

AL leader killed in bomb attack

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A prominent shrimp trader and a front-ranking Awami League leader, was killed in a bomb attack at 3:34pm yesterday in front of a private clinic where he went to visit his ailing wife.

Rahima Khatoun, the wife, was injured severely in a road accident on December 21 on her way to Khulna from Tala upazila with her husband, Syed Sirajul Islam, 45, on his motorbike.

According to police, the shrimp trader hailing from Ataroi village of Tala, Satkhira came under the attack by unidentified miscreants while he was about to ride away on his motorbike from Khulna Surgical Clinic. One of the three bombs hurled by miscreants hit him on his back.

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Convict on the run gunned down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Armed assailants gunned down a convicted criminal in the Advocate Habibur Rahman Mondol murder case at Dhalkanagar in Shyampur yesterday, following a dispute with other members of his gang.

A gang chased Bhezal Alamgir alias Alam, 27, who was sentenced to life imprisonment, following a row between them and shot him in the head from behind at Dhalkanagar Lane at about 12:45pm, police said.

Sutrapur police said Alam was an accused in two other criminal cases.

The miscreants ran towards Demra area to escape arrest. Later, Demra police held Sajjad and H a i u n

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Air France flights cancelled amid terror fears

AP, Washington

Intelligence warnings of possible terrorist plots to use aircraft against American targets yesterday prompted cancellation of six Air France flights between Los Angeles and Paris and triggered intense security talks between US officials and their foreign counterparts.

The flight cancellations added to Christmas holiday tensions that have been high since President Bush raised the national terror alert level to orange, the second highest level, on Sunday. US security officials have been closely monitoring activity at airports, train stations and public buildings. Police randomly stopped cars near the US Capitol on Wednesday.

The Air France flights, scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday, were canceled after US officials passed on information they deemed credible about security threats from passengers flying from Paris to Los Angeles, US and European officials said Wednesday.

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Opposition's UP meet hits snags

Parties pursue separate lines of anti-govt actions

REAZ AHMAD

An opposition-sponsored convention of Union Parishad (UP) chairmen and members scheduled for January has become uncertain as political parties seem inclined to carry on with their separate anti-government programmes rather than operating under the umbrella of a unified authority.

A meeting of the coordination committee of the Awami League (AL), Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-

Inu), Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and the Workers Party (WP) in Dhaka last week failed to reach a consensus on the timing of the convention.

Earlier on November 9, the four opposition parties decided to hold the national convention in early January to muster public opinion against "marginalisation of the UP by pitting it against the newly formed Gram Sarkar".

Sources said chances of the

convention being held anytime soon is slim as political parties are preoccupied with their individual programmes.

The AL has called a hartal on January 3 and will announce its anti-government programmes from a January 10 rally in the city while JSD (Inu) is busy organising a grand rally of freedom fighters in the city on January 7. The CPB and the WP, both

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PHOTO: STAR

People of Azampur in Uttara peer into the tank of an under-construction building in which five children were found dead yesterday.

PM plans to shed her squabbling staff

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is planning to replace half a dozen officials at her office who are divided into two sharp blocs and engaged in a war of attrition in an effort to make the administration dynamic.

In a brash bid to establish supremacy at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the feuding groups wield their influence to manipulate key appointments, postings, transfers and programmes and pursue their favoritism agenda compromising state interest.

The PMO staff comprises a principal secretary, a secretary, four director generals, 15 directors, seven press officials, two assistant private secretaries, two protocol officers, an assignment officer and several dozen officers and advisers on different cells and departments.

"There is no understanding among the four top people at the PMO -- two political secretaries, the principal secretary and the acting secretary to the prime minister," a top ruling alliance source said.

The hostility among the top ranks has permeated the lower spheres spawning a set of rival groups and sub-groups among officials, both civil servants and political appointees.

"Some of the staff openly side

themselves with certain groups and think that they are only accountable to their clique chiefs," an official said.

"The groups waste most of their time in mutual backbiting, stagnating vital activities at the top executive office of the republic," a senior minister remarked.

The long-running feuds escalated recently when rival groups complained to the prime minister about each other.

"It's time to replace most officials at the PMO who are playing dirty games, making illegal fortunes and serving their own interest," the ministers said.

Source said many staff at the PMO lobby the government for postings abroad, some always look for foreign trips and many are engaged in illegal dealings.

Sections of officials at PM's Personal Wing and Press Wing frequently skip designated office work and serve the interest of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leaders, who do not have any official assignment.

Officials said the premier came to know of some acts of her 'over ambitious staff' and is likely to remove them soon.

"The PM is personally annoyed with some senior members of the staff and likely to take action soon,"

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JU students withdraw hunger strike

JU CORRESPONDENT

Students of Jahangirnagar University (JU) Wednesday night withdrew their fast-unto-death demonstration after 37 hours, as the JU authorities and JU Teachers Association (Juta) reached a consensus on resumption of classes and examinations.

The decision came at around 11:50am, following a circulation by the authorities assuring the students of the resumption from December 27.

Vice-chancellor Prof Jashim Uddin Ahmed and President of Juta Prof Amin Mohammad Ali separately visited agitating students

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Five ansars linked to Shibir's bomb making

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Five ansars yesterday appeared in court on count of abetting Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) activists in making handmade bombs in an abandoned residential hotel in Khulna city.

Noor Mohammad, 35, Rajab Ali, 26, Humayun Kabir, 24, Hamidur Rahman, 26, and Matiur Rahman (age unknown), recruited as ansars in 1999, have been named as accused under the Explosives Act in the first information report.

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Disabled girl raped in Noakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Miscreants raped a teenage disabled girl at Debipur village under Sadar Upazila in Noakhali Tuesday.

According to sources, one Dr Enayet called the 15-year-old girl, daughter of a nut-seller, at his chamber on a way to her sister's residence at a nearby village in the evening.

Later, Dr Enayet, Ahsan Ullah, 35, Moslehuddin Mona, 40, Yunus, 22, Abdur Razzak, 35, Atiqullah Sabui, 32, Khalilullah, 35, Abul Hossain 38, Idris, 36, and seven other unknown youths allegedly took the disabled girl to a fish farm owned by Ketu Mian and gangraped her, sources said.

Locals recovered the girl in criti

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PHOTO: STAR

Santa Claus distributes gifts among children at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka as part of Christmas celebrations yesterday.

Dhaka wastes choke Trimohoni

Mayor's promise to change situation remains unmet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite promises by the government and the city mayor, the people of Trimohini are still suffering from health-threatening water pollution in the Narai river area.

Two decades ago, people collected river water for household use. The river still flows by the 12 villages, but the 2.5 lakh residents dare not touch its pitch-black, foul-smelling water.

They are victims of "development" in nearby Dhaka.

Solid waste from the capital is washed into the Narai, which joins up and in turn pollutes the Balu and Shitalakhya rivers.

Three canals -- the Norai, Debdholai and Dolai -- flow

through the 12 villages known as Barogram, carrying liquid and solid waste from Dhaka.

Waste from Malibagh, Basabo, Madertek, Kamalapur and Motijheel flow through the Debdholai and Norai canals. Untreated sewage from the Tejgaon industrial area, Gulshan, Banani, Rampura, Karwanbazar and Dhanmondi find its way into the canals and the Balu river before entering the Buriganga.

This correspondent found dead fish floating in the Narai. Ali Ahmed, 55, a boatman who has lived in the area for 32 years, said, "We are barely existing here. We cannot use the river water. Our cattle die if they drink this contaminated water. You can't sleep at night because of the mosquitoes. This pollution has changed

our lives."

Residents have protested to Wasa and other government agencies about the pollution and staged numerous demonstrations in the last three years. The prime minister instructed an inter-ministerial meeting to take steps to resolve the problems. Officials, including the city mayor, Sadeque Hossain Khoka, assured residents that treatment plants would be established at Rampura. The pollution continues.

"We demonstrated three times to get rid of the problem," says Sheikh Babul Aktar, a local youth, at the Trimohini bazar. "The authorities have promised to resolve the problems of our villages, but nothing has been done. And so the water full of sludge continues to flow."



STAR FILE PHOTO

Children play with toxic sewage water from Dhaka pouring into the Balu river from the Buriganga near Banarsi Residential Area, in the upstream of the Shitalakhya confluence.

Rivals kill 3 outlaws in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Three underground operatives were hacked to death following a gunfight with their rival party men at Borobeel Hatirgara village under Faridpur upazila of the district yesterday morning.

The dead are Nazrul Islam, 30, Ilu Fakhir, 28 and Maznu Pramanik, 35. All of them hailed from Hadal Union of the upazila.

Police and locals said the clash erupted at about 11:00am as a sequel to previous rivalry between the two groups.

The feuding groups traded gun

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Over 60 die as Boeing crash off Benin

AGENCIES, Cotonou, Benin

A Boeing passenger plane crashed into the Atlantic Ocean just after takeoff in the West African country of Benin yesterday, killing over 60 passengers, witnesses and airport officials say.

Witnesses said they saw at least 30 bodies strewn on the beach near the airport in the main city Cotonou, where the Beirut-bound plane crashed in the Gulf of Guinea.

Fishermen and volunteers scrambled to drag bodies out of the water as they were washed ashore by waves, prompting screams of horror from onlookers on the beach.

It was not immediately known how many people were aboard the plane nor which airline was involved. Airport officials said the

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3 killed as bus runs over them in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three persons were run over and killed by a bus on Arakan Sarak (Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway) at Padua in Lohagara upazila of the district yesterday.

The victims are Reazur Rahman, 18, Russell, 14, and Ismail, 35.

Police and witnesses said the Cox's Bazar-bound passenger bus knocked a bicycle and a rickshaw throwing the three on the road before crushing them under its wheels. The bus was seized but the driver fled.

Bicycle rider Rezaur was killed on the spot while Rickshaw passenger Russell died at Lohagara Health Complex and Rickshawpuller Ismail succumbed to his wounds at Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

A case was filed with Lohagara Police Station.

BNP-backed CBA defies BB order to relocate office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP-backed collective bargaining agent (CBA) of Bangladesh Bank (BB) remains indifferent to the authorities' instruction to relocate its office from the bank's main building to its annex.

Two CBA leaders resisted the central bank's attempt Wednesday to shift its office and allegedly called the persons trying to do so names. Finally, the two leaders locked the CBA office so that no-one could 'interfere' with their business.

Two months ago, the BB took its first disciplinary action against 10 unruly union activists who had barged into the BB governor's chamber and called him

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Prayer Timings		
December 26		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-00
Juma	12-15	1-20
Asr	3-40	4-00
Maghrib	5-26	5-31
Esha	7-00	7-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		