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MISUSE OF 4,000 GOVT VEHICLES

Establishment grilled for failure to submit report

SHAKHAWAT LITON

A parliamentary body yesterday blasted the officials of the establishment ministry as they failed to submit a report on over 4,000 vehicles being misused by government high-ups. It also accused the ministry of ignoring the committee by suppressing information.

The parliamentary standing committee on the establishment ministry at a meeting asked the authorities to come up with the report in detail, stating the present status of the vehicles, at its next meeting without showing any

excuse.

State Minister for Finance Shah Mohammad Abul Hossain attending the meeting on behalf of the prime minister who is in charge of the establishment ministry and also a member of the committee, regretted the ministry's failure.

The minister asked the officials concerned to provide the committee with sufficient information about all the public vehicles, purchased for development projects under various ministries and divisions and were supposed to be returned.

The parliamentary body itself

produced a report at the meeting detailing the number of vehicles being used by various government organs. The committee collected the report from the Transport Pool under the establishment ministry.

The report says only 133 public vehicles out of the total 4,230 were returned to the pool. The vehicles include 221 minibuses, 883 jeeps, 68 cars, 349 pick-up vans, 52 trucks, 10 buses, 25 minibuses, 2,489 motorcycles and 143 others.

Even the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and the Cabinet Division, which are under the prime minister, have not returned all the

vehicles on completion of the projects. The ministry has returned only 23 vehicles out of 113 and the Cabinet Division has given back only five vehicles out of 14, sources said quoting the report.

The committee rejected a 'partial report' submitted yesterday by the establishment ministry about the vehicles and slated the ministry officials for 'hiding information.'

As the committee members criticised the report that lacks adequate information, the ministry officials said they could not produce a detailed report due to poor

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SAARC SUMMIT Pre-disaster warning system to be on agenda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the wake of the Asian tsunami that devastated three Saarc nations on December 26, Dhaka will raise the issue of a South Asian pre-disaster early warning system at the upcoming 13th Saarc summit here between February 6-7.

Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan told reporters at his office yesterday that Dhaka will propose upgrading the existing Saarc meteorological centre in Dhaka with broadened terms of reference and areas of operation to incorporate the pre-disaster early warning system.

He said, however, that a decision on the matter would depend on a

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WB won't continue support unless use of aid improves

WB MD finds PRSP lacking focus on political governance improvement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for the next three years lacks a proper focus on improving political and overall governance, without which the government's aid utilisation capacity will remain retarded, visiting World Bank (WB) Managing Director Sheng Man Jhang pointed out yesterday.

"Bad political governance is an obstacle to rapid economic growth here," Jhang, the second man in the WB hierarchy, told newsmen after a meeting with Finance and Planning Minister M. Saifur Rahman at the planning ministry.

The issue of governance should be addressed with more importance

in the growth strategy, Jhang observed.

He said the WB will give Bangladesh \$220 million in aid -- \$200 million for flood rehabilitation programmes after readjusting some of its projects here and the rest as a fresh loan. The proposal in this regard will be tabled at the WB board meeting on January 28.

But the WB high official cautioned Saifur that if the country's aid utilisation capacity is not improved, the bank will not continue its support.

LGRD and Co-operatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Education Minister Dr. Osman Faruk, WB Country Director Christine Wallich and high officials

of the finance and planning ministries also attended the meeting.

"The World Bank managing director told us that if we fail to improve our implementation capacity of development programmes it will be difficult for him to convince the board of the bank to give us more aid," Saifur told the press after the talks.

Jhang also told me that the World Bank board members will charge him in case of a poor programme implementation performance by Bangladesh. They may ask -- the country cannot spend money, so why should it receive more aid?" Saifur said quoting the WB MD, who

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ROTTEN RICE MARKETING 7 show-caused by Bagerhat court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A Bagerhat court on Saturday served a notice to seven persons including six government officials to show cause in three days why a ban should not be imposed on handling over of 3,560 tonnes of rotten rice to the importer's agent.

The order came from Sub-judge Mohammad Shahidul Islam to prevent the rotten rice from being marketed for public consumption.

The respondents are the secretaries to the ministries of forests and environment, food and disaster management, chairman of Mongla Port Authority (MPA) and its director (traffic), deputy commissioner of Bagerhat, and managing director of Trans Maritime International (TMI), the importer's agent.

The food ministry imported

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Half the year gone, projects untouched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The primary and mass education ministry has not spent a single penny against four of its 15 projects in the first half of the current fiscal year.

Another four projects have spent only one to 10 percent of the allocated money, according to a report placed yesterday before a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry.

The meeting expressed dissatisfaction over the poor progress of project implementation and asked the ministry to implement the projects at a quicker pace.

The ministry, however, told the meeting that it is facing difficulties in implementing the projects in time because of tough conditions of donors and a large number of projects.

The projects yet to start spending anything include Reaching Out of School Children Project, which has been allocated Tk 23.3 crore, and Post Literacy and Continuing Education that has got Tk 1.3 crore.

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PHOTO: STAR

Many of these expensive four-wheel drives and minibuses were purchased for development projects and are being used by government high-ups without permission after completion of the projects. The photograph was taken on the Secretariat campus yesterday.

Freewheeling bigwigs

The Daily Star investigation at Secretariat reveals ministers, secretaries use luxury cars flouting rules

RAFIQ HASAN

On Thursday morning, January 5, a luxurious shiny Nissan Patrol car drove to the Secretariat and a man in expensive black suit got down from it as soon as it parked on the lobby of the 20-storey building.

The man is State Minister for Civil Aviation Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin. But the expensive car with the number-plate reading Dhaka Metro Gha-11-2369 belongs to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab).

The minister uses the car exerting his authority. Such sports utility vehicles (SUVs) were supposed to be used to supervise development projects at the field level. But scores of such cars enter the government's main office building every day because the top officials use those ignoring government rules.

This correspondent observed the movement of such cars at the Secretariat last Thursday from 9:00am to 2:00pm and counted a total of 108 SUVs parked inside the secretariat.

On investigation it was found that Education Minister Osman Faruq used by the car, Dhaka Metro Gha-11-4250, a Land Cruiser Prado. This car belongs to the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education at the Education Bhavan.

He is using it although the government has

specifically allocated him a luxurious car like the ones given to other ministers.

The driver of this vehicle said that the directorate engages this car for the use of the minister round the clock. The minister bears the fuel cost.

State Minister for Water Resources Goutam Chakraborty came by a Mitsubishi Pajero jeep with the number Dhaka Metro Gha-11-2032.

Energy Secretary Nazrul Islam came to office in his Mitsubishi Pajero jeep with the number of Dhaka Metro-3153.

Youth and Sports Secretary Suzauddin uses the luxury jeep of the National Sports Council. The number of the car is Dhaka metro-11-3783. He also uses another car given by the government's transport pool.

State Minister for Communication Salahuddin Ahmed rides a SUV jeep with number Dhaka Gha-112739. State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammad Quamrul Islam uses another luxury car bearing the number 11-3641.

Communications Secretary Shafiqul Islam drove in by a Nissan Patrol jeep with the number of Dhaka Metro Gha-11, 2728. MR Chowdhury, a deputy secretary of the same ministry, came by a Mitsubishi

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Students confine DUVC after cops harass female student

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Students of Dhaka University (DU) yesterday kept the vice chancellor (VC), pro-VC, treasurer, proctor, assistant proctor and some police officials confined to the proctor's office for about 40 minutes to press home their demand to bring three policemen to book for harassing and assaulting a female student.

Witnesses said a mentally disordered man tugged at the scarf of the fourth-year student of the Department of Dramatics when she was passing the DU Central Students Union building at around 9:00am.

Instead of preventing the mad

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Feud over 2 pristine isles

Environment ministry calls tourism's 'development' bid disastrous

REZAUL KARIM

Two ministries are at daggers drawn over the right to develop two pristine islands in the Bay in their own, quite opposing, ways.

While the tourism ministry has persistently been demanding the right to build some exclusive tourist zones on the isles -- Sonadia and Cheradia -- the environment ministry is dead set against any such conventional tourism schemes in the ecologically critical islands, where it has already initiated a few bio-diversity protection projects.

After an inter-ministerial meeting had rejected its proposal on June

16 last year, the tourism ministry in a fresh bid called another inter-ministerial meeting for last Tuesday, which its rival shunned. The meeting was postponed.

Sonadia, a 2,965.37-acre island under Moleshkhali upazila in Cox's Bazar district, has been officially declared as an ecologically critical area. Some 2,122 acres of the island have been given to the Forest Department to develop a reserve forest. The island already has a natural forest on 1,200 acres and the Forest Department has begun an afforestation programme on another 400 acres of land with domestic funds.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has undertaken another project in Sonadia to expand its forest and sustain its bio-diversity with a Tk 30-crore financial assistance from the Global Environment Facilities (GEF) under the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD). Bangladesh is one of the 165 countries that signed the CBD in 1994.

The Ministry of Environment and Forest, which plans to develop eco-tourism in the island, has banned extraction and collection of any resources from Sonadia.

The other isle, Cheradia, of an

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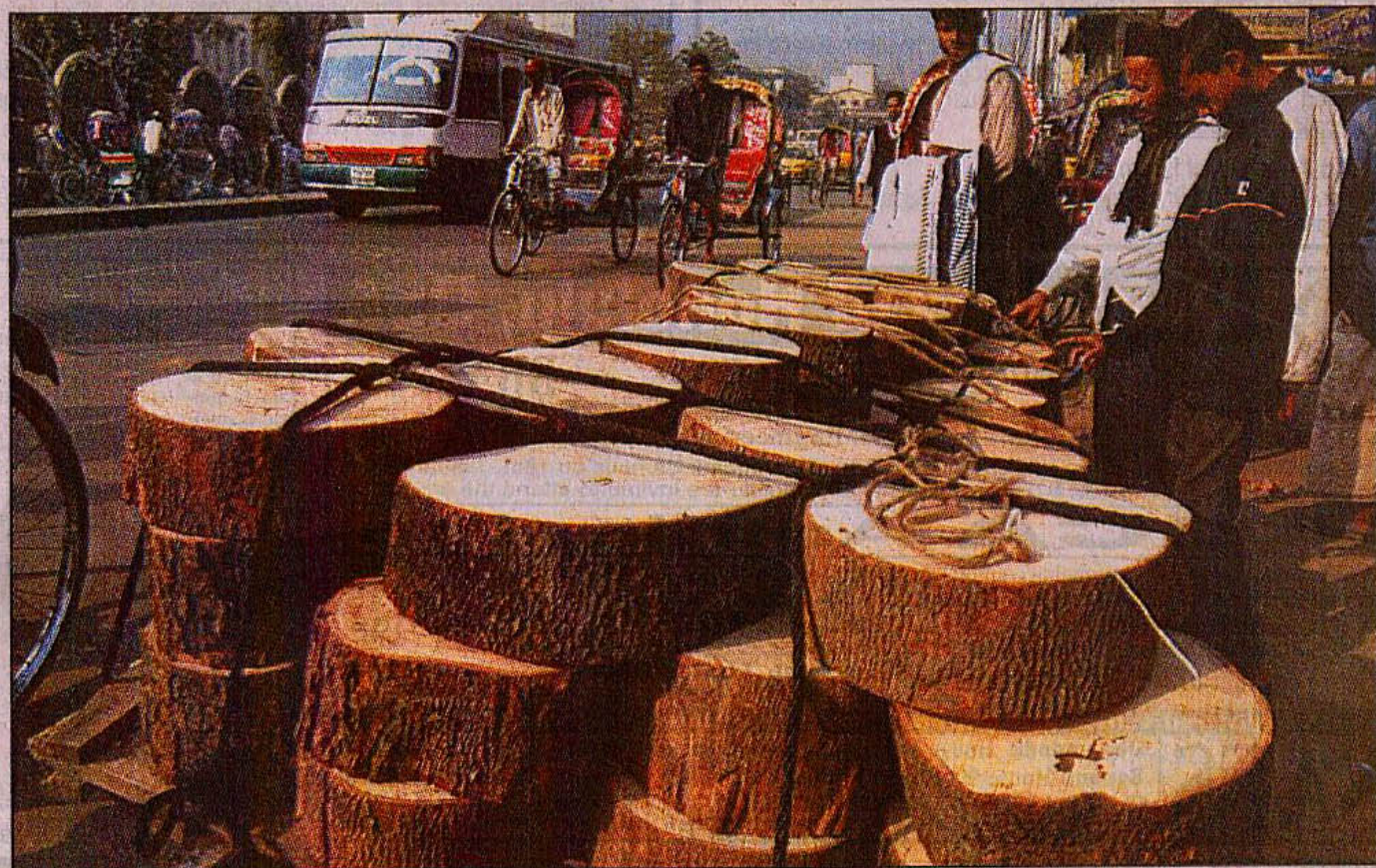


PHOTO: STAR

Blocks of logs to chop on the meat of sacrificed animals are put on display for sale by a city street yesterday, six days away from the Eid-ul-Azha.

Muggers stab one to loot Tk 50,000

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Muggers stabbed a man and snatched Tk 50,000 in Mohammadpur, while criminals injured another with a bomb blast at Mohakhali in the capital yesterday.

Jalal Uddin, 55, former accounts officer of a private company, and his wife Maryam Begum were going home by rickshaw after drawing Tk 1 lakh from Agrani Bank Asad Gate Branch at 2:00pm.

As the rickshaw reached Taj Mahal Road, three muggers stopped them, stabbed Jalal in the stomach and snatched Tk 50,000 from him.

His wife rushed him to the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH).

At Mohakhali Wireless Gate, bakery employee Abdul Aziz was reading newspaper inside the bakery in the morning when criminals

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Zim in catbird seat

AL MUSABBIR SADI

Zimbabwe consolidated their position against Bangladesh in the second and final Test yesterday when a 150-run fifth wicket partnership between captain Tatenda Taibu and Brendan Taylor helped the visitors stretch their lead to 290 runs with two days still to play.



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The tourists, having begun the second innings 79 runs ahead, had reached 203-6 when stumps were drawn at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Taibu, who has twice missed a chance to score his maiden Test hundred on the tour -- scoring 92 in the first Test in Chittagong and 85 not out in the first innings -- was 19

runs short of the magical three-figure mark while Tinashe Panyangara was batting on two.

After speedster Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza grabbed three early wickets to reduce the opposition to 37-4, Taibu dug in for another long haul innings mixing caution with aggression.

All three Mashrafe victims -- Stuart Matsikenyeri (14), Barney Rogers (20) and Dion Ebrahim (1) -- were trapped lbw in an 11-over first spell with the new ball while left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique, bowling with a severe hamstring injury, had Hamilton Masakadza caught by Rajin Saleh at mid-wicket for one.

The tenacious Taibu, however, stood tall and began a salvage operation in partnership with Taylor. Their fifth wicket stand, the best against the Tigers, erased the 125 runs produced between himself and Shaun Ervine in Harare last year.

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Outlaws form bomb squad, enter Jhenidah, police suspect

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A group of 25 outlaws is reported to have entered the Jhenidah district with a hundred powerful bombs purchased from an Islamic militant group from the Chittagong district.

According to a reliable source of the police, the Janajuddho faction of the Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) has formed a bomb squad with men as young as 20 years of age.

The source said some outlawed organisations are maintaining close links with a militant group of Islamic zealots in order to learn how to carry out deadly attacks.

Information from intelligence wing at the Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) suggests that outlaws from all the PBCP factions have

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Eid windfall begins in ticketing

AKBAR HOSSAIN and ASHIQUR RAHMAN

Homebound city dwellers are now purchasing tickets for buses, trains and launches at much higher prices in order to celebrate the Eid-ul-Azha with their near and dear ones.

Long route passengers have alleged that transport operators were charging Tk 80 to Tk 100 in extra fees for fares, defying Bus Owners' Association's letters to all bus operators asking them not to charge fares higher than those fixed by the association.

"We fixed increased fares from Tk 20 to Tk 50, depending on routes. If any bus operators charge higher fares than the rate fixed by the association, we will take instant action

against them," said GM Siraj, chairman of the Bus Owners' Association.

But bus operators in Gabtoli and Sayedabad bus terminal yesterday were found to charge much higher fares.

"I paid Tk 240 instead of the regular fare of Tk 160," said Swadip Chowdhury, a Gaibandha bound passenger of Al-Hamra Paribahan at Gabtoli.

Mohammed Mostafa, a Pirojpur bound passenger of Dola Paribahan in Sayedabad also alleged that he had to pay Tk 230 whereas the regular fare is Tk 150.

Defending their position, bus operators said their vehicles now return to Dhaka from distant places without any passengers. They added that they were not charging fares

higher than the government rates. Some operators said they had to charge higher fares as the price of diesel has gone up.

Meanwhile, all of Bangladesh Railway's advance tickets were sold out by yesterday.

Despite the government's declaration to take steps against black marketing of train tickets, it was found at Kamalapur Railway Station that tickets were selling in the black market for double the price yesterday.

Even Government Railway Police (GRP) are allegedly involved with the malpractice.

When this correspondent went to a GRP staff in the guise of a Feni bound passenger, he said, "If you

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