

More fertiliser

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feed, reports our staff correspondent in Royganj upazila recovered 200 sacks of fertilizers from a pond on khas land, says UNB.

Ghose & Brothers, a fertiliser dealer, hoarded the fertilisers on the ground floor of a three-storeyed building on 7 PC Roy Road. The owner of the dealership, Uma Prashad Ghose, could not be arrested.

Police took the owner of the building Deb Prashad Sheth in custody for his suspected involvement in the hoarding.

According to police, Uma Prashad Ghose is a listed smuggler and black marketeer.

The joint forces led by metropolitan Magistrate Atiqul Haque also seized huge quantities of spoilt basic commodities from a warehouse on Station Road.

The recovered spoilt food items are 150 sacks of rice, 136 sacks of sugar, 26 sacks of lentil and 233 sacks of fish feed.

The warehouse belonged to rice trader Elias Hossain -- proprietor of Madina Traders.

In Chittagong, members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) sealed off 16 large warehouses at Majhirghat under the Doublemooring thana, our staff correspondent reports.

However, Rab did not enter the warehouses as no magistrate was available yesterday. They would raid the warehouses in the morning today.

It is believed that many top food importers of the country stockpiled huge quantities of basic commodities such as lentil, sugar, pulses, edible oil or other items in these warehouses.

Sources said three commissioned agents -- Kabir Majhi, Ahmed Trading and Ali Enterprise -- rented the warehouses a few years back to store various commodities imported by leading importers including PHP and Abu Khalir groups.

UNB reports, police sealed off an unregistered food-processing factory in Natore after they found huge quantities of adulterated food items from the establishment.

Detective branch of police raided the factory named Uttara Foods and seized adulterated 'tasty saline', fruit juice, 'ready tea', sugar, and raw materials used in making the items.

In Sirajganj, residents of a village

Ekushey Book Fair

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contained essays.

Visitors expressed satisfaction over the environment of the fair with less dust and no long queues.

The gathering of book-enthusiasts was particularly noticeable at the stalls of Anya Prakash, Ananya, Moula Brothers and Saba Prakashani.

Several publishers expressed their satisfaction over the sales of books, while many others were not happy over the issue. The readers complained against the high price of books this year.

A number of prominent writers were also present at the fair yesterday.

Prof Muhammad Zafar Iqbal visited the fair in the afternoon and spent time at Samoy Prakashani giving autographs to fans. He also unveiled the cover of a book, 'Computer-e Bangla Operating System' by the publishing house.

Eminent writer Selina Hossain also unveiled covers of two books, 'Nari Jiboner Golpo', a collection of 84 women writers, and 'Se Ak Banishikha' by Rowshan Ara Akther.

In the morning, Reza Kibria came to the fair on the occasion of publication of an essay collection 'Prabondha Sangraha', by his slain father Shah AMS Kibria. The book was brought out by Agamee Prakashani.

Writer Imdadul Haq Milon spent time at Ananya Prakashani. Wrier Pranab Bhattacharya also came to fair yesterday.

A seminar and a cultural programme were held at the Bangla Academy in the evening.

Thick fog

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passengers on board more than 800 vehicles immensely suffered on both sides of the Padma and the Jamuna at Daulatdia, Paturia and Nagarbari points.

Around 350 vehicles from Dhaka lined up at Paturia in Manikganj whereas 430 vehicles that included Biswa Jitma-bound buses lined up at Daulatdia in Rajbari. About 20 vehicles queued up at Nagarbari terminal in Pabna.

Army men were seen controlling the traffic at the terminals to ease sufferings of the stranded passengers.

In Munshiganj, ferry movement on Maowa-Keorakandi route was severely disrupted for about 11 hours until 10:00am yesterday morning due to dense fog, causing immense sufferings to the passengers, reports UNB.

BWTC sources said ferry service on the route remained halted for over 11 hours leaving several hundred vehicles stranded on both sides of the river Padma.

Passengers of the stranded vehicles said they had to suffer a lot due to acute scarcity of food and drinking water.

Meanwhile, ferry movement through Muktarpur ferry ghat remained suspended for hours due to the same reason.

BWTC sources said thick fog forced 19 large launches and a number of boats to anchor in mid Padma, Meghna, Shitalakhy and Buriganga rivers.

Meteorologists, however, forecast that the foggy weather will start normalising by tomorrow. Temperature might fall by a couple of degrees but there is no possibility of any cold wave, they said.

Power ministry

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touches to their respective agenda.

A top BPDB official told the news agency that they have already completed the drafting of the work plan in line with the guidelines given by the chief adviser's office.

"We'll focus on the problems the power sector has been facing and also place some concrete proposals for resolving the haggling crisis," he said.

Sources said two types of strategies--short-term and long-term--will be accommodated in the plan of action.

Mainly there will be a list of generation projects, their funding and the present state of implementation in detail in the plan. The present state of the existing plants will also be included in the plan, according to the sources.

In this regard, they said, the short-term plan will be presented with an implementation target by 2009.

A number of priority projects might be laid out on list, such as 450MW Meghnaghat phase-II and phase-III, another 450MW plant at Bheramara, 300MW Shiddhiganj peaking plant, 360MW Shiddhiganj combined cycle plant, 150MW Chandpur plant, 90MW Fenchugan plant, 210MW Shiddhiganj plant and another 450MW Dhaka North Power plant project.

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shall give rise to the right on the part of Bangladesh PDB to initiate action pursuant to Land Lease Agreement," said the PDB letter.

The PDB gave BON Consortium 20 acres of land.

Meanwhile Karim has gone into hiding. Various sources claim that Karim has fled to Malaysia with his family using fake names and addresses. The Daily Star tried to contact him over telephone several times yesterday but failed to reach him.

Particularly, it will present in detail the present and future states of country's gas and coal production and the funding it needs to implement the projects.

The sources said the work-plan will emphasise diversified uses of the energy resources for power generation and other purposes including downstream business emerging from mining industry.

Energy Secretary AMM Nasir Uddin said the work-plan on gas and coal utilisation is being prepared on the basis of the Energy Master Plan up to 2025.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Fahim Munaim told the UNB that as per instruction, the Power and Energy Divisions are getting ready to make the presentation tomorrow.

The BON Consortium is supposed to be led with German power

Meghnaghat-2 Power Project

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bagged the power deal as a political favour by the previous alliance government, on January 21 gave PDB a Tk 6.22 crore cheque as land rent and initial development payment. But the cheque bounced.

As per the Land Lease Agreement (LLA) of Meghnaghat-2, the PDB can cancel the contract for such a fault. But the PDB gave BON Consortium three weeks time that expires on February 22 and served it with a notice of "Project Company Event of Default" as per the LLA.

The BON Consortium must "cure" its action, or the contract will be cancelled.

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While these cases were being set to be filed against Karim, the BON Consortium gave the PDB a cheque of Tk 6.22 crore. But the bank returned the cheque to the PDB along with a note saying, "May be presented again, 7 days required."

The PDB reviewed the situation in the light of the LLA and deducted the event of default. The PDB can cancel the contract if the contractor fails to take a remedial action. The LLA did not spell out any cure period for this kind of fault. So, the PDB resorted to another part of the contract dealing with material breach, which gives a 30-day period.

Early January, Obaidul Karim met The Daily Star correspondent to brief on the progresses on this project. The Daily Star ran a number of stories on this project, highlighting how Karim has been unduly favoured at the bid selection process and later during the contract formulation process.

Karim claimed that he had finalised 80 to 85 percent of the project finance. Upon awarding the engineering and procurement contract in February, he would be able to close the finances in March. He also claimed that world leading financiers were ready to fund the project.

Industry insiders said that Karim was earlier turned down by several

company Steag with only 20 percent stake (officially unannounced), Obaidul Karim claimed to The Daily Star early January. Orion has only 16 percent share and Belhsa holds the remaining shares.

However, though holding a small share, the BON Consortium is headed by Karim himself and he has been tapping various banks to arrange the project finance.

Karim has also held an international tender to procure power plant equipment last year and received three bids from NSRD, a Chinese company, Korean Hyundai and another unqualified Chinese company.

Karim told The Daily Star that he might opt for Hyundai plant and finalise the tender in February.

But the cases against him have thrown off the driving seat of this project as well as other projects.

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company like Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank--who's small involvement gives other financiers confidence to pump in major parts of required fund.

Orion never actually gave the bid that was selected for this power project and it actually submitted its name as one of the two partners of a Japanese bidder Nisso Eiwi, which has the experience to qualify for building such a power plant.

However, Nisso disappeared from the scene in 2004 and Orion brought in another German company Steag showing it as the lead bidder. The government initially rejected such a gross anomaly, but then with pressure from the Hawa Bhaban the government accepted and approved the bid by August 2005.

Orion signed a series of contracts with the PDB and other authorities for the power project and signed the LLA, the final deal, on October 11 last year.

Kuakata murder

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Dhaka at around 7:00pm on January 27 by their private car after a two-day stay there.

When they reached Rajopara on Kuakata-Dhaka road under Kalapara upazila, Abul attacked Tania with sharp knives and the other two killers helped him to murder her, Zahid told the magistrate.

According to the plan, the killers then dumped the body into a roadside ditch and set out for Dhaka with the car, while Zahid went to a nearby house and called locals saying that some smugglers had attacked them and killed his wife.

Later on, Kalapara police arrested him from the spot suspecting his involvement with the incident. Patuakhali Sadar police seized the car abandoned at Kalapakur on Patuakhali-Dhaka road the next day and recovered two bloodstained knives from the car.

Tania of Taltala in Dhaka was an assistant teacher of Shaheed Babul Academy of the capital.

However, the Apaches, which were designed to fight the Soviet Union on the plains of central Europe, have proven vulnerable to intense ground fire.

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, more than 30 Apaches had to break off an attack after suffering heavy damage in fighting with the Iraqi Republican Guard. One helicopter crashed but the two crew members survived.

Elsewhere, the US command said 18 insurgents were killed in fighting Thursday night and Friday after insurgents opened fire on the Americans from several positions in Ramadi, 115km west of Baghdad. No civilian or US casualties were reported, the military said.

The United States has lost more than 50 helicopters in Iraq since May 2003, about half of them to hostile fire.

In fresh violence at least nine people were killed on Saturday in a series of attacks across Iraq, including six police commandos shot dead near the northern town of Samarra, security officials said.

A group of gunmen attacked a police checkpoint early in the day, killing six commandos and wounding another six, an official at a local police coordination centre told AFP.

The attack took place north of Samarra, which is 125km north of Baghdad, he said.

However, the loss of four helicopters since Jan. 20 has raised new questions about whether Iraqi insurgents are using more sophisticated weapons or whether US tactics need changing.

Three of the latest crashes involved Army helicopters two Apaches and one Black Hawk. The fourth was an OH-6A observation helicopter operated by the Blackwater USA security firm. All were believed shot down, and 20 Americans, including four civilians, died in the crashes.

In Washington, Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, acknowledged that insurgent ground fire in Iraq has been more effective against our helicopters in the last couple of weeks."

But Pace said it was unclear whether this is some kind of new tactics or techniques that we need to adjust to."

The Islamic State of Iraq, an Al-Qaeda-linked group, claimed on Friday that it shot down the Apache near Taji in a statement posted on an extremist Web site.

"We tell the enemies of God that the airspace of the Islamic State in Iraq is prohibited to your aircraft just like its lands are," the statement said. "God has granted new ways for the soldiers of the State of Iraq to confront your aircraft."

Iraqi insurgents have used heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and shoulder-fired SA-7 anti-aircraft missiles throughout the Iraq conflict. US officials believe Iran is supplying Shia militias with new weapons including more powerful roadside bombs, Katyusha rockets and a newer class of rocket-propelled grenades.

Some of those weapons could have found their way into the hands of Sunni insurgents, who operate around Taji.

The US military relies heavily on helicopters to avoid roadside bombs and insurgent ambushes. Any new threat to helicopters would be a serious challenge to the military as it gears up for a major crackdown against Sunni insurgents and Shia militias in Baghdad.

Helicopters are always vulnerable to ground fire, said Stephen Trimble, Americas bureau chief for Jane's Defence Weekly. "A well-placed bullet can pretty much take down any helicopter," he said.

Protecting helicopters from attack is significantly more complicated than defending against roadside bombs, Trimble said.

"What you would do with a Humvee is up armour it," he said. But helicopters can't support a significant increase in weight. The US military is looking into technology that tracks and fires at rocket-propelled grenades, he said, but its use on helicopters is a long way off.

Apaches carry multiple high-tech defences, including long-range sensors, radar jammers and an infrared jammer for countering incoming missiles.

Around four thousand foreign devotees from 65 countries around the world are also attending the three-day congregation on the bank of the river Turag in the suburban town of Tongi.

The Jitma is being held under tight security by several thousand security personnel including Rapid Action Battalion members. Twenty-five magistrates are also performing Jitma duties by rotation.

Meanwhile five people including a Malaysian national died yesterday, the second day of the event.

Malaysian citizen Jali Mohammad Jane Abdul Rahman, 67, died at Asian Cardiology Hospital at Mohammadpur yesterday morning due to cardiac failure.

Abdul Jali, 84, of Jhenidah, Abdur Razzak, 32, of Noakhali, Rafiqul Islam, 44, of Rajshahi and Faruq Ahmed, 42, of Manikganj also died on Friday night.

About 54 Jitma attendees were admitted to different hospitals and clinics in Dhaka and Tongi.

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