

We have no links with KNF

Say leaders of five communities of Bandarban

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bandarban*

Leaders of five indigenous communities of Bandarban yesterday said no one from their communities was involved in the armed organisation Kuki Chin National Front (KNF).

Besides, the people of those communities have never assisted militants, the leaders told a press conference at Arun Sarki Town Hall in Bandarban town.

The five communities they represented are: Mro, Lusai, Khumi, Kheyang, and Pangkhua.

In a written statement, they said KNF's claim that their organisation was formed with people from Bawm, Mro, Lusai, Khumi, Kheyang and Pangkhua communities was false.

Some young men from the Bawm community, who chose the wrong path, formed the KNF, but no one else is involved, they added.

Former Thanchi upazila chairman Khamlai Mro said the KNF members have repeatedly attacked the Mro people, stole their valuables, robbed them, and kidnapped them.

There is no question of any Mro people supporting them.

Fraudsters clone UNO's SIM, try to extort UP chairmen

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Brahmanbaria*

Some fraudsters cloned the official mobile SIM of Brahmanbaria's Akhaura upazila nirbahi officer and demanded money from two union parishad chairmen using the number yesterday.

UNO Aonggyajai Marma filed a general diary with Akhaura Police Station in this connection.

He also made a Facebook post around 7:45pm.

In the post, he requested people not to do any kind of financial transactions if anyone contacts them using the number.

The UNO told The Daily Star that unidentified fraudsters cloned his official mobile SIM and had been demanding money from Dharkhar Union Parishad Chairman Shahful Islam Shafi and Akhaura South Union Parishad Chairman Jalal Uddin using the number.

However, none of them gave the

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Flanked by her sister Sheikh Rehana, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina buys the first ticket for metro rail at the Uttara North Station yesterday. Rehana bought the second ticket. The duo, *inset*, are seen among ministers, government high-ups, and dignitaries inside a train car during their trip to Agargaon Station.

PHOTO: PID

China Covid boom sparks jitters around the world

Countries consider imposing travel restrictions on China as cases spread unchecked after lifting of curbs

AGENCIES

Beijing's sudden pivot away from containing Covid-19 has caused jitters around the world, with the United States saying it may restrict travel from China following its decision to end mandatory quarantine for overseas arrivals.

China late Monday scrapped quarantine for inbound travellers from January 8 onwards, dismantling the last remaining piece of its stringent zero-Covid policy and ending some of the world's harshest border restrictions.

The move was greeted with jubilation by Chinese citizens, who rushed to book international flights, triggering a surge in ticket prices.

Hospitals and crematoriums across China continue to be overwhelmed by an influx of mostly elderly people.

AFP reporters saw dozens of mostly elderly Covid patients lying on gurneys in overflowing hospital emergency wards

in Tianjin, 140 kilometres (87 miles) southwest of the capital Beijing yesterday.

Medical staff are "pretty much all" expected to continue working despite testing positive for the virus, one doctor said.

Other countries have expressed concerns about the potential for new variants to emerge as China battles the world's biggest surge in infections.

US officials said late Tuesday they were considering Covid entry restrictions on travellers from China, after countries including Japan and India introduced PCR testing on arrival for Chinese passengers.

The Philippines was also considering imposing tests.

"There are mounting concerns in the international community on the ongoing Covid-19 surges in China and the lack of transparent data, including viral genomic sequence data, being reported from the PRC," the US officials said, referring to the

People's Republic of China.

The United States is "considering taking similar steps" to countries such as Japan and Malaysia, they added.

Taiwan, a self-ruled island that China claims as its own, yesterday said that it would also screen travellers from the mainland for the virus.

China's loosening of measures effectively brought the curtain down on a zero-Covid regime of mass testing, lockdowns and long quarantines that has stalled its economy and triggered large-scale nationwide protests.

"Currently the development of China's epidemic situation is overall predictable and under control," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said yesterday.

"Hyping, smearing and political manipulation with ulterior motives can't stand the test of facts," Wang added, calling Western media reporting on China's Covid surge "completely biased".

Court issues arrest warrant against Evaly chairperson

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected the bail of Shamima Nasrin, chairperson of e-commerce platform Evaly, and issued an arrest warrant against her for embezzling Tk 3.1 lakh from a customer.

Earlier, the same court had framed charges against her and her husband Mohammad Rassel, the CEO and managing director of the platform, in the same case.

Rassel, now in jail, pleaded not guilty while Shamima submitted a time petition through her lawyer.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mehedi Hasan issued the arrest warrant as Shamima was absent during the hearing.

He also directed the officers-in-charge of Dhanmondi and Kafrul police stations to submit a progress report on the execution of the warrant by February 18.

Arif Baker, a customer, filed a case with Gulshan Police Station on September 17 last year after the platform failed to deliver goods worth Tk 3,10,597, which he had ordered in May and June 2021.

The company had promised to refund the amount within 45 working days but did not, the case statement read.

Construction worker dies falling from building

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

A worker died after falling from an under-construction building in Chattogram city's Lalkhan Bazar yesterday.

The victim, Md Arif, 20, fell from the fourth floor of the building near Amin Centre around noon while working, said Sadequr Rahman, inspector (investigation) of Panchlaish Police Station.

He was taken to Chattogram Medical College Hospital where on-duty doctors declared him dead.

The body will be handed over to the victim's family following legal procedures, the police official added.

Man held with 2.4kg of gold

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

The Customs Intelligence and Investigation Department yesterday arrested a man with 2.4kg of gold at Chattogram Shah Amanat International Airport.

Jasim Uddin of Rangunia upazila landed at the airport from Sharjah around 10:20am. On suspicion, the security personnel searched him and found 2.423kg of gold and other expensive foreign cosmetics in his possession, said Saiful Islam, joint director of CIID.

He was later handed over to Patenga Police Station.

Metro dream rolls into reality

FROM PAGE 1

Security was beefed up in and around the Uttara North Station, the inauguration site and Agargaon Station ahead of the launching. A large number of people gathered at the inauguration venue. Many of them were waving the national flag. Members of the AL and its associate bodies were chanting slogans near the venue.

Mohammad Ali Pathan, a 69-year-old freedom fighter, travelled from Narsingdi to attend the inauguration.

"It feels surreal. I could not believe that I would witness such a monumental work get done in the country in my lifetime. But Sheikh Hasina's government has made it possible.

"As a freedom fighter, I am proud to see such a development in my country," he told The Daily Star.

The prime minister reached the venue at 11:02am. A few minutes later, she unveiled the plaque amid applause from thousands of people. She took part in a munajat before getting on the stage.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Chairman

of Parliamentary Standing Committee on road transport ministry Rawshan Ara Mannan, local AL MP Mohammad Habib Hasan, Road Transport and Highways Division Secretary ABM Amin Ullah Nuri, Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited Managing Director MAN Siddique; MRT Line-6 Project Director Altaf Uddin Talukder; Japanese Ambassador to Dhaka Iwama Kiminori and Jica Chief Representative in Bangladesh Ichiguchi Tomohide were on the stage.

ABM Amin Ullah Nuri delivered the first speech, saying that the people of Dhaka suffered a lot during the construction of metro rail, and thanked the people of the city for their patience.

Ichiguchi Tomohide said he was involved in the feasibility study of the project 10 years ago as a Jica director for Bangladesh.

"So, taking part in this ceremony is one of the happiest moments in my life," he said, adding, "MRT will contribute to making Bangladesh a 'Smart Bangladesh'."

Iwama Kiminori, newly appointed Japanese ambassador to Bangladesh, started in Bangla, saying he came to

the country just 10 days ago and that the Bangladesh-Japan relationship is a long one, and he wants to make the relationship deeper.

"The Dhaka Metro Rail is a symbol of Bangladesh-Japan relationship," he said.

MAN Siddique said vehicles move at just 6km per hour in Dhaka, adding that commute time will improve once the MRT lines are fully functional.

DMTCL is the implementing agency of the metro rail project.

A video was then shown consisting drone footage of the metro.

At the end of the video, the theme song by popular singer Momtaz Begum was played.

Obaidul Quader said metro rail was now a reality.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina then took the microphone and said the metro rail was a milestone for Bangladesh.

The prime minister was given a memento to mark the occasion. She also released commemorative postal stamps and a Tk 50 note and posed for photos with the DMTCL officials.

Initially, the 12km section, from Uttara to Agargaon, of the 21.26km

MRT Line-6 was opened. The section from Agargaon to Motijheel will be inaugurated a year from now.

Only 200 people will take the journey today on each train that has a capacity of carrying 2,308.

A commute from Uttara to Agargaon costs Tk 60 and the minimum fare is Tk 20. The complete service between the two stations is likely to start from March 26 next year.

MRT Line-6 will be capable of carrying around 4.83 lakh people a day between Uttara and Motijheel. The trip will take 38 minutes, down from at least two hours on other modes of transport.

The MRT Line-6 project was given the go-ahead in 2012 with a June 2024 deadline and a cost of Tk 21,985 crore. But the authorities went for early commissioning of the Uttara-Agargaon section considering public convenience.

The project was revised this year to extend the line to Kamalapur and to procure land for some stations. The project cost went up to Tk 33,472 crore and the new deadline was set at 2025. Japan is providing about 60 percent of the cost in soft loans.

Intra-party feud

FROM PAGE 1

Around a dozen AL leaders had vied for the party ticket to compete for the post over the last few years.

Though Hosne Ara Lutfa Dalia lagged behind, AL high-ups chose her to run in the election as the party candidate.

"Dalia was not capable enough to rally the party rank and file behind her. She doesn't even have much communication with the locals. As a result, many voters didn't vote for her," a local AL leader said, preferring anonymity.

Jatiya Party candidate Mostafizar Rahman Mostafa scored a resounding victory in Tuesday's polls and was re-elected the mayor.

Dalia was in the fourth position by polling only eight percent of the vote. AL rebel Latifur Rahman Milan ended up with more votes than hers.

While Dalia was a member of the immediate past AL Central Working Committee, Milan was former vice president of Rangpur city Kotwali AL.

As per electoral rules, a candidate's security deposit will be forfeited in favor of the government if the candidate fails to bag one-eighth of all the valid votes. Seven of the mayoral candidates, including Dalia and Milan, lost their security deposits.

Talking about Dalia's loss, some local politicians alleged that around a dozen party leaders, who were trying to get the party ticket, did not cooperate with her at all.

A Rangpur AL leader, seeking anonymity, said, "Rangpur Awami League activists were disappointed with the party's nomination. They couldn't dare to protest publicly, and instead opted not to work properly in Dalia's favour. This also contributed to her defeat."

Tuhin Wadud, political analyst and professor of Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur, said, "Awami League is the largest political party in Bangladesh. But it failed to unite and organise the party activists in Rangpur. Dalia also has poor connections with the grassroots."

Contacted, Tushar Kanti Mandol, general secretary of Rangpur city AL, admitted that a rebel candidate getting more votes than the party candidate is a major factor in the defeat.

"Dalia also didn't get enough time to reach the common people in the short period for campaigning."

Contacted, Rezaur Rahman Raju, general secretary of Rangpur district AL, said, "We will hold a meeting within a couple of days to analyse the reasons behind the defeat and the overall election results."

Dalia could not be contacted over the phone yesterday for comments despite repeated attempts.

Regarding JP candidate Mostafa's win, Khandaker Fakhrul Alam Banju, convener of Rangpur chapter of Sushasoner Jonno Nagorik, a civil society platform, said, "Mostafa was a stronger competitor than Dalia. He spent the last few years organising his party activists and was able to reach the common people."

Tuhin Wadud observed that Mostafa built a good image among the people over the last few years and that contributed to his victory.

Contacted yesterday, Mostafa said his party's chain of command was strong and all the JP activists worked hard for his victory.

Mostafa, running with JP's electoral symbol, "plough", got 146,798 votes and his closest rival, Amiruzzaman Pial of Bangladesh Islami Andolon, got 49,892.

AL rebel Milan got 33,833 votes, considerably higher than Dalia's 22,306.

Five others ran for the Rangpur mayoral post.

With 426,470 voters in the city, the turnout on Tuesday was 65.91 percent.

This was the third election since the city corporation was formed in 2012.

The first was on December 20 that year, in which an AL candidate was elected mayor.

JP's Mostafa had won the second polls in 2017.