

DB arrests ex-employee of Money Plant

Tk 87.50 lakhs more recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives arrested Sohel Rana, a former driver of Money Plant Link Private Ltd and allegedly one of the masterminds behind the recent robbery of Tk 11.25 crore from a microbus of the company.

Muhammad Harun Or Rashid, chief of the Detective Branch of police, said they arrested him from Savar's Hemayetpur on Friday night and also recovered Tk 87.50 lakhs from him.

So far, around Tk 7.89 crore was recovered from 12 arrestees.

Besides, the DB seized a microbus worth Tk 20 lakh from Khilkhet.

Sohel had the vehicle's spare key with which the robbers opened the door and snatched away the money, the DB chief said.

Sohel and another arrestee Akash mainly planned the robbery, while

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

AL INFIGHTING 300 men sued in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police sued some 300 unidentified men over the attack on law enforcers during Friday's clash between two factions of the ruling Awami League in Patuakhali.

The case was filed with Bauphal Police Station in connection to the incident that left nine of its police personnel, including Officer-in-Charge Al Mamun, injured while they were trying to quell the situation.

Speaking to The Daily Star, OC Mamun said they would conduct a thorough investigation and take legal action accordingly.

At least 50 people were injured in the clash that took place around 11:30am during the celebration of the 103rd birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and National

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1



Second from left, Ramiza Begum, widow of the 65-year-old man shot dead by Rab in Narayanganj, and the family members are in shock.

PHOTO: SAURAV HOSSAIN SIAM

Finland on course to join Nato

Turkey, Hungary drop objection; Erdogan says Ukraine grain deal extended

AFP, Ankara

Turkish President Recep Tayip Erdogan ended months of diplomatically charged delays on Friday and asked parliament to quickly back Finland's bid to join Nato.

A simultaneous decision by fellow holdout Hungary to schedule a Finnish ratification vote for March 27 means the US-led defence alliance will likely grow to 31 nations within a few months.

In another development, Recep Tayip Erdogan yesterday announced the extension of a deal that allowed exports of Ukrainian grain to resume following Russia's invasion.

Following talks with the two parties, we have assured the extension of the deal that was due to expire on March 19," Erdogan said in comments broadcast on Turkish television, just hours before the agreement was due to expire at midnight.

Nato's expansion into the country with

a 1,340-kilometre (830-mile) border with Russia will roughly double the length of the bloc's current frontier with its Cold War era foe.

Finland had initially aimed to join together with fellow Nato aspirant Sweden -- a Nordic power facing a litany of disputes with Turkey that ultimately sunk its chance to join the bloc before an alliance summit in July.

Helsinki and Stockholm ended decades of military non alignment and decided to join the world's most powerful defence alliance in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Their applications were accepted at a June Nato summit that signalled the Western world's desire to stand up to Russia in the face of Europe's gravest conflict since World War II.

But the bids still needed to be ratified by all 30 of the alliance members' parliaments -- a process that got hung up

once it reached Turkey and Hungary.

Friday's breakthrough followed months of tense negotiations between Ankara and the Nordic neighbours that threatened to collapse several times.

Erdogan told Finnish President Sauli Niinisto that Helsinki had shown a strong commitment to addressing Ankara's security concerns.

"We decided to start the protocol of Finland's accession to Nato in our parliament," Erdogan told reporters after the talks.

Erdogan added that he "hoped" that parliament will approve the application before Turkey's crucial general election in May.

The Turkish parliament is expected to end its current session in mid-April.

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed Turkey's decision while stressing the importance of Sweden also joining "as soon as possible".

A new era in energy cooperation

FROM PAGE 1

India will be reduced significantly with the use of this pipeline."

She said the supply of diesel to Bangladesh's 16 northern districts will remain stable.

Terming India a genuine friend of Bangladesh, Hasina said, "I want that the friendship of our two countries will remain intact."

She said that the government has developed Mongla and Chattogram ports, international airports in Sylhet and Chattogram and upgraded the Sylhet Airport as a regional airport.

"We are opening these ports for India completely. There will be no problem for India to use these ports. It will ease the trade and business activities, and the people of both the countries will be benefited."

The PM invited Indian investors to invest in Bangladesh's economic zones. She hoped that like this pipeline, Bangladesh and India will jointly celebrate many more successes in future.

Hasina recalled the contributions of the government and the people of India

during Bangladesh's Liberation War, and expressed her personal gratitude for the cooperation they extended to her after the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975.

PROGRESS MADE IN CONNECTIVITY

Modi said the supply of diesel through the pipeline would cut the cost and also reduce the carbon footprint of the two peoples.

Highlighting the increasing connectivity between the two neighbours, he said that the two countries together have made a lot of progress in the sector.

He observed that the rail connectivity between the two nations helped sending Covid vaccines and oxygen to Bangladesh through rail network. "Heartily congratulate Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Ji for her far-sighted vision."

The Indian premier said the inauguration of the pipeline was taking place a day after the birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"Bangabandhu's 'Sonar Bangla' vision included the harmonious development and prosperity of the entire region. This joint project is a perfect example of that vision."

Modi thanked Hasina for her constant guidance on the project and expressed his willingness to continue working with her for the benefit of the two peoples.

The cross boundary pipeline will carry diesel from Assam-based Numaligarh Refinery Ltd's (NRL) marketing terminal at Siliguri in West Bengal to the Parbatipur depot of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC).

The project is jointly implemented by the NRL of India and Meghna Petroleum Ltd of Bangladesh.

The Bangladeshi part of the pipeline is 126.57 km long while the remaining 5 km was installed in India.

Under the project, Bangladesh will annually import 2.5 lakh to 4 lakh tonnes of diesel from India.

Bangladesh needs to import 6.6 million tonnes to 7.7 million tonnes of petroleum to meet its annual

demand.

The country currently imports 22,000 tonnes of diesel from India per month on railway wagons.

NOT MUCH BENEFIT RIGHT NOW

Speaking to The Daily Star, BPC officials said Bangladesh will not get cheaper diesel from India through the pipeline right now.

They said there is an agreement between the two countries under which Bangladesh imports fuel from India at a rate fixed considering the international benchmark oil price.

Bangladesh will get diesel from India through the pipeline at this international rate. However, the transportation cost will reduce," said a BPC official on condition of anonymity.

India purchases Russian fuel at a discounted price. The Numaligarh Refinery is one of the Indian refineries which get Russian crude oil at a cheaper rate.

"If Bangladesh increases oil import after negotiating the prices with India, it may be able to get fuel at cheaper prices," the official added.

IMF conditions

FROM PAGE 1

the social safety net programme and distributing food among the poor at a low price or for free; and putting emphasis on subsidy on electricity, gas and agriculture considering fuel and fertiliser price hike in the global market and slump in the exchange rate.

The three other priorities continuation of the subsidy on fertiliser and mechanising agriculture; human resource development and employment generation, and rural development.

The government is also keeping in mind the IMF conditions related to the budget, said finance ministry officials involved with the proceedings.

Besides, the election is not far away. "The government is preparing the budget keeping all these things in mind," said one of the officials.

With that frame of mind, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal would be starting his series of pre-budget meetings today.

Today, he would be meeting with the economists.

In the three-day pre-budget discussions, Kamal will also meet with the business community and editors of the print and electronic media, where he will seek their opinion on how the next budget should be considering the myriad of challenges.

Ramping up revenue collection is one of the major conditions for the \$4.7 billion loan programme from the IMF.

The Washington-based lender has stipulated a tax revenue collection of Tk 143,640 crore for the July-December period.

Keeping the IMF target in mind, the government has planned a revenue collection target of Tk 420,000 crore, according to the finance ministry and IMF documents.

The IMF has also prescribed a budget deficit ceiling of Tk 114,110 crore for the first six months of the fiscal year. The government primarily earmarked a budget deficit of Tk 264,193 crore for the next fiscal year keeping the IMF deficit threshold in mind.

The government is also preparing the next budget keeping the other IMF conditions like reducing subsidies in different sectors including power and energy, reform measures to increase revenue collection and more focus on social spending including health and education.

The budget for the next fiscal year would most likely be Tk 750,165 crore, up from the current year's Tk 678,063 crore. The annual development programme getting a Tk 265,000 crore

target would be Tk 486,000 crore, up from this fiscal year's Tk 433,000 crore.

The government is planning to achieve a 7.5 percent GDP growth and keep inflation within 6 percent.

Elderly, paralysed woman dies in fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A woman was burnt to death after a fire broke out in her house in Dinajpur Sadar early yesterday, police said.

The deceased was Jahanara Begum, 57.

Jahangir Alam, the victim's son, said he woke up after he felt the heat from the fire.

"All the family members hurriedly left the house but as my mother was paralysed, she could not."

As the fire spread fast due to the house being made of corrugated tin sheets, no one was able to rescue her in time, said officials of the Fire Service and Civil Defense.

Villagers and fire service officials recovered her body after the fire was doused, said Tanvirul Islam, said officer in-charge of Dinajpur Police station.

Taking away ballot unit of EVM: None arrested in 48hrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police could not yet arrest the accused in a case filed over the taking away of an EVM ballot unit out of a polling centre during the Boalkhali upazila parishad by-election in Chattogram on Thursday.

The case was filed by Presiding Officer Sajal Das against a Jabo League leader for taking the unit out of a polling center at Sripur-Kharandip union on the day of the by-election for the post of Boalkhali upazila parishad chairman.

According to case statement, the accused, Nirmalendu Dey, who is the joint convener of Sripur union Jabo League, ran away with the EVM ballot unit from Raman Mohan High School polling centre on Thursday afternoon. Ratan Chowdhury later recovered the machine and returned it to the centre - which was caught on journalist's cameras.

Contacted, Abdur Razzak, officer-in-charge of Boalkhali Police Station, said police were trying to arrest Nirmalendu, who is currently absconding.

2 lakh yaba pills recovered in Teknaf

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

The BGB recovered two lakh yaba pills from the banks of Naf river in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf upazila on Friday night.

Lt Col Sheikh Khalid Mohammad Iftekhar, commander of Teknaf BGB Battalion 2, said, "Acting on a tip off that a large shipment was being smuggled into Bangladesh from Myanmar at the Shashmaqhat area, a BGB team conducted a raid and noticed a boat with around four people coming ashore," the commander said.

"As they tried to flee the area after reaching, a BGB man fired blank shots to stop them. They fired back and managed to flee but they left behind a sack with two lakh pills."

Mahi out on bail hours after arrest

FROM PAGE 1
with celebrities coming forward to condemn the arrest.

Around 4:45pm, Mahi's lawyer appeared before the magistrate's court and appealed for her bail citing her pregnancy as the reason.

"We pointed out two issues before the court. Firstly, she is pregnant and secondly, she is respectful to the law. She had been abroad when a case was filed against her. She could have stayed there, but she didn't. This proves that our client respects the law," said lawyer Anwar Sadat Sarker.

Considering the plea, the court granted bail to Mahi, he added.

The actress walked out of Gazipur District Jail around 7:45pm.

On Friday night, Rokon Mia, a sub-inspector of Bason Police Station in Gazipur, filed the DSA case against Mahi and her husband over "furnishing the image of the police by making derogatory comments" on Facebook.

According to the case statement, the couple on Friday morning went live on the social media platform saying that a group of criminals attacked and vandalised their car showroom in Gazipur.

The couple also alleged that Gazipur Metropolitan Police (GMP) took bribes from the attackers and sided with them.

Local businessman Ismail Hossain, who had a rivalry with Mahi's husband Rakib, filed another case on Friday night against the couple and 26 others on charges of assault, vandalism, and land grabbing in Gazipur.

Speaking at a press conference on Friday afternoon, he alleged that Rakib had set up his car showroom by occupying Ismail's land.

Meanwhile, GMP Commissioner Molla Nazrul claimed the allegation brought against him by Mahi and Rakib was false during a press conference he held yesterday.

On their Facebook profiles, director Ashfaque Nipun and Redoan Rony, chief operating officer of Chorki, said that the DSA must be repealed immediately.

Felt like a 'war criminal'

Following her release, Mahi said that she was not a criminal and she only spoke out against injustice.

She made the remark during a press conference at her husband's automobile showroom - Sony Raj Car Centre in Gazipur.

She went on to say that she felt like a "war criminal" when the entire airport was evacuated to arrest her.

Mahi also claimed that she was subject to abuse as she was being taken to jail.

"When I was being taken to jail I was having breathing difficulties and asked for some water. It took them an hour to get me water. They did not show me the least consideration I deserved..." she said.

Mahi further said she was not given any opportunity to defend herself in court.

Expressing concern over her husband's security, she said, "They did not show me any consideration even though I'm pregnant. Now, I'm worried about what they will do to my husband