

Gas pipeline scam

FROM PAGE 1
Planning Division of Titas Gas company, found pipes installed half a metre below the surface where these were supposed to be placed 2.5 metres below.

Again, at many places, the contractors dumped several feet of soil over the pipes laid just below the surface of the ground to meet this criterion. The flawed design of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited (TGTDCL) itself gave scope for contractors to resort to such evil practice.

Contractors even did not maintain a one-foot distance between two parallel pipes at some points, observed the parliamentarians, who included Sardar Shakhawat Hossain Bokul and Illias Ali.

There is no evidence of mechanical construction although Titas 'filtered out' many contractors on the grounds that the whole work should be done mechanically. Mechanical construction also 'justified' Titas' doubling of the project cost to Tk 60 crore.

On seeing the construction works Petrobangla Chairman SR Osmani could not help questioning how Titas could approve such risky design.

Meanwhile, a Petrobangla investigation committee submitted its report two days ago stating that the pipeline construction poses serious safety problems. It found fault with the project design, cost assessment as well as field inspectors and contractors and recommended ensuring that the contractors undertake remedial measures at their own expense.

The report stated the energy ministry refused to give the committee another investigation report filed a year before on the ground that it was 'classified'.

Pressed by the parliamentary standing committee and because of The Daily Star reports on the issue, Petrobangla and Titas also issued show cause notices against 14 high officials asking them to explain why departmental action would not be taken against them.

The officials are S M Anwaruzzaman, former MD of Titas and now GM of Petrobangla, MA Baset, former MD of Titas and currently MD of BAPEX, Shafiqur Rahman, deputy general manager (DGM), Petrobangla, Rana Akbar Haidary, deputy manager (planning), Titas, Abdur Rois Syddique, GM of Gas Transmission Company Ltd, Mahbubur Rahman, GM (planning), Titas, Amir Ahmed, former DGM of pipeline construction department of Titas, Kaosar Azizur Rahman, GM, marketing, Titas, Manjur Morshed Talukdar, MD of GTCL, Khurshid Hasan, GM, Service, Titas, Obaydullah, GM, LPR, Titas, Jalaluddin Bhuyan, secretary, Titas,

AQM Selim, GM (administration), Titas, and Mukhlesur Rahman, former GM, Titas.

However, the name of one Petrobangla director, who was serving as MD of Titas when the project was conceived in '98-'99 -- has been dropped for mysterious reasons. Sources said the director is close to the state minister.

The Daily Star last month reported that corrupt officials dou-

bled the project cost to Tk 60 crore and contractors began construction of the 109-km pipeline from Joydevpur to Mirpur Bridge and another 101-km pipeline from Kaliakoir to Garai Industrial area from October.

Although the contract was officially given to two companies, in reality nine companies are sharing the tasks and 'spoils', insiders said. Profit shares are also allegedly going to a certain bhaban to ensure political backing in favour of the corrupt officials.

Late in 2002, when the project's tenders were being awarded to two companies, the then energy secretary smelt a rat in the deal and conducted an investigation. Although the investigation found massive irregularities and recommended scrapping of the deal, state minister Mosharraf Hossain did not allow re-tendering or any action against the officials involved.

When the parliamentary standing committee at a meeting a couple of weeks ago proposed all the committee members make spot visits to see the pipeline project, Mosharraf Hossain refused to be a party to it. He is also a member of this committee.

No headway in Ctg customs official murder case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Law enforcers in Chittagong, till last evening, failed to make any headway in the Wednesday killing of Mokhter Hossain Afrad, a customs appraiser.

The 38 years old victim might have been killed due to personal feud over money transaction and enmity with colleagues over revenue collection, police suspect.

One Swapon, charged as an accused in the murder of Mokhtar's domestic help, might be involved in the killing, police added.

Unidentified assailants shot the customs official near his Halishahar residence in the port city at around 7:30pm. He died on way to hospital.

His wife Sultana Islam Sheela filed a case with Halishahar Police Station.

Organising a protest rally yesterday, officials and employees at Chittagong Customs House demanded immediate arrest and punishment to those involved in the killing.

Meanwhile, Mokhtar's body was sent to his village home at Akenagari in Monahardi under Narsingdi after autopsy, family sources said.

2 killed, 5 injured in Bogra road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Two people were killed and five others injured in a road accident at Baghpora in Bogra on Wednesday.

A speeding Rangpur-bound bus smashed into a tempo on Bogra-Rangpur highway at about 9:00pm, killing Hamidul, son of Monsur Ali, on the spot and injuring six others, police said.

Wounded Rafiqui, 32, Jadu, 30, Alamgir, 35, Khailur Rahman, 36, Belal Uddin, 30, and Zillur Rahman, 32, were admitted to Mohammad Ali Hospital in Bogra, hospital sources said.

Zillur succumbed to his injuries at about 10:00pm, they added.

A case was lodged with Bogra Police Station.

Altaf

FROM PAGE 1
Kader Siddiqui rejected the home minister's statement as untrue and staged a walkout in protest.

Altaf, however, regretted the 'isolated' incident in which Saber and Ahsanullah Master were injured and called it unfortunate.

Describing the incident in which the two AL leaders were injured, he said a section of unruly Awami League activists carrying sticks attacked some vehicles on the Rajuk Avenue in the morning.

"On-duty policemen tried to refrain them from creating anarchy for the security of innocent passengers. But the unruly pickets attacked police who were compelled to charge batons to disperse them," he said.

At one stage, he added, Saber and Ahsanullah fell on the road and sustained injury.

"Immediately afterwards, we inquired about the incident. The injured also received medical treatment," he said.

"The four-party government of Khaleda Zia doesn't believe in the politics of having politicians beaten by police. The present government respects honour and dignity of the politicians," he said.

The home minister said police are always alert to protect life and property of the people. "Police will not remain silent if anyone tries to create anarchy and unrest."

The minister also elaborated on other scattered incidents that took place in different parts of the capital during the dawn-to-dusk general strike enforced by the main opposition Awami League.

Gono Forum, Workers Party talk agitation

UNB, Dhaka

Gono Forum (GF) and Workers Party (WP) yesterday reached consensus on intensifying the ongoing anti-government movement by uniting all democratic, progressive and non-communal groups and forces.

"The BNP-Jamaat coalition government has pushed the country to such an intolerable situation that people want to get rid of it," the two parties observed at a meeting held at the residence of GF President Dr Kamal Hossain.

Leaders of the two parties also discussed overall situation of the country and latest state of the anti-government movement.

Dr Kamal invited the Workers Party to the national convention of Oikya Prochesta (effort for unity) scheduled for March 14.

Apart from Dr Kamal, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik and Adv Zahurul Islam of Gono Forum and WP President Rashed Khan Menon, General Secretary Bimal Biswas, politbuo members Fazley Hossain Badsha and Mahmudul Hasan attended the meeting.

Bird flu

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HSN1 virus.

"We have to conduct random checks on these birds nationwide and will kill those testing positive," Environment Minister Prapat Panyachatraksa told reporters.

Of the five Thai deaths, four were boys between the ages of six and seven. The other was a 58-year-old woman.

The human victims are believed to have caught the disease from contact with sick chickens, but fears persist that the bird flu virus could combine with a human flu virus and mutate into a deadly disease that could be passed between people.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says it expects more people to be infected by the virus beyond Vietnam and Thailand.

The U.N. agency criticised afflicted countries Tuesday for putting business before human health in the fight against bird flu. It said Thailand, the world's fourth largest chicken exporter, may be rushing to declare its outbreak over.

But Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak rejected the charge, saying the government, which plans to clear the last of 163 "red zones" this week, had not acted recklessly.

Somkid said the government would continue its mass cull if new infections were found in former red zones -- the five-km (three-mile) areas around confirmed outbreaks within which the government ordered the slaughter of all poultry.

"I think we can contain the outbreak for now," Somkid said.

"If we find positive results from the second round of tests on animals due this Sunday, we will do the same as we did last time," Somkid said referring to mass culling.

11 banks

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Islamic, City, NCCBL, Prime Bank, Dhaka Bank, Dutch-Bangla, First Security and Standard have reduced their deposit rates by as much 0.5 to 0.275 percentage points.

The banks, however, did not lower lending rates for agriculture and small industry despite the government and BB recommendations. In fact, the Standard Bank has even increased their agriculture loan rates by 4 percentage points.

The lending rates for agriculture sector of most banks hover between 10 and 14 percentage points. However, the Pubali, Arab-Bangladesh Bank and One Bank are lending agri loans at 8 percent-age points.

Meanwhile, all banks have started to set export loan rates at 7 percent, down a 2 to 3 percentage points.

BRTC service

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Gabtoli-Kalabagan route, which proved a loss for the corporation, the chairman added.

Plans are on to make three more major roads rickshaw-free next year. They are Protagi Sarani to Mouchak, Bangla Motor to Mouchak and Rokeya Sarani to Farmgate.

Mirpur Road stretching from Gabtoli to Russel Square was made off-limits to rickshaws on December 20, 2002.

Kerosene supply

FROM PAGE 12
to adulterate the essential fuel.

Our Khulna correspondent adds: The prices of kerosene are soaring in the industrial city where a litre sold at Tk 24, up from Tk 16 yesterday.

Retailers accused wholesalers of creating an artificial crisis and selling kerosene at high prices on the black market.

According to BPC's regional office in Khulna, the depot has a stock of about 48 lakh litres for the region that needs no more than 4 lakh litres a day. The BPC distributes it through 250 dealers and agents.

"We can scrape through 12 days with our stock," a BPC official said.

Over 100 wounded

FROM PAGE 1
Rajuk Avenue. Saber, also the AL organising secretary, and Ahsanullah, the general secretary of the Jatiya Sramik League, fell to the ground unconscious in police beating attempting to rescue demonstrators under police attack.

An autorickshaw of a newspaper on hartal duty ferried seriously injured Saber and Ahsanullah Master to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Master was given several stitches in the head.

Motihheel commercial hub became a battlefield during the 20-minute clash with the demonstrators throwing stones at police. The clash left at least 25 people injured.

The AL leaders alleged that some ruling alliance activists from roadside buildings hurled at least three bombs and stones at the procession when the demonstrators came under police attack.

Police swooped also on a procession taken out from the AL headquarters at Bangabandhu Avenue and spearheaded by former minister Motia Chowdhury, former Dhaka mayor Mohammad Hanif and ex-state minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Mayaa at about 1:30pm.

Motia and several others were beaten up when they tried to proceed through the barbed-wire fences police had put up.

Police went into action to quell anti-govt demonstrations in the city's Mirpur area, Shahbagh crossing, near the AL headquarters at Bangabandhu Avenue, Jatrabari roundabout and other places.

At Mirpur, at least 30 people and some policemen were injured when police charged baton on hartal supporters, prompting them to rain bricks-bats on police at about 10:20am.

Police cordoned a wayside rally of a few hundred Awami League, Jubo League and Mohila League activists. They swung into action when some activists from the rally threw stones at a public bus that was passing by. Some of the stones also hit policemen, according to witnesses.

The retreating pickets, some of

10 hurt

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and politics, and five unidentified others were injured. They were treated at the JU Medical Centre.

Police rushed there and fired five times in the air to disperse the students. They picked up two villagers.

The angry students left the area at around 7:00pm after policemen, who were deployed there 10 minutes to the beginning of the rampage, assured them of arresting those who attacked the students.

The students blocked the road that goes through the campus to connect Genua to Dhaka-Aricha highway.

Some villagers alleged General Secretary of Jatiyatatabadi Chhatra Dal Harunur Rashid assaulted a villager yesterday morning and the villagers made the attack to avenge the assault.

Police inspector

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refused. Then he rose from his seat to sit by me and fell down on the ground," he added.

Sayeed was rushed to nearby Al-Razi Hospital and later shifted to National Heart Foundation Hospital (NHFH) where doctors declared him dead at 11:15am.

Dr Shamim at the NHFH said the police personnel might have died of cardiac failure.

Police said the deceased earlier suffered a mild heart attack.

Sayeed, hailing from Kalihati upazila of Tangail, joined police service in 1979.

ROK scientists

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the genetic material inside them.

The lead scientist, veterinary cloning specialist Woo Suk Hwang, will unveil the research Thursday at a meeting of the American Academy for the Advancement of Science. Details will be published in the journal Science.

whom had already taken shelter in Mohona, the local AL office, and in nearby lanes, started raining brickbats on the law enforcers. Police fired three teargas canisters to disperse the demonstrators.

Some of the injured were taken to hospital while some others were given first-aid inside the AL local office. The hartal supporters vandalised at least three passenger buses.

After the incident, police besieged the AL office confining more than 100 AL activists including former MP Kamal Ahmed Majumder and Jubo League General Secretary Mainul Islam Khan Nikhil.

Earlier, police scuffled with women AL activists at the same place and clubbed some of them when a Jubo League procession just behind them threw stones at some buses.

Police also used batons to disperse a BCL gathering at Shahbagh intersection, leaving some 25 injured. The law enforcers, both male and female, assaulted female workers of AL's student wing, Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) at Shahbagh and dragged at least nine to police van.

Police also beat up BCL demonstrators staging a sit-in at Shahbagh when some of them tried to damage an autorickshaw. BCL leader Syed Abul Kalam was admitted to the DMCH in a critical condition.

There were also sporadic police attacks on pro-hartal activists near the AL headquarters till morning when the opposition activists tried to demonstrate on the streets breaking police barricades.

Frontline AL leaders also demonstrated near the Russell Square at Dhannoddi during the hartal hours.

At least six AL activists were injured, one of them seriously, at Kolaroa of Sathkira when the ruling BNP activists attacked on a procession during the hartal, sources and witnesses said.

Seven people were injured in Chittagong where the hartal otherwise passed off peacefully.

On hearing the news that Relief and Social Welfare Secretary Nazma Rahman was arrested in Dhaka, agitated AL activists in Narayanganj set fire to a tempo and vandalised several other vehicles.

Hartal passed peacefully in Barisal, Bogra, Gopalganj, Habiganj, Noakhali, and industrial city of Khulna without untoward incidents.

Political leaders

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newspersons, the police actions trampled democratic norms and were a flagrant violation of the right to protest the constitution guarantees.

"They (the government) should apologise for such attacks," he observed. Badruddoza, who is now forging an alternative political platform, refused to comment on the possibility to form an anti-government alliance with the AL.

A renowned physician, Badruddoza also examined the medical reports of the injured. He reached the hospital by an ambulance at 4:05pm and stayed there until 4:25pm.

Jatiya Party (Manju) Secretary General Sheikh Shahidul Islam, Communist Party of Bangladesh President Manjurul Ahsan Khan and its General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim, Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) leader Abu Hossain Babla and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal leaders Moinduddin Khan Badal and Syed Zafar Sajjad also visited the injured AL leaders and condemned the attacks.

Earlier in the afternoon, hundreds of leaders and activists of the AL and its front organisations rushed to the DMCH on hearing the news of injuries of their leaders.

Hospital sources said six opposition leaders, including Saber and Ahsanullah, are now undergoing treatment at the DMCH.

The other hospitalised are Bangladesh Chhatra League President Liaqot Ali Sikder, its leaders Syed Abul Kalam, Shahinur and female activist Azmin Lucky. Ten other injured were kept under observation at the hospital.

FBCCI blames politics

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because of conflict between the two main political parties [ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and opposition Awami League (AL)]." he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mintoo said his organisation would demand decentralisation of executive power as at present it was too much concentrated in the prime minister. "We want the government to exert power in a transparent way. We want the judiciary to be independent and parliamentarians to have freedom of expression and play their due roles. We want transparency in governance."

"With 30 percent of the population unemployed and 50 percent below the poverty line, we can no longer afford the luxury of the conflict between the two parties that is responsible for all this mess," he added.

In the face of continuing slide in law and order in recent days, different associations threatened to go for tough programmes if the government failed to safeguard their life and property from criminals. They also warned of stopping tax payments if the slide in law and order continued.

On Wednesday, a team of 30 leaders of Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity, the country's apex body of shop-owners, met Home Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury at his office and expressed grave concern over the recent rise in killing, toll, extortion and abduction of businessmen and their family members.

They told the minister that they would watch law and order for another week before launching a tough movement.

Two businessmen were killed in the

city last Monday.

Mostafa Kamal, 35, a travel agent, was killed in the afternoon at his office on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in Tejaoga in a hail of bullets, apparently over refusal to pay tolls. In reaction, members of Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue Traders Association asked the association's president Abul Khaer Bhuiyan Tuesday to take measures to prevent recurrence of such incidents in the area.

The second victim was Anwar Hossain Babul, 40, treasurer of Mirpur Benarasi Tanti Samity and a contractor, who was shot dead in the evening on Zoo Road in Rainkhola. Traders of three Mirpur wards kept shops closed Tuesday and Wednesday demanding arrest and trial of the killers.

Four jewellers' associations observed daylong strike in the capital last Saturday protesting the deterioration of law and order. They gave the government a 72-hour ultimatum to recover gold jewellery worth around Tk 5.5 crore looted from Kamaphuli Garden City on February 4.

A number of kidnappings of mag-nates occurred in Chittagong during the last few months. On July 24 last year, Jamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury was kidnapped; no-one knows his fate. On August 8, the body of abducted shipping magnate Rezaur Rahman Zakir was retrieved from roadside. During the Eid-ul-Azha vacation, businessman Nasiruddin bought his freedom in Chittagong, reportedly paying a ransom of Tk 10 lakh. Another businessman, Bablu, was kidnapped in Bandarban during the Eid holiday.

BSF kills 2, abducts 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) killed two Bangladeshi nationals in Chuadanga and kidnapped another in Sylhet on Wednesday.

In Chuadanga, the BSF men opened fire on Abdur Rahim, 35, and Ahsan Habib, 35, on Thakurpur border under Damurhuda upazila as they allegedly tried to cross the border at midnight, according to UNB.

Rahim was shot in the head while Habib in the abdomen. They died on the spot and the BSF personnel took away their bodies.

When contacted, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) officials confirmed the incident and said they were communicating with the BSF to bring back the bodies.

In Sylhet, the Indian border guards kidnapped a Bangladeshi from Dalia Khola border under Jointapur upazila.

Locals said the BSF men picked up Abdul Kadir, 25, of Bairkhal village at gunpoint while he was working in his land at noon.

BDR sent a letter to its Indian counterpart protesting the incident.

Spring comes

FROM PAGE 1
amid joys of regeneration in life and the nature.

As usual, daylong pageantry of celebrations has been arranged at Bakultala on the Institute of Fine Arts premises of Dhaka University to hail the season of life.

Jatiya Basanto Utsav Udjapan Parishad (National Spring Festival Observance Committee) has arranged the 'Basanto Utsav-1410' to welcome the Bengali month of Faigun.

The celebrations will begin at 7am and continue into the night. Channel-I will telecast live the morning mirth of the festival.

Renowned singers like Kiron Chandra Roy, Rezwana Chowdhury Banna, Sahin Samad, Mahmud Selim, Laisa Ahmed Lisa, Timir Nandi, Mita Haque, Shamya Rahman, Salma Akbar, Nargis Chowdhury and Bulbul Islam will render solo songs at the carnival.

Vaskar Bandapadhaya, Rupa Chakraborty, Shimul Mustafa, Ashrafal Alam, Laila Afroz and Laila Tarannum Chowdhury will take part in the poetry-recitation programme.

Kabi Shamsur Rahman, Wahidul Haque, Shafiuddin Ahmed and Kazi Arif will attend the festival.

Another hartal

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governance," Jalil added.

He blamed the government for attacking AL leaders and activists during yesterday's hartal.

Jalil further alleged that the government had the houses of the opposition politicians raided a week before yesterday's hartal. Leaders and workers were also arrested, he said.

Before the meeting, Hasina visited Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) to see the injured party leaders including her Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury.

Addressing an impromptu gathering at the DMCH, she dubbed the attacks on her party leaders and workers as barbaric and termed the BNP-led coalition as a 'jungle government.'

Man kills self

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Mohan Tripura, 8, died from the wounds, police added.

"All the family members were found lying in a pool of blood in the morning," local Union Parishad Chairman MK Azad said quoting Padmabati, a niece of the killer, as saying.

Seven-year old son Samiran Tripura, the only surviving family member in the gruesome incident, was admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) in critical condition. He underwent an operation in the afternoon, hospital sources said.

Police suspect the grim incident took place after Kasam returned home drunk late in the night only to develop an altercation with his wife.

However, locals believed some criminal gang was involved in the gory incident.

Recovering the bodies in the morning, police sent those to the CMCH for autopsy.

Two separate cases were lodged.

Queen Sofia

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headquarters for Mirpur tomorrow. She will stay at Hotel Sonargaon.

On Sunday, Queen Sofia will go to Comilla to see Grameen Bank's activities. She will also visit Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development there.

The other dignitaries who are coming to attend the summit include Zanele Mbeki, first lady of South Africa, Telefoni, deputy prime minister of Samoa, Ishrat Hussian, governor of State Bank of Pakistan, Firivana Khanthaphane, state minister of Laos, Moulana Ibrahim, deputy governor of Bank of Indonesia, Ram Babu Pant, deputy governor of Rastra Bank of Nepal, Sharad Pawar, parliament member and an influential political leader of India, QAAMA Rahim, secretary general of Saarc (South Asia Association for Regional Co-operation), and Phrang Roy, assistant president of International Fund for Agricultural Development.

Doctors face

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cancellation of their licences under the new law.

"The existing rules are not strong enough to prove offence of any private clinic or diagnostic centre. The best we can do is to bring charges against those clinics for malpractice and serve them with showcause notices," said Dr Md Rashid, director of Hospital and Clinic at the Directorate of Health Services (DGHS).

Private medical practitioners reject the Private Clinic Ordinance 1982 because it was formulated during the autocratic rule of former president HM Ershad.

The law proposes that all medical services post a chart of fees. It also stipulates that doctors have to follow the existing fees for private consultation -- Tk 40 a visit and Tk 20 for each follow-ups -- until a new schedule is set.

The Bangladesh Private Medical Practitioners Association (BPMMA), however, disputes some of the clauses of the proposed law and refuses to endorse it unless the clauses are changed.

"We strongly oppose the idea of law suits against medical practitio-

ners. We already have a body to monitor allegations of malpractice, negligence and other violations. Why ignore the BMDC and allow lawsuits against doctors?" asked Dr Muniruzzaman Bhuiyan, president of the BPMMA.

On the suspension of the BMDC's committee dealing with complaints, Dr Munir said, "The BMDC has a group of experts who are able to pass judgement on malpractice or negligence. So as long as we have that mechanism, why not force the government to make it functional?"

About fixed rates of fees or private consultation, Dr Munir said, "In the open-market system there is no justification of having fixed rates."

He also said the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) and the BPMMA welcome initiatives that bring discipline to the sector, but the doctors must be consulted.

3 more held on charge of Ctg robbery

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday arrested three more people in connection with the robbery in the Chittagong Chamber building in the early hours of Wednesday.

Detectives and Double Mooring police jointly conducted raids in Agrabad, and Kadamtoli areas and nabbed the three.