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Hajj agency owner ‘pockets Tk 36 crore’

Allege pilgrims; hajj for 538 becomes uncertain

RASHIDUL HASAN

“Embezzlement by a travel agency owner” has made hajj uncertain for at least 538 people.

Mohammad Shah Alam, owner of SN Travels and Tours, has allegedly stolen over Tk 36 crore the pilgrims gave him and fled on Wednesday, alleged pilgrims.

Some of the victims demonstrated in front of the hajj agency office in the capital's Shyampur on Wednesday and Thursday and requested the religious affairs ministry to take action against the agency.

In another incident, 71 people alleged that an agency called Ababil Tours and Travels took their money but had not confirmed their plane tickets and visas.

A top official of the ministry, requesting anonymity, said, “Our first task is to make sure the people who paid the money get to travel to Saudi Arabia. This is embarrassing. Law enforcement agencies have been asked to arrest the swindlers. These agencies’ licences will be cancelled.”

Sources at the religious affairs ministry said after different inconsistencies in hajj management were detected, the secretary and two high officials of the ministry were transferred on June 5.

The ministry on Thursday held a hearing on various complaints against 11 hajj agencies that include SN Travels and Tours, Aviana Travels and Tours, Lima Travel Agency,

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

The flyover from Uttara to Tongi College Gate area under the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project was officially opened to public yesterday. Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader inaugurated the section of the flyover at an event in Tongi. Story on Page 3.

ATTACK ON UGANDAN SCHOOL

Militants kill 37 students, abduct 6

AFP, Uganda

Militants linked to the Islamic State group massacred at least 37 people and abducted six others in western Uganda, the army said yesterday, in the country’s worst such attack in years.

The military said it was pursuing the attackers from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) after they raided a school late Friday near the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Officials said dormitories were locked and set alight and students cut down with knives in a grisly late-night assault on Lhubirha Secondary School in Mpondwe.

Police and army officials blamed the ADF, one of the deadliest militias over the border in DR Congo’s strife-torn east, which the Islamic State group has called its local offshoot.

“Unfortunately, 37 bodies have been discovered and conveyed to Bwera hospital mortuary,” Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF) spokesman Felix Kulayigye said in a statement, referring to a town near the attack.

He said eight people were injured and six others kidnapped and taken toward Virunga National Park, a vast expanse which straddles the border.

“UPDF embarked on pursuing the perpetrators to rescue the abducted students.”

Police have not released details about the victims’ ages or how many were students.

Outside the school, heavily armed soldiers and police stood guard, where a large crowd gathered and distraught survivors were comforted by loved ones.

It is the deadliest attack in Uganda since twin bombings in Kampala in 2010 killed 76 in a strike claimed by the Somalia-based Al Shabaab group.

According to a police report seen by AFP, police and military units were alerted to a “big attack” at the school around 11:00 pm (2000 GMT) on Friday evening.

“On arrival the school was found burning and the dead bodies of students were found lying in the compound and the school’s food store broken into” with items missing, the report stated.

The school is less than two kilometres (1.2 miles) from the border of the DR Congo, where ADF is primarily active and has been accused of killing thousands of civilians since the 1990s.

DU struggles to spend measly research funds

SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

Academicians often cite insufficient grants allocated by the University Grants Commission as a reason for poor number of research work.

But surprisingly, the Dhaka University authorities failed to spend the total funds they got in three fiscal years since fiscal 2018-2019, show university documents.

However, the authorities said they could spend all the allocation in fiscal year 2021-22.

Some prominent academicians and teachers of the university opined that teachers’ reluctance to carry out research and researchers’ failure to complete their work within a fiscal year are the two major reasons behind a part of the grants going unused every fiscal year.

For the small number of research work, the country’s largest and oldest educational institution continues to drop in the renowned global university rankings as research is considered one of the key parameters in preparing ranking.

For the small number of research work, the country’s largest and oldest educational institution continues to drop in the renowned global university rankings as research is considered one of the key parameters in preparing ranking.

Asked, DU Vice-Chancellor Prof Md Akhtaruzzaman said, “The allocation for research is too small to do basic research. Our teachers demand bigger funds for this. But we cannot provide as our research allocation is inadequate. Our teachers lose interest due to the small budget.”

According to the documents, the university authorities received around Tk 36.22 crore as research allocation in the last four fiscal years.

Of the amount, Tk 9.59 crore went unused.

In the fiscal 2020-21, nearly two thirds -- Tk 5.68 crore -- of the allocated Tk 9.50 crore, which is the highest in three fiscal years since fiscal 2018-2019, were unutilised, according to the university budget book.

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THREATENING PM

BNP leader lands in jail

STAR REPORT

A BNP leader of Sirajganj was arrested early yesterday in connection to an alleged death threat made to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The Detective Branch of police detained Rashedul Hasan Ranjon, joint secretary general of Sirajganj BNP, from his home hours after he addressed a protest rally on the Government Islamia College playground in the district town on Friday afternoon.

A case was filed against him under the Anti-Terrorism Act with Sirajganj Sadar Police Station around 10:00am yesterday, said Humayun Kabir, officer-in-charge of the station.

Abdullah Bin Ahmed, general secretary of the Chhatra League Sirajganj district unit, filed the case.

The OC said Rashedul was sent to jail.

According to the case document, Rashedul gave an inciteful speech against the government and the AL during the rally in the presence of senior BNP leaders, including its Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir.

At one stage of his speech, Rashedul chanted

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Dhaka jail’s chief hangman walks out of prison today

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The chief hangman of Dhaka Central Jail is set to walk free today after 32 years. The 73-year-old’s tally of 26 executions includes mobsters, militants, war criminals and assassins.

It was the face of hangman Shahjahan Bhuiyan that people like Bangla Bhai and Ershad Shikdar, war criminals like Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury and assassin Syed Faruk Rahman last saw before meeting their death.

Initially sentenced to 42 years in prison, Shahjahan’s sentence was commuted to 32, according to prison regulations.

Born on March 26, 1950, at Isakhali village of Palash Upazila of Narsingdi, Shahjahan Bhuiyan engaged in local politics when he had completed his higher secondary certificate exams.

According to documents, the man was convicted on November 8, 1992, for robbery with a 12-year sentence and in another case on September 19, 1995, for robbery and murder with a life term of 30 years. Each sentence had also fined him Tk 5,000 pending which Shahjahan was due to serve another six months in prison.

Although Shahjahan claims to have executed more, prison records put his tally at 26 hangings. “Maybe he is right, but so far this is the record we have,” Subhash Kumar Ghosh, senior jail super of the prison, told The Daily Star.

His list of 26 has names like former minister Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujaheed, Jamaat leader Mir Qasem Ali, and Bangabandhu assassins Bazlul Huda and Shahriar Rashid.

Prison officials said his initial sentence had been

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A street vendor selling a variety of Chinese-made rechargeable lights and fans for Tk 100 each at Malibagh level crossing in the capital yesterday. There has been an increase in the demand for such low-cost electronics due to power cuts.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

MORE NEWS

Dengue spike rings alarm

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Khartoum airstrikes kill 17, including 5 children

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Spain, Croatia vie for Nations League title

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Can new monetary policy crush inflation?

B1

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