

Bangladeshi cabbie

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dropping off the passenger, who had left him with a 30-cent tip on a \$10.70 fare.

"All my life, I tried to be honest," said Osman Chowdhury, adding, "Today is no different."

But the 41-year-old cabbie from Queens did have a message: "I'm proud of what I did so that people know New York taxi drivers are honest."

What he did started on Monday evening, when he picked up the woman at a hotel in midtown Manhattan and drove her to an apartment building several blocks away. She gave him \$20 to pay the fare and asked for \$9 back.

Hours later, at about 10:00pm, three other passengers with luggage discovered the woman's suitcase when Chowdhury popped the trunk open for them.

Chowdhury first drove to the building where he had dropped off the woman. But he had no idea in which of the many apartments she might be and didn't want to cause a disruption by knocking on doors.

He took the suitcase to the Manhattan headquarters of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, a drivers' advocacy group to which he belongs. He and the alliance president looked inside and found two display cases with 31 diamond rings inside.

"I saw flashing, and I said, 'Oh my

God! Diamonds!'" Chowdhury recalled. "I was shocked. I was trembling."

They also found a small luggage tag with a Texas telephone number they called--the home of the woman's mother in Dallas. Meanwhile, she called the number, too.

The woman, who said she was a jeweller, got back the gems on Monday when she arrived at the alliance office around midnight--incredulous at her luck. She offered Chowdhury a reward--a check for \$100.

"I cannot take a penny for being honest," he said, but he reluctantly accepted the money to cover the fares he lost while trying to track her down.

He said it never occurred to him to keep the diamonds.

"I'm not going to take someone else's money or property to make me rich. I don't want it that way," said the soft-spoken cabbie, who was a contractor in Bangladesh until he came to the United States 15 years ago.

He does not own a cab but rents one.

"I enjoy my life. I'm satisfied," said Chowdhury, who is single.

He didn't even mind the meager tip.

"I think some people might be broke," he said. "Or they're distracted."

The woman from Dallas asked that her name not be made public.

Rice "cautiously optimistic" on N Korea talks

REUTERS, Washington

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said yesterday she is cautiously optimistic that it may be possible to begin carrying out a September 2005 agreement on ending North Korea's nuclear programs.

"I think there may be -- I am cautiously optimistic that we may be able to begin, again, to implement the joint statement of 2 0 0 5 t o w a r d t h e denuclearization of the Korean peninsula," Rice told a congressional panel.

Six-party talks among the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States resumed on Thursday in Beijing and South Korean officials said North Korea was willing to take initial steps toward ending its nuclear arms program.

The talks in September 2005 produced an agreement under which North Korea said it was committed "to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs." In return, the others held out economic, political and security incentives.

"I am, as I said, cautiously optimistic but I don't count my chickens until they are hatched," Rice later told lawmakers on the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Fake insulin

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The same court raided a branch of the National Pharma at Kamalapur and held two of its staff Khandakar Nizamuddin and Rafiq and fined them Tk 4 lakh. The branch was also sealed off.

The court issued arrest warrants against the owner Dr Mosharaf Hossain and his son Md Mostaq Hossain, who used to run the factory.

The police filed a case under section 25 (C) of Special Power Acts-1974 against all of them. Raids on Mymensingh clinics

More than 50 people, including doctors, owners, technicians and staffs, were detained by the joint forces yesterday during raids on over 100 clinics and nursing homes in the town.

The forces also closed down over 50 clinics, nursing homes and pathology labs as they failed to produce necessary documents.

Led by a magistrate, the army, Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) and police carried out the raids at Charpara, Mashkanda, Sheora, Dupakhola mour, Baghmara Kalbari Road and Patgudam Bridge area.

Nearly Tk 1 lakh was realised as fines during the drive. Owners of many clinics closed their establishments to avoid arrest.

First Class Magistrate Rokhana Tarannum and Dr Anwarul Islam Chowdhury of local civil surgeon office told the reporters that they have found fake doctors and technicians and non-trained nurses along with unhygienic atmosphere in those clinics, nursing homes and pathology labs.

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CG plans

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sovereignty and national interest in negotiations or agreements with foreign countries.

"Every country wants to protect its own interest and we will protect ours...We'll make sure that our interests are not jeopardised," he said when correspondents sought his comment on a general perception that some foreign countries are trying to press this interim government to sign agreements on certain areas such as power and seaport.

He said he was not aware of any proposal for modernisation of Chittagong Port and that the shipping ministry might be in a better position to shed light on that matter.

When asked about foreign diplomats' plea for holding the stalled general elections "as soon as possible," he said they had said this before, "but now they are realising that it is a complex situation."

Defining "as soon as possible", Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, a seasoned diplomat, said that "...as possible is a key expression" indicating no precise timeframe.

About concern over the protection of human rights during the anti-corruption and anti-crime drives, he said the government as well as the law adviser had pledged that human rights must be protected in every step of the way.

Replying to a question whether he would make trips overseas to mobilise international support for the present caretaker govern-

ment, the adviser confidently said it does not need to go abroad and highlight the government's performance. "The way we will work, our activities will attract international support."

Asked if Bangladesh would seek US technical support in its effort to fight corruption, Chowdhury said the foreign ministry did not yet receive any specific proposal from the line ministries.

Chowdhury also mentioned that the two cornerstones of Bangladesh's foreign policy are to protect sovereignty and enhance cooperation with foreign countries for increasing trade and investment.

The adviser referred to his meetings with foreign diplomats stationed in Dhaka and said they gave assurance of continued cooperation and assistance for the economic progress and development of Bangladesh.

Acting Foreign Secretary Touhid Hossain and senior officials of the foreign ministry were also present at the briefing.

Bus driver dies

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capturing him. Nargis had brought allegations of rap and possession of illegal weapons against Musa.

The family members alleged that the army personnel beat up Musa before handing him over to Shivalaya Police Station next morning. He was later sent to Manikganj jail where he fell sick after three days.

Manikganj jail authority admitted him to Manikganj Sadar Hospital on February 6. He was rushed to DMCH as his condition deteriorated.

Musa's family claimed Musa had a feud with his cousin Abu Daud over a pond. Daud and his wife Nargis filed the false allegations, they alleged. The army could not find any weapons after searching Musa's house, they claimed.

However, morgue sources said marks of old injuries were found in Musa's leg and chest.

Daud and Nargis have been absconding after Musa's death.

UNDP

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readiness for extending assistance to the Election Commission (EC) in holding a free, fair and credible election.

"The UNDP assured us of providing all kinds of assistance for holding a free and fair election. We will seek their assistance if needed," Election Commissioner Sohel Hossain told reporters following the meeting with a UNDP delegation led by its local chief Reneta Lok Dessallien.

They discussed various aspects of electoral reforms and the holding of a free, fair and acceptable election. The UNDP delegation expressed their hope that the reconstituted EC would hold the elections in a transparent manner.

Talking to reporters at his office Election Commissioner Sohel Hossain said the EC is working to find out the problems. "We are determined to make the Election Commission an institution which everybody can be proud of. I will quit the Election Commission if we failed to create people's confidence in the Election Commission," the newly appointed election commissioner said.

He said the EC wants to hold a free and fair election ensuring participation of all political parties.

Replying to a query, Sohel said they did not have any discussion with the caretaker government regarding electoral reforms and making the registration of political parties mandatory.

However, the UNDP country representative told reporters that it was a courtesy call and they discussed various issues on holding a free and fair election.

Another delegation of UNDP's Electoral Association called on Law Adviser Mainul Hossain and assured the caretaker government of providing assistance in holding free and fair elections.

Body of girl

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in her chest, abdomen and thighs. It seems she was tortured with a hot knife," a morgue source said.

Police think that the girl used to work as a domestic help at some house in the locality where she had been tortured for a long time and the body was dumped in the early hours yesterday. The body was shown to the locals but no one could identify her.

None could be arrested in this connection till filing of this report as of 7:30pm.

Public universities

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banning students and teachers' politics having affiliation with political parties and 52 percent observed that the syndicate should take a decision for stopping politics on the campus and strictly implement it.

The research paper described the university engineering department, which deals with construction of residential hall and maintenance of university buildings, as a den of corruption.

Prof Mahtab Khan termed the existing environment at the public universities "pathetic" and blamed it on student politics. The universities cannot take any decision independently due to party politics, he pointed out.

DU professor Imtiaz Ahmed raised the issue of the teachers' accountability, saying they still teach on the basis of books written in the 1960s. There are many teachers who have been giving the same "notes" to the students for the last 20 years, he said.

He proposed not promoting a teacher as professor before they obtain the PhD degree.

Pointing out that the classrooms get jam-packed as more than 100 students often attend a master degree class, he suggested dividing the classes in several sections.

Prof Nazma Shaheen of DU, however, claimed that most teachers still take classes regularly but the whole teachers' community is blamed because of only a few.

Prof Muzaffer observed that much better results could be achieved with the money the government spends for the public universities every year.

Ex-BIAM DG

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of the terminated teachers and employees filed the case against him and his associates. As such, they prayed for bail of their clients.

Opposing the bail petitions for complainant Mohammad Wazed Ali, a senior teacher of the school, the prosecution told the court that Shahidul was a self-declared chairman of the school. He along with his associates beat up the complainant mercilessly. Moreover, they made an attempt to kill the victim. So, they prayed to the court to turn down the defendants' bail pleas and to send them to jail, the prosecution added.

After hearing both the sides, the magistrate rejected the prosecution plea and granted bail to Shahidul and others.

Following the order, Wazed Ali expressed his dissatisfaction over it and burst into tears. He said Shahidul Alam and his associates attempted to murder him only a couple days back, but they obtained bail.

According to the prosecution, at around 4:00pm on February 6, a group of thugs led by Shahidul Alam suddenly attacked the complainant and beat him up mercilessly in a bid to kill him.

Soon after the attack, Wazed filed an attempted murder case with Ramna Police Station against Shahidul Alam and nine others.

Palestinians agree

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evening at the latest, the results of which will then be presented to ... Abbas, Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal and prime minister Ismail Haniya," said Mohammed Nazzal of the Hamas political bureau.

"A drafting committee will then be formed to draw up the final text of the accord to be signed," he added.

Officials from the two sides said on Wednesday that an agreement would be reached within two or three days, and both parties have pledged not to leave Makkah without drawing a line under their deadly power struggle which has killed around 100 people since December.

"We will not leave this holy place without an agreement," Abbas said at Wednesday's opening of the talks, a vow echoed by Meshaal: "We have come to agree and will not leave without an agreement."

Saudi King Abdullah invited the Palestinian leaders to Makkah in a bid to end the deadliest internecine violence in the Palestinian territories in years.

Meshaal, who lives in exile in Syria and is one of Israel's most wanted men, urged both sides' fighters to exercise restraint.

Haniya told the opening session there was a need for a "code of honour" banning internal feuding and for a "comprehensive agreement" -- not just an interim deal.

Meshaal said it was vital that any deal reached be respected.

"The international community must respect our accord, recognise our Palestinian reality and deal with it seriously," he said.

Hamas, which formed a government last March after an upset parliamentary election win over Abbas's long-dominant Fatah movement, is anxious not to surrender the power it won at the ballot box without securing an end to the Western aid boycott that has crippled its administration.

Both the European Union and the United States froze all direct aid when Hamas took power, demanding that the Palestinian government renounce violence and recognise Israel and past peace deals.

Hamas and Fatah have since held protracted negotiations on forming a broad coalition acceptable to Western donors so it can resume.

In Jerusalem, talks with British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett on Wednesday, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert insisted that the West should not give up on the three principles and should ensure that any new Palestinian administration should be fully signed up to them.

"Any government of the Palestinian Authority will have to respect these conditions," he said, adding that he expected to hold a three-way summit with Abbas and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on February 19.

Iraq minister arrested

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and wounded another 10.

The Al-Aziziyah attack took place in the morning, while the market was packed, a security source said.

"Victims were taken to the local hospital, which has been sealed off," the source said.

It was the first attack in the Shia town, but late Wednesday a double bomb attack killed seven people and wounded 12 others in Suwaira, which lies 20km to the north.

In Baquba, northeast of Baghdad meanwhile, four policemen and a civilian died during an attack on a patrol Thursday, a security source said.

The latest violence came as Iraqi and US troops spread across the capital as part of a long-awaited security plan to curb bloodshed that has killed tens of thousands across the country in the past year.

Four more US marines have died after being wounded while fighting in Iraq, the military said on Thursday.

A statement from US headquarters said the four had died on Wednesday of wounds sustained in two earlier incidents in the western province of Anbar.

Anbar is a hotbed of Iraq's Sunni insurgency where US forces are locked in a fierce fight to reassert government control.

The deaths bring the number of US military killed in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion to 3,103, according to an AFP count based on Pentagon figures.

A US Marine transport helicopter crashed in flames Wednesday in a field northwest of Baghdad, killing all seven people aboard, the US military said. It was the sixth US aircraft reported lost in less than three weeks and the latest sign of growing problems with aviation in Iraq.

A US military statement gave no reason for the crash of the CH-46 Sea Knight, which went down near Fallujah in Anbar province, about 20 miles from Baghdad. However, at the Pentagon, three Marine Corps officials said the troop-transport helicopter was in flames when it went down, with the pilot appearing to attempt a hasty landing but losing control as the aircraft descended.

On Wednesday, US military spokesman Major General William Caldwell said that implementation of the Baghdad stabilisation plan was now fully underway.

"The plan is being fully implemented as we speak," he told reporters.

Caldwell emphasized that Iraqi commander Lieutenant General Aboud Qanbar "is in charge" of the operation, eventually expected to

"I hope that by then we will not find that Abu Mazen (Abbas) has partnered with Hamas in a way that is in contradiction of the principles of the quartet and the international community," he added.

Abbas adviser Nabil Amr said the two sides had already agreed on some power-sharing details, including that two independents -- Salam Fayyad and Ziad Abu Amr -- would take the finance and foreign affairs portfolios respectively.

Amr said there was also agreement that the sensitive interior ministry should go to an independent, although he added that Hamas had yet to name its preferred candidate.

Godfathers of graft

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rumours are being spread to harm the caretaker government.

"No genuine businessman would be caught and the chief adviser conveyed the message to the business community," he said.

"Those who have put lives under threat by selling rotten and adulterated wheat and other harmful food products cannot be called businessmen. They should be called criminals," said Mainul, adding, "If they are punished, genuine businessmen should not be afraid."

Asked what the charges were against the recently arrested and detained high-profile politicians and whether the charges would be made public, the law adviser said those politicians were already accused of corruption.

"Now cases will be filed against them and they would be openly tried in court, not in secrecy," he said.

They were arrested under Section 54 of the CrPC, which means they were held under suspicion and so there is no need for specific information at this point, said Mainul, adding that they would be tried under the Anti-Corruption Act.

They would be tried as soon as the Anti-Corruption Commission rules are reformed, he said, expressing hope that they would be tried within 2-3 months as per the rules.

Asked when the elections will be held, Mainul said the election schedule will depend on the steps required to hold a free and fair election, and the Election Commission will determine its timeframe.

UK wants

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the due process of law." In reply to a question, the spokesman said, "We've consistently urged this government to be respectful to human rights, the rule of law and press freedom."

Army has no intention

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said new advisers were appointed on the criteria of honesty, competence and sincerity.

"Now it needs people's support. This opportunity will not come time and again," the army chief said, adding that it "should not happen so".

General Moeen urged all to come forward to make a fresh start in national life with a clean slate. "Let's cooperate with this government so we can steer the nation forward," he said.

In an apparent emotion-choked voice, the army chief said the country was destroyed in last 35 years. He likened the predicament of the country to a derailed train.

"We need a heavy crane to put the train back on the track--and strength of the people is the crane. Once you can put the train on the track, it will move smoothly," he said in metaphorical terms about the imperative of a rescue operation in such situation.

Citing corruption an example of degeneration of the polity, the general deplored that because of disputes over who will get the "10 percent" kickbacks, a \$ 200m machine-readable passport project could not be implemented.

He said government provides subsidy for fertiliser to help the poor farmers, but, unfortunately, those fertilisers were smuggled out of the country by the vested quarters.

Referring to recent incidents of arson in garment factories that earn 70 percent of country's foreign exchange, General Moeen deplored that this export industry was burnt and destroyed in a planned way. "There is politics behind it," he said, adding, "We even do not try to understand our own well-being."

"We have eaten up the vitals of the country over the years, leaving the country like a skeleton."

About national or voter ID card, General Moeen said some intellectuals said that it will require Tk 1000 crore and five years time. But, he said they have made a calculation that suggests that ID card for the voters is possible within 10-12 months at an estimated cost of Tk

1,646 more held, 20 arms seized

UNB, Dhaka

The joint forces arrested 1,646 people on various charges across the country during the last 24 hours, ending at 6:00am yesterday.

They also seized 20 firearms and 35 bullets, said an official release.

Of the detainees, 156 were held by army personnel while the remaining 1,490 by Rab and police.

Besides, police and Rab members seized 23 motorcycles for having no valid documents.

Rab raided Bangla Motor area in the city on Wednesday night and arrested an extortionist named Nabi Solaiman. The elite force also seized a revolver from his possession.

In Savar, Rab picked up five people from a night coach and seized 500gm of heroine and 23 bottles of phensidyl smuggled from India.

In Jessore, the joined forces arrested 25 people, including listed criminal Selim Reza.

Rab arrested four people in different places of Sylhet district on Wednesday night and seized two firearms.

In Gaibandha, the joint forces rounded up 11 people, including drug peddlers.

In Patuakhali, Rab held Angaria UP Chairman Golam Murtaza who was wanted in criminal cases and two others accused in a rape case.

In Jhalakathi, police arrested eight people including land grabber Matabbar Mridha. Mridha was sent to prison with a 30-day detention under the Special Powers Act yesterday.

The joint forces held two men in Sherpur, who are wanted in double murder case. An UP member was also