

Two killed

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upazila on Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

Sensing danger, the gang opened fire targeting the DB personnel, prompting them to retaliate that eventually triggered the shootout, said Khorshed Alam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station.

Azad was shot and four of his cohorts were arrested from the scene, he said. A pistol and a machete were also recovered from there.

Doctors of Comilla Medical College Hospital declared Azad, who was facing two cases relating to robbery and theft, dead on his arrival, added the OC.

In Pabna, the "gunfight" took place in front of Raju Cinema Hall in Ishwardi early yesterday after a police patrol team went there on a tip-off to arrest a group of criminals.

Sensing police presence, the muggers fired gunshots on them. Police also fired several rounds in return that led to the gunfight, said SM Mostain Hossain, additional superintendent of police of the district.

Jahangir was killed on the spot, added the police official.

Shot dead

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Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) men rescued the victims from the spot.

Mashiru died on his way to the Jibannagar Upazila Health Complex. The two injured were undergoing treatment at the health complex.

Lt Col SM Moniruzzaman, commanding officer of BGB battalion-6 in Chuadanga, said they strongly protested the incident at a company commander-level flag meeting between the BGB and BSF held there at 6:00pm.

Bangladeshi

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working at the Ampang LRT extension project owned by Prasarana Malaysia Berhad Group near Putra Heights.

"According to their passports, the victims are Bangladeshis. They had been working at the company for long," said Sayedul Islam, counsellor (labour wing) at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

The bodies of the Bangladeshis were sent to a local hospital for autopsies. The bodies would be sent back to Bangladesh by next week, he told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

"We will sit with the workers' employers tomorrow [Friday] and urge the company to properly compensate the victims' families," Sayedul said.

Nine Bangladeshis, including the two victims, were working at the construction site when the accident happened on Wednesday. Seven of them were rescued soon after the incident. They took first aid.

The first floor of the building where other workers were levelling concrete mix collapsed at 4:20pm (local time), trapping the two Bangladeshis who were on the ground floor, reports Bernama, the Malaysian state news agency, quoting Sani Harul, assistant director of operations of the Selangor Fire and Rescue Department.

One of the bodies was recovered on Wednesday and the other on Thursday, it added.

"We sincerely regret the unfortunate incident and would extend a helping hand to the families of the two workers," said Zohari Sulaiman, Prasarana group director.

He also announced that a full cooperation would be given to conduct an investigation into the incident.

BCL denies

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showdown by several thousand activists of the BNP and its front organisations near a makeshift court at Bakshibazar before which Khaleda Zia appeared in two graft cases.

Iran censors 'offensive' Instagram pictures: media

AFP, Tehran

Iran has started censoring images posted on photo sharing app Instagram, removing content deemed "offensive" as part of a government project to screen social networking accounts, local media reported yesterday.

"The filtering of pages with immoral content began yesterday (Wednesday) evening on Instagram," the government daily Iran said.

The Sharq newspaper, citing the official Fars news agency, said that access to other posts was still possible.

"With the successful filtering of offensive content on social networks, it is no longer necessary to completely block them and users can access the site properly," it added.

BCL takes over

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instructed party leaders, including Standing Committee Member ASM Hannan Shah and Gazipur city Mayor Abdul Mannan, to continue preparations for the rally.

She said she would leave her Gulshan residence at 2:00pm Saturday for Gazipur at any cost, according to party sources.

The BNP warned the government of dire consequences for any obstruction to the rally, and said the ruling Awami League will have to take responsibility if any untoward incidents take place in Gazipur.

"We will barricade all roads across the country if the government bars Khaleda Zia from going to Gazipur," Goyeshwar Chandra Roy said at a programme in the capital yesterday.

Gazipur district BNP President Fazlul Haque Milon too said they would hold the scheduled rally any how.

Yesterday, a BNP delegation led by Hannan Shah went to visit the venue but could not enter the college.

Asked whether there is any possibility of declaring any programmes like hartal if they are obstructed, Hannan Shah said that is one of the options they are considering.

Principal of Bhawal Badre Alam College Abu Haider Ahmed Naser told The Daily Star that he granted permission for the 20-party rally in consultation with Gazipur-1 lawmaker AKM Mozammel Haq, also a minister.

The rally was earlier scheduled for December 23. But the BNP changed the date following request of the administration and police.

Also yesterday, police arrested four BNP men from Gazipur and Joydevpur for creating unrest in the areas.

Gazipur Police Superintendent Harun-or-Rashid said they will not allow any quarter to resort to violence in the district in the name of holding rally.

Despite his assurance, people fear that clashes between 20-party and pro-government activists might break out.

On Wednesday, weapons-wielding activists of Chhatra League swooped on BNP men gathered in the capital's Bakshibazar area in a show of support for Khaleda who was to appear at a special court.

The country's political situation has apparently begun to heat up ahead of the first anniversary of January 5 polls that BNP-led alliance and most of other political parties boycotted.

Both sides are now preparing for a massive show of strength in the capital that day. The AL will observe it as the victory day for democracy and the BNP as the black day.

The AL yesterday announced that it will hold a rally at Suhrawardy Udyan on January 5. The BNP on Monday sought permission from the authorities for a rally at Suhrawardy Udyan or Naya Paltan or Motijheel the same day.

The BCL central committee has shifted the date of a rally to celebrate its founding anniversary in the capital from January 4 to January 3, the day the BNP too wants to hold a rally in the city.

try and they may carry out attacks on your vehicles. You may also face such attacks," he said.

He also demanded immediate arrest of Chhabbi's attackers.

Hanif was briefing reporters after an AL secretariat meeting at the party's Dhanmondi office yesterday.

Blaming the BNP for Wednesday's clash, Hanif claimed that Khaleda Zia had appeared before the court with her cadres.

He, however, said an investigation was on to identify the attackers.

Kamal was talking to reporters at Dhaka Medical College Hospital after visiting Chhabbi Biswas, a ruling party lawmaker from Netrakona-1, who was assaulted by Jatiyatabdhi Chhatra Dal activists in front of the DMCH on Wednesday.

He said, "The attack on our MP was carried out in a bid to kill him, as the BNP wanted to create a chaotic situation to obstruct the proceedings of Khaleda Zia's trial."

The BNP men's attempt was foiled by law enforcers' immediate interference, he added.

He also said that those involved in the attack on Chhabbi would not be spared.

Meanwhile, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif also condemned the attack on Chhabbi. Warning BNP leaders, he said they would face similar attacks if they failed to rein in their "goons".

"There are many people in the coun-

Hasan, and former JCD president Azizul Bari Helal and former general secretary Habibur Rashid Habib are some of the accused in the cases, according to police officials.

Thirteen pro-BNP activists detained during the clash were shown arrested in the cases.

Clash of two

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When this correspondent mentioned the media reports and photos showing BCL men attacking the BNP gathering, OC Azizul said they accused only those "who had hurled brick bats towards on-duty policemen, injuring some of them".

Interestingly, the OC was on the scene during the violence and saw the whole incident.

Earlier, this paper contacted Mofiz Uddin Ahmed, deputy commissioner (Lalbagh division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, over the phone and sought his comments on this.

"Talk to the concerned OC," said the DC, avoiding a direct answer.

Another case was filed with Shahbagh Police Station accusing 23 BNP men and 50 to 60 unnamed persons. So, here too the BCL men were exempted.

Enraged by the attack on Wednesday, some pro-BNP activists vandalised vehicles carrying patients and set fire to a lawmaker's car in front of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

This case was filed for obstructing police work during the vandalism in front of the DMCH, said Habil Hossain, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station.

Wishing anonymity, sources at the DMP said a case for political violence is filed upon the directives of the office of the deputy commissioner of police concerned. The DC office receives instructions from the DMP headquarters beforehand.

Joint convener of the BNP's Dhaka City unit Abdul Awal Mintoo and member secretary Habib-un-Nabi Khan Sohel, JCD president Rajib Ahsan and general secretary Akramul

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Refugees drown in attempted Sudanese smuggling

AFP, Khartoum

At least eight asylum-seekers have drowned trying to cross a river in Sudan during an attempt to smuggle them out of a refugee camp, the UN refugee agency said yesterday.

The accident happened as a group of from the Shegarab-1 camp in the eastern state of Kassala tried to cross the Atbara river on Wednesday evening.

"There was an attempt to smuggle some of these asylum-seekers out of the camp and they were being transported on four rickety, small fishing boats," said Mohammed Adar, the UNHCR representative in Sudan.

One of the boats sank and "eight bodies have been found and two are still missing," he said, adding that another 10 people swam to safety and returned to the camp.

The other boats crossed successfully, Adar said, without saying how many people had managed to leave the camp.

Adar said the United Nations had not verified the nationality of the dead but said the government had sent a team to investigate.

Their intended destination was unknown, but eastern Sudan has a significant refugee population, the majority Eritreans fleeing a military regime at home.

Nearly 110,000 Eritreans currently live throughout Sudan.

The Shegarab-1 camp is jointly run by the Sudanese government and the UN and houses 15,000 people, mostly asylum-seekers.

Shiite militia abduct senior Yemen intelligence official

AFP, Sanaa

A senior Yemeni intelligence official was abducted in Sanaa yesterday by Shia fighters from the Huthi militia in control of the capital since a September offensive, security sources said.

"General Yahia al-Marrani... was kidnapped this morning by armed Huthis from his home in Sanaa," a source told AFP.

Another source said that about 20 Huthis had stormed Marrani's residence and taken him to an unknown location.

The kidnapping was confirmed to AFP by a relative of the officer, who had served for five years as head of the police intelligence unit in Saada province, a Huthi stronghold in north Yemen.

He was named as a director in Yemen's intelligence services by President Abdurrahman Mansur Hadi, who took power following a 2012 uprising that unseated longtime ruler Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Yemen has been rocked by instability since the Shiite fighters, who are also known as Ansarullah, seized control of Sanaa on September 21.

Thousands flee

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curfew clamped in the entire district.

Curfew has been also imposed in the affected areas of Sonitpur and Chirang districts along with parts of Dhubri and Baksa districts as precautionary measure.

Police blamed Tuesday's attacks on the outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), which has waged a violent decades-long campaign for an independent homeland for the Bodo.

Rights groups have in the past accused India's government of not doing enough to tackle violence in the country's remote northeast, which is home to many marginalised communities.

But Home Minister Rajnath Singh said authorities would be "tough" on those behind the latest killings, which he called "an act of terror".

"We have a zero tolerance policy against terrorism. And we have decided that those who carry out such massacres will face the same tough treatment that terrorists do," he told reporters in Guwahati, the largest city in the state.

Rajnath Singh accompanied by his deputy Kiren Rijiju yesterday visited Bishwanath Chariali in Sonitpur district to review the prevailing situation and also held talks with different political and social organisations.

They had reached Guwahati on Wednesday night and held meeting with Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi.

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Queen praises Ebola health workers in Christmas message

AFP, London

Queen Elizabeth II paid tribute in her annual Christmas Day broadcast yesterday to the "selflessness" of medical staff and aid workers fighting the Ebola epidemic.

She said how "deeply touched" she was by the volunteers who have gone to work in areas affected by the deadly virus.

"I have been deeply touched this year by the selflessness of aid workers and medical volunteers who have gone abroad to help victims of conflict or of diseases like Ebola, often at great personal risk," the 88-year-old queen said.

The virus has killed more than 7,500 people, the vast majority in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia.

People caring for the sick or handling the bodies of people infected with Ebola are especially exposed to the virus and 365 healthcare workers have died, most of them local staff.

A British health worker who survived Ebola delivered his own message to the nation after being chosen to give Channel 4's "Alternative Christmas Message".

William Pooley, a nurse who decided to return to Sierra Leone after receiving treatment in Britain, called for greater global action against the virus.

"I don't want to make you feel guilty but I would like you to think just for a few minutes about what you could do to help," the 29-year-old said in a

message filmed at Connaught Hospital in Freetown.

"This is a global problem and it will take the world to fix it. What a wonderful Christmas present that would be."

The queen's message is an annual event, broadcast on BBC television and radio after lunch, and watched by millions of people in Britain and across the Commonwealth.

It is one of the few speeches that she writes herself, rather than with government ministers.

For the past two decades, independent television station Channel 4 has selected a figure in the public eye to deliver an alternative message, which is broadcast after the queen.

US whistleblower Edward Snowden gave the message last year, and previous speakers included Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and French animal rights campaigner and actress Brigitte Bardot.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the