

Rab yet to get

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training course specially designed for them, Rab sources said.

The first batch of 730 Rab members went into the extensive training course at Ansar camp in Shalpur from Tuesday and the remaining force will undergo the training in phases, they added.

"I'll take around four months to impart training to 5000 Rab forces and then we will start our full-fledged activities," Anwarul Iqbal, director general (DG) of the Rab, told The Daily Star yesterday.

However, sources inside the crackdown force said the Rab has already started intelligence work in different parts of the capital.

"Our eight to 10 teams are gathering intelligence in different parts of the city," said a top Rab official seeking anonymity.

"Even if any offence takes place before us, we are strictly instructed not to go for any action," he added.

The delay in putting the force into action is due to complexities that arose over a rank dispute between police and army officials. Dissatisfaction surfaced among regular police officials following appointment of superintendent of police (SP) in the same rank with army major in the Rab, another source said.

The government finally removed six superintendents of police (SP) from the elite force following a series of brainstorming meetings with top Rab officials.

Despite the move, frustration is still high among police officials as an

army captain has been given the same rank of an additional SP in the force. An army captain is a government official with the pay scale starting at Tk 6,150 while an additional SP's is Tk 7,200.

Some top police officials vented their anger that in 1986, the autocrat Ershad government passed warrant of precedence, in which the army officials of the rank of major or above were upgraded one step, equalling in rank a major with an SP.

The SP and lieutenant colonel, however, wear the same badges despite the government order, they added.

On a question, Iqbal, also an additional inspector general of police, said no such problem persists in the force as the government and the authorities concerned placed the officials in the battalion having considered all aspects.

A number of police officials said many of their colleagues first expressed willingness to join the Rab as the elite force members will be given 30 percent forces' allowance and 30 percent disturbance allowance. They, however, started lobbying for moving out of the crackdown force due to the crisis over rank dispute.

The Jatiya Sangsad passed the Armed Police Battalions (Amendment) Act 2003 in last July.

Tk 402 crore is being spent to launch the force and the government will have to allocate Tk 80 crore a year to run its operations.

PBCP leader brought to Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Detectives yesterday brought the Khulna divisional secretary of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party's (PBCP) M-L faction, who was arrested in the capital Tuesday night, to Khulna.

Mashikul Islam alias Joy, 34, was made secretary of the underground outfit after the death of Abdur Rashid Shaikh alias Tapu in a police-outlaws shootout.

Police said Joy is wanted in 10 murder cases filed with Rupsha, Terokhada and Bagerhat Police Stations. He hailed from Ikhrhi Katenga village under Terokhada upazila in Khulna.

PM returns

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia returned home last night concluding her four-day visit to Shanghai in China where she attended a global conference on poverty.

Ministers, diplomats, high civil and military officials were present at the airport to receive the prime minister.

Faruque's bail

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The court fixed June 5 for full hearing on the cases with the lower court records.

The lower court on May 23 rejected Faruque's bail petitions and placed him on a three-day remand in the cases.

On May 22, a National Security Intelligence team held Faruque in High Court area and the Detective Branch of Police nabbed Proshika Vice-president David William Biswas in Savar in connection to the two out of the 15 cases against the NGO's top officials, sources said.

Anti-Dhaka river

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External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh yesterday assured his Bangladesh counterpart M Morshed Khan over phone that India wanted to resolve all outstanding issues with Bangladesh and strengthen bilateral relations.

Morshed called Natwar to tell him that he would visit New Delhi carrying letters of felicitations from Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for the new Indian premier Manmohan Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi.

The two foreign ministers agreed to work together for further strengthening the existing bilateral relations. Indian National Security Advisor JN Dixit, who was in the minister's room, also spoke with Morshed.

This was the first official contact between Bangladesh and India since the change of guards in New Delhi.

Natwar meanwhile recalled Indian ambassadors and high commissioners at Saarc and Asean nations for a two-day meeting, starting on May 31.

Meanwhile, the common minimum programme announced by the ruling coalition yesterday said in its foreign policy agenda that outstanding issues with Bangladesh would be resolved.

DCC

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heaps. Earlier, the authorities conducted a three-day campaign in the areas about the drive.

The drive involving four platoons of police was led by Magistrate M Nurul Alam and started at 10am to continue until 2:00pm.

The magistrate said the drive aimed to free illegally occupied part of the road to reduce traffic congestion and facilitate smooth movement of vehicles and pedestrians.

People of the area welcomed the drive. But they fear motor parts shops would again occupy the road and footpath.

"Today they (DCC) are freeing the road but tomorrow it will be reoccupied by the same people," said Jafar Ahmed, a local resident.

Asked about this, the magistrate said police will remain deployed to monitor the situation for at least one month. A high level meeting of DCC officials and Dhaka Metropolitan Police (traffic) took this decision on May 24, he added.

Fazul Karim, president of Dhaka Truck and Mini Truck Malik Samity said, "Setting up a truck terminal on a road is illegal. But influential people have grabbed the land the DCC gave us for a terminal."

DCC and traffic police officials assured the samity that the land would be recovered from illegal occupants. A meeting with the truck owners on this issue will be held on May 31, they said.

Dreaded boss

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Police seized black masks, swords, belts and diaries from Bangla Bhai on August 17, 2002 and linked him and his cadres as the leader and activists of another Islamic militant organisation, Harkat-ul-Jihad, with their stronghold in Mollahat in the southwestern district.

After arrest, Bangla Bhai went behind the name of Siddiqui Islam, son of Nazir Hossain of Karnipara village in Gabtali upazila in Bogra.

The AL leader lodged the first information report with Mollahat Police Station, accusing Bangla Bhai and 14 others. But police dropped from the chargesheet five accused, including Bangla Bhai, who was in Bagerhat Jail for three weeks.

Bangla Bhai

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Afghanistan, many of them as bodyguards. The present whereabouts of these Afghan returnees are mostly unknown.

Twenty of them reportedly returned home and are suspected to be members of the JMJB Majlish-e-Shura, the militant outfit's highest decision-making body.

"They are now working with Bangla Bhai to eliminate outlaws in Atrai, Raninagar in Naogaon, Bagmara in Rajshahi and Naldanga and Singra in Natore," a JMJB operative said, asking not to be named.

One such Laden's aide is Abdur Rahman, popularly known as Shai Bhai, commander of the JMJB camp in Vitigram under Raninagar.

The JMJB opened 10 camps in Bagmara, Durgapur, Atrai and Naldanga in its intense hunt for outlaws, with more such camps to be set up in Bogra.

The operations style of JMJB changed after the picture of a hanged man triggered sharp reactions across the country last week. Sources say police officials also suggested that the JMJB change its operations style.

Some of the al-Qaeda trained JMJB leaders now plan to take action against seven leftist extremists in secret, as the group suspended its anti-outlaw overt drive. The JMJB operatives will now go raiding the houses of suspected outlaws, capturing and handing them over to the police.

At least eight people with suspected ties to the banned Purbo Banglar Communist Party have been killed since the JMJB launched its anti-outlaw operation on April 1. The killings prompted the underground men to fight back and slaughter four alleged adherents of Bangla Bhai.

The JMJB is allegedly demanding part of the crops in the northwest as religious contribution to raising two out of the 15 cases against the NGO's top officials, sources said.

Our staff correspondent reports

from Rajshahi that people in Bagmara, where the JMJB unleashed a reign of terror, believe Bangla Bhai has links to al-Qaeda.

People in Bagmara call JMJB men al-Qaeda remnants. "Their oft-repeated talk about Laden and al-Qaeda made us believe they are al-Qaeda members," a resident said.

VIDEO PILFERAGE

The 50-minute video disc was screened for new JMJB members to watch at Razakar Ramjan Kaya training camp in Bagmara.

"Bangla Bhai showed his new recruits video footage on warfare training in Afghanistan and mobilised support for an Islamic movement," a senior police official said.

Anwar Hossain, a JMJB member, went missing after the disc was stolen from the camp in the first week of May. JMJB sources say Anwar was killed as punishment for stealing the disc.

Officials ponder

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passengers on board on Sunday after being caught by a storm.

Reports received from Jahajmarar Char said the speeds of swirling currents there varied between 9 to 13 nautical miles an hour and filled the 125 feet double-deck vessel with mud and sand, raising its weight by 150 to 200 tonnes.

Officials said the combined capacity of the Rustam and Hamza, the salvage tugs deployed by Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) to lift the vessel, stood at 120 tonnes.

Seventy-five frogmen of naval rescue ship BNS Shoibal also failed to attach towline to the launch despite several attempts since Wednesday because of heavy currents and dark in the depth of water, said Lt Emdad, commander of the ship.

The port officials of Chandpur vowed to continue the operation until the salvage of the Digonto, but experts said official abandonment of the drive was only a matter of time.

Philippines foreign secy due May 30

UNB, Dhaka

Philippines Foreign Affairs Secretary Delia Domingo-Albert will pay an official visit to Bangladesh May 30-31 at the invitation of her counterpart M Morshed Khan.

She will hold official talks with Morshed Khan on bilateral relations and discuss ways for cooperation in trade, commerce, maritime and other regional and international issues of mutual concern.

Delia Domingo-Albert is expected to call on President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and hold meetings with the health and family welfare minister and the education minister.

Envoy Anwar anxious to return to Dhaka

BSS, Dhaka

British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Choudhury, who is under treatment at a London hospital, is recovering fast and will return to Dhaka as soon as his doctors allow. Acting British High Commissioner Robert Gibson said quoting a message from Choudhury yesterday.

"I am determined to return to Dhaka as soon as my doctors allow," Anwar Choudhury said in his message to the acting high commissioner.

He said that he was making a good recovery and was in good spirits, a British High Commission press release said.

The high commissioner also expressed gratitude for the messages of support he has received since the explosion in Sylhet on May 21.

He expressed deep sympathy to those who were injured in the blast, and to the families of those killed.

Student released

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is believed to have been involved in the abduction, sources said.

Abductors, meanwhile, kidnapped Ishtiaq Rizvi alias Ruslu, 17, a secondary school student from Hamzerbagh High School. They asked his father Golum Rabbani, deputy manager of Hafiz Jute Mills, to pay them Tk 10 lakh for his son's release.

Four armed men picked Ishtiaq up in a CNG-run three-wheeler from in front of Tarebia mosque in Bibirhat after the Maghrib prayers.

CHT blockade

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three hill districts -- Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban -- protesting security forces' raid on PCJSS Guimara upazila office and arrest of 17 leaders and activists Tuesday.

It also demanded immediate release of the Tuesday's arrestees and withdrawal of what it said was false cases against them.

Sources in Khagrachhari said security personnel also raided Mohajonpara area in the district headquarters yesterday in search of PCJSS leaders and activists.

Five pro-blockade pickets were injured yesterday in police baton-charge and attacks by anti-blockade workers of Sanno Odhikar Andolon (a platform of Bangalee settlers).

In Rangamati, the blockade was observed peacefully.

Road transports and river vessels did not ply in the CHT, but the PCJSS allowed movement of auto-rickshaws for HSC examinees during the blockade.

Reports received from Bandarban said the blockade there passed off peacefully, too.

A press release issued by the PCJSS central office in Rangamati yesterday condemned the 'mass arrests' of its leaders and activists and what it said was atrocity committed on them.

BOU students

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of textbooks. "As the fifth semester students are the first batch of three-year BA and BSS course, they are facing this trouble," one source said.

Asked about the book crisis, Director of Dhaka Regional Centre Fateur Rahman said, "We have supplied most of the textbooks and hope we will be able to supply the rest by next week."

Robbers take

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up the guard and Khaled's driver and taped their mouth. At gunpoint they forced Khaled to usher them into his apartment on the 7th floor.

The robbers rang the doorbell and asked Khaled to respond to his wife's enquiry. As she opened the door, the robbers herded all family members into a room at gunpoint.

In the half an hour-long operation, the robbers left the house with Tk 5.26 lakh in cash, 111 tolas of gold ornaments and five mobile sets, police said.

Khaled's brother Didar Hossain filed a case with Motijheel Police Station in this connection.

Police held security guard Fazlul Haq for interrogation. Police said they could not arrest any of the culprits or recover anything till filing of this report at 7:15pm.

Proshika president

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body on Tuesday evening at its head office.

Oxfam Netherlands sent letters of concern to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar urging them to ensure legal safeguards against 'arbitrary detention' of both Faruque and Biswas.

They urged the Bangladesh authorities 'to ensure that under no circumstances they are tortured or subjected to other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of punishment.'

In their letters Oxfam also urged the government to allow the detainees access to lawyers, family, and medical attention. Oxfam also appreciated Proshika's operations that 'worked for the poor.'

President and co-chair of Advocacy Institute has sent a letter to the Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States, Syed Hassan Ahmed, asking him to communicate its concern over the 'failures of Bangladesh government to comport to democratic norms and procedures' to the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

Advocacy Institute in the letter also observed that the arrest of the leadership of Proshika did not go

UK team

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Anwar Choudhury among 70 injured.

They also visited the shrine spot where the previous blast took place killing five people. The detectives video-taped some places of both the spots yesterday. Later, they held a meeting with the district police officials.

Emerging from the meeting, Shaw told reporters that it was too early to reach any conclusion about the incident and that they were happy with the co-operation they had received from Bangladesh authorities.

"We are still reviewing the situation and things are yet to be decided," he said when asked when the British High Commission's Sylhet office would reopen.

Captors free

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role to form a 'criminal protection committee' in the area to fight robbery, abduction, rape and other criminal offences, which might be the reason behind his abduction.

A joint force camp has been set up in the area after the incident.

Meanwhile, Jhenidah police recovered the body of abducted transport trader Asauluddin, 40, of Arpara under Kaliganj upazila in Jhenidah from Khamarkumra field yesterday morning.

Al-Amin, the victim's son, told police that an armed gang of six forcibly took his father into a microbus from near their house at around 11:00 but did not make any contact with them.

Police could not tell the reason behind the killing.

3 more pvt operators

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Sylhet, Habiganj, Moulvibazar, Sherpur, Jamalpur, Netrokona, Mymensingh, Kishoreganj, Tangail, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Narayanganj excluding the district headquarters, Gazipur excluding the district headquarters, Tongi and Dhaka excluding Dhaka city, Jinjira and Savar.

The commission has segmented the country Central, South-East, South-West, North-East and North-West zones.

The Central zone covers Dhaka city, Jinjira, Savar, Narayanganj district headquarters, Gazipur district headquarters and Tongi, which has been out of bounds to open licensing regime as WorldTel Bangladesh Limited served a legal notice on the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications in early January not to open Dhaka city to the other companies.

The ministry awarded licence to WorldTel in July 2001 to run 300,000 fixed-line phones in the capital, along

with the elementary fair play that it, along with many others, had always expected from Bangladesh.

The letters came following a report by Amnesty International on May 24 that said Kazi Faruque and David William Biswas were held incommunicado and were at grave risk of torture.

Meanwhile, in Dhaka, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) held a rally and formed a human chain to protest at Faruque's arrest. Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP), a coalition of 48 Non-Government Organisations (NGO), in a press release yesterday also expressed grave concern at the arrests and subsequent halt in Proshika's operations.

One more held on charge of Tungipara bomb threat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police yesterday arrested one more person in connection with the threat to blow up the tomb of Banga-bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Tungipara of Gopalganj district.

The arrested man was identified as Hafez Mohammad Akhtaruzzaman of Kakkdanga village under Kotalipara upazila of Gopalganj district. Sources said he was the founder member of Kakkdanga Darul Ulim Hafiza Madrasa and a relative of Mufti Abdul Hannan Munshi of Kotalipara. Earlier on Tuesday police held one Paritosh Mondol.

Meanwhile, police made no headway in the investigation of the bomb threat till yesterday. They (police) were quizzing both the arrestees and checking three films that had been seized from the studio of Paritosh.

JS probe

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was sold at Tk 1.50 lakh to 2 lakh more than the actual market price. Following a heated debate between Huda and the committee members, a sub-committee was formed to probe the allegations and submit its report within 30 days.

The JS body yesterday also asked the ministry to stop 80 road maintenance projects worth Tk 300 crore during the monsoons. "Roads and Highways Department asked 81 private firms to complete the maintenance work in June to September. But, the quality of work amid the rains will surely be not good. So, we have asked to start the work in the dry season," the committee chairman said.

The committee instructed the ministry to initiate necessary steps to stop irregularities in toll collection at Meghna-Daudkandi Bridge, as "Irregularities in toll collection at the bridge are being reported frequently," Manjur Hossain said.

with the state-owned telecoms operator Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB), for four years from the date of commencement of service.

Bangladesh's teledensity is still the lowest in South Asia, according to statistics of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Only 1.56 of 100 inhabitants here have telecoms access, the 2003 data of the UN telecoms watchdog say.

Cell phones outnumber fixed-line telephones in Bangladesh, which has 0.55 fixed phone per 100 inhabitants. The number of mobile phones per 100 people stands at 1.01.

Currently, the country has around 1,000,000 fixed telephone lines installed by the BTB, Sheba Telecom and Bangladesh Rural Telecom Authority (BRTA). The cellular phones provided by four operators in foreign ventures number about 2,300,000.

Govt plans no oil price

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the peak-demand summer driving season, supply security fears and bullish speculators.

"We'll be affected only if high price continues in the coming months. However, analysis indicates that price of oils on the international market will decline further in the coming weeks," the minister hoped.

According to reports oil market lost more heat yesterday morning as traders held their nerve despite a report of tight US inventories, locking in profits ahead of a likely production boost by Opec (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) producers next week.

The price of benchmark Brent North Sea crude oil for delivery in July fell by 35 cents to \$36.73 in early deals. New York's reference light sweet crude for delivery in July dipped 23 cents to \$40.47.

The contract had fallen by 44 cents to \$40.80 a barrel on Wednesday, showing a drop of over \$1 since it peaked at \$41.85 in electronic trading on May 17, according to reports.

US oil prices, however, eased with Opec's president trying to soothe the market by saying the cartel was considering a big output increase to make a "psychological

impact".

The OPEC ministers are due to meet in Beirut next Thursday to discuss a Saudi Arabian proposal to lift the cartel's official production ceiling by at least two million barrels per day (bpd).

Opec President Purnomo Yusgiantoro said the cartel would probably have to raise production allocations by more than 2.3 million bpd, 10 percent, to have any hope of denting bulls' enthusiasm.

He acknowledged in Jakarta that with estimates of Opec production already that much over official output limits, anything less than 2.3 million bpd would do little to reassure traders of more supply.

He said the options being considered for a meeting of the Opec countries on June 3 in Beirut were for increases of two million bpd, 2.3 million or more than 2.3 million.

"The third (option) we have a significant increase so as to give a psychological impact to reducing oil prices," Purnomo was quoted by international news agencies as saying.

Saudi Arabia has already made a commitment to deliver real extra volumes of about 10 percent in June, taking its production to 9.1 million bpd, whatever Opec decides.

Mystery deepens over

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Kula. The by-poll was slated for June 6.

Court records show the returning officer (RO) of the constituency filed the petition with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, which is tantamount to jumping the hierarchy of the Election Commission (EC).

But the RO, Mia Mostak Ahmed, last night told The Daily Star that he did not file any petition and added: "I have no jurisdiction to do so. I may be made a party to the case without my knowledge."

Additional Attorney General Abdur Rezzak Khan came up with a different story. First he told The Daily Star that it was filed by the EC, a claim denied by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed.

Later, he said it was the RO who filed the petition. But then he said: "I cannot recall who did it. Ask the advocate on record about it."

Advocate on Record Mohammad Wahidullah, who maintains records of the court documents, said: "The EC as well as the RO filed the petition."

But when he was told that the CEC and other commissioners have denied going to court, he said: "I have to check with the records."

Pressed to divulge the name, he said: "It will be a lie if I say I cannot recall the petitioner's name. I am refraining from speaking. You better contact Additional Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali."

When contacted, Mohammad Ali said the EC filed the petition. But later he said: "Contact the advocate on record."

When he was told about the advocate on record's version, Mohammad Ali said: "You come to court and see the records for yourself." The record shows the RO as the petitioner.

The mystery became apparent when leading lawyers including Dr Kamal Hossain and Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud questioned the government's involvement in the case when the attorney general's office went to court to file the appeal.

CEC Syed, who holds a constitutional post, was totally ignored in filing the case, raising a host of questions about the motive for such a move.

In his reaction to The Daily Star, Syed said: "The Election Commission (EC) has not filed any petition against the stay order of the High Court. Usually, we do not move any petition in such a situation."

The government's becoming a party to the case as the attorney general's office moved the appeal in favour of the RO has whipped up the controversy even more.

AK Mohammad Ali, election commissioner, told The Daily Star last night: "We have not appealed against the stay order, nor have we given permission to anyone to do it for us. The court will decide whether

Court bans