

Traffic mess caused to welcome PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ismail Hossain, a resident of Gazipur, does not understand how and why public sufferings go unnoticed year after year during receptions and conventions through occupying the streets of the capital.

He came to the city yesterday to have his one-year-old child's check-up done at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

On his way home, he regretted his Dhaka visit, facing severe traffic congestion as thousands of Jubo League activists gathered on the streets and pedestrian walkways all the way from Jahangir Gate to Gono Bhaban around 12:30pm to welcome Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on her return from China.

Ismail waited at Shahbagh for one hour for a bus but none came by, as all the roads were congested, and

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Right, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina waves at the crowds on her way to the Gono Bhaban on her return from China yesterday. Left, people wait for transport at Farmgate while the city's traffic system almost collapsed as ruling party activists thronged the road from Jahangir Gate to the Gono Bhaban.



PHOTO: BSS/SK ENAMUL HAQ

ILLEGAL MIGRATION UNHCR worried about abuse of boat people

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has expressed concern over the rising abuse of people who have sailed from Myanmar and Bangladesh through the Bay of Bengal aiming at illegally migrating to other countries.

The UNHCR welcomed Bangladesh government's initiative to make a 'list' of the estimated 200,000 to 500,000 unregistered Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

"We hope the exercise will be carried out in accordance with international standards and that it will result in access to documentation,

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Witness testifies against Subhan

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Abdur Rahman Sarder, nephew of martyred Mohammad Ali Sarder of Sahapur village in Ishwardi, told International Crimes Tribunal-2 that his neighbour, Rajab Ali Biswas, was also killed on instructions from Subhan.

Rahman, the 12th prosecution witness in Subhan's case, gave a heart-wrenching description of the atrocities committed in their village on May 2, 1971 by the Pakistan army on provocation by Subhan.

Earlier, Jahanara Begum, wife of martyred freedom fighter Rajab Ali, said the Pakistan army had killed her husband and one of his friends before her very eyes after Subhan had identified the two on the day.

The Jamaat naye-e-ameer faces nine charges, including genocide, committed in Pabna during the nine-month-long war. Subhan, however, pleaded not guilty before the court.

Rahman, the 66-year-old day

labourer, said when he heard gunshots on the morning of May 2, 1971, he asked his family members to take shelter in safer places. But he and his uncle, Mohammad Ali, stayed back in their home.

He later went to a nearby road to observe the situation and found that the house of Principal Tayab Ali was burning. As he heard the sounds of two more gunshots from a nearby place, he hid himself inside a bamboo bush, the witness said.

"From that place, I saw Moulana Subhan, along with 20 to 25 Pakistani army men and five to six plainclothes men, approaching our home," he told the tribunal.

"Subhan pointed at my uncle, Mohammad Ali Sarder, and said, 'He is an Awami League man. We should not let him live. Finish him'," Rahman said, adding: "Upon orders from Subhan, the Pakistani army killed my uncle firing two shots."

After that Subhan's accomplices entered their houses and looted valuables before burning them, he said, adding that Subhan and his accomplices later entered the village and burned several other houses.

Rahman went on, around 1:00pm, he came out from the hideout and found the dead body of Mohammad Ali lying on the ground.

He later came to know from another of his uncles, Bakul Sarder, that their neighbours -- Rajab Ali and Shamsul Haque, a friend of Rajab, -- had also been killed.

The bodies of Rajab and Shamsul were found around 25 to 30 yards away from his uncle's body, Rahman said, adding: "Rajab Ali's wife [Jahanara Begum] had told me that Subhan Moulana ordered her husband's killing."

Rahman further said he had heard that his neighbours Chand Ali Pramanik, Akhter Pramanik, Anar

Pramanik and Hamezuddin had also been killed and he also saw their bodies.

"I heard that the Pakistan army, under the leadership of Subhan Moulana, set fire to the house of Chand Ali," he said, adding that he also saw the body of Rahim Pramanik at his house.

"I saw 10 to 12 burnt houses. I also heard that the Pakistani soldiers, who had accompanied Subhan Moulana, had torched the houses," said Rahman, who knew Subhan from 1970's election.

Subhan's lawyer Shahjahan Kabir had only one question for Rahman before the three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam adjourned the case proceedings until today.

Rahman will face further cross-examination today.

Tax proposals irk mobile operators

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mobile operators have urged the government to reconsider Tk 300 SIM tax, newly imposed Tk 100 SIM replacement tax, and a high corporate tax in order to continue the uninterrupted growth of the mobile telecommunication sector.

Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh (Amtob) made the suggestions at a press meet in the city's Ruposhi Bangla hotel yesterday.

The industry that is serving the customers with the lowest call tariff in the world is burdened with heavy tax, said TIM Nurul Kabir, secretary general of Amtob.

Operators are paying about Tk 55 to the government for every Tk 100 they earn, and even more taxation has been suggested in the proposed budget of

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Ismail Hossain and his wife went to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) at Shahbagh for the treatment of their ailing baby around 6:00am. Having visited the doctor, they waited for hours in vain for a bus to go back home to Gazipur. At around noon, they decided to walk to Farmgate, where another spell of wait began. However, it was not until 4:00pm when they got on a bus. To welcome Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on her return from China, ruling party activists occupied the thoroughfare from Jahangir Gate to the Gono Bhaban, obstructing public transport and thus throwing the city into utter traffic chaos.



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Almost all litchis

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the Poba demanded the government implement the Safe Food Act, 2013 immediately.

Abdus Sobhan, executive general secretary of Poba, said the tested fruits included mangoes, apples, berries, litchies and tangerines.

"We've used the formalin detection kit Formaldehyde Meter Z-300 to conduct the tests," he added.

Of the tested fruits, all 14 samples of black berries and 20 out of 21 samples of litchis were contaminated with formalin.

Out of 128 mangoes, 84 contained the toxic chemical while 11 out of 16 tangerines, and seven out of eight grapes were found to contain formalin.

The chemical was also detected in samples of water apple, guava, pineapple, and lemon.

Other than fruits, the Poba tested vegetables and milk for detecting formalin. "Tomatoes contained formalin more often than any other vegetable. Some samples of milk were found to have contained formalin too,"

mentioned Sobhan.

He observed that operating some mobile courts to punish the sellers of contaminated food was not enough.

"We need a strong monitoring system of the kitchen markets and enforcement of the Safe Food Act, 2013," he noted.

The Poba official urged the authorities concerned to bring into force article 25 C of the Special Powers Act, 1974 which has provisions of death penalty or rigorous imprisonment of up to fourteen years for food adulteration.

"Ingestion of this chemical can seriously harm pregnant women and children. It can also cause different types of cancer," he warned.

Quoting statistics from the National Board of Revenue, the Poba said a total of 529 tonnes of formaldehyde, the raw material of formalin, was imported in 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13.

Last year, the commerce ministry prohibited import of formalin without its permission.

Rampant use of chemicals

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pricier this year due to low output, the tendency of using chemicals to protect the fruit is very high.

Some varieties of mangoes are normally ripened early in the season than others, said Dr M Alim Uddin, chief scientific officer at the Fruit Research Centre of Rajshahi.

Among the varieties, Gopalbhog, Loukhna and Rani Pasand hit the market earlier, followed by Khirsapat, Himsagar, Langra and the king of mangoes, Fazli, one after the other, he added.

"Traders use toxic chemicals when they pluck some varieties of mangoes in advance. So buyers need to be careful about this," he mentioned.

Nazrul Islam, a trader at Banessor, said, "Some of us use calcium carbide to ripen mangoes like Khirsapat, Himsagar, Langra and Fazli within 24 hours."

"Some even apply formalin on Gopalbhog now as it is high time for ripening it," he mentioned, adding that the mango traders collect the chemicals from local shops selling fertilisers and seeds.

Mobile courts launched drives in local markets at least thrice in the last three days, but found nothing wrong.

But on Tuesday afternoon, a mobile court led by Executive Magistrate Sheikh Hafizur Rahman raided at least 12 mango hoarders' shops at Banessor and fined two mango traders Tk 75,000 for treating mangoes with calcium carbide and formalin. The court damaged mangoes worth Tk 1.50 lakh during

the drive.

It also fined a seed shop owner Tk 15,000 for storing date-expired seeds and selling chemicals in loose bottles.

"We suggest that growers use pesticides two to three times after the flowering and when the mangoes are of the sizes of grams and marbles. Growers are allowed to use pesticides two or three times more in cases of pest attacks," mentioned Dr Alim.

Spraying of chemicals on mangoes has been a common scene at the mango orchards of Godagari and Bagha upazilas of Rajshahi and also at the large market at Banessor, Puthia, in the last two weeks.

Growers said they use toxic pesticides, fungicides and vitamins like sevin powder, noin, tilt and mancozeb almost daily for ensuring attractive size, colour and skin of mangoes. At times, the total spray count of chemicals on mango plants reaches around 40 times.

Many growers in Godagari and Bagha upazilas this year mixed shampoo with pesticides and sprayed the mixture on mango trees for protecting the fruits from getting black spots which usually develop following rainfall.

"The growers will not spray chemicals on one or two trees for their own consumption. They hardly care about public health," said Mohammad Rassel, a youth of Bagha.

Some people who sprayed chemicals on trees without taking any protective measures complained of irritation and

Hold dialogue

FROM PAGE 16

Fakhrul told reporters yesterday after placing wreaths at the grave of the party founder, late president Ziaur Rahman, at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar with the leaders of the new committee of the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal.

He warned the government of tougher movements if the BNP chief's call for holding dialogue for polls was not realised.

On Sunday, Khaleda Zia told an EU delegation at her Gulshan office that her party was ready for dialogue with the government any time to reach a consensus on holding an inclusive parliamentary election.

However, the next day ruling party leaders, including its advisory council member Suranjit Sengupta and joint general secretary Mahubul Alam Hanif, on different occasions dismissed the possibility of any talks before 2019, saying the country did not have a situation that warranted dialogue.

They also asked the BNP leadership to wait till 2019 when the next parliamentary election is due to be held. Before that, there is no scope for dialogue regarding polls, but talks can be held on important national issues, they said.

Referring to the dialogue before the January 5 polls, Fakhrul said the AL had made this kind of remark before the polls but later it sat with the BNP twice, particularly after the visit of UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco to Dhaka.

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