

HR groups to move court to stop wholesale arrest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leading human-rights (HR) organisations yesterday decided to challenge the government crackdown on the opposition activists and innocent people alike in a bid to force it into wrapping up the ongoing blanket arrests and immediately releasing detainees with compensation.

The HR bodies yesterday at a meeting with Bangladesh Bar Council decided to serve a legal notice on the government today challenging the legality of the mass arrests. The notice will ask the BNP-led coalition government to immediately release the arrestees and compensate the victims, sources said.

They will also issue a statement at a press conference today to express concern at the ongoing mindless arrests.

The organisations filed an application with the High Court yesterday seeking an injunction against the mass arrests and implementation of a court ruling in last April in this regard, which the government ignored.

A party desperate for power with foreign force help PM alleges at rally

UNB, Comilla

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday alleged that a certain party became desperate to go to power with the help of foreign powers. "They have lost people's support and sought foreign assistance, but they should know that it is not possible with external help," she said. "A popular government can't be removed banking on foreign assistance," she asserted while addressing a public rally at DR High School ground at Muradnagar in Comilla.

Tax return deadline extended to Oct 31

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has extended to October 31 the deadline for submission of individual income tax returns in the wake of the floods and demands from different organisations. The NBR in a circular yesterday said the extended deadline is also applicable to submission of self-assessment on income tax returns. Officials at the NBR said taxpayers failing to submit the returns within the stipulated time would face stringent penalties.

YASMIN KILLING CASE Another convict to walk gallows tomorrow

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Amrita Lal, the third policeman sentenced to death in the sensational Yasmin rape and murder case of Dinajpur, will be hanged in Rangpur Central Jail at 12:01am tomorrow. All preparations have been taken to execute the death sentence. Jail officials, doctors and the representatives of district and police administrations will be present during the execution.

TIB FINDINGS ON IRREGULARITIES AND CORRUPTION AT CHITTAGONG PORT

Tk 40.70 crore paid in tips annually for loading and unloading	Tk 10,000 goes out in bribe for plotting a ship through to and out of port channel	Minimum Tk 500 bribe paid for submitting an import general manifesto (IGM)	Another Tk 500 in case of any change required to the IGM
Tk 1,000 bribe for permission to send a container from the port to the EPZ	Tk 4,000 bribe for permission to send a container from Chittagong Port to Mongla Port.	12 signatures needed from the customs and 18 signatures from the port authorities to clear a consignment. Importers have to pay bribe against every signature	
Total bribe stands at Tk 3,000 for completion of IGM documentation	Tk 200 bribe for permission to send a container from the port to the ICD		

STAR GRAPHICS

Rip-off at Ctg Port

Port, customs officials fleece traders Tk 783cr a year in bribes, TIB report reveals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chittagong Port and customs officials extract about Tk 783 crore from importers and exporters in bribes and tips a year, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) says in a stunning study released yesterday. The watchdog study was based on the outcome of a yearlong investigation from July 2003 to June 2004 that says customs officials get Tk 451 crore and the port staff Tk 332 crore at Chittagong Port that handles over 75 percent of Bangladesh sea cargo. TIB identified such clandestine practices as adding to the cost of business in Bangladesh.

Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, TIB Trustee Board treasurer, who formally released the "Diagnostic Study: Chittagong Port" at a function at the National Press Club in Dhaka, said the illegal charges are blunting competitiveness of Bangladeshi products and services. Customs clearance for imported goods involves the highest volume of illegal transactions, which translates into Tk 672 crore in bribes and tips, and loading and unloading involves Tk 41 crore and export clearance Tk 70 crore, TIB says.

TIB says the report marks the first comprehensive study on Chittagong Port, analysing all aspects and preparing a set of recommendations to improve the situation to face the challenges of continued traffic growth. The Dock Working Management Board forces stevedoring agents to hire double the number of required workers to load or unload goods from ships and stuff and de-stuff goods from containers, TIB says. Control of stevedoring agents over dockworkers slackened, allowing the workers to work at will: the dock workers are scheduled to work from 8:00am, but do not start until 9:30am, losing about 14 percent of working hours to the delay. The TIB research finds the shipping agents are at the mercy of 10 pilots who guide ships from the outer anchorage to the port jetty. Pilots take Tk 5,000 each time for berthing a ship and taking it to the outer anchorage. In 2003, 1,720 ships berthed at the port to carry 1,89,84,000 tonnes

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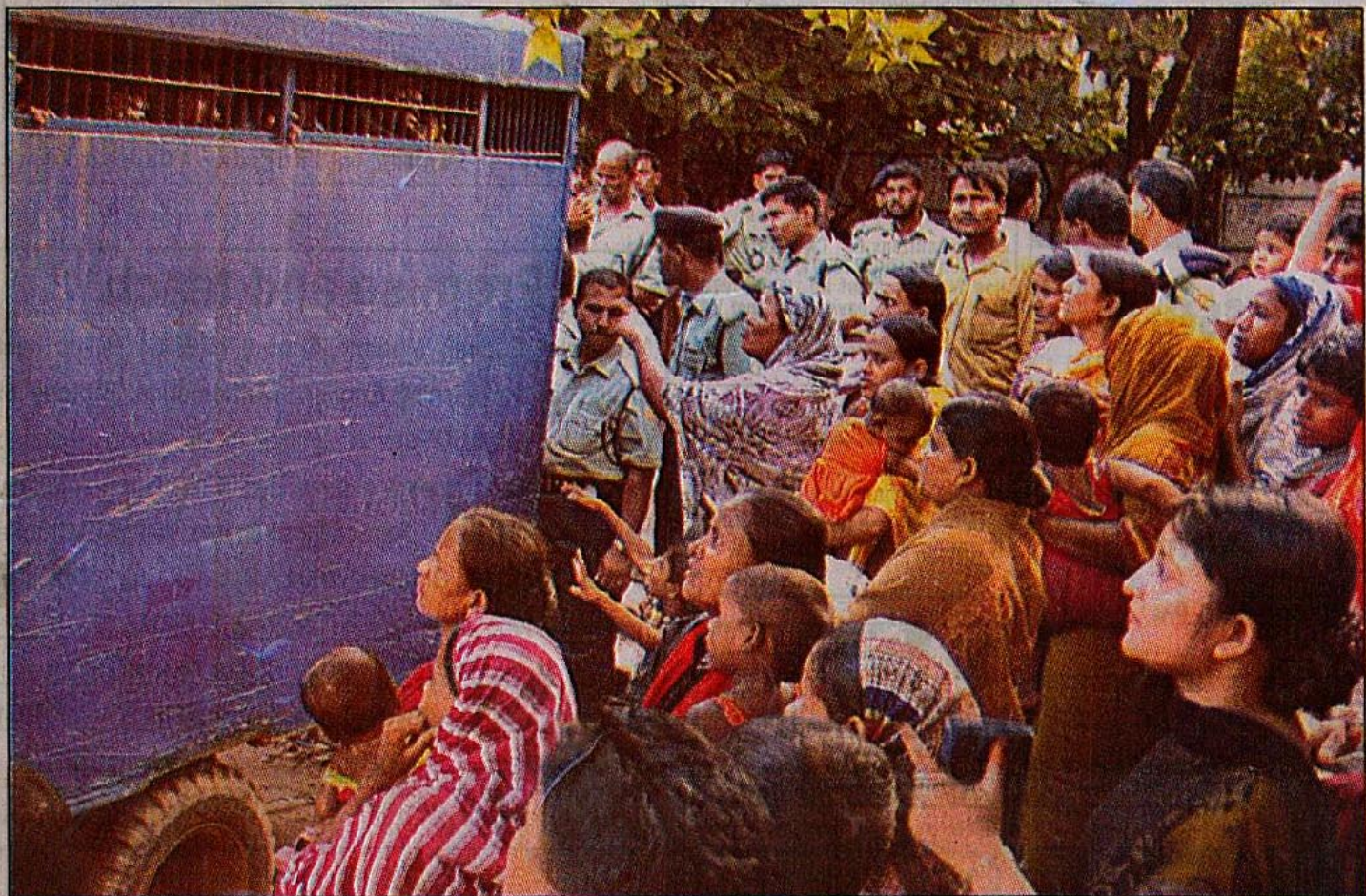


PHOTO: STAR

The victims of ongoing blanket arrests peek through the ventilation grating of a police van to have glimpse of their near and dear ones before they are taken to Dhaka Central Jail from the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka yesterday.

JU initiates probe into teacher's fatwa

JU CORRESPONDENT

Jahangirnagar University (JU) authorities yesterday formed a five-member probe body to investigate the issuing of fatwa (religious edict) by an assistant professor of physics department on September 26 asking female students to wear burqa. The probe body headed by Pro Vice-chancellor Prof Enamul Huq Khan includes deans of the four faculties of university. It has been asked to submit its report by October 7.

2 British soldiers killed in ambush

US air strikes kill 3 Iraqis; 2 Egyptian hostages freed

AFP, Baghdad

A pair of Egyptian hostages were freed yesterday as two British soldiers were killed in a rare flare-up of violence in southern Iraq and US warplanes again pounded the rebel-held town of Fallujah. Insurgents ambushed a British military convoy in the southern city of Basra, killing two soldiers, a spokesman for the British army in Iraq says. The first vehicle in a convoy of two armoured Land Rovers was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade, he said yesterday. As soldiers from the second vehicle were trying to rescue those hit, they came under attack from small arms fire. The two soldiers in the first Land Rover later died in hospital, the army spokesman said. The deaths bring the tally of

GPA-5 galore signals tough admission race

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Tough competition awaits students seeking admission to the best public universities as a record number of students passed this year's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations under the seven education boards. Pass percentage in the HSC examinations this year is a four-year high of 47.74 and 3,036 students secured the highest grade point average (GPA-5) against only 20 last year. As many as 106,888 students secured GPA-3 and above, which is the minimum requirement for admission to public universities. The country's 21 public universities can enrol 92,562 students in an academic year, according to government statistics. "We want to enrol our wards at public universities as tuition fees

and other expenses are within our reach," said Enamul Kabir Khan, a guardian. "We just cannot afford the high expenditures on our wards' studies in private universities," added Enamul, a lawyer. The 51 private universities can take over 40,000 students, according to University Grants Commission (UGC). However, 1,297 degree colleges affiliated to the National University can enrol 8,17,000 students. But students seek admission to those colleges only when they fail to get admitted to universities. Dhaka University (DU), the first choice for most students, can enrol about 4,600 students in an academic year. "Dhaka University is my number one choice, if I fail to get enrolled there I shall opt for Jahangirnagar University," said Mousumi Kabir, an admission seeker.

Meanwhile, the DU authorities have not yet decided when the admission test for 2004-05 would take place. "Admission committee will hold a meeting with deans of faculties and chairmen of departments to fix the date," DU Vice-chancellor (VC) Prof SMA Faiz told The Daily Star last night. "Only the best of the best will qualify in this year's admission tests," he said commenting on better performance of HSC students this time. "We have no plan as yet to increase the number of seats," the VC said in reply to a question. Jahangirnagar University can enrol about 1,000 students in an academic year. Accommodation capacity of different public universities reduced largely because of session jams due to campus violence.

BDB, Gono Forum mull electoral union

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) chief Prof. AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and Gono Forum President Dr. Kamal Hossain said they would consider forming an electoral alliance to resist reactionary forces, if necessary. "We are going to formulate a people's manifesto not for state power. But if necessary, we would forge electoral alliance to bring positive changes in the country and resist reactionary forces," said Prof B. Chowdhury, replying to a question at a joint press conference at the National Press Club. The BDB chief said any progressive political party could use the people's manifesto as there is no copyright. He also expressed his hope that they would be able to attract the countrymen to their people's manifesto.

"People of the country are greatly frustrated with the misrule of the successive governments," said B. Chowdhury. The BDB chief said the objective of people's manifesto would be to mobilise the countrymen against the misrule of the government. He also said the people want change but that has to be a meaningful change through a constitutional way. Replying to a question on whether the two leaders committed any mistakes in the past, Badruddoza said, "I tried to establish a new party (BNP) free from criminal activities but the party (BNP) derailed from its previous track due to mistakes of the leadership." Replying to the same question, Dr. Kamal said, "I seek apology as I could not separate the judiciary from the executive when I was law minister."

JAIL KILLING CASE Witness sick

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Recording of statement of a witness in the historic Jail Killing Case, for which the verdict was deferred once, is unlikely today as the witness is sick. Witness Saifuddin Ahmed, the then deputy superintendent of police and second investigation officer of the case, is paralysed and bed-ridden now with Parkinson's disease and cannot go out of his residence at Nawabpur in the old part of the city. The verdict of the case, originally scheduled to be delivered on September 21, was put on hold as court entertained a petition submitted by the lawyer of accused-on-bail Taheruddin Thakur that asked for deposition of Saifuddin who never appeared at court despite being an important witness. The court fixed today for recording of his statement

QUEST FOR A DROP OF LIFE

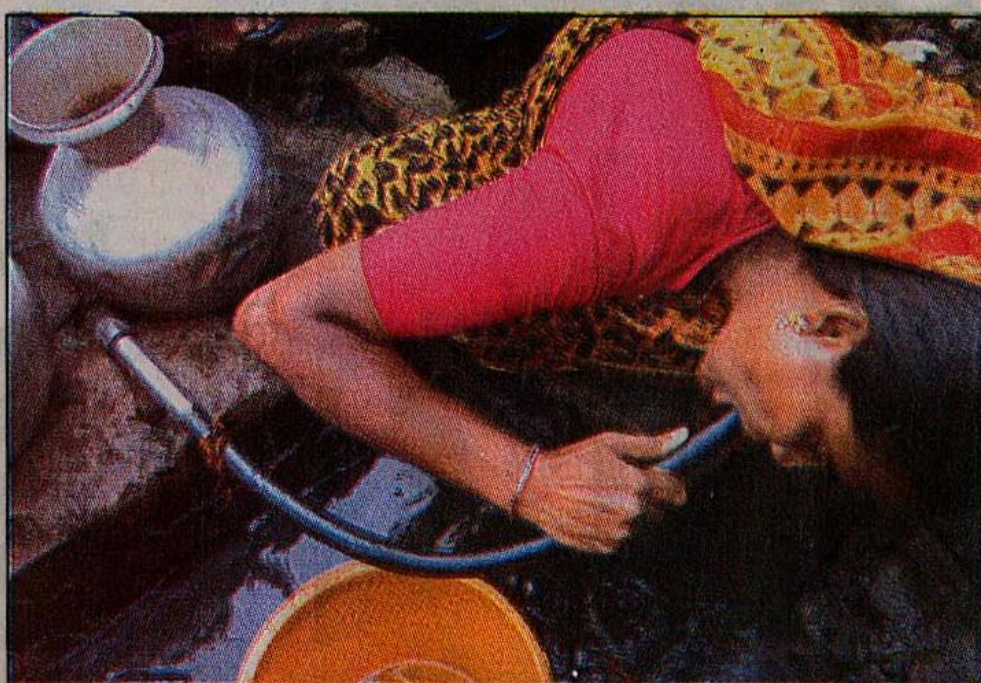


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

A housewife desperately tries to suck drinking water out of a roadside standpipe on Court House Street in Old Dhaka yesterday, as water supply dried up in the locality leaving the poor households high and dry.

Outlaws kill 2, gun battle with jt forces

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishitia

Cadres of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) gunned down two brothers including a freedom fighter in Rajbari while in Kishitia a PBCP man was killed and at least 15 were injured in an hour-long shootout with joint forces in the early hours yesterday. According to Rajbari police, about 20 armed PBCP men ringed the house of freedom fighter Asim Kumar Choudhury, 57, at about 2:30am. The gang stormed into the house and started beating the two brothers and at one stage shot them down. Both of them died on the spot. The miscreants also asked the victims' family to leave the area shortly. Police recovered their body in the morning and sent to Rajbari sadar hospital for autopsy. Sources said the gang earlier

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Judicial body feels footage of TV channel doctored

BSS, Dhaka

The judicial commission probing the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally felt some parts of a video footage of a private TV channel that identified two suspects were doctored. The commission also considers non-professional the attitude of three private TV channels in covering the incident. Sources close to the commission told the BSS that after watching the footages of the three TV channels, the commission felt that they could not realise the magnitude of the event and thus missed the golden chance to identify the attackers which would have led to unearth the mystery behind it. The sources said the commission thought although the footages of the TV channels assisted the local and

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