



PHOTO: STAR

These two earthen lions have been put up for sale in front of Dhaka's Shishu Academy on the occasion of the upcoming Bangla New Year. The potter is asking Tk 1 lakh for the sculptures.

Criminals stalk Rayer Bazar traders

STAR REPORT

Business people, especially the small traders and developers in Sankar, Rayer Bazar and Katashur, are living in a constant intimidation as a gang led by one Zahir maintain a reign of terror in those areas.

Locals on condition of anonymity spoke about the ordeal inflicted by the gang of 30 hoodlums spear-headed by Zahir alias Kutta Zahir, who is wanted by the Moham-madpur police station in more than two dozens of criminal cases.

Recently as some developers refused to pay toll ranging from TK 20,000 to TK 100,000 from each site, the Zahir gang chased away the workers from half a dozen construction sites stretched over Rayer Bazar, Zafarabad and Katashur areas. Consequently construction operations in those sites came to a complete standstill, said developers, not willing to be quoted in fear of reprisal.

Over the last six months, members of the Zahir gang visited almost

every shop in the area and asked them to contact their 'boss' over telephone. Most of the shopkeepers rang up the gang leader and paid the toll as demanded by him. Several shop owners, who refused to comply with the demand, have, in fact, plunged deeper into state of anxiety and insecurities.

A shop owner in Sankar, who also owns a land in the area, said that after he had refused to pay TK 20,000 demanded by Zahir, he and his family received several death threats leading to an intense fear both at home and away.

According to the locals and the police, Zahir, whose mother was a part time domestic help in the area, grew up in a slum at Poolpar. Zahir at the very early stage of his adolescence, got involved with a number of petty thefts. He served several convictions ranging from six months to one year and also skipped bail in several cases. It was in the prison, where Zahir got acquainted with top city hoodlums and extortionists, who readily extended a mentoring

programme of various criminal offences to him. On his return from the prison, Zahir formed his own gang in the area.

Last week Zahir's men demanded TK 50,000 from a fruit seller in Sankar area. When the middle-aged trader refused to pay the toll, they forcibly took him away to Dhanmondi lake area and bombarded him with dire threats for further non-compliance. As the trader remained unmoved, they abducted his wife and children. This time the trader gave in and paid TK 60,000 for the release of his family members. In addition, he promised to pay the Zahir gang TK 6,000 for every month, sources revealed.

While contacted, Moham-madpur police acknowledged that Zahir was a wanted criminal. They however, said they did not receive any complaint against Zahir lately.

Railway to get unlimited funds for uplift

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday assured Bangladesh Railway (BR) officials of unlimited funding in implementing an integrated development plan for the railway sector.

Coming out of a pre-budget meeting with BR officials, Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman told newsmen that instead of piecemeal improvements, the sector will receive funds for overall restructuring for the popular transportation mode.

The meeting decided to take an integrated approach for each segment of the BR. The railway authorities will implement their development plans in phases on availability of funds, the finance minister said.

Now the BR implements development works on the basis of emergency and availability of funds, a BR official said.

"Funds will be no problem for development," Saifur said, giving green signal to the railway authorities to go ahead with new projects for improved passenger services.

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Security scurry ahead of Pahela Baishakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 3,000 policemen are deployed at 40 strategic points of the city to thwart any untoward incident during the Bangla New Year celebrations.

Wednesday is the first day of the month of Baishakh, the Bangla New Year's Day Festivities on the occasion occupy a few days before and after, besides the day proper.

Peacekeepers, uniformed and plainclothes, were deployed last night. Drawn from the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and the Armed Police Battalion (APB), the security men will keep an eye on movements and activities of 'known criminals' and suspicious people in and around Ramna Park and Dhaka

University campus from last night through Wednesday night.

The decision for the deployment was taken yesterday at a meeting of the home ministry on law and order, chaired by State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar.

"We're concerned about law and order. So, we've chalked out some specific measures to ensure that people can celebrate the New Year without any disturbances," Babar said.

If the situation demands, security forces at key points would be beefed up and army personnel deployed at other installations too, he added.

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ISPR dismisses Ctg mayor's claim on separatist camps

Foreign ministry, US embassy rebut claim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) yesterday dismissed as 'false,' 'misleading' and 'motivated' Saturday's statement by the Chittagong mayor that Indian separatists have 50 to 60 training camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

An ISPR press release said there are no training camps of either Indian or any other countries' separatists in Bangladesh and the country is in no way involved with imparting training to the secessionists.

Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury at a press conference on

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Govt extends Block 9 PSC by 120 days

SHARIER KHAN

The government has extended the production sharing contract (PSC) of the block 9 oil companies by 120 days as the exploration faced a number of obstacles.

The three-year contract of the Irish oil company Tullow and its partners Chevron-Texaco and Bangladeshi concern Bapex expired yesterday.

As per the deal, the oil companies were to drill at least three exploratory wells in the most-sought-after area of explorers in the second round block bidding. But presently they are drilling the second well after their first attempt at Kashimpur.

"They have already reached at 1,900 meters depth in the second well. The target is to drill up to 2,700 meters," said a Petrobangla source. "With the 120-day extension, they

now have the time up to August 5 to finish the job and drill a third well as well. We believe they will be able to do it."

However, Tullow won the bid with a proposal to drill 10 wells, not just 3, in block 9.

Usually, an extension to PSC undergoes a long scrutiny in case of operator's failures in fulfilling obligations. But the PSC for this block states that when the exploration is in progress, the operators can be given an extension of 120 days. Accordingly, Tullow obtained the extension.

The exploration slowed down because of disagreements between Tullow and Chevron-Texaco over the sale of the US oil giant's block 9 shares to the Canadian company Niko Resources and extortion by local political leaders, insiders said.

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PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia presides over a meeting of the national ICT (Information and Communications Technology) task force at her office yesterday.

Raped, acid-burnt, now abandoned by husband

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

They raped and splashed acid on her, her newly-married husband refused to take her home as her face was distorted and she no more looked beautiful. Her world turned out to be a living hell. But she still wants to live, maybe not for herself.

"I want to live to see my violators punished properly so that no-one's dreams are shattered like the way

mine have been," says the teenage girl of Bhola's Charfassion at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday.

Her hapless father filed a case with Charfassion Police Station on November 28 accusing nine with Rab Bhuiyan as the main accused. But the violators managed local police to file a defamation suit against him. Denied of justice, the father then pleaded with the home

minister on January 3, who instructed the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to probe the case.

The girl (her name withdrawn) was three months to 17 years of age when her day-labourer father married her off to a rickshaw-puller of Chittagong in December 2002. With the marriage ended her days of playful rambling as her parents

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Strike in all educational institutions today

Student bodies demand arrest of MP Saidee

DU CORRESPONDENT

Three student organisations enforce a countrywide strike in the educational institutions today demanding arrest and punishment of the Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker Delwar Hossain Saidee for what they said was inciting the February 27 attack on writer Humayun Azad.

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of the main opposition Awami League (AL), the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Bangladesh Chhatra Moitri (BCM) are staging today's strike.

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FM concerned at civilian deaths in Iraq

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday expressed concern over the growing civilian casualties in Iraq and urged both the coalition forces and Iraqi insurgents to exercise restraint to avert civilian deaths.

He was speaking to the journalists at the Zia International Airport on his return from Turkey.

Describing Iraq as a 'battle ground', the minister said the withdrawal of American forces was no remedy for the problems in Iraq, rather it would lead to a civil war in the wake of current crisis situation.

Morshed also said that the responsibility to restore peace and maintain Iraq's national integrity and sovereignty rests with all parties concerned.

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PHOTO: STAR

An Awami League parliamentary delegation led by Deputy Leader of Opposition Abdul Hamid being stopped at the main gate of Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited (CUFL) during a visit to the port city to probe the April 2 arms haul.

CTG ARMS HAUL

AL calls off arms probe in face of non-cooperation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Non-cooperation of police and administration officials in Chittagong thwarted an Awami League (AL) initiative to probe the April 2 arms haul, forcing a visiting AL parliamentary team to wind up its fact-finding mission yesterday.

The parliamentary delegation led by Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid went to Chittagong on Saturday but returned to Dhaka last night after a daylong futile attempts to meet officials and security personnel concerned.

Police and district administration officials avoided talking to the AL team as it tried to gather information in connection with the largest-ever

arms shipment intercepted at the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited (CUFL) dockyard.

The visiting delegates encountered the first roadblock in the morning when security guards at the main gate of the CUFL stopped them. "The managing director of the CUFL refused to meet us," Hamid told newsmen, adding that the team gave up after 20 minutes of futile efforts to pass through.

During the day, other officials concerned also dodged the parliamentary team. Officer-in-charge of Kamaphuli Police Station ducked out just 15 minutes before the AL team arrived at the police station.

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Allowances for 1 lakh more senior citizens

Monthly allowance to go up to Tk 165

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government in a pre-budget meeting yesterday decided to increase the number of beneficiaries of its senior citizens allowance scheme by one lakh.

Their monthly allowance will also be raised from the present Tk 150 to Tk 165 per head from the next fiscal year.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman presided over the meeting with officials of the ministries of social welfare, housing and public works, fisheries and livestock, and foreign affairs attending.

At present the number of old people receiving the scheme's benefits is 7.5 lakh, which the government targets to expand to 10 lakh within the current fiscal. With the new decision, 11 lakh senior citizens are seen to enjoy the benefits from next year.

Prayer Timings		
April 12		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-35	5-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-24	6-28
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

