

Drugs worth Tk 1,700cr seized since inception

Rab DG tells press
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Director General Benazir Ahmed yesterday said the elite force had detained 68,498 drug traders and seized drugs worth Tk 1,700 crore since the inception of Rab in 2004.

"Strict action is being taken against drug traders and drug abusers," he said at a press conference at Rab media centre in the capital's Karwan Bazar yesterday.

Following the prime minister's May 3 call to be alert against drugs, the force conducted a special drive from May 4 to May 13, he said.

During the period, mobile courts run by Rab punished 1,415 drug abusers to different terms of jail sentence. Around Tk 20 lakh was fined and drugs worth Tk 15 crore were seized. In addition, cases were filed against 381 during the period, Benazir told the conference.

The DG said, "We want to continue this drive. Rab wants to conduct more mobile courts to hand down instant punishment to the offenders. Regular cases as per law will also be filed where it is necessary."

Terming drug abuse a national problem, Benazir said, "We want cooperation from all so that the drug traders cannot misuse the law".

He also called upon students, teachers, guardians, political leaders, religious leaders, imams and people of all strata of life to work for uprooting the root of drugs.

He requested the people to inform Rab about drug-related issues through mobile app, website, Facebook page and hotline of the force.

Benazir said if the media publish or air the drug-related news, it becomes easier for the law enforcers to conduct drives.

Asked if any member of the elite force is involved in drug trade or supply, he claimed that they had no such information.



Anti-clockwise from top, an aerial shot of the Shahbagh intersection blockaded by quota reform demonstrators yesterday. The almost six-hour blockade from 1:00pm caused immense sufferings to commuters across the capital. Not only did they have to stay put inside the vehicles for hours, but a number of passengers had to start walking. Due to the protest, vehicles going in the direction of Shahbagh are stranded while the other side of the road remains empty as a few could cross the intersection and head towards Karwan Bazar. With baggage, people of all ages walking to their destinations in front of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University. A group of students chanting slogans voicing their demand for publication of a gazette notification formalising the prime minister's April 11 announcement of quota abolition in all public service recruitments.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS, RASHED SHUMON

Quota protesters' blockade clogs up Dhaka streets

Thousands suffer as Shahbagh closed off for six hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

They came from different walks of life but all their faces bore a resemblance: that of weariness. Their helpless eyes told the same sad story of being stranded on the road for hours, caused by quota reform protesters.

At around 3:30pm yesterday at Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, hundreds of people -- men and women, young and old, employed and unemployed -- were seen either gathered at different places of the road hoping to get on a bus to their destination, or walking alongside a long trail of buses that moved sluggishly.

Quota reform protesters blocked one of Dhaka's main thoroughfares, Shahbagh, suspending vehicular movement in the area yesterday for about six hours from around 1:00pm. The traffic congestion soon spread to TSC, Elephant Road, Matshya Bhaban intersection and Banglamotor.

At the Banglamotor intersection, one Monir Hossain -- with his daughter in his arm -- was seen trying to get on a bus to no avail. His wife, who was walking behind him, was holding a large envelop containing medical test reports.

Monir Hossain had come to the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) from Kazipara for a doctor's appointment for his 5-year-old daughter Sohana.

"This is absolute anarchy. No one cares about anyone," he said, while making another failed attempt of getting on an already-packed Mirpur-bound bus.

The couple was later seen walking along the footpath to Farmgate, taking turns carrying their daughter.

To cope with the traffic congestion, police diverted Mirpur, Gabtoli and Uttara-bound buses to VIP road from Matshya Bhaban via Kakrail. From TSC, police rerouted Mohammadpur, SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

Joint Working Group meets Thursday in Dhaka

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The second meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG), responsible for overseeing the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar, meets this Thursday in Dhaka.

The first meeting of the JWG was held in Myanmar on January 15 when the two countries finalised an agreement on the "physical arrangement" to begin the repatriation of over 800,000 Rohingyas who were forcibly displaced from Rakhine State of Myanmar.

Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque and his Myanmar counterpart Permanent Secretary at Myanmar Foreign Ministry Myint Thu will lead their respective delegations consisting of 15 high offi-

cials on each side.

On November 2017, the two countries signed a deal to start the repatriation process within two months. But so far, the Myanmar authorities verified only 878 names out of 8,032 names of Rohingya refugees mentioned in a list that was handed over by the Bangladesh government on February 19, said Diplomatic sources.

The extremely slow verification process and inadequate preparations for the resettlement arrangement by the Myanmar authorities are making experts sceptic about the success of the JWG meeting.

Dhaka will raise those concerns at the Dhaka meet of the JWG to ensure safe, dignified and voluntary return of the refugees to their homeland, the sources added.

Fate sealed for 3,247 trees

Govt decides to chop them down to make way for two projects

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will cut down 3,247 trees in Kapasia of Gazipur and Moheshkhali of Cox's Bazar to implement two projects -- building a mini stadium and a jetty.

The weekly cabinet meeting approved the proposal of removing the trees though the cabinet has an earlier decision not to fell trees in reserve forests. The decision taken in January 2016 is supposed to be effective until December 2022, aiming at saving bio-diversity.

According to the cabinet, 1,546 trees on 2.34-acre reserve forest land in Chandpur Union of Kapasia upazila will be cut for building a mini-stadium there. Among them, 1,400 are Akashmoni trees and the others include mango, jackfruit, plum and bamboo.

"The forest was created as part of a social afforestation project," Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiqul Alam told reporters while briefing the outcome of the meeting.

The youth and sports ministry will have to pay Tk 23,66,096 as compensation to the forest department for chopping down the trees. The forest department will receive 30 percent of the sum, while the rest would be distributed among the tree planters.

The meeting also approved a proposal of cutting down 1,701 trees at a reserve forest in Moheshkhali upazila of Cox's Bazar on some specific conditions.

About the proposal, the cabinet secretary said the trees of various species would be logged from 191.25 acres of land there taken by Eastern Refinery as lease to implement installation of "Single

Point Mooring" of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC). The project is aimed at supplying imported crude oil and diesel directly to Eastern Refinery from mother vessels in deep sea.

The BPC will have to deposit Tk 2,400 every year as revenue for each acre of land through signing the fixed demand agreement and pay Tk 1.36 crore as compensation for the loss of forest resources.

Besides, the BPC will have to plant tree saplings five times the number of the trees to be chopped in the next five years.

Besides, the cabinet approved a proposal to rename the Ministry of Environment and Forests as "Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change".

"The climate change is now a global

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A vendor prepares street food standing amid vehicles standing still in Lemur Bazar of Feni on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway yesterday. Although traffic congestion on the highway eased up yesterday after days of massive gridlock, a part of the highway near Feni still saw some tailback. Story on page 16.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

DSCC fixes beef, mutton prices for Ramadan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) has fixed the price of beef per kilogramme at Tk 450 for Ramadan, Tk 25 less than that of last Ramadan.

Visiting different markets, the correspondent found that meat merchants have increased price of beef by Tk 20 to Tk 30 since Shab-e-Barat, and selling beef at Tk 500 per kilogramme.

At a meeting yesterday with meat merchants, DSCC Mayor Mohammad Sayeed Khokon said the price of buffalo has been fixed per kg at Tk 420, while mutton (khashi) at Tk 720, and lamb and mutton (bokri) at Tk 600 each, says a press release.

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A super-CNG in town

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Some members of his family call him "crazy". Others think he is a trailblazer. Tapan, the man in question, however, feels he is just fulfilling his long-term wishes.

Tapan is a CNG-run three-wheeler driver in the capital. Except, his vehicle is unlike any other you have seen before.

In the profession

for over 10 years,

Tapan started

embellishing his

vehicle four

months ago. It now

provides an

unmatched three-

wheeler experience.

The vehicle

comes packed with

features to make

one's journey as

smooth as possible.

There is WiFi, a filtered-water system,

calculator, two fans, a mounted car TV

loaded with classic Indian and

Bangladeshi movies and much more. A

mirror faces the passenger. There are

combs, facial tissue and even a nail clipper.

But that's just the interior. Outside,

the vehicle has an actual, thriving garden

on its roof. This little piece of nature



houses both exotic and local plants.

"It looks beautiful and helps keep the

inside of the vehicle cooler," Tapan said.

The 50-year-old said although he had

begun making additions to his vehicle

recently, he had always wanted to do so.

"I pondered about the ways I could

make the experience better for my pas-

sengers," he said.

Interestingly,

Tapan does not own

the vehicle he has

decorated with such

passion. He rented it

from one

Aftabuddin, a garage

owner in Khilgaon.

"I told him I

wanted to do all

those and he agreed,

provided I paid for

those," he said.

Tapan has already invested around

Tk 40,000 on the vehicle's decorations.

However, he does not charge his passen-

gers extra.

"If passengers like the service, then

they tip me," he said with a smile. Tapan

takes home around Tk 400-600 per day,

on par with other CNG drivers.

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5,200 teachers losing hope on MPO inclusion

MATHEWS CHIRAN

Two years ago, Shahina Akter got her first job as an additional class teacher (ACT) in a madrasa in her village in Tentulia of Panchagarh.

Ever since she joined the institution, under a government project, she put in a sincere effort teaching science to students of sixth to tenth grade. Her job started to lessen the financial burden of her farmer father, as she started supporting her four-member family.

Shahina, who completed her masters last year, was assured by project officials that her job would be permanent and she would be enlisted in the government's monthly pay order (MPO) system as a regular teacher after the end of the project. She was planning to get married and settle down. But her plans suffered a blow, as her job was not made permanent even after the

end of the project.

"For the last five months, I have been teaching my students at the madrasa every day without any payment from the government," a frustrated Shahina told The Daily Star.

The project director and school principal insisted her to continue, she said. "That's why I am still doing it, with the hope that my job will be permanent. But there is no confirmation from anyone," she added.

Shahina is only one of 5,200 ACT recruits from 2,100 educational institutions, who are living in uncertainty over their job.

To enhance the quality of education, the World Bank and government jointly started the project titled "Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project" (SEQAEP) in 2008.

These 5,200 men and women were recruited as ACT under the project on a temporary basis, to teach only

English, Math and Science subjects at secondary level in 2015, as students' results in these subjects in public examinations were poor. They were teaching along with the regular teachers of the institutions.

The three-year contract with the teachers ended in December last year, and the ACTs are not receiving salaries from the government any more. However, many of the teachers receive a small honorarium from the institution since the project ended.

Yesterday, the teachers organised a press conference under the banner of Bangladesh ACT Association to voice their concerns and place demands to make their job permanent.

"Many teachers did not try for other government jobs as they were sure that their job will be permanent but it has not happened. Now their age for government job has expired. It is difficult for them to pursue another job, after spending years in teaching

profession," said Koushik Chandra Barman, president of the association.

The teachers said ACTs were supposed to be included in MPO system as regular teachers as per the section 36 (Ka) and 36 (Kha) of the ACT manual, prepared by the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) under the Ministry of Education.

"We have been hearing the same old cliché for the last five months. But now we are losing our hope," Koushik said.

Headmasters of different secondary educational institutions from different districts said ACTs have been very helpful for their educational institutions, and students want them to stay.

"There was no science teacher in my school but since the joining of an ACT, he has been teaching science, which have very useful for the

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The interior of Tapan's three-wheeler, fitted with a fan, TV, clock, grooming kit and stationery, along with safety measures like a fire extinguisher, among many other amenities. The vehicle also has a mini-garden on its rooftop, above, with various kinds of plants and decorative lighting.

PHOTO: SHAHEEN MOLLAH