

Xmas today

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The biggest religious festival of the Christians, Christmas is a celebration of rebirth, new beginning, forgiveness and peace, and renewing relationship with God and humans.

The celebrations start on the Christmas eve with singing of carols in public places like lobbies, restaurants and lounges. The festivities also include decoration of Christmas trees with colourful lights, distribution of gifts by Santa Claus to children, family gatherings, feasts and special church prayers.

The day is a public holiday. President Zillur Rahman, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia greeted the people of the Christian community on the occasion.

Zillur, in his message, said Jesus Christ is one of the greatest men of the world who came in different ages to lead the mankind towards the path of welfare and truth.

The premier said establishing peace and justice in the world was one of the goals of Jesus Christ. "Jesus Christ sacrificed his life for the hapless and hungry people."

Khaleda Zia, in her message, said the greatest Jesus Christ had inspired his followers to establish truth and justice.

Security measures have been beefed up across the country deploying adequate police and Rab personnel to ensure peaceful celebration of Christmas.

Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar along with private TV channels and radio stations will broadcast special programmes, while national dailies will publish supplements highlighting the significance of the day.

Meanwhile, the reception programme, scheduled for today afternoon at Bangabhaban on the occasion of Christmas Day, has been postponed due to unavoidable circumstances, said a PID handout yesterday.

Duty-free

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The deadliest fire at Ashulia-based Tazreen Fashion killed 112 workers on November 24.

The same letter was sent to the European Union, Commerce Secretary Mahub Ahmed told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

The US and EU are two largest export destinations of Bangladesh.

"In the letters, we have mentioned the government's stance regarding the Tazreen incident," Mahub said without going into details. He declined to say what steps the government took after the blaze.

Under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), 97 percent of Bangladeshi export goods get duty-free access to the US.

However, the GSP does not offer duty-free access for textiles, which account for up to 80 percent of the country's exports.

As a result, exporters of Bangladesh have to pay 15.30 percent duty for exporting garment items to the American market. The country pays more than \$600 million duty annually for a little more than \$5 billion export to the US.

On January 24 this year, Bangladesh attended a hearing at the United States Trade Representative on whether it should remain part GSP, after trade union AFL-CIO applied for discontinuation of the facility for the country on the ground of deteriorating labour rights environment.

Earlier, it attended the USTR hearing in 2009 and 2007.

Another senior official of the commerce ministry said generally the USTR calls for hearing on GSP in every three year. The next hearing might take place in 2015, the official said asking not to be named.

Mercury to dip

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plexes, officials of the Civil Surgeon's Office said.

Residential Medical Officer of Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital Dr Nobur Rahman said it had become difficult for them to take care of the increasing number of patients.

A large number of people, especially children and the elderly, are being affected by cold related diseases like fever, cough, bronchitis, asthma, diarrhoea and pneumonia.

Met officer Bazlur Rashid said the problem is with dense fog that gripped mainly northwestern region and the central part of the country including Dhaka, Tangail and Mymensingh over past several days. The fog is also affecting some northern districts including Jessore and Kushtia, he added.

Dense fog blocks the sunlight and enhances a feeling of cold wave that occurs at a temperature below 10 degrees Celsius. It heavily disrupts movement of ferries, launches and highway vehicles. It may also lead to accidents on the highways in case of reckless driving.

Temperature in Rajshahi yesterday varied between 12 and 16 degrees Celsius, which is normal at this time of winter, said Rashid. Temperature in Dhaka was approximately 13 degrees yesterday and may slightly fall today.

Flight operations at Shahjalal International Airport are mostly normal except between 11:00pm

and 8:00am due to runway repair work.

Ferry services on Mawa-Kawrakandi route which were halted since 1:00am resumed around 7:00am yesterday, writes our Munshiganj correspondent quoting Shekhor Chandra Roy, assistant manager of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC).

Ferry services on Mawa-Kawrakandi and Paturia-Daulatdia routes faced disruption for hours due to poor visibility triggered by the dense fog.

Around 400 vehicles got stuck at both Mawa and Kawrakandi terminals.

Bus passengers and cargo vehicles bound for 21 southern districts faced untold sufferings due to the dense fog, which is leaving an adverse impact on businesses of agricultural products.

The services later resumed at 2:30am after the fog disappeared. Ashraf Ullah Khan, manager of BIWTC at Aricha Ferry Ghat, said two ferries carrying about 80 vehicles remained stuck in the mid-river.

Sale of second-hand warm clothes has shot up at makeshift shops in different areas of Narail district as heavy fog and biting cold have made the life of people miserable, reports our Narail correspondent.

Suranjit

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by January 2.

The tribunal, on its own motion, issued the show cause notice following a report of Bangla daily Amar Desh, published on December 23, quoting Suranjit's speech at a rally of Awami League-led 14-party alliance a day earlier.

The newspaper quoted Suranjit as saying, "The next year is 2013. Verdict of 14 identified war criminals has already been finalised. Trial of these 14 war criminals would be completed anytime within 2013. Their verdict of execution will also be implemented. None would be able to resist it."

In its order, the tribunal said Suranjit's comment in prima facie appears "to be extremely derogatory to the independence of the tribunal, causing substantial obstruction to the administration of justice."

"Thus we [tribunal] need to have an explanation from Suranjit Sengupta as to how and on what basis he has foretold such imaginary comment in public on a sub-judice matter," said Justice Hassan.

The tribunal on November 13 asked the high-ups in the government to exercise restraint and be careful in making comments on a sub-judice matter.

It also disposed of two separate contempt of court petitions against Awami League leaders Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and Matia Chowdhury on the day.

On December 4, the tribunal also issued a show-cause notice upon the editor and a reporter of the Bangladesh Pratidin for publishing report setting an "imaginary timeline" of passing verdict in the case of Quader Mollah.

The matter, however, was disposed of as the respondents offered unconditional apology before the court.

Lobbying

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Central Working Committee (ALCWC), the highest decision-making body of the party.

The last council held on July 24, 2009, re-elected Sheikh Hasina party president for the sixth time and elected LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam its general secretary.

A large number of partymen were seen gathering at the party offices every day and staying there until late at night for lobbying with top leaders to get their support.

"I won't say they are lobbying. As the country's oldest and largest political party, Awami League has a very large number of leaders and workers. It is obvious that they will through the party offices ahead of the council," AL Organising Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim told this correspondent.

He said there is of course a competition among the rank and file of the party to become central leaders. Thus a festive mood has been created among them centring the national council.

Meanwhile, a small number of ALCWC members are also lobbying with the party high command to get more important position than they have now. Some leaders want to be included in the AL Presidium, the party's highest policy-making body, while some central committee members aspire to get posts of departmental secretaries, party insiders said.

The insiders also said a few leaders are likely to be dropped from the central committee and they are trying frantically to remain in it.

A top policymaker said some central leaders would be dropped from the party this time for their poor performance and involvement in anti-organisational activities.

Contacted, AL Presidium Member Matia Chowdhury said some new faces would be included in the party leadership as there is a proposal to expand the central committee subject to approval of the committee and the national council.

Hall-Mark not alone

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On October 4, the ACC filed 11 cases against 27 top officials of Sonali Bank and Hall-Mark for misappropriating over Tk 1,568 crore [funded portion of Tk2,686 crore].

ACC sources said 14 cases will be filed against T and Brothers Chairman Jinath Fatema and her two sons Touhid Hossain, managing director of the company, and Taslim Hasan, director of the firm.

The ACC enquiry found that they had misappropriated depositors' money showing fake documents in inland bill purchase (IBP), payment against document and pre-shipment credit.

The trio prepared fake documents posing as both buyers and sellers of their non-existent sister concerns, including Dress Me, and misappropriated depositors' money.

Five cases will be filed against Paragon Knit Composite Ltd Managing Director Saiful Hasan Raja, and its directors Abdullah Al Mamun and Mukul Hossain.

According to the ACC

enquiry, they prepared fake documents to open IBP against their non-existent sister concerns -- Mondal Traders, Paragon Printing and Packaging, and Paragon Knit Ltd.

Three cases will be lodged against DN Sports Chairman Motaher Uddin Chowdhury, his daughter Mahmida Akhter Shikha, director of the company, and her husband Shafiqur Rahman, managing director of the firm, for misappropriating money showing fake documents.

Three more cases will be filed against Nakshi Knit Chairman Amena Begum, her husband Mohammad Abdul Latif, managing director of the company, and his brother Jamir Hussain, director of the firm, for swindling money through four non-existent sister concerns.

One case will be lodged against Khanjahan Ali Sweater Ltd Chairman Tajul Islam, its Managing Director Jalil Sheikh, and directors Rafiqul Islam and Mir Mohammad Shawkat Ali.

Sonali Bank's Ruposhi

Bangla Hotel branch executive manager AKM Azizur Rahman, assistant general manager Saiful Hasan and executive officer Md Abdul Matin will be accused in all 26 cases, along with some high officials of the bank's head office, said ACC sources.

However, the names of the high-ups of the bank's head office could not be known immediately.

Following its investigation in May, the central bank instructed Sonali Bank to take necessary action against 31 of its officials.

Later, Sonali Bank carried out a functional audit in its Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch, and found that Azizur Rahman and Saiful Hasan had extended unauthorised loans to Hall-Mark and five other companies.

The audit report said the branch manager showed utter negligence to banking rules in sanctioning those loans.

On August 30, Sonali Bank suspended 17 of its officials over the fraud.

Fakhrul

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Sessions Judge's Court refused the prayers filed challenging an earlier denial of bail by another court.

On December 11, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court rejected two bail petitions by Fakhrul in the same cases and sent him to jail.

During the hearing yesterday, defence counsels claimed that the cases filed against Fakhrul were false as a political leader like him cannot vandalise a waste disposal truck.

Oposing the bail petitions, the prosecution said the accused was the key planner of acts of sabotage centring the opposition's road blockade on December 9.

The BNP-led 18-party alliance enforced the blockade demanding restoration of the caretaker government system. Police on the same day filed the cases with Paltan and Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Stations.

The following day, law enforcers arrested the BNP leader before the party's central office at Nayapaltan. The arrestee is now in Kashimpur jail in Gazipur.

Fakhrul has been put behind bars twice during the tenure of the incumbent government.

On May 15, he was sent to jail in an arson case. He walked free on bail granted by the High Court.

Muggers

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Express from Kamalapur Railway Station around 5:15am to join their factory.

Ripon's brother Monirul Islam Rana said a gang of three muggers, who had already got on the compartment posing as passengers, swooped on the two around 10 minutes after the train started moving.

"They first tied Nayan neck with a belt and then Ripon," Rana told The Daily Star. Ripon had fainted after he was tied up. The muggers took away money, mobile phone and documents from the victims. Both had Tk 4,000 in cash.

The muggers then pushed Ripon off the train through the window and then Nayan through the door, he added.

Locals rushed them to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Later, Nayan was shifted to Trauma Centre on Mirpur Road where he underwent two surgeries. Ripon was taken to his Sabujbagh residence after he was released that day.

Alauddin Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Kamalapur Police Station, confirmed the report to The Daily Star.

On November 19, a doctor was pushed off the running Turag Express at Jaydevpu area. He was succumbed to his injuries at a city hospital on November 28.

Mexican police official resigns ahead of shake-up

AFP, Mexico City

One of Mexico's top federal police officials has announced his resignation, rejecting charges of corruption and promising to elaborate on his motivation after he steps down in January.

The move by Luis Cardenas Palomino, the top cop in charge of regional security, comes as President Enrique Pena Nieto seeks to bring the federal police under the control of the interior ministry as part of a major security overhaul.

Cardenas Palomino faces no charges of wrongdoing, but under his watch there was a shoot-out in June between police in the Mexico City airport that killed three officers, and an attack by federal police in August on a US diplomatic vehicle that wounded two US agents.

"After 23 years of public service, I have made the decision to move into the private sector," Cardenas wrote in an open letter posted on Saturday on Facebook, revealing his intention to resign on December 31.

Textbook job done well

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the capital's Residential Model School and College by distributing new textbooks to the students.

As of yesterday, more than 99 percent of around 10.78 crore primary and 89 percent of some 11.47 crore secondary level textbooks had been printed and sent, National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) statistics show.

Over 93 percent textbooks for ebtadai and dakhil students have already been dispatched, according to the statistics.

Although the NCTB set December 15 as the deadline for all textbooks reaching the upazilas, a portion of the secondary textbooks missed the deadline.

NCTB officials attribute this to transport constraints created mainly by the recent political programmes like hartals and blockades. They hope that the rest will be sent to the destinations by December 28.

Printing such huge numbers of textbooks for a new curriculum was a massive challenge, the education minister said, adding the NCTB will make corrections if they find any errors in the books.

This time, major modifications have been made to

111 textbooks of class I-IX after 17 years.

With suggestions of 550 teachers, academics and experts, the government modified the textbook curriculum in line with the recommendations of national education policy of 2010.

"There is nothing to worry about textbooks," NCTB Chairman Prof Mostafa Kamal Uddin told The Daily Star. "We tried to get the printing job done smoothly and, having learned from our past mistakes, we were able to get over the hurdles."

This year the total number of textbooks has hit a record high as the government for the first time is providing supplementary textbooks on English and Bangla grammars to class VI to IX free of cost.

It has already printed around 3.29 crore copies of supplementary textbooks on the subjects, said NCTB sources.

They said distributing these books free of charge will save the 8.55 crore secondary students around Tk 256 crore.

The number of textbooks distributed was over 22.10 crore last year and 18.68 crore in 2010, when the government started free

distribution among the primary and secondary students at the very beginning of the academic session.

Previous governments provided books only to primary students while secondary students had to buy theirs. They had to buy the books well into the first quarter of the academic session due to an artificial crisis created reportedly by a syndicate of printers and government officials.

The NCTB officials said it took a little more time to print the secondary level books as they were printed under the new curriculum.

Wishing anonymity, an NCTB official who is responsible for textbook distribution said, "After getting the curriculum, we first printed textbooks for class VI and VII and then those for class IX."

He said they are planning to send the remaining secondary level books first outside Dhaka as the capital has already got more than 76 percent of the books it needs.

This year, three Indian printers won the contract for the supply of some 3.29 crore copies while 13 local organisations printed the rest. They have all delivered the copies on time, said NCTB officials.

Trojan horse therapy

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the journal Cancer Research showed, tens of thousands of viruses were released to kill the cancerous cells.

Experts labelled the study "exciting," but human tests are still needed.

Using viruses to destroy rapidly growing tumours is an emerging field in cancer therapy, however one of the challenges is getting the viruses deep inside the tumour where they can do the damage.

"There's a problem with getting enough virus into the tumour," Prof Claire Lewis from the University of Sheffield told the BBC.

She leads a team which uses white blood cells as "Trojan horses" to deliver the viral punch. 'SURFING'

After chemotherapy or radiotherapy is used to treat cancer, there is damage to the tissue. This causes a surge in white blood cells, which swamp the area to help repair the damage.

"We're surfing that wave to get as many white blood cells to deliver tumour-busting viruses into the heart of a tumour," said Prof Lewis.

Her team takes blood samples and extract macrophages, a part of the immune system which normally attacks foreign invaders. These are mixed with a virus which, just like HIV, avoids being attacked and instead becomes a passenger in the white blood cell.

In the study, the mice were injected with the white blood cells two days after a

course of chemotherapy ended.

At this stage each white blood cell contained just a couple of viruses. However, once the macrophages enter the tumour the virus can replicate. After about 12 hours the white blood cells burst and eject up to 10,000 viruses each - which go on to infect, and kill, the cancerous cells.

GONE
At the end of the 40-day study, all the mice who were given the Trojan therapy were still alive and had no signs of tumours.

By comparison, mice given other treatments died and their cancer had spread. Prof Lewis said: "It completely eradicates the tumour and stops it growing back."

She said it was a "ground-breaking" concept, but cautioned that many remarkable advances in treating mice failed to have any effect in people.

She hopes to begin human trials next year. Dr Emma Smith, from Cancer Research UK, said: "Harnessing the body's own immune system to deliver a deadly virus to tumours is an exciting approach that many scientists are pursuing."

"This study shows it has the potential to make chemotherapy and radiotherapy more effective weapons against cancer."

She said the research was still at an early stage and tests to show it is safe and effective in humans are still needed.

Dr Kate Holmes, head of research at Prostate Cancer

Sonali trio hid

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Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Mostafizur Rahman passed the order after two assistant directors of ACC, who are also the investigation officers of the cases, produced them before the court with a 14-day remand prayer.

Previously, in his statement under Section 164, Managing director of Hall-Mark Group Tanvir Mahmud said the trio used to hide the forged documents of LC and Inland Bill Purchase (IBP) from the bank authorities, through which the scam was committed, Deputy Commissioner of ACC Mir Mohammad Zainul Abedin Shibly told reporters at his office in the capital.

The Sonali Bank's Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch, which had disbursed over Tk 1,568.49 crore in loan to Hall-Mark between October 2011 and May this year, used to send the copies of forged IBP and LC to the GM and the DGMS

as per banking rules, but suspended GM Mahidur did not inspect the branch timely during his tenure, said Shibly.

He said GM Mahidur in collaboration with others kept from inspecting the branch only to make the scam a success.

On October 4, after two and a half months' investigation, the ACC filed 11 cases against 27 top officials of Sonali Bank and Hall-Mark Group for misappropriating over Tk 1,568 crore of depositor's money. The amount is a portion of the total money swindled, according to the investigation.

Seven of the accused are officials of Hall-Mark, including its owner Tanvir Mahmud, while the rest of Sonali Bank, including its former managing director Humayun Kabir.

The cases were filed under the anti-money laundering and corruption prevention acts.

Mali fighters destroy more Timbuktu tombs

AFP, Bamako

Armed groups occupying Timbuktu in northern Mali used pickaxes on Sunday to smash up any remaining mausoleums in the ancient city, an Islamist leader said.

The rebels' ruthless implementation of their version of Islamic law comes just days after the United Nations approved a military force to wrest back control of the conflict-ridden area.

"Not a single mausoleum will remain in Timbuktu, Allah doesn't like it," Ansar Dine leader Abou Dardar told AFP. "We are in the process of smashing all the hidden mausoleums in the area."

Witnesses confirmed the claims and one resident, who said he belongs to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), another militant group occupying the city since a March coup plunged the west African state into chaos.

Anything that doesn't fall under Islam "is not good. Man should only worship Allah," Mohamed Alfoul said of the mausoleums, which the armed Islamists consider blasphemous.

The vandalism of the Muslim saints' tombs in the

UNESCO World Heritage site came a day after other Islamists in the northern city of Gao announced they had amputated two people's hands.

The continued strict application of sharia law is seen as a sign that the armed Islamist groups are unfazed by the UN's green light for the African-led military operation.

Planners have said any intervention cannot be launched before September next year. French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian however told Monday's edition of La Croix newspaper that he thought it could be launched in the first half of 2013.

In July, Islamists destroyed the entrance to a 15th-century mosque in Timbuktu, the so-called "City of 333 Saints."

"The Islamists are currently in the process of destroying all the mausoleums in the area with pickaxes," one witness said.

"I saw Islamists get out of a car near the historic mosque of Timbuktu. They smashed a mausoleum behind a house shouting 'Allah is great, Allah is great'," another resident told AFP.