Star city

DHAKA SUNDAY DECEMBER 25, 2005

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Weekly weather forecast for the city

source: accuweather.com

Today	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
High: 27° C Low: 16° C Plenty of sunshine	High: 26° C Low: 17° C Beautiful with a full day of sunshine	High: 27° C Low: 16° C A full day of sunshine	High: 26° C Low: 17° C Plenty of sun	High: 23° C Low: 17° C Sunshine	High: 23° C Low: 16° C Partly sunny

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Christmas services held under tight security

SILVERINE SHRIKANTHAN *and* FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

Tight security in the city ahead of the greatest feast of the Christian community has not dampened the festive mood.

A look around the predominant Christian areas shows that preparations to commemorate the birth of Christ are still in progress on a grand scale.

Many however were disappointed at the changes in the service times. The services on the eve of Christmas are usually from 11:00pm, but this year, services commenced as early as 4:00pm.

State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar after a high-level meeting held on December 19 on security measures on the eves of Christmas and New Year said that security has been beefed up.

"The Christian community should not feel threatened under any circumstances," said the minister. "We are just ensuring their safety," he added.

The minister asked the police to thoroughly examine all churches before December 25 to ensure security of the congregation, police sources said.

Yet the church authorities decided not to have the usual 'midnight' services and to advance the timings.

Father A Jyoti Gomes, parish priest of Holy Rosary Church, Tejgaon, said for security reasons, celebrated the Christmas Vigil Mass at 4:00pm in Bangla and 8:00pm in English yesterday.

He said there would be no "midnight" Mass on New Year's Eve for the January 1 Solemnity of Mary.

Only two services -- one at 4:00pm in Bangla and the other at 6:30pm in English were held at the Chapel of the Holy Spirit of the National Major Seminary in Banani for parishioners of Banani, Gulshan and neighbouring areas.

Father Gabriel, rector of the seminary, said that no church was put under any pressure, but the priests in charge of the various churches decided to hold the services early yesterday.

Priests of various parishes have asked the congregations not to carry bags with them in future when they come to church, and warned all to be alert regarding strangers within the church premises.

The pastor of Mary, Queen of Apostles Church in Mirpur-2 held their service at 7:00pm yesterday. The service was usually held at 9:00pm in the previous years.

Parishioners of the many churches said that Christmas won't be Christmas without the midnight services.

"I will go for the morning service," said George, a Tejgaon parishioner. "There is no feeling of Christmas without the midnight service," he added.

The Assembly of God (AG) Church at Eskaton will not have any Christmas Eve services. There will be only one service on today at 9:00am.

Said Elizabeth: "The children and I are disappointed, but what can we do. We have to consider the security situation."

De Mazenod Church at Naya Nagar had only one service yesterday at 4:00pm. The other will be held today at 8:00am, said Father Emil Moraes.

Church authorities said that police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) officials had started checking venues days before the feast.

"We feel safe and happy that such security measures have been taken to ensure safety for all," said a parishioner from Banani.

However, The Cathedral at Ramna was support to hold its Christmas Eve service at 10:00pm, amidst tight security.

"We will ensure tight security of all the churches in Dhaka," said Mazharul Huq deputy commissioner (South) of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP). "According to the decision taken at a central meeting police and Rab officials will stand guard on the premises of all churches for 24 hours till the events are over," he added.

"The Christian community should carry out their services like the previous years as the state minister has promised full support and security. The number of police personnel per church will depend on the volume of the congregation of Christians at each venue. There will be constant monitoring round the clock in the churches", said Mazharul.

Earlier in the month many associations and organisations held their annual Christmas Carols amidst tight security at various restaurants in the city. The Sri Lankan Association in Bangladesh held its carol service on December 15, while the Philippines community had its service on December 1.

Authorities of different police stations like Ramna, Mirpur, Badda and Gulshan that have churches under their jurisdiction said that according to the order from the central committee police from these stations will be deployed to cater security in and around the churches.

According to the meeting, the police force was assigned from December 22 in all the churches and all the venues geared with security devices. Thorough searches were conducted from December 22 and continued to do so until December 24, with a complete system to monitor the areas.

The minister requested the Christian community to call the police of Rab for immediate action in case of any untoward incident.

Yet Christians gathered in large numbers to partake at the services singing to themselves:

"God rest ye merry gentlemen, may nothing you dismay, for Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on Christmas Day, to save us all from Satan's power, when we are gone astray, - Good tiding of Comfort and Joy"

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Tight security was enforced at all churches in the city on Christmas Eve. The picture above was taken at Holy Rosary Church in Tejgaon.

Ineffective traffic signals worsen congestion

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The computerised traffic signals installed at various intersections in the city are not being followed by traffic police who are struggling to control the traffic manually.

The traffic department of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) says it is difficult to manage the huge flow of traffic using the automatic signals but the commuters allege controlling traffic manually is rather worsening the congestion at various points.

At most of the intersections, vehicles remain stranded for 20 to 45 minutes in long queues due to the traffic mismanagement, the commuters said.

Traffic department officials said the over populated city is unable to accommodate the increasing number of vehicles as road capacity has not been enhanced in recent times.

The city should have a road network constituting 22-25 percent of the total area but at present it has only 8 percent space for roads, they said.

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Not following the automatic traffic signals causes more congestion in the city streets.

Feroz Al Mujahid Khan, deputy commissioner (traffic) of DMP, said: "A street should have maximum 800 to 900 vehicles plying in an hour during normal times but we have to manage around 2,500 vehicles that causes the traffic problem."

"To control such a huge number of vehicles we have to apply the manual system instead of the computerised signal system," he added.

Feroz said there are 150 feet wide roads in Gulshan where the flow of traffic is thin. On the other hand, the Farmgate-Bangla Motor road is only 70 to 75 feet wide which is inadequate to withstand the huge pressure of vehicles.

The busy intersections like Mouchak, Malibagh, Bangla Motor and Saarc fountain regularly face long tailbacks. Signals at most places in the old part of the city also do not function properly because of the traffic mismanagement.

Traffic officials said freestyle movement of buses also causes traffic problem. The drivers stop the vehicles wherever and whenever they want.

"We need to follow both the electronic signal and the manual instruction of traffic police, which is puzzling," said a resident of Badda.

The drivers said they face difficulties when the police stop them despite green signal.

DMP officials said most of the high-rise buildings do not have parking facilities and a large number of vehicles are parked on the roads causing traffic congestion.

The customers of shopping malls and superstores in Gulshan, Sobhanbagh, Dhanmondi and Satmasjid Road areas park their vehicles occupying the roads.

The DMP officials said smooth traffic movement depends on several important factors such as traffic education of people, proper road plan and enforcement of rules. The police are responsible only for the enforcement of rules.

Dr KM Maniruzzaman, head of Urban and Regional Planning Department, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, said, "In no other countries in the world traffic signals are maintained manually. To improve the current situation the cycle of the signals can be made variable according to need."

"Manual signals can be followed only when the programmed signalling system do not work," he said. "Managing traffic with both automatic and manual signals can be very risky. Which way should the drivers look at, the signals or traffic police?"

Rajuk bid to build road in Gulshan foiled

A local resident claims possession of the lake land, eyes "negotiation" with Rajuk

TAWFIQUE ALI

A Gulshan resident yesterday managed to stop the work of constructing a road by the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) along the Gulshan Lake, claiming the possession of the land.

The hired men of Shahidullah Talukdar, a resident on Road no-41, obstructed the labourers and Rajuk officials while constructing the road so that the lake cannot be demarcated and "he can continue further encroachment into the lake," said a highly-placed source at Rajuk.

Claiming it a walkway, Rajuk Chief Engineer Emdadul Islam said, "Talukdar's men forcibly obstructed our work."

On a visit to the site, this correspondent found it to be approximately a 100-foot long road.

When contacted, duty officer sub-inspector Taslima of Gulshan police station said that Rajuk authorities did not seek any police back up to continue its work.

"Our assistant engineer has instructed us to postpone the work until next Monday, as the land claimant eyes a negotiation with the Rajuk authority on Monday," said Sajal Roy, a work assistant of Rajuk on duty at the construction site.

Talukdar legally owns a 5-katha plot allotted from the Rajuk, according to Rajuk sources. But over the years he has been consistently encroaching into the lake claiming it to be his own property. Now he occupies around 14 kathas of land.

"Having encroached into the lake, he managed the allotment of the occupied land in connivance with an unscrupulous section of the Rajuk estate department officials," said a high official of Rajuk on condition of anonymity.

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Workers appointed by Rajuk began construction work of a road beside Gulshan Lake but were forcefully stopped by a local resident.

"Talukdar even got the allotment of the encroached land at a price far lower than the existing rate of Rajuk for which there has been an audit objection," he said.

Talukdar has built an apartment building at the dead end of Road no-41 on one portion of the land and leased out another portion to a developer, according to Rajuk sources.

When tried to contact Shahidullah Talukdar, a businessman, his son Md Iftekhar said, "My father does not want to talk to the media before Monday next as we will have negotiation with the Rajuk chairman to reach a mutual understanding on the possession of land."

Iftekhar said his father got the allotment of 13.5 kathas of land from the Rajuk in two phases, first 8.5 kathas and then 5 kathas, both in 1986.

He said that his father had built the existing apartment building in 1998 and has been keeping the 5-katha plot on the lake vacant ever since.

When Talukdar was available later, he said that he got the first allotment of 9 kathas. He got another 3 kathas when Rajuk earth-filled the lake to develop a 17.5-katha plot on Road no-43 reducing the width of the 20-foot wide Road no-41.

He said that he has a plan passed by the Rajuk and valid lease deed.

The Rajuk has split the 17.5-katha lands into three plots, Talukdar said. "The latest lessee intends to hand over his 7-katha plot to a developer and the new road will add value to it."

The Rajuk on Friday demolished a boundary wall, raised by Talukdar on the lake, to construct the 100-foot road of 15 feet width connecting a new plot on the lake with the Road no-41.

Rajuk's intention, however, seems murky behind the attempt to construct the road, locals said.