

DRIVE AT ROHINGYA CAMP

2 Rab men shot by criminals

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Two Rab members got shot when criminals opened fire on them during an anti-narcotics drive at a Rohingya camp in Teknaf yesterday.

"A team of Rab went to a Rohingya camp in Nayapara to recover yaba pills. When the team was returning after arresting suspects, criminals opened fire on Rab members from behind," said Rab Director (Legal and Media) Lt Col Sarwar-Bin-Quasem.

Following a tip-off, the team from Rab-15 raided the camp around

4:00pm to recover a large consignment of yaba.

Solider Imran and Corporal Shahab Uddin were shot. One of them was shot in the leg while the other in the hip.

"They are now out of danger. They will be taken to Dhaka for better treatment," Lt Col Sarwar told The Daily Star last night.

Seeking anonymity, a community leader of Nayapara refugee camp said a group of criminals opened fire on the Rab team in broad daylight leaving two Rab members injured.

All loans at 9pc

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in 2008, didn't the US print dollars?" "Banks are in agreement with the government's instruction," said Md Nazrul Islam Mazumder, chairman of BAB.

Asked whether banks would face losses because of the latest decision, Kamal said the government would provide support to banks for a while to tide them over.

For instance, 50 percent of the government funds will be kept in private banks from now on. Previously, they were deposited with state banks.

This would provide the banks a steady supply of funds.

When his attention was drawn to a previous identical government measure, he said: "This time we will make sure this instruction is executed properly."

The fund will be kept at 5.5 percent interest rate in state-run banks and at 6 percent in private banks, Kamal said, adding that the private banks would get funds in line with their paid-up capital.

"No bank will be allowed to take deposit beyond six percent."

But there would be some losses for banks as they will have to cash out a portion of their fixed deposit receipts (FDR) before their due date, Kamal said.

Banks earlier pledged to bring down the interest rate to less than 10 percent

by August last year, but in the end they did not keep their word despite bagging a number of facilities to bring down lending rate.

The government provided various benefits to banks, including a reduction of cash reserve ratio -- which is the percentage of total deposits banks must maintain in the form of cash reserve with the central bank -- and repo rate -- which is the rate at which the central bank lends money to banks.

Asked why banks had not kept their previous promise of bringing down the interest rate on lending to single digit, Mazumder, who is also the chairman of Exim Bank, said there has been a difference between the two commitments.

"We earlier tried to lower the rates as per our own decision despite the fact that we did not enjoy full government support to do this," he said, adding that the government agencies did not keep their deposits in private banks as agreed then.

The latest decision will be implemented soon because of the finance minister's strong role here, he said.

"We strongly believe that the new decision will not fail under any circumstance and no additional support will be required for banks for implementation of the decision."

Rail services halted

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Rab released the man later in the evening.

Hundreds of passengers suffered at different stations and onboard the trains due to the delay.

Maron Chandra Das, manager of airport station, told The Daily Star that gateman Al Amin lowered the barrier at Kasaibari level crossing as Karnaphuli Express approached around 11:00am.

Several Rab men, in a vehicle, asked him to lift the barrier, Maron said, adding that Al Amin told the Rab men that the gate had already been locked.

The Rab men then picked him up, he added.

As the news spread among gatemen of nearby crossings, they suspended work.

Operation of trains remained suspended from 2:50pm-4:40pm, officials said. Dhaka-bound Maitree Express from Kolkata remained

stranded at Tongi, Rajshahi-bound Silk City Express at cantonment, Tangail Commuter at airport, and Upakul Express at Tejgaon stations.

Akbar Hossain, in-charge of Airport Railway Police Outpost, said the gateman was picked up following an altercation with Rab men. The work abatement began about two hours later.

Top officials of Bangladesh Railway talked with Rab officials, Maron said, adding that Al Amin was released around 6:00pm.

Contacted, Rab Director (Legal and media) Lt Col Sarwar-Bin-Quasem said Al Amin was detained because of allegations of drug peddling and extortion against him.

"After primary interrogation, we released him on a bond," he said. He refuted the allegation of detaining Al Amin because he asked the Rab men to wait until the train crossed the area.

43 Bangladeshis killed

FROM PAGE 1

Earlier in June at another DG-level talks in Dhaka, the then BSF director general Rajni Kant Mishra had termed border killings as "unfortunate deaths" and said the number of such incidents increased.

Border killings have continued for years despite a commitment from top BSF officials that the number of such deaths would be brought to zero.

Apart from killings, torture frequently takes place on the borderline.

During the last week of April, BSF members tortured a Bangladeshi man by pulling out all 10 of his fingernails with pliers after he was caught for "illegal entry".

Such incidents of torture have caught media attention and the BSF has been heavily criticised by human rights defenders.

Talking to this newspaper, Mizanur Rahman, former chairman of National Human Rights Commission, termed such incidents "high-handedness of India".

"...Unfortunately our government is not that vocal about this issue. Our ministers or secretaries always say that they bring up the issue for discussion with their Indian counterpart. But we don't see any improvement.

"Our government will keep on saying that the bilateral relationship with India is better than any time in the past. On the other hand, such border killings

will go on ... It's very unfortunate," he said, adding that now the government should step up its efforts to address the issue.

Talking to The Daily Star earlier, Brad Adams, executive director of Human Rights Watch's Asia Division, had said despite promises by successive Indian governments to end abuses and hold its forces accountable, there appeared to be complete impunity for BSF soldiers.

He mentioned that there has been a renewed push by the Indian government to stop illegal cattle trade at the border since 2014. "However, a duty to prevent cattle smuggling or other illegal activities at the border does not give the BSF a licence to kill," he said.

Since 2000, more than 1,000 Bangladeshi nationals have been killed in border areas, according to rights defenders who described the areas as "killing fields".

Of the killings, the Felani murder caught everyone's attention. The 15-year-old was gunned down by some BSF members on January 7, 2011, when she, along with her father, was returning home from India through Anantapur border along Phulbari upazila of Kurigram.

The photo of Felani's body hanging upside down from barbed wire fence sparked outcry and condemnation throughout the country. Nearly nine years on, her family's wait for justice seems far from over.

BERC to get

FROM PAGE 1

Under the existing law, the BERC can change energy prices only once a year.

He said prices of energy go up and down in the international market and the government needs to adjust the prices in the local market accordingly. And that was why the amendment was proposed.

Yesterday, the cabinet also gave the go-ahead to the drafts of two university Acts -- Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman University Act, 2019, and Sunamganj Science and Technology University Act, 2019. The two institutions will be set up in Kishoreganj and Sunamganj.

With the establishment of the two

new universities, the number of public universities in the country will reach 50. Of them, 46 are in operation now.

The cabinet also gave nod to the draft of Marine Fisheries Act, 2019.

According to the proposed law, fishing within the maritime boundary of Bangladesh by a foreigner will carry a jail term of up to five years and a fine of up to Tk 5 crore.

Under the existing law, a foreigner can be handed a jail term of up to three months and fined up to Tk 1 lakh for committing the offence.

The cabinet secretary said the draft law has a provision enabling the authorities to operate mobile courts in the country's maritime area.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina comforting Tuhfa Zaman Ali, wife of veteran diplomat Syed Muazzem Ali, after he passed away at the Combined Military Hospital in the capital yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

31 injured as police, left activists clash

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Coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon Zonayed Saki, and General Secretary of Bangladesh Biplobi Workers' Party Saiful Haq. Nine policemen were also among the injured.

Two photojournalists Habibur Rahman and Sohel Ahmed Sumit of Sarabanga news portal were wounded while covering the incident. During the clash, vehicular movement at the intersection came to a halt.

Of the injured, 22 DLA activists and nine policemen took treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Inspector Bacchu Miah, in-charge of DMCH police outpost, told The Daily Star.

"Police attacked a peaceful procession that left around 50 leaders and activists injured. Most of them are females," said Abdullah Al Kafee Ratan, coordinator of the DLA.

Abul Hasan, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, said they asked the demonstrators not to break the barricade when they reached near the Matsya Bhaban area, but they did not listen.

"They [demonstrators] attacked us with the sticks attached to the placards, injuring at least nine policemen," he said, adding that they detained four people from the procession on charges of attacking police.

Asked about the "attack" on the procession, Sazzadur Rahman, deputy commissioner (Ramna division) of the DMP, said the protesters attacked police first with sticks. They also threw brick chunks, leaving the nine policemen hurt.

Wahab fifer downs Rajshahi

FROM PAGE 1

In chase of a commendable 174 for five, Rajshahi started decently. However Wahab, who came in to bowl in the fourth over, bowled an extraordinary over featuring a maiden and three wickets to heap pressure on Rajshahi.

Wahab, who was able to extract pace and bounce from the pitch, scalped the wickets of Liton Das, Alok Kapali and Shoaib Malik, all of whom were caught behind. After that, Rajshahi was unable to shrug off the pressure and were bundled out for a

meagre 100-run total. Wahab ended career-best T20 figures of five for eight in 3.4 overs.

Earlier, unbeaten fifties from Tamim and Asif helped Dhaka Platoon post a competitive total. While Tamim played the anchor-role, carrying his bat through the innings with a 52-ball 68, it was Asif whose late 55-run 28-ball surge saw Dhaka end on a high.

An initially watchful Tamim was running out of partners before his 37-run third-wicket stand with Mahedi Hasan brought back some stability

following the loss of two early wickets. However, after Mahedi's departure, Rajshahi all-rounder Forhad Reza scalped two back-to-back wickets in the 13th over to put the pressure back on the home side. However, Tamim and Asif strung together a magnificent unbeaten 90-run sixth-wicket stand to regain Dhaka's foothold.

Meanwhile, in the day game, an explosive fifty from Cameron Delpport helped Rangpur Rangers romp to a seven-wicket victory against Sylhet Thunder at the same venue.

office and its adjacent areas, roads and alleys since morning to obstruct their rally.

Rizvi said the Awami League could hold rallies and meetings anytime, anywhere but the opposition parties had no right to do so as the entire country had turned into "an empire of the party".

In a protest against the "obstruction" to yesterday's rally, he said the BNP would stage demonstrations in all thanas of the capital today.

Meanwhile, the party leaders and activists wore black badges, and a black flag was hoisted atop its central office in observance of the "democracy killing day".

BNP standing committee members at a meeting last week decided to observe December 30 as the "democracy killing day".

On Sunday, Jatiya Oikyafront staged a demonstration in front of the Jatiya Press Club.

The BNP, the Gonoforum and some other parties joined the national election under the banner of Jatiya Oikyafront. The BNP bagged six seats in the polls and the Gonoforum two.

The Oikyafront turned down the election results, bringing allegations of various irregularities, including "massive vote robbery and nighttime ballot stuffing".

They have also been demanding re-election, cancelling the December 30 polls since the announcement of the results.

BNP activists in Tangail brought out a procession to observe the "democracy killing day", reports our district correspondent.

BSCIC estates in a shambles

FROM PAGE 1

The report also said the absence of a dedicated gas and electricity supply connection and red tape hamper proper functioning of the industrial units.

"Almost all of the estates have an electricity connection while only 57 percent of the estates have a gas supply connection. About 80 percent of the estates have water supply facilities and one estate has CETP [Savar tannery]. In about 37 estates, ETPs [effluent treatment plants] have been established by individual enterprises," the report stated.

It also said around 22 percent of BSCIC industrial plots have remained unutilised years after years. Weaknesses in rules and regulations, problems in the selection process, infrastructure bottlenecks (such as poor gas/electricity connections) were the key reasons behind the plots not being used.

The study also found that around 34 percent stakeholders argued that plots in the estates were allocated based on political and other influence.

Other factors included a weak selection process of entrepreneurs for the plots and corruption of BSCIC officials. Some entrepreneurs applied for plots only to resell for profit.

Monsur Hossain, senior research fellow and study director of BIDS, said if the site selection process was better, the BSCIC estates could have been more effective.

"The low utilisation of BSCIC plots is alarming. The government's decision to set up BSCIC in all the districts is not logical and this type of initiative was not successful even in India and China," he said.

For example, Khagrachari BSCIC is almost empty, so special incentives could be given to the entrepreneurs to encourage them to utilise those BSCIC plots, he added.

The BIDS report said the plot

utilisation rate is the lowest in Barisal division (50 percent) and the highest in Rajshahi division (95 percent).

BSCIC Chairman Mostaque Hassan said there were 496 vacant plots but those would be filled as soon as advertisements had been published to allot the plots.

"In Jhalakathi, Panchagarh, Sunamganj, Kurigram, Srimangal and some other places there is a crisis of potential entrepreneurs. For example, in Srimangal, there are 80 plots but we got only 10 applications. On the other hand, in Mirsarai, we have got more application than the number of plots," said Mostaque Hassan.

Regarding the poor facilities, the BSCIC chairman said: "Yes, it is true that in some cases the infrastructure of BSCICs is not good but we are trying to improve the situation."

He also said most of the times plots were allotted fairly.

"But in reality, we found that some industries suffered as they started with bank loans [which they could not repay]. When we take the initiative to cancel the plot allotment, the bank concerned files a case. In that case, we can't do anything until the issue is settled," said Hassan about ailing entrepreneurs whose units are "sick" or have shut down completely.

The BSCIC estates were established in six phases since 1960, the latest phase being completed in 2010.

A total of 1,969 acres were used for establishing 74 estates -- of which 3.6 percent was for administrative and other purposes (mosques/banks/green spaces etc.) and 19 percent was used for roads and drainage system, the study report said.

A total of 10,389 plots were developed and 96.8 percent of them were allotted to entrepreneurs.

Our correspondents in Barisal, Kushtia, and Jhenidah contributed to this report.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

No outdoor celebrations this time too

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Like the previous year, Dhaka Metropolitan Police has banned holding of any programmes in open spaces, including roofs of buildings, in the capital on the New Year's Eve today.

DMP also wants city dwellers to inform it about any sort of indoor celebration beforehand so that law enforcers can provide safety to people and that any sort of untoward incident can be avoided.

"All forms of public gathering on roads, flyovers, rooftops or in any open spaces will be prohibited from the dusk of December 31," DMP Commissioner Md Shafiqul Islam said yesterday.

A large number of law enforcers, both in uniforms and plainclothes, will be deployed in different parts of the capital, the DMP boss said.

The DMP chief also instructed people not to use fireworks or crackers for celebration, adding that the violators would have to face consequences.

He also requested city dwellers not to stay at Hatirjheel and Dhanmondi Rabintra Sarobar after 8:00pm today.

No outsiders will be allowed on Dhaka University campus after 6:00pm. Resident teachers, students, and staffers have been requested to show valid identity cards to the security personnel at the university entrances.

Checkpoints will be set up at the entry points of Gulshan and Baridhara areas.

Residents of these areas have been asked to return home by 8:00pm.

The two areas will be only accessible through the Kamal Ataturk Avenue from Kakoli intersection and Bir Uttam AK Khandakar Road from Mohakhali's Amtoli intersection.

Residents wishing to enter these areas after 8:00pm will only be allowed to do so after a body check, said the commissioner.

Bars have been instructed to shut down before 6:00pm and people with gun licence will not be allowed to carry their firearms for nine hours from 8:00pm today.

Meanwhile, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday said law enforcement agencies had taken all necessary security measures to ensure a peaceful celebration of the 31st night.

"Hopefully, people will celebrate the New Year without any trouble," he said after inaugurating the annual general meeting of Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh (Crab) at Dhaka Reporters Unity.

'Robber' killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A suspected robber was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Noakhali's Companiganj upazila early yesterday.

Shahadat Hossain Swapan, 39, was the member of a robber gang and was accused in 23 cases filed with different police stations, said Arifur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Companiganj Police Station.

A team of police arrested Shahadat from Chowmuhani area in the district's Begumganj upazila on Sunday afternoon.

During primary interrogation, Shahadat told the law enforcers that his gang members were going to commit a robbery in Chhotodholi village in Companiganj upazila few hours later.

When a police team, along with Shahadat, reached the spot to arrest the robbers around midnight, the criminals opened fire on them, forcing them to fire back that eventually triggered a "gunfight", OC Arifur said.

Shahadat suffered bullet injuries during the incident, the OC said, adding that he was taken to Companiganj Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

Police recovered a firearm, nine bullets and sharp weapons from the spot, the OC added.

Dozens of migrants intercepted in English Channel

AFP, Lille

French authorities said yesterday that 19 migrants were intercepted overnight trying to cross the English Channel to Britain, after 31 were rescued and brought back to France early Sunday.

The operations cap a year of growing attempts to brave the frigid and choppy waters off France's northern coast by migrants from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

Rights groups have linked the crossings to a police crackdown to prevent the establishment of migrant camps in Calais and other areas along the French coast.

Naval authorities said the 19 rescued on a small boat Sunday night included a woman and two children, and some of the migrants were suffering from hypothermia when they were returned to France shortly after midnight.