

Navy seizes Tk 42cr illegal fishing nets

Jan-March special drive also impounds jatka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Navy, in a three-month fishery protection campaign, have seized illegal fishing nets worth over Tk 41.88 crore and impounded jatka and other fish fry weighing about 1 ton.

The seized current fishing nets are 27,45,380 metre in length while the fish fry weighs 9,383 kg.

The seized nets were burnt in front of magistrate, local fishery officials and elite while jatka and fish fry were deposited with local fishery authorities.

In a bid to protect hilsha population, the special drive was designed

for January to March as the period is the breeding season for the country's most popular fish.

Navy ships BNS Tanveer, BNS Padma, BNS Meghna, BNS Shaheed Farid, BNS Nirbhoy, BNS Mohibullah, BNS Shaheed Daulat, BNS Barkat and BNS Shaheed Akhteruddin were engaged in the drive.

The ships belonging to Chittagong and Khulna naval areas kept vigilance in the coastal areas and important fish breeding areas like Bhola, Kuakata, Barguna, Khepupara, Barisal, Chandpur, Pirojpur and the Sundarbans.

Morshed goes to Ankara today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan today leaves for Turkey on a three-day visit in a bid to win support for Bangladesh's candidature for the secretary general post of Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC).

Officially, foreign affairs ministry informed that Morshed is scheduled to meet Turkish Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul and they will discuss on bilateral economic, trade, investment, defence cooperation and education, among other issues.

However, diplomatic sources said the foreign minister is visiting Ankara to persuade the European Muslim nation to withdraw its nomination from the upcoming election of the OIC secretary general.

The International Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Islamic organisation will elect its top position during 14-16 June in Istanbul.

Dhaka officially started lobbying for its candidate, Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, among other OIC members after his candidacy was announced last year. Morshed's trip to Turkey is part of the hectic campaigning for Salauddin, which also includes visits to other OIC member countries as the election date draws near.

Morshed's visit to Ankara also marks the first official tour by a foreign minister of the two Muslim countries since the alliance government assumed power in late 2001.

Morshed will also call on Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan during his visit.

Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury accompanies the minister on the tour and is expected to meet his counterpart Ugur Ziyal separately.

Bac charges Hanif, 3 others in graft case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) has pressed charges against four persons including former Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) mayor Mohammad Hanif for embezzling Tk 59.44 lakh in buying insecticide-spraying machines.

With Hanif, Dr Ashraf Uddin, chief DCC health officer, supplier Afzal Hossain, M Rashidul Alam, ex-chief DCC executive officer, were also implicated in the case of misappropriating Tk 7.43 lakh in purchasing each of eight mosquito-killing sprayers.

Bac Inspector Abul Hossain submitted the chargesheet to the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka yesterday, 311 days after the case was filed with Ramna Police Station.

According to the chargesheet, three companies—Janata Traders, Hossain Enterprise and Quest International—submitted their bids for supply of eight mosquito-killing machines in August, 1998 after the DCC floated a tender.

Although Janata Traders placed the lowest offer, the DCC awarded the work to Hossain Enterprise at Janata's rate without informing the lowest bidder, it added.

The DCC health department intended to purchase 1,000-litre capacity machines at Tk 14 lakh each, but later floated tenders for supply of 50-80-litre machines.

The corporation later bought each of eight 56.7-litre machines at Tk 13.93 lakh, but market price for such devices was Tk 6.5 lakh, the chargesheet said.

Arches again

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have occupied a chunk of busy thoroughfares.

Sources in the local BNP said party activists were "raising funds" to set up more than 200 arches. But the attempt failed after some influential local residents informed the top BNP leaders.

Khondker Mahbubuddin Ahmad, lawmaker of Dhanomdi-Mohammadpur constituency, told The Daily Star that arches have become part of "national culture" and he could not do much to stop it.

The seizure list after the final count presented 4,930 different types of sophisticated firearms, 27,020 hand grenades, 840 rockets, 300 accessories of rocket launchers, 2,000 grenade launching tubes, 6,392 magazines and 1,140,520-round ammunition.

"This time we have also decided, under the instruction of the Prime Minister's Office, not to line up students from local schools to greet the leader," Mahbubuddin said.

Asked on the source of funds for the arches, the BNP lawmaker said the party has allocated necessary money.

Bypass surgery

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Using a modern technology known as Octopus, the surgeons successfully repaired the blockages without stopping heartbeat and avoiding blood transfusion, which are usually done in most open-heart surgeries.

The patient now is doing fine, doctors said.

The surgical team included Dr Mujibur Rahman, Dr Amran, Dr Lokman, Dr Borah and Dr Prakash.

Hosts in command

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Wicketkeeper Parthiv Patel was batting on a dogged 13 with India, who were bowled out for 287 in the first innings, still needing 53 to make Pakistan bat again after the home side were bowled out for 489.

Pace spearhead Shoaib Akhtar struck the first blow, trapping Chopra lbw with a sharp inswinger.

In the next over, Dravid was run out without facing a ball when he tried to take on the arm of Imran Farhat at short cover.

Sachin Tendulkar started with a boundary but was out lbw when a ball from Mohammad Sami kept low.

Vangipurappu Laxman gave Sehwaq support in a 45-run fourth-wicket stand before seamer Umar Gul, who had grabbed a five-wicket haul in the first innings, sent his off-stump cartwheeling with a ball that swung in and then seamed away.

Left-hander Yuvraj Singh, India's first innings centurion, was the day's last casualty, caught behind trying to steer Sami.

But Sehwaq was unfazed, racing to his 50 off 55 balls with his 10th boundary and then inching closer to another century.

The 25-year-old had cracked an Indian record 309 in the first Test at Multan, where India won by an innings and 52 runs to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

Earlier, Indian seamer Irfan Pathan had grabbed three quick wickets to peg Pakistan back after they resumed on their overnight 355 for three.

The 19-year-old Pathan, who was wicket-less over the first two days, dismissed Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq for his overnight score of 118 in the first over.

Paceman Lakshminath Balaji struck from the other end, having Yousef Youhana (72) caught behind with a late outswinger.

Pathan then trapped Akmal lbw (five) and knocked back Sami's leg stump for two for first-spell figures of three for 11 from seven overs.

But Kamal raved Pathan over his head for a six and punished leg-spinner Anil Kumble with a flurry of boundaries before Pakistan finally folded 50 minutes before tea.

India are on their first full tour of Pakistan in over 14 years.

Strike force

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The Speedy Trial Court.

Emerging from the meeting Saifur told the press, "We'll take all measures for speedy implementation of the FSAT recommendations."

Commenting on the NGOs, he said, "Until now, it was only you who have been questioning the source of NGOs' money. Now they (the Americans) too are raising the same questions."

According to the FSAT proposal, the strike force will deliver solid prosecutable cases and obtain convictions and punishments that will serve to deter others from doing the same sorts of crimes.

The force will work under the attorney general and will include representatives of the BB, Criminal Investigation Department of police, Bureau of Anti-Corruption and the attorney general's office.

It will be equipped with all required expertise for investigating money-laundering cases and will use the central bank as a source of information, data and expertise. Members of the force will be carefully chosen and awarded with a high-level salary to prevent corruption.

The financial intelligence unit, the meeting decided yesterday, would be placed outside the direct control of the BB. It will be vested

When dream

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The embassy then contacted the expatriate welfare ministry, which brought the Bangladeshis back home on Thursday.

They include Abdul Hakim, Noor Alam of Manikganj, Mokhles of Munshiganj and Azhar of Narayanganj. All of them told the same story to reporters on their return home.

State Minister for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammad Quamrul Islam received them at Zia International Airport. They were given Tk 500 each to go to their village homes.

The Bangladeshis expressed their gratitude to the government and the embassy in Tehran for arranging their return and to the mazar authorities in Baghdad for giving them shelter.

Meanwhile, the government filed a case against the recruiting agency for illegal manpower export.

The airport police raided the agency office at Uttara several times but found no-one.

No plan

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The seizure and a section of the ruling BNP leaders based in Chittagong.

The state minister also termed the arms haul a "big conspiracy" but did not reject the possibility of having an international link.

The seizure list after the final count presented 4,930 different types of sophisticated firearms, 27,020 hand grenades, 840 rockets, 300 accessories of rocket launchers, 2,000 grenade launching tubes, 6,392 magazines and 1,140,520-round ammunition.

Army deployed

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Chittagong port jetties along with 600 security staff of the port authority and 200 ansar members.

Acting chairman of the port Abul Kasem said, "We have alerted our security men to step up vigil in and around the restricted areas in the wake of the arms and ammunition seizure." Commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan Police SM Sabir Ali said police were also on the alert for subversive activities.

Police and coastguard seized 10 truckloads of rockets, rocket launchers, submachine guns, grenades, AK-47 rifles on the Karnaphuli coast, sending waves of horror across the country.

3 bullet-hit in BDR raid in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Three people were bullet-hit in a shoot-out during a raid conducted by paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in bordering Harina village under Kolaroa upazila Tuesday night.

Rafiqul Islam, 42, Monsur Ali, 35, and his son Anisur Rahman, 16, who were under the roofs, suffered bullet injuries when the BDR opened fire on a gang of smugglers.

The BDR personnel were chasing the smugglers at around 10:00pm when the gang attacked the BDR men, who also reiterated. The smugglers, however, fled the scene, leaving behind Indian bicycle tyres and tubes reportedly worth Tk 26,000.

BDR Subedar Shahaduzzaman claimed the injured, who are receiving treatment at Satkhira and Khulna General Hospitals, are smugglers. But the villagers refuted the allegation.

The BDR again raided Harina yesterday morning and beat up many villagers, saying they are involved in smuggling. As most of the men went into hiding, the BDR threatened the women to raze their houses unless they surrender the men.

The BDR, however, denied any assault on the villagers.

Biman flights back

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D-check (overhauling) of a DC-10 aircraft, but Biman management reduced the number to three.

When the engineers protested this move, the MD allegedly misbehaved with them, which led to the strike.

Fakhru Alam Bhuiyan, convener of Biman Steering Committee, a platform of all seven unions in Biman, said all 250 engineers returned to work after Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary BMM Mozharul Haque gave the assurance that all six men could go for the D-check.

"All the six engineers were to fly on board the DC-10 on Tuesday, but three of them missed the flight as the MD refused to give permission. These three engineers were flown out today (Wednesday) on other flights, which obviously raises the cost," Bhuiyan told The Daily Star last night.

A total of 24 engineers will carry out phase-wise inspection of the month-long overhauling at Indonesia's Garuda Maintenance Facility. Half of the job will be done there and the other half in Bangladesh. The D-check will cost Biman \$2 million.

Drought brings

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per hour, they added.

During a field visit, the CARB personnel were found setting up power generators connected to BMDA deep tube-wells at Sarmongla in Godagari upazila and charging Tk 172 for an hour of irrigation during load-shedding hours.

Alam Pramanik, a peasant of Saranjanj union in Tanore, said, "The cost of Boro cultivation this year is Tk 2,800 per bigha that includes water charges at Tk 100 per hour. The average production this year is likely to be limited to eight maunds per bigha, which means farmers will get a return of Tk 2,400 per bigha if the price of rice is Tk 300 per maund."

Asked about the so high charges, BMDA Executive Director Asaduzzaman told reporters that water charges varied between Tk 75 and Tk 90, saying nonchalance. "The charges are quite reasonable considering the services."

On the allegation of taking Tk 100 for an hour of irrigation, he said investigation was on to look into the matter. He also claimed no power generators were used to irrigate Boro lands.

But, CARB Programme Director Zakir Hossain admitted that they were providing power generator facility to the BMDA deep tube-wells during load-shedding hours, but completely free of charge. "The tube-well operators might have been taking the money," he guessed.

According to sources, the BMDA earned Tk 2.50 crore profit providing irrigation services through 5,964 deep tube-wells in Barind region last year.

Engineer

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suggests the business dispute led to his death," said Kamrul Ahsan, assistant commissioner of Mirpur Zone of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

A primary police investigation says Razzaz was running a firm with architects Tarequl Islam and Fazlul Haq as partners and left the business venture to set up another on his own a year ago.

But Akhter Hossain, who works for Razzaz's firm as an assistant engineer, brushed aside police speculation on any business dispute.

Razzaz's wife Jahanara Begum and daughter Farhana Sharmin Shampa in a daze did not talk to journalists, who rushed to their home after the incident.

"My father was a nice man. I can't imagine anybody can kill him," Sumon, also an engineer, told The Daily Star.

A former member of Rupnagar Janakalyan Samity, asking not to be named, said Razzaz cleared some makeshift shops off the road in the neighbourhood about six months ago in an act that angered the shop owners, who he said might have roles in the killing.

After an autopsy at the DMCH, the family took the body of Razzaz to their home village in Nandail upazila in Mymensingh.

Battle rages through Iraq

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had at least 30 Americans and more than 150 Iraqis dead in fighting for Ramadi and Fallujah.

Anti-American violence intensified and spread to cities in northern Iraq yesterday. A US helicopter was forced down after being hit by small arms fire, and a Marine commander confirmed 12 of his men had been killed in fighting west of Baghdad.

Scores of Iraqis also have been wounded, as mosques called for a holy war against Americans and women carried guns in the streets.

American and allied forces fought both Sunni and Shia Muslim militants nationwide in a continuation of the heaviest fighting since Baghdad fell to US troops a year ago this week.

Marines fought for control in the Sunni Triangle cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, and soldiers battled Shia militiamen in cities stretching from near Kirkuk in the largely Kurdish north to holy cities in the Shiite heartland to the south of Baghdad.

US Marines have vowed to pacify the violent towns of Ramadi and Fallujah that had been a center of the guerrilla insurgency seeking to oust the US-led occupation force. The 12 Marines were killed Tuesday in Ramadi, where Maj. Gen. James Mattis, 1st Marine Division commander, said his forces still were fighting insurgents that included Syrian mercenaries along a one-mile front.

Sixteen children and eight women were reported killed when warplanes struck four houses late Tuesday, said Hatem Samir, a Fallujah Hospital official.

A US helicopter was hit by small arms fire and forced down in Baqouba, 30 miles north of Baghdad, the military said, as American soldiers fought militiamen of fiery anti-US Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, whose forces have been responsible for much of the violence other than in Ramadi and Fallujah.

No one was hurt aboard the OH-58 Kiowa chopper, and the military planned to transport it to a nearby base by truck, a US official in Baghdad said on condition of anonymity.

Ukrainian-led forces and al-Sadr's al-Mahdi Army clashed in the city of Kut, southeast of Baghdad, overnight, and at least 12 Iraqis were reported killed and 20 wounded, hospital officials said. Witnesses reported the gunmen

Gittu Nasir

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the driver and the car owner, who died instantly.

Sub-Inspector Akhter Hossain of Panchlaish Police Station leads the team formed at the directive of Commissioner SM Sabir Ali.

Local police alerted the CMP after arresting the man, son of Bazal of Chandgonj in Chittagong.

Police pressed charges against Nasir of killing eight Bangladesh Chhatra League activists in a single incident at Bahaddarhat in Chittagong in July 2001.

AL deadline

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Health Minister Khondakar Mosharraf Hossain, State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Huq Milon, State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Ziaul Huq Zia, lawmakers Shahid Imdad Chowdhury Ani, Abul Khaer Bhuiyan, among others, addressed the rally chaired by lawmaker Mahabuber Rahman.

3 Jhalakathi AL leaders expelled for ransacking Hasina's dais

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Three leaders of Jhalakathi district Awami League (AL) have been expelled for ransacking the dais set for public meeting of party chief Sheikh Hasina and attacking the houses of the AL leaders in the town on Monday.

As per directive of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, the district unit took the decision at an emergency meeting on Tuesday with its President Sardar Mohammad Shah Alam in the chair.

The expelled leaders are Alamgir Hossain Dulal, joint secretary, Afzal Hossain Rana, social welfare secretary and Mohammad Awal Hossain, labour secretary.

Shamsul Huq Akkas, acting secretary of Jhalakathi district Awami League, told newsmen that the three were involved in the attacks on the rally and the houses of AL central leader Amir Hossain Amu, Krishak League district unit President Advocate A Mannan Rasul and district AL Organising Secretary Khan Saifullah Ponir.

On Monday, a faction of Jhalakathi district Awami League reportedly known as anti-Amu group launched the attacks following announcement of the name of AL chairman candidate for the coming Jhalakathi Municipal election at the rally.

Party chief Sheikh Hasina declared the name of local AL leader Belayet Hossain as party candidate for the post of chairman of the municipality. She also introduced Belayet and some ward commissioner candidates to the audience.

The announcement angered the AL faction led by Dulal and Rana who termed it a pre-planned conspiracy.

They alleged that Belayet's nomination has been finalised without approval of the party's local unit.

killed a British civilian working for a foreign security company.

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry said its troops were forced to evacuate Kut early yesterday after al-Sadr forces hit the position with mortar fire during the night.

In Baghdad, a top American general said the United States would press the offensive.

"The coalition and Iraqi security forces will continue deliberate, precise and powerful offensive operations to destroy the al-Mahdi Army throughout Iraq," Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, the US military's deputy head of operations, told reporters in Baghdad. He called for the surrender of al-Sadr, who is named in an arrest warrant for involvement in the murder of a rival Shiite cleric almost a year ago. "If he wants to calm the situation... he can turn himself in to a local Iraqi police station and he can face justice," Kimmitt said.

Al-Sadr had urged Iraqis to rise up against the US occupation and vowed to die rather than be captured. "America has shown its evil intentions, and the proud Iraqi people cannot accept it," he said in a statement. "They must defend their rights by any means they see fit."

On Tuesday, however, insurgents opened a new front with a bloody attack on Marines in the nearby town of Ramadi. Gunmen hiding in Ramadi's main cemetery opened fire on US patrols, sparking a gunbattle in alleys near the governor's palace, witnesses said, adding that at least two Iraqis were killed.

With confirmation of the 12 dead Marines, the American death toll since the war was at least 626.

Police nabs 3

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godfather, and a leader of a truck owners' association of the city allegedly supplied the labourers and the trucks respectively for offloading and transporting the arms and ammunition.

Sources in an intelligence agency yesterday said they believed the arms and ammunition had come from Akiab port of Myanmar and the two seized fishing vessels -- FV Khazar Dan and FV Amanat -- carried the cache.

The consignment of the deadly weapons, reportedly despatched from China, reached Myanmar by land, sources in Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Chittagong claimed, adding the haul was then carried to the outer anchorage by sea.

But, none could say for sure if the haul was offloaded at the outer anchorage of Akiab Port or Chittagong Port. The sources further claimed the haul was heading for Bandarban and a terrorist group active in southern Chittagong district made a booking for some sub-machine guns, which leaked out of the cargo on the way.

At least five teams of police continued raiding on different areas of the city and the district to nab the people suspected to be involved in the arms trafficking.

The investigation committee continued its probe into the crime for the third consecutive day here yesterday. They recorded verbal and written statements of AKM Kabir Uddin, assistant superintendent of police of CID, Chittagong zone, besides others.

Details on the activities and progress of the investigation could not be known, as the committee maintained strict secrecy while those appearing before it also remained tight-lipped.

The committee headed by Home Secretary Omar Faruk also inspected the arms cache kept under army custody in Chittagong Cantonment yesterday, sources said.

Despite heightened tensions, Arafat said in a message to Israelis during this week's Passover holiday: "Let us continue together on the path to peace, and as soon as possible."

Sharon is pressing ahead with a unilateral plan to evacuate all Jewish settlements in Gaza and several of the more than 120 West Bank enclaves under a disengagement strategy he has vowed to impose if a U.S.-backed peace "road map" remains stalled.

Arafat told Yedioth he wants any Israeli withdrawal to be coordinated with the Palestinians under the auspices of the road map, which calls for creation of a Palestinian state by 2005.

While welcoming a pullout from occupied land, Palestinians fear Sharon is trying to trade Gaza for annexation of large swathes of West Bank land they want for a state.

Sharon, due to hold White House talks on April 14 to seek U.S. approval, faces pressure from far-right coalition partners and within his rightist Likud party against removing settlements.

"I plan to vote against this plan whose principles I do not accept. I intend to persuade Likud ministers to do the same," Likud Agriculture Minister Yisrael Katz told Israel Radio.

Despite that, opinion polls show a large majority of Israelis willing to part with hard-to-defend Gaza settlements where 7,500 Jews live next to 1.3 million Palestinians.