.

Lawyers noted that judgement in a case should be read out in presence of the accused.

In the case filed with Motijheel Police Station, it was alleged that Sweden Aslam was arrested from a residence at the DOHS in the city's cantonment area on May 20, 1997. A team of detective police led by AC Akram Hussain, now sentenced to life-term in the Rubel murder case, recovered one pistol, one stungun, one shooter gun and a revolver and six bullets from his possession.

While on remand, he gave a statement to the investigation officer (IO) of the case that there were huge arms and ammunition in the possession of his accomplices Shariful and Billal. Shariful was then arrested from Shyamoli in the city's Mohammadpur area on May 25, 1997 and he was placed on remand for interrogation, the case mentioned.

Later, police raided Billal's West Malibagh residence and recovered six revolvers and 98 bullets. Billal fled sensing police presence. Acting on information received from Aslam and Shariful, police made the recovery.

On May 29, Shariful gave a confessional statement before a magistrate stating that Swapan, another accomplice of Aslam, came to his (Shariful) Banani residence on May 7 and gave a packet and said Aslam gave it. He also said he went to his friend Billal's Malibagh residence at about 4:00 pm on May 22 and gave the packet to him.

And the trial began on July 3, 2000.

keep information from the public became embedded."

"Today, except in a handful of countries, governments enthusiastically retain and indeed embrace these symbols of supremacy as if there has been no intervening change from colonial to constitutional governance."

Referring to bureaucratic tangles, the report says public servants who genuinely believe they are serving their masters by denying the public information forget that their masters are the public themselves.

Apart from Bangladesh, the 11 other Commonwealth countries without access to information regime are: Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Maldives, Nauru, Namibia, Samoa, Singapore, Swaziland, Tonga and Vanuatu.

Only Australia, Belize, Canada, India, Jamaica, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom and Zimbabwe have the access regimes.

## Alliance toasts

**FROM PAGE 1**  
The pledge to stamp out crime and corruption topped the election manifesto of the BNP. Despite the anti-crime drive like Operation Clean Heart, the country experienced free fall of law and order. And, on Tuesday, the Transparency International rated Bangladesh as the most corrupt nation for the third successive year.

Commitments to increase parliamentary seats from 300 to 500 and raise in women's seats are yet to be implemented. The BNP was committed to address the women's reserve seat issue in the first session of the Sangsad.

Other important issues like separation of judiciary, autonomy of state-owned radio and television, setting up of human rights and independent anti-corruption commissions, appointment of an ombudsman, repeal of Special Powers Act 1974, revival of zila and upazila parishes, nationalisation of all non-government primary schools, etc have not been executed. In many cases, no initiative was taken at all.

However, several other commitments like establishing liberation affairs and expatriates welfare ministries, special court to try heinous crimes, repeal of Public Safety Act, free education for girls up to HSC level, etc have already been implemented.

The education for girl students has been made free up to bachelors' degree level and huge investment has been made to improve standard of education.

Copying in examinations has dropped down, but leakage of question papers for various exams, including those of public service commission, has tarnished the government achievements in the education sector significantly.

## Trade barriers

**FROM PAGE 12**  
the precondition of bringing reforms to some sectors by the IMF and WB for urgent loans, one of the delegates said, adding the CPA should work to remove pressure of those organisations on poor nations.

Another delegate said the poultry farms in his country have suffered a blow because of a huge flow of goods from the developed nations and underscored enforcement of strong antidumping laws.

The developed nations should provide duty-free access for the goods from developing countries, remove all tariff and non-tariff barriers, allow free movement of natural persons and stop farm subsidy to ensure an equitable trade in the competitive world, the workshop was told.

Canadian lawmaker Samite Bulte chaired the workshop, "How can the Doha round contribute to increasing trade and investment opportunities for developing nations".

Constance Simelane from Swaziland, Dr Yusuf Yacob from Malaysia, Patrick Rata of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), AbdulAlim from Bangladesh and Graham Hill from New Zealand also took part in the discussion.

They urged the CPA to work towards lifting billions of poor people from poverty.

Dr Yacob felt the developing nations should also take initiatives to remove restrictions on exchange of goods among themselves and urged the WTO to find ways to resolve agriculture and export subsidy issues.

Focussing on various aspects of Doha round conference, Abdul Alim said agriculture subsidy in the developed countries impacted agricultural products in Bangladesh.

## Free trade

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Besides, Bangladesh will propose allowing 20 per cent value addition in any product to be entitled to free trade among the countries and ask three developing countries – India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – to form a special fund to finance the revenue loss the LDC partners will suffer due to free trade.

The strategy was finalised at an inter-ministerial preparatory meeting with Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury in the chair at the ministry conference room.

"It is not possible for us to agree on issues that may cause substantial revenue loss. Besides, Bangladesh would not agree to any issue that differs from its WTO position," Khosru said after the meeting.

According to commerce ministry sources, if the Kathmandu meet succeeds in preparing a framework for the proposed free trade bloc, it may be placed in the next South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) Summit slated for January next in Islamabad.

The 1998 Saarc Summit agreed to establish a Committee of Experts (COE) for drafting a comprehensive trade regime on South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta).

"The expert committee made considerable progress in preparing the draft agreement for free trade area," said a commerce ministry official.

He said the impact of such an area on the regional LDCs and safeguard measures needed for them are yet to be agreed upon.

## Keraniganj murder

**FROM PAGE 12**  
An official of Keraniganj Police Station said seeking anonymity.

A gang led by Jahangir and Mujib shot dead Jubo Dal and Jaliyatrabai Chahtra Dal activists Marbel, Mamun and Nasim Rana following a dispute over returning the amount, family members of the victims alleged.

Jahangir got furious when Marbel demanded his money back and unleashed Wednesday night's attack, police said.

Marbel's father Sadek Ali filed a case with Keraniganj Police Station early yesterday accusing Mujib and Jahangir for the killing of Marbel, his friends Mamun and Nasim when they were gossiping in front of Marbel's residence near Pargandaria graveyard at about 8:30pm.

Mujib and Jahangir are activists of the Awami League's front organisation Jubo League, police said adding that both are also operatives of infamous Dacoit Shahid.

Jahangir was once a resident of the area but now resides in Sutrapur, police added.

Locals and police said the victims were involved in extorting money from local businessmen, snatching and other criminal activities.

However, police could not provide information regarding the victims' criminal records immediately.

## Private universities

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tried to explain why they could not fulfil the UGC criteria, he said.

"During the visit, we tried to assess infrastructure, classroom conditions, laboratory and library facilities, the number of teachers, their educational qualifications and the methods of teaching at the universities," the member added.

The UGC formed the nine-member committee following a directive from the education ministry to look into the status of private universities against a backdrop of widespread allegations of their falling standards of education, financial mismanagement, recruitment of teachers without required qualifications and various other irregularities.

The committee will gradually visit all the 51 private universities in the country, which have a total of some 45,000 students.

Currently, not any of the private universities fulfil all the criteria required for registration under the Private University Act. They lack requirements such as their own campus, faculty members, library and laboratory facilities.

## 54 schoolgirls

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on national news channels showed the bus and truck completely gutted by fire.

Police rescue crews and volunteers worked under spotlights through the night to extract dozens of burned bodies, carrying them to ambulances on stretchers.

An unknown number of injured were being treated.

"There were 51 students, two teachers and one tour leader killed," said Nanang, a doctor in the emergency room of Situbondo Hospital.

East Java Police Chief Heru Sutanto visited the site and Situbondo Hospital as an investigation got going.

"The assistant of the truck driver who ran away has been apprehended. The driver has been identified but is still at large," he told local television station SCTV.

"We cannot determine the cause of the accident at this stage, but the evidence we found on the scene is showing that the truck was in the wrong lane."

The bus driver and his assistant survived the crash, although they were badly injured. The man at the wheel of the minivan was being treated in hospital.

# Bol chief's money link

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This amount he receives in salary.

According to a source, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has recently come to know about Mahmudur Rahman's financial links. The Bol is directly under the PMO.

It has also been known that a business quarter involved in the 1996 share market scam are lobbying for Mahmudur Rahman to put him in Securities and Exchange Commission as its head.

Mahmudur Rahman and his former employer and Vice-chairman of Beximco Salman F Rahman have their own explanations that have discrepancies.

The Daily Star talked to the Bol chief in details about all the allegations and to Salman to know his version.

What is intriguing is whatever money Mahmudur Rahman received at his IFIC account – most of them in deposits of above Tk 5 lakh – was all in cash and seldom, if ever, by cheques.

Moreover, his account statements show that during the last nine months this year, he received as much as Tk 25 lakh in a single instalment and as much as Tk 35 lakh in a month.

If these allegations stand true, Mahmudur Rahman's joining the Bol in October 2001 and his alleged financial links with his previous employer, Shinepukur, raise serious questions of unethical practice, violation of government service rules and conflicts of interest.

A rough and partial estimate of what Mahmudur Rahman is alleged to have received from Shinepukur from November 2001 to September 2003 runs into over Tk 86.58 lakh. This includes 15.40 lakh in house rent from November 2001 to August this year, Tk 93,742 in car maintenance in May, June and September of this year alone, Tk 5,380 in landline and cellphone bills for June and September this year, Tk 14,500 in electricity bills for May, June and July this year, and Tk 70 lakh which was transferred between January 2003 and September 2003 in monthly instalments of Tk 5 lakh.

Competent sources also allege that the ceramics company has transferred two of its vehicles to the Bol chief and is paying for all repairs and maintenance of the cars and salary of two drivers. One of the vehicles is a Nissan Petrol and another a Honda Accord valued well over Tk 50 lakh. Salman F Rahman also admitted to all this.

The Daily Star has learnt from Pacific Motors and DHS Motors that Shinepukur recently paid the bills for repairs of three of Mahmudur Rahman's cars.

While holding the post of the Bol chief, Mahmudur Rahman is still alleged to have been issuing office memos for Shinepukur and frequently visiting the factory and advising its staff. Sources say that Mahmudur Rahman still performs most of the functions of MD, as evident from memos he is alleged to have signed.

This immediately raises questions if he has been playing a dual role, almost holding two offices

## Shrimp beds

**FROM PAGE 12**  
Sathkira.

In Khulna, at least 40 per cent fish enclosures have been washed away and 500 kutcha houses damaged. Standing crops in over 4,000 acres of land have gone under water at Paikgachha, Koira, Dumuria and Batighata upazila.

Thousands of people have been marooned and are starving. Aman crops in 10,000 acres of land have been flooded in Sathkira. A monitoring cell has been opened here at the deputy commissioner's office to assess the damage.

In Bagerhat, standing crops in thousands of acres of land have gone under four to five feet water. The sudden rise in the rivers has caused huge damage to the shrimp enclosures in all upazilas here. A large number of kutcha houses have collapsed.

simultaneously and if so, in utter violation of government service rules. And incidentally, Shinepukur has not appointed any MD since he left for Bol.

Allegations are there that Shinepukur Ceramics paid the monthly rent of Tk 70,000 for Mahmudur Rahman's house at Baridhara for the last two years where he stayed till August 2003 before moving to his apartment in Gulshan. And again, if such allegations are true, then it means the Bol chief had been simultaneously getting house rent from the government as well as his previous employer.

How and why Mahmudur Rahman gets Tk 5 lakh from Shinepukur every month is still shrouded in mystery as the parties concerned have explained the deal in different ways which contradict with what The Daily Star sources claim.

The Bol chief said at the time of severing ties with Shinepukur, the company owed him Tk 75 lakh. This he has been receiving in monthly instalments, he claimed.

But his former employer Salman F Rahman has his own version of the story.

"The company preferred to negotiate the compensation package under which the payments will be made in instalments to reduce financial burden on the company," Salman said. "Under the terms, we agreed to settle various expenses of Mahmudur Rahman and adjust it with the total amount."

Salman said Mahmudur Rahman is a shareholder of the company and the company still owes a lot more than the amount he has received from the company.

He said Mahmudur Rahman wanted the company to buyback his holding in the company and therefore is expected to receive a lot of money.

Salman said: "According to an agreement with Mahmudur Rahman, whatever money we spend on settling his expenses against credit card, car maintenance and house rents, will be offset from the total amount which we still owe him."

He however did not comment on the 'ethical aspect' of such a deal when the person in question has joined a government job.

Mahmudur Rahman has a rather feeble answer to back his using Shinepukur cars and said the company gave him the vehicles "in recognition of his service", but denied his drivers being under the payroll of Shinepukur.

He also denied that the ceramic company was paying for his credit card, mobile, utility bills, travel expenses or the house rents.

About Mahmudur Rahman's alleged rendering service to Shinepukur even after he joined the Bol, Salman has given an explanation that reveals the real nature of his former employee's links with Shinepukur.

He said it was difficult for the company to release Mahmudur Rahman when he opted for the Bol job, but he was let go on the condition that he would be available to support the company in case of "technical difficulties".

Any technical assistance rendered by the Bol chief during his stint with the government job however does not entail any monetary transaction, Salman said. Sources close to Shinepukur and Mahmudur Rahman said that the former MD has not given up his role in the company.

Mahmudur said the rent and bills were paid by Shinepukur also in recognition of his service to the company.

"It is nothing unusual. When you work for a company for such a long time, they let you stay in the company house for a certain period of time," Mahmudur said.

Controversy also rages over Mahmudur's farmhouse in Savar near the Shinepukur factory spread over an area of around 11 Bigha. Sources claim Shinepukur pays for the upkeep, maintenance and security, an allegation also denied by the Bol chief.

Salman also denied that Shinepukur Ceramics was paying for the travel and overseas expenses of the Bol chief.

When pointed out that on a number of occasions, Bex Trade, a sister concern of Beximco issued tickets to Bol chief, Salman Raman said Bex Trade had sold the tickets as a travel agent to a client who probably found the rates better.

The allegations against Mahmudur has now put the critically important office of the Bol in questions because investment and specially foreign investment depend largely on the transparency of this agency. And when questions rise against the head of such an office, these need to be scrutinised and clarified by the government, observers feel.

If these allegations are true, then the investors, specially the foreign ones, may lose confidence in the crucially important office dealing with the whole gamut of foreign investment, say the business people.

The allegations, if proven correct, raises some critical ethical questions:

Can such a pivotal employee, leading an important public body of the government, maintain such financial links with a private company?

Was the government aware of these links? If so, how much of the link? If the government knew of the links, then how ethical was it for the government to permit such a deal?

Is not there a conflict of interest between the position of the Bol chief and being in the payroll of a private company that may have its own dealings with Bol?

How can other investors feel confident of a level playing field when the Bol chief has financial links with a private company?

The huge amount of cash payment to Mahmudur Rahman raises questions about tax and related issues. Does the NBR know about these payments?

## Bapex

**FROM PAGE 1**  
handed over to Bapex after the IOCs failed to meet their work schedule.

"It's very encouraging for us. In search of gas, we are going for seismic work on our own block for the first time," said Mosharraf.

"We have been able to prove that we can carry out the operation by ourselves. We are also grateful to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for paving the way for operation on a block by our own company," he said.

"Inshallah, we'll find gas in the block," the minister told the news agency.

Earlier, the Bapex showed excellent performance in carrying out seismic operation for the Tullow-Chevron joint venture on block 9.

While the target for per day average shot was 70, the Bapex seismic team had made it 87 by even working in full monsoon – bringing in for Bapex Tk 8.7 million in cash and kind for the two-phase \$ 3.13 million project.

Their performance was internationally recognised by the Tullow Oil Plc.

Apart from carrying out seismic operation on its own block, there are offers for the Bapex to perform the job on blocks of the IOCs.

Cairn Energy Plc, the UK-based oil company, which is going to take over the operation of four blocks from Shell, conveyed their willingness to employ the Bapex for conducting seismic survey on block 10.

Besides, US oil giant Unocal is also eager to appoint Bapex for seismic survey on its block 12.

"The earnings from the IOCs' sub-contracts can help the Bapex to be self-reliant in running its own operation on Block 11," said a senior official at the Energy and Mineral Resources Division.

# Attack on Syria

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Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

The designated discussants included Australian Senator Robert Ray, British MP Harry Cohen, Canadian Senator Raynell Andrychuk and British educationist Tamara Makarenko. CPA delegates from a wide range of member countries from Nigeria to India took part in the open discussion at the workshop.

Coming out of the workshop, GL Peiris told newsmen "We have to understand the causes of terrorism and then decide on befitting global actions to redress those."

Asked on non-resolution of the long-drawn Middle East conflicts, Peiris said, "Terrorism in one part of the world has its effects on other parts of the world."

All should be careful about imposing 'terrorism experience' of one country on others as terrorism has various dimensions, he added.

Indian delegate Anadi Sahu told the workshop "Pan-Islamic fundamentalism, in the present day terrorist scenario, is the main cause of terrorist activity followed by economic considerations and social strife."

According to Sahu, religious fundamentalism is strengthened by flow of funds from illicit narcotics trade, smuggling of weapons and money laundering.

Young Nigerian lawmaker Farouk Lawan urged all to redefining terrorism particularly in the context of Israel's uncalled for bombardment on Syria.

Another participant dwelt on the current scenario in Iraq, saying more people were dying in Iraq every day after the invasion of it by Anglo-American forces ended.

Other discussants and participants noted that following the Twin Towers incident, the world saw adoption of or amendments to anti-terrorism legislation in

## 9-yr girl

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the roof. As the girl started to bleed severely, the youth called a rickshaw and took her to her aunt's house at Monipur in Mirpur, the victim told her parents before losing consciousness.

The violator told the rickshawpuller to take the bleeding girl to her relative's house and fled the scene, she added.

Her aunt Shahida Begum rushed the girl to the DMCH. She was unconscious till writing of this report at 8:00pm.

However, police failed to identify the rapist or the spot.

# Parliamentary bodies

**FROM PAGE 12**  
"On the other hand, parliament must work with the executive in a constructive manner, giving its critical support and keeping an effective surveillance over its activities.

"It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the real work of parliament nowadays is performed in the committees."

Joshi also observed democracy is the best known mechanism for ensuring social harmony and achieving lasting economic development.

"Hence, we all, whether in parliament or in executive, have to work together consciously to strengthen the system. We should remember that if democracy fails, there will be no executive, no parliament: the future of mankind will be very bleak."

Moderator Tshpinare meanwhile said the workshop participants had observed that many executives were more powerful than their parliaments and "we discussed how to overcome this phenomenon."

"If parliament knows its role and functions well then there is no scope for its being undermined," he said.

"Bureaucrats have a tendency of being authoritative over parliament. Parliamentary standing committees could be a means to go beyond such bureaucratic tangles and serve the

various countries. But unless the causes of terrorist activities were analysed and addressed, laws could not check those effectively, they thought.

Yesterday afternoon, the CPA conference also witnessed another workshop on 'Reconciling Human Rights with Cultural Diversity' held simultaneously at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

Indian lawmaker from Maharashtra state Narayan S Pharande, Western Australian MP Louise Pratt and representative of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) Maja Daruwala took part in discussion at the workshop, moderated by Carol Kidu, a legislator from Papua New Guinea.

## River-diversion

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icant change takes place at the political level in India," he added.

Asif Nazrul, Assistant Professor in the Dhaka University Law department, said, "Legally, we should immediately