

2 BCL men detained for beating up cop

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Two activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League beat up a police constable at the city's Baya police outpost yesterday evening for making them pull over their motorcycle for checking.

Police detained Russell and Samrat, members of the convening committee of Poba upazila unit BCL, in this connection.

Shamsul Arefin, officer-in-charge of Shah Makhdom Police Station, said constable Sunil of Baya police outpost signalled the two BCL men to stop at Baya Bazar. It enraged two, and a scuffle broke out.

Later on, Russell and Samrat went to the outpost, called Sunil outside and beat him up.

Other policemen rescued Sunil and detained the two BCL men.

PM's gift

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Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for the writers and organisers through her nephew and Bangabandhu's grandson Ridwan Mujib Siddique.

Hasina herself signed the copies of the book.

The writers and organisers said they had felt honoured to have received the gift.

Low paddy price

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constituency in Kishoreganj.

"People will say that you sit in the chair but you do not think about our sufferings," he said, expressing doubts whether people would vote in the coming election.

"Allah Bharosa (Allah knows) what happens," he said.

Hamid made the remarks at the Second National Haor Conference held at Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council in Dhaka.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith chaired the programme.

"Sometimes I think I have never failed (in election) and what is the point in losing at this age. It is better to go for retirement (stop participating in parliamentary election)," Hamid said.

But if he wants to retire at this stage of life, he said, he will have to do so with the dissatisfaction that he could do little for the development of the haor areas.

The Speaker's comments followed Jatiya Party lawmaker Mujibul Haque Chhunu's demand for ensuring fair prices of paddy.

Chhunu, also chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Haor, noted that farmers, especially in the haor areas, depend heavily on paddy. "Save us (people of the haor areas) by ensuring fair prices," he added.

Prices of paddy and rice fell after the harvest of Aman paddy at the end of last year, and continued to remain lower than that in the previous year.

In his speech, the finance minister admitted that the government did not succeed in ensuring fair prices of paddy.

Muhith said haor areas had a good harvest of rice last year, and the harvest is going to be good this year also due to building of rubber dams and submersible roads by the agriculture ministry. But increased production has given rise to the issue of fair prices.

"Prices have fallen this year. We are trying to ensure fair prices but we are yet to succeed. We also could not check the fall of prices despite public purchase (of rice)."

Muhith said one way of giving more support to farmers is providing subsidy for farm inputs. "We have continued this support for the last four years," he added.

Flying boat

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Leon, in Mexico, as he tested out his new equipment with an early morning flight.

Cramped in a seven foot boat the intrepid adventurer carried out the dry run as he prepares to fulfil his dream of crossing the Atlantic next year.

Accompanied by his copilot Nidia Ramirez, the adventurer will now fly across Mexico for 11 hours in the dry run.

A bystander said: "Everyone stood right next to it holding him down. Then they said launch and he let the ballast go and off he went - there was no stopping him. It went off like a rocket, it was amazing how quickly he lifted off."

Trappe, who had worked through the night with 20 helpers filling the balloons with helium, soared above the crowd and drifted perfectly towards a nearby lake to test the emergency landing procedure.

The "shake-out" test, which will give the team vital information about its capabilities, also included a landing and relaunch manoeuvre on a near by lake, to see if it was able to land safely on water.

Just 90 seconds after take off, Trappe cut away a several balloons and landed with a gentle splash on the water, skimming across for about four minutes. The 38-year-old then cut away a sand bag weighing the boat down.

Having checked the landings were in order he then ascended into the cloudless sky and tested the boat's built-in satellite communication equipment.

It is not the first time Trappe has taken to the sky powered solely by balloons, as he first wowed the world in May 2010 when he flew from England to Belgium dangling from helium balloons - just like the Disney "Up" character Carl Fredrickson.

Now the daredevil plans to take his ambition a little

further with an incredible world-first attempt from Maine, USA, to Paris, France in the boat.

Trappe, backed by a team of four scientists, has been brainstorming potentially life-threatening scenarios he will encounter, and testing them.

Depending on funding, Trappe plans to cross the Atlantic next year where he is expected to travel between 2,500 to 3,500 miles over three to six days.

He will float at between 18,000ft - 25,000ft and will net a world record for the highest cluster balloon flight when he climbs above a previous record of 21,600ft.

BNP slams

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They said the talk on sharia was nothing but an attempt to confuse people.

At a human chain in the capital, Mosharrif said the AL has always tried to enhance its image at home and abroad, by claiming to be a secular party.

The programme was organised by Shadhinota Forum demanding to know the whereabouts of Ilias Ali, a missing BNP leader.

Meanwhile, speaking at a programme marking the 36th death anniversary of Maulana Bhasani, organised by BNP, Tangail Unit, Fakhru said the AL's "double standard policy" has been shown through Hasina's speech.

While addressing a meeting of AL Central Working Committee at Gono Bhaban, on November 16, the Prime Minister, said those who had assaulted the police to hinder the war crimes trial could be tried "under the sharia law".

"The government knows how to deal with those who are attacking the police to save the war criminals. Besides, there are alternative means like sharia to try them," Hasina said

UN Council to hold emergency DR Congo talks

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council was to meet in an emergency session yesterday after UN attack helicopters launched missions against rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, diplomats said.

France's UN mission announced on its Twitter account that it had called for a meeting of the 15-nation body on the offensive launched by M23 rebels and that talks would start at 3:00pm (2000 GMT).

The UN mission in DR Congo, MONUSCO, said in a statement that M23 rebels had launched an offensive with "heavy weapons" early Saturday and that it had put peacekeepers into action as part of its mandate to "protect civilians."

"As part of this, 10 missions were carried out by its attack helicopters," the statement said.

The attack helicopters, provided by Ukraine, were put on standby on Friday after M23, former government troops who launched a mutiny in March, launched a surprise attack against the army just north of the Nord Kivu provincial capital of Goma.

The new fighting is concentrated around the town of Kibumba, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) north of Goma.

"MONUSCO is following the situation closely and will not tolerate any advance or action by M23 troops which would provoke panic in the civilians population," said the UN mission's statement.

Hay Festival

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"It was only through writing a novel in verse that I had the courage to write a novel at all," he said about his inspiring novel.

At a morning session, somebody asked Khademul Islam, editor of online journal Bengal Lights, if the online journals and ebooks herald the eventual extinction of printed books. He replied that he could not imagine a world without traditional publishing industry.

In another session titled "Lifelines", writer and academic Firdous Azim remarked that describing sexual encounters was something Bangladeshi women writers had not done yet. "I would ask them to start now," she said.

"So would I!" interjected the male moderator, Mahmud Rahman with humour.

On a similar note, seasoned Kolkata writer Debesh Ray, at another session, said the writers should focus on the body because the mind resides in it.

Syed Shamsul Haq boldly declared that translating poetry was impossible. He said one can "trans-create" poetry by taking the theme and create his/her own poem.

Kaiser Haq, who is known as a literary translator, said the translator must decide how much of the rhyme and structure of the original work he/she wants to retain.

"I don't want to write like Shakespeare," said Kaiser Haq to an aspiring writer, who suggested that she got discouraged by looking at the works of Shakespeare or Tagore. "What Shakespeare said is completely different from what I want to say in my work," he added.

Popular writer Anisul Hoque was present almost throughout the festival as he participated in different sessions.

Talking about how the festival benefited him as a writer, he said, "Philip Hensher read a translation of my book and said that he would advise translators in the UK to translate my work. On the other hand, I also read his work and found them very interesting. This exchange of opinions would not have been possible if it wasn't for Hay Festival Dhaka."

Tanks and self-propelled guns were seen near the sandy border zone on Saturday, and around 16,000 reservists have already been called to active duty.



People could be fooled by the name "Botanic" with an air of organicity but the fact is these cosmetic products have enough mercury in them to cause mercury poisoning. A mobile court yesterday sentenced the owner, his wife (also a director of Botanic) and a supervisor to two years' imprisonment and sealed off the factory.

Miracle herbal cosmetic

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was accompanied by officials of Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution in the drive, said the factory had been sealed, and all the products and equipment there had been seized.

Captain M Sohail, director of Rab's legal and media wing, told The Daily Star that the company has BSTI's approval but it was using ingredients that were not in the BSTI's guidelines.

The magistrate said the cosmetics company had been using toxic substances, including mercury, in their products.

Citing a report of Department of Dermatology

and Venereology at BSMMU, he said the chemicals are toxic to kidney and brain, and could lead to severe health problems.

Magistrate Anwar said Rab-1 officials collected samples of the company's herbal products from the market in the last one month and later got them tested at BSTI and Bangladesh Atomic Energy Centre.

Presence of toxic chemicals and ingredients was found in the cosmetic products of Botanic Aroma. The drive was launched based on the findings, he said.

Anwar said they also consulted a number of medical experts at Bangabandhu

Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) on the negative impact of those chemicals on human body.

In a report, the experts at BSMMU said cosmetics containing mercury are hazardous to health and may cause skin rashes and skin discoloration as well as reduction of resistance to bacterial and fungal infections.

The six company staff, who were fined Tk 1 lakh each, are General Manager MA Hasnat, Quality Control Manager Abdur Rouf, Production Manager Nurul Islam, Assistant Production Manager Emdadul Huq, and Abdus Sobhan and Mohammad Wahiduzzaman.

Tangail-3 goes to by-polls

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vacant after the death of ruling Awami League lawmaker Dr Matiur Rahman on September 13.

Shahidul Islam Lebu, former general secretary of AL's Ghatail upazila unit, was nominated for the polls by the AL parliamentary board.

Amanur Rahman Khan Rana, former religious affairs secretary of AL's Tangail district unit, is contesting the by-polls as an independent candidate, which led to his expulsion from the party on Friday.

Syed Abu Yusuf Abdullah Tuhin, HM Ershad's Jatiya Party-backed candidate and an industrialist, is another candidate in the polls.

Lebu's election symbol is boat, Rana's pineapple and

Tuhin's plough. No candidate from the main opposition BNP is contesting the by-election.

The Election Commission has already completed preparations in this regard and dispatched ballot boxes, with law enforcers ready to be stationed at the polling centres, commission sources said.

The number of voters in the by-polls is 2,71,329. Of them, 1,39,543 are females and 1,31,786 males.

Sharifa Khatun, upazila election officer, told The Daily Star that tough security measures have been taken to hold the polls freely and fairly.

A total of 67 out of the 96 polling centres were earlier identified as risky by the Election Commission. Web

cameras have been installed at those centres so that the commission can monitor them from the capital, said Sharifa.

A total of 27 officials from the Rapid Action Battalion, police and Ansar, including plain-clothes officials, will be deployed at each of the polling centers.

Besides, 24 additional police teams and six teams of the Border Guard Bangladesh will be patrolling the constituency. Six strike forces will remain ready to spring into action in case anything goes wrong.

Syed Khurshid Anwar, returning officer for the constituency, said the general, pre-election atmosphere was calm and peaceful.

70pc revenue pilfered

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in early 2009 due to international calls bypassing proper channels.

The call carriers were hired mostly on the basis of recommendations by some ministers, parliamentary standing committee men and lawmakers.

The BTCL did not follow its rules and regulations in awarding the contracts to these 40 call carriers between late 2009 and 2011, ACC sources said.

The carriers were appointed to improve the BTCL's international call quality.

The job of the call carriers is to aggregate calls, mostly from Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates and Singapore where many expats live.

The carriers rent STMI lines from BTCL, which connects Bangladesh to other countries, and transfer incoming international calls to BTCL. These carriers also convert incoming internet protocol calls (VoIP) to traditional calls using a machine, said experts.

The carriers are paid by other international carriers for carrying their calls to BTCL, which eventually connects the recipients of calls, getting a share of that money.

However, an ACC investigator said around 70 percent international call records had been erased from call details recorder (CDR) at BTCL offices in Moghbazar and Mohakhali exchanges in the capital since 2009.

Some CDRs remain traceless, helping call carriers to gobble up money they were supposed to pay BTCL, a state-owned company.

call carriers were involved in the corruption. The ACC has primarily detected BTCL officials were responsible for erasing call records.

The per-minute call, incoming or outgoing, earns around US 3 cents.

According to a rough estimate, the government is deprived of three crore minutes of revenue worth Tk 7.65 crore every day or a staggering Tk 2,774 crore a year.

An official of the three-member ACC enquiry team said, "In giving permission to the call carriers, the BTCL authorities did not take approval either from the post and telecommunication ministry or from the BTRC [the regulator] which the BTCL board was legally required to do."

The investigation found that most of the call carriers submitted fake bank guarantees, other required documents and addresses and BTCL did not properly verify those documents.

Sources said the call carriers get post paid facilities upon bank guarantee, but the BTCL never blocked their calls even though they had exceeded their call limits.

BTCL did not properly monitor the incoming calls, but early this year BTCL blocked around 80 carriers for their dues.

But illegal calls continue despite several carriers had been disconnected, sources said.

Md Abubakar Siddique, secretary in-charge of the telecom ministry, told The Daily Star that they would cooperate with the ACC investigation and take departmental action against

people found to be involved in the irregularities.

The three-member ACC team has started its enquiry in May this year and on November 5 it sued exacting BTCL managing director Abu Sayed Khan and 13 others for misappropriating government revenue of Tk 204.91 crore.

On that date, five cases were filed with Ramna Police Station in the capital against Sayed, five BTCL officers and eight officials of five international call carriers under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947.

In the last week of October, the ACC sued three other top officials of BTCL and the managing director of Sabil IT Ltd, an International Gateway operator, in connection with embezzling about Tk 3.27 crore.

The accused are BTCL member Mohammad Tawfiq, directors Mahbubur Rahman and AKM Asaduzzaman, former director (international) Mahafuzur Rahman and MD of Sabil IT AKM Mofidul Islam.

Asked when other people involved would be sued, the officer said they had nearly completed their enquiry and were completing some official procedures to file the cases soon.

Through an ordinance in 2008, the then BTTB (Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board) was split into BTCL. The government had then issued three private international gateways through an open auction. Recently, the government has issued more than 20 private international gateways licences.

Govt won't hold talks with Jamaat

Says home minister

A CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

Home Minister MK Alamgir yesterday reiterated that the government will not hold dialogue with Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami.

"There is no scope for holding dialogue with those who kill people, vandalise public property, disobey the country's law and attack policemen," he said.

Speaking at the foundation stone laying ceremony at Sachar Degree College in Chandpur, the minister said, "I have made it clear earlier that the government will not sit with Jamaat to talk about this."

He said that the incumbent government always prioritises development issues of the country and works accordingly.

People living in villages have been enjoying a lot of facilities under the tenure of this government, he added.

Earlier that day, Alamgir also laid the foundation stone of a madrasa in Kachua upazila.

Bal Thackeray

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and divisive politicians, Thackeray had been on a ventilator earlier after his health deteriorated sharply.

Security was enhanced across Mumbai and thousands of police and paramilitary personnel deployed on the streets to prevent violence following the death of Thackeray known for strident Hindutva ideology and rabble-rousing speeches.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who consoled Thackeray's death, appealed for calm and sobriety. He also spoke to Bal Thackeray's son Uddhav, the Shiv Sena executive president, to express condolence.

Thackeray's Shiv Sena party became synonymous with deadly communal violence during its campaign to protect local Marathi-speaking people and their culture from migrant workers.

The funeral for the founder and president of the Shiv Sena (the Army of Shivaji, a Maratha warrior-king who had fought against the Mughal empire) would be held today.

Nicknamed "The Tiger" because of his fearlessness and readiness to take on any opponent, a Bollywood film "Sarkar" has been made many believe loosely based on Thackeray's life. Veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan, his son Abhishek and daughter-in-law Aishwarya are in lead roles of the film.

Shiv Sena, which has controlled Mumbai's city council since mid-1990s, is a staunch ally of India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

President Pranab Mukherjee also consoled Thackeray's death and Manmohan Singh cancelled a dinner on Saturday night for BJP leaders to show respect for Thackeray.

A stream of politicians, cutting across party lines, and top Bollywood personalities had visited Thackeray's house in the past few days.

It was Shiv Sena which renamed Bombay into Mumbai to show its Marathi pride.

A self-confessed admirer of Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler, Bal Thackeray was one of the most controversial figures who was disenfranchised for six years by the Election Commission on the charge of communally provocative speech.

Born on January 23, 1926 to a social activist father who played a key role in the movement to establish the Maharashtra state of Maharashtra, Bal Thackeray began life as a political cartoonist.

But he later became more involved in calling for greater rights for local Marathi-speaking people and protecting their culture and language from migrant workers.