

8 DAYS BEFORE, AFTER EID CNG stations to remain open 24 hrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

CNG filling stations across the country will remain open round-the-clock for four days each before and after the Eid-ul-Fitr, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said yesterday.

He made the comment at a view-exchange meeting with stakeholders at a temporary office of Meghna Bridge authorities in Gajaria of Munshiganj.

Quader, also the general secretary of the ruling Awami League, said holidaymakers' journey during this Eid would not be "totally hassle-free but remain at a tolerable level".

"In order to ease the holidaymakers' journey, we have instructed the authorities concerned to repair all roads by June 8. If needed, the repairing work will continue round-the-clock."

Referring to the alleged corruption in toll collection at weigh stations on highways, the minister said actions would be taken if such allegations were found to be true.

ACC quizzes AK Azad over 'illegal wealth'

UNB, Dhaka

The Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday interrogated Ha-Meem Group owner AK Azad, also an ex-president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, over allegation of amassing wealth illegally.

ACC Director Jainal Abedin Shibly quizzed Azad from 9:00am to 1:00pm at its headquarters, said ACC Public Relations Officer Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya.

Secretary Shamsul Arefin of ACC said the businessman failed to appear before the graft watchdog for the second round of quizzing. He filed an application on May 9 seeking time and he was asked to appear on May 22.

Azad denied making any comment on the issue.

Earlier, the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) demolished part of his Gulshan house for constructing it allegedly without any approved design.

Opponents

The captains of France, Australia and Denmark -- Peru's group stage opponents at the finals -- also voiced their support for Guerrero on Monday in a letter addressed to FIFA.

FIFPro said the 14-month ban for taking cocaine was "unfair and disproportionate" and said its representatives wanted to meet FIFA as well to plead 34-year-old Guerrero's case.

FIFPro said the ban was "the latest example of a World Anti-Doping Code that too often leads to inappropriate sanctions, especially when it has been established that there was no intent to cheat".

It recalled that both FIFA and the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) had agreed that 34-year-old Guerrero did not knowingly ingest the substance and that there was no performance-enhancing effect.

Guerrero, who says he accidentally ingested the cocaine in tea, said in a message on Facebook that he was hopeful his meeting with FIFA supremo Gianni Infantino could lead to a breakthrough.

"A hope has appeared that I could play in the World Cup. That is my big dream... I hope to return with good news," he said.

"Peru is returning to football's ultimate stage after a 36-year absence and we believe Paolo Guerrero should be allowed to lead his nation and celebrate what will be a career highlight," read the letter signed by Hugo Lloris, Mile Jedinak and Simon Kjaer.

"In our view, it would be plainly wrong to exclude him from what should be a pinnacle of his career - an achievement he has worked so hard for, and for so many years - on the basis of a finding which confirms that he did not intend to cheat and did not intend to enhance his performance with prohibited substances," it continued.

"As such, we turn to the FIFA Council and kindly put forward an urgent request for clemency by asking the FIFA Council to temporarily interrupt the ban imposed on Paolo Guerrero during the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia, with the suspension to recommence at the conclusion of Peru's participation in the competition."



A woman is cooking food on a kerosene stove in her kitchen as there is no gas supply to her home in the capital's Uttor Goran area yesterday. Residents of the area have been suffering because of a shortage of gas supply for over a month.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Godfathers remain untouched

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The lists were also sent to the home ministry, but nothing has happened.

Interestingly this time, as the crack-down goes on, Teknaf-Cox's Bazar area is yet to see any major drive. But across the country, more than 30 alleged yaba traders have been killed in "gunfights" with Rab and police over the past few days.

In the latest move, the narcotics department sent a list of 141 yaba godfathers to the Anti-Corruption Commission in December 2017 that includes the names of Bodi and his gang. The department requested the ACC to investigate their wealth.

Earlier, Bodi was jailed for three years for concealing wealth but he is now out on bail.

The narcotics department report said Bodi was one of the main controllers of yaba trade in Bangladesh. Nothing happens without his nod.

In November 2012, the Department of Narcotics Control initially prepared a list of 554 top yaba traders. Later in 2014, intelligence agencies, the narcotics department, police and Rab prepared a list of 1,200 yaba traders. The list was revealed by the media in the middle of 2014.

Bodi and several of his relatives and associates were on the list, including Bodi's brothers Abdul Shukkur and Mujibur Rahman, step brothers Abdul Amin and Faisal Rahman, in-laws Akhter Kamal and Shahed Kamal, uncle Haider Ali, cousin Kamrul Islam Russell and nephew Nipu.

The 2014 list includes the names of 87 leaders of the AL and its front organisations Jubo League, Chhatra League and Sramik League who back the yaba traders in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi divisions, the daily Observer reported on January 22 last year.

No actions were taken against them and, as reported by the daily Observer, Bodi's name was later dropped from the list.

As Bodi's name surfaced, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told the media in 2014 that no action could be taken against Bodi because no evidence of his involvement in yaba trade was found.

Replying to a query about Bodi's alleged role in yaba trade, the home boss told reporters yesterday, "Those involved in drug trade will be brought to book. We're trying to collect more information about Bodi and action will be taken against him after receiving proper information."

Asked if only those who carry the drug would be killed in the name of gunfights, Kamal said, "We won't spare anyone, no matter if he is an MP, government official, member of security force or journalist."

But the most interesting thing happened when these alleged yaba traders participated at an anti-drug meeting at the Cox's Bazar deputy commissioner's office on October 2, 2014. Home ministry's then Senior Secretary Mozammel Haque Khan was the chief guest of the high profile meeting attended by a number of alleged yaba traders, including Bodi and Teknaf Upazila Chairman Zafar Ahmed.

They flatly denied any involvement in the yaba trade and said the list was prepared to harass them.

Meantime, the Dhaka Metropolitan

Police (DMP) has recently drawn up a list of 100 top drug dealers in the city, although their details are not yet known.

But earlier in 2017, the DMP drew up another list of 100 godfathers who were mostly linked to the ruling AL and its front organisations, two from BNP and Jatiya Party, a number of cops and also narcotics department officials.

Of the godfathers in the capital, 16 were ward councillors -- 15 from AL and one from BNP. Besides, a thana-level president of Bastuhara (homeless) League and a ward-level secretary of Tanti (weaver) League, both pro-AL organisations, were on the list.

The DMP had also compiled a list of 1,100 dealers and retailers of yaba in the city. The list was forwarded to the home ministry.

The police headquarters has already prepared a list of 26,299 drug dealers and patrons countrywide and has been conducting raids to catch them, a senior police officer said wishing anonymity.

12 more 'drug dealers' killed

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for several years and he did not get bail. So the law is equal for all," he said.

Replying to a query, Kamal said the law enforcers were gathering information about Abdur Rahman Bodi, Awami League lawmaker from the Teknaf-Ukhia constituency. "Action will be taken against him if we receive proper information."

The Rapid Action Battalion began an anti-narcotics drive on May 4 while the police launched a nationwide 10-day special crackdown on drug dealers on the first day of Ramadan on May 18.

According to the Police Headquarters, at least 3,200 people were arrested across the country in the last four days during the drive.

The Rab arrested 699 people for their alleged involvement in the illegal business while its mobile courts jailed 2,236 and fined 485 others since its operation began.

NHRC CONCERNED

Law enforcers have come up with more or less the same version of the so-called shootouts and rights activists are critical of the way things have unfolded. They said killing was not the right way of tackling the drug menace.

Yesterday, the National Human Rights Commission said it did not support any sort of extrajudicial killing. It also expressed concern over the killing of nine people in anti-narcotics drives at different places on Monday.

In a statement, NHRC Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque said an all-out effort, including a social movement, was needed to free the nation from the curse of narcotics.

"So, drug traders should be given exemplary punishment as per the law," he said, urging the members of the law enforcement agencies to launch drives taking the issue of human rights and the relevant law into consideration.

The agencies need to be watchful so that no innocent person is harmed during the drives, he said.

YESTERDAY'S 'SHOOTOUTS'

Of the 12 victims, two each were killed in Comilla, Nilphamari and Feni while one each in Netrakona, Chittagong, Dinajpur, Brahmanbaria, Narayanganj and Chuadanga districts.

An alleged drug trader was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Barowari Balumahal area of Netrokona sadar upazila.

The man, Amjad Hossain, 25, was accused in 13 cases, including for murder and possession of drugs and arms, filed with different police stations, said Borhan Uddin, officer-in-charge of Netrakona Model Police Station.

The law enforcers claimed to have recovered 500 grams of heroin, 305 yaba tablets, and a pipe gun from the spot.

Talking to The Daily Star, Aminul Haque, maternal uncle of Amjad claimed his nephew was innocent.

"Locals knew Amjad did not even smoke cigarettes, let alone taking drugs or getting involved in drug trade," he told The Daily Star.

Aminul, also secretary of Netrakona municipal BNP, said Amjad was the secretary candidate in the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) Netrakona municipal committee.

As he was involved in politics, he had been implicated in many cases, said Aminul.

In Chittagong, Sukkur Ali, 45, was killed in a "shootout" between a gang of drug peddlers and Rab in Bayezid area. A gun, three bullets, 10,000 yaba pills and half kilogram of marijuana were recovered from the spot, Rab claimed.

Sukkur, who was from Brahmanbaria, stood accused in more than 10 cases filed with different police stations in the city, said Deputy Director Lieutenant Commander Ashequr Rahman of Rab-7.

Sukkur's family members, however, said he was a CNG-run auto rickshaw driver.

"It's true my father-in-law used to take marijuana but he was not a drug dealer," Md Soheli, son-in-law of Sukkur, told this paper.

"He [Sukkur] was taking dinner at his house when a group of plainclothes men came around 12:30am and took him with them," he said.

"After a few minutes, we heard gunshots. Later, my father-in-law's bullet-riddled body was found near his house," Soheli said.

In Dinajpur, alleged drug peddler Probal Hossain, 35, was killed in a "shootout" with police in Birampur upazila early yesterday, hours after the law enforcers had picked him up from his home and taken him along them to arrest other criminals, said OC Abdus Sabur of Birampur Police Station.

Probal's wife Rajia Begum said her

husband was innocent but police claimed that he was accused in eight drug cases filed with the police station.

The man who was killed in a "gunfight" with Rab in Bancharampur upazila of Brahmanbaria was identified as Dhan Mia, 30.

Mufti Mahmud Khan, Rab's legal and media wing director, said the "gunfight" ensued when a Rab team challenged a car in Sonarampur area. As shots were fired from inside the vehicle, the Rab members retaliated, triggering the gunfight that left Dhan dead.

Later, the law enforcers arrested Dhan's wife from the car and seized 11,700 yaba tablets.

Dhan was accused in three cases filed with Bancharampur Police Station, according to the local police.

In Comilla, two suspected drug traders -- Peyar Ali, 24, and Sharif, 26 -- were killed in a "gunfight" with police in Sadar upazila's Aranyapur around 12:40am, said Abu Salam Mia, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station.

Peyar was accused in at least 13 cases while Sharif in five, police said.

In Feni Sadar upazila, "drug dealers" Manjur Alam alias Manju, 49, and Mohammad Faruque, 35, were killed in two "gunfights" with Rab.

Manju was killed in Lemua Bridge area on Dhaka-Chittagong highway around 2:00am while Faruque in Daudpur Bridge area around 11:15pm, Rab said.

The force claimed to have recovered a pistol, seven bullets and 10,000 yaba pills from the spot.

In Narayanganj, alleged drug trader Bachchu Khan, 35, was killed in a similar incident involving the Rab in Araihaar upazila. Bachchu was a notorious drug dealer in Tongi and Gazipur and was accused in at least nine drug cases, said Maj Ishtiaque Ahmed, a company commander of Rab-1.

In Nilphamari, two suspected drug traders -- Johni Islam and Shahin -- were killed in a "gunfight" with police around 2:30am near Golahat mass graveyard in Saidpur upazila, hours after they had been detained from their houses, said Ashok Kumar Paul, assistant superintendent of police in Saidpur.

The law enforcers had taken them to the graveyard area to arrest other drug traders who, sensing police presence, opened fire leaving the two dead, he

said.

Another person, Kamruzzaman Sadu, 38, was killed in "gunfight" with police in Chuadanga.

BNP ALLEGATION

Meanwhile, senior BNP leader Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain yesterday at a press conference in the capital alleged that the government was killing people in crossfire in the name of anti-drug drives in violation of the judiciary and the constitution.

At another briefing at BNP's Nayapaltan headquarters, party's Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said, "The deep-rooted political reason behind the current extrajudicial killing spree in the name of eradicating narcotics is to target and kill opposition leaders and activists."

[Our correspondents in Mymensingh, Dinajpur, Brahmanbaria, Narayanganj, Nilphamari, Kushtia, Comilla and a correspondent in Feni contributed to the report]

Cops open fire

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Tamil Nadu chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswami ordered an inquiry into the shootings but defended the police.

"The police had to take action under unavoidable circumstances to protect public life and property as the protesters resorted to repeated violence... police had to control the violence," he said in a statement.

The families of each victim would be offered one million rupees (\$14,700) compensation, he added.

Residents have been protesting for months against the plant run by a Vedanta subsidiary, Sterlite Copper.

Environmentalists and locals allege the plant is contaminating water resources, a charge denied by the company.

The protests have intensified after Vedanta, owned by an Indian billionaire but with its head office in London, sought to expand the plant.

The plant -- which is currently non-operational -- has a 400,000-tonne annual capacity.

It was shut briefly after an alleged gas leak in March 2013 that left hundreds with breathing difficulties, nausea and throat infections.

India's federal green court allowed it to be reopened.

No respite

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cubic feet per day (mmcf), while Titas' distribution capacity is only 1,650 mmcf. This resulted in a shortage of over 350 mmcf, Rahman said.

According to Petrobangla, the industry production stands at 2,700 mmcf while total demand is 3,300 mmcf.

As the authorities concerned failed to provide a solution during Ramadan, residents of different parts of Dhaka city, including Gendaria, Mirpur, Adabor, Shyamoli, Mirhajirbagh, Ibrahimpur, Gopibagh, Eskaton, East Razabazar, Khilji Road and Babor Road in Mohammadpur, Shewrapara, Ansar camp and Jhigatola, were facing difficulties.

The Titas MD, however, said city dwellers in 20 percent of the city were facing the gas crisis. "Consumption of gas rises by 15 percent during Ramadan due to the additional cooking of iftar items," he said.

He also mentioned that the government had taken some measures before Ramadan, including shutting down filling stations from 5:00pm to 11:00pm every day which was 5:00pm to 8:00pm before Ramadan.

He said the government also shut down Jamuna Fertiliser Company Limited before Ramadan to increase gas supply as fertiliser companies consume a large amount of the resource.

This ordeal

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Rakhine state that began in late August, causing the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world.

Almost 60 per cent of them are children with many aid agencies terming it a "children's crisis".

Chopra, also a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador for Child Rights, visited three Rohingya refugee camps in Teknaf yesterday, a day after she arrived in the beach town of Cox's Bazar, the central point of the ongoing refugee crisis.

At around 9:30am, she visited Hariyakhali relief distribution centre where UNICEF officials briefed her regarding the centre's operations. From there, she went to the Naf River's entry point through which the refugees entered Bangladesh, our Cox's Bazar correspondent reported.

As she walked through the area, dozens of children gathered to see the famous Indian actor, who is also a singer and producer. She talked to the children and took photos with them.

The former Miss World then walked up the steps carved into the Netang hill at the entry of Teknaf. From there, she took in the view of the Naf River.

Around 11:30am, she visited a child development centre at a Rohingya camp in Leda where hundreds of locals gathered to see the star. Finally, she visited a child-friendly space at Balukhali Rohingya camp where UNICEF officials described the activities of the centre to her.

She then returned to Royal Tulip Hotel in Ukhia where she has been staying since Monday.

Sharing her experience of the visit on Instagram, Priyanka said the trip the Rohingyas had to make from Myanmar to Bangladesh was filled with hardship and tremendous danger. Many of them made their journeys on foot, walking for days through the hills, and then floating across the Naf river or the Bay of Bengal on makeshift boats.

"...Many of them injured, pregnant, elderly, etc. Their ordeal didn't end here...after entering Bangladesh; they would often have to wait for days, sleeping in the open fields with no food or water, for aid workers to reach them."

"For a lot of the Rohingya children, this ordeal will leave them scarred, physically and emotionally, for the rest of their lives. With your help, maybe these children can have a chance at a future...because right now, their future is bleak."

Priyanka is scheduled to visit Kutupalong camp today and fly to Dhaka tomorrow, ending her four-day long trip.

Bangabandhu-1

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2-3 more months to fully begin its operations."

The satellite reached its destination in 11 days after launch.

Bangladesh entered the elite Space Club of 57 nations with the launch of its first geostationary communications satellite, Bangabandhu-1, into the orbit by US space transport company SpaceX on May 12.

The satellite was launched using the latest version of SpaceX's upgraded Falcon 9 Block 5 rocket, from the historic Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral.

The slot was rented from Russian satellite company Intersputnik for \$28million in January 2015.