

Traffic deptt helpless to reckless driving, overloading

Political interference, lack of resources blamed

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Traffic officials ahead of nationwide traffic week beginning from Monday said they are unable to prevent reckless driving and overloading on highways due to political interference and lack of resources. Officials at the city's Mohammadpur office yesterday said most officers decline to prosecute offenders, especially buses and trucks, as they fear unruly transport workers might retaliate by blocking the highways. A traffic sergeant at the office said he receives calls from different political quarters or even his senior officers the moment he detains

trucks and buses to let go the offenders. "The bulk of the transport sector belongs to influential quarters that include politicians, ministers, government and police officials and business magnates," he said, "I don't want to invite problems by offending those people." The officials held reckless driving and overloading responsible for huge loss of lives, properties and limbs. According to Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights, 2,496 persons were killed in road accidents and thousands were injured in 2003. They said an ever-increasing

number of overloaded trucks are fast damaging highways and bridges built with millions in foreign aid. Officials at the Traffic Inspector's office yesterday said they do not dare stop an overloaded truck at night, as there are many instances when unruly drivers ran over sergeants. Drivers and owners of trucks at Tejgaon truck terminal yesterday alleged that police are too busy earning millions from extortion in the transport sector. "We pay police regularly and expect some immunity from law,"

Benapole port paralysed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Export-import activities at Benapole land port came to a halt yesterday due to an indefinite strike enforced by four trade organisations. Benapole Transport Owners' Association, C & F Agents' Association, Importers and Exporters Association and C&F Agents Employees Union have given the strike call to press home their several demands including keeping cranes and forklifts in operation at the port round the clock. The leaders of the organisations have said that loading and unloading of imported machineries are being hampered as most of the cranes and forklifts remain inoperative at the port. They have alleged indifferent attitude of the government although Benapole land port contributes to revenue earning of over Tk 1000 crore annually. "We shall go for a tougher movement if our demands are not met," said Mozibur Rahman, general secretary of Benapole C&F Agents' Association.

Sajek no more forlorn



A bulldozer clears trees to make way for the road to Sajek. An army team supervises the work to connect the remote union to Khagrachhari town.

The most inaccessible area in the hill tracts gets a road built by the army

ABDULLAH -AL MAHMUD, back from Sajek in Rangamati

Sajek till recently was a forlorn, most inaccessible area in Bangladesh. Now a road runs to this union under Baghaichhari thana in Rangamati, linking the people to the mainstream Khagrachhari. The Baghaichhari-Massalong-Sajek (BMS) Road, completed on January 29, promises better days for the locals, mostly indigenous people.

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PIPELINE SCAM Titas withdraws four officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd (TGTDCL) yesterday withdrew four officials from two pipeline construction schemes for duty negligence. The officials are Anisuzzaman, manager of Pipeline Construction Department, Shafiqur Rahman, manager, Hamidul Islam, assistant technical officer and Mushfiqur Rahman Khan, sub-assistant engineer. Contractors in collusion with some Titas high officials have been allegedly siphoning off at least Tk 30 crore from the over-priced Tk 60 crore pipeline schemes, dubbed as Bangabandhu Bridge Approach Road Pipeline Project. During a visit recently, the parliamentary standing committee on energy also brought similar allegations finding glaring negligence by the TGTDCL.



Workers dig away at a hill at Sylhet's Haripur in broad daylight making a mockery of stringent environment protection laws confined within the statute books.

PHOTO: STAR

CIA was given data on hijacker long before 9/11

REUTERS, *New York*

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was given the first name and telephone number of one of the September 11 hijackers two and a half years before the attacks on New York and Washington, according to a report. German intelligence officials gave the CIA the first name and telephone number of Marwan al-Shehhi in 1999 and asked the Americans to track him, according to Tuesday's New York Times.

Al-Shehhi was determined to have piloted United Airlines flight 175 into the south tower of the World Trade Centre, the report said. The attacks which destroyed the World Trade Centre, damaged the Pentagon and crashed into a Pennsylvania field claimed about 3,000 lives. The name and phone number in the United Arab Emirates were obtained by the Germans by monitoring the telephone of Mohamed Heidar Zammar, an Islamic militant in Hamburg who was closely linked to the al Qaeda plotters who masterminded the September 11 attacks, the Times said, citing German officials. But after the Germans passed the information on to the CIA, they did not hear from the Americans about the matter until after September 11, the story said, citing a senior German intelligence official. The CIA decided that "Marwan" SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

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Iraqi elections could be held within a year: UN

REUTERS, *United Nations*

The United Nations said credible elections for a permanent Iraq government could be held in early 2005 if preparations began immediately. In a report issued by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that the UN Security Council was set to discuss yesterday, the United Nations said elections needed at least eight months after a legal framework was in place. "If the work was started immediately, and the required political consensus was reached fairly rapidly, it would be possible to hold elections by the end of 2004," said the report, released on Monday. But the report, written by Annan's senior adviser, Lakhdar Brahimi, who spent a week in Iraq earlier this month, said that it would probably take until May to make preparations and then a minimum of eight months after that to organise elections. Brahimi called for an "autonomous and independent" Iraqi electoral commission to be established "without further delay" to begin SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Bomb explosion kills 2, injures another in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

A bomb explosion killed two youths and injured one at Giletala Madhyapara in Khulna yesterday. The blast killed Belal, 20, and Russell, 22, on the spot and injured Sumon, 24, who were making bombs at an abandoned house at about noon, witnesses said. The injured fled the area in a baby-taxi, they added. Two bombs and huge bomb-making materials including potassium, sulphur and gunpowder were recovered from the place, police said. The trio had various criminal records with different police stations in Khulna, police added.

al-Qaeda warns of more attacks on US

REUTERS, *Dubai*

A top al-Qaeda leader warned President Bush in an audiotape broadcast yesterday to prepare for more attacks on the United States. In the tape aired by Al-Jazeera television, Ayman al-Zawahiri said: "Bush, strengthen your defenses and your security measures for the Muslim nation which sent you the legion of New York and Washington has determined to send you legion after legion seeking death and paradise."

Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's right-hand man, also appeared yesterday to single out France in its league of enemies, accusing Paris of displaying "Crusader hatred" toward Islam by banning Muslim headscarves from state classrooms. By turning on France in an audiotape broadcast on Dubai-based Al-Arabiya television, Zawahiri - identifiable by his voice and rhetorical style -- went beyond now familiar SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

2 die, 300 hurt in Habiganj village clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Habiganj*

Two persons were killed and at least 300 injured in a clash between two groups of villagers at Bahubal upazila yesterday. The deceased are Jalil Khan, 35, of Barauri and Fazar Uddin, 22, of Daulatpur village. At least eight to 10 thousand people of 13 villages equipped with arms fought the four-hour fight, which reportedly sprang from previous enmity between two youths of Karimpur and Daulatpur villages. Police fired 70 rubber bullets and eight tear gas shells and arrested 30 persons to quell violence. Eight policemen including an assistant sub-inspector also suffered injuries during the clash. The administration imposed section 144 in the areas and deployed paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and additional police. The deputy commissioner and superintendent of police of Habiganj visited the spot. A tense situation is prevailing in the area.

AL, JSD (Inu) agree on alliance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) and the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) yesterday agreed to launch agitation from a common platform to end the rule of BNP-led coalition. Leaders of the two parties also decided to run jointly in the next election to form an alliance government of pro-liberation, democratic, secular and progressive forces. "We share the view that immediate steps should be taken to unite all patriotic, democratic, secular, progressive and pro-liberation forces to end the rule of oppressive alliance government," said AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, reading out a joint-declaration after SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Putin fires entire govt

AFP, *Moscow*

Russian President Vladimir Putin in a surprise move yesterday sacked his government led by Yeltsin-era figure Mikhail Kasyanov in a bid to further stamp his authority and rally voters ahead of his expected re-election next month. In a live television address to the nation, Putin said he was dismissing his government -- and would choose a new prime minister before the March 14 presidential elections. Kasyanov, 46, one of the last vestiges from the time of Putin's

predecessor Boris Yeltsin, and who had served as prime minister since Putin took over as head of state at the end of 1999, was replaced temporarily by one his deputies, Viktor Khristenko. "In line with Article 117 of the Russian Constitution, I have decided to dismiss the government," said Putin. "This decision is not linked to the government's achievements, which on the whole I consider satisfactory. This is linked to my wish to set out once again my position on what the country's course will be after March 14, 2004," the Russian leader

added. "I consider that citizens of Russia have the right and should know who will serve in the government if I am elected as president," Putin said. The overwhelmingly popular Russian leader, who was elected to a four-year term in March 2000, is forecast to win a second mandate with 70 percent or more of the vote. Putin added that he would submit a candidate for the prime minister's post to the State Duma, lower house of parliament, in line with SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

4 shot in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One robber, two students and a construction worker were shot in separate incidents in the city yesterday. In Demra, police shot Mohammad Kalam (Dakaat Kalam) while he was preparing for robbery at Matuail Madrasa Bazar in Demra with another associate, Rokon, at around 4:00pm. Acting on a tip-off by locals, police rushed to the spot and challenged them. But the robbers threw a hand-made bomb at them. Police then opened fire and nabbed Kalam with bullet injury. The robber is now undergoing treatment at Dhaka College Hospital (DMCH). At Khilgaon, two friends -- Fazlur Rahman Apu and Kamal Ahmed Dulu -- stopped their rickshaw at Malibagh Chowdhurypara to buy cigarettes at around 1:30pm. A gang of five waylaid them at gunpoint and snatched away a mobile phone and gold chain from them. As the gang was leaving, they shouted for help. The muggers then SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



Left Democratic Front demonstrates in Dhaka yesterday protesting the price hike of diesel, pesticide and fertiliser.

PHOTO: STAR

OUTLAW THREAT Magura cops asked not to move alone

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Magura*

Security has been tightened at the police stations, camps and outposts in the district in the wake of a threat of attacks by the outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (Janajuddha). "Police officials have been asked not to move alone while on duty and tight security measures have been taken following a directive by the district superintendent of police (SP)," said officers-in-charge of Sripur and Shanikha police stations. On Monday, some unidentified persons phoned the SP and threatened attacks on the police stations in Magura district. They also claimed them to operatives of the Janajuddha faction. Police officials said police patrol

has been increased at different points across the district to avoid any untoward incidents. After the threat, the SP of Magura sent a special message to four police stations and 12 camps directing them to take tight security steps. The SP also directed the four police stations of the district to file general diary in connection with the threat from Janajuddha, according to the officers-in-charge and duty officers of the four police stations. Magura SP Biswas Afzal Hossain admitted the threat from Janajuddha. "Tight security measures have been taken at all police stations and camps in the district to face any untoward situation," the SP told The Daily Star.

Prayer Timings		
February 24		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-00	6-05
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation