8 killed, 55 injured in road mishaps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eight persons including a woman and two boys were killed and 55 others injured in three separate road accidents in Comilla, Chittagong and Feni yesterday.

Five were killed and 20 others injured when a Chittagong-bound passenger bus from Brahmanbaria careered off the Dhaka-Chittagong highway into a roadside ditch at Tailbari in Chouddagram of Comilla vesterday afternoon.

The identities of the dead could not be known immediately. The bodies

were sent to Comilla General Hospital for autopsy, while 18 of the injured are undergoing treatment at the same hospital. Conditions of five are critical, hospital sources said.

A case was filed with

Chouddagram Police Station.

In Chittagong, two boys were killed and 20 others injured, three critically, when a Chittagong-bound bus skidded off the Dhaka-Chittagong highway and fell into a ditch at Chhoto Kamaldaha in Mirer Sarai at around

Saifuddin, 12, and Jewel, 10, reportedly hailed from Kachuva in Chandpur and Chandina in Comilla. died on the spot, while the injured were admitted to Chittagong Medical College ospital and Mastan Nagar Hospital. Police seized the bus but could not

arrest the driver. Acase was filed.

In Feni, Belal, 36, was killed and five others were injured when a Comilla-bound bus collided with a covered van on Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Jatrasiddi in the afternoon.

The injured are receiving treatment at Feni General Hospital.

16 AL men's houses

gold ornaments and other valuables from the house of Wajed Ali Shah, a BNP worker, in the same village during the rampage.

Witnesses said the arsonists came by motorbike soon after a police team hemmed in the village in search of the killers, an allegation of police aid that Natore Superintendent of Police (SP) Syed Nazrul Islam brushed aside.

The attackers resisted neighbouring villagers who came forward to douse the fire and Natore Fire Service vehicles during the arson that killed cattle and pet animals.

On the apparent retaliatory attack on Shahpara village, Deputy Minister for Land Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu. who lost his nephew on Saturday afternoon, said he was in the dark about the arson attack and claimed no

BNP workers had roles in it. "We will take action against them if anyone of our party was found guilty.' promised Ruhul Kuddus, elected . lawmaker from a Natore constituency.

Those who lost houses in the fire are Naldanga upazila AL Vice-President Anisur Rahman, General Secretary SM Feroz, former union parishad member Zaherul Islam Shah and AL workers Ahad Ali Shah, Asad Ali Pramanik, Rafigue Ali Shah, Abbas Ali Shah, Shahin Shah, Momin Shah, Fayez Shah, Jabbar Shah, Faruk Shah, Futu, Forhad, Fazlu and

OUTLAW CLAIM A couple of hours into the killing, an unnamed person called three local newspersons and a newspaper office in Rajshahi, the neighbouring district of Natore, and claimed responsibility for the killing, identifying himself as a leader of outlawed Purbo Banglar

Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist-"We have killed Gama." one of the

journalists quoted the caller as saying. The deputy minister described the killing as a handiwork of the main opposition AL and said: "I declared Natore as free from crime two years ago and the murder was committed to

ent my image. He blamed the killing on the Naldanga AL vice-president and said he threatened him repeatedly before in an allegation that Natore District AL General Secretary Hanif Ali Sheikh described as a sign of political vengeance of the ruling BNP.

Police arrested two AL workers over the murder: Fazlul Haque Shah, a schoolteacher and brother of the Naldanga upazila AL general secretary, and Abdus Sattar.

The SP says police are chasing the leads to the killing, adding: "I believe goons, not outlaws carried out the

Kushtia by-polls

2 candidates withdraw from race

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Two candidates yesterday withdrew their candidatures for Kushtia-1 (Daulatpur) by-polls.

Sahir Uddin of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)-Inu and Abdul Khalek of the Freedom Party withdrew their nomination papers on the last day for withdrawal.

Twelve candidates submitted nomination papers for the by-polls scheduled for February 24.

Computer supply fiasco

FROM PAGE 12

crore as grant for introducing computer courses at secondary and higher secondary levels in 3,382 educational institutions under a project that was scheduled to be implemented by March 2001.

After a series of discussions with Bangladesh government, the Dutch government selected Amsterdambased Tulip Computers, the lone computer manufacturer in that country, as the project implementation agency

An inter-ministerial meeting approved the 'price offer' and the 'commercial contract' with the Dutch

Tulip Computers' offer amounted to 50 percent of the total project cost. It would be supplying 10,388 personal computers, uninterrupted power supply (UPS), printers and software for the project. Under the project, 6.768 teachers, two each from every beneficiary institution, were also scheduled to receive computer train-

In its first offer, the Dutch company had quoted a unit price of Tk 99,000 for the computers. Following negotiations, it later revised the rate to Tk 70,000, which too was found to be much higher than the prevailing market price, sources said.

The Cabinet Purchase Committee on December 20, 2000 cancelled the procurement initiative, finding the price offer to be 'inflated and unsolicited', Education Minister M Osman Farruk

told The Daily Star. Following the suspension of the project, Tulip Computers lodged complaint with a Dutch court accusing Bangladesh government of breaching an international contract.

Bangladesh could not even contest in the case due to time constraint, said. Osman Farruk: "We wrote to the

amicable solution through diplomatic efforts, so as to maintain existing bilateral relations, a senior official at

"The education ministry also has written to the cabinet secretariat to convene an inter-ministerial meeting to fix the modus operandi of tackling the issue." the official said, adding representatives from the foreign, law, education and commerce ministries and the Economic Relations Division would be there.

tained apprehending a crisis. On kerosene hoarding by unscrupulous quarters, the minister said they would take action against them. "But ultimately they will be losers, as now there is no fear of

Currently the country has a stock of kerosene for 14, diesel for 16 and jet fuel for 15 days, although the present administration could in advance raise the stock equivalent to two months' needs from the

Officials preferring anonymity blamed the delayed procurement procedure and subsequent cancellation of an international tender by the Cabinet Purchase Committee for the present crisis.

Earlier on January 6, the BPC sent a proposal for purchasing 7.5 lakh tonnes of various fuel oils through Japanese Marubeni and Indian Reliance, who were the

But the committee took more than two weeks to monitor the proposal and rejected the tender on January 24 without considering how to meet fuel demand.

The reason behind cancellation of the tender was that the purchase worth Tk 1,500 crore would affect the foreign-exchange reserve, as the LC (letter of credit) was due to be opened in cash.

The cancellation had other impacts too. Unscrupulous profiteers took it as an opportunity for hoarding kerosene, anticipating that delays in this regard would create fuel crisis.

Besides, demands for kerosene increased as the ravenous quarters are mixing it with comparatively costly diesel for transport fuelling. and many irrigation pumps use

kerosene instead of diesel. The monthly demand for kerosene, at the price of Tk 17 per litre, in the past months increased from 53,000 tonnes to 63,000 tonnes, while this January, the demand rose

to 73,000 tonnes. The other way round, monthly demand for diesel, Tk 20 per litre, decreased from 1.6 lakh tonnes in 2002 to 1.5 lakh in 2003. In January this year, the demand further declined to 1.41 lakh tonnes

Body recovered in Nayahat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police recovered the body of a man from at Nayahat in Chittagong on

Being informed, police recovered the body of Nurul Kabir Chowdhury of Sholakbahar in Panchlaish from Kalarpool area in the evening, sources said.

Sources claimed the man of 35 years was killed following a family

Ekushey book fair

FROM PAGE 12 almost all the stalls and asked about the new books.

However, few books were sold yesterday with some publishers saying that the sale usually gets momentum after a week when genuine bookworms will swarm the stalls. They added that novels and books of prominent writers including Humayun Ahmed, Dr Humayun Azad and Dr Muhammad Zafar Igbal were

selling more than other writers. Meanwhile, the traditional programmes of the book fair began yesterday with discussions and cultural programmes at its premises.

Hasna Jasimuddin Moudud, Prof. Moniruzzaman and Fatema Kawser took part in yesterday's discussion on 'Reading of Charjapad and related

The book fair will remain open to all from 2:00pm to 8:00pm every day and from 11:00am to 8:00pm on weekends, Bangla Academy sources said. They added that on February 21, the fair will be open from 8:00am to 9:00pm.

A discussion on 'Zangonama-Middle Age War Epic' will be held today at 4:00pm at the fair premises followed by a cultural programme.

multiple visas and undertake stud-

ies on the introduction of BIMST-EC

Khan and his counterparts from

other member countries of the

Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri

Lanka and Thailand -- Economic

Cooperation (BIMST-EC) attended

the meet. They and the Thai prime

minister witnessed the signing of the

talks Saturday, demanding com-

pensation for any revenue loss

resulting from dropping of tariffs,

ignoring other members' assur-

ances that its concerns could be

Bandladesh's position over tariff

reduction issue was not new. They

believe the main reason for

Bangladesh's not being a party to

the deal this time was the absence

of Commerce Minister Amir Khosru

Mahmud Chowdhury at the meet-

ing, who was forced to stay back

home due to illness. Tariff Commission Chairman MA Taslim

merce ministers are supposed to

sign the documents and

Bangladesh may sign it later on," a

commerce ministry official said

yesterday. "The issue of revenue

compensation for tariff reduction

should have been resolved by last

The framework agreement

stipulates preferential treatment

including suitable timeframes for

tariff reduction for the least devel-

oped countries (LDCs). The accord

also elaborates that India, Sri Lanka

and Thailand would get five years

while Nepal. Bhutan and Myanmar

would get 10 years for tariff reduc-

joined the originally five-member

nated for 'fast-track' treatment to be

traded on a zero-tariff basis by mid-

2009 for the three developed mem-

bers -- India. Sri Lanka and Thailand

-- and by mid-2011 for the poorer

members -- Nepal, Bhutan and

goods under the framework agree-

America," Kerry said at a state party dinner in Richmond, Virginia,

where he lashed out at Bush for

tion" and said the "Bush attack

machine" would not be able to

stream -- and we're going to stand up and fight back," said Kerry, who

leads Bush in several national

through the residential area after the

double murder," said a phaeton

driver, who would not give his name

intra-party rivalry," said Deputy

Commissioner (South) Ali Akbar of

Rupsha upazila brought the number

of killings to 10 in the district since

parishad (UP) chairman Amir Azam

Khan, Awami League leader Manjur

Morshed Labu and UP member

Khulna Metropolitan Police.

"The killing was the result of

The death of the two from

The victims include union

'They're extreme. We're main-

running an "extreme administra-

ment would begin in July next.

The negotiations on trade in

grouping formed in 1997.

Mvanmar.

Kerry

smear him.

FROM PAGE 1

mid-January.

Kobbad Shaikh.

Rivals kill

for security reasons.

FROM PAGE 12

Nepal and Bhutan have recently

Tariffs would begin to be reduced

mid-2006, with products desig-

evening.'

"As per provision, only the com-

led the commerce ministry team.

Commerce ministry officials said

addressed within the agreement.

Bangladesh pulled out of the FTA

Foreign Minister M Morshed

FTA deal

FROM PAGE 1

business card.

FTA accord.

DU student's date

authorities did not officially sign him in on board for the project. Also, his parents were not officially informed about the trip.

Two days later, Motiur was travelling from Dinajpur to Rangpur as part of a five-member INFS team to conduct studies on arsenic contamination in food chain.

On the way, the team met a fatal accident at around 9:00pm when their microbus collided head on with a goods truck killing two Dr Shibtosh Roy and Dr Dalim

died on the spot while Motiur and two others survived miraculously. The impact of the accident left Motiur trapped unconscious inside the mangled microbus. The front of the vehicle had to be cut open to

Apart from the trauma, Motiur suffered severe fractures including damage to the left femur and right fibula of both his legs. Bleeding profusely, he was taken to Rangpur Medical College

Hospital where he was left practically untreated. The following day, the two other survivors including Dr Zaher, who also sustained some injuries, returned to Dhaka but Motiur was

left behind in the hospital. Motiur's condition deteriorated the next day and he was referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital or the National Institute of Trauma and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor). But he was taken to Dhaka Community Hospital (DCH) instead at project supervisor Dr Zaher's recommendations and following his assurances to Motiur's family that all-out help would be provided for this treatment

Motiur spent three months at the DCH. But the only treatment he received was a skin graft on his left ankle because project authorities refused to foot his medical bills despite earlier assurances. Although Dr Salamat Ullah, director of INFS, collected funds for Motiur's treatment, the money was not enough to pay for the cabin rent at the DCH. Financial insolvency of

Motiur's family prevented them from

paying for his proper medical treat-

On October 22, 2001, Motiur was shifted to Nitor for further treatment under Dr RR Kairy. But the condition of his leg deteriorated after a faulty 'experimental' operation.

Without the consent of the patient, Dr Kairy 'experimented' by implanting a 12-inch metal rod in Motiur's left thigh that eventually caused further bone fracture.

Within three days of the operation, Motiur's thigh developed serious infection and he began to suffer acute pain. Dr Kairv then sent for several costly medical tests. The patient was also injected with several antibiotics. But his infection did

After three months, Dr Kairy informed Motiur that his limb might have to be amputated. But Motiur decided to consult Dr Saleh Talukder. During the course of one and a half years of treatment, Dr Talukdar conducted four operations in his thigh and knee, removing pus and other infected tissues.

Asked why the poor student was not getting any assistance from the project. Dr Zaher said. "None of us. including myself, got any help from the project as there was no insurance coverage for it. Besides, we had no idea a claim for reparations for accident would ever be made. have no clear idea of the total budget of the project either."

He, however, agreed that Motiur should get all sorts of assistance from the project whether or not there was any formal agreement.

Ebaidul Hague Chand, President of

Rajshahi Chamber of Commerce

and Industry Mohammad Lutfor

Rahman, President of Bangladesh

Oushadh Shilpa Samity SM

Shafiuzzaman and Chairman of

Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity

Amir Hossain Khan.

Business leaders'

Industries (FBCCI).

The letter also said trade and business together with production in mills and factories are being hampered due to frequent hartals, siege and similar agitation programmes. "We need a peaceful environment to carry forward trade and business activities to survive in the competitive global market "

However, the main opposition party stuck to its guns and seemed set to go ahead with its hartal programme unless its 15-point demand, including a demand for an end to violence and corruption, is fulfilled by tomorrow.

About the necessity to withdraw hartal in the country's interest, AL Joint Secretary Obaidul Kader told The Daily Star that his party will actually be serving a greater interest of the nation by enforcing the hartal which he said is aimed at freeing them from the misrule of the BNP-Jamaat coalition government.

"We understand the sufferings of the common people as well as businessmen due to hartal, but it's a temporary sacrifice for the greater well-being of the countrymen." he said urging people to observe the

Signatories to the letter are acting President of the FBCCI Kamaluddin Ahmed, President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fazle RM Hassan, President of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury, President of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters' Association Kazi Moniruzzaman, Chairman of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association MA Awal, President of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries AK Azad, President of Barisal Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Lankan parliament FROM PAGE 12

minimise violence. The caretaker government yesterday called for international observers to ensure free and fair elections amid fears that the snap poll could turn

"We want a free and fair election free of violence," the deputy leader of Wickremesinghe's United National Party, Karu Jayasuriya, told reporters. "On our part we will set an example

Bomb found

FROM PAGE 1 AL, demanded a probe into the

matter Opposition Leader and AL President Sheikh Hasina meanwhile said top leaders of her party have been made targets as part of "killings of and repression on AL leaders and workers that began with the assumption of power by BNP-Jamaat alliance," reports UNB.

"The heinous plan to plant bomb in the public meeting of the general secretary and the organising secretary of country's largest political party has caused alarm to every conscious people," she said in a statement.

"Public meeting, mosque, madrasa, mazar, hospital, cinema hall everywhere there is fear of bomb attack," she said.

Looted money and two brothers Koyes Ahmed and Suej Ahmed have been taken into police custody for interrogation late

Earlier, on January 13, office bearers of the FBCCI met with AL President Sheikh Hasina at her Dhanmondi office in the city and urged her not to enforce any more hartals or agitation programmes to the detriment of the country's economy. Hasina defended AL's position saying when the Bangladesh Nationalist Party was in the opposition, they did not respond to a similar no-hartal call from the then ruling AL. BJMC staff

FROM PAGE 12 jute, adding that top officials down to employees at the lowest level are

purchase and marketing of jute. Jute is inexpensive at the beginning of the season but mill authorities wait until the end of the season to buy it at a much higher price, the minister said.

involved in corrupt practices concerning

To this, the BJMC officials said the money to purchase jute is not adequate and not allocated in time. They said only Tk 50 crore has been allocated this year as opposed to Tk 150 crore last year.

Death threat

FROM PAGE 12 Communist Party (ML-Janajuddha), in an anonymous letter on Saturday, threatened to kill the correspondents of different national and local dailies and electronic media men within a month

Meanwhile, none of the outlaw groups denied authenticity of the

The 11 journalists from yester-

day restricted their movement within the city. Journalists urged the local

administration to track down the sender of the letter

Bablu

FROM PAGE 12

During his visit to the restive hill district yesterday, Mir Mohammed Nasir Uddin, state minister for civil aviation and tourism, told local journalists that the abducted hotelier would be rescued within a day or

"This incident would affect tourism industry in Bandarban as well as the whole of the country," the state minister said.

He visited Hillside Resort and also held a closed-door meeting with top officials of joint forces at Bandarban Circuit House in the afternoon. However, officials present at the meeting kept mum about

Among others, Ma Me Ching, chairman of Bandarban District Council, Bandarban Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Hafizui Rahman Bhuiyan, Superintendent of Bandarban Police Igbal Bahar and Managing Director of Guide Tours Limited and Bablu's elder brother Hasan Mansur Milon, accompanied the state minister during his visit.

Bablu is co-owner and managing director of picturesque Hillside Resort.

Meanwhile, a permanent police camp was set up in the resort area and another would be opened in Chainga soon, official sources said.

7 women barred from boarding **Kuwait-bound** flight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Immigration officials at Zia International Airport (ZIA) barred departure of seven female garment workers by a Qatar Airways flight to Jordan yesterday.

The officials at the ZIA said they arrested the garments workers as they had no NOCs (no objection certificates) from the Directorate of Manpower.

The officials later handed over Majeda Begum, 22, Rizia Begum, 25, Rokeya Bibi, 24, Moyna, 27, Nasima Begum, 21, Aklima Begum, 23, and Yasmin, 21, to Airport police.

Following the arrestees' statements, police arrested broker Nurul Islam, who claimed himself to be a staff of Arman Garments and an expatriate in Jordan and said he has so far sent more than 600 women to Jordan.

Police suspect the women become commercial sex workers in

Jewellers keep

Bangladesh Goldsmith Association. Robbers looted gold and ornaments worth Tk 5.5 crore from Sultana Jewellers and Tk 5 lakh in cash from Mahanagar Jewellers at Karnaphuli Garden City in Dhaka in the early hours of Wednesday.

Earlier, similar robberies were committed in the city's Sunflower, Nabarupa, Mou and Al Raiu Jewellery shops but the perpetrators could not be arrested nor the gold recovered, said leaders of the four associations during a press conference in the city yesterday.

PM

FROM PAGE 12

Senbag would be met soon. The prime minister also inaugurated the annexe of Senbag Upazila Health Complex that was upgraded it a 50-bed hospital from a 31-bed one. She unveiled the plaque of the new building built at a cost of Tk 2.15

CHT Road

FROM PAGE 12

road during the blockade. The PCJSS brought out small processions in the town and pickets were active throughout the day to enforce the blockade.

However, they made no attempt

to disrupt the visit of State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammed Nasir Uddin who went to Bandarban yesterday. On the other hand, Parbattva Gano Parishad held a rally at the

local press club protesting the 48-

hour road blockade in the three hill Our Rangamati Correspondent adds: Parbattya Bangali Chhatra Parishad (PBCP), a student organisation of Bangalee settlers, brought out a peace procession carrying black flags and also held a rally in

JP(E) walks

out

Rangamati town.

FROM PAGE 1 lawmakers to a walkout.

When Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury asked the Chair about the reason for the government restriction on Ershad and his family's visit abroad. Salauddin Quader Chowdhury came up with a rather queer expla-

"While Frshad was president. Morshed Khan (incumbent foreign minister) and I were barred from going abroad. The reason behind the then government's barring us and the one for the recent action are

same.' Chowdhury also asked the Chair to put his explanation on the record of the parliamentary proceedings.

Kader Siddiqui, another opposition lawmaker belonging to Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Janata League, also sought an explanation

The 11th session of the eighth parliament, which has been running without the main opposition Awami League like in three previous sessions, resumed business yesterday after a 10-day Eid recess.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda made fun of Ershad, saying the former military dictator might have been barred from going abroad to ensure the privileges of his spouse (Rawshan Ershad) who is a lawmaker, too, are not curbed. Rawshan Ershad, Ershad's first

wife and a JP lawmaker, was not present at the House. He and his second wife Bidisha and son Eric were to catch a Thai Airways flight on Friday to visit Sri Lanka and the Maldives but the immigration authorities at Zia International Airport barred them from boarding the plane on the

excuse of "instruction from higher

Mars

authorities.

FROM PAGE 12 a key condition for life -- ever existed on the planet.

One reason scientists selected Adirondack for inspection was its relatively dust-free appearance compared to other nearby rocks. The rover's rock abrasion tool first cleaned a circular patch then grinded off the weathered surface.

Data and images from Spirit about the rock were expected to be received from Mars late Saturday.

100 get death, 136 life in 2 years

JS told of speedy trial tribunals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In 50 sensational cases, the speedy trial tribunals have handed down about 100 death sentences and imprisoned at least 136 convicts for life

in nearly two years. Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed gave the figures yesterday in parliament responding to a volley of questions by lawmakers about the government steps on early disposal of cases.

The law minister said until January 25, some 2,801 cases relating to disruption of law and order were disposed of by 73 speedy trial tribunals under the Speedy Trial Act.

Besides, nine speedy trial tribunals, set up to deal with specific offences, disposed of 299 cases until last month. To expedite the cases of on-trial prisoners, particularly women, chil-

government has set up legal aid committees in 61 districts. He said the government has also taken initiatives to provide legal aid to

dren and the elderly who are unable to

get legal aid, the minister said the

on-trial foreign prisoners and quickly settle their cases. Moudud further said a 10-member monitoring cell, headed by the state minister for home, was working to speed up disposal of cases involving

grave offences like murder, rape and

illegal possession of firearms and

explosives. He said the Supreme Court rules have been amended for quick hearing of 'death reference' cases by prepar-

ing the "paper books". The law minister said Bangladesh Judicial Service Commission Rules have been promulgated to separate the judiciary from the executive. The commission would start functioning

'soon', he added **NOPLANTORAISE**

RETIREMENTAGE The government has no immediate plan to raise the retirement age of civil servants. "If the retirement age is extended, the unemployment problem in the country will worsen," said Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Huq, in-charge of the establishment ministry, in parliament.

NO LEAK OF BCS QUESTIONS

In reply to a query, Aminul also said there was questions of the 24th BCS preliminary exams held on February 28 last year were not leaked.

He informed the House that a probe committee did not find any proof

of leak after a five-month inquiry. Media reports of question leak prompted the authorities to cancel the

Firearms flood in

FROM PAGE 1 "Don't you see the roles of other

agencies?" he said. A large chunk of the arms end up in the hands of 'shrimp lords', owners of farms who buy them and arm their gangs to guard the brackish, marshy enclosuers, from 'shrimp pirates' or gangs of the fish looters

who raid farms in fishing seasons. The 'shrimp pirates' and outlaws are also big buyers of the smuggled

The BDR and police personnel,

And officially, they remain 'igno-

stationed on the poorly demarcated borders that run along small rivers and through plains, stand by as smugglers carry arms into Bangladesh.

rant about the gunrunners and their regular routes' **MONEY TALKS** "I'm running arms for over three years, but I've never been challenged by BDR or police who stand close by," a smuggler told this correspondent who approached

him as a buyer in a village in Kaliganj upazila on February 3. The scrawny, short and swarthy young man with sprinkling eyes runs his lucrative business without fear and tells the tale of swimming across the Isamoti with arms amid a

stepped-up BDR watch. "They are our friends, not enemies." he said. "Our money talks." A top BDR official agrees to the suggestion: "The Field Security (FS) of the BDR as well as other intelligence agencies like the NSI (National Security Intelligence) and SB (Special Branch of police) lack honest manpower who would serve

the nation, not the smugglers." People in the bordering villages say Bangladesh arms syndicates have established good networks with their Indian counterparts and share intelligence of the police, BDR and Border Security Force

(BSF), Indian border quards. Rafiqul Islam, superintendent of Satkhira police, said it was tough to check influx of arms through the Satkhira border, stretching from Kolaroa to the Sundarbans mangrove forest, with the inadequate

number of police and BDR personnel. "When we get information, we raid and try to arrest the smugglers,"

Smugglers of essentials including sugar, clothes and onions also work as small-time gunrunners. Local residents, watching operations of smugglers for years, say a section of people has emerged as

negotiate the bribe deals between smugglers and law enforcers. BDR personnel and the middlemen count the number of smugglers

middlemen on the borders who

share' "The police and BRD men never mind what the smugglers carry, they just care for their money," said a man, believed to be close to a smuggling racket.

ARMS TRAVEL BY BUS

in line with the agreement to ensure

that no other people cross the

border without giving them 'their

carry the arms to Dhaka and elsewhere," said the gunrunner whom this correspondent approached posing as a buyer. "Once I used to supply machines

"Strapping firearms to our body, we

(arms) to a dealer in Lalmatia in the capital who gave me shelter and bought me security there." He said five of his firearms, carrying a street value of Tk 1.2 lakh, were seized by the Criminal

Investigation Department of police from a computer shop at Kazipara in Dhaka last month. He said he also supplied at least

seven firearms to the landless in Satkhira. Some 5.000 of the landless. locally called as Bhumihins, settled on about 6,500 bighas of government land in Kaligani and Debhata upazilas in Satkhira in 1998 and

shrimp farms owners say they have taken 'shrimp piracy' as a living. Local residents say gunrunners mainly smuggle four types of firearms into Bangladesh: Kamare or Chhakka, pistols made by blacksmiths or in iron workshops or local engineering workshops; Auto-Nakka, a revolver with a nine-room magazine; Double-shutter gun, used to hit a short-range target by pulling half the bolt and a distant

target by pulling the full bolt; and seven-gear sawn-off rifle. Sources close to gunrunners say a Chakka sells at about Tk 3,500 in Satkhira and at about Tk 5,000 in Dhaka and a Nakka sells at about Tk 12,000 to 13,000 in West Bengal, at about Tk 35.000 to Tk 40.000 in

Satkhira and at about Tk 50,000 to Tk 55,000 in Dhaka. A shutter gun carries a street value of about Tk 1.500 to 1.800 in India and at about Tk 4.000 in Bangladesh, A seven-gear sawn-off rifle sells at about Tk 18.000 in Satkhira and at about Tk 45,000 in

facturing engineering workshops have thrived in small bordering towns in India, keeping an eye on Bangladesh markets. Gangs also buy arms from

Ghatakpukur and Rajarhat in

Kolkata and from Bardhaman for

sale in Bangladesh.

They said scores of arms manu-

Hide traders face

want us to sell hides on credit instead of cash payments. If they make further delays in coming in, we

are bound for huge losses, as

rawhides can't be stored for more than 25 days," he said. Nurul Islam, another leading hide trader, informed that hide bills of nearly Tk 8 crore had been lying unpaid from last year with the tannery owners.

Fearing further price-falls, most

of the small traders are selling off

their stocks at throw away prices to avoid major loss while the bigger houses are still awaiting buyers from the tanneries A section of local traders are also

allegedly smuggling out large quantities of rawhides to India through various border points of Raishahi.

Akramul Hasan, general secretary of the local Hide Traders' Welfare Fund, said Natore market supplied roughly 35 percent of the country's hides. This year some 300 have bought at least 60,000 cowhides and some 80,000 goat-hides, he informed At Natore hide market vesterday.

this correspondent found all the traders, hoarders and middlemen waiting for buyers. "We are in for trouble. It's very unusual that this year we haven't received a single buyer in the last six days after the Eid," Natore Hide

Traders' Group Vice President Babul Pramanik observed. M Forhad, who brought 99 pieces of goat-hides and 38 cow-hides from Chatmohor in Pabna, suffered a loss of Tk 1,600 from selling the goat-hides to a local hoarder. "If I fail to make profit from

Sunil Kumar who came to Natore market three days ago with 107 goat-hides and 67 cowhides from Kushtia is yet to find any customer. Jahrul of Sirajganj

the cowhides, I will definitely be

Asaduzzaman Masud of Rajshah and many others are facing the

Kerosene

Mosharraf said, admitting that a 40 percent rationing has been main-

shortage. previous practice of one month's.

lowest bidders.

Bangladesh embassy in the Netherlands to appoint a lawyer to represent Bangladesh in the case. But it was not possible due to a very tight schedule. Now, facing the immediacy of the verdict, Bangladesh will try to reach an

the education ministry said yesterday.