

Check cop extortion of cattle traders

MPs tells home minister at a meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Members of parliament (MP) from the northern and southwesten bordering districts have demanded adequate steps to check police repression and extortion of cattle traders during the ensuing Eid-ul-Azha.

They made the demand at an inter-ministerial meeting at the home ministry yesterday with Home Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury in the chair.

The lawmakers told the meeting that in the past cattle traders had to pay toll and bribe at more than eight spots on their way to the capital. As a result, the cattle prices went up and traders felt insecure on their way back home with money.

The meeting also discussed harassment of hides and skin traders during the Eid and decided to ensure that hides and skin are not smuggled out. It also decided that genuine traders will be given bankloans.

Participants in the meeting suggested revival of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) to import onion to avoid its crisis. They feared that shortage of onion would take a turn for the worse before and during the Eid.

The meeting was told that the government would allow more import of cattle but measures will be taken to stop their smuggling. The lawmakers suggested opening of more entry points on the borders to help increase cattle import.

The home ministry already asked the district and upzila authorities to ensure security of

Singapore Airlines too leaves Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Silkair, the regional wing of Singapore Airlines, suspends its operation on Chittagong-Singapore route from today, airlines sources said.

The suspension will come into effect after take-off of the airlines' final flight

from Chittagong Shah Amanat International Airport at 2:00pm, sources added.

Silkair introduced its service on the route via Yangon twice a week--Monday and Thursday--in March 2002.

Business sources said fall in the number of passengers and relocation of companies to Dhaka from Chittagong are the reasons behind the suspension.

Singapore Airlines is the latest to halt its service from Chittagong, sources said.

Earlier, Phuket Air, a private Thai Airlines and Indian Airlines suspended their services.

Phuket Air stopped its service on Chittagong-Bangkok route on June 2003 and Indian Airlines suspended its flights on Chittagong-Kolkata route early last year.

Anti-Dewanbagi zealots ready for showdown

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An uneasy calm prevails at Arambagh as an Islamist outfit has called for a demonstration beside Bab-e-Rahmat, office of the Dewanbagi pir, to stop the annual 'Biswa Ashiq-e-Rasul Sammelan' there tomorrow.

Activists of the Iman Aqida Sangrakshak Committee (IASC) and the Islamic Shahanatanta Andolon (ISA) brought out separate processions in the city yesterday, a day after supporters of Charmonai and Dewanbagi pirs clashed at Siddhirganj in Narayanganj, leaving seven people injured.

Participants of the processions that began from the north gate of Baitul Mokarram National Mosque after *Asr* prayers chanted slogans demanding arrest of Dewanbagi Pir Madazzilluh Ali and all his disciples and a ban on Dewanbagi activities.

Cordoned by policemen to check any violence, the procession ended where it started. The IASC and the ISA later held a joint demonstration there.

AL leader shot dead in Khulna

UNB, Khulna

An Awami League (AL) leader and Union Parishad chairman was gunned down by unidentified assailants near his home in Terokhada upazila yesterday afternoon.

Police said Chan Mia Sikder, 45, chairman of Sachidaha Union Parishad and organising secretary of AL's Terokhada upazila unit, came under attack

Boyar crossing in Charpatla area at about 3:45pm while he was returning home from a bazaar by a rickshaw.

Locals said a gang of three shot Sikder point-blank in the chest and head and fled the spot riding a motorbike. He died instantly

Police recovered the body and sent it to hospital morgue for autopsy.

cattle importers and traders and warned of stern action against the officials concerned in case of failure to do so.

The meeting suggested setting up of mobile courts for Eid cattle markets for their smooth operation.

Plain-clothesmen and other law enforcers will be deployed in the cattle markets in the capital.

Dhaka City Corporation will set up 12 cattle markets for the Eid but not on the streets, meeting sources said.

The meeting was attended by MPs from Meherpur, Jessore, Satkhira, Naogaon, Joypurhat, Kusthia, Home Secretary Omar Farooq, the inspector general of police, a joint secretary of the commerce ministry, directors general of Bangladesh Rifles, Ansar and Coast Guard and DCC representatives.

2 held with marijuana

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A team of Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) seized four mounds of marijuana and nabbed two alleged drug peddlers at Airport Railway Station yesterday.

Being tipped off, a DNC team held Akhtar Hossain, 28, and Zakir Hossain, 25, with five sacks of marijuana at 6:25am after they with three others reached the station on a Dhaka-bound inter-district Upanban train, sources said.

However, other associates of the pair fled, sources added.

The DNC claimed yesterday's haul as the biggest ever in Dhaka metropolitan area.

A case was filed with Railway police.

Sergeant

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said Mohammad Zahid, a resident of the area.

Locals identified the man Firoz was talking to as Shahin, a local ward unit leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League.

Firoz took a bullet in the chest and was rushed to Suhrawardy Hospital where he died.

The victim's uncle said a gang of extortionists had been demanding money from Firoz for some time, and that the murder could be related to that.

The two bodies were sent to the DMCH for autopsy.

Amini

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anti-Ahmadiyya issue at the meeting.

Sources said if the ruling BNP declines to include representatives of the BJP and IOJ in the cabinet, they will demand that the prime minister drop the two Jamaat-e-Islami ministers from the cabinet.

A frontline BJP leader, asking not to be named, said the message of the resolution was conveyed to the prime minister through intelligence agencies.

Land tax

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Narayanganj, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi cities from Tk 125 to Tk 300. For residential holdings in those cities the proposed tax is Tk 60 per decimal.

The RRC favours charging Tk 20 and Tk 35 as tax per decimal for residential and commercial holdings respectively at district towns, instead of the present Tk 5 and Tk 22 respectively.

It also recommends introducing irrigation tax in the command areas of large irrigation projects like the Chandpur Irrigation Project, Muhuri Irrigation Project, DND Project, Meghna-Dhanagoda Project, Ganges-Kobadek Project and North Bengal Tubewell Irrigation Project. It proposes collecting 3 percent of the estimated value of incremental output of crops as irrigation tax in these areas.

Suicide bomber

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triangle, where resistance to the American-led occupation is strong.

Tuesday's attacks at Samarra involved people firing from a convoy of eight vehicles, Major Aberle said.

Two cars were destroyed while the six others were seized and their 26 occupants were arrested, she added.

Major Aberle described the way the Iraqis had initially opened fire on the US troops as a "drive-by shooting".

"The attackers fired on the soldiers with automatic weapons. They attempted to escape after the initial confrontation," she said.

The four men held after a dawn raid in Samarra are all thought to be nephews of the former vice-president, Al-Douri, who has a \$10m bounty on his head.

American forces suspect they had been sheltering him in a series of safe houses.

Lieutenant-Colonel David Poirier said the men arrested had been "enablers" for Al-Douri and they had good information on his whereabouts.

"We think that [the raid] brought us one step closer to finding him."

JU teacher assault Probe clears JCD men

JU CORRESPONDENT

The committee to probe the assault on teachers by the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) men at Shaheed Salam Barkat (SSB) Hall on August 10, last year submitted its report Tuesday without any recommendation.

Provost of SSB Hall AKM Shahnawaz rejected the report, describing it as an eyewash.

The five-member committee headed by Treasurer ABM Enayet Hossain submitted the report to Vice-chancellor Prof Jasim Uddin Ahmed. The report pointed out what should be the students' behaviour rather than accusing the JCD activists of the incident, sources said.

A committee member preferring anonymity said, "No-one came forward with any evidence against the JCD. That is why we made no recommendation."

The JCD activists assaulted and kept confined the provost and eight house tutors of the SSB Hall to the hall office for five hours.

Crowley worried

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Participating editors, after the meeting with Crowley, said the issues discussed included the treatment of minorities, the economy, good governance, political instability and the negative impression held by the American public of Bangladesh.

The congressman expressed dismay over Bangladesh topping the global corruption rankings for three years running. "Even if we work very hard, it's very difficult to sell a country if it remains at the top of the corruption index for three consecutive years," he said, suggesting the nation needs to overhaul its police force.

Greater political consensus and tolerance of minorities are also required to attract increased foreign investment, Crowley said. Investors are discouraged by the government's practice of suspending contracts following regime changes in Bangladesh, he added.

However, Crowley stressed that Americans do sympathize with the challenges Bangladesh is trying to overcome, and that the country can benefit from this sympathy.

Crowley said he will continue to champion free market access to the US for Bangladesh, similar to the access of Caribbean and sub-Saharan countries after 2004.

After the meeting, Abdul Awal Mintoo, President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said, "We are trying to sign TIFA (Trade and Investment Framework Agreement) with the USA. It's the first step towards a sustainable relationship that may lead to the signing of a trade agreement."

During his stay, congressman Crowley and his entourage called on both the prime minister and the leader of the opposition, and met with various religious, business and non-profit groups, including the UNFPA-assisted Adolescent Reproductive Health Project at Sonargaon.

Abducted trader

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family declined to pay ransom to his captors, family sources alleged.

Unidentified miscreants abducted Saidur on Sunday when he was returning home on his motorcycle at about 9:00pm and they later demanded Tk 2 lakh in ransom, police said.

Gono Bahini of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, an outlawed organisation, might have links with his murder, police suspected.

Police found the wood trader's motorbike near Harinarayanpur field. However, they failed to recover the beheaded body till the writing of this report at 6:30 last evening.

Police handed over the head to the father in the afternoon, sources said.

A case was lodged with Sadar Police Station.

JS body

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held on January 25 or 26.

"Widespread allegations have been raised against the ministry including its purchase of Volvo buses under the present government. We want to ensure accountability in the ministry activities," Monjur said.

The sub-committee on the CNG scam will start work in a couple of days, he added.

The four-member sub-committee was formed on January 7 in the wake of allegations that Uttara Motors, the sole importer of the autorickshaws, sold 8,000 vehicles at about Tk 3.67 lakh each against the real price of Tk 1.67 lakh each.

Five days after the formation of the body, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda in a letter appealed to the standing committee chairman to recast the sub-committee.

"Six members of the eight member standing committee were present at the meeting, but no one, including the communications minister, disagreed with the formation of the sub-committee," Monjur said.

"It is quite surprising that the minister has appealed to recast the sub-committee."

Monjur said he received a complaint yesterday from Cox's Bazar in which one Zaker alleged that bribe played a vital role in the land allocation for a local CNG filling station.

Zaker alleged that he applied, but was denied the land as he did not pay bribe.

Allegations of financial corruption and mismanagement are also rife in BRTC and BRTA.

RU shut down till February 7

AN RU CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University (RU) has been closed until February 7 as authorities feared recurrence of campus violence in the wake of Tuesday's armed clash between Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) that left at least 50 people injured.

The RU syndicate took the decision yesterday after proctors of resident halls indicated the situation has gone out of control with armed cadres roaming the campus to establish supremacy.

Sources said ICS cadres raided all men's dormitories between Tuesday midnight and early yesterday. They beat up some 20 JCD leaders and activists with iron rods and ransacked their rooms.

RU Vice-chancellor (VC) Prof Faisal Islam Faruki convened the syndicate meeting just after the JCD called an indefinite strike on the campus to protest what it called was the ICS-sponsored violence to undermine the JCD.

Residents of men's dormitories were asked to vacate their rooms by 6:00pm yesterday while female on-campus residents were given until 8:00am today to get out.

"All classes and examinations have been withheld but admission forms will still be available," said Pro-VC Prof AKM Shahadat Hossain Mondol.

A seven-member committee led

by RU Treasurer Abdul Jabbar investigating Tuesday's incident has been asked to submit its report in seven days.

The syndicate will also request the government to launch a judicial probe into the armed clash, sources said.

Artiste Mimi interrogated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police interrogated TV artiste Afsana Mimi at Gulshan Police Station to ascertain the relations between her and Azam Tuesday night.

One of the interrogators said Mimi claimed to be Azam's friend, with whom she had travelled many places during the last few months. She will go through further interrogation to clarify the relations, the investigator added.

Mother of Jayanti and her brother-in-law have also been questioned by the investigators and high officials, according to police.

Police are interrogating Azam, a Dhaka Bank executive, who is persistently denying the accusation of killing his wife Jayanti, saying she committed suicide.

Jayanti's mother Lucille Sadekin in a case filed Saturday accused Azam of murdering her daughter.

150 seats to JS

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minister told the meeting that a bill providing for the enhanced JS seats would be passed in the upcoming JS session. The move is aimed at keeping pace with the rising population.

"The 300-member parliament was suitable for the seven crore population what has virtually doubled over the years," a meeting source quoted Khaleda as saying.

Portrait Debate

The premier also hinted at the passage of another bill proposing for hanging of the portraits of the heads of state and government at public offices.

BJP Chairman Nazim Rahman Manjur reminded the prime minister of her commitment in the Jatiya Sangsad to hang the portraits of national leaders, including Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, at government offices.

Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid objected to Manjur's remarks, saying his party would not support any move to hang Mujib's portrait at government offices.

"You (Jamaat) are controversial as razzakars for your opposition to the War of Liberation. You don't have any right to suggest anything about the Bangabandhu," an incensed Manjur thundered on hearing Mujahid's comments.

Khaleda and other key leaders kept silent, but BNP Standing

50,000 'fake'

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parliamentary committee, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"This time we asked the ministry to maintain transparency in the ongoing process. As the fakes have been crossed off the list, the number is supposed to be fewer than the previous one's."

The parliamentary committee decided that six lawmakers of the committee will monitor the enlistment process.

Meanwhile, the liberation war affairs ministry will provide a loan of Tk 25 crore to the war-wounded freedom fighters without interest.

Anti-Ahmadiyya

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Islamic Oikya Jote (IOJ), on January 20 for the same demand.

Majlis-e-Tahaffuz President and Khatib of Baitul Mokarram National Mosque Obaidul Haq will preside over tomorrow's demonstration to be addressed by the outfit leaders from Egypt, India, London, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The movement against about one lakh Ahmadiyyas in Bangladesh comes after the government banned all publications of the Muslim sect on January 8 for what it said were objectionable materials in Ahmadiyya publications that "hurt or might hurt the sentiments of the majority Muslims".

The ban viewed as the first step towards declaring the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim, came after religious bigots, represented mainly by the IOJ, launched an anti-Ahmadiyya campaign with Hizafate Khatme Nabuwat Andolon at the forefront.

Announcing the programme that includes another demonstration on January 23 at Paltan Maidan, Majlis-e-Tahaffuz General Secretary Mohammad Nurul Islam at a press conference at its office in Dhaka welcomed the ban.

"The government took a step to safeguard human rights by preventing Ahmadiyyas from deceiving people with their books," he said, tamping down the allegation by socio-cultural, political and

Cops chase down 7 robbers in Motijheel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested seven alleged inter-district robbers with firearms in Motijheel after chasing the bus they boarded down for an hour from Sobhanbagh.

Mohammad Sohrab, 28, Mohammad Amirul Islam, 29, Alamgir, 27, Mohammad Anisur Rahman, 30, Anwar Hossain, 28, Mizan, 29, and Abdul Barez, 30, were arrested with a pipegun and a cartridge, police said.

Tipped-off, the police team approached to search a Gabtoli-bound bus (Dhaka Metro Ja-5072) in front of Prince Plaza at Sobhanbagh at about 1:45am but it speeded up to dodge police, said MA Malek, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station.

"We chased the passenger bus and asked all police stations to stop it as its movement raised suspicion among us," he added.

Despite the alert, Tejgaon and Ramna police failed to stop the vehicle at different city points.

Motijheel police put up a road-block in the Danik Bangla intersection as Mohammadpur police were chasing the bus down. However, the bus took a U-turn in a last-ditch evasive action but could not go far off, Malek added.

Barek jumped from the bus during the chase and was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with head injuries.

During preliminary quizzing, the alleged robbers said they looted buses and other vehicles at various points between Gabtali and Gulistan and on several highways, Malek said.

Two cases were lodged with Mohammadpur Police Station.

Asian Art

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inaugurate the 17-day exhibition at Osmani Memorial Auditorium at 12:00 noon.

The participating countries include Algeria, Australia, Bahrain, Bhutan, China, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Madagascar, Malaysia, Morocco, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Qatar, Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, UAE, Vietnam, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

A total of 633 artworks of 375 artists of the participating countries will be put on display at Osmani Memorial Auditorium, National Museum and Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy during the exhibition.

Some 214 artworks of 185 artists of host Bangladesh are among the 633 artworks.

This year, the jury consists of five members. They are Prof Ali Akai of Turkey, Prof Gholam Hossain Babai of Iran, Prof Gholam Mohammad Sheikh of India and artist Prof Murtaja Baseer and art critic Mijarul Quays of Bangladesh.

Three artworks will receive the Grand Prize, carrying Tk 1 lakh, on the recommendation of the jury.

As part of the exhibition, Shilpakala Academy will organise a two-day international seminar, titled "Duality in Asian Art -- The Ethnic and the Global" at its premises, beginning tomorrow. Eminent artists from home and abroad will take part in the seminar.

Foreign docs

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disposal of petition of foreign doctors for registration.

The health ministry in a notification on December 4 last suspended its previous temporary permission to practise subject to obtaining registration from the BMDC.

But the foreign doctors continued practice without registration.

The ministry had also laid down conditions on foreign doctors which include: 1) they will provide medicare and training; 2) report arrival, stay and departure to the home and foreign ministries; 3) submit weekly report of their activities; 4) will not carry any data or information while leaving the country and 5) two local doctors should be associated with them during their service and training.

The BMDC refused registration to foreign doctors as it said patients were not getting treatment free of cost at Sikder Medical College & Hospital.

Dr Kamal Hossain, counsel for the petitioner, submitted that the foreign doctors were not receiving financial benefits. They were providing service to the patients free of cost.

Refuting his contention, Additional Attorney General Zaman Akhter Bulbul informed the court that the foreign doctors were taking away huge money out of the country. The hospital is peeling the patients in the name of foreign doctors.

Quoting relevant laws, Bulbul submitted that no foreign doctor is allowed to practise in Bangladesh. They are coming on invitation or hired by the voluntary organisations.

Uzbekistan plane crash kills 37

AFP, Tashkent

All 37 people aboard a Soviet-built Uzbek passenger plane, including the nation's top UN official, died when the aircraft crashed and burst into flames as it landed in thick fog in the capital of the Central Asian country, officials said.

Uzbekistan's public prosecutor, Rashitjon Kadirov, said the landing gear on the Yak-40 aircraft had failed to deploy.

He said there were no indications that the crash resulted from terrorism, but a full investigation would be held.

The 28-year-old plane, which was almost at the end of its working life, crashed and burst into flames approaching Tashkent airport on a flight from the southern city of Termez, near

Uzbekistan's border with Afghanistan, at 19:27pm (1427 GMT) on Tuesday, Kadirov said.

After its undercarriage failed to deploy, it smashed into a concrete barrier, burst into flames and then fell into a river, he said.

Among those who died was the UN's resident coordinator in Uzbekistan, Richard Conroy, 56, and the head of the Tashkent office of the Washington-based humanitarian organisation World Concern, Richard Penner.

A foreign ministry spokesman said that Penner was a Canadian citizen and not, as officials had earlier indicated, from the United States. Two Afghan businessmen were also among the dead.

A total of five crew members and 32 passengers, including one child, died in the crash. There were no survivors, Kadirov said.

Opposition criticises

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women seats," he pointed out.

President of Gono Forum Dr Kamal Hossain said the increase in the seat number is rational because of population growth. However, he believes this should be done through a national consensus.

"Since a constitutional amendment is required to implement the decision, a national consensus is also an imperative," Dr Kamal, also the framer of the constitution, said.

On women's representation in parliament, he said, "Women deserve to be directly elected to their seats. We will give our detailed observation once official process starts on the decision."

Non-govt teachers' indefinite strike from today

UNB, Dhaka

The non-governmental teachers and employees will go for an indefinite strike today to press home their eight-point demand.

In a statement yesterday, leaders of the National Front of Teachers and Employees requested the guardians not to send their children to educational institutions during the strike.

The leaders also urged the teachers and employees to instantly stage demonstrations and hold press briefings in case of any obstruction by any quarter during the strike.

Sarbahara

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eyewash.

The apparent change to tomorrow's programme came from a meeting at the office of the deputy inspector general (DIG) of police in the final hours to the event that high police officials say will clear the way for the operatives to return to normal life after years of gang-land violence.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury will attend the programme in Agarpur village in Babuganj, a southern upazila believed to be a strong base of outlaws popularly known as Sarbaharas.

"It's a great chance for the operatives to return to normal life. If they blow the chance, they have to face dire consequences," a home ministry official told The Daily Star, asking not to be named.

But legal experts questioned the intent of the programme that comes after a spike in crimes in Barisal and accused law enforcers of stage-managing the event that they say has no legal grounds.

Political observers view it as a scheme to rehabilitate the ruling BNP-patronised outlaws.

Gaza suicide

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stalled by persistent violence.

A caller to Reuters' office in Gaza claimed joint responsibility for the bombing in the name of the militant Islamic group Hamas and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed offshoot of President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement.

Hamas, the main group behind a campaign of suicide bombings during three years of violence, said it sent a woman for the first time because of growing Israeli security "obstacles" facing its male bombers.