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Drives against illegal weapons ahead of polls

Says DMP chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police will conduct special drives to recover illegal weapons ahead of the upcoming national election, said Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Habibur Rahman yesterday.

"The drive against illegal weapons is a regular activity of the police. However, these operations are intensified on special occasions," he said while speaking at a workshop at Cirdap auditorium in the capital.

If militants want to spoil the election, they will be resisted and police have that capacity, he said.

People's participation, alongside police and media, is needed to eradicate militancy and extremism, he added.

Security measures will be taken ahead of Durga Puja, the commissioner said during a meeting at DMP headquarters.



Students planting trees on the divider along Mirpur Road near Dhanmondi 27 yesterday. Earlier this year, DSAC renovated the road island and in the process felled many trees that existed there. Following protests over the issue, they planted new trees which soon expired. So these students of a nearby private university took things into their own hands and planted the trees.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Rail links to Cox's Bazar, Mongla to open in November

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Cox's Bazar is going to be connected to Chattogram through a railway network on November 12.

Mongla, which has the country's second important sea port, will also come under rail network with Khulna on November 9.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate both the projects in person, Mofizur Rahman, additional director general (infrastructure) of Bangladesh Railway, confirmed to The Daily Star yesterday.

The 102km dual gauge line from Chattogram to Cox's Bazar will connect the tourist spot with the rest of the country by rail and will have nine new stations.

The fast-track project, funded by the Asian Development Bank, is being implemented by dividing the line into two parts -- Dohazari to Chakaria and Chakaria to Cox's Bazar.

The government initially planned in 2010 to lay a metre-gauge rail line from Chattogram to Gundhum in Cox's Bazar spending Tk 1,852.35 crore, but later opted to have the dual-gauge line to Cox's Bazar town, which shot up the cost to Tk 18,034.47 crore.

Dhaka to Cox's Bazar train service is also being planned.

Meanwhile, the 63.5km broad gauge rail line between Khulna and Mongla with seven new stations is expected to boost rail connectivity in Bangladesh and trade with India, Nepal and Bhutan.

BANGLADESH-INDIA
Fares of three trains to go up again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Railway is going to hike the fare of three trains to and from India from November 10 due to travel tax and the rise in the US dollar rate.

The fares of the three trains -- Moitree Express, Mitali Express, and Bandhan Express -- will increase by up to Tk 150, according to an order signed by Mihrabur Rashid Khan, deputy director (interchange) of BR, on October 5.

This is the second time in four months that BR is hiking the fare of inter-country trains. On July 1, BR hiked the fares of the three trains between India and Bangladesh by up to Tk 655.

Although the BR circular cited travel tax as one of the two reasons for hiking the fares, the travel tax remains the same at Tk 1,000 that it had set in July after raising it from the previous Tk 500.

394 lives lost on roads last month

16 more than August, shows Road Safety Foundation report

UNB, Dhaka

As many as 394 people died in 398 road accidents across the country last month, according to data compiled by the Road Safety Foundation.

Among the casualties, 48 were women and 53 children. According to the foundation, 378 lives were lost in 403 road accidents in August.

The foundation prepared the report based on information from nine national dailies, seven online news portals, and electronic media, according to a press release. Among the casualties, 151 (38.32 percent) were motorcyclists; 16 (4.06 percent) bus passengers; 15 (3.80 percent) riders of trucks, covered vans, pickups; and 68 (17.25 percent) riders of three-wheelers.

According to the foundation's analysis, 139 (34.92 percent) accidents occurred on national highways, 183 (45.97 percent) on regional roads, 49 (12.31 percent) on rural roads, 22 (5.52 percent) on urban roads, and 5 (1.25 percent) in other places.

The report reveals that in September, Dhaka division saw the highest number of accidents, with 121 reported accidents resulting in 116 fatalities. Sylhet division recorded the lowest number of accidents, with just 20 incidents, while Mymensingh division had the lowest number of fatalities, totaling 23. At least 17 people died and 21 were injured in 23 accidents in Dhaka.

The organisation identified several factors including, reckless driving, slow-moving vehicles on highways, absence of fixed pay and working hours for drivers, and inadequate traffic management.

Regional cooperation can deter global powers

Security analysts tell event on increasing geostrategic influence in Indo-Pacific region

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Security analysts have suggested South Asian countries to increase trade and development cooperation among themselves as the global powers' struggle for geostrategic influence is increasing in the Indo-Pacific region.

They were speaking at a session titled "Security Architecture of the New Asia Pacific" on the second day of the three-day Bay of Bengal Conversations organised by the Centre for Governance Studies at a city hotel yesterday.

They said disputes over territories like Ladakh and Arunachal, South China Sea, East China Sea, Korean Peninsula, and Taiwan could intensify unless they are resolved through arbitration.

The possibilities of such conflict escalations have gone up as the Russia-Ukraine war has increased the US-China rivalry, they said. They

cautioned relevant stakeholders against a potential arms race in the region.

"It is the poor who suffer most because of the arms race. So, military is not the solution," said former air commodore Ishaq Ilahi Choudhury.

US-based Hudson Institute Fellow Satoru Nagao said, "While China invests extensively in the military to control maritime areas including the South China Sea and Taiwan, Japan is partnering with the US, and the US is partnering with other countries like Australia to deter China."

"Japan is depending on a network-based security architecture for dealing with China," he said.

Ishaq Ilahi said China can follow Bangladesh's example of maritime conflict resolution with India and Myanmar.

"An India-China war over Ladakh or Arunachal will affect Bangladesh. Bangladesh will

continue to promote cooperation rather than taking sides," he said.

Despite pressure from global powers, Bangladesh is still maintaining a balance. Bangladeshi ports are gateways for Northeast India, Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan, which can benefit from the ports of Chattogram, Mongla, and Payra to boost trade, the security analyst said.

Former Indian Army commander Arun K Sahn advised South Asian regional states to prioritise self-reliance and resilience above military intervention.

Despite Indo-China tension, their bilateral trade is worth \$130 billion, while US-China trade is close to \$700 billion. The world today is heavily interdependent, so trade and development should be encouraged, he said.

At the session moderated by Australia's La Trobe University Associate Professor Bec Stratton,

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Ansar Al Islam nayeb-e-amir, 4 others held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit on Saturday evening arrested five members of banned militant outfit Ansar Al Islam, including its nayeb-e-amir, from Jatrabari in Dhaka.

The arrestees are Nayeb-e-Amir Sakhawatul Kabir alias Anis alias Rafique, 45, military wing chief of Dhaka region Ihsanur Rahman alias Murad alias Saif, 26, and members Bakhtiar Rahman alias Nazmul, 30, Yusuf Ali Sarker, 31, and Jahedul Islam alias Ashraf, 35, said CTTC Chief Md Asaduzzaman at a press briefing at the DMP Media Centre yesterday.

Two foreign pistols and 15 rounds of bullets were recovered from them.

Asaduzzaman said the arrestees had gathered in Jatrabari to carry out sabotage at different places in Dhaka.

In response to a query from journalists, the CTTC chief said one of the two death row convict militants who escaped from police custody last year sought refuge at the residence of one of these arrestees. As of now, both of them are still within the country.

About the arrestees, Asaduzzaman said Shakhawatul became involved in militancy in 2002 when he joined an organisation known as "Jamayatul Muslimeen," led by his sister-in-law, Ejaz Kargil. Over time, he established connections with top militants across the country.

In 2010, Ejaz assumed leadership as the first amir of

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Country's people are our strongest poll observers
Says EC Rashida Sultana

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has local observers and media to monitor the next parliamentary polls if there are no international observers, said Election Commissioner Rashida Sultana at her office yesterday.

People of the country are our strongest election observers, she said while answering a reporter's query on whether the national elections will lose credibility in absence of adequate international observers.

The European Union recently said it will not send a fully-fledged election observation team for the Bangladesh national polls.

"International observers are important regardless they come to monitor elections or not. If they don't send observers, don't we have observers in our country?" she asked.

Rashida said the EC has committed to hold a free and fair election. "We will need assistance from the government to hold a free and fair election. If they don't help, a fair election is not possible. The government also wants a good election," she added.

Meanwhile, the visiting US pre-election assessment mission is scheduled to meet the EC officials on Tuesday.



A sight like this has become common in the busy streets of Dhaka. Motorcycles and rickshaws start getting on footpaths once they encounter a slightest bit of traffic, making it difficult for pedestrians to move freely. The photo was taken in Dhanmondi's Jhigatola area yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN