

Indian land port strike

Cattle, essentials prices soar

STAR REPORT

The prices of some imported essential commodities have spiralled after suspension of activities at the three land ports in the north-west since January 13 due to a strike called by the West Bengal Exporters Co-ordination Committee (WBECC).

The cattle prices have already hiked a great deal due to the strike with barely a week to the Eid-ul-Azha, our Rajshahi and Satkhira correspondents quoted the local cattle traders as saying.

The government is losing about Tk 1 crore in revenues every day for the last 13 days due to the strike at Sona Mosque, Hili and Burimari ports, said a top customs official.

"Cows are being sold between Tk 7,500 and Tk 50, 000 compared to their previous prices ranging between Tk 5,000 and Tk 35,000 two weeks ago," said Abdus Shukur, president of Sultanganj Cattle Traders Association.

The rice prices soared by Tk 1 a kg while sugar prices went up by Tk 3, flour by Tk 2, onion by Tk 5, chilli by Tk 3, oil by Tk 2, market sources

said.

"The government suffered a loss of Tk 7 crore at Sona Mosque Land Port in 15 days since January 11 when the traders initially suspended works," the custom official said. He added the government had been counting an average daily loss of Tk 30 lakh at Hili and Tk 20 lakh at Burimari ports.

"The WBECC called the strike protesting an order of Indian customs which said all loaded trucks of any consignment must come to the port simultaneously and after reaching the ports the customs officials would give them clearance to enter the Bangladesh from January 23," said Ashrafuzzaman Ashu, president of Bhomra Port Users Association (BPUA) quoting the WBECC leaders.

"About 150 consignments are waiting in the Indian territory opposite to Bhomra Port and some goods are going to rot in the trucks stuck up on the other side of the border (India)," he added.

A customs official said long queues of trucks were also there inside the Bangladesh territory.

2 killed in city road mishaps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two women were killed in different road accidents at Airport and Kafrul areas in the capital yesterday.

Ranu, 40, employee of Macys Limited, a garment factory, was run over by a private car at Kawla bus stand in Airport when she was returning home at around 8:30am after night duty.

Police seized the car and arrested its driver Dulu. A case was filed with Airport Police Station.

In the other incident, housewife Puena Costa, aged around 38, was killed in a bus of Bikalpa Auto Service rammed her on Rokeya Swarani in Agargaon at around 8:30am.

Police arrested driver Salam and seized the bus.

Both the bodies were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

JAYANTI MURDER

Court rejects Azam's bail petition

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected the bail petition of Azam Reza arrested on charge of killing his wife Jayanti Munshi.

After hearing both sides, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) Mohammad Ayub rejected the petition.

The court also directed the investigating officer of the case to submit a report on Reza's involvement in the killing.

Azam was arrested on January 10 and taken on remand for seven days in three phases. He was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail Friday.

Gulshan police handed over the case docket and other documents regarding the death of Jayanti to Detective Branch (DB) of police on January 17.

Jayanti, a teacher of Australian International School, was found dead at her Banani house on January 9. An unnatural death case was filed with Gulshan Police Station the same day and a murder case was filed after autopsy report confirmed she was killed.

1 killed

FROM PAGE 12
group in presence of police, locals and sources said.

Moulana Mohammad Ali, another resident of the area, said ansars opened fire during the clash when some thirty rounds of gunshots were heard.

Ansars have formed a three-member committee led by Circle Adjutant Mokhesur Rahman to probe the allegations.

Of the bullet-hit, Alamgir, 24, a local businessman, died on way to hospital while the other two, Abdus Sattar, 21, and Khalilur Rahman, 25, were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Abdus Satter, reportedly a jute mill worker, was stated to be in critical state.

Sources said Solaiman is a businessman of city's Chawk Bazar area and son of Mahbubul Alam Sheth alias Bachchu Nawab -- the caretaker of Prof Rehman Sobhan and Faruk Sobhan's family that owns huge land property in the area.

There has been a long-drawn dispute between Sobhan family and one Kulsoma Begum over some portions of the land. Mohammad Nagar Housing Society bought some 10 decimals land from Kulsoma and yesterday's clash occurred over that land, sources said.

Md Yunus, an old resident of the locality, further alleged that the father of the Sobhans entrusted Bachchu Nawab with the power of attorney. Using the power, he made huge property in and around Bayezid thana area while his son Solaiman also followed in his father's footsteps.

Local people further alleged that Solaiman had long been engaged in grabbing others' land in the name of Sobhan family and selling the same piece of land to different persons.

However, Solaiman, who fled the scene immediately after the second round of clash reportedly to escape wrath of the locals, could not be contacted for comments.

The general secretary of Mohammad Nagar Housing Society filed a case with Bayezid Police Station accusing 12.

ADP fund

FROM PAGE 12

led by Tadashi Kondo, transport and communications director of South Asia Department of the ADB, reviewed the progress of ADB-assisted ongoing transport infrastructure-develop-ment projects and future financial assistance programme in the sector.

The delegation emphasised execution of development schemes "in stipulated time" and reforms of Bangladesh Railways.

Tadashi Kondo took keen interest in the launch of the circular road and Padma Bridge.

He said the ADB is keeping a "close coordination and contact" with Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) assigned to conduct the feasibility study for the planned Padma Bridge.

He gave assurance of extending the bank assistance to the communications sector for development projects undertaken by the government.

Communications Secretary Sayed Rezaul Hayat, the director general of Bangladesh Railway and high officials of the Roads and Highways Department and communications ministry were present.

Temple arson Tension runs high at Patharghata

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A tense situation is prevailing in Patharghata in the wake of Friday night's arson attack on the Gangabari Temple there.

Police are guarding the scene where a group of unidentified men torched three tin-shed structures of the Hindu temple.

A manhunt by police to capture the arsonists has failed so far.

Mohammad Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station said, "An investigation is on and we are trying to catch the culprits."

Local Ward Commissioner Jalaluddin Iqbal said efforts are on to resolve the ensuing tension in the aftermath of the incident and a meeting to that effect would be held on the temple premises.

Sources said the incident was a sequel to a dispute between Jalil Estate of Jalliganj under Kotwali police station and Shyamol Sadhu, who was appointed caretaker of the temple about six months ago.

An official of Jalil Estate accused Sadhu of fomenting communal tension in the area. "He is using the Hindu community here to spark communal violence to cater to the hidden agenda of a vested interest group," he alleged.

Sadhu has gone into hiding since the arson attack.

Hindus living on premises of the temples complained about police harassment during Friday night's incident.

Some Hindu women told this correspondent that police abused them physically.

"Some policemen stormed into the house of Shukla, Rupashi Sarkar and Ankur and harassed them," said 80-year-old Laxmi Rani Das, while talking to The Daily Star yesterday morning.

"I was sleeping when police entered our house looking for my husband. They pulled me out of bed and struck me with a baton," said Shukla, a housewife.

Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) dismissed the allegations of police excesses, adding that a tiny vested interest group was trying to upset the communal harmony by exploiting the issue and "diverting the truth".

Faisal Jalil Chowdhury, one of the owners of the vast Jalil Estate, alleged that the incident was orchestrated by a vested interest group to grab the land of the estate.

"We would like to see the problem settled lawfully and amicably," he said.

Privatisation body

FROM PAGE 1

to assign the ministries concerned with privatisation of the SOEs that are out of operation. It was also decided that Privatisation Commission would only deal with the SOEs that are in operation.

As per the government's privatisation list for the current year, the decision if implemented leaves the 10-year-old commission with very little to do.

Chairman of the commission Inam Ahmed Chowdhury said, "Only the textiles ministry has a skeletal liquidation cell. It will be a time consuming, expensive and complex task to liquidate [the SOEs] by setting up liquidation cells in each of the ministries concerned."

Talking to The Daily Star, Chowdhury observed: "As per the Privatisation Policy 2001, a single entity like the Privatisation Commission was given the power to privatise the SOEs. For, if different bodies are involved in the process, there will be different procedures and different terms and conditions, leading to confusion."

Article 10 (5) of the policy not only empowers the commission as the

sole authority but also bars any ministry or body from interfering in or initiating privatisation process of an SOE, Chowdhury added.

The commission members include five parliamentarians, five secretaries, president of the FBCCI and chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Explaining the rationale of the move, Saifur Rahman said last month, "The laid-off mills have huge liabilities. The ministries that own these laid-off units will be able to waive their debts through negotiation with the respective banks or parties. So, the ministries can do this job better [than the commission]."

The commission since its inception in 1993 has privatised 44 SOEs, of which 25 were sold each through a single deal and 19 by sales of shares.

Although the previous BNP government formed the commission, the highest number of SOEs, 32, were privatised during the Awami League government. Only three SOEs were privatised in the last two years, while 10 were closed down.

Moudud snubs

FROM PAGE 1

-- Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain, Advocate Harun-al-Rashid, Barrister Ziaur Rahman Khan and Justice Mozammel Haq -- all ruling BNP lawmakers, supported Moudud's stand.

The chairman made sure that his opinions were included in the meeting's minutes.

The parliamentary body yesterday decided to drop the provision allowing any retired personnel of the armed forces to become member of the commission.

According to a previous provision in the bill, people with 20-year experience in law, education, administration, judiciary or armed forces are eligible to become commissioner of the watchdog.

The committee included a new sub-clause in the bill providing for financial autonomy to the commission like the Supreme Court and the Jatiya Sangsad.

It also finalised a five-member selection committee that will list six people for the president to nominate three of them as commissioners. Initially, the bill proposed a six-member search body, including finance and law ministers.

The five members of the selection committee are a judge of the Appellate Division as its chairman and a judge of the High Court Division, Public Service Commission chairman, comptroller and auditor general and the immediate past cabinet secretary as members.

The committee will sit on February 9 to discuss the commission's functions, including the process of filing graft cases and trial.

Mystery disease

FROM PAGE 12

at the Goalongdo upazila health complex to deal with the emergency situation.

Dr Jahangir Hossain leading the eight-member team of experts told The Daily Star yesterday that the team collected more samples of blood, urine and saliva from victims and sent them to the ICDDR,B (International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh) for diagnostic tests. The same samples have also been sent to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, USA.

"A team from the CDC is expected to arrive in Dhaka soon to investigate if the disease is connected to animals," he said.

According to the team, 11 people from Goalongdo have died so far. However, our correspondent at the DMCH put the number at 15.

They are: Kabbo, 3, Suruj, 14, Sabuj, 8, Tisha, 9, Zakir Hossain, 14, Manik, 10, Rina, 9, Lisa, 8, Zakir Molah, 8, Zaid, 15, Babu, 8, Alamgir, 18, Parvez, 13 and Nakib, 3, and Sapna, 28.

Sources said three people have also died from similar symptoms in Tangail last four days.

Mamun, 11, and Aklima, 10, under treatment at Infectious Diseases Hospital were referred to the DMCH yesterday.

Titas gas's N'ganj DGM suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Higher authority of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited stand released its regional deputy general manager (DGM) on Saturday on charge of illegal gas supply to various industrial units at Narayanganj.

M Kamal Uddin, regional DGM of the Titas gas, was suspended of his duties after a team of parliamentary sub-committee found illegal gas connections at different industrial units in Fatullah and Sidhvirganj industrial areas on January 22. Titas gas sources said.

According to sources, Sardar Shakhawat Hossain Bakul, chairman of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee on Gas Sector, and its member Shamsuzzoha found 100 gas burners at Azmeri Salt Factory and similar gas pilferage in two other establishments in Fatullah and Sidhvirganj.

The committee members also directed the authorities concerned to take immediate legal actions against the owners of those factories, sources added.

Profitable base

FROM PAGE 1

banquet hosted in her honour by Sultan Hassanalk Bolkhiah at the Royal Palace this evening.

Earlier, the Bangladesh premier had an audience with the Sultan at the Royal Palace.

Khaleda in her banquet speech said Bangladesh enjoys duty-free market access for most of its products to the markets of the European Union and Canada. This can provide a significant advantage for investment there, she added.

The prime minister also underscored the need for reinvigorating and revitalising the Islamic ummah to face the challenges of the century.

Addressing another gathering of expatriates at the state guest house, she said that her government would try to send more Bangladeshis abroad, including Brunei, to work to help contribute to the country's economy.

Khaleda thanked the Bangladeshis living here and gave a brief resume of her two-year-old government's programmes on education, agriculture, health, communications, industry, environment, telecommunications, local government, ICT, poverty alleviation, curbing of terrorism and establishment of rule of law.

Joint drive

FROM PAGE 12

others stayed on orders by the High Court, while another is under process to be handed over to the Speedy Trial Tribunal.

At Khulna Leo Club, Babar told journalists that the case of Manik killing will be tried under the Speedy Trial Tribunal.

Babar visited the house of Manik and gave his widowed wife Tk 1.5 lakh. Lawmaker Ali Asgar Lobby pledged to provide financial help for Mahima Saha, Manik's elder daughter, who studies in Kolkata.

Earlier in the morning, Babar met Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) officials engaged in the joint drive and discussed their problems in running the operation.

Whip Ashraf Hossain, Lobby, inspector general of police, directors general of the BDR, Ansars and Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and high officials of police were present at the meeting.

Outgoing CJ

FROM PAGE 12

ing the appointment of chief justice and said: "The Bar disapproves of politicising this office. We don't want any politics in appointing chief justice."

He criticised the government for setting a trend of appointing chief justice, mindful of the next caretaker administration that will oversee the 2006 general elections.

Rokanuddin appreciated the seven-month role of Hasan as chief justice and said: "You have removed our apprehensions with your performance."

But he regretted the non-implementation of the 12-point directive on the separation of judiciary even four years after the ruling.

Additional Attorney General AG Mahmud Ali also spoke at the ceremony, also attended by judges of both divisions of the Supreme Court and senior lawyers.

Child Trafficking

FROM PAGE 12

1,209 boys and 1,196 girls went missing from January 2000 to June 2003.

Of them, 510 boys and 457 girls were smuggled out of the country mainly to Gulf states, it added.

Discussions said most of the boys below 10 years were used as camel jockeys in some Gulf countries while the others became bonded labourers across the globe.

And trafficked girls, between 11 and 16 years, were mostly used in the sex trade, they added.

According to a Unesco report in 2002, some 30,000 women, mostly girl children, were tricked to be taken out of Bangladesh in the last decade.

Lorraine Barker, Australian high commissioner to Bangladesh, addressed the function as chief guest while Dr Khaleda Salauddin, CWCS advisor, chaired the discussion session.

CWCS President Prof Ishrat Shamim and Shahidul Haque, regional representative of International Organisation of Migration, also spoke at the meeting attended by teachers, guardians, police officials and school children.

Ammar murder

Court rejects ministry plea to clear accused of charges

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected the home ministry petition for withdrawal of charges against an accused in the Ammar Shamsi murder case.

After scrutinising the case diary and other relevant documents, Judge AR Masud, of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-4, issued the order.

The judge, in his order, said the government did not mention why the charges should be withdrawn. Moreover, the contents of the FIR, charge sheet and other documents also did not suggest that it was a case of political harassment.

The home ministry sent a recommendation letter to the Dhaka Metropolitan Public Prosecutor (PP), asking him to arrange withdrawal of charges against Mostafa Almas Bappi although he had confessed to his involvement in the abduction and killing of the 20-year-old student for a Tk 10 lakh ransom in 2000.

In its December 21 letter last year, the ministry observed the case was filed for political harassment.

Previously, the home ministry kicked up a controversy, asking the PP to arrange charge withdrawal against Reazuddin Ahmed Monir, brother of ruling BNP lawmaker

Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and nine others accused in the Keraniganj double murder. But the same tribunal on August 17 last year rejected the petition.

A separate tribunal had also thwarted another ministry move to clear two people of charges in industrialist Russel Bhuiyan murder in Narayanganj in 2000. The tribunal on January 18 this year handed death sentence to the two and four others.

AS Mahmud

FROM PAGE 1

shock at the death of AS Mahmud.

AS Mahmud was a member of the Brac governing body for about 15 years and made significant contribution in formulating the organisation's policies and in guiding its activities.

His liberal, objective and secular thinking has always been a source of inspiration for the Brac, says a press release.

The Brac members prayed for salvation of the departed soul and conveyed heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved family members.

In another statement, former president Badruddoza Chowdhury expressed his condolence at the death of AS Mahmud.

Govt unleashing

FROM PAGE 12

of demands placed by her party, the opposition leader said. "The demands are to free people from present panicky and suffocating situation and also to restore democracy in the country."

Hasina urged the students to unite people in a bid to realise the demands including curbing violence and corruption by the ruling alliance men and a halt to price hike of essentials. "No-one can cling to power ignoring the people," she said.

The AL chief criticised the government for distorting the history of Liberation War in the textbooks and asked the BCL leaders and workers to prepare a list of the authors who have put 'distorted information in those books'.

"They will be brought to justice in an appropriate time for delivering erroneous materials to students," she said.

On the change of police uniform, Hasina said: "The decision to change police uniform was taken to only profit Dandy Dyeing, an industry owned by the prime minister's family members, as the government has made it mandatory to buy clothes only from Dandy Dyeing for new uniforms."

The AL chief once again accused the government of politicising administration, judiciary and other

sectors. She alleged that pro-government student bodies are unleashing violence on the campus of public universities including Rajshahi University, where two pro-government student wings recently locked in gunfights.

Referring to Bangladesh's candidate for the top OIC job, Hasina said there are allegations of war crime against him and also other criminal allegations including smuggling. She also criticised Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit to Indonesia saying the PM has gone there to promote such a candidate.

Former BCL leaders from 1950s to immediate past M Quamruzzaman, Abdur Razzak, Khaled Mohammad Ali, Toifal Ahmed, Ismat Kadir Gama, Sheikh Shahidul Islam, Obaidul Kader, Bahul Mazum Churnu, Mustaf, Jalal Mahiuddin, Abdul Manna, Jahangir Kabir Nanok, Sultan Mohammad Mansur, Abdur Rahman, Shahe Alam, Ashim Kumar Ukil, Mainuddin Hasan Chowdhury, Iqbalur Rahim, Enamul Haq Shamim, Ishak Ali Khan Panna, Bahadur Bepari and Ajay Kar Khokon addressed the discussion.

BCL President Liakot Ali Sikder chaired the programme while its General Secretary Nazrul Islam Babu conducted it.

Bill on court reforms introduced

UNB, Dhaka

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterday introduced the Court Reforms Implementation (auxiliary provision) Bill, 2004 in parliament with an aim at implementing reforms of the existing case management and court administration.

Introducing the bill, he said a donor-funded project, 'Legal Capacity Building', was under the process implementation to bring massive reforms in the age-old judicial system.

Under the project, he said, reforms would be brought about by introducing IT in the court administration and in case management system. Some existing laws, orders and provisions might have to be suspended to pave the way for reform, he added.

Powell

FROM PAGE 1

Powell acknowledged that Saddam Hussein had banned weapons but added, "We had no questions that needed to be answered."

"What was it?" he asked. "One hundred tons, 500 tons or zero tons? Was it so many liters of anthrax, 10 times that amount or nothing?"

DG shipping

FROM PAGE 12

and regulations.

The fined vessels included MV Coco, owned by a son of the prime minister, and a number of others, owned by ministers and influential political leaders.

On January 17, DG Azim in a letter to Munir criticised the latter's directive against MV Abu Bakar, which was seized on November 17 last year and fined for playing without registration and survey certificate for long.

In the letter, Azim challenged the validity of the magistrate's order, terming it illegal and unlawful. He even gave the vessel permission to ply in the Bangladesh-Maynamar India coastal belt.

Munir termed the DG's remarks totally 'irresponsible' and 'baseless'. He alleged that the DG shipping issued the letter influenced by Saidur Rahman, owner of the vessel and a very influential person having direct links with the shipping ministry and ruling party highups.

The magistrate also termed the DG's action beyond his jurisdiction, as he had no authority to comment on judicial proceedings, as only the

Appellate Division of the High Court can give verdict on the legal validity of a magistrate's order. Munir said it was a clear violation of administrative norm and would only instigate and inspire the lawbreakers.

The magistrate also alleged that instead of co-operation, the DG since the beginning created various obstacles to the special drive against faulty launches and tried to influence government officials to be lenient to the launchowners.

Earlier, Munir also complained to the shipping ministry against the DG for issuing survey certificates to default launches and giving temporary permissions to those vessels to ply, without making proper investigation.

Contacted, Azim told The Daily Star: "It is an administrative matter and I will not make any comment on any person or any case of my department."

He, however, refuted the allegation of non-cooperation with the special drive, saying he provided whatever logistic facilities he had for the drive.

Azim became DoS DG in May last year, before which he was chief nautical surveyor of the same department.