

Extortionists still rule Mawa ferry points

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Despite the ongoing clampdown on extortionists and other criminals across the country, Mawa and Char Zanazat ferry ghats remain in the grip of organised gangs, who are extorting lakhs of taka every day from trucks, buses and other vehicles.

Locals, shopkeepers, ferry workers and motorists in both ghats on the Padma allege the gangs are operating in connivance with police, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) employees. The BIWTC is respon-

sible for operating the ferry, while the BIWTA looks after the landing facilities.

Both the departments' failure to maintain a smooth ferry service is apparent at every stage of the operation. For instance, when a vehicle arrives at Mawa or at Char Zanazat, there is no mechanism in hand to know where in the ghats, which are quite a distance away from each other, a ferry is available. The drivers have to use their guesswork and hop from ghat to ghat on the potholed roads before finding a ferry.

"When finally we find a ferry we are asked to maintain a serial, which never comes until we pay

money to these ruffians," said the driver of a cement laden truck travelling to Barisal. "The ferries operating here are also rundown and very slow and therefore each trip takes up to two and a half hours to cross the river both way," he added.

According to BIWTC Dhaka office, every day over 1,000 vehicles cross the Padma from Mawa, while another 1,000 vehicles take Char Zanazat-Mawa route. Almost 80 percent of these vehicles are trucks, buses and minibuses.

The BIWTC earns about a million taka every day from the two ghats. Moreover, up to 50,000

Some are out to blackmail politically, says Hannan Shah

UNB, Gazipur

Brig Gen (retd) ASM Hannan Shah, adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, called upon the party activists to remain united and "not be misled by the troublemakers".

Talking to newsmen at Ghagatiachala in Kapasia upazila Friday, Hannan Shah said BNP chief Zia asked him to spread the message of unity among party men when he talked to her over telephone Thursday.

He said the party would be run as per the party constitution and reforms are to be made through the council, also as per party constitution.

One killed, 63 hurt as storm lashes four districts

STAR REPORT

Tomadoes lashed four districts--Tangail, Barisal, Chandpur and Shariatpur--yesterday, killing one person and injuring 63 others.

The violent storms also damaged over 400 thatched houses in the districts, rendering several thousand people homeless.

Our Tangail correspondent reported that a tomado ripped into 20 villages in three upazilas of the district at around 4:00pm, leaving one person dead and 30 others injured.

Romesh Mandol, 30, of Moteshwar village under Basail upazila died in house collapse.

Besides, over 100 thatched houses were also damaged and a large number of trees uprooted by the storm that lasted only a few minutes.

The affected villages are Joshihat, Piron, Nedar, Moteshwar, Poulee, and Suruj in Basail upazila; Aloa, Bhabani, Garail, Kazipur, Bazidpur and Paschimpara in Sadar upazila; and Hilora, Katakhal, Baniara, Doklahati, Purbo Goran, Boilanpur, Ghonapara and Patilapara in Mirzapur upazila.

Four of the injured were admitted to Mirzapur Kumudini Hospital



Stunned people gather at the blast site near the Red Mosque in Islamabad, where a suicide bomber blew himself up, killing at least thirteen people and wounding many others yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

Jubilant Rakhaine youths make merry on Cox's Bazar shore on the first day of their three-day 'rains festival' yesterday.

40 Afghan civilians killed in airstrikes

50 Taliban also die in fighting

AP, AFP, Kandahar

Nato and Afghan troops clashed with Taliban insurgents and called in airstrikes, killing at least 50 suspected militants and dozens of civilians, local officials and villagers said yesterday.

The fighting started Thursday night in the village of Kumbarak in Helmand province, and Nato forces told residents to evacuate their homes because of the clashes, said Gereskh district chief Abdul Manaf Khan.

The airstrikes killed 50 Taliban and up to 40 civilians, Khan said, citing villagers' reports. He said the bodies have already been buried, and the fighting continued Friday.

Afghan authorities and foreign forces said Friday they were checking claims that up to 40 civilians were killed in an overnight air strike by international troops.

The alleged incident happened in southern Helmand province, a hot-bed of Taliban insurgents where US-led forces say scores of militants have been killed in recent

days.

"Foreign troops destroyed five civilian houses in a four-hour aerial bombardment last night, killing 40 civilians," Mualim Mirwali, an MP for the province, told AFP.

The MP said rescuers brought out 40 bodies from the rubble in the province's Bawri village but more were feared buried underneath.

The provincial police chief, Mohammad Hussain Andiwal, said he had heard the reports but could not confirm civilian casualties.

Jute worker dies after court upholds his dismissal order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A discharged employee of People's Jute Mills and Joint Secretary of Khulna-Jessore Regional Committee of Patkal Sangram Parishad (PSP) died of a massive cardiac arrest hours after a court turned down his appeal against his dismissal order.

Rawshan Jaydani, 55, served as a typist at the jute mill before being dismissed in March last year in connection with participating in a movement against government's

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Prisoner dies at B'baria hospital

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

An inmate of Brahmanbaria District Jail died in a Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital bed Thursday night after becoming sick.

According to sources, police arrested Bashir Ahmed Bashu, 45, brother of Md Ferous, commissioner of Brahmanbaria municipality, at Medda on July 21 as he was gambling. He was sent to Brahmanbaria District Jail the same day.

Around 10:00pm Thursday, he became ill. He was admitted to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital in a critical condition where he died at 10:30pm. He was suffering from heart disease, hospital sources said.

The autopsy was done at the same hospital. The body of Bashir was handed over to his relatives, jail sources said.

Prayer Timing		
July 28		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-20	4-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-50	6-55
Esha	8-15	8-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		