

Robbers tunnel

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lockers. Some of them said they even kept ornaments of their relatives in the lockers.

The bank officials also said the robbers did not however steal any passport, savings certificate, or any other document from the lockers.

Police detained four Nidmahal staff on Sunday for interrogation, suspecting their involvement in the heist. Police also said they are intensively interrogating the detainees Shah Alam, 30, Supon Barua, 20, Sujon, 18, and Monir, 18, but have yet to get any lead from them.

Renters of the lockers came to know about the incident yesterday morning and started rushing to the bank immediately. They were seen bursting out in anger, as in their words, the Bank management is trying to shrug off its liability for the stolen materials. Some of the renters were seen very dejected while some were even in tears.

Wasim Chowdhury, a staff of hotel Nidmahal, housed on the second, third and the fourth floors of the building, said three persons aged between 40 and 45 rented a room on the third floor on December 1. A day later they shifted to the second floor renting two rooms there right above the locker room of the bank.

The three registered themselves as Salam, Abdul and Jalal at the front desk and mentioned that they were from Hathazari in Chittagong.

Police suspect before the final heist, other members of the gang rented four other adjacent rooms on the second floor to create a buffer zone for the noise of cutting through the floor. Police recovered a packet of a hand drill from the hotel room containing the hole on the floor.

Wasim also said detained Sujon, who works as a janitor in the hotel, told him that the suspects used to keep at all times something on the spot of the floor where the hole is now, and never allowed him to clean that spot saying they themselves would clean the spot later.

After the heist had been detected the hotel staff found a box of around two feet by two feet covering the hole.

Around 6:00am on Sunday the three suspects left the hotel with the stolen goods, said the front desk clerk of the hotel.

Law enforcers recovered a receipt of sales for the hand drill suggesting that the thieves had bought it from a shop at Nababpur in the old part of the capital. They also recovered some gold ornaments and paper documents from the hotel room above the lockers.

Officials of the bank suspect the heist might have taken place sometime between the midnights of Thursday and Saturday.

Abedur Rahman Sikder, head of marketing and corporate affairs of BRAC Bank Ltd, said they came to know about the heist on Sunday after the bank had opened.

He said one of their staff found out the heist when he entered the locker room on Sunday morning after a renter had gone to the bank to access her locker.

He then informed the management, who soon informed the law enforcers.

"We then informed the law enforcers about the burglary who later visited the bank collecting fingerprints and other evidence,"

Abedur told The Daily Star.

He said, "As per the terms and conditions signed between the clients and the bank, the bank is not liable for stolen goods." He however said, "The bank's top management will take the final decision regarding the matter."

Section 8 of the terms and conditions the clients had signed, reads, "The Bank will not be held liable or responsible for any loss or damage to any article, document, or valuables deposited in the locker as a result of theft, robbery, fire or any other incident or pillage."

"We kept the valuables deposited in the bank and for that we pay the bank, so it must be liable," said an affected locker renter.

Although the bank management claimed that they informed most of the renters over the phone about the incident on Sunday night and sent letters to all of them through a courier service, most of the renters gathered at the bank yesterday, said venting their anger that they neither got any phone call nor did they receive any letter until noon yesterday.

Rezwana Khukumoni, an affected locker renter, said when she went to the bank around 10:15am on Sunday to access her locker, a bank staff who was accompanying her first entered the locker room, soon to come out of the room saying she would not be able to go inside due to some problems in the room.

She said she later suspected something had gone very wrong as she saw police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel at the bank when she was returning home that night in the same neighbourhood.

Another affected renter, Farhana Kabir, said she had deposited 99 tulas of gold ornaments in her locker which are now gone.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Naim Ahmed said last night that they had yet to detect the robbers. "We are working intently," he said.

Officer-in-Charge of Mohammadpur Police Shibly Noman said last night that they were trying to get details on the suspects from the four detainees. He also expressed hope that they will be able to detect and arrest the thieves.

BRAC BANK'S STATEMENT
It has been discovered that some unknown persons unlawfully entered the safe deposit locker facilities of the Dhanmondi branch of BRAC Bank Ltd and stole the contents of a number of lockers during the weekend holidays.

The matter was promptly communicated to the law enforcement agencies by the bank and in this regard a case has been filed on January 6, 2008 with Mohammadpur police station.

Police have initiated investigations as well as an all out effort to locate the perpetrators of this crime and to establish the whereabouts of the stolen locker contents.

The affected locker holders of the bank have been informed of the incident and have been advised to provide all possible assistance to Mohammadpur police in connection with the ongoing investigations.

BRAC Bank will continue to make every endeavour to keep the concerned locker holders informed on all developments in this regard.

BDR gets

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to keep the irrigation pumps operational throughout the Boro season.

Besides, it decided to form a high-level committee headed by the energy secretary to scrutinise the proposal for third round international bidding for hydrocarbon exploration in maritime Bangladesh.

The committee would be set up drawing representatives from the ministries of finance, planning, foreign and law, National Board of Revenue and Bangladesh Navy.

The Committee on Economic Affairs also approved a food ministry proposal for buying 2 crore pieces of jute bags from Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation without giving a mandatory 10 percent performance guarantee.

PRICESITUATION
Prices of all varieties of rice decreased by Tk 1 on average at different kitchen markets in the city.

The lowest price yesterday was Tk 31 a kg that was Tk 33 two days ago. Retailers said Swarna, a variety imported from India, and Parja sold at Tk 32-33 a kg while they cost Tk 33-34 per kg Sunday.

The price of Gutti and IRRI dropped to Tk 31-32 per kg from Tk 32-33 a day ago.

"Rice prices have decreased more in the retail markets than in the wholesale markets," said Aiyub Ali, owner of Barisal Rice Agency at Karwan Bazar.

Talking to The Daily Star, some people claimed that prices are still very high at the small kitchen markets and groceries.

Meanwhile, all 40 BDR-run fair price shops in the capital remained closed yesterday for weekly holiday.

The price of edible oil was stable. It rose by Tk 8-10 per litre in the last two weeks.

Tk 6,200cr

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roads of Dhaka cover only 5-6 percent.

According to the BoI proposal, the 52-kilometre subway would have six routes with 50 stations connecting almost 80 percent of the city area. The underground rail system will have the capacity to transport on average 40 lakh passengers a month.

The first route would start from Gabtoli and end at Sayedabad via Mohakhali and it would be connected with the second route, Uttara to Mohakhali, at the Mohakhali bus terminal.

The third route, Pallabi to IDB Bhaban, will be connected with the first route as well.

The fourth route will be from Shyamoli to Elephant Road, which will cover Shyamoli, Adabor, Mohammadpur, Dhanmondi, Jigatola, Rayerbazar and Hazaribagh areas. It will be connected with the first route at Shyamoli and Elephant Road forming the first inner loop.

Starting from Sayedabad, the fifth route will end at Tejgaon Sastara via Malibagh, Moghbazar and Kamalapur Rail Station. It will also be connected with the first route and it will form the second loop almost as long as the first loop in the network.

Completing the entire network, the sixth route from Sayedabad to Gulistan will connect all the entry points of the mega city.

The initiative to construct the subway in Dhaka was taken during the BNP-Jamaat government and a private company was primarily selected for the project.

After assuming power, the present caretaker government halted the work of the project and in February last year, it said that the next political government would complete the work.

Later in November that year, the government, however, shifted from its decision and made a fresh move about the project considering it as a priority work to ease traffic congestion of the capital.

DU students

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Five of them belong to Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL).

The other accused are Rashedul Habib, Muhammad Ibrahim, KM Mahbub Alam Shyamol, Enamul Haque, Golam Azam Khomeni, DU correspondent of Khagabazar Patrika, Kased Ali, Chanchal Karmakar, ABM Shamsuddoha, Siddique Nazmul Alam, Kamruzzaman, Sohel Rana Tipu, Abdul Karim, Abul Hasan, Arifuzzaman, Delwar Rahman Dipu, Mizanur Rahman, Rashedul Mahmud and Sarwar Alam.

Sixty-three people have been shown as witnesses.

BTBTB

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matter is under investigation. So, at this moment it is difficult to say who had committed the crime."

Intelligence sources, however, said they would continue their investigation until they find the "big fish" behind the snapping of the fibre-optic cable.

Sources said a number of BTBTB officials pocketed large amount of money in the name of fibre-optic cable maintenance. They said the officials withdraw allocated budget before doing any maintenance work.

The optical-fibre cable is 433 km long and installed only a few feet below road-side surface along with the cable of Grameenphone and Aktel. Interestingly, only the BTBTB fibre-optic cable is repeatedly disrupted.

BTBTB loses revenue of \$70,000 per hour with every disruption. The BTBTB invested \$35.1 million for the submarine cable.

Observes Mainul

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that a certain group was out to push the government into trouble using insignificant issues as weapons to disrupt government's journey according to its planned roadmap.

Hinting manipulation of rice market that contributed to price hike of the staple food, he said: "There was a move to create a crisis in the market though imported rice is on the way."

PIB organised the seminar on the eve of the caretaker government's one year in office. Oliur Rahman, a senior instructor of PIB, presented the keynote with Information Secretary Jamil Osman in the chair.

"We're not trying to stick to power... We're trying to salvage democracy from ruin," said the adviser.

It is the responsibility of the whole nation to establish democracy, he said. "We need a partnership between the caretaker government and the people to reform democracy."

"If democracy is not safe, press freedom is not secured," he said, adding that the goal of both the government and the media is same -- democracy in the country.

Democracy and press freedom has to be uttered in one breath, Mainul quoted late journalist Obaidul Haq.

Saying that the present government should have good relations with the press, he asked newspapers to work with responsibility.

The biggest criterion of press freedom is public interest, he said, asking journalists not to report whatever they see or come to their minds but to write with responsibility considering public interest.

Anyone can own a newspaper, but newspapers must be run by editors who are journalists, he noted.

Saying that the caretaker government doesn't need reforms for

its own sake, he said they brought about reforms in the Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission and judiciary and promulgated human rights commission ordinance because democracy cannot have a strong base without these.

Talking on the ongoing anti-corruption drives, Mainul said: "Not out of grudge, the corruption cases are being filed to ensure rule of law. And we've no connection with corruption cases, we're just extending cooperation to the Anti-Corruption Commission."

PIB Director General Nazrul Islam delivered the welcome speech. Dr Shakhawat Ali Khan, Prof Kazi Abdul Mannan, Dr Golam Rahman, Press Club President Showkat Mahmud, AP bureau chief Farid Hossain and New Age city editor Saiful Huda, among others, were present.

Zafarullah

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after he was released from Dhaka central jail.

On April 18 last year, the AL leader was arrested under the Emergency Powers Rules and later shown arrested in connection with an extortion case filed with Gulshan Police Station by Gazi Golam Dastagir, the owner of Gazi Tank.

Thereafter, he was served with a detention order under the Special Powers Act.

Kazi Zafarullah was granted bail in all the cases and the High Court on November 20 last year asked the government to release the AL leader as his detention order was not further extended.

Emerging from the court, Barrister Shafique Ahmed, counsel for Zafarullah, told the news agency that there is "no legal bar" to setting his client free this time around, as he secured bail in all the case and the detention order against him does not exist.

upazilas, municipalities and city corporations has already been done with 1.24 crore people on the electoral rolls with their photographs and fingerprints.

Currently, the task is going on in 85 places, and till January 5 a total of 99.01 lakh voters were already registered.

Besides, 37.37 lakh national identity cards have been prepared, and 22.86 lakh of those distributed among the voters.

INDEPENDENCE OF EC SECRETARIAT

Law Adviser Mainul Hossain yesterday said the government has finalised the draft law to free the EC Secretariat from the control of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), now the office of the chief adviser.

Talking to reporters at his residence after supplying the particulars to an EC official for voter listing, Mainul said the government will soon promulgate an ordinance providing for independence of the EC Secretariat.

About holding parliamentary polls and upazila elections together, the adviser said the EC will have to take decision on it.

Asked about this, Sakawat said if the EC gets proposals from the government, it will examine the possibility of holding the polls to parliament and upazilas together.

The law adviser however said the caretaker government wants holding of polls to city corporations separately. "Polls to the city corporations are required to establish relations between the government and the people," he added.

Ex-adviser Bulu sued

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and son, owns wealth worth Tk 3 crore. Of the amount, he owns Tk 1.2 crore, his wife Tk 1.23 crore and son Tk 49.41 lakh.

The case against Comilla municipality Chairman Monirul Haque Saku and his wife Afroza Jesmin was filed with the same police station.

The two were charged with amassing Tk 4.24 crore beyond known sources of income and withholding from the ACC information about assets worth Tk 1.28 crore.

Earlier on Sunday night, two other cases were filed against the two in Comilla.

ACCENQUIRY
Meanwhile, the ACC has begun preliminary enquiry into the allegations against 12 of the 35 graft suspects on the fourth list of ACC.

Twelve of its officials were tasked with carrying out the probe on January 2. After investigation, the suspects will be served notices asking them to submit wealth accounts.

The 12 are former managing director of Essential Drugs Company Ltd Harun-ur Rashid, former BNP lawmakers Sardar Shakhawat Hossain Bakul, Fazul Haque Milon, Abul Khayur Bhuiyan, Dewan Salauddin and Elias Ali, Proshika Chairman Kazi Faruque, former Jatiya Party lawmaker Mashur Rahman Ranga, former managing director of

INSTITUTIONAL GRAFT Mashhud holds non-accountable civil servants responsible

BSS, Dhaka

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Chairman Lt Gen (ret'd) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury observed that institutional corruption thrived because many civil servants, especially some heads of the public offices worked without any accountability and transparency.

"Some officials do not maintain minimum transparency in performing their duties while there is no accountability in implementing most of the development projects," he told BSS in an exclusive interview at his office.

The ACC chairman was talking to the national news agency marking one-year of the fresh journey of the commission after its reconstitution.

Mashhud said the ACC is trying to identify the anomalies in public sector bodies where engineers, contractors and influential political persons devour most of the allocations.

The commission is talking to some contractors, honest engineers and officials to this end, he said, adding that on the basis of their information, steps will be taken against systemic corruption in the country.

The ACC chairman said the commission is trying to see this problem in a different way, as there are precise rules in every organisation to check the corruption. So, the responsibility of controlling corruption in an organisation bestows on its authority.

"I think the anomalies begin from Annual Development Programme (ADP) when a two to three times overestimated project is submitted and a large portion of the amount of the project is misappropriated," he regretted with reference to some development projects in his home district.

Mashhud said, "We should give attention to administrative corruption and to those areas where gross misappropriation of public money is happened in the name of Annual Development Programme."

He said the ACC will verify whether the decision-making process is transparent and neutral in the process of unearthing institutional corruption.

"And in view of this, we will verify the tender system, purchase policy and quality of services of the ministries and departments that transact a huge amount of money a year and have bad image of corruption," he said.

Mashhud dismissed the notion that the commission is reluctant to bring many corrupt people to book saying, "I can assure you that we will go after all big or small persons against whom we will get evidences of corruption."

Charges framed

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Karim and Harris Chowdhury of "illegally" selling and buying a tax-free car within three years of import under the special privilege of members of parliament.

According to the case, Ashraf's car was sold to Obaidul Karim, who then offered the luxury vehicle to Harris Chowdhury allegedly in bribe to manage work order for Jatrabari flyover.

Harris and Karim have been hiding, reportedly abroad, since the army-led joint forces launched the ongoing operation against serious crime and corruption under the state of emergency.

DU violence Case

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Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Golam Rabbani recorded their statements and defence lawyers of the four teachers and a student, now in jail custody, cross-examined them.

The four teachers, currently in jail custody, are Prof Sadrul Amin, president of Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta), Prof Anwar Hossain, general secretary of Duta, Prof Harun-ur Rashid, dean of Science Faculty and Prof Neem Chandra Bhowmik, chairman of Applied Physics Department.

DU student Moniruzzaman Sardar, who was arrested earlier, is also in jail custody now.

The four accused teachers were permitted to sit down on a wooden bench in the dock of the courtroom during yesterday's hearing.

On August 22, a case was filed against some 5,000 unnamed students and teachers of DU and outsiders for violating the EPR, vandalising public and private properties, obstructing the police from discharging their duties, and assaulting law enforcers on the campus and its adjacent areas.

However on September 9, the police pressed charges against four teachers and 15 students of DU for inciting violence on the campus and in the Shahbagh area on August 21 and 22.

Hearing of another case filed against the same accused is set to be held today.

Advocates Syed Rezaur Rahman, Abdul Mannan Khan and Molesuddin Jasim defended the accused.

Meantime, several teachers including Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, former vice chancellor of DU, and relatives of the detained teachers were present in the courtroom during the hearing.

Dhaka zoo

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poultry and birds from all types of infectious agents -- viral, bacterial, fungal or parasitic, said Dr Dan Rutz, senior communications specialist of National Centre for Health Marketing (NCHM), USA.

Consistent biosecurity practices are the best way to prevent bird diseases such as exotic Newcastle disease (END) and Avian Influenza (AI), Dr Rutz said adding that people, animals, equipment or vehicles -- all can carry the viruses and infect poultry or zoo animals.

Therefore, it is important to practice biosecurity to keep the birds safe from potentially deadly diseases, he said.

During a visit to the Dhaka National Zoo, this correspondent saw cautionary notices posted in front of a number of birdcages including cassowary, peafowl and heron. The notice reads: 'Maintain safe distance from the bird sheds -- Be aware of preventing Bird Flu'.

Raihan, a class X student who came to visit the zoo with his friends from Bogra, said, "The message doesn't really clarify what 'safe distance' is and how we can 'be aware of bird flu'."

The message lacks adequate information, he complained saying that he did not even know how the avian flu virus spreads.

Another student from Jahangirabad Cantonment Public School said, "My teachers never told us about it. We came to know about it just by watching television and reading newspapers."

Though the posted notice also asks not to bring any food item near the birdcages, people around the cages were seen quite careless about the warning and eating fruits bought from a young vendor who was selling fruits right in front of the cages.

Prof Nazrul Islam of Department of Virology at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University said, "Bird flu spreads with swabs, nasal discharge and faeces of infected birds through the air. If people come in contact with infected birds, they risk the chance of being infected with the virus through inhalation. Even if someone touches an (infected) bird and eats food with that hand, there is possibility of getting infected."

This correspondent also noticed that the zoo is under constant threat of contamination as most of the cages where flightless birds are kept did not have any roof above. Various common local birds such as sparrow, shaluk (common Indian myna) or crow were freely entering and leaving the cages to feed on the grains served for the caged birds.

The veterinary surgeon of the zoo admitted the risk. He however said since there is no immediate solution to the problem, biosecurity measures are being enhanced as a precaution.

A total of 1,220 birds of more than 58 species housed at the Dhaka National Zoo are now under imminent danger of being infected by bird flu virus as 19,000 fowls were culled only a few days ago at the neighbour-

ing Central Poultry Farm following detection of bird flu.

Experts said birds that are susceptible to Avian Influenza need to be identified first and then biosecurity measures should be enhanced in the entire zoo to save the precious birds.

Delwar permitted

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Khaleda-appointed party Secretary General Delwar will also get an opportunity to discuss party matters when he meets her at the sub-jail.

The leaders said they could not get permission to meet the party chief since her arrest. Even her lawyers were not allowed to meet her in the last two months. All this has created confusions regarding the party Delwar, who is facing pressure from different quarters to forge unity with pro-Saifur BNP leaders, had earlier said he had no objection to this but he would only go by the decisions taken by Khaleda.

Previously, Khaleda had sent messages to party leaders and workers through her lawyers that in her absence, the party would run under the leadership of Delwar Hossain and Hannan Shah.

Even after the much-talked-about meeting of BNP's standing committee at Saifur Rahman's Gulshan house on October 29, which appointed him acting chairman and Hafiz Uddin Ahmed acting secretary general of the party, Khaleda reportedly reiterated her earlier decision.

Party leaders say Khaleda will now come to know from Delwar the actual situation of the party. The party will also get her decisions on different important matters and this will help the party men to remain united.

Meanwhile, Awami League acting President Zillur Rahman is leading the counsels in the cases filed against detained party President Sheikh Hasina.

Muggers

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in a private car blocked the way of the microbus on the highway near Malibagh of Narayanganj when expatriate Mongal Mian, his brother-in-law Shahidullah, who is also the chairman of Talibhanga union under Meghna police station of Comilla, and his cousin Rezaul were coming to the capital yesterday noon.

The muggers smashed the windows of the microbus and tried to snatch a bag containing the money. As Rezaul tried to resist them, one of the muggers shot him in the neck.

Rezaul's uncle Shamsuddin told reporters at DMCH that Mongal Mian, hailing from Tultuli village under Meghna police station of Comilla, drew Tk 13 lakh from Uddayamang, Sonargaon branch of Janata Bank yesterday.

He also said Rezaul was coming to Dhaka for registration of a piece of land he had bought earlier at Shaniarakh in the capital.

Superintendent of Police of Narayanganj Sibgat Ullah told The Daily Star that they suspect persons close to Mongal Mian might have been involved in the mugging, adding although two others were accompanying Mongal Mian, they did not bother to inform police about the incident.

"We have started an investigation to find out the muggers," the SP said.

Obama breaks free

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another contentious debate, though the party's New Hampshire front-runner Senator John McCain, appeared to escape any damage before Tuesday's poll.

Forced to go onto the attack, Hillary Clinton warned Obama's soaring eloquence, masked a lack of achievement, and told Democrats they should "nominate and elect a doer, not a talker."

But in duelling rallies across the northeastern state, Obama pressed home his mantra of hope and change, and accused Clinton, 60, of stooping to desperate tactics.

"What we're seeing is the last throes of Washington resisting change ... twisting facts, distorting people's records, twisting words," said Obama, who hopes to become America's first black president.

A USA Today/Gallup poll gave Obama a 13-point lead over the senator from New York, while a CNN/WMUR tracking poll showed Obama leading Hillary Clinton by ten points.

The previous edition of both polls had the two rivals tied.

For the first time, also, more New Hampshire voters saw Obama as the Democrat most able to beat a Republican rival in the race for the White House, according to the CNN/WMUR poll, which gave Obama a 42 to 31 percent edge over Clinton on "electability."

"The Iowa caucus results have convinced growing numbers of Granite State voters that Obama can really go all the way," CNN Polling Director Keating Holland said.

Hillary Clinton fought a pitched battle to keep Obama from snatching the primary, after he trounced her in Iowa last week.

"There is a big difference between talking and acting, between promising and delivering," Senator Clinton, who would make history by becoming the first