

Homebound people

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Thousands of passengers are desperately looking for tickets at all bus terminals. They said the operators have already raised fare and would charge more a couple of days ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr to be celebrated on Sunday or Monday.

Most bus operators claimed they have sold out all the tickets for November 10 to 13 in advance. A few of them, however, are still selling tickets for various routes at exorbitant prices, the homebound passengers alleged.

The passengers complained of unavailability of train tickets as many brokers in the guise of passengers have bought tickets from Kamalapur Railway Station for selling later to the passengers at higher rates, said a station official.

BUSTERMINALS
During a visit to Sayedabad Bus Terminal yesterday, it was found that the presence of Rab, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and police personnel has prevented the bus operators from charging extra from the daily passengers.

But the operators who are selling tickets in advance are forcing the passengers to pay around Tk 50 extra per ticket for various routes, the passengers alleged.

The government has deployed mobile courts at Sayedabad, Mohakhali and Gabtoli bus terminals in the capital. But this year the authorities did not display the fare chart approved by Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

"I have bought a ticket for Amui in Pirojpur at Tk 300, paying Tk 50 in extra," said Rumana, 28, at the ticket counter of Sundarban Paribahan.

A staff of Parjatak Paribahan at Sayedabad terminal demanded Tk 160 for Khulna and Tk 180 for Bagherhat for yesterday's journey but he would not say how much would be the fare on November 12 and 13.

SADARGHAT
Advance booking of cabins in luxurious launches has almost finished, although the black marketeers are selling tickets charging more than double the regular fare.

A salesman of a launch operator said they have nothing to do if anyone buys five or six tickets at a time and sell them later at higher price.

"We are ready to pay extra but tickets are not available," said Selim Khan, a passenger.

Low and middle-income passengers who usually travel on deck are also paying exorbitant fare as some brokers in connivance with launch staff have already booked all the tickets for deck.

"I had to pay Tk 200 for a deck ticket for Bholia. The normal fare is Tk 80," said Reza, a small businessman, at the Sadarghat terminal.

The ticket sellers of Parabat, Sagar, Rajdoot and Surovi launches are charging Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,500 for a single cabin, up from the normal rate of Tk 350 to Tk 500.

For a double cabin, the Barisal and Patuakhali-bound passengers

5 killed, 1 hurt in city road accidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five people including a woman and a child were killed and one was injured in four separate road accidents in the capital yesterday.

Johura Khatun, 40, was sitting with her 8-year-old child Babu in the Mirpur Stadium premises when a car ran over them at around 3:00pm. The two died on the spot while another unidentified person was injured in the accident.

Abdul Mannan, 40, while crossing a rail gate at KM Das Lane in the city was hit by a Narayanganj-bound train at around 1:30pm.

His son Montaj Miah rushed him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared him dead.

In another accident, a 60-year-old unidentified man, clad in punjabi and payjama, was hit by a vehicle when he was crossing Airport Road at 2:00pm.

Locals rushed him to the DMCH where he was declared dead.

Another unidentified youth, 25, clad in blue jeans and black T-shirt, was run over by a vehicle at Patan crossing at 6:00pm.

Locals rushed him to the DMCH where doctors declared him dead.

have to pay the black marketeers Tk 2,000 to 2,500, up from Tk 600 to Tk 800.

When The Daily Star correspondent asked a launch staff about the black marketeers, he said, "Brother, these people get the chance only twice a year."

The government has decided to start special launch services from November 11 to 20 but passengers said all the cabins have already been booked. "These are not for us... Ruling party leaders and influential people have booked them," alleged a passenger.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) will arrange extra launch services on 17 routes from Dhaka and Narayanganj, sources said.

The extra launches would go to Bholia, Barisal, Barguna, Chandpur, Ichuli, Madaripur, Kalaiya, Borhanuddin, Patuakhali and Amtoli from Dhaka, and Chandpur, Ichuli, Talatola, Ramchandrapur, Machuakhali, Sureshwar, Torik and Matlab from Narayanganj.

The BIWTA will also introduce special ferry services on various routes to facilitate travel of about four million people from Dhaka to their villages ahead of Eid.

KAMALAPUR STATION
Bangladesh Railway has introduced special trains only on three routes on the occasion of Eid but most passengers said tickets are not available at station counters.

These special trains will ply Dhaka-Noakhali, Dhaka-Jamalpur and Chittagong-Chandpur routes from tomorrow. "We have managed these special trains using all our reserved compartments," Station Manager Solaiman Shikder said.

During a visit to Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday, The Daily Star correspondent found a large number of passengers looking for tickets desperately.

"Eid is the only occasion for me as well as my family to meet relatives at village. But this year I may miss the opportunity as I could not manage any ticket for Sylhet," said an aggrieved passenger, Sharafat Ali.

The passengers said the arrangement of special trains and additional compartments in the regular trains is inadequate to accommodate the huge number of passengers. They complained of unavailability of tickets at the station counters.

When asked, a Railway official said, "The homebound passengers have not complained of any irregularity at the station. But we have nothing to do when they repeatedly complain of not getting tickets from counters."

Bandarban tense over visit of Shantu Larma

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

A tense situation prevails in Bandarban town over the visit of Parbatya Chhatrang Jano Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) President Jyotindra Bodhipriyo alias Shantu Larma.

Bangalee settlers hoisted black flags and staged fierce demonstration yesterday when Shantu Larma, also the chairman of Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council, arrived in the town.

The ruling coalition-backed Sama Odhikar Andolon, an organisation of Bangalee settlers, has also called for hartal today to protest the visit of Shantu Larma. They accuse Shantu Larma of masterminding Bangalee killing.

The hartal programme runs counter to a public rally organised by PCJSS and its front organs to commemorate the death anniversary of Manabendra Narayan Larma, the founder of PCJSS. Shantu will address the rally today at Rajbari Ground.

The indigenous people observe the death anniversary of MN Larma on November 10 as Jumm Mourning Day.

Abduction:
In Khagrachhari, criminals yesterday abducted Gul Moni Chakma, 52, chief of Pekkuayapara village of Laxmichhari thana.

Locals said, a gang of about 25 stormed the house of Gul Moni, father of Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) leader Super Jyoti Chakma, at about 1:00pm and abducted him.

United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) and PCP in separate press releases accused Jana Sanghati Samity of kidnapping Gul Moni.

Keraniganj double murder case verdict today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Verdict in the Keraniganj double murder case against Reaz Uddin Ahmed Monir, brother of the ruling BNP MP Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and 22 others will be given today.

Judge AR Masud of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-4 will pronounce the verdict at 11:30am, court sources said.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defence completed their arguments and the court recorded statements of 23 prosecution witnesses.

Amir Abdullah Shakil, 26, secretary of the Zinjira Market Association and Sports Secretary of the Zinjira Union Jubo Dal and Sentu, 30, a lessee of a cattle market at Zinjira Bazar, were shot dead on February 16, 2002.

Shakil's brother Amir Hamza filed a murder case with Keraniganj Police Station accusing Monir and nine others the same day.

The investigation officer brought charges against Monir and 22 others on November 20, 2002.

The court framed charges against Monir and 22 others on July 13 last year.

Monir and 13 others are now on bail while Kader and four others are in the custody. Five others are still at large.

Special Public Prosecutor Aminul Islam and Advocate ABM Sharifuddin Khan Mukul appeared for the state while advocates Mahbub Ahmed and Masud Ahmed Talukder defended the accused.

10 fishermen

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fishermen said FB Soheli came under pirates' attack on the night of November 5 deep in the Bay of Bengal.

The pirates after beating and hacking the 10 on board looted fish, fishing nets, cash and engine parts worth around Tk 2 lakh. They herded the fishermen to the engine room and locked them in before leaving the trawler after about two hours.

Nemai Chandra Das, secretary of the Alipur-Mohipur fish sellers' association, said two more trawlers named FB Howader and FB Khairul were also robbed last week. Pirates looted valuables worth about Tk 10 lakh from those trawlers, he claimed.

3 killed

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admitted into the CMCH.

Scraping of MV Ocean was going on at the shipyard, owned by ZN Enterprise at Madambibirhat under the upazila, at around 2:00pm when the incident happened, according to the police and witnesses.

Witnesses said that the workers were trapped inside the vessel after the explosion.

Fire brigade personnel and police aided by local people launched rescue operations after the blaze was doused at around 4:30pm.

They recovered charred bodies of the three and rescued the injured, sources said.

Bidhu told The Daily Star at CMCH yesterday evening that they were cutting an oil pipe of the vessel when the blast occurred. He could not say what happened later.

Police and fire service sources said the ship caught fire due to a gas explosion.

The vessel was brought for scraping to the ship-breaking yard around six months ago and a part of it was already cut after its arrival. Scraping resumed yesterday after it remained suspended for around five months, sources said.

Noor Hossain

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and opposition parties have chalked out elaborate programmes, including discussions and rallies in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in a message recalled with gratitude the sacrifice of Noor Hossain, saying that his martyrdom had helped steer the anti-autocracy movement towards its logical end.

In observance of the day, Awami Juba League will place wreaths at the graves of Noor Hossain and Babul and hold discussion meetings at the party office today.

No industry in North

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bus services, the bridge brought hardly any benefit to the area that has a population of over 50 lakh, he observed.

Before independence, the then government set up two sugar mills and one soyabean refinery in Rangpur and since then there has not been any government-financed industry, said Mostafa Azad Chowdhury Babu.

"Governments since the independence have deprived us of public financing," he alleged.

Private entrepreneurs too are not comfortable with investing in industries here because of the geographical remoteness of the area and accompanying high cost for production, said Mostafa Azad Chowdhury.

"The import-oriented industries are not financially viable in the district because of long distance from the sea ports and international airports".

"Besides, lack of gas supply makes most fuel-dependent industries barely cost-effective," he observed.

Monga would never cease to plague the area unless massive income generating industries like textile mills, food processing units and catering services are developed, said Mostafa Azad.

He stressed the importance of having a separate industrial policy for developing industrial base in North Bengal.

"Without special and added incentives from the government, local and foreign entrepreneurs would never opt for large-scale investment here."

The other leaders of the Rangpur chamber echoed the view.

"In fact, mostly for want of policy support there has been little industrial development in last 33 years," said Mohammad Jahangir, vice-president of the Rangpur Chamber.

Alongside setting up industries, the government could also lease the khas lands, rivers and ponds of the area to the landless in order for them to take up different income generat-

ing projects like fisheries, poultry and dairy farming.

The chamber leaders said the Uttara Export Processing Zones (EPZ) at Sadpur failed to reap the benefits because of inadequate gas supply.

In the last couple of years, half a dozen industries were set up in the UEPZ and of them, only a sweater factory could go into operation, they told The Daily Star.

In Rangpur Industrial Estate set up by the BSCIC in the 60's, there are only 21 industrial units, which can not generate employment for more than 2300 people.

To attract investment in the area, private entrepreneurs should be given special facilities like duty waiver, lower interest rate, tax holidays and uninterrupted power supply at minimum charge, observed the chamber leaders.

The chamber president said lack of knowledge among the local rich about the industries that would suit the area also contributes to backwardness of the area.

"We on several occasions wrote to the government for providing the local entrepreneurs with consultancy and technical support, but to no effect".

The officials of the Rangpur BSCIC said there is no plot vacant inside the estate on 20 acres of land. There is no scope for expanding the estate because it is surrounded by a river and a cantonment, said an official.

"We had submitted a plan to the industries ministry to set up another BSCIC estate in Rangpur but that too did not progress," Sarwar-e Alam said.

Though there are still some plots vacant in BSCIC estates in Kurigram, Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat, the entrepreneurs are not interested in those, he said.

Only a few industries mostly rice mills, flour mills and cold storage were developed in those estates, he added.

Textbook printing

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pressure on NCTB and make it more dynamic, said a NCTB report submitted yesterday at a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on education ministry.

"The main objective of the NCTB is to improve quality of textbooks but the board cannot do it because of the extra burden of printing books," Education Minister Osman Faruk told the meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

The education minister hoped the NCTB would be able to work effectively to improve quality of textbooks by freeing itself from the printing job, Committee Chairman Shamsul Alam Pramanik told reporters after the meeting.

The NCTB is tasked with the formulation of curriculum, text, publication and distribution of textbooks from primary to higher secondary level. But the board does not have necessary capacity to perform the massive tasks.

Officials said the NCTB is not efficient enough to publish quality

textbooks in time that leads to delay in distribution of books almost every year.

Initially, the board is engaging private printers for books on seven subjects -- English second paper, Algebra, Social Science, General Science, Physics, Management and History -- for grades IX and X students.

An independent textbook evaluation committee is now evaluating the contents of the seven textbooks under the supervision of the NCTB.

Senior officials of the NCTB at yesterday's parliamentary committee meeting gave assurance that students would get books in time from the next year. The board has initiated all-out measures in this regard, said the NCTB report.

The parliamentary body also discussed a proposed bill seeking establishment of an organisation to introduce a system of registration and awarding eligibility certificate for the teachers of the private educational institutions.

Last-minute shoppers

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including the VIP Road. The worst traffic congestion was witnessed on the roads and lanes in Dhanmondi, Tejgaon and Gulshan areas.

At many intersections, traffic policemen were seen standing helpless and unable to control the huge onrush of vehicles.

Another factor worsening the situation was the increased number of rickshaws in the city, as like every year rickshaws from the suburbs and adjoining areas had rushed to the capital ahead of the Eid in hope of earning some extra and quick money.

Despite the continued drive of Dhaka Metropolitan Police to eliminate those from the city roads, the number of unauthorised rickshaws has increased in the last few days.

"Police have seized a good number of rickshaws under their drive," a senior traffic official told The Daily Star. But, nevertheless, the number

of unauthorised rickshaws has been increasing by the day ahead of the Eid, he noted asking not to be named.

Almost all drivers of rickshaws, CNG-run auto-rickshaws and black and yellow cabs demanded extra money besides fare as Eid tips, with rickshaw-pullers demanding almost double the fare from people out to shop.

"I have never seen such awful traffic congestion paralysing the city life," said a bus passenger, who had been stuck in a jam for about an hour.

In busy shopping areas like New Marker and adjacent Elephant Road and Mirpur Road, pedestrians were unable to use the footpaths, as hawkers wholly occupied those.

Many believe the traffic situation would improve gradually in the next few days after people start leaving the capital heading for their village and small town homes.

100 hurt over fishing dispute

UNB, Savar

Over 100 people were injured, eight with bullets in police firing, in a violent clash between two groups of people over fishing in a water body at Ballol village in Dhamrai upazila yesterday.

Six policemen were among those wounded during the clash.

Police said the clash erupted in the morning when a group of over 200 people led by fishermen Shaif and Mostafa, with the help of police, attacked several hundred people of 25 villages while they were fishing in Barosh Beel.

Witnesses said police opened fire when one constable was injured during the clash.

Police arrested five people from the spot, but the angry villagers snatched away three of them.

The seriously injured people were admitted to different hospitals and clinics in Dhamrai and Mirzapur areas.

Outlaws kill 2 in Kushtia and Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Outlaws gunned down a BNP activist and injured 20 in a Kushtia village while in Wazirpur upazila under Barisal, outlaws shot dead the mother of an oil trader for not paying toll.

An armed gang stormed into the house of Nannu at village Uttarachadpur under Kumarkhali upazila in Kushtia at about 11am when Nannu was not in the house.

Then the gang fired on the BNP activists staying there, leaving one dead and 20 others injured.

The dead was identified as Abdul Hanif, 23, son of Abdul Alim of the village.

Local BNP leader Nannu and some BNP activists leased the Dakus beel (water body) this year, which had for long been captured by outlaws, police and local people said.

After the lease, the outlaws threatened Nannu of dire consequences.

A case was filed with Kumarkhali Police Station.

In Barisal, outlawed Sarbaharash entered the house of oil trader Shah Alam at Sakrail-Goria village under Barakota union of Wazirpur upazila and demanded toll from him. He managed to escape through the back door of the house.

Failing to extract information from his mother Sufia Begum, 65, the miscreants shot her dead and left the house after looting Tk 2 lakh in cash and kind.

Shah Alam filed a murder case with Wazirpur Police Station without naming anybody.

Torkel

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He said he will visit Chittagong seaport for a firsthand view of the port facilities as "strengthening bilateral trade relations mostly depends on development" of the country's main port.

Following the meeting, Altaf told the reporters that Patterson asked for further improvement of the country's RMG industry as well as suggested Bangladesh to look for new products to increase Bangladesh exports to USA.

Bangla Bhai's

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besides legal expenses and helping its poor members.

They JMBB operatives also asked the Imams of the mosques to advise their Muslim parishioners to spend for the JMBB, threatening to punish those that do not comply with their directives, local sources said, adding they are yet to complain to police for fear of JMBB reprisal.

The areas most troubled by the JMBB are Jhikra, Jhargam, Mid-Jhina, Boloshing, Anantapara, Jatragachhi, Shikdara, Bhotkhali, Hamirkutsa, Gokandi, Bihani and Bagmara.

The JMBB men also are patrolling the villages on motorcycles as they used to do before, locals said, adding many of the well-to-do villagers have already paid them the tolls.

Sources said Bangla Bhai is still in command, though in underground, and is considering staging come back with increased force.

Rajshahi Superintendent of Police Masud Mia however said he was quite unaware of any such extortion, claiming, "Bangla Bhai or his people have no chance even to enter any village in Rajshahi."

Arafat fate mired

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agency from France that Arafat had passed away.

"It's just a matter of hours before they make an official announcement about the death."

The comments came shortly after a delegation of four senior Palestinian officials including prime minister Ahmed Qeri and acting Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) leader Mahmud Abbas had visited the hospital where he has been since October 29.

But Palestinian Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath told CNN from Paris that Arafat was alive and no decision has been made to take him off life-support.

"His coma has deepened but he is fully alive," Shaath said. "His brain, heart and lungs, his vital organs still functioning."

A French official at the army medical service in Paris said that Arafat was "not dead" at 3:30pm (1430 GMT).

"The statement made public by General Christian Estripeau is still valid at 3:30pm," he said. Estripeau, the medical service's official spokesman, said earlier Tuesday that Arafat had slipped into a "deeper coma."

"His situation is serious. Sadly it is very serious. We have seen all the doctors," Abbas told AFP after the visit.

In the West Bank, meanwhile, Palestinian negotiations minister Saeb Erakat told Arafat was "critical but still alive", denying reports he had died.

Earlier, the Palestine delegation held talks described as "political" with French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier, and in the afternoon they had an appointment with President Jacques Chirac. A press conference was scheduled for 6:00pm (1700 GMT).

The delegation's arrival in Paris came against the background of a bitter quarrel with Suha Arafat, who has used France's strict privacy laws to control access to her husband and severely limit information about his health.

In four decades leading the Palestinian nationalist cause, Arafat has gone from guerrilla icon to Nobel prize-winning peacemaker to a shunned old leader mired in renewed bloodshed with Israel.

Arafat has been in a coma brought on by a still-undisclosed illness, with

his dream of a Palestinian state unrealized, a possible succession battle brewing and the threat of chaos in Palestinian territories looming.

He had been widely admired by Palestinians as the father of their struggle for statehood but was reviled by many Israelis as the face of terror.

Nonetheless, both sides have wondered whether his death might serve as the catalyst for first real peace effort in years or plunge the region into deeper crisis.

SWIFT DECLINE
Arafat had been flown to the Paris military hospital from his battered West Bank headquarters where he had been effectively confined by Israel for more than two and a half years.

Despite his reputation as a consummate survivor, Arafat's decline came swiftly and with little warning.

Initial claims that he was suffering from a stomach ailment were soon buried in a flurry of reports that he had slipped into a coma and that his organs were failing.

French doctors kept a tight lid on details of Arafat's condition at the behest of his wife, who engaged in a war of words with senior Palestinians officials over her virtual monopoly on information from his hospital bedside.

But on Tuesday, as the officials arrived in Paris to check on Arafat despite his wife's objections, doctors said he had slipped deeper into a coma.

The hospital had ruled out leukemia but had not given any diagnosis of Arafat's illness. Palestinian officials said he had suffered from liver failure.

All three leaders who flew into Paris on Monday are potential successors and Arafat's wife had accused them of wanting to "bury him alive." Shaath said the delegation wanted to get the full facts on Arafat.

Despite the bickering, Secretary of State Colin Powell said on Monday he was impressed by the Palestinian leaders' handling of Arafat's absence and said he hoped the "relative calm" in the region would continue.

"I hope that sense of quiet and calm can be maintained and (that) it gives us something to work with," Powell told reporters on the way to Mexico. He reiterated that the United States was "ready to engage as soon as it is appropriate to engage"