

Ban on import of buses, trucks without seatbelts

UNB, Dhaka

The government has banned import of buses and trucks without seatbelts for passengers and drivers as part of its steps to reduce traffic fatalities.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the National Road Security Council with Communications Minister Nazmul Huda in the chair.

The minister told the meeting that bus and truck owners would have to force their drivers to use seatbelts, or else, legal action would be taken against them.

The meeting decided that rickshaws and other non-motorised vehicles would gradually be made off-limits to major city streets and adequate government and non-governmental buses would be introduced to meet the requirement of the commuters. However, it did not set any timeframe.

It also directed Dhaka

Metropolitan Police (DMP), Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) and Roads and Highways Department to properly execute the decisions.

Some mobile courts in coordination with the DMP, BRTA and environment department would begin work soon to seize vehicles that emit black smoke to pollute the environment.

The meeting was told that rickshawpullers would also be forced to ply rickshaws on lanes demarcated for them on various city streets and traffic police would take proper steps in case of violation of the directive.

It said the work of evicting huts, bazaars and illegal structures on all national and regional roads would be accelerated to restore discipline on the roads and highways.

AL snubs JS body remark on defence purchase graft

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) yesterday strongly protested the recent accusations made by the parliamentary standing committee on the defence ministry of irregularities in defence budget spending during the AL regime.

"The eight Russian Mig-29s and the South Korean naval frigate were purchased following proper and transparent procedures and there was no room for irregularities," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said in a statement.

On the promotion of Mustafizur Rahman to the rank of a general he said that was done in accordance with the rules of the army. The statement also brushed aside other accusations of irregularities in the construction of a mosque and an arch commemorating the liberation war heroes.

Jalil said the modern frigate was procured at a price \$96 million only. "Buy one of these frigates at this price today, all right pay 20 percent more," he challenged the present government.

He said, "Six navy officers inspected the building of the frigate at the Daewoo dockyard. Besides, the parliamentary standing committee on the defence ministry, comprising members of BNP and Jatiya Party also visited South Korea to witness the trial run of the frigate."

The frigate was sent to Bangladesh after getting a certificate from the committee members, Jalil said in the statement.

The AL secretary general claimed, "The Awami League government had saved \$170 million of public money by purchasing the eight Mig-29s for only \$119 million." He said it was possible only due to the fruitful negotiations conducted by the then AL government with Russia.

10 abducted

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Those kidnapped at gunpoint are Horomoni Chakma, 36, Uzzal Chakma, 17, Doelmoni Chakma (age unknown), Shutchandra Chakma, 28, Tunga Chakma (age unknown), Probhat Ranjan Chakma, 28, Parashmoni Chakma, 16, Roy Mitra Chakma, 46, Jagatjyoti Chakma, 33 and Bodhitra Chakma, 40.

Police recovered the body of Shushil Bindu Chakma, Ukhyonchhari unit general secretary of the CHT Hill Students Council, who was killed after abduction in Borkol upazila Monday night.

The local gangster, Ainul Islam, is believed to have led the gang that killed the 25-year-old in deep forest on his way home, says a press release of PCJSS's student chapter.

Police found the body floating on the Karnaphuli river.

The student organisation yesterday brought out a procession in town and staged a rally, chaired by its district unit president, Asheen Chakma, on the local Shilpakala Academy premises.

ABDUCTION IN THE CHT

Armed men believed to be supporters of the PCJSS abducted 20 family members and relatives of some leaders of UPDF on December 23 in a fresh flare of political violence in the CHT.

Four people, two of them truckers, were abducted in Khagrachhari on January 1.

Clashes between the two outfits have left more than 300 indigenous people dead and several hundred have been abducted since 1997.

CNG 3-Wheeler

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allegations about the sale of the three-wheelers and land allocation for setting up CNG filling stations," Monjur told The Daily Star.

Uttara Motors, allowed to import 10,000 CNG autorickshaws, has sold 8,000 vehicles to local buyers since January 2003, when the government phased out petrol-driven two-stroke three-wheelers to cut air pollution in Dhaka.

"The people I have met today (yesterday) expressed happiness with our initiative to curb corruption in the communications sector," said Ataur Rahman Khan, a member of the committee and ruling BNP lawmaker.

"We will not allow anyone to strip people of money that is denting the government's image," he added, describing the high prices of CNG autorickshaws as a robbery.

The complainants also raised allegations of graft in land allocation for setting up gas stations and were willing to provide evidence of anomaly in an echo of BNP lawmaker SA Khaleque's complaint of corruption against State Minister for Communications Salahuddin Ahmed.

Khaleque told the House on June 28 last year Salahuddin took Tk 25 lakh in bribe from Ward Commissioner Monwar Hossain Dipjol and allowed him to set up a gas station in Mirpur -- an allegation that prompted the state minister to accuse the lawmaker of land grab.

The sub-committee will start its probe by next week and review the sale of CNG autorickshaws and import permit of Uttara Motors, said Nadeem Mostafa, convenor of the sub-committee.

Hasina blasts PM

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League still in power."

She also accused the coalition government of destroying three pillars of governance -- executive, judiciary and legislature in a planned way. "Administration and judiciary have been politicised and parliament has been made non-functional."

"The parliamentary standing committees are facing quorum crisis apart from the House and this is a testimony to the government's failure in running parliament."

Hasina termed the BNP-Jamaat government 'weak' and 'without adequate confidence'. "They are aware of the fact that people did not vote them to power. They came to power by promising to sell out natural resources and through rigging."

"Had they had confidence in themselves, they would not have resorted to repressive acts against the AL in a bid to eliminate the

opposition.

"The government has been systematically killing prospective Awami League leaders," she alleged.

Hasina urged the lawyers as well as commoners to unite against the misrule of the government. "Now time has come to free the people from the repression and torture of this oppressive government. I urge you all to get united to pull down this government and establish people's rights to justice."

Supreme Court Bar Association President Rakanuddin Mahmud expressed doubts about the initiatives of former president Badruddoza Chowdhury.

Rokan also invited Hasina to attend an opinion exchange meeting at the Supreme Court Bar. Bar leaders Barrister Amirul Islam, Mahbub Ali and M Israfil also spoke at the meeting, which was attended by senior AL leaders.

Meghna Launch

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passengers missing. A total of 230 passengers escaped death as they either swam ashore or rescued after the accident.

But, according to unofficial sources, the death toll would exceed 600.

The Department of Shipping hurriedly formed a three-member investigation committee headed by Shaiful Islam, engineer and ship surveyor of Mercantile Marine Department, Chittagong.

But the ministry found the probe report submitted by the committee in August last year as 'weak and partisan', and rejected it. The ministry also asked the probe committee to submit a supplementary report within that month.

The supplementary report also failed to identify the causes of the accident and made some illogical arguments, sources said.

The probe committee allegedly did not point out the fact that surveyors okayed the survey reports of the launch during a long 22-year period without even visiting it.

MV Nasreen-1 was built in 1981 and refurbished in 1999. The investigation committee mainly blamed faulty design of the launch for the catastrophe, though the sunken vessel is yet to be rescued, commented a shipping expert, wishing to remain unnamed.

The committee mentioned

'squat effect,' the tendency of a vessel to be pulled downwards when travelling in shallow water, as the cause of the accident. But the place of occurrence was very deep, at the confluence of rivers Padma and Meghna, he pointed out.

Shipping experts and naval architects reviewed the report and criticised their observations to the ministry last Tuesday. They too termed the report partisan and erroneous.

Although MV Nasreen-1 had an official capacity to carry 294 passengers, it took more than 1,000 passengers on board and 400 sacks of rice and pulse on deck on that fatal trip on July 8.

According to witnesses, around 400 additional passengers had boarded the ship on that trip as another launch on that route cancelled its journey at the last moment.

Shipping experts observed that the probe body intentionally avoided accusing any of the shipping department staffs and making any constructive recommendation in its rather long and detailed report.

Shaiful Islam could not be contacted over telephone even after several attempts.

Body fished out of Dhanmondi Lake

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhanmondi police yesterday recovered the body of a young man from Dhanmondi Lake, four days after he went missing.

Police retrieved the body of Shahadat Hossain, 20, from in front of road No. 5 at around 10:30am and later sent it to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for autopsy.

There were no marks of injury in the body but blood was oozing from its nose, morgue sources said.

JCD leader shot at Mirpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four gunmen shot a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader at Mirpur in the capital yesterday.

Tawfiqur Rahman Tuhin, 22, convenor of Ward No. 12 unit of the JCD, BNP's student wing, was a BA student at Mirpur Bangla College.

Critically injured Tuhin was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Police arrested one of the gunmen, Mahmudul Haq Rony with a revolver and eight bullets but gave conflicting information about his identity.

UN top official

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and also likely to visit Bangladesh Institution for Peace Support Operation and Training (BIPSOT) in Rajendrapur.

His visit comes at a time when people of Bangladesh mourns the death of 15 Bangladeshi peacekeepers in a plane crash in Benin.

As the highest-ranking UN official dealing with peacekeeping affairs, he will get a firsthand view of the capabilities and expertise available in Bangladesh in terms of contributing to global peace and security under the aegis of the UN.

Bangladesh is the second largest troops contributing country to the UN peacekeeping operations.

9 killed

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deadliest helicopter incident for Americans in Iraq since Nov. 15, when two Black Hawks collided under fire near the town of Mosul, killing 17 soldiers.

AMNESTY FOR DETAINEES

Paul Bremer, the US administrator in Iraq, announced the amnesty Wednesday, saying low-threat detainees rounded up since April and held without charges would be released as part of efforts to promote reconciliation with Iraqis.

US forces have seized around 9,000 suspects over the past eight months, most of whom are being held at Abu Ghraib.

Boy hurt in bomb attack on police van

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A bomb thrown at a police van missed its target and went off to severely injure a four-year-old boy at Sheikpara in Khulna yesterday.

A young man threw a bomb at a pick-up of Sonadanga Police Station from the rooftop of a shop at about 8:00pm near Power Development Board Staff Quarters, witnesses said.

Missing its target, the bomb exploded and wounded Sumon, son of Abdul Karim of Haji Ismail Road under Sonadanga Police Station, police said.

However, all six policemen abroad the police vehicle were unhurt, police added.

Suman was admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital later.

Joint forces swung into action soon after the explosion to nab the attacker, sources said.

Twelve policemen were killed in separate bomb explosions in Khulna last year.

PM finds talents

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proper training at the very beginning of their service," she told the function.

Addressing the recruits joining the foundation training course, Khaleda reminded that their recruitment test was not the last. "You will have to face tests to prove your talent, skill and ability regularly," she said urging them to acquire knowledge through reading and attain skill.

"You have to perform your responsibility with sincerity, dedication and honesty," she said pointing out that the nation will fall behind if they fail to catch up with the present competitive world.

She mentioned her government's programmes and steps to improve standard of education and the rate of literacy in the country.

Chaired by Rector of BPATC Ahab Ahmad, the function was also addressed by Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, Agriculture Minister MK Anwar, Education Minister M Osman Farruk and Secretary in charge of the Ministry of Establishment Safar Raj Hossain. Members of parliament, diplomats and a large number of civil servants attended the function.

UNDP envoy

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at the latter's office.

During the meeting, Larma did not blame any particular community, group, organisation or the authorities for the slide in law and order in the hills region.

Replying to a question, the mission leader said, "Larma did not point a finger at anyone."

Other two members of the delegation are Elsa Stama Topoulou of Greece and Victoria Lucia Taul Corpuz of the Philippines. The team later called on the RHDC Chairman Maniklal at his office and was apprised of its functions and responsibilities.

The team informed the chairman about the challenges involved in implementing development schemes and the importance of the RHDC in ensuring good governance, meetings sources said.

The team would leave Rangamati on January 11 for Mahalchhari, where an arson attack took place on the indigenous people on August 26 last year.

11-party

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Central leaders of the alliance enforced the barricade programme at Kanchpur in Narayanganj and Gazipur roundabout.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, also coordinator of the alliance, yesterday at a post-barricade rally at Mukhtangon in the capital announced a sit-in on January 24 in districts and upazilas.

Menon alleged that during the barricade programme, the BNP activists and police swooped on the 11-party activists across the country, injuring at least 19 in Rajshahi and Kanchpur.

Workers Party leader Mahbur Rahman and Bulbul Ahmed were stabbed and 15 others including Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) Rajshahi district General Secretary Rafiqul Islam injured when at least 50 armed BNP activists allegedly attacked a rally at Puthia Bus Stand.

In Kanchpur, Suruj Ali Mattabor, Shamim Ahmed and Hafiz were injured in an attack led reportedly by the BNP men. Police also foiled a rally at Natore.

Menon warned that the alliance would resist any obstacle put by the government to its demonstrations. He said the government tried to hamper the 11-party's hartal and road-barricade programme in vain.

The alliance is on the road also in protest at the deterioration of law and order and price spiral of essentials, to protect national resources and save the country from clutches of imperialist forces including World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation.

Garo murder

'Police make forest guards scapegoats'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police are trying to shift the responsibilities of Piren Snal's killing on to the forest guards, says Odhikar, a human-rights watchdog, after a spot investigation into the incident.

Police and forest guards opened fire on a peaceful demonstration of the Garos on January 3 at Modhupur in Tangail that left one dead and injured 25 others, Odhikar said in its finding.

The Garo people were on their way to Gaira Primary School to hold a scheduled rally there to protest the walling up of an eco-park area as well as to save their endangered culture and heritage.

As the procession reached Jalbadha, police and forest guards opened fire on the demonstrators without any provocation. Piren was hit by a bullet and died on the spot during the indiscriminate firing.

But police and forest guards claim 200 - 300 armed indigenous people started to tear down the wall of the eco-park. When the law enforcers ordered them to refrain from doing so, they started pelting stones and chased the law enforcers wielding sharp weapons, according to the law enforcers. Police and the forest guards then fired gunshots in 'self-defence', they claimed.

Following the incident, Abu Zafar Alam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Modhupur Police Station, filed a case accusing the forest guards of the murder. Havildar Idris Ali of the same police station filed another case accusing 500 - 600 indigenous

people of obstructing government officials from carrying out their duties and ransacking government property.

The OC claims Piren was killed by gunshots fired from one of the rifles of the forest guards.

Local lawyers however said the OC could not shake off the responsibilities of his force in the killing just by filing a case against the forest guards. They said police and forest guards acted as a team and fired indiscriminately on the demonstrators.

The indigenous people said they were against the Forest Conservation and Eco Tourism Project which would separate 3,000 acres of Madhupur Gar by erecting surrounding wall of the area earmarked for the eco-park. They see the forest as the sole source of their livelihood, from where they collect their food and firewood, without harming the nature. Their life, culture and heritage fully depend on the forest.

The Odhikar report quoting the father of Piren said he would file a case accusing both the policemen and forest guards. The locals also have taken up non-stop programmes following Piren's killing to drive home their demands.

The demands include cancellation of the eco-park, compensation for the families of Piren and others injured, judicial inquiry into the killing of Piren and other indigenous people, punishment to the culprits, withdrawal of false cases against the indigenous people and permanent land settlement for them.

Bush asks Congress

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competition amid a sea of illegal immigrants.

"We must make our immigration laws more rational and more humane, and I believe we can do so without jeopardising the livelihoods of our American citizens," Bush said.

Bush telephoned Mexican President Vicente Fox to outline the proposal, which the Mexican leader promptly welcomed as "an immigration plan to clearly recognize the worth of the Mexican men and women who are working in there in the United States."

Bush and Fox are to meet on Monday at a summit of the Americas in Mexico. Ties between the two leaders grew frosty as immigration reforms sought by Fox stalled after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

Under Bush's plan, illegal immigrants now in the United States would be allowed to stay for an initial three-year period if they could prove they had jobs.

Many of the estimated 8 million to 14 million illegal immigrants in the United States came from Mexico. America's 39 million Hispanics are the largest US minority group and a target of Bush's re-election strategy in states such as Florida and

BDR, BSF

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Fulbari Border Outpost in Kurigram.

A BSF team captured Russell, 25, son of Abdur Rahman of Gangarhat village, and Selim Rahman, son of Abdul Khaleque of the same village, at about 8:00am when they were working in cropland inside Bangladesh territory, BDR sources said.

A source at Fulbari outpost of the BDR said they were in touch with the BSF till the writing of this report at 6:00pm last evening.

Global Warming

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between 1990 and 2050, using elaborate computer models.

Three scenarios for expected climate change were used in the computer models -- a minimum expected total rise of between 0.8 and 1.7 degrees Celsius (1.4 and 3.1 degrees Fahrenheit) by 2050; a mid-range scenario with total temperature increases of 1.8-2.0 degrees; and the maximum rise, when the Earth's average climate rises by over 2.0 degrees during the period.

Australia, one of the regions studied, would lose over half of its more than 400 butterfly species by 2050, thanks to global warming.

Brazil's Cerrado area, a savannah-type area with a wealth of plant and animal species, could lose between 39 and 48 percent of its flora -- thousands of plants whose medical or scientific benefits will never be known.

The six regions studied by the scientists were Australia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Europe, Mexico and South Africa.

The head of the UN Environment Program, Klaus Toepfer, warned that "the figure of one million may be an underestimate", since it only counts the extinction of species due to climate change, without taking into account a "ripple effect" that could also kill off interdependent plants

and animals.

Toepfer said humans would suffer from the consequences of global warming, the result of their dependence on fossil fuels.

"If one million species become extinct as a result of global warming, it is not just the plant and animal kingdoms and the beauty of the planet that will suffer.

"Billions of people, especially in the developing world, will suffer too as they rely on nature for such essential goods and services as food, shelter and medicines," he said.

Lee Hannah, a co-author of the study with the Washington-based Conservation International, said that species faced with a dangerously warm environment would naturally seek a cooler area, but this was no longer possible in many cases.

"If habitat destruction has already altered those habitats, the species will have no safe haven."

Not all of the million-plus species would disappear by 2050, Thomas said, but many would be in decline and en route to extinction.

The UN's Toepfer called the study an alarm which "underlines again to the world the importance of bringing into force the Kyoto Protocol", the international agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions which the United States has refused to adhere to.