

No operations

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Kuala Lumpur, Kuwait, Riyadh, Dammam, Muscat, Kathmandu, Rome, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Kolkata have also been significantly cut for the hajj period.

Besides, big aircraft on these routes will be replaced by smaller ones.

Despite all these measures, leaders of the Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (Haab) are worrying about what would happen if technical glitch force a number of flights to remain grounded.

This year around 1.13 lakh devotees will perform hajj. Of them, Biman will carry over 56,000 pilgrims while the Saudi Arabian Airlines, National Air Services Airways, and other airlines will fly the rest.

In an inter-ministerial meeting at the religious affairs ministry on Wednesday, Haab leaders demanded that the government allow other airlines operating from Dhaka to carry a certain number of pilgrims in case Biman or Saudi Arabian Airlines failed.

After the meeting, Biman's acting managing director AM Mosaddique Ahmed told journalists that they had taken preparations and back-up measures to face any problem. He said Biman now has the capacity to fly 58,000 pilgrims.

A Biman official, however, said it would have been better if they had a preparation for carrying around 62,000 pilgrims. Biman was trying to get 14 more slots (the schedule of departure and arrival) at the Jeddah Airport, he said. Biman now has 110 slots.

Wishing not to be named the official said the Haab leaders were raising hue and cry, as hajj agencies would be benefited if their demand was met. The agencies would have to spend \$ 800 while they charged each pilgrim \$ 1,475 for return ticket.

Biman will carry the pilgrims with its two Boeing 777-300ER (each having 419 seats), a 582-seated Boeing 747, and two DC 1030 aircraft (each having 314 seats) during the season.

About back up, a source said an Airbus would join the fleet on September 15 after a massive overhauling in Singapore while Biman was planning to take lease a 382-seater Boeing 767 by September 20.

The source also said the Biman board had decided to maintain this year's hajj operations with its own aircraft after the flag carrier had failed to take lease of two more Boeing 747 aircraft despite floating several international tenders.

A number of top Biman officials protested against the decision saying that suspending operations in certain routes and slashing flight frequencies would have a disastrous impact.

"I apprehend Biman will lose a huge number of passengers when it resumes operations in the five routes and increases flight frequencies after the hajj operations," said an official of Biman's marketing division wishing anonymity.

Road crash

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Kamruzzaman, 35, his wife Ainur Akter Panna, 32, and their son Ainan, 5. The couple are senior assistant secretaries, Panna's brother Saidur Rahman told The Daily Star.

The accident occurred when a Gulshan-bound human hauler of Bandhu Paribahan collided head-on with the auto-rickshaw near Padma Cinema Hall at Chowdhurypara around 8:45pm, said Md Shah Alam, OC of Ramna Police Station.

The four were rushed to nearby Khidma Hospital where the driver was pronounced dead. The injured were later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The accident sparked commotion among the locals who set the human hauler on fire and vandalised another human hauler of Bandhu Paribahan.

Saidur said the victims were going to Kamalapur Railway Station from Ashulia to catch a train to Comilla.

BNP goes

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programmes, Khaleda is scheduled to address public meetings in Dinajpur on September 20, Rajbari on September 29, Habiganj on October 6 and Barisal on October 9.

The BNP chief will also hold meetings with the district-level leaders of the 18-party alliance during her tour, said Rizvi.

On August 28, the BNP-led 18-party alliance had announced the fresh but soft agitation programmes.

Khaleda will exchange views with different professional bodies at her Gulshan office in the capital from today to October 4.

She will sit with teachers of different universities on Saturday, engineers on September 10, physicians on September 12, journalists and writers on September 15, agriculturists on September 17, diploma agriculturists on September 18, diploma engineers and medical assistants on September 22 and with lawyers on September 24.

The opposition leader will start exchanging views with BNP's grassroots-level leaders and activists of different districts from tomorrow at her Gulshan office until October 4.

Khaleda will sit with the BNP leaders and activists of Gazipur on September 9, Munshiganj on September

11, Tangail on September 13, Jamalpur on September 16, Comilla north and south on September 23, Brahmanbaria on September 26, Sirajganj on September 27, Lalmonirhat on October 1, Bogra on October 2, Pabna on October 3 and Thakurgaon on October 4.

Meanwhile, leaders of the 18-party alliance in 27 teams have already embarked on their mass contact in 64 districts as per their scheduled programme.

The programmes that include rallies and processions in metropolitan cities, district towns and upazila headquarters began yesterday and will continue until September 30 to elicit public opinion in favour of the demand of the BNP-led alliance, the press briefing was told.

The alliance will also stage demonstrations tomorrow, on September 16, 23 and 30 in all the cities, district towns and upazila headquarters to protest various issues, ranging from the government's corruption in all sectors, including Padma bridge project; unusual price hike of essentials, fuel oils, power and water; killing and torturing of opposition leaders and activists and filing of false cases against them, among others.

Swindle unearthed

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General Trading by creating accommodation bills. The branch showed exports and imports in papers to help the company to withdraw the money although no such operation took place in reality, said a Sonali Bank official.

The audit report said there were no important documents in the files of parties and there were no client-wise ledgers.

Branch Manager Akteruzzaman continued to hold the post there despite transfer order to Ramna branch on September 5 last year, according to the report.

"The transfer order was not acted upon and instead, he continued to resort to the same irregularities as before.

"This should be investigated thoroughly to see if there were any influences exercised either by the top management of the bank and by the outside political or bureaucratic strength," said the report.

The branch manager has already been suspended following a Bangladesh Bank order. The top management of Sonali Bank will now take punitive action against him, a senior official of the bank told The Daily Star.

Another bank official said the management was planning to file cases against the officials involved in the irregularities.

This official said the central bank had sent directives to the bank management and also to the government to this end, and the process to take action against them was underway.

Irregularities in local and foreign bills purchase and acceptance have been going on in the country's banking sector for long, said a Bangladesh Bank official, adding that the central bank had already collected information from various banks in this regard.

The BB is to sit with the chief executives of commercial banks on Thursday to discuss the findings into the loan fraud and also issue guidelines to commercial banks to stop such plundering of depositor's money.

The audit report found unexpected growth in inland bill purchase (IBP) against total loan and advances in Gulshan branch. In September 2010, the IBP was 9 percent of total loans and advances, which went up to 51 percent in December the same year.

IBP is a bill of exchange that is drawn and made payable within the same country.

In January 2011 the IBP

in the branch was 52 percent of total loans and advances, which rose to 76 percent in May this year.

In some cases, IBP transactions occurred within the sister concerns of the party of Gulshan branch against accommodated bills. Even more intriguing is that many transactions also took place within the same bank and even the same branch.

Although the Principal Office of Sonali Bank had been regularly informed about these irregularities, the General Manager's Office, ITFD and other relevant departments of the Head Office did not take any action, the audit report said.

2 Jessore

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miscreants on June 15 night.

ASI Masudur Rahman had been transferred to Monirampur Police Station in Jessore on Thursday night while constable Shohid was transferred to Dhaka a few days ago.

The police department took the action against the duo after the Rab, during its investigation, found that the two policemen had conversations with the killer Tota Mallick over the phone.

Criminals abducted Jamal from a tea stall at Kashipur Bazar under Sharsha upazila in Jessore around 11:00pm, and killed him after brutal torture.

Abdul Alam, father of the slain journalist, filed the murder case with Sharsha Police Station on the next day of the killing accusing seven people including Tota Mallick, of Kashipur village.

Kamrul Ahsan, superintendent of police of Jessore, told the journalists those were not punishment posting. They have been transferred for the convenience of the investigation.

Sources preferring anonymity said, both the police personnel managed to get transfer orders from their superiors, fearing that their association with the killer might come to light.

A departmental probe will be carried out soon against the policemen to find out whether they were involved in the murder, said Mejbah Uddin, DIG of police of Khulna range.

As the media reported the police personnel's involvement in the murder, the probe will be carried out by other law enforcement agencies, he added.

Of the seven accused in the case, Lata Begum, wife of Tota Mallick, was arrested by police on the night of the killing, while Rab officials arrested Raju Mollik, son of Shamsher Mollik, from Arpara of Magura on July 6.

Buet crisis

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part of solving the crisis, will take measures to remove the VC at the earliest opportunity.

"Neither the Buet will be safe nor it would be possible to restore the institution's glory keeping the VC in his post," mentioned Sudipta.

The minister, he noted, has assured them of taking necessary steps to restore Buet's glory and suitable educational atmosphere. "We believe the minister will meet the assurances with utmost sincerity."

Earlier on Wednesday, a 16-member team of the protesting students sat with Nahid over their one-point demand for the removal of the VC and pro-VC. Two Buet teachers also accompanied the team.

The students then held several meetings with their fellows in the last two days to reach a decision on returning to their classes.

On April 7, Buet Teachers' Association (BTA) launched an agitation raising 16 allegations of corruption against the VC and the pro-VC. But they suspended their agitation temporarily after the prime minister had assured them of meeting their demands.

As there was no progress on the issue, the teachers announced non-stop work abstention from July 14. The students and staff of the university also joined them. Asked what they would do if it takes time to meet the assurances, Sudipta said they would return to classes straight away if the assurances are met.

"We are hopeful about a peaceful solution of the problem and don't want to put any barrier in the way of solving the crisis," he added.

After the press conference, Prof Ashraful Islam, general secretary of the BTA, told reporters that the academic activities will resume soon. "We will go back to classes trusting the assurances of our minister. But we are reiterating that we have no confidence in the VC and demanding his resignation or removal."

The teachers, said Ashraful, will give the government a reasonable time as they sought time to meet the assurances.

Talking to The Daily Star, the education minister said they have already initiated the process of removing the pro-VC and withdrawing the cases filed against the teachers and students.

He urged the students to go back to classes soon.

Powerful

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A government statement also said 100,000 people were made homeless by the disaster, and at least 20,000 houses collapsed or were damaged. Altogether 700,000 people have been affected, it said.

Television footage showed people running from damaged buildings and streets strewn with fallen bricks and rocks in Yunnan province's Yiliang district, which appeared to be worst hit.

The death toll could still rise as some villages remain blocked by landslides and the worst-hit areas may have lost power and communications, Xinhua said, citing local officials.

Rocks as tall as four meters crashed into mountain roads and landslides are hampering the rescue operation, the report said.

Southwest China is prone to earthquakes. In 2008, about 87,600 people were killed in the south-western province of Sichuan when a 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit. Many of the victims died in the rubble of homes and schools built without adequate steel reinforcement.

A 6.9 magnitude earthquake in April 2010 killed nearly 3,000 people in a remote part of western Qinghai province, devastating much of Yushu county, where many displaced by the disaster still live in tents.

Quakes with an epicentre less than 70 km below the surface are considered shallow and can cause significant damage, even at lower magnitudes.

Moon ride on port city

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drains and kept the soil on the road, which turns the road muddy after a shower of rain.

As there has been no repair of the road for a long time, a lot of potholes have developed.

Schoolteacher Romana Rashid said she does not ride rickshaw on this road as the rickshaw pullers demand extra fares.

Project Director Mahfuzur Rahman said the scheme could not hit full swing as the rainy season has set in.

The road would be carpeted after the monsoon rains, he added.

CHITTAGONG COLLEGE ROAD

The CDA has already failed to meet the June 2012 deadline for delivering the Chittagong College-Kapasgola Road Expansion and Development Project.

Aslam Uddin, a resident of Deb Pahar, said excavation work in the stretch of Goni Bakery to Chawkbazar has been going on for months. Traffic tailbacks have become a common occurrence in the area.

Nasir Uddin Mahmood Chowdhury, chief engineer of CDA, said the excavation work was delayed as they could not use bulldozers to demolish illegal structures in the area.

They avoided using bulldozers fearing it would worsen the traffic problem.

DHAKA TRUNK ROAD

The development work of the DT Road continues at a

snail's pace, complained local resident Md Rafique.

As part of the road remains impassable, commuters often get stuck in traffic congestion.

Denying the allegations, Project Director Mahfuzur Rahman said they have already finished widening the road since starting the project 10 months ago.

He hoped to start the finishing work soon.

PATHANTULI ROAD

Though the CDA had started developing the street one year ago, it has only built about 50 percent of a bridge so far near the Khan Saheb Govt Primary Girls' School.

Rakib Ahmed, a resident, said the unplanned work has led to waterlogging on the road, which consequently creates tailbacks during school hours.

Project Director Mohammad Hasan attributed the delayed implementation of the scheme to land acquisition problems.

He hoped to deliver the project by June next year.

BAHADDARHAT INTERSECTION

As a flyover has been under construction here for a long time, maintenance of roads has been neglected. Local people complained that the roads have been virtually impassable for about one and a half years.

An engineer of the CDA said any repair of the roads will not help in the long term as it is the rainy season now and the construction of the flyover is underway.

Once the flyover is complete by December, the roads will be carpeted, he added.

MURADPUR INTERSECTION TO CHAWKBAZAR

The development work in this part of the city had started in January last year and a major part of the work still remains incomplete.

The poor state of the road has been a bane for the commuters as even riding rickshaws and walking on the road have become difficult for them.

When it rains, rickshaws as well as CNG-run three-wheelers meet with accidents here, said Mohammad Khorsheed, a resident of Panchlaish area.

Asked about the dilapidated state of the road, Project Director Shahabuddin Khaled said they could not take up the repair job as the rainy season was in full flow.

Talking to The Daily Star, communications specialist Engr Subhash Barua said a road development site should have a diversion for vehicles, but the CDA does not have any.

He also blamed the authorities for taking up several projects simultaneously and not following any systematic approach to continue the development work.

Nasir Uddin Mahmood, chief engineer of CDA, expressed optimism about completing all the projects by December.

Eradicating illiteracy

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Amid such realities, the country observes the International Literacy Day today. The day will be observed through events on the theme "Literacy and Peace".

Since 1991, governments have held education as one of the sectors receiving the highest budgetary allocations.

Yet, it failed to bring any significant results.

In 2009, the ministry, with a seriousness to fulfil the government's election pledge of ensuring cent percent literacy, drew up a Tk 3,000-crore mega project, to be implemented by Bureau of Non-Formal Education (BNFE).

But, it could not launch Basic Literacy Project till now for want of money, said officials of BNFE.

The project cost was reduced to Tk 500 crore, and it is now awaiting approval of Ecne, BNFE Director General Md Alamgir told The Daily Star.

Currently, the government has two ongoing projects to eradicate illiteracy. It hopes to launch two more projects soon including the basic literacy project.

The state minister believes the government would be able to eradicate illiteracy through the projects if all the stakeholders cooperate.

Educationists, however, are sceptical about achieving this target under the project-based approach.

During the press briefing at his ministry's conference room on the eve of the International Literacy Day,

the state minister claimed that the literacy rate during the previous Awami League government crossed 65 percent, but it plummeted to 55 percent during the BNP government.

"Now we have the literacy rate of over 60 percent. Besides, we have been able to ensure over 99 percent enrolment in primary schools," he said.

In reply to a question, he said, "It will not be possible to achieve cent percent literacy by 2014 but we will be able to keep moving on the track."

Md Alamgir, DG of BNFE, said the literacy rate would have been improved had the government taken up the mega project.

He, however, said they have been able to literate around 10 lakh people between the ages of 11 to 45 through their Post Literacy and Continued Education for Human Development-2 project.

The BNFE chief also told The Daily Star that they have provided basic education to around 1.66 lakh children aged between 10 and 14 in six divisional towns under another project.

"Apart from providing basic education, we have also offered some skill-based training so that the participants can do something for their livelihood," he said, adding that they had sent a proposal to extend time of both the projects by one year to the planning ministry.

"Despite limited resources, we have come a long way," he observed.

Greens demand

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and Munshiganj to follow Cadastral Survey of 1913, and Revised Survey of 1983, to ascertain the original positions of the rivers and demarcate those, including foreshores.

The HC also said the deputy commissioners of the districts would be held responsible in person for any negligence in the demarcation work.

The BIWTA started the demarcation work in cooperation with the district administrations on April 12 last year following the HC order and directives of the river taskforce.

Bapa General Secretary Abdul Matin said the authorities concerned were not following the HC order while setting up the boundary pillars. "It will give scopes to the existing encroachers to become legal and encourage others," he added.

He feared that if the demarcation work was completed this way, then it would

become a weapon for the encroachers to grab hundreds of acres of river lands across the country.

It is time to be united at the national-level against this kind of activities, said M Jakir Hossain Khan, project coordinator of Transparency International Bangladesh.

Convener of the national committee to protect oil-gas-power and port Sheikh Mohammad Shahidullah, former director general of Hwr O Joladhar Unnayan Board M Inamul Haque, joint secretaries of Bapa JK Boral and Sharif Jamil, and Coordinator of Green Voice Humayun Kabir Suman addressed the rally.

Sharif Jamil, also the Buriganga Riverkeeper, told The Daily Star yesterday that following a detailed presentation on the irregularities in setting up the pillars by Bapa two to three months back, three review committees headed by the deputy commissioners were formed.

"How can we expect fair

judgment from these committee heads who are responsible for the wrongdoings?" he wondered.

On September 5, environmentalists and social activists at a meeting came down heavily on the administration of four districts. Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) organised the meeting at its office on how to prevent river pollution and encroachment.

Representatives of the deputy commissioners' offices of Dhaka and Narayanganj at the meeting, however, could not give any satisfactory reply to the allegations.

Sharif Jamil at the meeting said, "Many pillars are seen in the middle of the rivers. It seems the government is legitimising river encroachers."

In response, Mahbubul Islam, Narayanganj additional deputy commissioner, said a change in water flow over the decades could be one of the reasons behind that.

Mashiur won't

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"I will resign ten times if the World Bank gives the assistance on my resignation," he told reporters at Shahjalil International Airport on his return from India after a four-day visit. Gowher Rizvi, another adviser of the premier, was with him during the visit.

"But, neither I nor my party and my country will accept the blame," Mashiur added.

He also called on the WB to make public the names of the people who gave "false information to the bank."

"It's unjust and unlawful," he said, adding that the WB should hand these people over to the Bangladesh government.

Earlier on several occasions, Mashiur dismissed the allegation that he was a party to the "corruption conspiracy" that the WB had been insisting to have found in the bridge's project.

Recently, the WB has given a clear signal to the government that it would withdraw the cancellation of the pledged loan if the government met three conditions, including the removal of Mashiur.

During their India visit, Mashiur and Rizvi met Indian Power Minister M Veerappa Moily, Water Resources Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal, Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde and Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh. Tipaimukh power project, Teesta water-sharing, transit and transshipment, and implementation of the land boundary accord were among the issues discussed.

Mashiur claimed that India gave them all the information regarding the Tipaimukh project.

Foreign

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reports relating to the Washington meeting of September 5 were incorrect and misleading.

Besides, the reports were wrongly attributed to a foreign ministry press release. Even, the reports were inconsistent with the relevant press release of the US Embassy in Dhaka.

The statement also said the US Deputy Secretary of State had expressed the hope that Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement (Ticfa) between Bangladesh and US would be finalised "soon".

"But at no point was the 'signing' of Ticfa linked to the issue of duty-free access of Bangladeshi products to the US markets," the statement said.

The foreign ministry hoped for retraction of the "inaccurate reporting" by the segments of the media.

Colombia rejects FARC truce call

REUTERS, Bogota/havana

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos rejected a proposal on Thursday by leftist FARC rebels for a bilateral ceasefire during talks next month aimed at bringing an end to half a century of war.

The call for both sides to put down their weapons while talks are under way in Norway came earlier from leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia at a news conference in Havana.

The proposal and its rejection could complicate the process from the start as Santos is adamant that Colombian military operations would continue across "every centimetre" of the Andean nation.

"I have asked that military operations be intensified, that there will be no ceasefire of any kind," Santos said during an address at a military base in Tolimaida, close to the capital.

"We won't cede anything at all until we reach the final agreement," he added. "That should be very clear."

At its news conference, the FARC named two negotiators who will sit with government representatives in Oslo and later in Cuba to try to end a war that has left tens of thousands dead since it began in 1964.