

City paralysed

FROM PAGE 1

transport leader allegedly in Rab custody.

The number of rickshaws increased sharply, as rickshaw-pullers from other parts of the country swarmed the capital to make some quick bucks ahead of Eid.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), however, claimed continuing with its drive to get unauthorised rickshaws off the city.

"Police have seized a good number of rickshaws but the number of unauthorised rickshaws has been on the increase before Eid," a traffic department official seeking anonymity told The Daily Star.

Some taxicabs, three-wheelers and government-owned BRTC (Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation) buses plied the city streets, but they proved too few for the commuters, said a resident while returning home on foot.

Hundreds of people waited for taxi or three-wheelers for hours on end at city suburbs such as Uttara and Mirpur. Many could not go to office or shopping and returned home finding no transports.

Not everybody suffered from the transport strike. To the rickshaw-pullers, yesterday came as a blessing. In the absence of public transports, they charged twice the normal.

"Usually, I pull rickshaw only in residential areas of Mirpur. But today is an exception, it is a great opportunity for me to earn some extra money as rickshaws are allowed on the Mirpur Road," said Tota Mia, a rickshaw-puller.

France downs Ivory Coast warplanes after 8 of its troops killed

REUTERS, Abidjan

Eight French soldiers have been killed after Ivory Coast government warplanes bombed French positions in the rebel-held town of Bouake, a United Nations official says.

The French military retaliated by destroying two Ivorian Sukhoi fighter jets on the ground at Yamoussoukro airport, a French military spokesman in Abidjan said.

Government warplanes carried out bombing raids across the rebel-held north for a third day yesterday, fuelling fears of a slide back into full-blown hostilities in the world's top cocoa grower which could threaten a fragile peace in the region.

"Military sources from the U.N. said that two Sukhoi (warplanes) belonging to the Ivorian army have just been destroyed by the French after these aircraft targeted and hit a French target," said Jean-Victor Nkolo, spokesman for the U.N. mission in Ivory Coast.

"Eight were killed and 23 wounded. All were French military," he said.

The French military spokesman said the French barracks in the rebel stronghold of Bouake had been hit, but he had no information on casualties.

Government warplanes attacked Bouake shortly after French and U.N. officials heard reports of machinegun and artillery fire around the city.

Changes in admin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday brought some important changes in the civil administration and made an acting secretary officer on special duty (OSD).

According to official notification, the government yesterday appointed Chairman of Power Development Board Mokhelesur Rahman Khandaker as secretary in-charge of the Ministry of Jute and Textile, making OSD acting secretary Azizul Islam.

Hasan Mahmud Delwar, a newly promoted officer to the post of additional secretary, has been appointed as chairman of National Housing Authority. He belongs to the seven joint secretaries promoted under the president's 10 percent quota due to their non-qualifying in regular promotion process.

Delwar is an officer of much-talked-about 1973 batch.

Shahabullah, joint secretary of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, has been made member of the Administrative Appellate Tribunal and its member Anwarul Karim transferred to the Ministry of Home as joint secretary.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, meanwhile, worked at her Secretariat office for about a couple of hours yesterday.

Minister for Commerce Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar, State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Rezaul Karim, Cabinet Secretary Dr Saadat Hussain and Establishment Secretary Safar Raj Hossain met with Khaleda at the Secretariat.

Official sources said Khaleda signed some important files and enquire about the situation at the Secretariat and administration.

Robbers injure 6, loot valuables at Kazipara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Armed robbers hacked six members of a family and looted Tk 22,000 in cash and 25 tolas of gold ornaments at West Kazipara, Mirpur in the capital yesterday.

A band of about 10 robbers entered 822/1, West Kazipara house of Moinuddin Ahmed through the unlocked door of the rear veranda at about 2:00am, family sources said.

They tied up all eight inmates with ropes and confined them in a room on the first floor of the two-storeyed building at gunpoint and asked for the keys of almirahs.

As some inmates cried out for help the robbers hacked five with ramdao.

The robbers later attempted to rape a domestic help. As the landlord's son Ahmedul Hasan came forward to save her, robbers hacked him badly, failing to rape the girl.

The landlord's wife Anwara Begum, son Ahmedul Hasan, nephew Russell and domestic help Swarna are undergoing treatment at Mirpur Al Helal Hospital while another maid Kalpana at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Soon after Fazr Ajan, the robbers left the house wearing Pajama and Punjabi.

Family members suspect some locals they know might have link to the robbery as two of the robbers were wearing masks.

Tape sent

FROM PAGE 12

contact yet made with the kidnappers," Khan told UNB over telephone yesterday. But the envoy is, however, optimistic about hearing some good news anytime.

He was also hopeful about Kashem being still alive.

The Bangladesh Embassy in Jordan is also trying for Kashem's release, the ambassador said.

Revolution

FROM PAGE 1

organisations see it as a day of 'killing of freedom fighters'.

The Jatitya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) observes it as the day of civil-military revolution.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia gave separate messages on the eve of the day, making call to the people for working together to uphold national unity.

The national flag will be hoisted on public and private buildings, and roads and road islands will be decorated on the day.

Bangladeshi missions abroad will also hold programmes in observance of the day.

The ruling BNP and different political parties and socio-cultural organisations have drawn up programmes including discussions, seminars, milad mahfil, Qurankhwani and cultural functions to observe the day.

National dailies will bring out special supplements highlighting the significance of the day. Bangladesh Television and Radio Bangladesh will air special programmes.

As part of the day's programmes, special prayers will be offered at mosques, seeking divine blessings for peace and progress of the country. Prayers will also be offered at temples, pagodas and churches on the occasion.

Leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organisations will visit the mazar of late president Ziaur Rahman in the morning to offer feteha (prayers) and place wreath.

To mark the day, the JSD organises a discussion at Colonel Taher Auditorium in the city.

Public university

FROM PAGE 1

Tk 33 crore, which would run under the current system. The meeting agreed to a rise in tuition fees as it considered tuition fees the public universities currently charge are meagre, meeting sources said.

Students of public universities currently pay Tk 12-13 a month as tuition fees and they would see a rise in the fees, which would however be less than charged by private universities, according to officials at the education ministry.

"The government currently subsidises 99 percent of the expenditure of public universities and there is a growing demand for more public universities. But it is not possible for the government to continue subsidising the universities. Besides, students would take to the street if the government moves to raise tuition fee," Education Minister Osman Farruk told reporters after the Ecneec meeting.

"In this context, we are going to set up public universities that would run according to the new concept. If more universities are to be set up in the future at public initiatives, we would give our approval provided they run under the new system," he said.

Asked what would the tuition fee be at the universities, he said, "Certainly it would not be so small as in the public universities, the authorities would fix the fees so as to keep the universities in business."

Ecneec at yesterday's meeting presided over by its Chairperson and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia approved 13 development projects worth around Tk 1,085 crore, including Tk 120 crore in project aid.



PHOTO: AFP

A woman kisses a portrait of Yasser Arafat in Marseille, France yesterday during a demonstration of about 150 in support of the leader of the Palestinian Authority whose state of health remains a grave concern.

Comatose Arafat clings to life

FROM PAGE 1

Doctors said late Friday there had been no change -- for better or worse -- in the 75-year-old patient's health. They have yet to offer any official public diagnosis.

"The state of President Yasser Arafat's health has not worsened," Gen. Christian Estriepeau told reporters camped outside the hospital. "It is considered stable since the previous health bulletin." In an equally terse statement Thursday, the hospital spokesman denied rumors that Arafat was dead.

Conflicting reports on Arafat's health have emerged since he was rushed into the hospital's intensive care unit on Wednesday night, with many in his close circle concerned that the news about his health might increase chaos back home.

Meanwhile, Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei has begun talks with faction leaders in Gaza, as uncertainty mounts over who will succeed Yasser Arafat, if he dies.

Qurei is meeting officials from a number of groups, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad. He has been stressing the need for unity.

Many Palestinians fear a power vacuum and a battle for political control. Foreign leaders are urging the Palestinians not to abandon stalled peace efforts with Israel if

Arafat dies.

A row is also brewing over where Arafat, who personifies the Palestinian struggle for an independent state, might be buried.

Palestinian officials have refused to discuss funeral preparations openly, but Arafat has said he wants to be buried in Jerusalem. Israel wants Arafat, admired by Palestinians but reviled by many Israelis, to be buried in the Gaza Strip.

The death of a Palestinian leader Israel and Washington see as an obstacle to peace could alter the dynamics of the Middle East conflict.

HOSPITAL VIGIL

A hospital spokesman said late on Friday that Arafat's condition had not deteriorated in the previous 24 hours but gave no details.

Supporters staged another vigil outside the hospital, burning candles, waving Palestinian flags and carrying pictures of the Palestinian leader.

He was rushed to France from the West Bank on October 29 with severe stomach pains, diarrhoea and vomiting. Doctors have ruled out leukaemia but have not said what is wrong with him.

Some of Arafat's powers over security and financing have been

handed to Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, a leading moderate.

But he has not suggested a preferred successor and Palestinians fear a power struggle as they wage a four-year-old uprising against Israeli occupation.

At a meeting in the Gaza Strip on Friday, 14 Islamic and secular Palestinian groups involved in the uprising for a Palestinian state put up a united front.

"We are people looking for freedom, not fighting tribes," said senior Islamic Jihad official Mohammed al-Hindi, who emerged from hiding for the meeting. "We have demanded the formation of a unified national leadership."

In Brussels, worried European Union leaders said peace efforts must go on whether or not Arafat survives.

"Europe will continue to make every possible effort to ensure that the Palestinian state becomes a reality," said EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana.

Washington and Israel accuse Arafat of fomenting violence against Israel, a charge he has denied. The Palestinians want Gaza and the West Bank -- territories captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war -- for a state. (Reuters/AP/BBC)

Annan warns over Falluja assault

REUTERS, London

The government says UN chief Kofi Annan can "say what he wants" about Iraq, but it is up to the interim government in Baghdad to decide whether to launch an assault on Falluja.

The UN secretary-general wrote to the leaders of the United States, Britain and Iraq urging them not to attack the rebel-held town of Falluja, drawing a rebuke from Iraqi interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi who called the letter "confused".

A Foreign Office spokesman said on Friday Prime Minister Tony Blair had received Annan's letter.

"He's allowed to say what he wants. But nevertheless we listen to the Iraqi government in this respect," he said. "Falluja is a matter for the government of Iraq."

"It is easy for people not in Iraq to underestimate the overwhelming concern that the Iraqis themselves have for their security. So you cannot have an area as big as Falluja which is allowed to be a base for terrorism."

According to the Los Angeles Times, which obtained a copy of the letter, Annan wrote: "The threat or actual use of force not only risks deepening the sense of alienation of certain communities, but would also reinforce perceptions among the Iraqi population of a continued military occupation."

In an interview with BBC radio, Allawi made clear he had little

patience for the UN chief's attempt to intervene.

"It was a confused letter, really, and message that I got from him. It's not clear to me, and we are now seeking clarification," Allawi said. "We don't know exactly what his intentions are. We don't know whom he means. It was a very unclear message."

Allawi said Iraq was required to depend on American firepower because insurgents could still outgun the nascent Iraqi army. Annan's letter offered no alternative plan to deal with rebels, he said.

"I don't know what he means by 'not to attack', or 'to attack'. What are the substitutes? I don't know what pressure he has to bear on the insurgents. If he can stop the insurgents from inflicting damage and killing Iraqis then he is welcome."

Mehedi murder

FROM PAGE 12

Asma Akter, sister of Mehdi, went to Kotwali Police Station on Friday to lodge a murder case accusing Captain Mehdi Hassan and other members of the Rab unit that conducted the operation. But Kotwali police did not treat allegations as a separate FIR.

Mizanur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Barisal Kotwali Police Station, said they did not take a separate case, but attached the allegation to an already filed case in this connection.

He said Anisul Huq, assistant deputy director of Rab, lodged the case on October 25. And that is why the allegation brought by Mehdi's sister after 10 long days was not considered as separate FIR, he added. The complaint filed by Mehdi's family, however, would be investigated, said the OC.

In the allegation, the complainant described that when Mehdi was preparing for Tarabi prayers, Rab members forced their way into the house at about 8:00pm on October 25. They detained the other members of the family and shot and bayoneted Mehdi to death.

The Rab unit denied the family members, journalists access to the house for three hours. And by this time, they contrived so as to show Mehdi dead in a crossfire, the complainant continued.

Family members of Mehdi said they are preparing to file a murder case with a court.

Arms recovered

A team posing themselves as buyers of firearms arrested an arms dealer from Lakutia area under Babuganj upazila of Barisal district on Friday.

They also recovered one LG, one pistol and six bullets from him.

A local of Bodir Char village of Babuganj, Shahidul, 25, is allegedly an operative of outlawed Sarbaha. He was handed over to police and a case was lodged against him under arms act.

Irregularities in OMS

FROM PAGE 12

OMS centre in Free School Street area.

At least five women of the locality were denied rice at Mohiuddin's centre yesterday, though there was no one other than those five.

"Here we have arranged that only men will get rice from this centre while women will get from the other one," said Mohiuddin.

Sakhina Begum, a street vendor, said instead of five kilos, Mohiuddin sells only three kilos of rice per person.

Mohiuddin said that four out of the allotted five sacks of rice were sold out by 10:30 in the morning.

Meanwhile, when asked about the separate arrangement for men and women, Towfik said, "We at our centre sell rice both to men and women and there is no such arrangement."

The OMS sale of rice at Palashi kitchen market closed before 11:00 am yesterday.

Dealer Khurshed Alam said he had to close the sale because he had run out of the day's allotment.

Nazma Begum and Maksud Akhtar, two housewives, came to

Palashi market from as far as Kamrangir Char yesterday but found the sale closed.

"My husband, a rickshaw-puller, told me of the low-price rice here. I've been coming to the centre for last three days but got rice only once and that too after a long wait," said Nazma.

She said that five kilo low-price rice that she bought the other day, was of great help as it saved her at least Tk 25, enough to manage a day's kitchen shopping.

As there is no OMS centre in her locality, she has to come such a long way every day.

Many poor people at the Malibagh kitchen market alleged the dealer in the market sells rice for a very short period and close the sale refusing many still standing in line.

On a visit to different OMS centres, The Daily Star correspondent did not find any food department officials there.

A worker at an OMS centre in the Free School Street said food officials come to the centre as early as 7:30 in the morning to open the sale and leave in a while.

He said food officials use indelible ink to mark the person who has bought rice from the OMS centre.

Despite the OMS programme running for last two weeks, there has not been any significant fall in the prices of rice in the retail markets.

Price of Minikri rice still ranges from Tk20 to 22, Nazirshail Tk20 to 24 and Pyjam Tk18 a kilo.

Final ODI

FROM PAGE 12

underlights at the BNS.

Bangladesh picked Alok Kapali to replace Bashir but the team management said that they would disclose the playing eleven after morning practice.

Although Bangladesh's batting has been under constant pressure right from the Test series, which the Kiwis won 2-0, there was one bright ray of hope in the second one-dayer when young Afab Ahmed, bowing in his first-ever competitive match, took a fantastic 5-31. It was the first time a Bangladeshi bowler has taken five wickets in the abridged version of the game.

New Zealand had a light practice with only four players taking part. But New Zealand coach John Bracewell said that he would be aiming for nothing less than a 3-0 whitewash before next month's all-important series against Australia.

55 appointment in Bagerhat stayed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The High Court has stayed for three months the appointment of 55 employees under the deputy commissioner of Bagerhat.

A division bench comprising Justice Joyntul Abedin and Justice Zubair Rahman Chowdhury on November 1 passed the order following a writ petition. Mosharef Hossain, son of freedom fighter Rustam Ali of Kaldia village, and Abul Hasan, son of freedom fighter Mohammad Ali of Korhamara village, filed the writ.

The HC also asked the secretaries of the establishment and land ministries and the deputy commissioner of Bagerhat to show cause in three weeks why the appointments will not be cancelled.

The petitioners alleged authorities deprived them of the job, though 30 percent of the posts were reserved for children of the freedom fighters.

'Outlaw', 'godfather'

FROM PAGE 12

At Kumari village in Chuadanga's Alamdanga upazila, a band of alleged criminals hurled a bomb at fish trader Nazrul Islam and his two companions when they were returning home on a motorcycle Friday afternoon.

The fish traders escaped unhurt but locals caught one of the attackers, Tutul.

After he was turned in to the police, Tutul disclosed the name of Sharif Doctor as their 'boss' during interrogation.

Police arrested Sharif the same night in the area. Acting on Sharif's confessional statement, a police team took him to Kumar Nodi area at Kumari village at 2:00am yesterday to seize arms reportedly dumped in Bajitpur village.

Some unknown criminals opened fire on the policemen as they reached the area, prompting the law-enforcers to retaliate, claimed a local policeman.

Sharif was gunned down as he tried to flee during the gunfight, said the policeman.

Police seized one shutter-gun, two bullets and three cartridges from the spot.

Eleven people, most of them said to be criminals, have been killed in similar 'crossfire' in the district this year.

Yet another push-in bid foiled

UNB, Jeypurhat

BDR foiled Friday a BDR attempt to push 18 Indian nationals into Bangladesh through the Lakma-Koaria border.

The BDR and villagers resisted the BSF move to push in a group of Bengali-speaking Indian Muslims at 9:00pm. Earlier on Thursday, BSF tried to push in the group through the same area.

54 RU students

FROM PAGE 12

and guardians gathered during the hearing.

The bail order was halted by the university's Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Pragatisil Chhatra Jote who marched in separate processions and held a rally in the court premises.

The leaders at the rally demanded withdrawal of the cases and opening of the university immediately.

The next hearing will be held on November 17.

Al-Hiqma chief

FROM PAGE 1

an explanation for barring them from holding a scheduled press conference at a local community centre.

Kawsar and his group have been on the police hit list since he was accused of plotting an armed movement to turn the country into an Islamic state in the sedition case filed on March 20, 2003.

He had announced the press conference on November 2 and accordingly arrived with his companions at Swapnil Community Centre in the city in a hired microbus at around 11:30am.

But, the community centre's management refused to let them hold the conference citing law enforcers' directives, which angered and spurred the group to go to the police station to register protests.

Police seized Kawsar's cellphone and some documents of al-Hiqma including the press statement he had prepared to present at the press conference from him. His co-arrestees are M. Mohsin, a former convenor of Nachol upazila JCD, Mujib, Ismail Hossain and M. Zakaria. Police also held Anwarul Islam and Sharif, the driver and helper of their hired microbus.

But, witnesses said, one of Kawsar's top aides, Hussain Bin Abdul Latif, managed to slink away from the station with some more documents.

THE STATEMENT

At the top of the 12-page press statement of al-Hiqma is imprinted its motto -- 'Right use of arms is the lone way to check injustice'.

The statement labelled police a giant force of terrorists and accused them of heavy corruption. It said, "If the government fails to check police corruption, we will take our own course to do that."

Kawsar termed the ban on his party by the then home minister, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, as baseless and said his party rejected the ban and challenged the government to impose it through the court if it can.

The statement threatened to launch an attack on the capital if the government 'misuses' its power against al-Hiqma operatives.

"Beaware," it said, "We have the capability of attacking the capital. We will abide by nothing but the

constitution and the judiciary. If you [government] have enough strength, go to court to get a ruling outlawing our party."

Kawsar also prepared a list of 31 persons, against whom he said he would bring sedition charges for drawing a blue print against the country. On the list are 12 journalists including The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam, Prothom Alo Editor Motiur Rahman, Janakantha Editor Atikullah Khan Masud, Advisory Editor Toab Khan and Executive Editor Borhan Ahmed, and Aker Kagoi Editor Azmi Shahed Ahmed.

Among the political leaders listed by al-Hiqma are Workers Party Politburo Member Fazleh Hossain Badshah and Awami League leader AHM Khairuzzaman Liton.

During police interrogation, Kawsar said in the press conference he was going to announce a fresh political wing of al-Hiqma. The previous wing was announced on February 8, 2002.

He said the arrest of them was illegal as they received bail in all the three cases running against them. "Our success is 100 percent sure. We have many influential people behind us. No police and court of the country can keep us behind bars," said the boy-leader in revolutionary zeal.