

233 Bangladeshis held in Japan since January

UNB, Dhaka

As many as 233 Bangladeshi nationals have been arrested in Japan during the first six months of this year on various charges, according to a message from Tokyo.

Deputy Director General of the Press and Information Division of the Japanese Foreign Ministry Tomohiko Taniguchi disclosed this in the Japanese capital yesterday. Speaking at a regular press briefing, Taniguchi said according to figures released by the National Police Agency, South Korean nationals topped the list of suspected offenders with a total of 14,031 booked.

High criminal offence rates among South Koreans prompted the Japanese authorities to pick up the matter with their South Korean counterpart. And high officials of police agencies of the two countries met this week to discuss the possibilities of widening cooperation in crime-prevention matters.

"Of the 233 cases of arrest of Bangladeshi nationals during the first six months of 2005, majority are those who had been arrested for overstaying in the country beyond the permitted period," said the message.

UPDF frees 7 abducted villagers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Seven villagers, abducted by anti-peace accord United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) in Naniarchar upazila Wednesday night, were set free on Thursday, said a source in the army yesterday.

"The abductees got back home unscathed. None of them were tortured while in captivity," the source added.

However, it has yet to be learnt whether the abductors released the seven against ransom.

"Our forces dealt with the matter. By combing the area round the clock for the abducted villagers, they had exerted huge pressure on the captors and eventually forced the UPDF cadres to release the hostages," said the source.

The UPDF men on Wednesday night took away at gunpoint Atul Bihari Chakma, 35, Raj Bihari Chakma, 45, Kanak Kumar Chakma, 55, Kali Prosanna Chakma, 45, Tejendra Chakma, 45, and Ripon Chakma, 25 from Krishnamachhara village.

Hours later, they freed Ripon Chakma and asked him to tell the families of the rest of the captives that they wanted Tk 1 lakh for the others' release.

The army launched a rescue drive immediately after the abduction while the local Union Parishad chairman was trying to negotiate release of the hostages.

Outlaws kill young man in Chuadanga

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kusthia

Cadres of an underground outfit slaughtered a man at village Hazirapur in Sadar upazila of Chuadanga district early yesterday.

The victim was identified as Thandu Mia, 35, son of Nabishuddin of the village.

According to police, two outlaws named Bahauddin and Moniruddin of the village called Thandu out of his house at about 2:00am. EE

They took Thandu to a house

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Further fuel price hike to make rice pricier

REAZ AHMAD

A fresh increase in fuel price would put the country's agriculture sector in dire straits by pushing up irrigation costs, and trigger further price hike of rice.

The August 27 meeting at the finance ministry mulled a fresh increase of petroleum prices, creating concern in the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) over increased cost of diesel as farmers largely depend on diesel-run pumps for irrigating rice fields.

The MoA has given up seeking subsidies for diesel-run irrigation pumps due to the finance ministry's persistent indifference to the issue, and fears this would affect rice production and result in a price surge.

Since August 2003, the MoA has been asking the finance ministry to release Tk 310 crore in subsidy for diesel-run irrigation pumps as farmers using electricity-run pumps are already enjoying subsidy.

It estimated that out of the 7,86,004 shallow pumps now in operation for irrigation across the

country, 7,31,612 are diesel-run and the remaining 54,392 electricity-run. The difference of irrigation cost per acre in the two categories is as high as Tk 600. Farmers using diesel-run pumps incur 30 per cent more cost compared to those using electricity-run pumps.

Diesel now sells at Tk 26 per litre as against Tk 12.95 a litre in 2000. Since early 2003, price of diesel first rose to Tk 20 per litre from Tk 17 and then to Tk 26 from Tk 23 on May 24, hitting around 13 million farmers hard. An overwhelming majority of them grow rice on irrigated land.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Agriculture Minister MK Anwar said, "We've told the finance (ministry) many a time about the need for giving subsidies to farmers to meet the ever-increasing irrigation costs due to repeated rise of diesel price. But there has been no step as yet."

The minister however said he would no more ask the finance ministry to consider diesel subsidy to farmers.

Earlier, in January last year, the finance ministry rejected the proposal for subsidy for diesel-run

pumps saying that these pumps have multipurpose use and subsidy for this sector could be misused.

The MoA proposed the subsidy on August 11, 2003. The proposal was okayed by the Cabinet Committee on Agriculture and recommended by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the ministry for approval.

"It is true that diesel-run engines have multipurpose use but that should not bar us from providing the much-needed subsidy to farmers," the agriculture minister had said at that time.

"In our proposal, we clearly mentioned that diesel-run pumps, against which the subsidies would be provided, would run 12 hours a day and 65 days in a season. We gave the monetary estimate accordingly. On an average, one of these pumps will consume 0.95 litre diesel an hour," Anwar said.

Irrigation cost accounts for 28 percent of production cost of rice in Bangladesh. The cost is 6 percent in Vietnam, 8 percent in Thailand and 13 percent in Punjab, the rice-bowl

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Prices of essentials soar further

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prices of fish, meat, egg, vegetables and spices marked further rise during the last week, about a month before the Ramadan.

The prices of protein items and vegetables are unlikely to decrease shortly as the demand of these items will further rise in the next month when the Ramadan begins, traders in the city's kitchen markets said.

At Karwan Bazar kitchen market per kilogram mutton was selling at Tk 180, up from Tk 170 last week, per kg beef at Tk 110, up from Tk 100 in last week, per dozen eggs at Tk 51, up from Tk 45.

In the same market, per kg domestic ginger was selling at Tk 70, up from Tk 65, per kg garlic was

selling at Tk 42, up from Tk 40 last week, per kg dried chili at Tk 60, up from Tk 58.

However, the price of onion remained unchanged at Tk 24.

There a medium-sized hilsha was selling at Tk 200 to Tk 250 while a small pangash was available at Tk 60 to 65 and small Ruhit at Tk 80 and Telapia at Tk 80 per kg.

All kinds fish got price hike from Tk 5 to 10 per kilogram, fish traders said.

In city's Mirpur-1 kitchen market per kg aubergine was selling at Tk 18, up from Tk 15 last week, per kg cucumber at Tk 14, up from Tk 12, per kg bitter melon at Tk 20, up from Tk 18.

Rice remained almost static at

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Fear of floods over: Experts

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Although some areas of the country have lately been inundated afresh, experts yesterday said the possibility of major flooding is over for this year.

"This year, we may not have to face flooding like the last year when nearly 40 million or 25 percent of the total population were affected as 30,582 square kilometres of area went below water," said Mohammad Selim Bhuiyan, executive engineer of Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC).

"As we have already passed the months of June, July and August, the prime period for flood, we can now have a sigh of relief that the chances of major flooding are over," he added.

"On considering different fac

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Daudkandi bridge on Dhaka-Chittagong Highway exposes risk to vehicles because of damage and removal of its rubber joints at places. Its Japanese construction company had given a 100-year guarantee. But the communications ministry has recently decided to make the bridge off limit for vehicles only 10 years after its opening.

Indian, Nepali Maoists vow to fight together

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Maoist rebels in Nepal and India have vowed to join together to promote communism, reinforcing fears that the bloody insurgency in the Himalayan kingdom could spill over into its huge southern neighbour.

Nepali Maoist chief Prachanda and his Indian counterpart Ganapathy accused the governments of the two countries of trying to crush their movements.

"We pledge to fight unitedly till the entire conspiracies hatched by the imperialists and reactionaries are crushed and the people's cause of socialism and communism (is) established in Nepal, India and all over the world," they said in a joint statement e-mailed to journalists

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Involving judges in politics erodes confidence in them

Legal experts tell seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The judiciary is slowly losing public confidence and greatness due to its politicising through involvement of judges in the politics, eminent legal experts said at a seminar yesterday.

They expressed the view at a seminar on "Caretaker Government and Electoral Reforms: Legal Framework" organised by Jatiya Ainjibi Parishad at the Supreme Court Bar Association auditorium in the city.

Provision for appointing the former chief justice as the chief advisor of the caretaker government

in the constitution and appointments to posts like the Chief Election Commissioner allure the justices while the political parties take these opportunities to make them loyal to their parties, the legal experts said.

They called on the government to hold dialogue on the reform proposals on the caretaker government and electoral process placed by the 14-party, as they think the next national elections are not going to be fair and free without the reforms of these two crucial democratic institutions.

Then chief justice Shahabuddin Ahmed's being the chief of the

caretaker government on national consensus after the fall of Ershad regime consequently contributed to the appointment of the immediate former chief justice as the caretaker government chief, Bangladesh Bar Council Vice Chairman barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud said.

The elections in '91 and '96 were also above any debate, but the national polls in 2001 under the chief advisor of the caretaker government drew a lot of questions that later prompted the opposition parties to propose reform proposals, he said.

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BCL faction calls strike at CU

CU CORRESPONDENT

A faction of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), Chittagong University (CU) unit, has called for an indefinite students strike at the university from today.

Earlier, the faction led by Mamunur Rashid Mamun had enforced a two-day strike--Wednesday and Thursday--on the campus following the August 30 intra-party clash on the Chittagong-Rangamati highway near the campus.

At least 30 BCL men belonging to the Mamun faction were injured in the clash.

Mamun faction blamed its rival faction led by AZM Nasir for the incident and called the strike demanding immediate arrest and expulsion of those involved.

When contacted, CU Proctor Dr Al Amin said the authorities have nothing to do with the agitation that resulted from BCL intra-party feud.

"They have to solve the problem with the help of their central leaders," said the proctor while talking to the Star correspondent yesterday evening.

He, however, said a two-member body has been formed to probe the incident.

LONDON BOMBING al-Qaeda claims responsibility, warns of more attacks

AP, Cairo

One of the four suicide attackers who bombed London's transit system on July 7 made a dramatic farewell in a videotape that also included al-Qaeda's No. 2 Ayman al-Zawahri calling the subway attack "a slap to the face" of Britain and warning of more bloodshed.

Mohammad Sidique Khan, a Briton of Pakistani ancestry, said in the tape broadcast on Thursday that Westerners had failed to heed previous warnings. "Therefore we

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ATTEMPT ON TOP CTG OFFICIAL 4 suspects held, remanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police have arrested four people in connection with the Thursday's attempt on Additional Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong Golam Kuddus.

Panchlaish police arrested Bipin Dey, 25, Babul Barua, 26, Amzad Hossain, 20, and Abul Kashem, 19, from Chittagong Medical College, Chawk Bazar and Sholoshahar on Thursday night.

The cops are interrogating them at Panchlaish Police Station after the suspects were placed on a four-day remand yesterday.

"We have started quizzing the suspects, but can't say anything offhand before the investigation is complete," said investigation officer (IO) of the case Sub-inspector Atiqur Rahman.

He said, "We have nabbed the

four as they were booked for mugging and committing robberies in and around Panchlaish." The police are, however, yet to identify the motive behind the attack. They believe it was something more than an attempt to rob the government official's house, sources said.

Meantime, Kuddus suspects at least one, if not more, of the four assailants was acquainted with his house. The four, who did not rob anything, were in masks and did not utter a word during the attack, he explained.

The health of Golam Kuddus marked some improvement yesterday and he received phone calls from his colleagues and well-wishers enquiring about him.

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Saddam trial to open in October

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's former dictator Saddam Hussein will go on trial in the second half of October after a referendum is held on the constitution, a government official said Friday.

"The trial will take place in the second half of October," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

A referendum on the constitution is scheduled to take place on October 15.

There was no official word from the Iraqi Special Tribunal, which is tasked with trying Saddam and his henchmen.

Saddam, who was ousted in April 2003 and captured in December of that year, is currently in US custody near Baghdad airport facing charges of crimes against humanity.

The Iraqi Special Tribunal said in July he would initially face trial for the 1982 killing of 143 residents of the village of Dujiail, northeast of

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Observatory project to go ahead, finally

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Ending a nearly three-year limbo, the process of implementation of the Tk 14.02 crore Seismological Service Development Project has resumed with the government allocating funds for it recently.

Under the project, sophisticated seismographs and other devices will be installed at the four seismic observatories--the decades-old observatory in Chittagong and three new ones in Sylhet, Rangpur and in Gazipur, Meteorological department sources said.

Buildings were constructed

for the three new ones about three years ago.

The project will be completed by the end of the current financial year.

Tender for procurement of sophisticated machinery and equipment for the observatories was floated recently. Bids were submitted last week and they will be evaluated soon to issue work orders, an official said.

Back in 1999-2000, a Tk 10-crore project was taken up for establishing four observatories at places considered highly vulnerable to earthquake -- Sylhet, Chittagong, Rangpur and Gazipur.

Later, the project was revised raising the cost to Tk 18.17 crore. Construction of buildings under the project was completed in 2002 but suspension of fund allocation since fiscal 2001-2002 stalled its implementation.

Last year, the project was reviewed, dropping agriculture-related forecasts and revising the cost to Tk 14.02 crore.

The Public Works Department has started giving finishing touches to the three new observatory buildings to hand them over to Meteorology department shortly, officials said.

Prayer Timing		
September 3		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-30	5-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-23	6-26
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

