# Opulent Urs

TAWFIQUE ALI

The public works ministry rented out a playground and a part of a park to allow an extravagant religious congregation (Urs), caring little for children's access to the ground and putting people in difficulty for a month.

The Ministry of Housing and Public Works rented out T&T playground in front of Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban and a part of the nearby Anwara Park on Indira Road at Farmgate for two days (yesterday and the day before that) in exchange for Tk 15,000 even though rules prohibit such lease.

The organisers of the Urs virtually took over the public spaces in the beginning of January to erect enormous marquees, five grand arch gates and a regal stage to deliver sermons to devotees, who turned up in thousands from across the country.

Secretariat and the office of Dhaka metropolitan police (DMP) commissioner endorsed the event when the House is in session.

The year 2000 law on conservation of playgrounds, parks, open spaces and wetlands categorically prohibits alteration, rent and lease of these for use other than what they are designated for. A High Court bench in

May 2003 following a writ petition issued a rule upon the government to ensure proper maintenance and protection of playgrounds and open spaces in light of the said law. The HC following a sepa-

rate petition, regarding the playground on Road-8 of Dhanmondi, directed the government to maintain the playground.

Lipton, a devotee of the Pir and a Khadem (attendant), said, "We started the work to erect the gates and marquee on January 1 but the children and youths can still play." However, Mahtab

Hossain, a college student and a resident of nearby Indira Road, said they had to stop playing on the ground since the Urs organisers installed hundreds of bamboo poles there.

Shirin Akhtar, joint secretary (administration) of the public works ministry, said, "We gave permission to use

Shahsufi Hazrat Jakir ground and the park.

Syed Ziaul Haque, a Dhanmondi resident who uses Manik Mia Avenue every day, said he saw extensive and lavish lightings with hundreds of bulbs all over the venue for the last one week.

"The rationale for this kind of luxurious use of electricity is incomprehensible when the whole country reels The Parliament under persistent power crisis," said Ziaul.

sions of the DMP and the Parliament Secretariat impose the conditions of not creating public difficulties and traffic bottlenecks in and around the venue, the organisers had set up scores of amplifiers. Around 100 cows, 15 buf-

faloes and four camels donated by the devotees, were lined up in a pen occupying a part of the Indira Road, to the south of Islamia Eye Hospital, to be slaughtered for the feast at the Urs.

Each of the five arch gates is a five-storey bamboo structure ornamented with fancy colourful cloths. One of the young attendants said funding for such event is generated with devotees' dona-

Nearly two lakh devotees Md Mahbubur Rahman from the capital and across the country turned up last devotee Lipton.

> holding similar congregations at the T&T playground, Anwara Park and Rajdhani High School playground since 2008.

Thousands of devotees stayed overnight in the marquees. The marquee set up on Anwara Park was meant for women devotees.

But the government has

failed on almost all counts and

has lately appealed to the

court to extend the deadline

aging also with regard to the

sitting in October last year

decided to conduct eviction

drives on four canals every

month to gradually free 43

canals from illegal structures.

But in over three months, only

Sanzida Khanam, ruling

Awami League lawmaker,

alleged the administration

evicts only the poor, while the

influential grabbers remain

taskforce identified 13 low

bridges (some under con-

struction) on rivers around

the capital as obstacles to

movement of watercraft and

decided to knock those down.

Tremor jolts

capital rocked like a boat.

The hypocentre (source

of the earthquake under the

ground) was 70 km deep

because of which the tremoi

had less damaging capacity,

he said. Bangladesh felt the

damaging capacity of an

earthquake with 10 km

hypocentre is as less as the

one with 70-80 km

hypocenter. But an earth-

quake can be devastating if it

is generated around 30 km

Barisal, Sirajganj

Mushiganj, Gopalganj,

many buildings and struc-

tures in the districts jolted

heavily prompting residents

But no damage or casu-

Our Dinajpur correspon-

to rush out in panic.

Sylhet and Noakhali said

Our correspondents from

from the earth.

The expert added that

shaking since its soil is soft.

regarding that as well.

FROM PAGE 1

But no action was taken

Earlier on March 31, the

out of reach.

At the meeting in October,

two have been recovered.

encroached city canals.

The signs are not encour-

The taskforce at its eighth

by two more years.

## Result close

of Environment had con-

ducted drives and fined more than 100 industrial units in last three months. The level of pollution

remains so high that Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) has to treat stinky water and supply it to the households.

The four rivers still give off a horrid smell, as industries keep polluting them. The government has done

little to plug the sources of river pollution. A recent study by World Bank and the Institute of Water Modelling (IWM) shows that major effluent discharge units in Dhaka and Narayanganj continue dumping industrial and household waste into the rivers in and around the capital.

Talking to The Daily Star, Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan said they could not meet the court's deadlines for different reasons.

However, he added, the government is putting in its best efforts to make good on

the pledges. In reality though, things appear otherwise. Not only

have the influential encroachers remained untouched, new encroachers have emerged to fill up rivers, canals and other wetlands. Even the BIWTA, the gov-

ernment agency entrusted with the task of maintaining the navigability of the rivers, has filled a stretch of Shitalakhya at Kanchpur and built structures for commercial purposes.

It did so ignoring repeated protests and pleas from the environmentalists.

Asked if they would knock down those structures, the shipping minister said the government would go by the court directives.

In its directives, the HC said once the demarcation is completed, the authorities concerned must have the riverbanks lined with pillars

alty was reported. by May 30, 2010. It also ordered that within six months after demarcation, dent said a mild tremor the land ministry hand over 50 rocked Dinajpur for about 7 yards along the riverbanks to to 10 seconds at 7:56pm the BIWTA. yesterday evening.

the playground and the park for two days only, considering religious sentiment." "Police should have taken

action if the organisers were occupying them for a period beyond permission," she

Shah, Pir (a spiritual guru) of Kutub Bagh Darbar Sharif, held the two-day Urs that formally started the day before yesterday at the play-

Even though the permis-

year to attend the Urs, said The darbar sharif has been

### 4 outlaws

FROM PAGE 20

ern region.

Ramnagar in Gangni upazila in Meherpur; Alamgir Hossain, 30, of Mathurapur, and Nazrul Islam, 25, of Taragunia in Daulatpur upazila in Kushtia.

On information that a group of BCP men gathered at a jackfruit orchard a Ramnagar village, Rab o Meherpur and Gangni police led by Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Sheikh Jahidul Islam around 2:30am went to the place.

When the law enforcers cordoned off the area, the outlaws surrendered to them.

One rifle, two light guns, 13 bombs and a sharp weapon were recovered from them, said the ASP.

Sub-Inspector Gias Uddin of Gangni Police Station said two cases were filed against the outlaws.

The Judicial Magistrate's Court in Meherpur sent them to jail at noon.

### 9 BCL men

FROM PAGE 1

The microbus was in the motorcade of Awami League lawmaker RMA Obaidul Muktadir heading for Dhaka after visiting the grave of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Gopalganj. Muktadir was unhurt.

The deceased were assistant secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra League centra committee Mehedi Alam Santo, 30, BCL activists Leon, 26, Raihan, 27, Ariful Islam, 29, Golap Morshed, 28, Romen, 27, Riad, 26, Ashiq, 25, and Imran, 25, and driver Mizan, 30.

Faridpur Deputy Commissioner Helaluddin Ahmed, Rab officials, police, district Awami League leaders and activists had rushed to the hospital.

President Zillur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed deep shock at the death of the BCL members, reports BSS.

## Encephalitis

report for the proposed rail FROM PAGE 1 Lalmonirhat. They will go A joint survey to prepare door-to-door conducting the alignment for the 16 km medical inquiry until the

Agreement

Indo-Bangladesh rail link

was carried out in

September last and later it

was placed before both the

governments for a deci-

According to officials,

both the sides readily

agreed on the proposed

alignment as it will be

feasible for both sides.

Now, a MoU will be signed

between Bangladesh and

India and hopefully the

work will flag off shortly,

Meanwhile, construc-

tion of a bridge on the river

Feni in Ramgarh under

Khagrachhari district and

Sabroom in South Tripura

district would also begin

soon as the final alignment

had already been made by a

joint team of engineers of

India will construct the

bridge at a cost of Rs 12

crore aiming to connect

South Tripura with the

Chittagong Port, 75 km

from the Indo-Bangladesh

border at Sabroom. This

will provide a major boost

to the connectivity

the bridge is being con-

structed also in light of the

joint communiqué in

which Bangladesh will

allow use of Mongla and

Chittagong sea ports for

movement of goods to and

from India through road

ministers agreed to

operationalise land cus-

toms stations at Sabroom-

In another development,

Foreign Ministry sources

said Chief Minister of

Tripura Manik Sarkar on

Friday underlined the need

to introduce Agartala-

Dhaka-Guwahati air service

to boost trade and com-

merce with the northeast-

Besides, the two prime

and rail routes.

Ramgarh.

Official sources said that

between the two sides.

Bangladesh and India.

FROM PAGE 20

connectivity.

sion.

they added.

situation improves. A common symptom of the disease is high fever accompanied by headache and vomiting. The disease causes inflammation of brain, and bats are natural hosts of the virus, said the doctors of IEDCR.

They also advised caution while drinking raw date juice as bats usually drink date juice at night. The virus can transmit

among humans through the saliva, urine and stools of infected bats, Prof Mahmudur said adding, boiled date juice can be taken. The disease can pass from human to human, though the rate of such infection is low,

said the doctors, suggesting taking precautions such as washing hands after coming into contact with an infected person. They also advised not to use patient's bed, and to wash patient's clothes separately. Patient's spit, cough and

added. Meantime, four more people died of the disease in Lalmonirhat and Rangpur yesterday and Thursday night, raising the death toll to 20, reports our Lalmonirhat and Rangpur correspondents.

excreta will have to be

dumped into the ground, they

Two more people-- Israt Jahan, 15, and Lamia, 2, of South Kolkond village in Gangachara upazila of Rangpur--have been found infected with the disease.

### Driver

**FROM PAGE 20** 

for Tk 2,000, Morshed said. As the car reached Mawa, they stabbed him, left him on the road and drove away.

Morshed added that one of the criminals said he was in urgent need to go to Mawa to see his mother who fell sick. The hijackers asked him to stop the vehicle for urination.

Victim's brother Faizul Alam said the criminals also took away two cellphones. On Thursday, three

motorbikes were hijacked in separate incidents in the city. Of the bike owners, two were shot and injured and the other sustained stab injuries.

They were admitted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital yesterday.

The dead were identified as Bachchu Miah, 56, of Baraipara village; Joynal, 42, of South Goddimari; and Asadul Islam, 18, of Gendukuri village in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat and Lubna, 14, of South Kolkan village in Gangachara upazila of Rangpur. Of them, Bachchu and

Joynal died at Hatibandha Upazila Health Complex at about 11:30pm on Thursday and Asadul died at Rangpur Medical College Hospital early hours yesterday and Lubna at her residence around 12:00 noon. A three-member medical

team led by Civil Surgeon of Rangpur Rejaul Karim visited the house of Lubna yesterday morning.

Nipah was first reported in the country in 2001. A total of 152 people have been infected by the disease from 2001 to January 31, 2011. Of the infected, 113 people died. In Bangladesh, two types of encephalitis--Japanese and Nipah--are common, IEDCR sources said. The case fatality (the per-

centage of people who got the disease and did not survive) rate of the Nipah virus in Bangladesh is 75 percent. No vaccine against the disease has yet been developed, but the fatality can be reduced through symptom control or general management, they

#### Miladunnabi FROM PAGE 1

started from today.

Eid-e-Miladunnabi is observed on the 12th day of the Hijri month of Rabiul Awal which falls on February 16. Vice President of National

Moon Sighting Committee and Secretary to the Religious Affairs Ministry Kazi Habibul Awal presided over the meeting held at Baitul Mukarram conference room of the Islamic Foundation yesterday eve-

Eid-e-Miladunnabi is also known as Barah Wafat the twelfth day.

The day is marked by holding religious discourses, reading the holy Quran and giving alms to the poor.

# Biman suspends

FROM PAGE 1

will remain operational. Of those, two flights will be operated on the Dhaka-Sylhet-Dubai-London route, Biman said yesterday.

Biman officials hope to resume direct flights on the route in April with the inclusion of two Boeing aircraft to the airline's existing fleet. They said the national

carrier signed an agreement with the Euro Atlantic Airways in November 2009 to hire two Boeing aircraft for four years.

Biman received one aircraft from the airline on February 3 last year on onevear wet lease, which means the lessee must bear the costs of the aircraft, crew, maintenance and insurance, followed by a threeyear dry lease.

Biman later scrapped the deal with the company that failed to provide the national carrier with the second aircraft on time.

Biman Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Muhammad Zakiul Islam said, "We had an option to use the aircraft on dry lease. But we could not do so for a hefty registration

Biman has entered into another agreement with the Pacific Aircraft Lease Management, USA to get two aircraft under the Aircraft Crew Maintenance and Insurance, Biman officials said.

The airline also published advertisement for leasing two Boeing aircraft to resume direct flights to New York, which were suspended in 2006 due to shortage of aircraft. Biman had earlier

announced that it would resume direct flights to New York by 2010, but failed to do

Two Boeing aircraft are expected to be added to Biman's fleet in October and November in line with an

agreement with the Boeing flights via Dubai every week Aircraft Company on purchase of ten aircraft, said Biman.

has a fleet of 11 aircraft flying

The national carrier now

to 19 international destina-Wishing anonymity, a Biman official said the airline had been running the Dhaka-London direct flight

at a loss. Kazi Wahidul Alam, editor of Aviation and Tourism Fortnightly, said it is very unlikely that Biman incurred loss on the route,

#### which is immensely popular Criminal

FROM PAGE 20 dead around 2:00am, police

said. A resident of Shah Ali, Sumon's name is in the list of criminals of Shah Ali Police Station. He is also an accused in three murder cases, claimed lawenforcers.

Members of a police patrol noticed a group of youths roaming suspiciously near Proshika Bhaban around 12: 30am, said Abdul Aziz, subinspector of Mirpur Police Station.

As the team asked them to

halt, the gang tried to run

away. Police, however, man-

aged to capture Sumon, he added. Sumon told the cops that some of his cohorts, including Alamgir, Faisal, Khokon, were inside the National Botanical Garden and planning a rob-

As soon as the team entered the garden around 1:00am, Sumon pushed constable Tarif Hossain over and tried to escape. His cohorts opened fire on

the police triggering the gunfight, noted the SI. Law enforcers found

Sumon bullet-hit after the 'combat' while his associates managed to escape. They recovered a pistol and four bullets from the spot.

Two cases were lodged with Shah Ali Police Station in this connection.



# Book fair draws huge crowd

RAKIB AHAMMED

Jammed with booklovers, Ekushey Boi Mela yesterday saw the largest crowd since its opening on February 1. The sale was high too, and the sellers

struggled in meeting the demands of the huge number of visitors. Thousands of people entered the

Bangla Academy premises after waiting in long queues for hours in the afternoon. The gate opened at 11:00am, as it was a weekly holiday.

Publishers displayed the highest number of new books of different genres. A good number of school students in uniform also came to the fair.

Newly-married Hosne-ara-Parvin had

a unique feeling.

"I visit the fair every year from my school life. This is my first time with my husband, and it is very special," said

Parvin. In the evening, the stalls that sell novels saw even a greater crowd, as the fans of popular writers swarmed to the stalls to collect the copies of their favourite writ-

To make the day memorable, many visitors took autographs of the writers and poets present in the fair.

Clouds of dust, however, posed to be the nuisance of the day for the booklovers. Although the organisers sprinkle water on the premises to keep the dust settled, it did not work.

## Egyptians rally

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members of the mass Islamist movement the Muslim Brotherhood, mingled, sang and chanted under banners and ubiquitous Egyptian flags.

Members of the Christian minority were also taking part. "Game over" said one

banner, in English for the benefit of international television channels beaming out live coverage. The defense minister visited the square, inspect-

ing troops who have prom-

ised to protect demonstrators. There was no sign of Mubarak loyalists who attacked protesters on previous days. "The army and people are united!" the crowds

"Allahu akbar!" (God is greatest), some protesters cried after the prayers on Tahrir Square.

chanted.

Iran's supreme leader hailed an "Islamic liberation movement" in Egypt. Iran's anti-Western,

Islamic revolution of 1979 against the repressive, USfunded shah has been cited by some in Israel and the West as creating a possible precedent for Egypt to turn into a major hostile force to Western power in the region if its 60-year-old military-backed secular system falls.

**US DISCUSSIONS** 

US officials said they were discussing with Egyptians a number of options to begin a handover of power that would keep Egypt stable. Though President Barack Obama has called publicly only for an immediate start to "transition," one option, a US official said, was for Mubarak to be replaced right away.

The United States is a key sponsor of Egypt's politically influential army and of the Mubarak government as allies in the West struggle with radical Islam in the oil-rich Middle

East. In Brussels, European Union leaders renewed their calls for change in Egypt and warned the government against using

Mubarak, 82, responded to rallies of a million or more on Tuesday by pledging to retire when his fifth presidential term ends in September. That has not satisfied opposition leaders, including the Brotherhood and the liberal Mohamed ElBaradei.

But Mubarak hit back, saying he was "fed up" and willing to go but was holding on to prevent a descent into chaos. Ministers in the government he hastily appointed a week ago in response to the protests have kept up that message, appealing over the heads of the marchers to 80 million Egyptians weary of disrup-

"More than 95 percent of the Egyptian people would vote for the president to complete his presidential term ... and not (retire) now as America and some Western states want," new Prime Minister Ahmed ing by state media. Shafiq's team, along

Shafiq was quoted as say-

with newly appointed Vice President Omar Suleiman, have been at pains to try to present a moderate face to the public, apologizing for violence by pro-Mubarak groups this week and pledging to provide order and democracy.

New Finance Minister Samir Radwan told Reuters the economic losses after 11 days of protest will be "huge." The tourist business, centered on pyramids and beaches, has been ravaged.

Radwan said the government had set up a fund worth \$850 million to compensate people whose property had been damaged. ISLAMISTS

The long-banned Muslim Brotherhood has sought to allay Western and Israeli concerns about its potential to take power in a free vote. A day after Vice President Suleiman broke ground by saying the Brotherhood was welcome

to join a national dialogue,

it said it would not seek the

presidency. Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, whose non-Arab, Shi'ite Islam is often at odds with the Sunni branch dominant among Arabs, praised those in Tunisia and now Egypt who had wrought dramatic change in the past month on autocratic regimes typical of the Arab

world. "The awakening of the Islamic Egyptian people is an Islamic liberation movement and, in the name of the Iranian government, salute the Egyptian people and the Tunisian people,' said Khamenei, whose forces suppressed popular protests in 2009.

Calling himself a "brother in religion" to the Arabs, he said the Egyptian army should back the protesters and "focus its eyes on the Zionist enemy." Cairo's 1979 peace treaty with Israel has been a key component of the Jewish state's security strat-

Egypt's armed forces which receive hefty funding, training and arms from Washington, appear to be weighing their options, ready to see Mubarak replaced, while anxious to maintain their institutional influence over Egyptian politics.

Any new government will face major challenges not least the sheer diversity of long-suppressed political opinion, religious tensions and the high expectations aroused by the demonstrations of solutions to unemployment and other economic ills.

Amr Moussa, secretary general of the Arab League and former Egyptian foreign minister, said he believed Mubarak would hold on until September's election. Then he added cautiously: "But there are extraordinary things happening, there's chaos and perhaps he will take another decision." Moussa, spoken of by

sor, told France's Europe 1 radio that he would consider standing. He later joined protesters in Tahrir Square. The UN estimates 300

people have died in the

unrest, inspired in part by

protests in Tunisia which

some as a possible succes-

forced veteran strongman Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to flee last month and which have since spread to other parts of the Middle East. In Algeria, opposition groups said on Friday they would probably go ahead with protests planned for next week, despite concessions on political freedoms

#### government on Thursday to address complaints. PM's remarks

and measures to create

jobs announced by the

FROM PAGE 1

press conference at her official residence Gono Bhaban Thursday, Awami League President Hasina questioned the necessity of divulging such information. The party manifesto

titled "charter for change" drew huge public support and was appreciated by different professional groups, ultimately ensuring the party's landslide victory.

Hasina apparently tried to sidestep when a reporter asked why the wealth statements of her ministers and lawmakers and herself have not been made public. She told journalists, many of them editors, that

she along with her cabinet members and lawmakers submits wealth statements and pays taxes to the National Board of Revenue every year and she has the documents.

Besides, they had submitted their wealth statements to the Election Commission prior to the December 2008

election, she said. Hasina and her party leaders submitted their wealth statements to the Election Commission prior to the election as candidates, not as prime minister,

minister or lawmaker. Making public their wealth statements is in the manifesto (chapter establishment of good governance) as top five priority

The Awami League council approved the party's election manifesto and declaration paper on July 24, 2009 where the line "Extrajudicial killing will be stopped" is present. Interestingly, the English version of the manifesto, put on the party website, does not have that line.

On extrajudicial killing,

the premier said a practice

that was initiated during the BNP-Jamaat alliance rule cannot be stopped overnight. Hasina told the press conference that her government does not support such killings. But she did not mention anything about

what measures the government has taken to stop these killings and honour the electoral pledge of the party. She said her government investigates every such

unlawful killings and that she was against such killings since the very beginning.