

Seize more faulty cars, rickshaws to ease jam , ministry asks police

UNB, Dhaka

The home ministry yesterday directed the law enforcers to seize faulty motor vehicles and unauthorised rickshaws jamming roads in the capital.

"Remove faulty motor vehicles and unauthorised rickshaws and take legal actions against those concerned," State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar told the law enforcers at a high-level meeting held at the ministry.

He also stressed integrated activity in controlling traffic in the capital, saying community police will also work side by side with traffic police.

The meeting formed a committee headed by an additional secre-

tary of the ministry to identify the faulty vehicles, which are the main cause of traffic congestion in the capital.

The meeting decided to deploy joint teams of police, paramilitary BDR and Ansar at all Puja mandops across the country for smooth celebration of the greatest festival of the Hindus.

It also decided to deploy 34 mobile courts in Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur to check crimes during the holy month of fasting.

Among others, Home Secretary Omar Farook, Directors General of BDR, Rab and Ansar, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate and high officials concerned attended the meeting.

Two S'pore celebrities in drug link

ANN/ THE STRAITS TIMES

TWO local celebrities -- rapper-actor Sheikh Haikel and Channel NewsAsia (CNA) presenter Cheryl Fox -- have been linked to the cocaine trafficking syndicate busted last week.

Both were arrested by the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) on suspicion of consuming illicit drugs, but their initial urine tests were negative.

They are out on bail pending the results of further, more thorough tests being carried out by the Health Sciences Authority (HSA).

The test results are expected next week.

Mr Haikel and Ms Fox are the latest high-profile personalities involved in last week's bust, in which 23 people were arrested.

Three people have already been charged with trafficking, and another six with drug consumption or possession.

The six include Dinesh Singh Bhatia, the eldest son of former Judicial Commissioner Amarjeet Singh and former Nominated Member of Parliament Kanwaljit Soin; Nigel Bruce Simmonds, the editor of high-society magazine Singapore Tatler; and French chef Francois Fabien Mermilliod.

A CNB spokesman confirmed that Mr Haikel, 28, was among the 23 arrested, although he has not been charged.

He was at the house of alleged syndicate leader Marx Oh on Thursday night when CNB officers moved in.

The officers found 2.3g of cocaine and 23.6g of cannabis in Oh's Hyde Park Gate home in Seletar Camp.

Creative declares war on Apple

ANN/ THE STRAITS TIMES

Expect to see and hear Creative Technology everywhere as it embarks on a worldwide marketing campaign to snatch dominance of the digital music player market from Apple Computer.

Mr Sim Wong Hoo, Creative's chief executive officer, promised to come out with "'guns blazing" in what he called a war, and said his company would "'take no prisoners".

A recent spate of TV and newspaper advertisements, he said, was the beginning of a multi-million-dollar marketing campaign to correct what he called mistakes in the past.

Said Mr Sim: "'We have learnt a lot of painful lessons in the MP3 market after being overtaken by Apple.

"We have the technology with better audio quality, but we lost out on marketing. We didn't shout about it. For example, our battery life is much longer than Apple's gadgets."

According to Mr Sim, Apple had a 17 per cent market share worldwide of the digital audio player market in June, while Creative's share was 10 per cent then.

He said Creative should not have slowed down its marketing efforts when the dot.com bubble burst in 2001, and when Sars hit the region last year.

Creative will be going big with the launch of its latest product, the Zen Micro, to ensure that it grabs a greater mindshare among consumers: On the cards is a \$100,000 launch party next month which may feature celebrity guests.

Product placements in Hollywood movies and endorsements by celebrities like singer Jewel are other possibilities.

These represent a significant departure from traditional Creative product launches, which are low-key affairs held at the company's Jurong East headquarters.

The Zen Micro will compete directly with Apple's iPod Mini.

Touted as the "'iPod Mini killer", the Zen Micro was developed by engineers and designers whose mission brief was to "'beat Apple on all fronts".

To do this, the Zen Micro will come in 10 colours - the iPod Mini has five - and will include features missing in Apple's product, such as built-in FM radio and voice-recording capabilities.

Price will also be a factor. The Micro, which has a capacity of 5 gigabytes (GB), will sell for \$499, compared with the 4GB iPod Mini's price tag of \$458.

One reason for Creative's big push in the digital music player market is Mr Sim's vision of it: He says it is exploding, and predicts that it is potentially bigger than the cellphone market.

"Everyone can own three MP3 devices in different colours, or of different types, such as flash-memory or hard disk-based. You can also upgrade your player, just like your cellphone."

Mr Sim is equally upbeat about his speaker product line, particularly with the big push by Microsoft to transform computers into entertainment centres for the living room.

As for Creative's flagship Sound Blaster products, the company will continue to roll them out, including a PC card version that plugs into notebook computers to provide high quality surround sound.

A new Sound Blaster sound card for the PC, based on a newly-developed audio micro-processor, is also likely to be launched next year.

Uninterrupted gas supply

FROM PAGE 1

Given the gas reserves we have in hand and considering our future gas exploration, we can meet both their immediate and future demands," State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources AKM Mosharraf Hossain told reporters yesterday.

International oil companies (IOCs) have also shown renewed interest in gas extraction and exploration, the minister said.

"We're quite convinced that the availability of gas from Bangladesh is going to be there... we're quite satisfied," Tata Group Chairman Ratan N Tata told reporters after a meeting with Mosharraf at the Secretariat.

He also met Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami, State Minister for Power Iqbal Hassan Mahmood and Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan in the afternoon.

Mahmood said the Indian conglomerate would conduct a feasibility study on both gas-fired and coal-based power plants. The Group may set up the power, steel and fertiliser plants at different locations to be decided by the Tata technical team.

The Tata Group will conduct a feasibility study on the proposed projects in six months, for which a technical team is likely to fly in Dhaka in a week, according to its chairman's meetings with the state ministers for energy and power.

Ratan Tata said he expects the plants to go into production in three to four years on successful completion of the feasibility study and settlement of all issues on stake.

About the gas pricing, he said they will come back after the feasibility study to discuss all the issues including the pricing of gas with the government.

Mosharraf briefed the Tata Group officials about the country's gas reserves including proven,

probable, recoverable, remaining, possible and potential reserves and the gas consumption pattern.

The Tata officials inquired about the price rates at which gas is supplied to independent and state-run power plants and also to fertiliser plants including Kafco (Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company).

The state minister told them that the government has a pricing policy and the Energy Regulatory Commission will fix the prices for gas supply to the proposed Tata plants taking into account all aspects including international fuel oil prices.

"Still the gas prices in Bangladesh are competitive, but we'll discuss the pricing issue after the feasibility study," Ratan told journalists.

The Tata Group will need 200 mmcfd gas per day in the initial stage, which will rise to 350 mmcfd when the plants go into full operation. The conglomerate will invest \$1.50 billion in the first phase and \$ 0.50 billion in the next phase.

The Group also sought export facilities that local export industries enjoy.

The Tata officials told Mahmood and Mosharraf that they will sell a portion of their production from the plants for local consumption and the rest will be exported to India and other countries.

Mahmood said the government needs to put a power export policy in place. "They (Tata Group) are not here for charity, they are here to do business. Bangladesh has a huge demand for electricity and their study will see if selling power to local market or exporting it is more profitable."

MORE INVESTMENT ON CARDS

The visiting Tata Group delegation yesterday met Board of Investment

(BoI) Executive Chairman Mahmudur Rahman at his office and discussed their investment proposals.

After the meeting, the BoI chairman said in addition to their previous proposal of investing in the power, steel and fertiliser sectors, the Indian industrial giant has also showed interest to invest in service and pharmaceutical sectors in Bangladesh.

The Tata Group, which owns the Taj Group of Hotels in India, wants to build a holiday resort in the prime sea beach town of Cox's Bazar.

It is also interested to set up a pharmaceuticals factory for export of medicine to developed world.

TATA GOES GAGA

OVER BANGLADESH

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, quoting the Tata Group chairman, told reporters: "He (Ratan) told us that the misperceptions held outside (Bangladesh) do not match the realities on the ground."

"He said that he found no malice from the people of Bangladesh, that he saw Tata products being used widely and that a lot of people would not understand the potential of Bangladesh without coming here," Morshed told the reporters at his office after his meeting with Ratan Tata at the foreign ministry.

Emerging from the meeting, Ratan Tata told reporters that he was "very, very impressed" with what he has seen in Dhaka and said, "I wish I had come earlier."

Meeting sources said the Indian business tycoon told Morshed that the Tata Group has come to Dhaka neither for charity, nor for exploitation, it is here to share the work towards development.

He said although no deals were on the table, they were very upbeat about their future here and would be conducting a number of feasibility

studies in Bangladesh.

During the meeting, the foreign minister said, both sides discussed greater potential in Bangladesh and natures of investment that would result in a 'win-win' situation. Other sectors the two sides discussed were hotels, human resources development and healthcare, especially world-class hospitals.

Morshed quoted the Indian business tycoon as saying, "There is a tremendous potential for Bangladesh to multiply its export income and employment generation."

The Group has also expressed interest to expand scientific education in the social sectors of Bangladesh, meeting sources said.

ALL SUPPORT ASSURED

Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami yesterday assured the Tata Group of all government support to implement its \$2 billion investment plan when the Tata Group chairman made a courtesy call on him at his office.

He, however, cautioned that the Indian giant will not get any 'undue' facility, which could harm local industries.

Talking to newsmen after the meeting, the minister said, "We welcome Tata's investment in Bangladesh. But the government will put national interests before everything in dealing with Tata."

The Tata Group will have to comply with all rules and regulation of the land for setting up industries in Bangladesh, he said.

"Bangladesh needs foreign direct investment to generate employment and reduce poverty. But we must protect our local industries, too," he noted.

Drive

FROM PAGE 12

The traffic department in a notice on October 6 ordered all owners of rickshaws without any valid papers to withdraw their non-motorised vehicles from the city streets within October 12.

After the deadline was over, the traffic division of DMP in collaboration with Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) appointed eight teams, each led by a traffic sergeant, in the city streets to seize illegal rickshaws from October 13.

The traffic division of DMP has taken the step, as it did last year, to keep the city's traffic jam situation in control and reduce suffering of people especially during the upcoming Ramadan, as they consider the non-motorised vehicles responsible for major traffic congestion.

The number of unauthorised rickshaws using fake numberplates of the DCC is notably increasing in the city causing traffic congestion, according to DMP officials.

It is estimated that about three lakh rickshaws ply the capital using fake numberplates and DCC documents while at least 50,000 more illegal rickshaws hit the city streets every year, according to sources.

There are, however, about 80,000 registered rickshaws in the capital, according to Wheel Tax Department of the DCC.

Meanwhile, Rickshaw Van Sangram Parishad convenor Shukur Ahmed said they will observe a dawn-to-dusk strike tomorrow (October 16) protesting the seizing of illegal rickshaws without providing alternative employment which, they said, the government cannot do.

He also demanded declaring of the renewal date of rickshaw licence by the DCC.

Altaf asks

FROM PAGE 1

including vegetables, he admitted that the market would take time to cool down as recent floods and rain heavily damaged crops.

"Prices will come down to a tolerable level before Ramadan," he asserted.

Musharraf

FROM PAGE 12

could undermine his authority in pressing home the war against terror in Pakistan and in pushing forward a nascent peace process with rival India.

Military spokesman Major General-Shaukat Sultan told Reuters before the passage of the bill that Musharraf had yet to decide whether he would remain in uniform, but circumstances had changed since he announced his plan to quit the army.

"President Musharraf has given his position many times in the media and he says 'let the time and I will decide'," he said Thursday.

"When he said in the past -- it was a year back -- things have changed a lot since then. The environments have changed, so hence he needs to review his decision this way or that way, whatever it is."

Under a deal last year with the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal Islamic opposition alliance, Musharraf pledged to stand down as army chief in return for their support for controversial constitutional changes that gave him sweeping powers to sack parliament and dismiss the government.

Moudud, his deputy

FROM PAGE 1

The Supreme Court has asked the government to separate the judiciary from the executive, but the government has the deadline extended 18 times since 1999. The government petition for a 19th extension will be heard on November 9.

The roundtable on "Good Governance and Judiciary" was organised by the law ministry to celebrate the BNP-led alliance government's three years in office and to project the successes of the ministry since its accession to office.

A number of opposition politicians, who took part in the discussion, bitterly criticised the government for what they said was the killing of people by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on the pretext of 'crossfire' and without trial, denying them the chance to defend themselves.

"How can we say the rule of law exists in the country when people are being killed in custody and unfortunately, both the prime minister and home minister have welcomed such operations," said Rashed Khan Menon, president of the Workers' Party of Bangladesh.

Menon also slated the government for giving impunity to the joint forces after the custodial death of 48 people during the Operation Clean Heart anticrime drive. "Now we are witnessing politicisation in the appointment of High Court judges," he lamented.

On the criticism of the Rab activities, Moudud said, "We did not form the force through any new law and it has been formed under the law relating to the Armed Police Battalion."

Without admitting to allegations of custodial deaths, the law minister observed that custodial killing is not acceptable to any government. Such killings cannot be licensed, as the government is the custodian of the citizens.

On killings in crossfire, Shahjahan Omar said human rights are not for criminals. "In many countries criminals are killed after their arrest."

Responding to some discussants' views on people's lack of

confidence in the judiciary, he said it might be true that public trust in the judiciary has decreased, but it does not mean that people have no confidence in the judicial system.

"It is not true that our judicial system has been destroyed. (But) I want to make it clear that our judiciary is absolutely independent," said the law minister.

Jatiya Party (Ershad) lawmaker GM Quader criticised the speedy trial procedure, saying people are being deprived of justice as in many cases investigators do not get enough time to enquire into the cases with the Speedy Trial Tribunals.

Moudud however termed the system a great success of the government, as a number of sensational cases have been disposed of through the tribunals. He claimed no-one has been 'politically' harassed in the speedy trial procedure.

Quader demanded scrapping of the Article 70 of the constitution, which bars a lawmaker from voting against his party. Accountability of a government cannot be ensured in parliament because of these sorts of loopholes, he added.

Shahjahan Omar sharply reacted to Quader's view and said scrapping of the Article 70 would create rooms for purchase of lawmakers. "If it is done, the lawmakers will take bribe from the opponents and cast vote against their own party."

Barrister Mainul Husein presented the keynote paper. Attorney General AF Hassan Arif, Barrister Rafique ul Haq and Harun-al-Rashid MP, among others, took part in the discussion held at the Old High Court Bhaban.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 12

A nine-member committee of the University Grants Commission in a report soon to be submitted to the prime minister has recommended a deadline for the PUB to improve its performance. The high-powered committee had been formed to evaluate performance of the country's private universities.

Low may bring

FROM PAGE 1

and is likely to move in the north-northeasterly direction," a met official said yesterday evening.

Weatherpersons forecast heavy rain with gusty wind in most of the areas of Chittagong and Barisal divisions and medium rain in Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi. The met office recorded 12mm rainfall in Dhaka yesterday.

Our Barisal correspondent reports waterlogging and huge traffic congestion in the city streets due to a downpour yesterday hampered vehicular movement and work at Durga Puja mandops for hours.

The BIWTC authorities Wednesday night postponed a scheduled voyage of MV Alauddin on Barisal-Chittagong-Barisal route. The authorities said the BIWTC vessel will not ply until the weather improves.

Barisal and Patuakhali port authorities have also stopped plying of passenger vessels less than 65 feet in length on the same route. Special forces have been deployed to maintain the order.

Reports from the Kalapara Patharghata coastal belts said sea was rough and 7 to 8-foot-high waves were hitting the coast.

Govt to downsize

FROM PAGE 12

and Baichhatr under Banderban, a police official said.

The home ministry is trying to relocate policemen from the CHT to other areas as a big security force is deployed to ensure peace in the hill districts.

A senior official in the CHT said, "Initially we got a proposal to send back most of the policemen but we agreed to spare only 800 because we need the rest to guard the villages of Bangalee settlers and maintain legal procedures relating to arrest of terrorists and other criminals or recovery of dead bodies after an incident."

He explained, "If army personnel nab terrorists or other trouble-makers, law requires them to hand over the elements to police."

Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar yesterday visited Khagrachari and also went to some police camps in the district.

The local authorities appraised him of the necessity of keeping a certain number of policemen in the district.

The CHT saw an end to two decades of insurgency with the signing of a peace accord between indigenous rebels known as Shantibahini and the then Awami League government in December 1997.

Ramadan

FROM PAGE 1

State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharraf Hossain Shahjahan will preside over the meeting, said an Islamic Foundation press release yesterday.

Anyone who will see the Ramadan moon anywhere in Bangladesh has been requested to inform the Islamic Foundation through telephone numbers: 9559493, 9556407, 9555951, 9558337, 9559643 and 9555947.

Kerry wins third

FROM PAGE 1

Fourteen percent called it a tie in the poll, which had a 4.5 percentage point margin of error.

In CBS's poll of uncommitted voters, 39 percent said Kerry won, 25 percent Bush and 36 percent called it a tie. The margin of error was seven percentage points.

Not surprisingly, Kerry's team declared their man the victor.

"We're 3-0, it's a sweep," Kerry strategist Tad Devine said.

But Bush's team also pressed a victory claim.

"It was a decisive victory for the president on style, substance and humor," said Bush's campaign communications director Nicole Devenish.

Meanwhile, Democratic challenger John Kerry yesterday plans to start casting in on what aides claimed as a clear win in his last debate with President George W. Bush, hitting the campaign trail in Las Vegas.

Kerry checked into the gamblers paradise late Wednesday night after making the short hop from Tempe, Arizona, where he slugged it out for 90 minutes with Bush on the economy, healthcare, national security and Iraq.

Bush was also due in the city yesterday, and the rivals are likely to

spend the next two-and-a-half weeks before the November election shadowing one another around 7 to 10 key states still seen as up for grabs.

Kerry was due to give a speech to senior citizens Thursday morning, before leaving the balmy southwest to head north to Iowa, another marginal state analysts believe he must win to claim the White House.

The Massachusetts senator, who roared back into the race with a strong performance in the three faceoffs with Bush, was then due to swap his 757 campaign plane for a bus on Friday and Saturday.

He will chug through up for grabs Wisconsin on Friday and launch a similar tour through Ohio on Saturday.

Face to face Wednesday for the last time before the November 2 election, Bush charged Kerry was weak on terrorism; favored higher taxes and government-run health care; and quipped the senator sat on "the far-left bank" of US politics.

Kerry countered that the president had let Osama bin Laden slip away because of his focus on Iraq; abandoned the US middle class in favor of cutting taxes on the richest Americans; and short-changed efforts to secure US borders.