



PHOTO: COURTESY

AK-22 rifle, bullets and explosives seized at Kamalapur railway station in the capital yesterday. For the second day in a row, law enforcers recovered arms and explosives from railway stations.

Another AK-22 rifle, ammo recovered

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said, which belonged to Shamim alias Abdullah arrested the day before along with Nurul Islam after a similar bag was recovered from their overhead luggage rack in a Dhaka-bound train from Chittagong.

Abdul said he suspected there was a connection between the two bags recovered in the two consecutive days.

"The arrestees might have carried both bags. One was recovered on Monday. The other was left in the train. Then someone left that bag on the pile of slippers inside the railway station," he added.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court granted police 10 days' remand of the arrestees.

Asked about the ID card, Shamim confessed before police

that they had been carrying the bags for some money, the OC claimed. The police gathered more information from him but will not reveal those for the sake of investigation, he said.

Law enforcers suspect that any militant organisation might have wanted to use those modern arms and ammunition to carry out devastating activities in the capital.

Govt found not serious

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The ruling also comes six months after the government passed a stringent food safety law, replacing the Pure Food Ordinance of 1958.

But despite the new law, food adulteration continues unabated.

Under the law, the maximum punishment for food adulteration is 14 years' jail sentence.

The food ministry had originally drafted the law providing for death penalty as highest punishment for the offence, but the cabinet changed it.

Yesterday, an HC bench comprising Justice Mirza Hussain Haider and Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar also directed the government to inform it within 20 days about the steps taken against those responsible for poisoning food items.

The court asked the health and food secretaries and director general of Bangladesh Standards and

Testing Institution (BSTI) to submit to it a report to this effect by May 18.

It issued the rule on the authorities concerned to explain why they should not be directed to ensure production and sale of safe food and to take legal action against the people responsible for marketing and selling adulterated food.

Nine top government officials, including the secretaries of health, food, law, commerce and industries ministries, inspector general of police and directors general of BSTI and directorate of health services, are respondents to the rule.

Supreme Court lawyer Kazi Mynul Hasan filed the petition, requesting the HC to pass necessary orders to stop food adulteration and punish the culprits.

Earlier in 2010 and 2012, the HC had directed the police to file cases against food adulterators under the

Special Powers Act of 1974. The law provides for death penalty as maximum punishment for the offence.

But there is no known instance that a person got the capital punishment for food adulteration, although the government set up food courts in all the districts last year and enacted a tough food safety law in October.

Quoting a FAO-sponsored test at a government laboratory -- National Food Safety Laboratory -- this newspaper reported on Monday that 40 percent of the 82 food samples tested in the lab contained banned pesticides and toxic substances beyond permissible limits.

Carrot, bean, tomato, lettuce, capsicum, banana, apple, pineapple and mango were contaminated with highly toxic pesticides. And the presence of banned pesticide Aldrin was found in milk, the test found.

Digitisation won't resolve land issues

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land-related case has been going on in court over the last 16 years.

Low-level land officials are involved in corruption. They help land grabbers and rich people make fake documents and grab lands, alleged the director general.

Indigenous people, Hindus, women, and owners of small plots of land are the worst sufferers and deprived of services at land offices.

In most countries, people get all land-related services, including that for land records and registrations, from a single office. But in Bangladesh, three offices provide the services, causing hassles to people.

Land Minister Shamsur Rahman Sherif, who was present as the chief guest, said the government will go tough on land grabbers and corruption in the sector to ensure land rights of the marginal people.

He said land grabbers are very powerful, and urged the civil society and non-government organisations to extend support to the government.

Philippe Jacques, head of cooperation of the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh, said the land digitalisation project is very crucial for Bangladesh, and they intend to expand their involvement in the land reform project.

Sanjeeb Drong, secretary general of Bangladesh Forum for Indigenous People, described how indigenous people are deprived of land rights despite the government commitments to protecting their rights.

Shamsul Alam, national project director of Strengthening Access to Land and Property Rights for All Citizens of Bangladesh, presented the key features of the pilot project.

With the EU's financial support, the government is implementing

the project in three upazilas -- Jamalpur Sadar, Manoharpur of Rajshahi and Amtoli of Barguna.

Under the project, Khas land will be recovered after a digitised land survey in the upazilas. Then the land will be given to landless people. All land owners will receive a certificate from the land office, said Alam.

The project will help protect the land rights of marginal people, he added.

Shahidul Haque, director of Uttaran, gave a presentation on the Sustainable Access to Land Equality project that promotes digitalisation of land records and survey in Bangladesh.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, chaired the discussion.

Monzu Morshed, deputy chief of CARE's Shouhardo project, and Segufta Islam Emily, an Awami League lawmaker, also spoke there.

Anti-Ershad group runs JP

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are also trying to ensure that the JP chairman, who has quite a record of flip-flops during crucial political times in the past, does not make any such move in future. Because of such U-turns of Ershad, the party has so far split four times.

These leaders think the party needs to be saved by neutralising Ershad as his whimsical back-flips are detrimental to the organisation.

Ershad's political somersaults were most evident ahead of the one-sided January 5 parliamentary election when he kept switching stances frequently, leaving most JP leaders confused and directionless. It was then these "anti-Ershad" leaders decided to move for a change in the party's steering wheel.

They made Ershad's spouse Raushan Ershad, senior presidium member of the party, the opposition leader following the election. The party gelled well with the ruling AL as well. Despite being the opposition in parliament, it secured three berths in the cabinet, an unprecedented happening in the history of Bangladesh.

Ershad now has no future in the party he created in 1986, says JP leaders.

"Following his U-turns ahead of the last election, he can't be trusted

again," said a senior JP leader, preferring anonymity.

Besides, the former military strongman's "possible conviction" in Gen Manzur murder case is another reason to make him "powerless" in the party, added the leader. Ershad will remain the figure-head only, said JP insiders, adding if Ershad is convicted in the case, Raushan will be made the chairman.

Relieving Ruhul Amin Hawlader from the post of secretary general of the party was an important step to wresting power from Ershad. Hawlader supported Ershad every time the latter was against participating in the January 5 elections.

Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu, who has good links with the AL high command, has been given the office of the secretary general so that the JP could operate smoothly under the shadow of the government.

Against this backdrop, the presidium members and the lawmakers of the party met on Sunday to discuss reforms. Ershad chaired the meeting.

Now the reformist leaders are planning to strengthen the organisation across the country in a bid to save the party from an "existential crisis".

"Jatiya Party's debacle in the

recent upazila elections was a reflection of the party's sorry state," Kazi Feroz Rashid, a senior presidium member of the JP, told The Daily Star.

In the recently held upazila elections, the JP-backed candidates won only three chairman posts against 455, and 16 vice chairman posts against 910.

Golam Mosih, personal secretary of Raushan, said the JP has lost its character as an independent political party since it has long been playing the role of a catalyst in taking either the AL or the BNP to power. So, the party requires a major overhauling and new strategy.

In a bid to win public support, the JP now plans to speak against the government on popular issues, alongside the BNP. At the same time, the JP ministers would help people with jobs and other government facilities.

The party currently has three memberships in the cabinet -- water resources minister, state minister for local government and rural development and state minister for labour and manpower.

Sources said the JP will also try to net in those leaders of the BNP and the AL in district levels who have popularity but got distanced from their party high command.

2 robbers killed in 'shootout'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Two forest robbers were killed in a "shootout" between their cohorts and Rab members near Bhadra camp in western Sundarbans yesterday afternoon.

The deceased were identified as Dulu, 42, ringleader of Dulu gang, and Bachchu, 38, the gang's second-in-command. They hailed from Khulna and Bagerhat districts.

Lt Commander Md Gulzer Hossain said that, acting on a tip-off, a Rab-8 team detained six members of a forest robber gang at Jeti Ghat area early yesterday.

The team also recovered nine firearms and 300 bullets from their possession.

The detainees are Raju Shikder, Abu Taleb, Ibrahim Hawlder, Jahangir Mallik, Nurullah Sheikh and Kamal Sheikh.

As the law enforcers took the detained robbers to the Bhadra camp area around 3:30pm, their associates opened fire on the Rab personnel from a boat.

The law enforcers in retaliation fired back, triggering a 15-minute gunfight, Lt Commander Gulzer said.

At one stage, the gang members anchored their boat on the edge of a canal and fled into the deep forest.

Later, Rab members recovered the bodies of Dulu and Bachchu and 400 bullets from the deck of the boat.

Laughing can

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and learning ability in the elderly.

Researchers at the Loma Linda University wanted to find out if laughter altered its effects.

Dr Lee Berk, who also worked on the study, said: "It's simple, the less stress you have the better your memory."

"Humour reduces detrimental stress hormones like cortisol that decrease memory hippocampal neurons, lowers your blood pressure, and increases blood flow and your mood state."

"The act of laughter -- or simply enjoying some humour -- increases the release of endorphins and dopamine in the brain, which provides a sense of pleasure and reward."

Gurinder Singh, who led the study, showed a 20-minute laugh-inducing funny video to a group of healthy elderly individuals and a group of elderly people with diabetes.

The groups were then asked to complete a memory assessment that measured their learning, recall, and sight recognition.

Their performance was compared to a control group of elderly people who also completed the memory assessment, but were not shown a funny video.

The research team found a significant decrease in cortisol concentrations among both groups who watched the video.

"Our research findings offer potential clinical and rehabilitative benefits that can be applied to wellness programmes for the

India set to choke

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Durgapur and Namatari villages fear that once the barrage is built, their crops would go without water during the dry season and their villages would be flooded when the barrage releases water during the rainy season.

At least 800 acres of cropland in Putibari, Dighaltari, Durgapur and Namatari villages would be facing drought and at least 500 families affected directly, said Ashrafur Islam, a farmer of Putibari.

"We have been obtaining great production using irrigation water from the Gidari and we are mostly dependent on our agriculture," said farmer Iskat Ali of the same village.

Al-Mamun, sub-divisional engineer of Water Development Board in Lalmonirhat, too said four bordering villages would be flooded during the rainy season and once a year they would face desert-like situation if India completed the barrage.

He said after seeing the barrage construction with binoculars, they had sent a letter to the Joint Rivers Commission in Dhaka last week.

However, Mir Sazzad Hossain, member of Joint Rivers Commission, on Sunday said he knew about the matter but his office had not received any letter regarding the matter.

"Once we get the letter from the Water Development Board or Border Guard Bangladesh, we will take up the matter and protest through the foreign ministry," he said.

UN must block flow of arms to Syria: HRW

AFP, Beirut

An international rights group yesterday called for the UN Security Council to block the flow of weapons to Syria's regime, which it said was launching indiscriminate attacks with "barrel bombs".

The call from Human Rights Watch came a day after a group of prominent legal experts urged the United Nations to deliver aid to rebel areas in Syria, even over objections from the Syrian government.

The New York-based rights group said it had documented 85 aerial attacks by the regime against opposition areas in the northern province of Aleppo since February 22 alone.

It urged the UN to block the flow of arms to the government and any group committing abuses against civilians in the war-torn country where an estimated 150,000 people have been killed in the past three years.

"The Security Council should impose an arms embargo on Syria's government, as well as on any groups implicated in widespread or systematic human rights abuses," HRW said.

Its statement comes more than two months after a February 22 Security Council resolution demanding an end to attacks on civilian areas.

HRW said that since then it "has documented at least 85 strike sites in (opposition-held) neighbourhoods of Aleppo city... including two government barrel bomb attacks on clearly marked official hospitals".

The strikes, most reportedly involving "unguided, high-explosive barrel bombs", have hit civilians and civilian objects "indiscriminately".

The group said attacks that cannot distinguish between fighters and civilians are "unlawful".

Such attacks "continue despite a United Nations Security Council Resolution unanimously passed on February 22, 2014, demanding that all parties in Syria cease the indiscriminate use of barrel bombs and other weapons in populated areas," HRW said.

Syrian government forces launched an aerial offensive targeting opposition areas on December 15.

Rohani hits back after attacks from hardliners

AFP, Tehran

Iran's President Hassan Rohani yesterday derided hardliners critical of his style of governance and outreach to the West, saying they do not speak for the country.

After a backlash stemming from rising prices of fuel, utilities and basic foods, Rohani's administration is increasingly coming under attack from ultra conservative camps.

"I am proud that the government has created a situation allowing everyone to easily talk and criticise -- even though sometimes (they) make a mountain out of a molehill," he said in remarks broadcast live on state television.

Deal signed

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"It is a matter of comfort that the site requires almost no resettlement and rehabilitation," he said. Besides, the plants can be operated with minimum disturbance to the nature, environment and eco-system.

Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, power, energy and mineral resources affairs adviser to the prime minister, requested the Chinese company to complete one unit within the next three years.

The project is a high priority for the country, he said.

McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm and trusted adviser to the world's leading businesses, governments and institutions, and credit rating agency Moody's underline that a rapid enhancement of Bangladesh's power generating capacity is more than essential, said Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali.

"We achieved 10,000MW electricity generating capacity last year. The government has unveiled its plan to generate 39,000MW power by 2030," he added.

3 killed as train rams bus

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carrying around 25 passengers, reached the level crossing, less than 200 yards off Kamalapur railway station, shortly after 10:00pm, said witnesses and police.

All vehicles came to a halt and lined up on both sides of the crossing as the gateman lowered the bars on both sides.

"Instead of queuing up, the bus took the wrong side of the road that was empty," said Mohammad Arif, driver of a human hauler, which was in the queue at the crossing.

It was raining at that time. As the bus tried to cross the railway track hurriedly, the train hit the vehicle in the middle and dragged it about 15 yards, he said.

"The passengers started screaming and asked the driver to stop. But he didn't," said Shah Ali, a passenger of the bus, who suffered minor injuries.

"Within seconds, we heard a big bang," he said.

Some of the bus passengers alleged that the gateman didn't lower the barrier.

Locals pulled some passengers out of the mangled bus.

Two passengers of the bus died on the spot while Nazu was declared dead after she was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Four train passengers also suffered injuries. One of them, Al Amin, was admitted to National Institute of Traumatology and Rehabilitation in critical condition.

Abdul Mazid, officer-in-charge of Dhaka Railway Police Station, held the bus driver responsible for the accident.

The gateman lowered the bars. But the driver ignored it and tried to cross the railway track hurriedly, he said.

The OC said they couldn't find the driver or the helper. He was also unsure whether they were among the dead.

Police seized the bus.

The gateman could not be found at the crossing.

Eight injured bus passengers were taken to the DMCH and five others to a local hospital.

Unique helpline for farmers

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the software after extensive soil tests throughout the country to identify specific fertiliser requirements in different regions, said Mokbul Hossain.

"It is yet another step to make a digital Bangladesh," said Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury at the inauguration of the website in Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council (Barc) auditorium yesterday.

Addressing as the chief guest at the ceremony, she said farmlands of the country had been declining by more than 68,000 hectares per year while food demand was increasing with the growing population.

So, balanced use of fertiliser could be a major contributor to increasing productivity, she told the programme organised by SRDI.

The government would welcome innovations in crop production in the hilly, char, salinity prone and haor areas where farmers had been facing difficulties in producing crops, said the agriculture minister.

Special guest at the ceremony, European Union Ambassador William Hanna, said use of fertiliser and pesticide is also related to food safety, which is a major issue in Bangladesh now.

He said he had visited many project areas and was impressed with the achievements of the farmers in enhancing crops and developing new technologies that help improve the soil quality.

Agriculture Secretary SM Nazmul Islam, Barc Executive Chairman Kamal Uddin, SRDI Director Syed Ali Nasim Khaliluzzaman and Emadul Haque of Katalyst also spoke at the programme.

Commercial Space Wanted

Airtel Bangladesh Limited is looking for a commercial space for rent at Motijheel Commercial Area. Facilities mentioned below are required in the establishment:

- Location should be beside main road
- Space should be on the ground floor
- Space size should be 2000 - 3000 sqft.
- Electricity load should be 75 KVA - 100 KVA
- Generator space/facilities required
- Statutory approvals from government authority

Interested building owners are requested to contact 01678128637 for any query and proposal.