

Security for cable

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A gang of 50 to 60 armed pirates attacked the Chittagong Port-bound barge twice on Friday when it was crossing the Kutubdia channel on its way to the outer anchorage. The pirates injured 27 crewmembers and looted goods of little value, including ropes, sources said.

Following the attack the barge, a Singapore flag carrier, was taken to the Dry Dock jetty on Saturday morning. Crewmembers at the time refused to sail with the ship to Cox's Bazar, citing safety reasons.

Sources yesterday said the Prime Minister Office (PMO) has taken the matter seriously, ordering the Ministry of Home Affairs on Sunday to provide sufficient security measures so that the ship can soon sail.

"As per the home ministry's measure, we are receiving 10 ansars, five members of the Armed Police Battalion and a patrol ship from the coast guard for our safety, and will leave Chittagong at 7:00 am tomorrow morning with them and hopefully reach Cox's Bazar before dusk," said Parvez Ahmed, the managing director of the barge's local agent, Mutual Shipping Lines Ltd.

Parvez told The Daily Star that the foreign crew and other staff are now happy and convinced with the measures taken by the government.

"I hope there will not be any further trouble," he said.

Fujitsu of Japan will install the 22.24 km-long submarine cable line on the seabed with assistance from Tyco Telecom of the United States of America and Otronix of South Korea.

The installation work, originally slated to begin today, will now begin on the morning of Thursday, April 7, after completion of a one-day field survey, and will take 15 days. Setting up a base landing station with all necessary equipment will require an additional two months.

Alcatel and Fujitsu will finish the cable laying by the middle of August to connect Bangladesh with the high-speed global telecom network by October 2005. Alcatel will set up the equipment at the landing station while Fujitsu will set up the transmission equipment at the branch line.

Bangladesh will receive \$60 million

Three killed

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yesterday for seizing firearms.

When the police team reached the spot, Janajuddha operatives fired on them and the police also retaliated, said the superintendent of police of Jhenidah.

Shahid, accused in 15 criminal cases including five for murders, attempted to flee during an hour-long shootout and died on the spot, he said.

Three police constables -- Nazrul, Ibrahim and Motiur -- and Nayek Tamizuddin of ansar were wounded during the shootout, the police claimed.

Govt will need extra

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recommendations by next week.

The secretary committee is likely to recommend implementation of the new pay structure in three phases over a period of three years.

The finance ministry review notes that if only the salaries of the civil and defence staff are increased in line with the recommendations of the pay commissions from January 1 this year, this will need an additional Tk 653 crore.

Similarly, if teachers and staff of educational institutions are given 50 percent of the recommended salary, this may cost the government an additional Tk 301 crore.

The government will need an extra Tk 200 crore if pensioners get 50 percent of the recommended pensions.

EXTRA FUNDS NEEDED

To fully implement the recommendations of the two pay commissions, the government will need an additional Tk 6,712 crore a year.

An extra Tk 3,846 crore -- Tk

PM urges public

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Khaleda alleged a certain quarter is involved in tarnishing the country's image and destroying peace.

"We have to foil the conspiracy for our own interest and for the sake of the country's present wellbeing and its future," she said.

The 12-day-long SME Fair, second of its kind, has been organised by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

A total of 135 small and medium enterprises are taking part in the fair, which will remain open from 9:00am to 9:00pm till April 15.

Minister for Industry Maulana Matiur Rahman Nizami, Commerce Minister Altaf

Hossain Chowdhury, FBCCI President Abdul Awal Mintoo, FBCCI Vice-President Kamal Uddin Ahmed and Director Enayet Hossain Chowdhury also addressed the function.

Ministers, MPs, diplomats and entrepreneurs from home and abroad were present on the occasion.

The prime minister said utmost importance has to be laid on small and medium enterprises as they generate more employment with less

from the Islamic Development Bank under an agreement signed between the two sides in February this year for linking the country to the submarine cable.

Bangladesh signed the 16-party consortium contract in Dubai on March 27 of last year for the transcontinental submarine cable, which will be around 20,000 kilometres long, including the main trunk line and branches, and cost about \$500 million to install.

BTTB, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Italy, Thailand, Algeria, Tunisia and France, along with Indian private carriers Bharti and VSNL, are members of this consortium.

HABIGANJ ATTACK BNP expels Quiyum

UNB, Habiganj

AKM Abdul Quiyum, vice-president of Habiganj district BNP and prime accused in former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria murder case, has been expelled from the party.

The decision was taken at an executive committee meeting of Habiganj district BNP yesterday with its President Alhaj Syed Mohammad Faisal in the chair.

On March 19, police pressed charges against Quiyum and nine others for the January 27 grenade attack at Boiddayer Bazar that also left four others killed. Quiyum is now in Habiganj jail.

Younis

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are proving to be the biggest factor in the one-day series. April is not the best time to play cricket in India.

"It's all a question of how you recover from games and how you manage your time on and off the field," India vice-captain Rahul Dravid told reporters after a team practice session.

"You have to leave enough in the tank to play the next game."

India opener Virender Sehwag, who scored 108 in Cochin, did not practice on Monday and Dravid, who also scored a century, did not field in the first game.

Dravid said the toss would again be significant.

"It's not rocket science that you should bat first in such conditions, keep the other team on the field for 50 overs and then ask them to chase a big total after they're already tired."

India are expected to pick an unchanged side.

Ministry probing NU VC's scandal

Says education minister

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The education ministry is probing alleged scandals involving National University (NU) Vice-chancellor (VC) Atab Ahmed and sacked deputy registrar Begum Sultana Razia Jui.

Some newspapers recently reported that Sultana, who was a lecturer at a college, was appointed deputy registrar (academic) of the NU without any advertisement, application and interview for the post, in gross violation of the university rules.

"The ministry is concerned over the allegations and counter-allegations in the media concerning the vice-chancellor," Education Minister Osman Farnuk told The Daily Star in response to query on the media reports.

"We are investigating...I have talked to the vice chancellor and asked him about the media reports. I shall talk to him again and take a decision," the minister said.

The reports said Sultana lacks required experience to have the post of deputy registrar. The NU authorities dismissed her on March 15 on different allegations. The reports alleged that before her dismissal, she had illicit relationship with the VC.

The reports first came out in a vernacular daily. On Saturday, the parliamentary standing committee on education ministry discussed an eight-page appeal from Sultana to the VC to get her job back.

In her appeal, Sultana alleged that Atab sacked her after failing to establish physical relations with her.

She lodged a General Diary with Mirpur Police Station on Sunday alleging the VC is threatening her with death if she speaks against him.

Sources alleged the NU often violates appointment rules. Last year, it appointed a retired deputy secretary as controller of examinations, ignoring rules. It also appointed a newly promoted associate professor as inspector of colleges, a post requiring vast experience in the field.

When contacted, Atab termed the media reports " concocted and one-sided." He said Sultana had 12-year teaching experience and was appointed on ad hoc basis. Later, the university advertised for the post and she was put on probation. Her service was regularised after a selection committee's recommendation was approved by the syndicate.

The VC also said Sultana was suspended and later sacked after a high-powered investigation committee unearthed her corrupt practices. She took a bribe of Tk 5,000 from the teachers training college of greater Mymensingh, he alleged.

A vested quarter is conspiring against him to tarnish his image, the VC said.

On Sultana's allegation of death threat by him, Atab said "She is a threat to me...I am not."

Sultana could not be contacted despite repeated efforts.

Martians

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scientist Dr Amitabh Ghosh disclosed this during his visit to Kolkata.

Nasa sent 'Pathfinder' in January 2004 to the Mars to search for life. 'Rover', a component of 'Pathfinder', also collects information on weather, time and so on.

Dr Ghosh said life has not yet been discovered in the Mars, but once there was an environment conducive to life there, Nasa will send another mission to the Mars in 2011.

Wasa to resume

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near now defunct Beauty Cinema in Mirpur to Horirampur Ananda Nagar to Dhaka-Paturia highway. The Kha branch stretches from Mirpur Mazar Road to Tolabagh behind Bangla College to Dhaka-Paturia highway.

The Wasa has identified scores of illegal structures on the two branches that include mainly tinshed and bamboo houses, said the sources. They added that they will make a public announcement today so that the land grabbers can move their valuables.

On public support of the Thursday's drive, Wasa Managing Director ANH Akhter Hossain said, "We're getting wide public support for removing encroachment on the canals."

This drive will continue until May this year to free eight city canals, selected on a priority basis, from encroachment, he added.

A Wasa official said the drive requires involvement of several departments such as police, district administration and other relevant organisations and also eviction equipment, which slows the process.

The Wasa will also conduct similar drive against encroachment on the Begunbari, Mohakhali and Zirani canals in Rampura, Katashur and Ramchandrapur canals in Mohammadpur, Ibrahimpur canal and a cross-dam barrier on the Gulshan-Banani lake.

A high-powered eviction implementation committee headed by a joint secretary of the home ministry is taking care of the canal recovering drive.

The city had once 43 canals in and around it and 26 are now recognisable. Of the 26, 19 still have lean flows despite encroachment and the rest have partial existence.

Besides, the authorities have constructed box culverts on Dholaikhal, Segunbagicha, Arambagh, Rayerbazar, Gopibagh, Panthapath and Paribagh canals and also built roads on them. However, the move proved to be less effective for drainage than open canals.

Opposition to take

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accept the reform proposals, though Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has rejected the demands outright.

The month-long agitation programme of the main opposition Awami League (AL) and its Left allies has just come to an end with the enforcement of the latest hartal and chances are very slim for them to go for a combined street agitation in the remaining days of this month, as the parties will try to give a final shape to their electoral reform proposals.

The AL, 11-party left alliance, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Workers Party and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal have already placed some draft proposals at separate roundtables and discussions.

Besides, Jatiya Oikya Mancha led by Dr Kamal Hossain and Bikapla Dhara Bangladesh of former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury are also working on the issue and will place their draft proposals shortly, sources said.

The opposition leaders and legal experts over the last few weeks have come up with a wide range of electoral reform proposals. They are also suggesting that the president consult major political parties on the appointment of a person acceptable to all parties as chief adviser, as the Constitution stipulates that those who run the interim administration will be non-partisan.

According to another proposal, the powers of the president and the chief of the interim government have to be clearly defined and charges of the Armed Forces Division should be given to the chief adviser and the Armed Forces should not have the magistracy power.

The appointment of the chief election commissioner and other commissioners will have to be made in consultation with the major political parties.

The Election Commission will have to have the power to tailor its budget on its own and appoint staff who will run the election instead of the employees deputed from the administration cadre.

Saber critical

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arena with the ultimate objective of protecting those under whose instructions this crime was perpetrated by means of a sham investigation," said Saber commenting on foreign ministry's explanation over the statement of three US legislators.

Three US legislators recently sent letters to the US and Bangladesh governments, urging an independent, impartial and transparent enquiry into the January 27 grenade attack that killed Kibria.

Talking to BDNEWS, he said, "The government has said that it has concluded its investigations and the perpetrators have been taken into custody and charge-sheeted. On the other hand it is saying that FBI are conducting their own investigations."

Saber said that there are now concerns that the government might be "using the good name of FBI to lend credence to their eyewitness."

Saber said, "We have seen nothing in the public domain from the US Embassy to confirm that FBI are indeed conducting their own independent investigations as asserted by the government and neither has the government delivered on its public promise to issue a joint statement with the FBI on status and findings of these apparent FBI investigations."

"The government investigation, as well as FBI's so-called independent enquiry, is shrouded in mystery. If the Government really has nothing to hide, why this absolute and

"Reforms to the caretaker government and the Election Commission will be the main agenda of the opposition parties in the next course of the anti-government agitation," JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu told The Daily Star.

"If there are no reforms, there will be no election," he said.

If the government goes to next election setting aside the proposed reforms to the caretaker government system and the Election Commission, the mainstream opposition will take a hard line and may not participate in the poll, AL leaders said.

Though the AL is yet to take a formal decision, a number of its senior leaders have publicly announced that the party will not contest the next election if the proposed reforms are not implemented.

AL's legal wing is now drafting some recommendations on electoral reforms. "We have given a number of options on reforms in the draft proposals and will submit it to the Awami League leaders once the draft is done," Barrister Amir-Ul-Islam, chairperson of the sub-committee assigned to formulate the proposals, told The Daily Star.

Another member of the committee said they will submit the report to AL President Sheikh Hasina when she returns from abroad tomorrow.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jail told The Daily Star they plan to finalise the recommendations by the month-end for placing before the nation a common proposal of all parties.

"Our plan is to thrash out the proposals accepted by all parties," he said.

Awami League presidium member Tofail Ahmed said it would be suicidal if the opposition goes to election without seeing the necessary reforms implemented. "The president is theirs (ruling alliance's), the chief adviser is theirs...in such a situation how can one expect an impartial election?" he said.

conspicuous disregard for transparency?" questioned Saber.

"Rule of law demands a transparent and comprehensive investigation that will bring to justice the actual perpetrators of this crime, their political masters and also the sources of funding for the grenade used in the attack," Saber observed.

Saber said, "Why is Bangla Bhai yet to be arrested despite the prime minister's apparent instructions? Why have hundreds of citizens of this country been the victims of custodial deaths and extra-judicial killings under the present BNP-Jamaat Government and why has the government failed to investigate arms hauls including the one in Chittagong?"

"It is shameful that yet again the government's rhetoric does not square up with reality and its words and deeds continue to drift disconcertingly further apart," he said.

"The current situation is so alarming that even old friends and well-wishers of Bangladesh now publicly state that permissiveness of at least some within the government has allowed acts of political terrorism to take place and the failure to investigate these attacks has created a climate of impunity," he added.

The AL leader asked, "How can a government complicit in acts of political terrorism against progressive and secular forces be expected to conduct real investigation into the attacks?"

Deputy secretary

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Hussain, prepared the list of the senior assistant secretaries on Sunday after a series of earlier meetings.

The officials selected for promotion include those from the 1984 batch and a few others from the 1985 and previous batches, the sources said.

Around 500 officials have qualified for promotion to the rank of deputy secretary but the government is unable to elevate all of them because of shortage of vacancies.

According to official sources, the civil administration has a total of 830 approved posts of high officials, 263 of which are currently lying vacant.

Establishment ministry sources said the SSB faced tremendous pressure from the officials of different batches, particularly from the 1985 batch, during the selection.

The 1985-batch officials had qualified for promotion long ago but the government could not promote them keeping the promotion of the officials of 1984 and previous batches pending.

The SSB this time selected a good number of officials from the special and regular batches of 1982, who were previously superseded.

Besides, the SSB included several officials of the 1985 batch in the promotion list in the face of pressure from the government policymakers, sources said.

A state minister, who was also a

AL leader Abdul Mannan passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Veteran Awami Leaguer (AL) leader and a leading organiser of the Liberation War Abdul Mannan died at his city residence yesterday after suffering from old age complications.

He was 75. Mannan, a close aide of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, served the post-independence Awami League government as home minister and later as health minister.

He was elected Member of Parliament in 1973 and 1996. Abdul Mannan left behind his wife, five sons, a daughter, political colleagues and a number of well-wishers to mourn his death.

The first namaj-e-janaza of the late leader was held yesterday at Aeroplane Mosque on Elephant Road and the second one in front of the AL central office on Bangabandhu Avenue after Magrib prayers.

He will be buried at the family graveyard at Paradise Para in Tangail this morning after a third namaj-e-janaza there.

Born in Tangail in 1929, Mannan played an important role during the Liberation War.

He administered the oath-taking programme of the Bangladesh government on April 17, 1971 in Meherpur. He founded the weekly newspaper 'Joy Bangla' during the War of Liberation.

Mannan was also one of the main accused in historical Agartala Conspiracy Case and in his 59 years of political career, he was involved in Language Movement of 1952, six-point movement of 1966 and the mass upsurge of 1969.

He served the Awami League as its presidium member and was member of the party's Advisory Council till his death.

Leader of the Opposition and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina in a statement yesterday expressed deep shock at the death of Abdul Mannan. She recalled the long political career of the late leader and prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul.

UNB adds: Prime Minister Khaleda Zia expressed deep sorrow at the death of AL leader Abdul Mannan. Recalling the late leader's contribution in the country's Liberation War and democratic movements, she prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed her sympathy to the bereaved family members.

UK praises

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Briefing newsmen after the meeting, officials said the diplomat also rated highly the measures and success so far achieved in the investigation into the killing of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria.

"The British government hopes that the transparent measures of the present government will help the authorities bring the culprits to book," the Bangladeshi-born British envoy was quoted as saying.

During the meeting, cooperation in various fields, including British assistance for training Bangladesh policemen, also came up for discussion.

The prime minister and the high commissioner also discussed other matters of bilateral interest and issues of common concern.

Bear mauls

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After receiving news of the bear attack, the BDR and the Parshuram thana police started searching for the animal.

Four of the eight injured were admitted to the Parshuram Health Complex.

In the end, the bear crossed back into Indian territory through Muhurichar border after being chased by the villagers.

JS body

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Chowdhury told journalists they made the suggestions on humanitarian grounds.

The meeting did not however state clearly as to how the land evacuated by the Biharis will be used.

The committee asked the authorities to evict an illegal occupant -- Abdus Sattar -- of some eight plots in Mirpur Section B-11.

The meeting also suggested implementing the housing and public works ministry's recommendations to activate the interest rate on payment for Rajuk plots after all preparations for these plots are complete. It also called for implementing the recommendations of reviewing the present 17 percent interest rate in line with different financing institutions.

The committee discussed the Purbachal project and decided to visit Rajuk to have a comprehensive idea on the project.

The housing ministry informed the meeting that 13,000 abandoned plots were sold to people. The meeting discussed the remaining 113 plots.

Shahajan Chowdhury chaired the meeting while its members Mohammad Alamgir Haider Khan, Nur-e-Alam Chowdhury (Liton), Zainal Abedin, Mohammad Sultan Mahmud Babu and Mohammad Abdul Mottalib attended it.

The secretary of the ministry and chairman of Rajuk were also present.

Pope's funeral

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Elio Toaff, who had hosted John Paul during his historic visit to Rome's central synagogue in 1986, viewed the body Monday. He raised his arm before the body in a gesture of tribute. The current chief rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni, viewed the body Sunday.

John Paul's body appeared to have been touched up or embalmed overnight.

Up to 2 million mourners are expected in Rome to pay tribute to the Polish-born prelate who reigned firmly over his flock for 26 years with unbending loyalty to its ancient precepts, resisting calls from modernisers for the church to adapt.

In St. Peter's Square, lamp posts were covered with impromptu memorials to John Paul, including flowers, hand-written messages and children's drawings pinned up with multicoloured candle wax.

The Vatican's Swiss Guards, who normally wear gaily coloured uniforms, were clad in black cloaks Monday as the official mourning period for the pope continued.

As tens of thousands of the faithful file past John Paul's bier above the traditional site of the St. Peter's tomb, the cardinals in their first preparatory meeting were dealing with the practical arrangements of disposing of the pope's mortal remains before they get ready to choose who will inherit his mantle.

John Paul himself set an imposing agenda for the cardinals in instructions he drafted in 1996, including the reading of any final documents he may have left for them. That could include directives on where he wanted to be interred, whether in the crypts beneath St. Peter's Basilica as has been done with most popes, or in his native Poland.

In addition, the cardinals were expected to arrange the destruction of John Paul's Fisherman's Ring and the dies used to make lead seals for apostolic letters formal gestures meant to symbolise the

KIBRIA KILLING

'Govt keen on transparent probe'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, Bangladesh's ambassador to the US, responded to the three US lawmakers who sent a letter to Bangladesh urging a transparent probe into the January 27 grenade attack in Habiganj.

"I told the senators in my letter that the government is sincere in its effort to carry out a transparent investigation into the Kibria killing and that some measures have already been taken to that end," Chowdhury told the BBC Bangla Service last night.

Referring to his letter to the US senators, he said the government is pledge-bound to bring Kibria's killers to book.

"In the Jatiya Sangsad, our prime minister condemned the killing of Kibria and pledged to carry out a transparent probe into the incident," Chowdhury told the BBC, quoting his letter to the US senators.

The letter also said the arrest of individuals belonging to the ruling party who were in charge of Kibria's killing proves the government is properly undertaking its investigation.

Chowdhury denied that the letter of the US senators is a form of pressure, insisting that the government is conducting a transparent probe of its own.

Federal Democratic lawmakers Edward Kennedy and John Kerry, as well as Republican lawmaker Barney Frank, sent letters on Saturday to the US and Bangladesh governments urging an independent and transparent probe into the January 27 grenade attack, which killed former finance minister SAMS Kibria and four other persons.

ACC Commissioner Prof Maniruzzaman Miah officially pointed out such controversial decisions and asked the chairman to take steps in line with the act.

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No one, however, was hurt.

"We don't know who hurled the bombs," said a BSS staff. He also said the criminals might have disappeared in the bustling crowd of Paltan.

After the explosion, BSS staff, local traders and pedestrians rushed for safety. Police and intelligence men later collected splinters and other evidence.

Two policemen deployed at the office were inside the building during the incident.