

Petrobangla

FROM PAGE 12
Five of the appointees are serving in different organs of Petrobangla and the other one is working in the BCIC, a source said. They will have to resign first before accepting the five-year contract, an unattractive proposition since the appointees will lose retirement benefits.

They are now inquiring whether they could join under lien, instead of resigning from their present services. They cited the instances of Petrobangla and Power Development Board (PDB) officials, who are working under lien in the Hydrocarbon Cell and the Power Cell, in their defence, said the source.

"Besides, except for salary and house rent, the contracts have not offered benefits like festival bonus, leaves, dividends, and profit bonus though they are enjoying such privileges under their present jobs," he said.

Currently serving in the Jalalabad Gas Company Ltd, Mohammad Abdullah has been appointed managing director (MD) at the Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Ltd, Monzur Morshed Talukder (presently at Titas) at the Gas Transmission Company Ltd, and Abdul Wadud (currently in the BCIC) at the Rupantarita Praktirik Gas Company Ltd (RPGCL).

At director level, the government appointed Aminur Rahman in Titas (now in Titas), Khandker Salek Sufi in the GTCL (now in GTCL) and Kamruzzaman in the RPGCL (now in Wessgas).

They were selected from over 185 candidates who responded to newspaper advertisements. Petrobangla interviewed 66 applicants from both public and private sectors and selected six on the basis of merit.

Petrobangla interviewed a couple of dozen aspirants for director's posts and selected six. This list was okayed by the energy ministry before getting green signal from the Prime Minister's Office.

The appointment letters were

supposed to be issued on November 1 but were shelved in the face of serious opposition from trade unionists at Titas.

Though government reportedly reached an understanding with the unions leaders, a source said unionists threatened the Titas management of dire consequence couple of days back.

But a top union leader at Titas told The Daily Star they will not resist appointments of new MDs and directors although they would continue to oppose the donors' plan to corporatise the utility departments.

The managing directors will get a monthly salary of Tk 50,000 plus Tk 20,000 for house rent, a full-time motor car and medical facilities for whole family. A director will get Tk 45,000 salary plus Tk 15,000 for house rent.

The appointees are currently serving the government at a much lower salary but their fringe benefits are much higher than those of contract services.

One of the director-appointee has served Petrobangla for 23 years and is qualified for a pension worth no less than Tk 15 lakh on completion of 25 years' service. If he must accept his contractual appointment, he will have to resign and forego the pension benefit.

"This is a disincentive that is going to affect his performance if he accepts the appointment," noted a source. "But that was not the plan initially for corporatising Titas, the GTCL and the RPGCL."

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been pressing the government to give full autonomy to the three affiliates of Petrobangla with appointments of fresh MDs and directors under contract.

On fulfilling the conditions, the ADB will clear the \$ 113.4 million loan for the Dhaka Clean Fuel project that aims at setting up a robust Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) distribution system for Dhaka and its outskirts.

Retail prices of vegetables keep soaring

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The retail prices of some vegetables yesterday soared further while those of others remained stable at their previous highs to cancel out wholesale prices fall.

The prices of spices, however, remained by and large unchanged over the past one week.

The price of a kg of green chilli went up by Tk 10 to 12 and sold at Tk 50 at the city's Fakirerpool, Shantinagar and Karwan Bazar kitchen markets yesterday.

Aubergine sold at Tk 24 to 26 a kg yesterday against Tk 16 of Monday. "Aubergine is selling at a high price as it is on high demand for Iftar," said a trader at the Fakirerpool market.

A kg of green papaya sold at Tk 8 yesterday against Tk 5 last week, while old potatoes sold at Tk 14 against Tk 10 and the new ones at Tk 28 against Tk 30-32.

"It's really confusing; the government says it is taking measures to contain essentials price, the media reports say wholesale prices are going down, but the retailers claim the opposite," said Shahidul Islam, an NGO activist, while shopping at the Fakirerpool kitchen market.

"Ordinary consumers like me are undoubtedly helpless," said Ishita Huq, a housewife of Bara Magbazar area while shopping at Shantinagar kitchen market, "It appears we are hostage to unscrupulous traders."

The price of a kg of cucumber ranged between Tk 26-28 yesterday, up from Tk 24 the day before. But beans sold at Tk 40 a kg yesterday, down from Tk 50 the day before. The price of a kg of tomato remained stable at Tk 40.

A kg of fresh long beans sold at Tk 28 yesterday, which was Tk 20 three days ago at Karwan Bazar and Gulshan lakeside outlet.

Local onion sold at Tk 28 to 30, Indian onion Tk 24, turmeric Tk 75, dried chilli Tk 85 and edible oil Tk 48-52 a kg.

Bank managers

FROM PAGE 12

Earlier, the central bank directed the commercial banks to receive the torn and soiled notes from the public to ease their sufferings.

The deputy governor said now the commercial banks can no longer complain that the central bank does not change the defective notes of the commercial banks.

Cut interest rate

FROM PAGE 1

during the same period.

Nazrul said lending rates also shrivelled by 6-7 percent in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand during the period.

Interest rates on treasury bills have also decreased by 2-3 percent and call money rate is hovering around 2-3 percent in the last one year due to a number of steps taken by the BB.

Aminuzzaman, managing director of the National Credit and Commerce Bank Ltd, said the new step will force banks to reduce rates.

MA Yusuf Khan, managing director of Premier Bank, said lending rates are already coming down because of various steps of the BB and the new move would definitely have impact by January.

According to BB statistics, the banks had Tk 19,754 crore stashed with the central bank as SLR and cash reserve ratio (CRR) on October 16. The banks also had Tk 8,099 crore in excess liquidity on the same day -- Tk 2,272 crore with the nationalised commercial banks, Tk 3,838 crore with the private banks and Tk 1,673 crore with the foreign banks.

Revolution day

FROM PAGE 1

and roads and road islands will be decorated on the day. Public and private buildings will also be illuminated.

Special prayers will be offered at mosques, seeking divine blessings for peace and progress of the country. Prayers will also be offered at temples, pagodas and churches on the occasion.

National dailies will bring out special supplements highlighting the significance of the day. Bangladesh Television and Radio Bangladesh will air special programmes.

The BNP will also hoist party flags atop all its offices. Leaders and activists of the BNP and its different front organisations will visit the Mazar of late president Ziaur Rahman at 10:00 this morning to offer foteha (prayers) and place wreath.

Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will offer foteha at the mazar this morning. Besides, the BNP and its front organisations will organise discussions from tomorrow to November 15.

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs has chalked out a three-day programme, while the Islamic Foundation has taken a two-day programme to mark the day.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia gave separate messages on the eve of the day.



PHOTO: STAR

Iftar preparation goes on in full swing outdoors in Dhaka on Wednesday as stallholders chop, mix and fry the much sought-after delicacies, unmindful of the dirt and germs that the people will consume with the food.

2 more US soldiers

2 US soldiers

FROM PAGE 12

and close Baghdad down and make it look as though Iraq can't work with coalition forces," and added British troops could still be in Iraq in 2005.

Faced with daily guerrilla attacks and a string of suicide bombings, the United States has been pushing for more countries to share the burden of policing Iraq, but with limited success.

Turkey initially agreed to send a large contingent, but Iraq's US-appointed Governing Council objected to the plan and says the idea has now been dropped.

US officials did not give the number of American troops being called up for Iraq, but said they would include Marines as well as two regular Army divisions, the 1st Infantry Division in Germany and the 1st Cavalry Division from Fort Hood, Texas.

Marine Corps General Peter Pace, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stressed that the troops would be part of a 2004 Iraq rotation plan, and that the 132,000 American troops now there could decrease to just over 100,000 in May.

"We will be talking to Congress this

Businessmen

FROM PAGE 1

of Jahangir Market at Hazari Goli Tuesday night. They took him to Bakshirhat Bridge area, some one kilometre off the spot, to confine him to a room to demand a large amount of toll. Subhash managed his way out of captivity assuring them of payment of Tk 7,000.

The criminals made another attempt to kidnap Subhash from the shop at around 12.15m yesterday. But as the jeweller cried out for help, local businessmen and people rushed to his aid, prompting the abductors to flee.

Following the incident, some 100 businessmen and local people laid a siege to Kotwali Police Station at around 12:30am yesterday demanding arrest of the criminals and safety of the people.

The siege was withdrawn after the victim filed a case accusing three criminals identified as Prabir, Arup and Uttam at around 4:30am.

The agitating businessmen also alleged that the criminals also kidnapped another jeweller Tapan Pal and released him on payment of Tk 5,000.

However, Kotwali police denied the siege and said some 100 businessmen thronged the police station to file a case for the 'reported abduction attempt'.

Monga plight

FROM PAGE 1

misappropriating a huge amount of relief.

But State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman denied the allegation in his address to a meeting in Kurigram on Tuesday.

"Relief distributors here are not involved in corruption unlike in Gaibandha," he told another meeting at Durgapur Union Council.

Relief and Disaster Management Deputy Minister Asadul Habib Dulu, visiting Nanchipara union in Fulchhari, Gaibandha, on Tuesday caught Union Parishad (UP) Chairman Akbar Hossain in the act of distributing VGF rice less than allocated 10kg a person.

"The UP members did not give me a VGF card, as I could not pay them Tk 30 they demanded," said 85-year-old Abbas Ali of Fakirpara village.

Sakhina Begum, a widowed mother of five, alleged the UP chairman and members prepared the relief distribution list favouring their party supporters and the poor who gave them money.

On the allegations by Nandi, Abbas

afternoon and issuing orders tonight and having press briefings tomorrow on the next rotation of forces," Pace told the House of Representatives Armed Services Committee Wednesday.

"It does include a call-up of reserves, it does include use of land forces, it does include the Navy and Air Force."

A spokesman for Paul Bremer, the head of Iraq's US-led postwar administration, said he was open to the creation of a new Iraqi security force to help root out guerrillas and foreign militants.

But Bremer was in talks with the Governing Council to ensure that such a force was not controlled by Iraqi political factions, was integrated into existing command structures and worked in coordination with US-led troops, the spokesmansaid.

'Powerful men played role to let smuggler off cop office'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Influential 'villains behind the scene' played the main role in bringing notorious smuggler Shamsu to Khulna Police Station Sunday night and letting him off next morning, the officer-in-charge (OC) of the station claimed.

But he refused to divulge names of the villains and said he is ready to face the situation without fear.

A one-man probe body comprising Assistant Commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) Mohammad Alif is now investigating the matter.

The OC, Shafuil Azam Swapan, has been asked to show cause why Shamsu was arrested and released without the knowledge of senior KMP officials.

There are allegations that Shafuil took Tk 3 lakh in bribe from the smuggler and allowed him to go. He denied the allegations.

No KMP official senior to the OC admitted giving him permission to arrest the smuggler.

"We were not informed even after his arrest and till he was let off by the OC," said KMP Commissioner Md Mustafizur Rahman.

KMP Deputy Commissioner Md Mahbub Hakim and other senior officials also expressed similar views.

Meanwhile, one of the two rival groups of local BNP is reported to have intervened in the matter to save the OC from being punished.

Sources alleged this group forced the OC to arrest Shamsu as they failed to realise Tk 10 lakh from him to celebrate the ensuing Eid.

Custodial death Cops foil bid to lay siege to IGP's office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police foiled a bid of Khilgaon locals to lay siege to the office of the inspector general of police (IGP) yesterday demanding arrest and trial of Khilgaon policemen involved in beating a young man, Shakil Ahmed Chowdhury Sumon, to death.

More than 300 locals took out a procession from Khilgaon area yesterday morning and marched down to Golap Shah Mazar at Gulistan where police intercepted them.

Police told them they would not be allowed to go up to the police headquarters and asked them to hand over their memorandum, if any.

The processionists said they demanded arrest of former officer-in-charge Entejar Rahman and second officer Mahbubur Rahman of Khilgaon Police Station within 24 hours and a judicial probe into the death of Sumon in police custody.

They later tried to proceed towards the Jatiya Press Club, but police dispersed them at Zero Point.

They held a rally at Muktangan where Sumon's parents rejected the police investigation into Sumon's death. The probe found no proof of police beating on Sumon.

Normalcy limps back to N'ganj

OUR CORESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Normalcy was drifting back to Narayanganj yesterday after three days of chaos that stemmed from the death of a garment worker in police fire, fuelling waves of violence and a half-day hartal in the district.

But many knitwear factories did not resume operation for fear of further attacks by angry garment workers and thin presence of workers in the industrial belt of Fatahul and Siddhirganj.

Paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles, still on patrol, dispersed workers attempting to stage demonstrations in front of Faria and Majumder garment factories at Majidair in Fatahul.

The commercial district descended into lawlessness as thousands of frenzied garment workers wrecked about 200 factories and clashed with law enforcers, after a machine operator of Pantex Garments Factory died in Monday's police fire on the workers demonstrating for an eight-hour work schedule and pay of arrears.

Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) demanded deployment of army in the knitwear factories for security. The BKMEA leaders placed the demand at a meeting with the Dhaka divisional commissioner and deputy inspector general of police (Dhakarange).

Meeting sources said the divisional commissioner did not agree on the demand.

To bring the workers back to work, a tripartite meeting between the local administration, BKMEA and labour leaders were on until 8:30 last night.

Brokers

FROM PAGE 12

Minister for Agriculture Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed, Chairman of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh Md Shahjahan were also present.

"We have recommended setting up the wholesale markets to reduce the gulf between wholesale and retail prices," Khosru told newsmen after the meeting.

On implementation, the markets will help increase supply of vegetables and other perishables in Dhaka, the minister said, adding farmers would also get fair prices of their produces.

The commerce ministry at a meeting on November 3 proposed to set up two wholesale markets in Dhaka -- one at Khilgaon and the other at Jatrabari.

But the ministry altered the decision on wholesale markets on observation that producers do not get reasonable prices compared to what retailers, down the business channel, reap.

Gunfight over naming of a bazar leaves 70 injured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

At least 70 people, including three policemen, were injured in a gunfight between two rival groups of villagers in Daulatpur upazila of the district yesterday.

The clash erupted over the naming of a bazaar set up at the middle of Goolgram and Nathpara villages seven days ago. Since its establishment, people of both villages have been demanding the naming of the bazaar after their villages.

According to police and locals, both groups sat at a meeting at the bazaar at about 9:00am to settle the issue. They however locked in an altercation, which led to a gunfight. At least 20 shops were ransacked and looted during the clash that lasted for nearly two hours.

Tipped-off, Daulatpur police rushed to the spot and fired blank shots to bring the situation under control. Three policemen, who were injured during the shootout between the two feuding groups, were admitted to Kushtia General Hospital. They are Sub-Inspector (SI) Safiqur Rahman and constables Swapan Kumar Paul and Samsul Islam.

Police arrested 37 people, including three BNP men, on the spot. They said

3 more die from bootleg liqueur binge in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

With the death of three more people yesterday, the death count from bootleg liqueur binges in Kushtia town since Monday rose to 13, hospital sources said.

Year Ali, 49, of Gobindapur village in Mirpur upazila, Gopal Sheikh, 39, of Kumarkhali upazila and Jony, 32, of the town, died by yesterday afternoon when 25 more fell sick, taking people on the sick list to 75, they added.

Doctors at Kushtia General Hospital carried out autopsy on four of the 13 killed and blamed unrefined alcohol consumption for their death.

The district administration in an anti-liqueur drive arrested nine people and filed 12 cases against suspects on bootlegging charges.

Police demolished four illegal shops in town on suspicion of selling the contaminated alcohol and a high official of the department of narcotics control visited the scene.

Saifur

FROM PAGE 12

minister) make such remarks? If the work is done in a planned way, no question regarding funds would arise," a meeting source quoted the finance minister as saying.

"When Oli Ahmed was communications minister during 1991-1996, such questions were not raised, but why those are being raised now," the source said quoting Saifur, also a member of the committee.

The parliamentary body discussed various projects about which the prime minister gave assurances, especially under the communications ministry.

The committee asked the finance ministry to submit a report at its next meeting specifying the assurances given by the PM.

Chairman of the committee M Akbar Ali presided over the meeting attended by committee members and high officials.

the rival villagers fired about 100 rounds of bullets during the clash.

The villagers who suffered bullet wounds are Afzal, 35, Kamrul, 25, Mahirul, 35, Kobbad, 30, Yakub, 32, Idrish, 29, Ali, 50, Saheb, 26, Box, 53, Sukur, 31, Junab, 22, Moti, 18, and Rabiul, 33. They were admitted to Kushtia General Hospital and Daulatpur Upazila Health Complex.

Two separate cases were filed with Daulatpur Police Station.

VDP-outlaws gunfight kills 1

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A villager was killed and 15 were injured in a gunfight between extremists and members of Village Defence Party (VDP) at Char Bhadrakala village under Sathiya upazila Tuesday night.

Police and witnesses said an armed gang of 30 to 35 attacked the village at midnight.

Earlier, extremist attacks were made on the villagers and they set a tight security around the village fearing more attacks.

At least 200-round bullets were fired in the clash between the extremists and the VDP men that lasted for about two hours. After the retreat of the attackers, the villagers found Chand Ali, 55, dead.

The injured -- nine of them in critical condition -- were admitted to Sathiya Upazila Health Centre. The injured alleged that there is a nexus between the attackers and a group of villagers.

A case was filed and additional police have been deployed in the village.

6 more dengue

FROM PAGE 12

were admitted to Central and Shamoria hospitals in the last five days. Doctors said it is not necessarily a dengue case when one has high fever and rash on skin. Several other reasons may cause such symptoms, they said.

Dengue is a mosquito-borne infection, which in recent years has become a major international public health concern. Dengue is found predominantly in urban and semi-urban areas.

Experts said the late and sporadic rain the country experienced this year helped the Aedes mosquitoes, the deadly carrier of dengue, breed extensively. "But the absence of preparatory measures by Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has also prompted the Aedes mosquitoes' comeback," said a doctor at the emergency of Al Raji Hospital.

Tapu, a physician at Shamoria Hospital, said they were puzzled seeing the outbreak of dengue fever at this time although late monsoon rain was largely blamed for its outbreak.

Though there has been no death from dengue so far, reports say conditions of some of the patients are critical.

Doctors have pointed out time and again that there is no reason to be panicked, since the disease usually subsides if the patient is kept under proper medical care for about a week.

Experts in Dhaka feared the disease might have travelled from dengue-hit India through thousands of people who frequently visit that country for treatment, education and business purposes.

They advised the city dwellers to be aware of the disease and keep their houses and premises free so that Aedes mosquitoes can not use those as their breeding grounds.

SL cabinet demands

FROM PAGE 12

He said there was no reason for the imposition of an emergency, which gives sweeping powers to security forces to detain suspects for long periods.

"This is gross abuse of power, absolutely mindless of the consequences and a reckless act," he said.

Troops were given powers to detain suspects for extended periods. Kumaratunga's office said only that she declared the state of emergency for "administrative and logistical reasons".

But there were no signs of unrest on the streets as people in Colombo went about their daily work.

Kumaratunga effectively scuttled the annual budget, which was to have been unveiled on November 12 and sent the markets into a nosedive with the Colombo Stock Exchange shedding 20 percent in two days. The market was flat Thursday.

The last state of emergency collapsed together with a government headed by Kumaratunga's party, which

suffered defections in October 2001.

That led to fresh parliamentary elections two months later, which saw her party defeated by Wickremesinghe. The president was elected separately to a six-year term that ends in December 2005.

Wickremesinghe promised to sort out the turmoil.

"This is not the first crisis I have had," he told reporters at the White House Wednesday.

"When I go back, I'll sort it out. We have a majority in parliament. I have a mandate to bring peace to the country."

The White House said Bush "expressed his strong support for the prime minister's leadership and his commitment to peace", apparently referring to the premier's policy of talking peace with the Tamil Tigers.

Kumaratunga has accused the premier of making too many concessions to the rebels, whose 30-year campaign for a homeland for the Tamil minority has left more than 60,000 people dead.