

Traffic rules

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violating the traffic rules," IGP Nur Mohammad said. The police boss also observed that the nagging problem of traffic jam in the capital is not possible to fix within a short time and suggested adopting several short and long-term strategies to get rid of the menace.

He made the observations while addressing a monthly luncheon meeting of American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (Amcham) at a city hotel as the chief guest and speaker.

Amcham President Syed Ershad Ahmed, Vice President Trevor MacDonald and Executive Director A Rafiq addressed the meeting. The topic was "Traffic jam in Dhaka city: Challenges and possible solution."

When a participant observed that the truck and bus drivers dare to violate traffic rules as the sergeants take bribes from them, the IGP said that the tendency is going down adding that the previous corrupt recruitment process is responsible for it.

He said to bribe Tk 4 to 5 lakh to get the job of a sergeant earlier, Nur Mohammad said adding that he was positive that a new batch of around 700 sergeants to be rolled in the streets shortly will be free from this negative practice as their recruitment process was fair.

The IGP put forward several short-term strategies to reduce traffic jam that includes re-adjusting the school and office times keeping at least one-hour gap, reducing and replacing private transport with convenient and cheaper ones and fixing different fares for rush hour and non-rush hours.

The long-term strategies are

ANTI-HOARDING DRIVE

500 tonnes of rice seized in Chuadanga

UNB, Chuadanga

About 500 tonnes of rice were seized in this tiny border district town in an anti-hoarding drive yesterday.

Some of the hoarders were arrested but later set free with the seized rice given back to them on condition that they would sell it in the market at Tk 26 per kg, said local joint forces commander Lt Col Badrul Hasan.

He said it is surprising that the hoarders are not rice traders. Moneylenders, pesticide dealers, iron rod and cement dealers, and jute traders hoarded the rice at secluded places. They formed a syndicate with the motive of creating artificial crisis of rice.

Meanwhile, price of coarse rice has come down by around Tk 3 per kg from Tk 30-31 a kg in local markets due to the anti-hoarding drive. Five teams of joint forces are carrying out the drive.

Acting on intelligence reports, they raided Barobazar, Puratanbazar, Badurtala, Alokdia, Dingedaha and Sarajanj markets, and seized the hoarded rice.

Donors

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assistance depends on the assessment of the mission," said a planning ministry official. The mission would also suggest possible projects in which the donors can contribute, he added.

Asked about the government's plea for providing food support instead of money, sources in the donor agencies said the mission would not deal with food support.

The ministries have designated high officials who would assist the mission during their assessment, the sources added.

The government earlier estimated that \$ 2.1 billion would be necessary for relief, recovery and medium to long-term restoration and rehabilitation work in the cyclone-affected area.

Part of the programme would be implemented in FY08 at a cost of \$ 520 million. Of this, \$ 143 million would be provided from the budget of FY08 and another \$ 377 million would be met this year from additional foreign assistance. Another \$ 603 million is needed for medium-term projects and \$ 982 million for longer-term projects.

Meanwhile, the WB has already made a commitment to provide \$ 325 million assistance and the ADB another \$ 180 million to recover the losses caused by Sidr.

On January 10, the board of WB approved a proposal for disbursing \$ 100 million financial support to the government by the end of this month. The amount will help reduce the strain on the budget of FY08 following the non-planned spending resulted by the cyclone.

The WB will provide another \$ 100 million by April for social investment programmes to restore the livelihoods of the cyclone-affected impoverished population through micro credit, emergency assistance funds, community infrastructure activities, skills development and income generating activities.

The WB's assistance in longer-term projects will depend on the findings of the DNA. According to a preliminary estimate, the size of the long-term programme of WB is around \$ 125 million.

Offenders warned

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conference room of the Local Government and Rural Development Ministry. A committee led by Commerce Secretary Feruz Ahmed was formed at the meeting to investigate the cause for frequent labour unrest in the garment factories, Iqbal told a briefing after the meeting.

Iqbal also told reporters that government intelligence teams have already identified the persons involved in the latest incident at Mirpur.

"The law enforcers will round up the identified persons for the unrest they caused in the garment factories," Iqbal said.

The meeting was attended by Commerce Adviser Hussain Zillur Rahman, Home Ministry Secretary Abdul Karim, President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury (Parvez), President of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) Fazlul Hoque, Director General of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) Shakil Ahmed, Director General of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) Hasan Mahmud Khandaker and Inspector General (IG) of police Noor Mohammad.

BKMEA president Fazlul Hoque said some vested quarters have been misleading the workers to try and destroy the RMG sector potentiality of the country.

"More than 90 per cent of the factories have been paying their workers according to the minimum wage recommendations. But, vested quarters are trying to make the sector volatile as local exporters work to recover the losses incurred last year," Hoque said.

Foreign adviser

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Anwar Choudhury was also hopeful of the government's ability to hold elections by the end of 2008 as it is on the "right track."

"They have to understand that this government has to succeed. I think they do understand that," Iftekhar told reporters, adding, "Failure is not an option."

Iftekhar briefed the envoys about government plans to hold dialogues with political parties and the gradual process of lifting the ban on indoor politics.

"This is a new chapter," said Iftekhar, who said that consensus building among all the stakeholders would be difficult but will have to be completed.

Iftekhar said the envoys raised a number of issues, including militancy, to which the adviser told the briefing that this government's ability to maintain social and economic stability would deter militants.

He also sidestepped concerns over human rights abuse, saying human rights abuses have gone down and the concerns will be addressed through the yet to be formed National Human Rights Commission.

Edible oil

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66.92 per kg in November. The average production costs of the two oil products were Tk 43.09 per kg during January-August and Tk 56 in November 2007.

The commerce ministry and the Export Promotion Bureau also conducted separate investigations and submitted their reports to the National Coordination Committee on checking corruption and serious crimes on January 8.

"We have submitted our investigation report on the export of edible oil, but we are not authorised to speak anything about it," said Nur-Un-Nabi Talukder, joint secretary for the commerce ministry and the head of a probe body.

NBR Chairman Muhammad Abdul Mazid told The Daily Star that some traders misinterpret the harmonised system of code and take advantage.

"The NBR is working on the issue and thinking of formulating a long-term policy so that businessmen cannot misuse the complexity of product specification," Mazid said.

Asked for his comments, Edible Oil Refiners and Importers' Association President MA Reza Chowdhury said, "The matter is really suspicious and if any member of the association is found involved in exporting edible oil to India at cheaper rates, the association will take action against it."

"There was no reason to export edible oil at that time as the country was struggling to fulfil its internal requirement. The issue should be investigated properly and if anything is found wrong, the traders involved should be punished," he added.

Talking with The Daily Star, the managing directors of United Edible Oils and Bay Fishing's parent organisation TK Group, Mostafa Kamal and Abu Kalam, said despite "some supply dearth" in the country, they exported edible oil to some north-eastern Indian states to grab the potential market there and keep it under their control.

"We can export products to Assam by lorry which is a major advantage for the business," Kamal added.

Selim Bhuiyan

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building up assets through illegal means. NIKO CASE Metropolitan Magistrate Waliul Islam recorded the statement of Selim Bhuiyan after the ACC's Assistant Director SM Sahidur Rahman produced the detained businessman to the magistrate's chamber.

Details of his confessions, however, could not be known immediately. Selim was placed on a four-day remand for interrogation in connection with the case after task force members arrested him Thursday.

The ACC in its January 11 forwarding report said Selim was involved in reaching contract with Niko and that all the dealings between the government and the energy company were made through him.

The case, in which Khaleda Zia and five other people are also implicated, was filed with Tejaqon Police Station on December 9 on charge that awarding the gas exploration deal to the Canadian company caused huge losses to the state.

The other accused are former law minister Moudud Ahmed, former state minister for energy AKM Mosharrar Hossain, former energy secretary Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, former acting energy secretary Khandaker Shahidul Islam, and Kashem Sharif, vice president (South Asia) of Niko Resources Bangladesh Ltd.

Detained Khaleda, Moudud and Mosharrar were shown arrested in the case on December 30.

In the case statement, ACC Assistant Director Mahbul Alam said Khaleda Zia, who was the custodian of the country's wealth in her capacity as prime minister, criminally violated her oath and abused power by giving Niko through corruption the opportunity to extract gas worth Tk 10,000 crore.

The plaintiff said the other accused were complicit in the illegal deal.

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Sidr assistance

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survivors of Cyclone Sidr where there is reduced overall food availability. Providing assisted-food rations consisting of rice, pulses, edible oil, blended food, salt and high energy biscuits, WFP will continue to deliver food assistance in the affected districts in collaboration with the Government and NGO partners.

Contributors to the WFP emergency operation in Bangladesh include Australia, Canada, European Commission, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, Spain, USA, UN CERF and private donors.

Cyclone Sidr severely affected 9 million people and claimed 3,347 lives.

DU violence

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After the defence lawyers completed cross-examining investigation officer (IO) of the case Sub-inspector (SI) Sirajul Islam, Assistant Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Golam Rabbani fixed today for recording the testimony of the accused, five of whom are now in jail.

The court also set today for the closing arguments of the case. Earlier, the court recorded statements of 15 prosecution witnesses including the complainant of the case.

Another Dhaka court fixed today for the cross-examination of IO Babul Bhuiyan in another case filed against the same accused.

The accused four teachers and a student were produced before the court yesterday for the hearing. The magistrate allowed them to sit down during the proceedings.

The accused teachers are Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) President Prof Sadrul Amin, General Secretary Prof Anwar Hossain, Science Faculty Dean Prof Harun-ar-Rashid, and Applied Physics Department Chairman Prof Neem Chandra Bhownik.

The cases were filed against 5,000 to 6,000 unnamed students and teachers of Dhaka University and outsiders on August 22 in connection with violating the EPR, vandalising public and private properties, obstructing police performing their duties and assaulting law enforcers on the campus and its adjoining areas.

The police pressed charges against only four teachers and 15 students on September 9 in connection with instigating the violence on campus and in Shabbagh area on August 21 and 22.

Advocates Syed Rezaur Rahman, Masud Ahmed Talukder, Abul Masud Khan and Mosleuddin Jasim defended the accused.

India

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Jiabao on Monday signed a broad agreement that they said would push an often testy relationship to a new level of cooperation.

The pact included a pledge to make a renewed effort to solve a Himalayan border dispute over which they fought a brief war in 1962.

"Our prime minister has stated on a number of occasions that there is enough room for the rise of both India and China," said Nirupama Rao, India's ambassador to Beijing, according to the China Daily.

Nuclear energy cooperation between the two countries could help slow the depletion of world energy resources, said Xu Liping, an international relations expert at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"The populations of India and China constitute one-third of humanity. The energy consumption of these two engines is very great, so joint development of nuclear power can help reduce resource consumption," he said.

"This could have a positive significance."

Artefacts

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possible", without mentioning any specific date. A foreign ministry press release yesterday said the French envoy also assured the adviser of sending back the objects of art.

The Bangladesh government sent 42 artefacts for the Paris exhibition; but after the heist of two Vishnu statues from the airport on December 22, the government cancelled sending the remaining items and asked the French government not to hold the exhibition.

The ambassador did not say who to bear the shipment costs of the artefacts to Dhaka. He only said the issue is being resolved.

The press release said Ambassador Causseret told the foreign affairs adviser that bilateral relations between France and Bangladesh are excellent and that the artefact issue would not have any negative impact on them under any circumstances.

He also said he would work to promote bilateral relations across the political, economic and cultural spectrum during his time in office here.

Hasina

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with the District Court of Dhaka to establish Aziz's claim. "No undue favour was received or necessary from the former prime minister of Bangladesh," he said.

On September 2 last year, the ACC filed the case against detained Hasina and six prominent personalities for helping a foreign company and its local partners--Wartsila Consortium, Summit Group and United Group--win the deal "through mutual understanding and use of influence".

The case statement said the three companies paid the Tk 3 crore kickback, which was spent for buying a house in Dhannoddi of the Bangabandhu Memorial Trust set up and controlled by Hasina.

The other accused in the case are former energy secretary Dr Toufiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, former Power Development Board chairman Noor Uddin Mahmud Kamal, Summit Investments and Mercantile Corporation Private Ltd Managing Director Aziz Khan and Director Farid Khan, United Group Chairman Hasan Mahmud Raja and Director Abul Kalam Azad.

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4 killed

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In the past three years, a series of explosions in Lebanon have targeted mainly anti-Syrian politicians and journalists.

The last car bombing on Dec 12 in Beirut's suburb of Baabda killed Lebanese army Maj. Gen. Francois Hajj and two other people.

Delwar tells

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Fakhruddin Ahmed, during his Saturday's address to the nation on the occasion of the first anniversary of the caretaker government, said his administration would soon move to initiate dialogues with political parties of the country in line with a decision taken by the council of advisers.

When asked about Delwar's teleconference, Rizvi Ahmed, acting secretary general of BNP, told The Daily Star, "He [Delwar] replied to a few questions from journalists while inaugurating the website of Khaleda Zia Antorjatik Mukti Andolan."

The chairperson's presence is a must for a fruitful dialogue with the government, Rizvi said echoing Delwar's comment.

When Delwar was asked during the teleconference to evaluate the activities of President Iajuddin Ahmed, he said he [the president] had imposed the state of emergency as conspiracies were going on at the time to cripple the country.

At that time, he [the president] was compelled to bow down to pressure and failed to take a firm stance as he is a non-political person," Delwar said. To make his point, Delwar mentioned the success of former political president Abdur Rahman Biswas in foiling a military coup.

"The government is talking about dialogue, but we want to know the objective and agenda of the dialogue," he said alleging, "The government is trying to create division in BNP... All kinds of conspiracies are going on so BNP cannot participate in the election."

Asked whether they would participate in the election with Khaleda Zia in jail, Delwar said only the chairperson can take the decision in this regard, but they did not get the permission to visit her.

The pro-Khaleda secretary general of BNP said they were ready to accept any party in power through a truly free and fair election.

He also said justice cannot be served with the emergency power rules enforced and nobody will accept the verdicts of the types of trial that are being conducted now.

Responding to another query, Delwar said the country is passing a transitional period and only an elected government can overcome the existing problems of the country.

Blasting Saifur Rahman for his recent activities, Delwar said he [Saifur] has done everything, including appointing a secretary general through an illegal meeting, to make certain quarter happy.

Matin given reins

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"I don't know what prompted the chief adviser to give the home ministry to another adviser. As far as I can recall, all chief advisers of caretaker governments in the past kept the portfolio of home ministry with themselves," former adviser to the 2001 caretaker government M Hafizuddin Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mirpur sizzles

FROM PAGE 1

workers went to the Rab office and had Shakhawat freed by 3:30pm. This all helped calm the workers who ended the day with a rally in front of MBM factory late afternoon.

Anwar Hossain, deputy commissioner of police (Mirpur Zone), told The Daily Star, "We have been trying our best to keep the situation under control. We believe it is very much their [workers'] right to press home their demands. But they must do so peacefully and remember that unruliness is not to be put up with."

The demonstrators alleged that the MBM Garment authorities have been giving no attention to their demands forcing the workers to continue the street agitation over the last few days.

At least 100 people including 50 workers and 20 policemen were wounded in clashes Monday.

CLASH AT DEPZ A tense situation was prevailing in the EPZ area with additional forces deployed to avert further fighting.

Yesterday's incident was a sequel to the previous day's. Around 2,000 workers of Indonesian company Shine Fashion Monday staged demonstration inside the DEPZ demanding a rise in allowances for meal and transport, said witnesses.

They went back to work after the factory authorities assured their demands would be considered.

As the employees gathered in front of the DEPZ main gate at around 7:30am yesterday, they found a notice announcing that the factory would remain closed for an indefinite period.

Incensed, they tried to enter the EPZ premises only to be attacked by the security men and police. The workers resisted leading to a clash that lasted at least 20 injured.

Selim Al Deen

FROM PAGE 16

was a great playwright "not only of Bangladesh or in Bengali language but also by any standard, be it national or international... How many times, both here [Kolkata] and in Dhaka, have I leapt in joy or drowned in despair as we experienced the magic and mystique of his words."

Born in Bangladesh, Rudrasad joined Kolkata-based theatre group Nandikar in 1961 and became leader of the group in late 1970s. As a thespian, he appeared in some Bengali art films -- Bernardo Bertolucci's Little Buddha and Roland Joffe's City of Joy.

DU demos

FROM PAGE 1

Robaet Ferdous, Zinat Huda, Dishani Chakravorty, Kajol Krishna Banerjee were present at the rally.

Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury, Prof Anwar Hossain, Salimullah Khan, Ahmed Kamal, Ashfari Hossain expressed solidarity with the demonstrating students over telephone.

The students will also observe a two-hour abstention from class today.

DUTAMEETING Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) will hold a requisitioned meeting today to decide what they can do to have the teachers and the student released and discuss the stalled election of the executive committee for 2008.

Teachers belonging to pro-Awami League Blue Panel and left-leaning Pink Panel called for the meeting as Duta's acting president and general secretary "failed to make any decision in this regard".

The pro-BNP-Jamaat White Panel termed the meeting unconstitutional and decided not to join.

Musharraf faces

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doing nothing to deal with them," he said. Sharif, the man ousted by Musharraf in a military coup in 1999, has repeatedly called for the president's resignation since returning to the country from exile in November.

Police were on high alert in Karachi and thousands of paramilitary forces were fanning out across the city, Pakistan's largest, officials said.

"We have deployed 10,000 personnel at all sensitive points and installations," Paramilitary Rangers spokesman Captain Mohammad Fazal said, adding that another 4,000 were on standby.

The blast Monday evening ripped through a busy intersection outside a factory as workers were buying food on their way home.

"There was no specific target, it was just meant to kill ordinary civilians. The terrorists chose a soft target to spread panic and terrorise society," interior ministry spokesman Brigadier Javed Cheema said.

Bush urges Opec nations to pump more oil

FROM PAGE 1

Police Station Kamrul Islam and Shine Fashion's General Manager Major (retired) Mainul Alam were among those wounded. Police arrested a worker named Nazmul Hossain on the scene.

DEPZ has 88 factories with about 2 lakh workers. "High energy prices can damage consuming economies," the president told a small group of reporters traveling with him in the Mideast.

"It's affected our families. Paying more for gasoline hurts some of the American families, and I'll make that clear to him," said Bush, heading into more talks with Saudi King Abdullah. Shortly after Bush spoke, the Saudi oil minister said the kingdom, responsible for almost one-third of the world's total output, would raise oil production when the market justified it.

In a stern warning to Iran days after a Jan 6 confrontation with US warships in the Persian Gulf, Bush put Tehran on notice that it needs to be careful. The president said it would not matter to him whether an attack against an American vessel resulted from an order by the government in Iran or a rash decision by an Iranian boat captain.

"It's not going to matter to me one way or another," Bush said. If the Iranians hit a U.S. ship, "there are going to be serious consequences," he said.

U.S. officials claim Iranian speedboats swarmed three Navy warships in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway that is the only entry and exit to the Persian Gulf. They said U.S. Navy commanders were considering firing warning shots, before the retreat of the five Iranian speedboats, which the Pentagon said were operated by the elite Revolutionary Guards.

Iran has denied that its boats threatened the U.S. vessels. AP, Riyadh

AL asks govt

FROM PAGE 16

programme at his Gulshan house where Abu Dhabi chapter of Bangabandhu Parishad donated Tk 5 lakh to the AL's committee for relief operation.

Iftekhar Hossain Bakul handed over the cheque to Zillur Rahman for helping the cyclone-affected people in the country's southern districts.

"We have to think deeply why the government has taken the matter so seriously and whether there is any scheme behind it," Zillur said adding that why the government did not take up the