



Making the life of locals and pedestrians a misery, authorities have been digging trench on a road in the capital's Islambagh for underground power cables. The photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Reckless driving

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The dead were bus driver Shamim Hossain Belal, its passengers Nazmul Haq Sarkar, and Parvez Alam, Tajirul Islam, Dulal Hossain, Abdul Hakim, of Dinajpur, and Hafizur Rahman, of Thakurgaon, Sarwar Hossain, of Joypurhat, Benzir Rahman, of Rangpur, and truck driver Bhola Mia, of Tangail. The victims were aged between 35 and 42.

According to police, the Dinajpur-bound bus coming from Dhaka and the Dhaka-bound stone-laden truck from Rangpur crashed head-on at Dhonkundi near Pentagon restaurant on Dhaka-Bogra highway around 6:30am. Seven people died on the spot. Locals and police rushed the injured to Sherpur Upazila Health Complex and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in Bogra. Of the wounded, two died at the hospital and one at the upazila health complex.

Following the accident, a long tailback was created on the highway for around an hour.

Superintendent of Police (SP) in Bogra Mohammad Asaduzzaman and SP of highway police Israfil Hawladar visited the spot.

BNP asks

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appointed 42 leaders. It was Fakhurul's first meeting with them.

Emerging from the two-hour meeting, another BNP leader said they focused on the party's present status and role of central and district leaders in the ongoing union parishad polls.

Some leaders urged the party high-ups to announce the rest of the names of the central committee as early as possible because it is "hampering" party's work. They also called for announcing the district and grassroots committees.

Later Fakhurul told the journalists that they discussed current political situation, ways to strengthen the party, and the "movement for restoration of democracy".

"The government has been oppressing the opposition to establish a one-party administration in the country... There is no alternative to holding a free fair election," he said.

BFUJ faction

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jointly organised by the BFUJ faction and the Rajshahi Union of Journalists.

The discussants at the meeting demanded that the government declare dearness allowances for journalists and employees soon and take initiatives to implement it.

RUIJ President Kazi Shahed Ahmed presided over the meeting, conducted by its General Secretary Mamun-Ur-Rashid.

The faction's Central Secretary General Omar Faruk, former president Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Treasurer Modhusudan Mondal, President of Dhaka Union of Journalists Shaban Mahmud and President of Chittagong Union of Journalists Riaz Haider Chowdhury, among others, addressed the programme.

The speakers raised the demands to cope up with the recent prices of essential commodities.

The faction's leaders also urged journalists to uphold the dignity of the profession through forging a greater movement for announcing the ninth wage board against the backdrop of a price hike of the essential commodities after the new pay scale for the government employees came into effect in July last year.

"The journalists are passing dire socio-economic condition because of the price hike of the commodities after the declaration of the new pay scale for the government service holders," Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul said.

PM reaches Jeddah

FROM PAGE 1
A Bangladesh Biman flight carrying the PM and her entourage touched down at Jeddah King Abdulaziz International Airport at 7:50pm local time.

Crown Prince Mohammad bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz, Bangladesh Ambassador to the KSA and Permanent Representative to the OIC Golam Masih received the premier at the airport.

Hasina was given a guard of honour by a military contingent of the kingdom at the airport. From there, the prime minister was taken to King Faisal Palace to join a banquet hosted by the crown prince.

After attending the banquet, Hasina went to Jeddah Royal Conference Palace where she will be staying during the visit to Jeddah.

It is the first visit of the Bangladesh PM to Saudi Arabia after the swearing-in of Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud as the king.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali,

youngest daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Rehana and a business delegation are accompanying the PM.

The premier will perform Umrah at Haram Sharif in Makkah today and offer Fazr prayers.

She will lay the foundation of Bangladesh Chancery Complex and Bangladesh House in Riyadh at a function in Jeddah in the evening.

Tomorrow afternoon, Hasina will hold bilateral talks with the Saudi king at the Al Salam Palace at Al Andalus in Jeddah where bilateral, regional and international issues would be discussed.

On Monday morning, the prime minister will leave Jeddah for Madina by air. She will offer Asr and Maghrib prayers at Masjid-e Nabawi in Madina and perform ziarat of the Rawza Mubarak of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH).

She will leave Madina for home on Tuesday morning.

No solution

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"We have been discussing formation of a powerful body to ensure integrated development of the city, its traffic and transport system," Hoque, who teaches civil engineering at Buet, told The Daily Star.

He regretted that the Strategic Transport Plan (STP) was formulated in 2008 but it was not followed. "Different ministries are taking up projects, limiting scope for future projects. The ministries concerned only talk about coordination and integration but don't work on it."

Regarding improvement of the city's traffic, Muhith repeated some projects like the bus rapid transport and metro rail, while plans to construct three-layer circular routes, five MRT lines and two BRT lines by updating the Strategic Transport Plan (STP) are

nothing new.

He skipped the Dhaka Elevated Expressway, construction of which is still uncertain five years after its initiation. However, he said an elevated expressway would be constructed in Chittagong.

He mentioned partial opening of the Moghbazar-Mouchak flyover, which itself is an embarrassment for the government because of its faulty design.

The minister highlighted the ongoing projects and plans to improve transport and communication infrastructure but said nothing about the growing number of road crashes and casualties due to chaos on roads and highways.

Experts say a guideline to reduce traffic chaos and road accidents should have been there in the proposed budget.

Allocation rises

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crore, kept aside in FY 2009-10, said Finance Minister AMA Muhith in his supplementary presentation on "Advancement Towards Digital Bangladesh: Perspective 2016" in his budget speech in parliament on Thursday.

Jabbar says, "Most of the allocation will be spent for building structures and office expenses. But we want more for digitising the process."

Shameem Ahsan, president of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services, says though the allocation is huge, "only a little of it will be used for software and digital services development."

Besides, increasing supplementary duty will "be a direct blow to the (government) plan," he thinks.

In the "Perspective 2016", Muhith spoke of a government plan to increase 100 percent internet penetration and 50 percent broadband penetration by 2020.

With 36.71 percent internet penetration, Bangladesh is ahead of neighbouring Nepal, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and even India in this regard.

The government is giving special focus on four sectors -- e-governance, e-commerce, e-education and e-service, according to Muhith's "Advancement towards Digital Bangladesh" presentation.

The minister boasted that the cur-

Ctg MP sued

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Besides Mustafizur, two others accused in the case are his Personal Secretary Tajul Islam, also the AL chairman candidate in Baharchhara union, and Maulana Akhter, president of Banshkhalhi upazila unit Olama League, said the police official.

On June 1, Mustafizur "beat" and "verbally" abused Banshkhalhi Upazila Election Officer Zahidul at the office of Upazila Nirbahi Officer, who was not present during the incident, for not appointing the MP's men as polling officials in the upazila parishad polls there.

Following the incident, the victim lodged a complaint with the Election Commission. A day later, the EC sent a letter to the OC of Banshkhalhi Police Station, asking him to file a case against the lawmaker and his aides.

"Accordingly, I recorded the case on Thursday night. As Zahidul Islam lodged the complaint with the commission, he has automatically been made complainant in the case," the OC told The Daily Star.

However, MP Mustafizur denied the allegation of Zahidul, terming it "bogus".

Talking to The Daily Star, the lawmaker rather brought an allegation against Zahidul that he was working in collaboration with the BNP-Jamaat men.

Over the incident, the EC suspended elections to all 14 UPs of Banshkhalhi that were scheduled to be held today.

Meanwhile, BNP leaders in Chittagong demanded arrest of Mustafizur for his misdeeds.

Don't see

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and many other countries here represented -- as the unwelcome interference of a handful of foreign envoys on Bangladesh domestic affairs."

In today's Bangladesh, Palma said, the cry that all of them are hearing, even more clearly now that the number of tragic events are increasing almost weekly, does not come only from the dying canals or "The Black Gel" once known as the Buriganga River.

It comes from people who have been attacked and hacked to death or who see themselves as potential future victims for professing ideas or creeds that are different from those of self-appointed guardians of religious orthodoxy and social customs, he said.

The diplomat mentioned about the cry of the expatriates' community for the murder of Cesare Tavella and Hoshi Kunio and the cry of local society as a whole for the repeated, incessant attacks on bloggers, intellectuals, religious minorities and even ordinary people.

"We would like to see more resolve from their [authorities] side for what is at stake is the very future of the much-cherished secular features of the State and the rich cultural diversity of this country," Palma said.

UN urges

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But the brave men and women working to protect the environment are routinely harassed, threatened, unlawfully detained, and even murdered, merely for opposing powerful economic and governmental interests bent on exploiting and destroying the natural environment on which all depend, the experts observed.

Of the nearly 1,000 reported murders over the last decade, fewer than 10 have resulted in convictions, the UN experts said.

Bangladesh saw rise

FROM PAGE 1
these attacks," according to US Country Report on Terrorism 2015.

Justin Siberell, acting coordinator for counterterrorism at the department, on Thursday presented the annual report. It said attacks dropped by 13 percent compared with 2014 across the world, while fatalities caused by terrorist activity declined by 14 percent.

Transnational groups such as ISIL and al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) claimed several attacks in Bangladesh, targeting foreigners, religious minorities, police, secular bloggers and publishers, stated the report.

Despite these claims, the Bangladesh government attributed recent extremist violence to the political opposition and local terrorists.

The government articulated a "zero-tolerance" policy towards terrorism and remained committed to counterterrorism cooperation, but the country experienced a significant increase in violent extremist activity in 2015 compared to 2014, the report pointed out.

Bangladesh's criminal justice system continued to make progress in fully implementing the Anti-Terrorism Act. The government forces reportedly arrested numerous "members of ISIL" and of domestic terrorist groups, including suspected supporters of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Ansarullah Bangla Team, said the state department.

The country cooperated with the US to further strengthen control of its borders and land, sea, and air ports of entry. It continued to participate in the Department's anti-terrorism assistance program and received counterterrorism training for law enforcement officers in areas such as crisis response, explosive ordnance disposal and aviation security, it added.

28,300 DIED LAST YEAR

Data compiled by the University of Maryland for the state department showed there were 11,774 terrorist attacks worldwide during the year, in which more than 28,300 people died and roughly 35,300 others were wounded.

The drop was due to fewer attacks in Iraq, Pakistan and Nigeria, Siberell told a special briefing in Washington DC.

"Terrorist attacks and deaths increased in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, the Philippines, Syria and Turkey," he added.

Terrorist outfits used social media to spread their radical ideologies and solicit followers from Bangladesh.

An article titled "The Revival of Jihad in Bengal" appeared in the November 2015 edition of the ISIL online magazine Dabiq, outlining the outfit's activities in Bangladesh and plans for future attacks.

The ISIL claimed nine attacks, including the murder of an Italian NGO worker (September 28), a Japanese aid worker (October 3), and an attack on an Italian priest (November 18), read the report.

The outfit reportedly was behind an attack on a Shia Ashura procession (October 24) that killed one person and injured nearly 100; an attack on a police checkpoint (November 4) killing a police officer; and a December 25 suicide attack on an Ahmadiyya Muslim Community mosque.

The AQIS claimed attacks on February 26, March 30, May 12, August 7, and October 31 that resulted in the murders of four bloggers and a publisher, including an American citizen, stated the report.

The Bangladesh government insisted that ISIL didn't have an operational presence in the country and attributed the ISIL-claimed attacks to domestic elements.

Additionally, there was an unclaimed December 18 attack using crude explosives at two mosques on a naval base in Chittagong, as well as threats and small scale attacks against Christians, Hindus, and minority Muslim groups.

In each of the terrorist incidents claimed by the AQIS, attackers used machetes. The attacks claimed in the name of ISIL involved a variety of weapons: machetes, pistols and crude explosives. In the case of the attack on the Ahmadiyya mosque, a suicide vest was used, said the state department.

In February, Bangladesh participated in the White House Summit to Counter Violent Extremism and follow-on summits. It also joined the Saudi-led Islamic counterterrorism alliance announced in December last year.

The country formed the Community Support Mechanism (CSM) last year under the Global Fund for Community Engagement and Resilience (GCERF), a public-private global fund to support local, grassroots efforts to counter violent extremism.

The report said the terrorism finance provisions of Bangladesh's anti-terrorism act prohibit the provision, receipt and collection of money, services and material support where "there are reasonable grounds to believe that the same has been used or may be used for any purpose by a terrorist entity."

The religious affairs ministry and the National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention worked with imams and religious scholars to build public awareness against terrorism.

According to the report, the police last year began developing a plan to engage religious leaders in the fight against violent extremism by helping to counter terrorist propaganda with appropriate scripture-based messages.

Hike in source tax

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good number of imported products is set to be withdrawn.

The government might face challenges in VAT collection as Muhith proposed doubling the amount of package VAT.

Ahmad, however, said the FBCCI will give its formal reactions to the proposed budget on June 8 or 9 as they are not prepared yet.

The BGMEA chief welcomed the proposal to slash the corporate tax rate for the garment sector to 20 percent from 35 percent.

He also hailed the Tk 4,500 crore incentive package for exporters, the continuation of concession on import of capital machinery and duty-free import of fire fighting equipment and pre-fabricated building materials.

In its reaction, the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) said attaining the increased revenue target will be a major challenge for the government.

"Tax compliant enterprises should not be excessively burdened. Instead, new avenues of tax collection should be identified and pursued."

The government should also set targets for tax officials and reward them for enrolling new taxpayers.

"We are disappointed that no measures have been proposed to ease the current gas crisis. We urge that businesses suffering from low gas pressure be exempted from the minimum charge."

The chamber also demanded that the savings from lower import payment for petroleum products be immediately passed on to consumers at all levels.

The MCCI was disappointed that the tax-free threshold for individual's income has not been increased and that the highest rate for tax for individuals remains unchanged at 30 percent.

The chamber, however, welcomed the proposal of implementing the new VAT law from July next year instead of this July due to a lack of necessary preparation.

"We would like to draw the attention of the finance minister to our extensive comments given earlier on the VAT Act and VAT Rules and trust that this will be taken into account so

that the laws are fair and equitable between the interest of the revenue and taxpayers," it added.

Hossain Khaled, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, appreciated the proposal to continue with package VAT for the next one year.

Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry said the economic growth target of 7.2 percent is achievable provided that the investment-GDP ratio increases to a desired level.

FICCI also appreciated an increase in the allocation for education, social security and welfare programmes including the widening of social safety net, saying the measures will mitigate extreme poverty situation.

However, the reduction in the allocation for agriculture and health will be detrimental to the desired socio-economic impact in the economy, FICCI said in a statement.

The chamber also urged the government for corporate tax rate cuts and it said the scope of whitening black money is highly discouraging for honest taxpayers.

The International Business Forum of Bangladesh said it is praiseworthy that priorities were given to infrastructural development, including physical infrastructure, and initiatives for separate monitoring for mega development projects were also taken.

"But since the implementation of the Annual Development Programme in the past was not satisfactory, the government should give special emphasis to appropriate implementation of development projects in the days ahead."

The fixed-income and general middle-class groups would have been much more benefitted had the individual tax ceiling been raised from Tk 2.50 lakh to Tk 3 lakh, it added.

The Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry urged the government to complete the construction of the 16.5-kilometre expressway in Chittagong quickly.

The chamber said the proposal to increase VAT on transportation of petroleum products to 4.5 percent from 2.25 percent would increase the burden on common people.