

The Daily Star

COMMITTED
TO
People's Right to Know

Wednesday 27-10-2004

F-28 CRASH Probe to take more time

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Submission of the probe report on Biman's F-28 crash in Sylhet that took place on October 8 will take more time, CAAB Chairman Air Commodore Zahed Kuddus, who is heading the three men inquiry committee, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Such a probe needs to analyse a number of highly technical reports, said the chairman, adding that report on the flight recorder, which was sent abroad, is yet to be received.

Meanwhile, rescue operation of the F-28 aircraft is still going on.

The accident badly damaged the cockpit and some other parts of the craft. Though both the engines and some other valuable parts of it are in good condition, the craft will never be able to fly.

After separation of different valuable parts, the craft body may be sold through a tender, or by the Biman may sell as scraps.

Meanwhile, a 170-foot brick built path from the runway to the crash site on the bank of the narrow canal is nearly complete. It would be used for pulling the damaged craft after separating some of its major parts.

But the cranes available in Sylhet may not serve the purpose, said an official adding, it would be hard to bring a high capacity crane or a flatbed from Dhaka due to the poor condition of the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway at places.

Besides, even if such a flatbed is brought to Sylhet, in no way will the runway be suitable for it to reach the crash site, said an official.

BDR, BSF trade heavy fire over push-in bid

UNB, Panchagarh

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Border Security Force (BSF) of India traded heavy gunfire at Panchagarh frontier on Monday night over push in of Indian nationals, but no casualty was reported.

Villagers said more than 1,000 bullets were fired from both sides along Boda and Tentulia borders as the Indian border guards tried to push Bangla-speaking Indian Muslims into Bangladesh territory through 15 points.

BDR with the help of villagers foiled all but one push in attempt. Nine Indian Muslims, including three men, two women and four children, were forcibly pushed into Bangladesh through Rawshanpur border of Tentulia early yesterday.

The BSF of Tiapara outpost had pushed eight Indians into Bangladesh through Ghagra border on Monday night. But they were pushed back. The BSF then opened fire at BDR leading to a

fierce battle.

BDR Commander Lt Col ABM Asaduzzaman and Deputy Commander Major Khizir Khan admitted the exchange of heavy fire.

Informed sources said Indian Muslims were assembled in small groups all along the border of the district to push into Bangladesh.

As tension mounted along the border, the BSF yesterday proposed for a flag meeting at sector commander level. BDR sources said the flag meeting is likely on October 28 at Banglabund zero point.

Another report from Lalmonirhat said the BSF was raising new outposts along the Adilmari border, creating panic among 12,000 Bangladeshis living in Batrigachh and Kishamat Batrigachh enclaves.

Residents of the enclaves said they were facing difficulties in communicating with the mainland as the BSF suddenly increased patrol. The BSF was raising new outposts at Kutibari, Daribas and Noonkhawa

besides three boat camps on Jari Dharala river.

BSS adds: BDR officials in Rangpur said the frontier clash erupted amid massive Indian attempts to push in overnight their Bangla-speaking Muslim nationals into Bangladesh territory through Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur and Rangpur borders.

Residents of the bordering villages and officials said the BSF men brought their nationals to the borders in trucks at night and then asked them to cross the zero line at gunpoint opening the gates of barbed wire fencing.

"More than a dozen such overnight attempts were foiled by the BDR in these frontier points" since Monday evening, a BDR official said.

Locals and BDR said additional BSF troops were called out. They took positions digging trenches forcing the BDR to reinforce its strength.

PM launches water plant run by physically challenged

BSS, Tongi

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday called upon all, particularly the well off, and voluntary and community-based organisations to work for the welfare of the physically challenged.

"The disabled are our brothers, sisters and near and dear ones. We have to come forward to ensure their welfare," she told the inaugural function of the government-sponsored bottled water plant run by the physically challenged.

Established by the Ministry of Social Welfare at a cost of Tk 19.5 crore at Tongi Station Road on the outskirts of the capital, the plant has created job opportunity for 250 disabled people. The profit of the project will be spent for their welfare.

With brand name 'Mukta', the bottled mineral water will be marketed in five different sizes. A 600ml bottle of water will cost Tk 6. The prices of four other sizes will be fixed soon.

The mineral water plant, set up with machinery imported from University Aqua Technologies Incorporate, California, USA, will purify around 3,000 litres of water every hour through reverse osmosis system.

The prime minister formally inaugurated the plant by unveiling

Rab action kills 4 in city, 1 in Rangpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five people including three alleged criminals, a trader and an Awami League activist were killed in three separate operations by the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in the capital and in Rangpur in the early hours yesterday.

Rab sources as usual claimed they were killed in 'crossfire' or 'shootout' between criminals and the Rab members. With these killings, the death count in Rab operations rose to 39 since the elite force swung into action in April this year.

Alleged criminals Naziur

Rahman alias Najiya and his brother Faruq alias Falainya, and Sekendar Ali, were killed in a 'crossfire' in Baunia embankment area under Pallabi Police Station in the capital at about 1:30am, Rab officials said.

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The death of dreaded extortionist and crime boss of the city's Karwan Bazar Khan Mohammad Shahabuddin in a gunfight with Rab early hours yesterday is greeted by jubilation of common traders of the market.

84 Muslims killed in Thai custody

AFP, Bangkok

At least 84 Thai Muslims died -- mainly from suffocation in the back of packed security force trucks -- after police and troops broke up a violent demonstration in the kingdom's troubled south, Thai officials said yesterday.

Most of the victims suffocated when 1,300 detained protesters were crammed into trucks after officials used water cannon and tear gas to break up a protest Monday

outside a police station in Narathiwat province.

Six were confirmed dead from the clashes on Monday. The others were crushed and suffocated, including several with broken necks,

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Some of the 300 demonstrators arrested by police and soldiers Monday during a demonstration against government's heavy handed treatment of Muslim militants lie on a pavement in front of Tak Bai Police Station in Narathiwat, southern Thailand.

RECRUITMENT AT RMC Irregularities alleged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The ongoing recruitment process of 150 employees by Rajshahi Medical College (RMC) authorities has raised allegations of widespread irregularities and politicisation.

The RMC employees who applied for the jobs termed the recruitment process a 'business of top politicians and officials' and alleged employees under revenue pay structure were not even called for interview.

Applicants were selected for interview for money, alleged a number of deprived candidates and the RMC sources.

Some 81 employees of the RMC have already filed a case challenging the recruitment of 81 new employees instead of regularising those who were serving more than a decade on temporary basis.

Cardiographer Atikur Rahman Chowdhury applied for the post of sterilizer-cum-mechanic but he was not called for interview. LDA-cum-typist Abdus Sabur applied for the post of stenographer, he was not called too.

But RMC Collective Bargaining Agent Assistant General Secretary and MLSS Abdul Quader was issued interview card for the post of steriliser, although he has not the required educational background.

Nazma Begum who applied for

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Losing out in battle to make ends meet

Runaway rise in cost of living pushes commoners to wall

MONJUR MAHMUD

Widening gap between income and expenditure has pushed the back of most commoners against the wall as they are struggling to cope with the soaring cost of living.

People in the low and middle-income brackets see a very little rise in their earning while an ever-increasing expenditure continues making a dent in their purses.

The income rise of officials and employees of government, non-government and private organisations, teachers, bankers, journalists and other professionals mostly depends on increment in their salary, which goes up by 2-3 percent a year.

Their spending, on the other hand, is always on the rise. Apart from rising prices of essential commodities, house-rent, utility bills and transport fares rise at regular intervals resulting in a serious mismatch between people's income and expenditure.

Overall cost of living rose sharply from only 5.42 percent in 2001 to 8.52 percent in 2002 and marked an

alarming rise to 10.48 percent last year, according to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh. The trend indicates a further increase this year.

Shariful Alam, 42, a school-teacher of Mirpur in the capital, earns Tk 8,000 a month, Tk 45,00 of which he spends on house-rent. These days he finds it very difficult to manage the monthly expenses of his four-member family with the rest amount.

"My expenditure is going up every month," Alam said. "I cannot even bear the expenses of my daily needs, then how can I manage tuition fees of my kids which also rise every year? How can I treat if any member of my family falls sick?"

After paying house-rent at the beginning of a month he can run his family hardly for 10 to 12 days. Then he has to take loans from friends and relatives. "Now I have to work hard for some extra money from private tuition."

The government increased electricity bill by 5 percent in August 2002 and 15 percent in September

2003. Gas bill also went up in three installments --6 percent in February 2002, 5 percent in October 2002, and 3.5 percent in July this year.

In the last two years Wasa bill increased three times -- 5 percent in July 2002, 5 percent in January 2003 and further 5 percent in January this year.

Bus fare rose 16 percent in January last year when fuel prices were hiked by 13.75 percent. Launch fare rose 15 percent in November 2002 and 10 percent in February 2003.

House rent also marked a 10 percent rise, on average, in the last two years.

The prices of essential commodities crossed all previous records in the last few months that hit the poor and middle class people hard. Prices of rice, wheat and vegetables have been on a constant rise since August this year.

The rice and vegetable prices further shot up at the beginning of Ramadan. In Dhaka, the price of a kg

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One-kg hand bombs found at grave near Khulna shrine

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police recovered two powerful hand bombs Monday night from near the grave of "Jinda Pir" adjacent to the holy shrine of Hazrat Khanjahan Ali (RA).

The bombs were found in two empty milk powder cans wrapped with red adhesive tape. Each of the bombs weighs over one kilogram, police said.

Being tipped off, Bagerhat Sadar Thana police recovered the bombs from an arum field belonging to Mostafa Sheikh, a farmer of Sundarghona village under Bagerhat Sadar Thana.

OC Fariduddin said one Mohammad Azam of Rupsha upazila of Khulna district has been arrested as suspect for keeping the bombs there.

Fitra fixed at Tk 30

UNB, Dhaka

Fitra has been fixed at Tk 30 per person for Dhaka and its adjacent areas.

In other parts of the country, fitra will be 1.65 kg of wheat or flour or its local market price.

The decision was taken at a meeting held at the Islamic

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OMS Govt ups rice sale

UNB, Dhaka

The government has decided to sell 5kg rice instead of 3kg to each person through open market sale (OMS) across the country from today.

Anyone can collect the amount of rice at the fixed rate of Tk 13 per kg, said an official handout.

The decision was taken at an official meeting yesterday with Food and Disaster Management Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf in the chair.

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Barisal hospital staff begin strike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Agitating staff and workers of Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) started a three-day strike yesterday demanding cancellation of the selection list for 126 posts at the SBMCH.

Meanwhile, a letter signed by Md Tazul Islam, senior secretary of ministry of health and family welfare, reached the SBMCH

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Bush, Kerry vie for decisive edge as race hits final week

AGENCIES, Green Bay

The US election campaign entered its final week with Republican incumbent George W Bush and his Democratic rival, John Kerry, struggling to establish a decisive edge among American voters.

The two rivals started their latest day of intensive lobbying in Wisconsin, one of 10 swing states expected to decide the November 2 election.

Kerry appealed to voters to elect a president namely, him who will "trust you with the truth," and quickened the pace of a campaign now in its final week. President Bush tailored an economic pitch to conservative Democrats in Wisconsin, investing crucial hours in a state Republicans think they can nudge their way.

A three-stop western Wisconsin

bus tour yesterday offered Bush a chance to peel away soft supporters of the Democrat, the president's aides said, citing Bill Clinton's star turn in the campaign a day earlier as a sign Kerry lacks luster of his own with his party's base.

Kerry, opening his day across the same state in the east, is pressing his case that Bush bungled and misled on the Iraq war and national security crises generally.

"When the president is faced with the consequences of his own bad decisions, he doesn't confront them, he tries to hide them," Kerry said in a speech prepared for delivery Tuesday in Green Bay. "The truth is, President Bush isn't leveling with the American people about why we went to war, how the war is going, or what he is doing to put Iraq on track."

And Kerry broadened the attack

to declare, "Just as he has been warned about his mistakes in Iraq, George Bush has been warned time and time again about the vulnerability of our homeland security."

Kerry said he would spend an additional \$60 billion over 10 years on homeland security, using the money to screen cargo for nuclear materials at ports and borders, add border patrol agents and more.

Bush lost Wisconsin and its 10 electoral votes by only 5,708 ballots in 2000 and focused his efforts Tuesday in Democratic-leaning reaches of the state.

Warming up for that task in his last stop Monday, in Davenport, Iowa, Bush ditched his single-focus, national security speech of earlier events in favor of a broader pitch praising the traditions of the Democratic Party.

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A girl during a shopping binge at Karnaphuli Garden City holds the Eid dress of her choice and cajoles her mom to buy it for her.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ