

Relief materials for Rohingyas being sold in Sylhet

MINTU DESHWARA, back from Sylhet

Relief materials, distributed among Rohingya refugees at Cox's Bazar camps, were found being sold in Bandarbar area of Sylhet city.

When contacted as a customer, a trader of the relief materials told this correspondent that rice, pulses, oil, sugar, milk, chili pepper, soap, baby food, clothes, blankets and many more relief materials were available for sell at a very low price.



The products that were being sold at the local market were distributed by international aid agencies including World Food Programme and USAID.

Mizan Mia, 35, one of such relief traders, said they usually sell the products during night time.

"Rohingyas sell these relief materials

at Moricha, Sonar Para, Kotbazar, Ukhiya Sadar, Kutupalong, Balukhali, Thaingskhali and Palongkhali areas," he added.

Another such trader, Saju Mia, 45, said he bought USAID Super Cereal Plus Wheat Soya Blend, a special formula for children below six-month of age, at a price of Tk 50 but would sell each pack between Tk 200 and Tk 250.

"Rohingyas sell these products for some extra cash," he said.

Saju also offered this correspondent to contact with him if he was interested in doing wholesale business.

Contacted, M Kazi Emdadul Islam, deputy commissioner of Sylhet district, said this was unacceptable.

"We will find out who sell these relief materials and take action against them," he said.

HK police retrieve fresh trove of petrol bombs from univ

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Police in Hong Kong this week re-entered the campus of a university it besieged for more than 10 days last month, gathering newly discovered chemicals and petrol bombs hoarded by anti-government protesters in the Chinese-ruled city.

Following the dramatic saga - where riot police and more than 1,000 demonstrators transformed Hong Kong's Polytechnic University campus into a battleground - officers were called to retrieve additional dangerous items found among the debris and stowed in locked areas.

Between November 26 and December 2 authorities seized 4,296 petrol bombs, 671 bottles of chemicals and 622 weapons, police said in a statement late on Tuesday.

Officers first entered the Polytechnic campus on November 29, when they collected thousands of petrol bombs, which they dusted for fingerprints, as well as bows and arrows and bottles of chemicals.

The campus conflict began in mid-November when protesters barricaded themselves against riot police in days of violent clashes that marked a significant escalation in the political unrest that has roiled the former British colony for six months.

About 1,100 people were arrested in connection with the campus siege.

Sparked by a controversial and since-withdrawn extradition bill, the protests have swelled into broader calls for greater democratic freedoms.

Those who have joined the pro-democracy demonstrations accuse China of increasingly interfering in

freedoms promised to the former British colony when it was returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

Pro-democracy parties won a resounding victory in local district council elections late last month. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has appealed for peace in the city but has not offered any concessions.

Sustained demonstrations, scheduled to continue this week and expected to draw thousands to the streets this weekend, show few signs of abating and are taking an economic toll on the global financial hub.

Business activity in Hong Kong contracted at the fastest pace in 21 years in November, dragged down by the protests and softening global demand, an IHS Markit survey showed yesterday.

Asia's largest distributor of luxury brands, the Blubell group, has appealed to Hong Kong landlords to scrap the base rent in shopping malls, saying a slump in tourist spending will push even more retailers out of business.

Sales in some of its stores, two of which are on the verge of closing, have dropped as much as 60 percent during the six months of protests, Bluebell chief executive Ashley Mickelwright told the South China Morning Post.

Hong Kong recorded its largest-ever retail collapse in October, with sales dropping 24.3 percent to HK\$30.1 billion, the government said Monday.

The new figures will extend the technical recession recorded last quarter, with the government preparing to release a fourth round of economic stimulus.

N Korea's Kim in new horse ride through winter snows

AFP, Seoul

North Korean media yesterday published fresh pictures of leader Kim Jong Un riding a white horse on a sacred mountain, imagery that experts say is heavy with symbolism and may indicate a policy announcement.

The photos come as nuclear talks with the United States are stalled and with a looming end-of-year deadline set by North Korea for some kind of concession from Washington.

Kim -- in a black leather trenchcoat he has worn recently to open a flagship construction project and supervise a weapons test -- was pictured leading a squad of riders in a white forest near Mount Paektu.

The group included his wife Ri Sol Ju as well as several officials, the images released by the official KCNA news agency showed.

The mountain -- a dormant volcano on the border with China -- has great symbolic significance in the North as both the spiritual birthplace of the Korean nation and, according to Pyongyang's orthodoxy, the birthplace of Kim's father Kim Jong Il.

The current leader toured several historic locations and climbed the mountain, KCNA said, leaving a "sacred trace in the revolutionary battle sites", through "knee-high virgin snow".

The agency also released new images of Kim in a light brown coat with fur collar at the summit of the mountain, to which he previously rode in October.

Analysts say that pictures of Kim at

Mount Paektu -- a physically dramatic location that is ubiquitous in North Korean imagery -- represent assertions of leadership and legitimacy, given the historical background.

According to Pyongyang's propaganda, his father was born at a secret camp in the area, where his own father, the North's founder Kim Il Sung, was fighting Korea's Japanese colonial occupiers.

According to independent historians and Soviet records, however, Kim Jong Il was born in Russia, where his father was in exile.

Kim tends to visit once or twice a year, trips that are sometimes seen as indicators of policy changes.

54 detained

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"Apart from that, inspections were also conducted at road blocks to ensure that foreigners possess valid passport and travel documents," he said.

RTD DG Shaharuddin Khalid said his department identified 380 violations involving foreigners during the operation.

About 189 violations were related to not having driving licences, 47 for driving without a Goods Driving License (GDL), and 72 for driving with expired licences and driving without car insurance, he added.

"...foreigners are not allowed to drive commercial vehicles or public service vehicles in Malaysia," he added, urging employers to pay serious attention to the issue.



Flanked by senior Awami League leaders, party President Sheikh Hasina speaks during a meeting of the Awami League's National Committee at the Gono Bhavan yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Continue drive against graft

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members of the AL Central Working Committee, 21 members nominated by the party chief, and one member each from 78 organisational districts.

Its main task is to make important decisions on national and international issues and approve the party's decisions and expenditures.

Speaking at the meeting, some district leaders requested the party president to expand the ongoing anti-graft drive to the grassroots level, saying it will enhance her image, according to meeting insiders.

The AL chief urged her party leaders to remain united.

Earlier in her introductory speech, she called upon people to stay alert so that "looters and arsonists" cannot grab state power again.

"This is my appeal to the nation for keeping these elements away from state power," she said at the meeting, reports BSS.

"Ziaur Rahman, Khaleda Zia and Tarique Rahman all are killers... they

are a family of killers. All they know is killing, corruption and money embezzlement, nothing else."

She further said her party does not believe in politics of vengeance.

Coming down heavily on the BNP chief, the PM said Khaleda is in jail not in a political case, but in a corruption case for misappropriating orphans' money, and a caretaker government had filed it.

Hasina wondered why some people are shedding tears over the treatment of a corrupt person like Khaleda, who killed several hundred people by carrying out arson attacks...

The PM thanked people for not forgetting "miserable misrule" of the BNP-Jamaat alliance and for not voting it in the 2008 election.

"The BNP got only 29 seats in the polls... Many people seem to have forgotten this."

Regarding the 2014 election boycott by the BNP, Hasina said the party's aim was to impede the ongoing democratic process. "They never believe in the

power of people and democracy."

About the BNP's debacle in the last general election, the PM said the party could foresee its defeat, and nomination "business" cost it a lot.

"They sold nomination papers to more than one candidate in a constituency... they took the election as a scope for business."

Terming Khaleda the "godmother of terrorism" in the country, Hasina said terrorists got state patronisation during her tenures as PM.

"She [Khaleda] pampered Bangla Bhai... she was behind the killings of people through arson attacks..."

Referring to her government's drive against corruption and terrorism, the PM said the drive must continue to reap the benefits of her government's massive development work.

Describing various development activities of her government, Hasina said the AL always works for people and the country.

"We are taking the country forward..." she added.

Legal entities, illegal sales

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arms illegally in grey market for years, said Jahangir Alam, additional deputy commissioner of special action group of the CITT.

A double barrel gun, a one shooter and 74 bullets were also recovered from their possession while they were handing those over to criminals in the capital's Gulistan.

A high official of CITT unit, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star recently that Babul is not the only legal arms dealer who is involved in selling arms illegally.

"Majority of the arms dealers doing business outside Dhaka have links in grey market."

In grey market, officials say, legitimate goods come from the authorised manufacturers but are sold through unauthorised channels.

"We went through the registries of nine arrested legal arms dealers and did not find any sale records of last couple of years, yet they were running the shops with staff," the official added.

Asked about the police claim, Legal Arms Dealers Association's Secretary General Nasir Uddin said it is totally baseless.

Nasir termed the arrest of nine arms dealers in the last 17 months "isolated incidents."

"We did not provide support to any arms dealers involved in illegal business and we also terminate the membership of the dealers if found guilty," he said on October 29.

The Legal Arms Dealers Association have 84 members right now.

TEN BORDER POINTS

The 10 border points the syndicates have been found using are Benapole, Chapainawabganj, Hili in Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Sylhet, Akhaura, Bheramara in Kushtia, Khagrachhari, Bandarban and Rangamati.

Syndicate members from the Indian side bring arms from different states of their country and hand those over to their Bangladeshi counterparts, according to CITT investigators.

Sometimes the members cross border and in some cases, the smugglers use Bangladesh to supply arms from one state to another of India, they added.

FIREARMS TYPE, PRICE

Investigators found that the smugglers in the last two years brought over 200 firearms to Bangladesh and its main customers were muggers, extortionists and political goons.

CITT officials, however, refused to give details of customers for the sake of investigation.

The syndicates mostly smuggle 7.65 and 9mm pistols and .32 revolvers from India. They also bring in AK 22 and one shooter but demand for these guns is not so high, according to the police investigation reports.

A 7.65 pistol is bought at Tk 20 thousand in India but sold at Tk 40-80 thousand in Bangladesh.

A .32 revolver and 9mm pistol in India cost Tk 20 thousand and Tk 40 thousand and they are sold here at Tk 70-90 thousand.

The price of an AK 22 gun in Bangladesh is around Tk 7.5 lakh while it costs around Tk 4.5 lakh in India, said the investigators, quoting the arrested syndicate members.

If legally imported, these firearms will cost at least Tk 3 lakh.

To sell legally imported firearms in grey market, an authorised dealer shows sale records in their registries mentioning that they sold the items to another legal dealer.

Later, the barcodes are removed and the arms go to grey market, the investigators added.

TECHNIQUES THEY APPLY

According to investigators, the

syndicates always use code words to buy and sell firearms. The Bangla words for "Tree", "Cow", "Car", "Elephant", "6-acre land", "9-acre land" and "Banyan Tree" are some popular code words for firearms.

They use "Sapling", "Calf", "Lipsticks" and "Seed" for bullets.

The syndicates mainly use women and street children to carry arms inside Bangladesh. A woman gets Tk 3,000 and a child Tk 100 to Tk 1,000 for every assignment.

The arms are carried in the packets of sweetmeat or biscuit and bags of rice or vegetables to dodge eyes of law enforcers, added the investigators.

Contacted yesterday, ADC Jahangir said they were trying their best to check the illegal sale of arms trade and arrest all those working with these syndicates.

Still there are two pending cases and they are working to file the charge sheets soon, he added.

CITT unit official say they place the charge sheet in every arms case within 60 working days as per the directives in section 30 (B) of the Arms Act 1878.

The unit brought charges against the 41 people under section 19 (a) of The Arms Act 1878, which provides for life sentence or rigorous imprisonment for not less than seven years.

It arrested four persons, including legal arms dealer Anowar Hossain Babu, owner of Sarker Arms in Rangpur, on March 29 last year and submitted the charge sheet on July 10. The trial began on February 26 this year but Babu already secured bail from jail, according to court sources.

The trial of 11 other arms cases are yet to begin.

Eight other arrested legal arms dealers, who were named in the charge sheets, also secured bail, said court sources.

Gold hope dashed

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found herself collapsed on the mat following a kick to the back of her head from her Sri Lankan counterpart.

She reeled under the impact of the hit and collapsed before being rushed to a hospital a half-hour's drive from the venue.

Fortunately, a CT Scan and X-ray showed that Priya had not sustained any severe injury or concussion,

but Bangladesh were dealt a heavy blow as they lost one of their best karatekas.

Bangladesh lost that bout and were tied at a game apiece against the Sri Lankans, who tried to exert their physical superiority by going for knock-out kicks. The last bout became a decider and Antara, who had previously won a gold and a silver, carried the weight of the team on her shoulders, beat her opponent by 4-1 points to clinch the final berth.

But they were up against Pakistan, arguably the best team of the competition, and without one of their gold medallists.

Still, the first two bouts of the final proved to be fiercely competitive as Antara gave Bangladesh a leveller with a 7-3 win after Pakistan had taken the upper hand with a 6-4 win in the first game. And then came the decider, which Priya was supposed to play. But instead, she was lying on a hospital bed as Naima Islam was fielded in her place. The reserve member failed to put up any resistance against the Pakistani karateka as Bangladesh had to settle for a silver medal.

However, it was a brave effort from the Bangladesh karate team as they went down fighting to earn a silver medal on a day when Bangladesh failed to add to their gold tally of four from the previous two days. There were three more bronze medals from karate events, bringing the tally from the discipline to three gold, three silver and 12 bronze medals.

Elsewhere, there was only one other silver medal that Bangladesh won yesterday, courtesy of the men's kho kho team, while there were seven more bronze medals in wushu, one in long-jump, one in women's kho kho and two in table tennis. These achievements took Bangladesh's total tally to four gold, eight silver and 31 bronze medals for a total of 43 medals.

Meanwhile, Nepal, the host country, continued their dominance in the medals tally and were followed by India in second position, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in third and fourth positions respectively while Bangladesh were in fifth.

Govt moves

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The ministry has decided to cut the DAP price, expecting that it would help increase the use of this fertiliser and gradually lower the use of urea and triple super phosphate (TSP) among farmers, he said.

The ministry has to subsidise about Tk 800 crore for DAP alone, he said, adding that they now give about Tk 7,000 crore to the fertiliser sector in subsidies.

The minister added that they took different steps to bring down the onion price.

Farmers of this country can grow onion as there is land to cultivate the produce and the weather is favourable for its cultivation. So, there should not be onion deficit in the country "if we can ensure its storage accordingly", he said.

On high prices of vegetables, the minister said among many reasons, this was because transportation cost was unusually high and vegetables are perishable. "I think that it [the price] will go down soon."