

BSF tortures 3 Bangladeshi cattle traders

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Dinajpur

Three Bangladeshi cattle traders were tortured by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel in Bhimpur border of Birampur upazila early yesterday.

Of the three, Abdul Jalil, 40, from Monipur village was detained by the BSF while the other two managed to escape, sources at Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) said.

Critically injured Golap Mia, 25, and Erfan Ali, 26, from Dakshin Daudpur village were taken to Birampur Upazila Health Complex. Golap was later shifted to the Neurosurgery Department of Rangpur Medical College Hospital, due to severe head injury.

Following the incident, tension mounted in the area as rumours about the detainee's death floated in the air.

A flag meeting was held at Daudpur border, inside the Indian territory around 12:30pm.

S Mukundor Talukdar, camp inspector of Gobindapur BSF camp informed the BGB of Bhaigarh border outpost that Jalil was moved to Hilli Police Station of Dakshin Dinajpur, Paschim Banga.

However, they did not comment on the physical condition of the detainee.

BGB officials at Phulbari 40 Battalion said BSF of Gobindapur camp caught the three at Chhagaldangi village around 300 yards from Bhaigarh border and beat them up with iron rods as they entered into the Indian territory. At one point, Golap and Erfan left Jalil and managed to escape.

Lt Colonel Tayeb Ul Haque Commanding officer of Phulbari 40 Battalion confirmed the incident.

BNP trashes

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party like BNP would take money from a foreign organisation for election campaign," Rafiqul Islam Mia, a member of BNP standing committee, said when The Daily Star brought his attention to the report published in Khaleej Times.

Rafiqul back in 1991 was also an influential member of the national standing committee, the highest policymaking forum of the party, and party Chairperson Khaleda Zia after winning the polls appointed him as a minister.

Alluding to a report about ruling Awami League and the 2008 elections published in the July 2011 copy of The Economist, the BNP leader said, "An influential international newspaper has recently published a story about a major political party of our country. This one [in Khaleej Times] might have been intended to counter that one."

The Dubai-based newspaper carried the news on Saturday under the headline "Asghar Khan's petition finally comes up for hearing".

The report mainly deals with a petition filed by Pakistan's former Air Force commander-in-chief Air Marshal Asghar Khan against 140 million Pakistani rupees doled out by the establishment through the ISI to a select group of anti-Benazir Bhutto politicians in 1990.

The report adds, "Another Rs 50 million was allegedly paid to Bangladesh's Khalida (Khaleda) Zia to help her in polls against Hasina Wajid's (Wajed's) Awami League generally perceived by Pakistan's security establishment as pro-India".

Asked about the report, Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman said it was BNP who had brought back multiparty democracy and parliamentary democracy in the country. So, this is beyond question that BNP would not take money from anyone for election campaign.

Political standoff

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His remarks came at a time when the main opposition BNP has been demanding restoration of the caretaker government system in the constitution, which was cancelled through a constitutional amendment last year.

In democracy, there will be difference of opinions; but there are also solutions to problems arising out of any issue, observed the former chief justice.

Habibur, however, did not proffer any probable solution. "I cannot say something new. You rather ask the youth for the solution. They think about the country much more than I do."

Addressing the conference, the eminent jurist rated Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) as the weakest regional bloc of the world.

Realising the importance of regional cooperation, the European Union (EU) has made significant progress in socio-economic fields. They have also addressed many ethnic and minority issues, he maintained.

Prof Imtiaz Ahmed of international relations department at Dhaka University said the European nations have witnessed many wars and bloodshed in the past, but now they have a very different Europe.

"Look at Schengen visa of Europe. But there is a serious problem in our region. India and Pakistan appear to be at war even in cricket," he mentioned.

Former adviser to a caretaker government CM Shafi Sami said despite having a common history

3 killed

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Also on Dhaka-Chittagong highway, a hit-and-run accident left a trader dead.

Md Mohsin, 29, was the owner of Ikra Computer and Studio in Daudkandi, Comilla. He came to Dhaka on business purpose.

Around 10:30pm, he was hit by a truck while crossing the highway to go to a friend's house at Rayerbagh.

Mohsin was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital only to be declared dead by doctors, said the friend, Ismail.

The apparel worker, Mohammad Alam, 25, was employed at Ananta Garments Factory located in New Elephant Road area.

Hailing from Panchagarh, Alam used to stay at a rented house with his sister in Kamrangirchar.

Alam's colleague Shaheen Talukder, who witnessed the incident, told The Daily Star that Alam slipped and fell down on the road when he tried to board a running bus around 7:50am to go to his workplace.

After his fall Alam was crushed under the rear wheel of the bus, said Shaheen.

Alam was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared him dead.

After the accident, pedestrians and other garment workers, who were waiting for buses, vandalised the bus and set fire to it, said Azizul Haque, officer-in-charge of Labagh Police Station.

The OC said two fire-fighting units of Palashi Fire Station arrived at the scene and doused the fire.

The road in front of Eden College was closed to traffic for about half an hour.

Police seized the route no 13 bus plying between Dhupkhola and Mohammadpur. The driver of the bus managed to escape.

At Malibagh, a truck hit restaurant worker Dilip Talukdar Sagar, 40, around 5:30am.

He arrived there from Natun Bazar and was crossing the road, said Anowarul Islam, assistant sub-inspector of Motijheel Police Station.

Dilip was rushed to DMCH in a critical condition and later on succumbed to his injuries.

The truck driver fled with the truck, Anowarul said.

and traditions, there are conflicts in South Asia over sharing of resources like water.

The Saarc, being a younger bloc, can learn from the EU how it had addressed the domestic political issues, supervised and implemented the regional projects for economic growth and social development, he noted.

In this globalised world only shared prosperity can ensure peace and security, said Manoj Kumar Mohapatra, first secretary at the Indian High Commission in Dhaka.

Individually, the EU has strong ties with the South Asian nations, but the EU-Saarc relation is not very strong, he pointed out. "There is a lot to be done here."

Aamer Ahmed Atozai, fist secretary at Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka, suggested more investment and transfer of technology from the EU to this region. Creating job opportunities for the South Asian youths in the EU could be an area of greater cooperation, he maintained.

Diplomats, academics and youths from different South Asian countries joined the conference, organised by South Asia Youth for Peace and Prosperity Society.

AG Abyeckera, minister at the Sri Lankan High Commission in Dhaka, and KC Aryal, deputy chief of the mission at the Nepalese embassy in Dhaka, addressed, among others.

Tikka Khan

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administrator, Lt Gen Sahibzada Yaqub Khan, also made his way out of the regime when he declined to adopt a tough military stance toward the restive province. Tikka Khan was thus effectively holding two positions, that of governor and zonal martial law administrator.

However, he was not sworn in as governor by Justice BA Siddiqui, chief justice of the East Pakistan High Court, in view of the ongoing civil disobedience movement in the province.

In another development, as a way of checking a possible declaration of Bangladesh's independence the next day by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, General Yahya Khan moved away from his earlier announcement of a postponement of the national assembly session and told the country that the session had now been scheduled for March 25 in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, senior leaders of the Awami League remained engaged in consultation among themselves at Dhanmondi Road 32, especially on the matter of what Mujib would announce at the March 7 public rally at the Race Course. The meetings ended without any definitive conclusions being reached. For his part, Bangabandhu remained under pressure from various quarters, particularly the student community, on the independence question. Their expectation was that he would declare independence the next day, a question which kept all of Pakistan in a state of suspense. Yahya appealed to Mujib to refrain from taking any extreme action and told him that he would meet him soon.

The crowds kept converging on Bangabandhu's residence. The international media sent out feverish reports on the unfolding crisis, but pointed out that what course of politics Pakistan would pursue now depended on what Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would say the following day. Throughout the province, the atmosphere was one of a new country having already come into existence. On the streets, pro-independence slogans were heard all day. Bengali nationalism, it was clear, had arrived at a point from where it could not be rolled back.

The past EC led by Huda decided to begin the task for updating the voter list on March 10 and the work will continue till October 2013.

Earlier, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) Zayed Ali said the schedule of DCC polls would be announced in the last week of April and the polls would be held a month later.

On the task for updating the voter list, CEC Rakiuddin said the EC is examining whether there are any legal complexities that might hinder the task beginning on March 10.

The meeting also approved amendments to the Income Tax Ordinance, 1984.

Hasina warns

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On December 18, the day the BNP arranged a reception of freedom fighters, activists of the party and its key ally Jamaat-e-Islami clashed with police at different points of the capital. At least 50 homemade bombs were exploded, leaving one man dead and many injured.

Some senior ministers at the meeting yesterday said it would not be wise to take the BNP's threats centring on the March 12 Dhaka Cholo (Go to Dhaka) programme lightly.

Many BNP leaders maintain the main opposition will wage a movement to oust the government if it tries to obstruct their grand rally programme.

Cabinet sources said a number of ministers, including Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Rail Minister Suranjit Sengupta and Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, State Minister for Liberation War Affairs AB Tajul Islam and HT Imam, an adviser to the premier, raised in the meeting issues related to the upcoming grand rally and the December 18 clashes.

They mentioned BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's warning that the government would be toppled by March and reminded the premier of some BNP leaders' remarks on the grand rally.

The BNP's acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir had said March 12 was a turning point. According to standing committee member Moudud Ahmed, the country's political scenario would be changed after the grand rally programme. Sadeque Hossain Khoka had advised the ruling party ministers not to come out of their residence on the day.

The ministers at the cabinet meeting asked the premier to act on the BNP's threats seriously as it was setting a timeline for overthrowing the democratic government.

The government must investigate whether any conspiracy against the government was hatching and what the BNP could do on March 12, meeting sources quoted the ministers as saying.

Hasina also called upon all lawmakers from Dhaka and its adjacent districts to remain vigilant in their constituencies on March 12.

Asked about the meeting, Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star that they had discussed the BNP's upcoming programme since the opposition leaders were speaking undemocratically.

"If the opposition holds its March 12 programme peacefully, the government will do nothing. But if it tries to create chaos or destabilise law and order the government will take care of it."

The people will not allow BNP to create chaos to protect war criminals, she said.

Earlier on the day, Mahbubul Alam Hanif, joint general secretary of Awami League, urged the government not to allow the opposition's March 12 programme as, he said, he had reports that the BNP was planning to create anarchy.

No decision

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parliamentary polls.

Speaking about the polls to bifurcated Dhaka City Corporation, Rakiuddin said schedule for the polls will be declared in time and the polls will be held within the timeframe of May 29.

However, the EC is yet to fix the date for the polls, he said.

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Fuel, electricity

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was sold at Tk 26 early last year.

After the ruling Awami League assumed power, fuel prices were not hiked in 2009 and 2010.

After two hikes in last three months, power price now stands at Tk 5.02 per kilowatt-hour, which was earlier Tk 4.16 Kw/hour.

The incumbent government also increased price of urea fertilisers by Tk 8 per kilogram in June last year and fixed the price at Tk 20.

However, the government decreased the price of non-urea fertilisers three times.

To justify its proposal, the Finance Division says the difference between the prices in the international and local markets has

become narrower due to the recent price hikes, but a huge amount of subsidy is going to fuel thanks to devaluation of taka.

In the first six months of the current FY, the average exchange rate against dollar was Tk 76, which would shoot up to about Tk 84 by the end of the FY, projects Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation.

According to a projection by the finance ministry, in the current fiscal year the loss in fuel sector may be more than Tk 15,000 crore.

A finance ministry official says if the price is adjusted again during the current FY, still Tk 12,000 crore will be required in addition to the budgetary allocation on subsidy.

The Finance Division also proposed introduction of an automated pricing formula for fuel. If price goes up by 10 percent in the global market, fuel price will increase in the local market and vice versa.

The premier supported the proposal but did not give an immediate decision in this regard, the official adds.

The Finance Division also suggests separate subsidy be sent to the farmers' bank accounts so that the price hike does not affect them adversely.

State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Enamul Haque told the House yesterday the BPC has to count about Tk 1,000 crore in loss every month.

Divider, speed reducer

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In this particular incident, the microbus carrying them collided head-on with a bus on the Dhaka-Aricha highway at Ghior. The bus driver did not slow down even as he turned left, hitting the microbus after travelling about 10 yards from the turn, witnesses told reporters.

Speed bumps work as a deterrent on roads and highways to rear-end collisions, as drivers often with fake licences drive recklessly and run into other vehicles, said ARI Director Prof Hasif Mohammad Ahsan.

He added that all busy roads, irrespective of their size, should have dividers.

Illegal modification of buses and trucks is also to blame for frequent accidents.

"The bodies of almost cent percent buses and trucks are modified through ignoring rules, which is one of the main reasons for road crashes," Prof Hasif told The Daily Star.

Usually, buses and trucks

are modified in two ways -- by increasing their length and width.

"It's very difficult for a truck driver to notice vehicles coming from behind due to the illegally modified body, which is larger than the driver's cabin," he observed.

A truck's width and its driver's cabin must be of the same size, he insisted.

Contacted, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority Director (enforcement) Tapan Kumar Sarker admitted that most of the vehicles plying the roads were illegally restructured.

"The BRTA has recently asked all the deputy commissioners to seize all the vehicles that have been illegally modified. And we are also conducting mobile courts in this regard," he said.

The ARI report prepared last month reveals yet another frustrating trend: that although the number of road accidents is rising every year, police reports have it otherwise.

Mujib-Indira treaty

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Shahara in a written report at the meeting said New Delhi has assured Dhaka of handing over Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's convicted assassins captain Majed and risalder Moshleuddin, now hiding in India.

The cabinet secretary said the home minister seriously protested the border killings during her visit and the Indian authorities assured her of taking necessary measures to this end.

The home minister also raised difficulties the Bangladeshis face in getting Indian visa every day and urged the authorities to make the process simple. Taking it positively, the Indian authorities assured her of resolving the problems, Musharraf added.

As Shahara requested them to take measures so that Bangladeshi businesspersons can open bank accounts in India and open offices there, the Indian side has assured her to take necessary measures in this regard, informed the cabinet secretary.

Besides, both Bangladesh and India have agreed to work together to combat terrorism and border crimes including arms and drugs smuggling and women and children trafficking, he said.

Yesterday's cabinet meeting also approved the draft of Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 2012 aiming at quick disposal of pending civil cases. Musharraf said disposal of civil cases will be quicker once the bill is passed in parliament.

Currently, there are 6.34 lakh cases pending with the lower court, he noted.

The meeting also approved amendments to the Income Tax Ordinance, 1984.

Explaining the amendment, the cabinet secretary said artistes of radio, television, theatre and film

whose honorarium is below Tk 10,000 do not have to pay 10 percent tax at sources from now on.

Those who will buy programmes at less than Tk 10,000 would not have to pay tax at sources as well, he added.

BORDER ISSUE

As India proposed to erect barbed-wire fences at 167 spots along the Bangladesh-India border, the Bangladesh home minister told them that previous rules and regulations on constructing the fences should be followed, said the cabinet secretary during yesterday's press briefing.

She also informed the Indian authorities that the Border Guard Bangladesh, instead of the land ministry, will supervise demarcation of border through construction of pillars when the Indian side made a proposal to this end.

Meanwhile, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar told the state assembly yesterday that Bangladesh had agreed to allow India to erect barbed wire fencing on the zero line in some selected places but turned down India's proposal to construct the fence on the entire border.

Replying to a question asked by opposition Congress member Gopal Roy, if the state government had asked the central Indian government to take up with Bangladesh so that fencing could be constructed on the zero line, the chief minister said the neighbouring country had agreed to allow India to erect barbed wire fencing on the zero line in some selected places only.

To adhere to the India-Mujib pact and guidelines formulated in 1975 for border management, India constructed fencing 150 yards away from the zero line to check smuggling, illegal migration and cross border movement of Indian insurgents.

ARI sources said they prepared the report based on police record, which showed 3,656 accidents in 2008, 2,802 in 2009 and 2,437 in 2010, indicating a downturn.

Prof Hasif, however, differs with the police record. He says the ARI report does not reflect the reality due to "under-reporting" by the police.

The actual number of road accidents will be four to five times the police figure, he said, quoting various foreign organisations.

On the fitness of the vehicles, the BRTA director said all the five Vehicle Inspection Centres (two in Dhaka and one each in Rajshahi, Khulna and Chittagong) were inoperative for long, forcing them to inspect the vehicles manually.

The job of fitness inspection would be done through outsourcing in private workshops, and that the process for that was underway, he added.

The chief minister, who is also the home minister, said many district and sub-divisional towns, markets and even Agartala airport have fallen within 150 yards of the Indo-Bangladesh international border.

He said at least 50,000 people of 8,750 families were affected as their agricultural and homestead land fell on the other side of the fence.

PM's advisers

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leading a long march towards Feni.

He alleged that a conspiracy was on to turn Noakhali region into a desert. "All, irrespective of opinion and party affiliation, should resist it."

Jatiya Party, a component of the Awami League-led ruling alliance, launched the long march from its Banani office around 9:00am, demanding steps to ensure adequate water flow in the river Feni as India is withdrawing water from it unilaterally.

Earlier, Ershad addressed two wayside rallies at Madarpur and Mograpara bus stand in Sonargaon.

Meanwhile yesterday, at the weekly cabinet meeting, some ministers drew Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's attention to the free-style criticism of the government by some leaders of Awami League-led grand alliance, adds our staff correspondent.

They mentioned about Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon's March 4 statement in parliament where he had said the advisers to Sheikh Hasina talked on bilateral issues as if they were the advisers to the Indian prime minister and government.

"Many people, many minds," replied the prime minister, adding that previously a few people had benefited by speaking excessively, so there could be others who would do the same for such gains.

Poland mourns victims of train disaster

AFP, Warsaw

Poland began two days of mourning yesterday for 16 people killed in its worst rail disaster in two decades, as investigators probing the cause of the trains' head-on crash said human error was to blame.

A station master responsible for scheduling one of the doomed trains was charged with "unintentionally causing a transport disaster" following his detention earlier Monday, and could face up to eight years in prison, prosecutor Tomasz Ozimek told reporters.

The man, who has been placed under psychiatric care after doctors found he was suffering from shock, allegedly directed the north-bound train onto the wrong track, putting it on a collision course with a south-bound train speeding down the same line.

March 12 rally

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receiving such directions from the police.

Party leaders said they have assigned 10-15 senior leaders to figure out a solution.

The sub-committee on food management for the March 12 rally yesterday in a meeting chaired by its convener SA Khaleque gave the responsibility of food and shelter to 10 of its leaders.

It also asked BNP's city unit and ward-level leaders to ensure accommodation for as many rally attendees as possible in their houses.

BNP City Convener Sadeque Hossain Khoka will coordinate the whole arrangement, said a member of the sub-committee. Khoka also said many of the community centre owners refused to allow them room fearing police restriction.

"We are determined to accommodate each and every supporter despite the obstacles created by the government," said Kazi Abul Bashar, member of the party's Dhaka city unit committee.

Against such backdrop, BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia will sit with the leaders of her party's allies and like-minded parties tomorrow to discuss the rally preparation.

They will also talk about the expansion of BNP-led four-party alliance and its next course of action, which is likely to be declared in the grand rally by Khaleda, said party insiders.

Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, BNP standing committee member, yesterday told The Daily Star that the government wanted to create anarchy by obstructing peaceful programmes of the opposition.

"But no conspiracy can hold us back as the people will make the rally a success," he said.

Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abdin Farroque alleged that law enforcers had been raiding the houses of BNP leaders and activists in various cities, upazilas and municipalities.

"Our men are being detained," he said while addressing a human chain organised by Zia Nagarik Forum in front of the Jatiya Press Club.

Central leaders BNP are now busy with meetings in divisional and district headquarters in a bid to inspire people to join the March 12 rally. The rally was called for mounting pressure on the government to restore caretaker government system.

Meanwhile, Khaleda Zia last night urged journalists to be present in the grand rally and said her party would ensure security for the journalist community if it is voted to power.

She was exchanging views with pro-BNP journalist leaders at her Gulshan office.

"The BNP chairperson also expressed deep concern over the fact that the killers of journalist couple Sagar and Runi had not been arrested yet, Shawkat Mahmud, secretary general of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists told newsmen after the meeting.

National press club president Kamaluddin Sabuj and its general secretary Syed Abdal, among others, were present in the meeting.