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61pc driving licences obtained without test

Tk 100-7,000 for a licence, Tk 100-500 for passing test, reveals TIB study on BRTA graft; minister pledges reform committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sixty-one percent drivers have got driving licences from Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) without sitting for the required test while 54 percent of them drive vehicles on roads in the country with expired licences.

A report of the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) also reveals that a person has to bribe BRTA officials concerned Tk 100 to Tk 7,000 to get a driving licence and Tk 100-500 for passing a driving test. Drivers also use fake medical certificates to get licences.

Taking into cognisance the huge politicisation and corruption in the country's road transport sector, Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain yesterday pledged to form a powerful committee within a week to root out the irregularities and modernise the sector.

"I endorse the findings of the report, which is objective and appropriate. We shall form a high-powered committee in a week to bring reforms to the sector and make it service-oriented," the minister said at a programme at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday where the TIB report was presented.

He also said the government would introduce online banking system for stakeholders to pay BRTA fees in six months, amend the relevant laws and take a comprehensive plan to modernise the transport sector.

The report titled "Role of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and other stakeholders in Bangladesh's road transport system: problems and ways out" highlights rampant corruption and indiscipline in road transport management and among motor vehicle owners, trade unions and the traffic and highway police. The TIB conducted the two-year long

survey among 368 motor vehicle owners and 310 transport labourers, interviewed BRTA officials, owners and transport trade union leaders, watched activities at the BRTA office, traffic control and passenger services, and conducted 13 group discussions for the research.

Prepared by TIB Research Officer Rezaul Karim, the report says 96 percent drivers do not get any appointment letters as there is no such obligation and in 84 percent cases vehicle owners do not pay their employees when their vehicles do not operate even if for valid reasons.

According to the report, motor vehicle owners bribe Tk 1,000-50,000 for getting their vehicles registered with BRTA while owners of new vehicles have to bribe a company operating on a Dhaka Metropolitan route Tk 10,000 to Tk 3 lakh to get their vehicles included in that company's fleet.

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Akhtar Hamid sued for cheating

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A case was filed yesterday against former Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui with Mohadevpur police station in Naogaon on charge of cheating authorities of a private primary school.

Shamima Yasmin, headmistress of Bagdob Girls' Primary School, lodged the case against Siddiqui and his aide Mahbub Alam Hasan, also a union parishad chairman.

In her case, Yasmin alleged

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BDR CARNAGE Rab arrests 'Leather' Liton

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel last night arrested listed criminal "Leather" Liton at a Hazaribagh house in the city in connection with last month's BDR carnage in Pikhana.

Liton is accused in several cases including murder and arms cases.

Rab sources said the house where Liton was arrested is close to gate-5 of the BDR headquarters.

On March 10, Rab arrested his father Torab Ali, president of Retired BDR Members' Club.

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War criminals barred from going abroad

Genocide documents to be gathered, says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday said the government will take necessary steps to gather documents on genocide in 1971 and bring back war criminals who fled the country then.

"Let the trial begin first and then we will start all

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Bidi factory dodges Tk 44cr in taxes

Pays only Tk 91 lakh in taxes in 4 years; owner accused of maintaining fake sales ledgers; 3 cases filed

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

The owner of a bidi factory in Bogra was found to have evaded over Tk 44 crore in taxes during September 2004-December 2008, according to the district Customs, Excise and VAT Division.

Inspector Md Shahjahan Ali Talukder of the division recently filed three cases against Md Mozammel Haque, owner of Aziz Bidi Factory, with the Customs, Excise and VAT Commissionerate of Rajshahi under the VAT Act of 1991.

Md Lutfor Rahman, commissioner of the Rajshahi Customs, Excise and VAT Commissionerate, yesterday told The Daily Star over cell phone that the trial of the cases would start soon.

Officials of Bogra Customs, Excise and VAT Division said the bidi factory paid only Tk 91,44,584 in taxes against the sales of Tk 126,21,54,600 during September 2004-December 2008 whereas it was supposed to pay

Tk 44,03,86,704 as per existing rules. Mozammel, however, denied the allegations and said he does not know about the cases. "I do not evade taxes, so these allegations are not correct...I do not know about the cases," he told The Daily Star over cell phone.

An investigation by a seven-member team revealed that the factory owner maintained fake sales ledgers instead of customs department's prescribed format during the period, a senior official of the department said.

The first case mentions that according to sales ledger the factory owner sold bidis worth at least Tk 87,28,08,100 during September 2004-August 2007 but he paid Tk 55,72,417 in taxes. The originals taxes were Tk 30,28,18,516.

Mozammel Haque further evaded Tk 8,80,48,561 by submitting fake sales statement for the period from September 2007 to June 2008 to the Customs, Excise and VAT Division in Bogra. The second case mentions that the

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JAMAAT REGISTRATION EC decides not to contest writ petition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) decided not to defend in court its decision that allowed Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami get registered with the EC as a parliamentary political party, saying the matter is "sensitive".

This means the EC will not contest the writ petition pending with the High Court (HC) challenging the EC's decision to register Jamaat. The Commission was made respondent to an HC rule in the case along with Jamaat and its two top leaders, sources in the EC said.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda termed the matter sensitive and said it's better for the EC not to get involved.

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BNP starts meeting with div teams

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Standing Committee yesterday started discussions with the Chittagong division central team about its report on reorganising the party's grassroots-level committees in that division.

The committee last night held a meeting with the team led by BNP Joint Secretary General Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, which was assigned to talk with upazila-level rank and file in Chittagong division and submit reports.

After completing the discussions, the standing committee might dissolve all the

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SERIAL BLASTS 7 JMB men get life in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The first court of Rajshahi Divisional Special Judge yesterday sentenced seven militants of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) for life in

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Prayer Timing		
March 23		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-55	5-30
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-16	6-20
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation



PHOTO: STAR

Poorly parked cars on the street between Shapla Chattar and Dainik Bangla intersection at Motijheel in the capital cause traffic jams every weekday. The photo was taken yesterday.

WWF pledges action on water

But rift surfaces over statement

AFP, Istanbul

A seven-day focus on the world's water crunch wound up here yesterday with a pledge by more than 100 countries to strive to provide clean water and proper sanitation for billions in need and shore up defences against drought and flood.

Ministers and delegation chiefs endorsed the declaration, coinciding with World Water Day, at the end of the biggest-ever conference on the planet's crisis of freshwater.

But some countries criticised the cornerstone outcome of the fifth World Water Forum (WWF) as flawed while activists dismissed the event itself as a "trade show."

"The world is facing rapid and unprecedented global changes, including population growth, migration, urbanisation, climate change, desertification, drought, degradation and land use, economic and diet changes," the non-binding statement said.

It set out a roster of recommendations for action, including

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Russia keen to set up nuke power plant

Envoy makes formal proposal

UNB, Dhaka

Russian Ambassador to Bangladesh Gennady P Trotsenko yesterday submitted a formal proposal to State Minister for Science and ICT Yafez Osman for setting up a nuclear power plant to meet Bangladesh's growing demand for energy.

Talking to reporters after the meeting with the state minister, the ambassador said Russia is making endeavours to assist Bangladesh to construct nuclear plant to meet

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Pak PM, Sharif call for reconciliation in talks

Iftikhar resumes charge as chief justice

AFP, Raiwind

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and opposition leader Nawaz Sharif called for reconciliation to end Pakistan's political crisis but stopped short yesterday of announcing concrete agreements.

The thaw in their icy ties came after their first meeting since the Supreme Court disqualified Sharif from contesting elections, sparking a showdown that pushed the nuclear-armed nation to the brink of chaos.

They met as the government reinstated top judge Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, two years after he was sacked under emergency rule, in a significant climbdown bowing to demands from Sharif who whipped up mass

protests.

"I came to meet Mr. Nawaz Sharif with an olive branch from the government, with a message from President Asif Ali Zardari that the situation demands greater reconciliation because Pakistan faces great challenges," Gilani said.

The premier travelled to Sharif's country estate Raiwind in Punjab, the country's most important province which controls 60 percent of the seats in parliament and where Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) is dominant.

"We want reconciliation. Nawaz Sharif has responded positively and I thank him," Gilani told a joint news conference with the PML-N chairman.

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Wajed Miah leaves for Singapore for treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dr M Wajed Miah, ailing nuclear scientist and husband of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, left for Singapore in the early hours of today for better treatment.

The noted scientist, who has been suffering from kidney and cardiac complications, will

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CTG ARMS HAUL Former CBA leaders called for quizzing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has sent notices to five former CBA (Collective Bargaining Agent) leaders of Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited (CUFL) to appear for questioning in the sensational Chittagong arms haul case.

CID investigators will interrogate the CBA leaders to know if they had any information about offloading of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Core of Qaeda in Pakistan

Says British PM

PTI, ANI, London

Stating that the core of al-Qaeda has shifted from Afghanistan to Pakistan, Prime Minister Gordon Brown yesterday said that Britain was about to take the war against terrorism "to a new level".

Britain will release on Tuesday a new counter-terrorism strategy called Contest Two, billed as the most

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Govt okays import of 60,000 MT Indian wheat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet committee on purchase yesterday approved the proposal for importing 60,000 tonnes of wheat from India to meet domestic demand but it did not okay six other proposals, including construction of over 500 flats for public servants.

The cost of importing the wheat was fixed at Tk 86.30

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



PHOTO: STAR

A roadside restaurant puts its stove on the pavement and fries jilepi obstructing pedestrians' movement. The photo was taken near the footbridge on the Airport Road-Kamal Ataturk Avenue intersection.