

Year of soaring crimes

SHAIKH NAZRUL ISLAM

The crime rate soared in 2003 exceeding the previous year's incidence despite sporadic government efforts to bridge crimes, greatly eroding people's confidence in the state-provided safety and security.

Surveys carried out by some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) show that the number of homicides rose to 3,450 in 2003 from 2,773 in 2002 and rape incidents almost tripled from 119 in 2002 to 327 in the year that ended yesterday.

Police repression cases totalled 1,879 in 2003 against 439 in 2002 while 1,346 abductions took place in the just-ended year against 840 of the previous year.

Sources noted that while the crime curve showed an upturn, what struck the public mind more was the fearlessness of criminal cartels, who operated violently caring little about the consequences.

It appeared more frustrating for the public that so many hardcore criminals remained beyond the reach of law despite the government initiatives for speedy trials by

setting up tribunals, which handed down capital punishment to scores of convicts in murder cases in an unprecedentedly short span of time.

The killings of more than 12 law enforcers and local politicians by operatives of outlawed parties in the southwestern region of the country threw a challenge to the police force to control these elements.

Public morale was at a low ebb due to the failure of the law enforcers

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No Army HQ response to Hasina's request for homage to peacekeepers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Army Headquarters did not respond to the request of Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina for making arrangements for her to pay her last homage to the 15 Bangladesh peacekeepers killed in the December 25 air crash in Benin.

"The Awami League chief could not join the programme at the (Zia International) airport as the authorities did not respond to the request, but we are still waiting for a positive

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PABNA MENTAL HOSPITAL Probe finds drug theft, spurious injections

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The probe into the robbery at Pabna mental hospital has brought to light the long use of spurious injection and widespread theft at the facility reeling under acute shortage of essential drugs in the wake of the December 25 heist.

A five-member body constituted to probe the robbery found 5,000 fake ampoules of Dekonet worth about Tk 5 lakh in storekeeper Zillur Rahman's cupboard.

Locals allege patients of the country's lone mental hospital were treated with the fake injections over the years.

Police arrested Zillur, his assistant Saidur Rahman and Cashier Abdul Gaffer and sources say they have confessed to their roles in medicine theft.

Zillur told police that he along with hospital medical suppliers Mustak Hussain and Ansar Ali had long been stealing medicine from the hospital.

The storekeeper and the cashier were sacked in the wake of the robbery which locals allege was stage-managed to hide theft and irregularities at the hospital.

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption and the National Security Intelligence are also probing the robbery in which medicine and property worth about Tk 31 lakh were stolen.

The condition of 363 patients at the hospital has deteriorated as they are virtually going without medicine since the heist.

Doctors told The Daily Star that essential drugs including Dekonet

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Khaleda championed hartal: Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League (AL) President and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday hit back at the prime minister for criticising her and said Khaleda Zia was the "champion" when it comes to enforcing hartal.

"She (Khaleda) criticised the Awami League for calling hartal. During the past five-year rule of the AL, she enforced 382 hartals...today, people are fed up and they want to get rid of repression, torture, terrorism, unabated corruption and misuse of the BNP-Jamaat coalition," Hasina said.

Hasina's criticism came as Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on Tuesday lashed out at the Awami League for enforcing hartal at the beginning of the New Year, saying that the AL wants to make people averse to work when people would start life with a fresh zeal.

The former prime minister was speaking at a discussion, marking the Victory Day organised by the city unit of the AL at the Bangabandhu Avenue in the afternoon.

Later, the AL declared it as a condolence meeting to mourn the

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Rajuk's two plot allocations termed illegal

Audit finds Tk 12cr anomalies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary subcommittee in a report to the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday said Rajuk (Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha)'s allocation of two plots under the public works and housing ministry to

Rajuk Employees Welfare Society in 1994 and 1998 was illegal.

Citing a report of the comptroller and auditor general (CAG), the subcommittee on public accounts said the allocation of the two plots at much lower than contemporary

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Morshed hopes for consensus on Safta

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday hoped that the leaders of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) would reach a consensus on establishing South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) at next week's summit in Pakistan.

"Although a final decision has not yet been taken, we hope the heads of government of the seven south Asian nations would reach a consensus on Safta," he told reporters at Zia International Airport (ZIA) prior to his departure for Islamabad at noon.

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Salma Sobhan's Janaza today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Namaz-e-janaza of Barrister Salma Sobhan, a lawyer, social worker and human-rights activist, will be held at Gulshan Central Mosque today after Zohr prayers.

Salma, wife of Professor Rehman Sobhan, an economist and former advisor to the caretaker government, died of a cardiac arrest at her Gulshan residence in the early hours of Tuesday.

Qulhwani of the deceased will be held at Gulshan Central Mosque tomorrow after Asr prayers.

Meanwhile, scores of organisations including Bangladesh Mohila

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Prayer Timings		
January 1		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-45	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-28	5-33
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation