

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 Talibari in Choudagram of Comilla yesterday 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

Choudagram 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 3:00pm.

Saifuddin, 12, and Jewel, 10, reportedly hailed from Kachuya in Chandpur and Chandina in Comilla, died on the spot, while the injured were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital and Mastan Nagar Hospital.

Police seized the bus but could not arrest the driver. A case 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

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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 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, Rafique Ali Shah, Abbas Ali Shah, Shahin Shah, Momin Shah, Fayed Shah, Jabbar Shah, Faruk Shah, Futu, Forhad, Fazli and Formajul.

OUTLAWCLAIM

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-Lal Potaka).

"We have killed Gama," one of the

journalists quoted the caller as saying.

The deputy minister described the killing as a handwork of the main opposition AL and said: "I declared Natore as free from crime two years ago and the murder was committed to deny 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 20 AL workers over the murder: Fazul 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 murder."

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

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crone as grant for introducing computer courses at secondary and higher secondary levels in 3,362 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 Amsterdam-based 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 company.

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 training.

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 Faruk 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 Faruk: "We wrote to the 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 amicable solution through diplomatic efforts, so as to maintain existing bilateral relations, a senior official at the education ministry said yesterday.

"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.

Kerosene

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Mosharrarf said, admitting that a 40 percent rationing has been maintained 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 shortage."

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 previous practice of one month's.

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 lowest bidders.

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 Saturday.

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

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

Ekushey book fair

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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 Iqbal 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 theories'.

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.

FTA deal

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multiple visas and undertake studies on the introduction of BIMST-EC business card.

Foreign Minister M Morshed 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 FTA accord.

Bangladesh pulled out of the FTA talks Saturday, demanding compensation for any revenue loss resulting from dropping of tariffs, ignoring other members' assurances that its concerns could be addressed within the agreement.

Commerce ministry officials said Bangladesh'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 meeting, who was forced to stay back home due to illness. Tariff Commission Chairman MA Taslim led the commerce ministry team.

"As per provision, only the commerce 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 evening."

The framework agreement stipulates preferential treatment including suitable timeframes for tariff reduction for the least developed 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 reduction.

Nepal and Bhutan have recently joined the originally five-member grouping formed in 1997.

Tariffs would begin to be reduced in mid-2006, with products designated for 'fast-track' treatment to be traded on a zero-tariff basis by mid-2009 for the three developed members -- India, Sri Lanka and Thailand -- and by mid-2011 for the poorer members -- Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar.

The negotiations on trade in goods under the framework agreement would begin in July next.

Kerry

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America," Kerry said at a state party dinner in Richmond, Virginia, where he lashed out at Bush for running an "extreme administration" and said the "Bush attack machine" would not be able to smear him.

"They're extreme. We're mainstream -- and we're going to stand up and fight back," said Kerry, who leads Bush in several national polls.

Rivals kill

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through the residential area after the double murder," said a phaeton driver, who would not give his name for security reasons.

"The killing was the result of intra-party rivalry," said Deputy Commissioner (South) Ali Akbar of Khulna Metropolitan Police.

The death of the two from Rupsha upazila brought the number of killings to 10 in the district since mid-January.

The victims include union parishad (UP) chairman Amir Azam Khan, Awami League leader Manjur Morshed Labu and UP member Kobbad Shaikh.

DU student's date

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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 Shibtoosh 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 rescue him.

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 treatment.

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 Kairy then sent for several costly medical tests. The patient was also injected with several antibiotics. But his infection did not go.

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. I 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.

Business leaders'

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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 strike.

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

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minimise violence.

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

"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 and follow the rules."

Bomb found

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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

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and two brothers Koyes Ahmed and Suej Ahmed have been taken into Suez custody for interrogation late Saturday night.

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 Jordan.

Jewellers keep

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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 Raju 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

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Senbag would be met soon.

The prime minister also inaugurated the annexe of Senbag Upazila Health Complex that was upgraded to 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 lakh.

CHT Road

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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, Parbatya Gano Parishad held a rally at the local press club protesting the 48-hour road blockade in the three hill districts.

Our Ranganamati Correspondent adds: Parbatya Bangali Chhatra Parishad (PBPC), a student organisation of Bangalee settlers, brought out a peace procession carrying black flags and also held a rally in Ranganamati town.

JP(E) walks out

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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 explanation.

"While Ershad 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 for the bar.

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 authorities."

Mars

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, children and the elderly who are unable to get legal aid, the minister said the government has set up legal aid committees in 61 districts.

He said the government has also taken initiatives to provide legal aid to 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.