

Dreadful ordeal

FROM PAGE 1
from the road outside, which opened at 10:00am."

Failing to bear the scorching heat, a garment factory supervisor who had gone to the passport office on Sunday morning died of a heat stroke there. Police told reporters that 45-year old Lebu Mia, who had gone there to renew his passport, died of a cardiac arrest as he had waited among scrambling people in a queue for a long time in sweltering heat.

During a visit to DIP by The Daily Star, many people alleged that they had to suffer the same ordeals for a good number of days, as they couldn't get the job done in one visit. They also alleged that the officials of the passport office are to be blamed for such hassles.

The Agargaon passport office, where over two thousand people go everyday for new passports, renewals and attachments, has only 65 officials and employees despite having 71 posts.

The officials in Dhaka office who have updated information for up to March said in March they issued around 25,000 new passports and renewed or gave attachments to 46,000.

There are 313 officials and employees in 15 passport offices across the country now while there are a total of 397 posts.

The very important department last saw recruitment of officials in 1982 when the number of passports issued, renewed or given attachments to yearly was 1.7 lakh only. The demand for new passports, renewals or attachments increased 19 folds, but the number of manpower remains the same as 1982, DIP officials said.

In March a total of 1,35,217 passports were issued and 1,50,893 passports were renewed or given attachments to across the country. DIP provided the government exchequer with Tk 436 crore last year. Its expenditure was only Tk 40 crore including purchasing cost of passport books from abroad, the officials added.

However, the passport building which is usually crawling with passport brokers was found almost broker free as about 20 policemen and Ansar personnel were keeping a strict vigil. Despite the effort, at least two brokers approached this correspondent outside the premises and inside the passport office asking whether he needs their help. Although the authorities opened a service centre for giving out application forms to passport seekers, two women were found roaming with forms in their hands on the road outside the passport office entrance despite the police presence.

Director General of DIP Abdur Rob Howlader told The Daily Star that despite the shortage in manpower they are somehow managing such a huge demand for passports and other activities.

He said to lessen the sufferings of the passport seekers he introduced the queue system, evicted the brokers and strictly directed the staff not to let any broker enter the rooms of officials. Besides, two service centres were opened -- one at the gate and the other on the ground floor -- from where people can collect forms and gather passport-related information.

Besides, entry and exit paths for the visitors were separated, the road in front of the office was made one-way and a number of law enforcing personnel was increased to ensure security, and installation of CCTV cameras in the offices is in the pipeline, he said adding that soon 270 Ansar personnel will be employed strengthening the current 20 member Ansar team there.

"We have also strictly asked the policemen to arrest brokers if they are found," he said.

The DG of DIP also said four new office buildings are being established spending Tk 23 crore outside the capital, and many vacant posts have already been filled up.

To reduce the sufferings Abdur Rob said he forwarded a proposal

Rain trees

FROM PAGE 16
as of now," said Prof M Amin Uddin Mridha of the Botany Department of Chittagong University while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

Prof Mridha, who collected bark samples of the rain trees to examine the cause of the disease, said that he and his department just started their investigation and would be able to determine the actual reason in the next two weeks.

"The cause may be fungal pathogens or some other reasons related to the soil and environment," said the plant pathologist, who is also the vice chairman of Biodiversity Research Group of Bangladesh.

Referring to the symptoms of the disease, Prof Mridha said some plants here are already dead and the rest are also dying. At the initial stage, leaves will turn yellow and eventually all the leaves will fall off the trees.

He suggested immediate removal of the infected plants before they contaminate the healthy ones.

Bangladesh Railway (BR) authorities (Eastern Zone) have decided to auction off the affected trees as timber after uprooting them.

They also planned to replace the rain trees by planting other valuable trees such as teak, mahogany, etc.

for establishing nine new offices in the country including four regional ones in Dhaka. Besides, they have proposed to employ licensed agents who will work as a go-between for the department and the clients in exchange for money. He said the proposals are under active consideration of the government.

On the nexus among brokers, and DIP officials and employees, he said steps will be taken if specific allegation regarding any officer's or employee's collusion with brokers is brought forward.

TALES OF VICTIMS
"I had to visit this office around 28 times since January 31, and the Special Branch office in Gazipur 14 times since February which cost me an extra Tk 6,000," Harun-or-Rashid of Kapashia told this correspondent at DIP yesterday. He said he applied for an urgent passport on January 31 with Tk 5,000 emergency fee. Police verification report also came in due time, but the report somehow went missing," Harun said.

"At the suggestion of the officials, I again applied for a police verification report which reached the office on April 16. But again the report went missing," Harun said.

He said he finally brought the matter to the notice of the DG who directed the officials concerned to look into the matter seriously. On Sunday, passport officials discovered the two police reports in a sack full of papers.

A disappointed Harun, who was waiting for his passport in the guest room on the fifth floor of the office yesterday, said he might be lucky enough to get the passport that day, but might fail to apply for a visa for Italy, the deadline for which is May 15. "I applied for an urgent passport, but I did not get it in four months," he said asking, "Who will compensate if I cannot apply for the visa for Italy this year?" "I will have to wait for another year if I fail," he said.

Ameer Ahmed who was from Compañanyaj in Noakhali said he had to come twice to the passport office in Dhaka for collecting his passport with a Saudi visa on it that he had submitted for an attachment.

He said passport officials on Sunday told him that they could not find his passport. "As I told them it was urgent, the officials told me to apply again," Ameer, having passport no A 0611680, said. He also said he already spent Tk 6,000 extra for coming to the passport office four times, two of which were for only submitting the application and the passport.

Nizami

FROM PAGE 1
seeking stay on the proceedings of the case.

Earlier on April 24, the court accepted the charge sheet of the case and directed them to appear before it today.

Besides Nizami, the other accused are former minister and Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, Assistant Secretary General Muhammad Qamaruzzaman, Central Nayab-e-Ameer Mokbul Ahmed, Assistant Secretary General ATM Azharul Islam, Dhaka City Unit Ameer Rafikul Islam, Paltan Unit Ameer ATM Sirajul Islam, Islami Chhatra Shibir President Shafulik Islam Masud, General Secretary Zahid Hossain and President of Dhaka University Unit Shishir Monir.

On April 11, investigation officer (IO) of the case AKM Idris Hossain, who is a sub-inspector of the Detective Branch of Police, pressed charges against the 10 Jamaat and Shibir leaders in the case for killing Workers Party activist Russell Ahmed Khan during a demonstration in Paltan area.

The IO showed 45 people as prosecution witnesses in the charge sheet.

Activists of Jamaat and Shibir on October 28 last year had gathered in front of the north gate of Baitul Mukarram mosque and launched an attack on Awami League-led 14-party alliance's procession. The attack sparked a fierce street battle between the two sides. Shibir activists were seen firing shots

while their rivals launched a counter attack with oars and sticks.

Following a case filed by Workers Party leader Kamrul Ahsan, charges were brought against the accused for organising unlawful assembly, inflicting injuries to people, murder, and aiding and abetting criminal activities.

YESTERDAY'S REVISION CASE
In the revision case yesterday, defence lawyers said the case against Jamaat leaders and the case against Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina and 45 others were filed in connection with the same incidents on October 28 last year.

But the IO of the case against Jamaat leaders pressed charges against Nizami and nine others on April 11, and the lower court ordered sending the case to the sessions judge's court for trial, after accepting the charge sheet.

On the other hand, the same court ordered further investigation into the case against Hasina and others. So, both the cases should be tried jointly and proceedings of the case against Jamaat should be stayed till disposal of the revision case, the defence counsels added.

Following the revision case, the court fixed May 23 for hearing on it.

Khaleda hails

FROM PAGE 1

"Staying in homeland, freedom of movement, and conducting all lawful activities are one's birth rights," said the BNP chairperson in a statement signed by BNP's Assistant Office Secretary Enmar Saleh Prince.

"I hope all concerned will be sincere enough to protect and honour these rights," Khaleda said.

Indian team

FROM PAGE 16

Ganguly, will try to bury their World Cup blues with convincing wins, the Tigers are ready to build on their success in the World Cup, where they also beat South Africa in the Super Eight phase.

Both Tendulkar and Ganguly were not considered for the one-day series but would join the team for the Test series.

The one-dayers start on Thursday at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium. The new home of Bangladesh cricket will also play host to the second ODI on Saturday.

The teams will then fly to Chittagong to play the third and final one-day on May 15 and the first Test from May 18.

The second Test will take place at Mirpur again from May 25.

Captain Dravid and new cricket manager Ravi Shastri said on their arrival at the Zia International Airport that they wanted to play hard cricket and win their first assignment after a forgettable World Cup.

"Our target is like any other series. We have come here to win'em all but I must say the result will depend on the basis of which team play better on the day," said Dravid, who is leading a relatively young team.

"We know how well Bangladesh played in the World Cup but there is a very clear message for them that we came here to play hard, hard cricket, a kind of cricket that should give a lot of enjoyment to millions of fans who not only enjoy the game but also love it," said Shastri, who took over after Australian coach Greg Chappell resigned after the World Cup debacle.

The Indian team left the airport amidst tight security and had also skipped the scheduled training at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in the afternoon. They'll have their first practice session at the venue today.

SQUAD

Rahul Dravid (Captain), Gautam Gambhir, Robin Uthappa, Virender Sehwag, Yuvraj Singh, Mahendra Singh Dhoni (wicketkeeper), Dinesh Karthik, Manoj Tiwary, Shanthakumaran Sreesanth, Munaf Patel, Zaheer Khan, Rudra Pratap Singh, Piyyush Chawla, Ramesh Powar and Dinesh Mongia.

Explain action

FROM PAGE 1

Abdul Wadud Khondkar, a Supreme Court lawyer, filed the petition Thursday, seeking a court directive for the government to end the reported confinement of Khaleda, desist from pressing her to leave the country, restore her phone connections and allow relations, friends and well-wishers to visit her at the cantonment residence.

The hearing started in the morning and with a break for lunch continued till late in the afternoon.

The petitioner in his submission said some people in plain clothes have been obstructing the BNP chairperson's movement while the phone line has been disconnected.

He also alleged that the authorities put pressure on her to go abroad and they do not even allow her lawyers to meet her.

Additional Attorney General Salauddin Ahmed contended that no restrictions have been imposed on Khaleda's movement.

She is not being held incommunicado and no detention order has been issued against her, he said adding that she has visited different places including some of her relatives.

One must follow some rules in case of movement in cantonment area. If she should avoid those she would better move out of the cantonment, observed the state's legal officer.

He said he does not know anything about matters relating to her telephone connection.

The court asked the petitioner to mention specifically who is barring Khaleda's movement. It also asked him to come up with her telephone number.

Wadud submitted Khaleda's land phone number when the hearing resumed after the lunch break.

At one point, the court asked him, "Who are you anyway to speak for Khaleda Zia? Are you a relative of her?" He replied, "I stand on behalf of the people."

When the bench said he does not represent the 14 crore people of the country, the petitioner identified him as a representative of Khaleda. He said she is his party chief.

About restrictions on meeting Khaleda, the court asked the petitioner to try visiting Khaleda and report back to it if someone had barred him or not.

Last month Khondkar Babul Chowdhury, a member of the BNP national executive committee, too filed a habeas corpus petition with the HC, challenging the reported confinement of Khaleda. That petition has yet to be resolved.

Series explosions

FROM PAGE 16

al-Qaeda, which asked the Ahmadiyyas to acknowledge by May 10 that Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) is the last and greatest prophet.

The Ahmadiyya Jamaat observes that the anti-Ahmadiyya elements have roots in Pakistan and Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh endorses these elements from behind the scenes.

"We suspect that the above mentioned organisations including the Jadid al Qaeda have the same origin and urge the government to investigate the matter and reveal the facts," said Maulana Abdul Awwal Khan Chowdhury, Naeb Ameer of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, Bangladesh.

It is imperative for the government to find out if there are any similarities between the May 1 explosions and various other militant activities and threats by the anti-Ahmadiyya elements in the last few years, said Ahmad Tabshir Chowdhury, coordinator of public relations division, in his written speech.

The anti-Ahmadiyya forces killed seven of its members by bombing one of Ahmadiyya mosques in Khulna in 1999. In 2003, they killed an Imam in Jessore, committed atrocities against the community and set fire to many Ahmadiyya structures all over the country, he said.

Ahmad Tabshir said, "We believe that Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) is the last and greatest prophet and there will not be any more advent of any other prophet. The

propaganda against our belief therefore is intentional and false and it is due to ignorance."

There is only one difference between the Ahmadiyya Jamaat and other sects (Firkas) of the Muslims, he said explaining, "We believe that Hazrat Imam Mahdi (A) has already appeared, but the others are still waiting for his appearance -- an event that was foretold by Hazrat Mohammad (SM)."

This difference cannot determine that the Ahmadiyya Jamaat cannot practise Islam, said Naeb Ameer of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, adding that this is an artificial crisis imported from Pakistan and it is being imposed on the Ahmadiyyas in Bangladesh.

"These elements from Pakistan are spreading the poison of communalism in Bangladesh, which traditionally is known as the land of harmonious co-existence," he said.

He also said that the militants are in fact against Islam and the nation. "Please identify the reasons behind the creation of such militant outfits and root out these outfits to uphold the tradition of co-existence here."

Asked if there should be any religion-based politics in Bangladesh, Maulana Abdul Awwal said in the context of present day, politics and religion cannot go together... "water and oil cannot mix."

Mohammad Kawsar Ali Mollah, Mohammad Abdul Jalil and Maulana Alhaj Abdul Aziz also were present at the conference.

Hasina arrives

FROM PAGE 16

scrum of newsmen when asked if she fears being arrested or confined.

Thousands of AL supporters, workers and leaders gathered in and outside the airport's VIP terminal with national flags, festoons and posters to greet the party chief.

A large procession escorted her till Biswa Road in Khilkhet. Thousands others lined the streets as she made way to her Sudha Sadan residence in Dhanmondi. To a cheerful Hasina, people waved also from the rooftops, verandas and passing vehicles.

The law enforcement agencies did not block the procession following her.

The AL chief went straight to the Bangabandhu Memorial in Dhanmondi to pay respect to her father's portrait as several thousand AL supporters cheered along the Dhanmondi road No.32.

Politicians, professionals, intellectuals, lawyers, and others flocked to the memorial to drop in on a tearful Hasina. There, she told those gathered, "What did I do to be kept out of my country? It feels good to be among you."

The massive crowd followed the leader to her residence at Dhanmondi road No.5.

Earlier at the ZIA, a good number of AL leaders turned up at the VIP lounge to receive her though the government gave permission only for 16 AL leaders.

Zillur Rahman, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Abdul Jalil, Suranjit Sengupta, Matia Chowdhury, Sheikh Fazul Karim Selim, Syed Ashraful Islam, Mukul Bose, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Abdul Mannan, Mahmudur Rahman Manna, among others, were present.

The party did not organise a public reception for its president in view of the government ban on indoor politics.

"I am grateful to the local and international print and electronic media, the world leaders and those from the US, UK, and the European Union," she said, adding, "I owe gratitude to almighty Allah above and also to the people and my party."

Asked what she would do now, Hasina said, "I have just returned and met you all and that is a great achievement."

"Let me discuss things with everyone and try to understand the

Pakistani apex court suspends inquiry into sacked judge

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Supreme Court yesterday suspended a judicial inquiry into misconduct charges against the country's top judge that triggered weeks of nationwide protests.

The court ordered the move, a decision likely to embarrass President Pervez Musharraf's government, as it took up a petition from Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry challenging his suspension from office.

Musharraf suspended Chaudhry on March 9 on allegations of misconduct and abuse of authority, sparking a wave of massive protests by opposition parties and lawyers who branded it an attack on the independence of the judiciary.

The misconduct allegations were being investigated by the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), a panel of five senior judges, but Chaudhry argued that it was not competent to try him.

"The SJC proceedings have been stayed," Tariq Mehmud, a lawyer for Chaudhry, told AFP after the hearing.

Outlaw killed in 'shootout'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

An underground operative was killed in an encounter with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in Aitakula upazila of the district yesterday.

The outlaw was identified as Abdur Rob, 35, a regional leader of Purbho Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddho).

Acting on a tip-off, a Rab team raided Goaisbari School premise at Goaisbari village at around 7:00pm where Rob and his accomplices were holding a meeting.

The outlaws opened fire on the Rab men, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate. Rab sources said Rob received bullets during the "shoot-out" and died instantly while his cohorts managed to flee.

The PBCP leader was wanted in more than 12 cases including eight for murder, the sources added.

A gun and eight bullets were recovered from the spot.

HSC exam

FROM PAGE 16

Education Board from 480 centers.

Besides, some 166 candidates will sit for the HSC exams in five centres abroad under Dhaka Education Board. The centres are Jeddah, Riyadh, Tripoli, Doha and Abu Dhabi.

The adviser hoped that the examination would be held in a copy-free atmosphere. "All preparations have been taken to hold the exams smoothly", he said.

Tagore

FROM PAGE 16

and especially his songs have an eternal appeal to the Bangladeshes.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed gave separate messages paying rich tributes to the poet on the occasion of his birth anniversary.

The president in his message said Tagore's contribution to enriching Bangla literature would be ever remembered.

The president noted that the multifaceted creativity of Tagore established Bangla language in the world arena. "So, he was not only a personality but also an institution."

The chief adviser said Rabindranath is an endless source of inspiration in every joyful moment and crisis in life. A vast portion of his creativity covers the people and nature of Bangladesh.

"Tagore's songs and poems had inspired the freedom-loving people during the War of Liberation," he said.

Government and socio-cultural organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes on the occasion.

Tagore's birth anniversary will be celebrated also at Shahzadpur in Sirajganj, Patisar in Naogaon and Dakkhin Dih in Khulna.

Hawa Bhaban

FROM PAGE 16

the party chairperson and senior leaders including the secretary general," a BNP leader told The Daily Star.

On April 10 a statement in the name of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia was faxed to newspaper offices, but senior leaders of the party told The Daily Star that they had not known anything about it.

Sent from a Bangla national daily linked to BNP, the fax had the party letterhead but the signature on it was blurry.

According to sources, the Hawa Bhaban clique prepared the statement and sent it to newspaper offices without permission from the party leadership.

Members of the desperate group, who were powerful in the last five years during the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance's regime, want to ensure that the family of Khaleda maintains control over the party. In several meetings they also agreed to work together to ensure the ouster of few leaders including the secretary general from their current posts.

A former BNP lawmaker said, "BNP will be a loser again if the chairperson surrenders to Hawa Bhaban people."

An influential relative of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, who is also with the Hawa Bhaban group, is trying to maintain liaison between her and the clique, sources said adding that a few former officials of the Prime Minister's Office along with some associates of detained Tarique Rahman are involved in the initiative.

Nor'wester

FROM PAGE 1

was at a mango orchard near his house during the storm. Suddenly, a big branch from a mango tree fell on him, killing him on the spot.

The three others--Babu, Aminul Shaful--were struck and killed by lightning at mango orchards at their respective areas during the twister.

The injured were admitted to different health complexes and Rajpara of the city, Paba, Bagha and Charghat upazilas.

In Kurigram, storm hit nine villages in Nageswari upazila of the district yesterday, damaging over 400 houses and injuring ten people, according to the UNB.

The worst-hit villages are Monarpur, Daknirpur, Nandanpur, Kachapur, Madakhal, Saheganj and Babulal villages.

The injured--Fulbar, Yunus, Tuku, Ahal, Fatema, Rashedul, Rafiqul, Sukhvan, Sabu and Saifur--were admitted to local hospitals.

Brahmaputra waters

FROM PAGE 16

project is implemented.

"Around 15 to 20 small and medium rivers including Dhaleshwari, Shitalaksha and Balu will die," he cautioned.

"Salinity normally increases if water flow in the rivers declines. Less flow of water will result in alarming increase of salinity in river water, badly affecting the world heritage site Sundarbans as well as Bhola, Barisal, Khulna and Chandpur, and even different places of Sylhet and Rajshahi divisions," Sarker said adding saline water will also affect the fisheries and trees of the areas.

Although Chittagong government claimed that the project is still at a conceptual stage, confidential sources confirmed that work of the project has already begun with the target to finish it in next five to seven years.

Mohammad Inamul Haque, former director general of Bangladesh Haor & Wetlands Development Board (BHWDB), said Yarlung-Tsangpo project is part of China's long-term river interlinking project to divert water from south to north.

China wants to build the dam as water flow of Yellow River declined due to huge water demand of the people of both sides of the river, said renowned engineer Tasqem Akhan.

"Although China denies launching of the project work, we believe they will go ahead with its plan to divert water from south to north for irrigation in the vast stretches of land," he said.

However, Bangladesh is yet to take any diplomatic initiative regarding the project. Even water ministry

officials have no idea about the Chinese dam project.

India has already expressed concern, fearing similar effects in Assam and Arunachal provinces.

Experts suggested that Bangladesh create pressure on China as per a United Nations convention on Law of Non-Navigation Uses of International Watercourses, which disallows countries from barring natural flow of water of any international river.

As Brahmaputra is an international river, China cannot build dams blocking water flow without prior permissions of Bangladesh and India, they said.

"We should raise voices against the project at home and abroad immediately," said the BHWDB director general.

Barrister Raihan Khalid, representative of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), said although Bangladesh is yet to ratify the UN convention it can exert pressure on China.

A group of retired Chinese officials first wrote about the idea to divert Brahmaputra water in a book titled 'Tibet's Water will Save China' last year.

Bangladesh is already facing water crisis in the major rivers due to India's Farakka barrage on the Padma. Some 17 rivers have already died and seven more are awaiting the same fate due to the barrage.

India is also planning to construct Tipaimukh dam on the upstream of Meghna River and initiate a river interlinking project that threatens to worsen the water crisis in Bangladesh.

Iraq reels

FROM PAGE 16

ensure that there are not more casualties," he said.

Mortars rained down Monday on a family home in the mostly Shia Bayaa district in southwest Baghdad, killing five people from the same family.

It was in that same neighbourhood on Sunday, a car bomb ripped through a crowded street demolishing two shops and killing at least 33 people.

Such spectacular massacres are carried out by Sunni insurgents to discredit Iraq's fragile government and its US allies, while provoking Shia reprisals and leaving the

Dhaka asks Delhi

FROM PAGE 16

However, it is still not clear whether it would be possible to bring back Joy as there is no extradition treaty between Bangladesh and India.

Joy, who had been hiding in India under a pseudonym Tareq Rana, is on the Bangladesh government announced list of 23 most wanted criminals.

Joy was arrested as part of a drive by Indian law enforcers launched on the basis of list provided to Indian authorities by Bangladesh government.

Meanwhile, Kolkata police have found several accounts of Joy with different banks in Kolkata yesterday. Joy admitted to the intelligence officials that he has Tk 10 crore in those banks, local newspapers reported.

The Indian intelligence officials also found three posh flats at Rajarhat, ashop