

## Dreadful ordeal

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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 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

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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.

## Khaleda hails

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"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 Enamul Saleh Prince.

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

## Indian team

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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-dayer 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.

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 this year. "I will have to wait for another year if I fail," he said.

Ameer Ahmed who was from Companyganj 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 A0611680, 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

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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 Mohammad Qamaruzzaman, Central Nayab-e-Ameer Mokbul Ahmed, Assistant Secretary General ATM Azharul Islam, Dhaka City Unit Ameerul Islam, Palta Unit Ameer ATM Sirajul Islam, Islami Chhatra Shibir President Shafikul Islam Selim, General Secretary Zahid Hossain and President of Dhaka University Unit Shishir Monir.

On April 11, investigation officer (IO) of the case AKM Idris Hossain, 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.

He 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.

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 Mahmud, a lawyer for Chaudhry, told AFP after the hearing.

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

## Series explosions

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al-Qaeda, which asked the Ahmadiyya 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 Jadaid al Qaeda have the same origin and urge the government to investigate the matter and reveal the facts," said Maulana Abdul Awal Khan Chowdhury, a Naib 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 Jessor, 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 Naib 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 Awal said in the context of present day, politics and religion cannot go together... "water and oil cannot mix."

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

## Hasina arrives

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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 of people lined the streets as she made way to her Sudha Sadar residence in Dhanmondi. To a cheering Hasina, people waved also from the rooftops, verandas and passing vehicles.

The law enforcement agencies did not block the procession following.

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 all."

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.

Asked what about her previous announcement that the AL would give legitimacy to the current government's actions if it is voted to power, she said, "I don't want to comment before I learn and understand everything."

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## Outlaw killed in 'shootout'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

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

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

Acting on a tip-off, a Rab team raided Goishbari School premise at Goishbari 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 "shootout" and died instantly while his cohorts managed to flee.

The Rab team 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

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Education Board from 480 centers.