



The wreckage of the bus that fell into a canal by the Khulna-Barisal highway in Rajapur yesterday. The driver lost control over the wheel while driving on even after one of the tyres deflated. PHOTO: STAR

Bus plunge

FROM PAGE 1
around 3:30pm, killing eight on the spot, said Masuduzzaman, officer-in-charge of Rajapur Police Station.

Another died on the way to Barisal Sher-E-Bangla Medical College Hospital where 22 of the injured in critical condition were being treated, he added.

Six of the deceased are Shaon, 35, son of Sabuj Mollah of Pataukhali's Lebukhali; Shaon's wife Kulsum alias Jorna, 28; Abul Kalam, 45, son of Joynul Abedin of Mehendiganj in Barisal; Advocate Mukul, 40, of Barisal; Shanti Rani Sheel, 19; and Sadhona Rani Sheel, 13, of Shonapara of Pirojpur. The rest could not be identified till 1:00am.

The bodies were kept at Rajapur Upazila Health Complex. The driver went missing after the accident.

Meanwhile, locals who worked alongside the police and fire service personnel in the rescue operation said the casualties could have been less if wreckers to salvage the bus had been brought in quickly.

"It took three hours for the first wrecker to arrive here from the Barisal city, a merely 40-minute distance. We saw people stuck under the bus. They were throwing their hands in the air for help. The bus was too heavy for us to move. If the wreckers came in time, we could save at least a few of them," said a local rescuer.

Endangered

FROM PAGE 16
The "weak and hungry" vultures were caught by the locals on Sunday and Monday, he said.

Even though, two of the twelve vultures were handed over to the Panchagarh district administration officials immediately, the other ones were recovered from the locals later, Tapan added.

After the recovery, the vultures were taken to the Social Forestry and Nursery Training Centre in Panchagarh, said Arshadul Haque, rang-officer of the forest department of the district.

Veterinary Surgeon Abdus Sobhan said the vultures received primary treatment at the centre and were shifted to Bangabandhu Safari Park in Gazipur later to be released there.

Govt moves

FROM PAGE 16
information ministry, has been made the member secretary of the committee. Other members of the committee include personnel from newsprint and electronic media, advertising agency, drama personalities and lawyers.

Names of other members of the committee could not be known immediately.

"We have kept all stakeholders in the committee," the secretary said, adding that the committee could include more people if needed. The committee, Murtaza said, would draft the law and work on the commission's structure, functions and jurisdictions.

The committee has been formed four months into the formulation of the National Broadcast Policy-2014. The cabinet on August 4 approved the policy that drew widespread criticisms from different media and rights organisations.

Many of those involved in the broadcast media said the government might misuse the policy in the name of maintaining standard of news, programmes and advertisements in the electronic media.

The committee has been given two months to suggest drafts of National Broadcast Act and three months for Broadcast Commission Act.

Qaisar, why?

FROM PAGE 1
years. She learnt that her birth is entwined with the birth of the nation.

"You are the child of Pakistani soldiers," the grandparents told her.

During the Liberation War, her mother, who had just been married, was raped by Pakistani troops in Jagadishpur area of Habiganj.

The victim later gave birth to a baby girl, who would be the first-ever war child to testify in Bangladesh war crimes trials.

The girl got the shock of her life as she first faced the bitter truth of her birth.

When one of the maternal grandfathers married her off, she thought her bad days were over.

But within a few months, her husband came to know it all and began to torture her. Eventually, she was sent back to the grandparents at Belghar village in Habiganj.

Meanwhile, her mother, who had been living with husband in another village, became a widow. She took her daughter to Sultanpur village in Habiganj.

They never got separated again. The war baby now works at a nursery, the only source of income for the two-member family.

"We are destitute, passing days in hardship," the mother told The Daily Star, requesting for government assistance. Now at 60, she is plagued by eye troubles.

Earlier this year, they testified against war crimes accused Syed Mohammad Qaisar.

Yesterday, a tribunal sentenced Qaisar to death for this rape and six other crimes including rape of another woman in Chunarughat of Habiganj.

The mother said she was happy to learn about the verdict from TV news at her neighbour's.

According to her testimony, in mid-August 1971, Qaisar and his men picked her up along with her father and uncle from their house and took them to the Pakistan army camp set up at Jagadishpur High School.

The army men raped her for 8-10 days at the camp where she used to hear screams of other women, she said.

One night she was dumped near Temunia Primary School on Qaisar's instructions.

"Within a few minutes, a storm began. My entire body was caked with blood and mud and my clothes were torn. I lied down the whole night under the open sky with insects crawling over my body," she said in her deposition.

In the morning, she managed to walk home, half a kilometre away.

"What was my fault? Why he [Qaisar]

Mob foils

FROM PAGE 16
flee the scene.

He said a group of miscreants intercepted a CNG-run auto-rickshaw carrying Jahir Uddin at Madam Bibir Hat on Chittagong-Dhaka Highway. He was returning home after withdrawing Tk 1.5 lakh from Islami Bank Colonel Hat branch in the port city.

Impersonating DB men, the kidnapers tried to force Jahir to get into the microbus. As he screamed for help, locals rushed in and surrounded the vehicle.

Later, they gave the kidnapers a good wallop and also set the microbus on fire. On information, police rushed to the spot and rescued them.

Two abductors, however, managed to flee scene with Tk one lakh from Jahir, said the ASP.

Jahir kept the money separately in his trousers pockets.

Vehicular movement on Chittagong-Dhaka Highway in that area remained stalled for around an hour.

Two cases, one in connection with mugging and other for mob beating, were being filed with Sitakunda Police Station, he added.

handed me over to Pakistani army for rape ... my daughter does not call anybody her father..." she cried during her testimony before the tribunal behind the closed doors.

The tribunal put the testimony in the verdict.

While adjudicating this rape charge, Justice Obaidul Hassan, chairman of the International Crimes Tribunal-2, said the act of rape during the war was most grave and justifiably proscribed.

"It was not an isolated incident of rape. It formed an attack against women in order to send a message of intimidation to the pro-liberation Bengali civilians."

He added, "The perpetrators had carried out the act of sexual violence as an instrument of threat to the civilians who took stance in favour of the war of liberation."

Another judge of the tribunal said Qaisar's order to dump the victim shows how he saw a woman's life, "possibly not worthier than a disposal syringe as she had become useless, she was just disposed of like leftovers of a fruit".

According to one of the charges, two Pakistan army men raped a Santal woman at her house in Chunarughat of Habiganj on May 11, 1971, after Qaisar showed them the victim.

Her father-in-law tried to save her only to be beaten up by Qaisar and other collaborators.

"What a perverted man the accused Qaisar was! It is indeed hard to believe that the accused Qaisar was a Bengali Muslim," the tribunal said.

"Accused Qaisar, by his act and conduct, eventually outraged the civility."

The tribunal observed, "War-time rape victims are the greatest mothers and sisters of the soil indeed. They are the integral part of our war of liberation. They are our pride. They fought for our independence, by laying their supreme self honour and bravery."

"The nation salutes them, their sacrifices. It is true that the trauma they sustained can never be minimised. But however, they should never be left untended and uncared as it makes the society, the nation, the humanity and our conscience seriously humiliated."

Tribalrebels

FROM PAGE 16
Calling it an "act of cowardice" in a Twitter post, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi late yesterday. Home Minister Rajnath Singh will be visiting the state today.

Police said NDFB cadres attacked at five different locations across the state yesterday. The attacks started at around 5:00 pm at Maitalubasti in Sonitpur district where worst attack took place. Police are recovering the bodies in this area inside the Pabhoi reserve forest.

Within few minutes of the attack, the militants struck at a village called Pakhriguri in Kokrajhar district in the western part of the state where three people were killed.

The next three attacks were carried out again in Sonitpur district at two other places. So far 10 people have been found dead in Phulbari and another six at Batasipur.

The authorities have issued a 'red alert' in the state and imposed a night-time curfew, NDTV news channel reported.

Assam, a tea-growing state that borders Bhutan and Bangladesh, has a long history of often violent land disputes between the indigenous Bodo tribes, Muslim settlers and the Adivasi community.

About 10,000 people fled their homes in northeast India when violent clashes over a border dispute left more than 45 people dead earlier this year.

The militant outfit had on Monday warned the state government of retaliatory attack if security forces did not stop operations against the cadres.

Ban on Jamaat thru' legal procedure

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government wants to ban Jamaat-e-Islami, the party that opposed the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, through a trial for the offences committed during the Liberation War, Law Minister Anisul Huq said yesterday.

"We will not formulate any law to ban the politics of Jamaat-e-Islami. But we will bring changes in the relevant law," he said while talking to reporters at his Secretariat office in response to the International Crimes Tribunal's verdict sentencing former Jatiya Party law-maker Syed Mohammad Qaiser to death for his crimes against humanity.

An amendment to the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act will be proposed to the cabinet in January to try and punish any organisation for war crimes, the law minister told The Daily Star.

After the cabinet's approval, a bill on the amendment will be placed in parliament, he added.

"We can ban the politics of Jamaat-e-Islami now at will. But we want to have a clear conscience that our government has gone through a legal procedure," he said at the Secretariat.

Jamaat has already been termed as a criminal organisation by a war crimes tribunal for its anti-liberation activities in 1971.

Anisul in May said the law did not provide for any punishment to an organisation for war crimes and so Jamaat could not be tried under the law. The government next month drafted an amendment to the act to incorporate a provision of banning such organisations.

In response to the verdict on Qaiser, the law minister said the judgment reflected the aspirations of the people and the government.

"We are now seeking execution of the judgment on completion of all the legal procurers, including the disposal of the appeal that will be filed with the Supreme Court against the tribunal judgment."

UN team

FROM PAGE 16
resources to mangrove plants to wildlife to human health. A separate team, however, will seek to find out the ways to respond immediately to the crisis, said a member of the team.

Two weeks after an oil tanker, carrying 3.58 lakh litres of furnace oil, sank in the Shela river in the Sundarbans, the UN experts team has come to visit the area for an assessment of the damage done to the environment and wildlife of the forest.

Members of the team collected samples of the soil from the bank of the river as they wanted to find out whether the spilled oil had reached below the top soil level, said another member.

Local forest officials said members of the team had trekked up to the Harintana forest station which is around 40 kilometres away from the accident spot in the Shela river.

The team members, specialised in oil spill intervention measures and also in various other aspects of mangrove forest management system, are expected to submit a report to the government by the end of this month.

The UN team would conduct laboratory tests of those samples and incorporate the test results into the report, said a member.

Nazibur Rahman, secretary to the ministry of environment and forest, Shafiqul Alam Mehedi, secretary to the shipping ministry and Md Yunus Ali, the chief conservator of forest, will join the team today.

Nearly 300 heritage sites hit by Syria war

AFP, Beirut

Nearly 300 cultural heritage sites have been destroyed, damaged and looted in Syria since its conflict broke out in 2011, the UN said yesterday in a report citing satellite evidence.

Among the areas exposed to major damage were Unesco world heritage sites such as Aleppo, where settlements have been in place for 7,000 years, and the fabled desert Greco-Roman oasis of Palmyra.

"Looting, destruction from aerial bombardment and other explosions, as well as infrastructure construction at cultural sites significantly threatens the heritage to future generations of these historic structures and objects," the UN said in a statement.

The report focused on 18 areas, of which six are Unesco-listed: the Old City of Aleppo; Bosra; Damascus, the Dead Cities of northern Syria; Crac des Chevaliers and Palmyra.

Detailed analysis of satellite imagery of 290 locations at these sites showed 24 of them had been destroyed, 104 severely damaged, 85 moderately damaged and 77 possibly damaged.

Hindu state campaign

FROM PAGE 16

scam-hit coal exploration sector.

Protests by the opposition erupted in parliament against a campaign by Hindu hardliners to bring Muslims and Christians back to Hindu-fold.

What further contributed to Modi government's discomfiture is Bhagwat's support on Sunday to reconversion even as the government tried to find a way to push the insurance and coal sector bills through the persisting opposition blockade.

Opposition members threw papers and swarmed to the centre of the Rajya Sabha on Monday, forcing the suspension of the session and effectively preventing the government from tabling a bill to increase the FDI to 49 percent from 26 and another bill to replace a decree to overhaul the coal sector.

These two legislations were considered low-hanging fruits that Modi hoped to push through parliament's winter session to showcase his government's determination to go ahead with the economic reforms ahead of US President Barack Obama's visit to Delhi next month.

Modi is being accused by the opposition of not reining in the hardliner Hindu groups.

About one fifth of India's 1.2 billion people identify themselves as belonging to faiths other than Hinduism. Conversion is a sensitive issue with Hindu groups saying many poor Hindus over the ages were forced to give up their faith, or lured into Islam and Christianity.

Opposition Congress party leader Anand Sharma urged Modi to make clear his stance on conversion. Modi has so far let his party colleagues tackle the criticism.

BJP chief Amit Shah, a trusted aide

President meets ailing Gobinda Halder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

It was well after 10:00pm that President Abdul Hamid, soon after attending a dinner hosted by West Bengal Governor KN Tripathi, was driven straight to a hospital in a north Kolkata neighbourhood on Monday.

The occasion was to meet Gobinda Halder, whose memorable songs like "Ek Sagor Rokter Binimoye Banglar

Dhaka entry may

FROM PAGE 1

there was much scope for the government to cut wasteful expenditure. But the idea of introducing toll at the capital's entry points to collect revenue was not realistic.

First of all, it will increase travel time. Then it will push up inflation because if the government collects toll from a goods-laden vehicle, prices will go up. Moreover, the toll might be misused by those responsible for its collection, he noted.

The government can reduce unnecessary expenditure by cutting subsidy on state-owned enterprises. Moreover, if the government can utilise more foreign aid, it will save revenue income and the government can use that money to meet its additional expenditure for increased salary, he said.

The commission has suggested implementation of the Vat and Supplementary Duty Act 2012 to earn more revenue. This would take the government's current contribution of 60 percent in the ADP to up to 90 percent.

It also proposed increasing land development and entertainment tax and judicial and non-judicial fees, and introducing Tk 20 revenue stamp instead of Tk 10 against salaries of government employees.

Also, government institutions, including Chittagong Port, BTCL, education boards and educational institutions enjoying MPO benefits will deposit, as proposed by the commission, at least 50 percent of their operational surplus in the government exchequer.

It also proposed imposing more tax on buses and trucks older than 10 years.

Zahid Hussain, lead economist at the World Bank Dhaka office, supports

of Modi, has made it clear that the conversion controversy would not derail Modi government's pursuit of reforms and economic development, and his party has made it clear that conversion should be banned and the opposition should support a law against conversion.

However, analysts say that more than the hue and cry over conversion, what was really difficult for Modi government in the Rajya Sabha was the unfavourable arithmetic in the upper house. This does not necessarily mean any lack of will on the government's part even though some of the affiliates of the RSS may not be on the same page with the government on some economic reforms.

For now, the government will have to wait for the long budget session of parliament, expected to start in late February, to try and push the reforms bills.

It is keeping this in mind that the BJP has focused more on winning elections in different states legislatures and increasing the number of seats in legislatures where it cannot hope to be voted to power.

The BJP has already won state legislature elections in Maharashtra and Haryana a few months ago and is set to grab power in the eastern state of Jharkhand. It also put up an impressive show in assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir.

The significance of getting more seats in state legislatures is that their members elect members of the Rajya Sabha. If the BJP and its allies manage to get majority in the Rajya Sabha, they can get the reforms legislations passed. The party has comfortable majority in the Lok Sabha.

Swadhinota Anlo Jara" inspired the Bangalees to fight against the Pakistani occupation forces during the Liberation War, 1971.

Hamid spoke to the 84-year-old poet for about 10 minutes.

"Halder is one of us. He is a Muktijoddha, a brave soldier. Please take care of him," the president told reporters after emerging from the hospital.

the pay hike but is doubtful about the realisation of the additional money in the way the commission proposes.

"The commission has recommended increasing tax revenue collection to finance the pay increase. Clearly, borrowing to finance pay increases does not make economic sense," he said.

But there is room for reducing "wasteful" expenditures and some of it may happen fortuitously because of the fall in oil prices on the international market. For instance, the combined losses of Power Development Board (PDB) and Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) last year amounted to Tk 95.8 billion, of which PDB loss was two-third. Oil price decline will have a direct positive impact on BPC's bottom line, he added.

He said the government needed to revisit the revenue and development budget to identify cost savings that will not hurt the quality and coverage of service delivery.

In FY2014-15, the budgetary allocation for salary and allowance of government employees, pensioners and non-government school and college teachers is Tk 36,017 core. The pay hike will take this allocation to Tk 58,970 in the next fiscal.

The commission estimates the FY15-16 budget to be Tk 3,13,071 crore, up from Tk 2,50,506 crore in the current fiscal.

A finance ministry official said the additional Tk 17,464 crore needed to pay the increased salary and allowance will be needed in phases. Of the sum, Tk 10,090 in salary will be required in the next FY while Tk 7,373 crore in allowance in the FY16-17.

City of clouds

FROM PAGE 16

Venus is in many ways a better bet for space exploration than Mars. It's nearer to us, closer in size and it has a density and chemical composition more like Earth — but it's also completely inhospitable.

The planet is much hotter than Earth, at around 462 degrees Celsius, and has an atmospheric pressure around 92 times greater. It's also got huge volcanoes and an acidic cloud layer. Even probes that have been sent to the planet have burnt up and died shortly after arriving.

While the conditions on Venus keep humans from venturing down there, staying about 30 miles above the planet would keep astronauts in

conditions mostly similar to Earth. The atmospheric pressure is comparable, and gravity is just slightly lower. The temperature is warm but the ship would be able to keep the astronauts cool enough.

The challenges for the mission would be getting the airship to Venus — and then, since it will be wrapped up, inflating it there. Before it is used scientists will also have to be confident that the ship and the solar panels that will power it can withstand the sulphuric acid in the atmosphere and the other strain it will be put under while it floats above the planet.

But if they can work on the technology, "missions to the Venusian atmosphere can expand humanity's future in space", the SADC says.