

Eid exodus

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A truck stationary with a punctured tyre on the single carriageway Meghna-Gumti bridge caused a jam on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway around 5:00am. The truck was towed away in 30 minutes but by then the damage was done. The queue of vehicles was 22km long on both sides of the bridge.

The traffic jam was still there when this report was filed yesterday evening.

People who left Dhaka in the morning for Comilla, Feni, Chittagong and other south-eastern districts were stuck in the jam.

Heavy rain caused waterlogging at some places on the Tongi-Joydevpur road on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, disrupting traffic.

Potholes had developed on many roads, causing officials of Roads and Highways Department to be concerned.

Traffic movement on the Dhaka-Tangail highway slowed down yesterday due to increased number of vehicles leaving the capital for northern districts.

Police said the onrush of vehicles increased since Tuesday night and the trend was likely to continue.

Our Tangail correspondent said vehicles were moving in queue and slowly on the 65km long Chandra-Bangabandhu Bridge stretch of the road.

Abul Kalam, president of bus owners' association at Mohakhali Bus Terminal, said passengers have begun to leave Dhaka in large numbers. "There would have been more passengers, had there been no rain," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mosharaf Hossain, Hanif Paribahan general manager, claimed that even though the rush of passengers had increased, they were not facing any problems as they had adequate number of buses in reserve.

Manager Dinesh Kumar of Shyamoli Paribahan expects the pressure of passengers to increase more today.

A large number of passengers were also seen at the Kamalapur Railway Station and the Sadarghat Launch Terminal. Both trains and launches were crowded.

Cry for open

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Children's dependence on TV, computer, video games will raise their risks of getting headache and eye problems, he said.

"As a doctor, during my practice, I find four to five children out of 12 to 15 with these problems almost every day," he said.

Dr Aliya said authorities should give security at parks so that children could play there safely.

Several schools could also collectively manage one park, she suggested.

Prof Ishrat Islam, chairman of the urban and regional planning department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), said as children could not play outdoor games, they were getting isolated from society and taking drugs.

Socialisation takes place at parks or playgrounds, she said, citing the example of Dhanmondi Lake.

Sayed Khokon, the new mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation, said he needed some time to give full attention to recover the parks.

The mayor in Dhaka north, Annisul Huq, said he would visit the parks and then decide on what steps to take. He said they would give special attention to the parks.

Journey highly

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passengers must be stopped at any cost as it is the main reason for accidents in waterways.

He suggested that the government take additional measures to ensure safety of passengers as the Eid-ul-Fitr falls in the monsoon this year.

Seeking anonymity, a BIWTA official said it is not possible for them to check overloading of passengers due to the huge rush of holidaymakers.

"If we make an attempt to unload passengers from vessels with the help of law enforcers, it might ultimately trigger a clash between the law enforcers and passengers," he noted.

A passenger of MV Surovi-9, Mashirul Rahman said they risk their lives on trips to Barisal ahead of every Eid due to overloading of vessels by launch operators. "The operators and the government made many pledges to make our journey safe, but hardly anything has been done to meet them. We want to travel home safely."

According to government statistics, 180 people die in accidents in waterways annually on an average. However, the National Committee to Protect Shipping, Roads and Railways said river accidents claimed 326 lives every year on an average in the last 20 years.

India's 'living dead' fight for resurrection

AFP, New Delhi

For the last two years Ramjanan Mauriya has made countless journeys to Azamgarh magistrate's office in northern India, laden with stacks of documents to prove he is not a ghost.

"It's frustrating. I am alive, yet they say I am dead," Mauriya told AFP.

The 65-year-old is one of hundreds of people from the giant state of Uttar Pradesh who have been classified as deceased in official records as part of a plot by unscrupulous relatives to grab their land.

Mauriya alleges it was his brother who bribed officials to have him declared dead in order to gain a greater share of ancestral property.

Others have been fallen victim to similar scams by cousins, nephews or

even their own sons who bribe local officials to falsify or destroy paperwork.

Nearly all the cases have been recorded in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, which also has a reputation for being one of the most corrupt and crime-ridden parts of the country.

Azamgarh district, around 300 kilometres (180 miles) east of the state capital Lucknow, has been at the centre of a host of cases over the decades which have multiplied as the scramble for land has intensified.

It's nearly 40 years since Lal Bihari discovered his three-acre plot in Azamgarh had passed into the hands of one of his cousins who had connived with a corrupt local bureaucrat

Despite an appeal from US President Barack Obama to King Salman of Saudi Arabia for an urgent end to the fighting, Saudi-led warplanes carried out six raids on rebel positions before dawn, witnesses and military sources said.

Hadi loyalists advance in Yemen's Aden

AFP, Aden

Loyalists of Yemen's exiled president seized more ground in second city Aden yesterday after recapturing the airport held by Iran-backed rebels for four months, military sources said.

The offensive, dubbed Operation Golden Arrow, is the first major advance by the loyalists since the Houthi rebels entered the port city in March, forcing President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi into exile in neighbouring Saudi Arabia.

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Robbers kill

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Rahman, 32, of Satkhira Sadar upazila.

Based on preliminary investigation, police said the guards could be involved in the crime and the robbers slit their throats "failing to break the vault" and "in fear of getting caught".

Nothing went missing from the bank in the incident that took place sometime between Tuesday night and yesterday morning.

Locals said a customer was the first to see the bodies after he mistakenly went inside the bank around 10:00am yesterday, finding its main gate and entrance door open.

The bank was closed because of Shab-e-Qadar holiday.

He later informed others about the matter.

This correspondent visited the branch of the bank located on the first floor of a two-storey building near Kolaroa bus stand area.

The body of Asadur was on the floor, while Jahangir on a staircase. The bodies bore several stab wounds.

The robbers tried to drill a hole on the vault in vain.

"They [robbers] broke into the building, but could not open the lockers," said Montosh Kumar Sarkar, manager of the branch.

Montosh said he went home from the bank on 6:30pm Tuesday and was informed about the death of two night guards over the phone around 10:30am yesterday.

Abdul Gafur, another night guard at an ATM booth close to the branch, said he saw the door near the bank staircase shut around 11:00pm Tuesday.

The manager said the branch on average has a daily transaction of Tk 1.5 crore. On Tuesday night, there was about Tk 52 lakh in the vault, he said, adding that not a single lock in the bank was broken.

Abu Saleh Masud Karim, officer-in-charge of Kolaroa Police Station, said they found hammer, chisel, saw and drill machines inside the toilet. The equipment was brought there probably to drill into the vault, he said.

The OC said the criminals also burned some clothes of the slain night guards "apparently to destroy evidence".

Chowdhury Monzurul Kabir, superintendent of police in Satkhira, said, "The killers probably had links with the guards. They planned the heist and contacted them [the guards] accordingly."

"Primarily, it seems that when they [robbers] failed to break the vault, they killed the two," he said, adding that there was no closed circuit camera at the branch.

Contact, Khan Shahidul Islam, deputy general manager of Sonali bank in Satkhira, said CCTV cameras were being installed there.

Satkhira Ansar and VDP Commandant KM Monirul Islam told this correspondent that the two guards had got contractual jobs in the organisation following a 42-day training each.

Asadur was transferred to the bank five months ago while Jahangir two and a half months before, he added.

Meanwhile, the bodies were handed over to the families after their autopsies at Satkhira Sadar Hospital, police said.

A case was filed with Kolaroa Police Station over the incident.

29 eminent

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The citizens include Prof Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury, journalist Kamal Lohani, Convener of National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports Sheikh Mohammad Shahidullah, Language Movement veteran SD Ahmed, Dr Shafiuuddin Ahmed, Prof MM Akash, AN Rasheda, Prof Ashrauzzaman Selim and Prof Mohammad Abu Sayeed.

The workers have been demonstrating since July 12 for payment of their last three months' arrears (April-June) before this Eid but the factory authorities suspended operations on April 10 and the owner, a national of Hong Kong, fled the country three days later.

Sayed Khokon, newly elected mayor of DSCC, said he needs time to give full attention to recover parks of the city, adding that soon they would begin eviction drives.

US delivers Iraqi antiquities seized in raid on ISIS

REUTERS, Baghdad

The United States yesterday handed back to Iraq antiquities it said it had seized in a raid on Islamic State fighters in Syria, saying the haul was proof the militants were funding their war by smuggling ancient treasures.

The Iraqi relics were captured by U.S. special forces in an operation in May against an Islamic State commander known as Abu Sayyaf. They included ancient cylindrical stamps, pottery, metallic bracelets and other jewellery, and glass shards from what appeared to be a coloured vase.

The haul also included early Islamic coins.

Islamic State, a hardline Sunni Islamist group, has ransacked some of the greatest archaeological sites in northern Iraq, posting video footage of fighters destroying pre-Islamic monuments they consider idolatrous.

Iraqi officials have been unable to verify the full extent of damage at the sites under Islamic State control, but they have said that footage of the destruction was published in part to distract attention

from the fact Islamic State is smuggling antiquities to raise cash.

"This is the first tangible evidence that Daesh are selling artefacts to fund their activities," U.S. ambassador Stuart Jones, said, referring to Islamic State by its Arabic acronym.

"Their goal is to sell these antiquities on the global black market," he told reporters at Baghdad's national museum where the items were handed over.

Abu Sayyaf, who was killed in the raid, was described by U.S. officials at the time as an Islamic State commander responsible for the group's oil and gas sales.

He was killed south-east of the city of Deir al-Zor, near Syria's main oil fields and about 100 km (60 miles) from the Syria-Iraqi border across which Islamic State declared its "caliphate".

"Today's effort represents one success in the efforts to return Iraq's historic patrimony, but the campaign to return all of Iraq's treasures continues," Jones said.

Pluto up close

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New Horizons is moving faster than any spacecraft ever built, at a speed of about 30,800 miles per hour.

Some 13 hours after the flyby, applause broke out in mission control at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Center outside the US capital Washington, as the spacecraft made its "phone-home" contact with Earth and all systems were reported to be intact.

"We have a healthy spacecraft," said mission operations manager Alice Bowman.

"We are outbound from Pluto."

The confirmation eased anxiety among scientists who were waiting all day to find out if the \$700 million New Horizons survived the chaotic Kuiper Belt, the region beyond Neptune that Stern has described as a "shooting gallery" of cosmic debris.

Nasa had said there was a one in 10,000 chance that the spacecraft could be lost, and all it would take would be "a collision with a particle as small as a grain of rice."

The spacecraft passed 7,750 miles -- or about the distance from New York to Mumbai, India -- from Pluto's surface at 1149 GMT.

"It is truly amazing that humankind can go out and explore these worlds. And to see Pluto be revealed just before our eyes -- it is just fantastic," Bowman said.

New Horizons principal investigator Alan Stern said scientists can now look forward to a "16-month data waterfall" that will help scientists write whole new textbooks about Pluto.

"We have completed the initial reconnaissance of the solar system, an endeavour started under president (John F.) Kennedy more than 50 years ago, continuing today under President (Barack) Obama," Stern told reporters.

Obama cheered the mission on Twitter.

Spotlight shining

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"Turning little dots, little points of light into planets," is what New Horizons, on the road for 9½ years and 3 billion miles, is all about, principal scientist Alan Stern said Monday.

Here's a rundown on Pluto, a 20th-century discovery about to become the 21st-century darling of astronomers:

DISCOVERY

Pluto is the only planet (OK, now former planet) in our solar system discovered by an American. Astronomer Clyde Tombaugh spotted the dot in 1930 from Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona. The name Pluto came from a British schoolgirl, Venetia Burney, then 11, based on the mythological god of the underworld.

Tombaugh died at age 90 in 1997, nine years before New Horizons took flight. A smidgen of his ashes is on board. Burney died in 2009, also at age 90. A student-built dust counter aboard New Horizons -- from the University of Colorado at Boulder -- is named after her.

FIVE MOONS

Big moon Charon was discovered in 1978 by Americans using the U.S. Naval Observatory in Flagstaff, followed by little moons Nix and Hydra in 2005, Kerberos in 2011 and Styx in 2012. The Hubble Space Telescope revealed all four baby moons.

Astronomers stuck to underworld undertones when it came to the names.

New Horizons will hunt for more moons, but at this point, they would have to be pretty elusive -- scientists guess probably less than a mile across. The Pluto empire, complete with six bodies, at least for now, is like its own mini solar system.

FORGET THE SUNGLASSES

Pluto is so far from the sun -- between

2.8 billion and 4.6 billion miles -- that twilight reigns. At high noon on Pluto, it looks as though it would be dawn or dusk on Earth. And let's not forget the frigid weather, given its distance from the sun. Temperatures can plunge to minus-400 degrees.

Pluto's orbit is extremely oblong, plus it's tilted. It takes 248 years for Pluto to orbit the sun. Thus, it's only made it about one-third of the way around the sun since its discovery in 1930. Every so often, Neptune's orbit exceeds Pluto's, putting Neptune slightly farther out.

FIRST A PLANET, THEN IT'S NOT

Pluto is the only planet to get kicked out of the solar system club.

Just seven months after New Horizons rocketed away from Cape Canaveral, Florida, the International Astronomical Union declassified Pluto as the ninth planet for technical reasons. Instead, it became a dwarf planet. The decision left the solar system with eight full-fledged planets, with Mercury replacing Pluto as the smallest.

On Monday, scientists said measurements by New Horizons showed Pluto to be 1,473 miles in diameter, a little bigger than earlier estimates.

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

Pluto is the biggest object in the icy Kuiper Belt, also known as the third zone after the inner rocky planets and outer gaseous giants. It's also called the Twilight Zone because of its great distance from the sun.