

Govt takes on terror socially, politically

Ansar-VDP assigned to monitor militancy at grassroots; imams join campaign

SHARIER KHAN and ABUL KALAM AZAD

Recognising the fact that anti-militant drive is not enough to uproot the evil of extremism from the society, the government has launched a massive socio-political campaign, involving 14 different agencies, to educate people and closely monitor militant activities at the grassroots level.

This campaign heavily involves the 3.5 lakh strong Bangladesh Ansar and Village

Defence Party (VDP) for the first time as the networks of the two agencies are spread even to the remotest parts of the country where neither Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) nor police have regular access.

With the state minister for home affairs spearheading the drive, the government has taken up various innovative initiatives to make people aware about the destructive nature of extremism. The initiatives include holding campaigns, screening documentaries, training imams of

mosques, organising anti-militancy campaigns at madrasas and others.

Under the initiative imams will be trained to present sermons against militancy prior to Juma prayers. "This has already begun in Dhaka and some other parts of the country," said Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder.

Another aspect of the drive is to involve unemployed youths in various development work and different trades

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4



A high spatial resolution from the Quickbird satellite data dating October 2003 shows the forest landscape where the crisscrossed walking trails were made to facilitate forest clearance. Another picture, right, shows the present state of the entrance to the Madhupur forest, where a vast patch of forestland has been cleared and then converted into a rubber garden.

PHOTO: STAR

Forest-hostile projects deforesting Madhupur

Donors favour plantation of foreign species; locals keep trust in natural forest

PINAKI ROY

The Department of Forest is apparently depleting the Madhupur Sal Forest through implementation of different donor-funded afforestation projects, which mainly plant exotic trees of commercial value.

The majority of the donor-funded projects in the past or the projects the government and development partners

plan to implement shortly are about planting alien species of wood trees or constructing infrastructures inside the national park area of the forest.

Instead of reviving the natural forest, the forest department shows its keenness to plant alien species like acacia, rubber, mahogany and eucalyptus in Madhupur as per the condition of the projects.

Talking with local people and analysing different studies on Madhupur, it has

been learned that unresolved land tenancy disputes created antagonistic relations between the forest department and the inhabitants.

These unresolved disputes are also contributing to deforestation for years.

The indigenous people allege the foresters have been destroying the forest by implementing different "harmful" projects, while the officials term the locals

SEE PAGE 12 COL 1

SPREAD OF SWINE FLU

Ministry asked to watch educational institutions in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid urged the health ministry to monitor educational institutes to contain swine flu a day after two leading English medium schools in Dhaka were shut.

Scholastica and Sunbeams closed as a precaution against swine flu.

"The schools were closed without our knowledge," the minister told the reporters at the secretariat yesterday, adding that the current situation in the country does not require the institutions to be shut down.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

TRAFFIC CONGESTION

BRTA drive makes little difference

KAILASH SARKAR

The drive to ease traffic congestion in the capital often proves counterproductive as queues of buses and cars seized by mobile courts obstruct the other vehicles.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority has lately launched a campaign to alleviate the plight of the commuters during Ramadan.

But the way its mobile courts stop vehicles to check papers, file cases, collect fines and leave the seized ones waiting to be towed away make matters even worse.

Despite special measures by the BRTA and Dhaka Metropolitan Police, almost all roads in the capital clogged up yesterday, the first day of Ramadan.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Ministers slam traders for price hike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two ministers yesterday blasted businessmen, blaming them for the red-hot prices of essentials.

Finance Minister AMA Muhiht slammed traders for forming syndicates to make hefty profit, while Commerce Minister Faruk Khan came down heavily on the businessmen for charging high for the essentials.

"The government itself is embarrassed about such syndicates. The consumers will have to be united against them," Muhiht told journalists after a meeting on revenue stamps at the finance ministry.

While speaking at the launch of a journal at the National Press Club, Khan said he is in a dilemma over what to do since a drive by the last

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5
MORE IN STAR BUSINESS

Iftar items get costlier

Essentials' prices remain unchanged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prices of ingredients used for making iftar items went up yesterday, the first day of Ramadan, while the prices of most essentials remained unchanged at city's kitchen markets.

The prices of aubergine, chickpea and puffed rice continued to rise while the prices of green chilli and vegetables witnessed a fresh hike.

However, the prices of most essentials

remained the same as the day before yesterday at city's kitchen markets.

The price of green chilli that came down to Tk 120-160 a kg on Saturday increased to Tk 140-200 a kg yesterday.

Prices of aubergine of different varieties ranged between Tk 40 and Tk 80, which was between Tk 35 and Tk 70 a kg the day before yesterday.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

WHO warns of 2nd wave of pandemic

AFP, GENEVA

The World Health Organisation is urging the planet to brace for a second wave of the swine flu pandemic as the heavily populated northern hemisphere edges towards the cooler season when flu thrives.

"The WHO is still mobilised and worried," spokesman Gregory Hartl said as the global health watchdog kept an anxious eye on some "mysterious" patterns of illness associated with the new A (H1N1) virus that appeared in April.

Influenza traditionally surges to its peak during the northern autumn and winter.

WHO Director General Margaret Chan warned on

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4



PHOTO: STAR

A salesman packs iftar for a customer (not seen in picture) at a stall selling delectable traditional items in the old town's famous Chawkbazar market.

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