



B1
Inflation over 9pc a matter of concern: BB



P11
United brace for tough Chelsea test



P7
Rahul Gandhi files nomination for India polls



P3
One year since Bangabazar fire

Bank heists rock hills

3 robberies in Bandarban in 16 hours; home minister blames Kuki Chin

STAR REPORT

It was around 12:30pm. Bandarban's Thanchi Bazar was abuzz with people as it was the weekly haat yesterday.

Out of nowhere, three chander garis (human hauliers) arrived there carrying dozens of armed men clad in tactical gear. There, they joined an armed group that was already in the market area, according to witnesses.

Divided in two groups, the armed men stormed two branches of Sonali Bank and Krishi Bank, located within about 10 feet, near Thanchi High School, brandishing weapons and asking people not to move.

Inside the banks, some of the gang members started looking for the managers, while others started looting money from the cash counters. Within 20 minutes or so, they made off with around Tk 17 lakh from the two banks, according to officials and customers.

The daring robbery took place less than 16 hours after a similar incident at the Sonali Bank branch in Ruma, also in Bandarban, about 100km from Thanchi. Although no money was reported being looted from that branch, the attackers kidnapped the branch manager, who remains missing since.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said Kuki Chin National Front (KNF), an armed group in the Hill Tracts, was involved in the robberies.

"Kuki Chin was involved in the bank robbery and firearms looting. They also hit police constables, ansar members and security personnel of the bank," he told journalists at his ministry office in Dhaka yesterday.

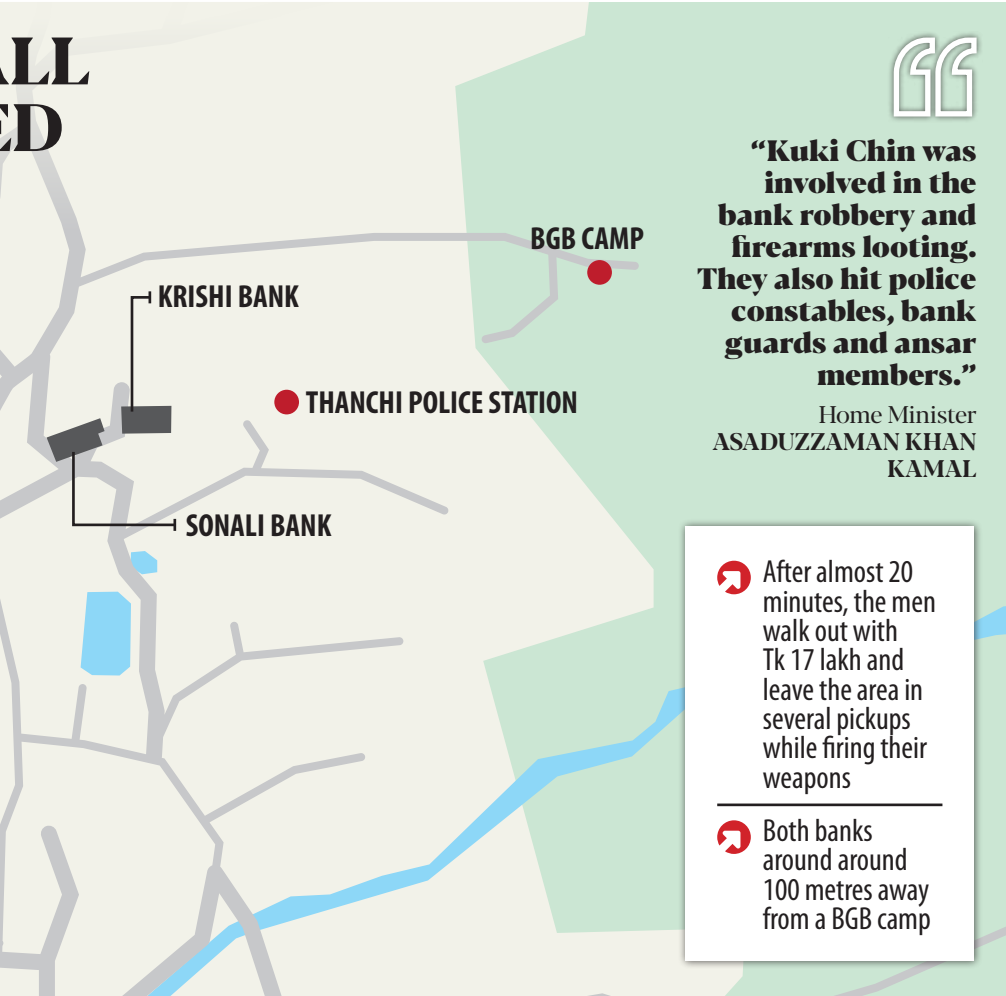
More detailed information about the robbers is not yet available, he said.

THE ROBBERIES

The two branches of Sonali and Krishi banks are located at the heart

HOW IT ALL UNFOLDED

- Dozens of armed men in two groups walk into Sonali Bank, Krishi Bank in Thanchi Bazar around 12:30pm
- Another armed group waits outside in a pickup while some members take position at different points in the vicinity
- The groups take cash from the cash counters and try to break the vaults



"Kuki Chin was involved in the bank robbery and firearms looting. They also hit police constables, bank guards and ansar members."

Home Minister ASADUZZAMAN KHAN KAMAL

After almost 20 minutes, the men walk out with Tk 17 lakh and leave the area in several pickups while firing their weapons

Both banks around around 100 metres away from a BGB camp

PM may visit India in June

She'll tour China likely in July



DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will visit India and China, likely in June and July, in her first major bilateral tours after the January 7 national election.

"The prime minister will definitely visit India, but the tour will take place after the national election there. The schedule is yet to be finalised," Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud told reporters at his ministry yesterday.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Some 15 people carrying arms barged into the bank and asked everyone to put their hands up at gunpoint while they emptied the cash counter and stuffed the money in sacks.

of Thanchi upazila, and both police and BGB have camps within 100 meters of the two banks in Thanchi Bazar. The area is almost always crowded as parking areas for CNG-run autorickshaws, human hauliers and bikes are also located there.

Hai Mong Marma, a teacher at Thanchi Govt Primary School, was inside the Sonali Bank when the robbery happened.

"Some 15 people carrying arms barged into the bank and asked everyone to put their hands up at gunpoint while they emptied the cash counter and stuffed the money in sacks," he said.

Preferring anonymity, another bank customer said the gang swiftly took everyone hostage upon entering the bank. "They confiscated all belongings and locked us in a room before fleeing."

Members of the gang also took position at different points of the bazaar to deal with any possible threat, witnesses said.

They said the area turned empty after the robbers fired shots in the air as customers and traders ran for their life, leaving their shops open.

Aongsing Marma, a local, said the armed men arrived in three vehicles from the south side, namely TNT Para, Chandak and Saizan Bom Para.

The group members who were already in the market area then brandished weapons and asked everyone to keep their mouth shut and close their shops.

After the robbery, they fired shots in the air, creating panic. They left the area in four human hauliers that drove towards TNT Para, Chandak, and Sahjanpara, witnesses said.

Osman Gani, deputy manager of Sonali Bank's Bandarban district, said their branch offices in six upazilas, except for the one in the district headquarters, have been temporarily closed down in the wake of the robbery spree in the hills.

He added that the branches will reopen once normalcy returned.

"We have learned that the group looted Tk 15 lakh from Sonali Bank

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

DEMO AT BUET Chhatra Dal's expression of solidarity rejected

Students call it political ploy

DU CORRESPONDENT

Buet students demonstrating for a politics-free campus yesterday rejected Chhatra Dal's expression of solidarity.

Speaking at a press conference at the Dhaka Reporters Unity around 11:30am, Chhatra Dal leaders said they stand in solidarity with the Buet students' movement on banning "evil politics". They said that they believe in democratic student politics in a healthy manner.

The Buet students at a separate press briefing termed Chhatra Dal's announcement a "political ploy".

Addressing the event in front of Buet's

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

A hostel of nightmares

At least 100 Bangladeshi workers 'confined' there after being deceived by Malaysian company

PORIMOL PALMA

The dream of a better life in Malaysia has turned into a nightmare for around 100 Bangladeshi migrant workers, each of whom had taken loans of around Tk 5 lakh to reach the country.

Once there, they were thrown into a squalid hostel in Sepang district in the southern part of the Malaysian state of Selangor.

Crammed together, 20-25 men share a single room, with limited access to even basic necessities like food. Their pleas for work and wages went unanswered, leaving them drowning in debt with no way out.

This crushing despair was only intensified by the sudden death of fellow worker Shafiqul Islam, who suffered a stroke on February 29.

Al-Amin (not his real name), 23, on March 20 told this correspondent, "Shafiqul and I were roommates. Each of us had borrowed large sums of money to come to Malaysia. However, upon our arrival, we quickly discovered that we had been deceived."

"Like the rest of us, he [Shafiqul] was constantly anxious. We are uncertain about how we will manage to repay the loans."

He claims they had only received a meagre 200 Malaysian Ringgit (Tk 5,000) for food in the past seven months. "It is an attempt to just provide us with the bare minimum so that we

don't complain to the labour department."

Al-Amin added that around 300 workers arrived in Malaysia to work for Petrazehra Berhad in October. But none of them were given jobs, granted work permits, or had their passports returned.

Around 200 of them managed to leave the hostel to seek employment or stay with friends.

Crammed together, 20-25 men share a single room, with limited access to even basic necessities like food.

The 100 who remain at the hostel sleep on the floor, mostly eat rice and lentils, and occasionally can afford eggs. Many of them have been falling ill, with no access to proper healthcare, they said.

"My blood pressure is often high. When a few of us visited the doctor two weeks ago, he only checked our pressure and gave us some medications," said Al-Amin. He explained that the doctor could not do further check ups as they do not have passports or work permits.

He borrowed Tk 5 lakh for the job in Malaysia and took an additional Tk 60,000

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

NRBC bank's rejoinder, our reply

NRBC Bank PLC has sent a rejoinder in response to our story "Capital Flight Covered Up", published on March 22, 2024, and a follow-up rejoinder in response to our story titled "Gun in Boardroom", published on March 21, 2024.

On March 25, 2024, The Daily Star has already published in full a rejoinder, sent by NRBC Chairman Tamal Parvez, on "Gun in boardroom" along with our response. Today, we are again publishing the full text of the rejoinder, this time sent by Chairman of the bank's Executive Committee Adnan Imam, along with our reply.

THE REJOINDER

I am writing to address the unfounded and defamatory allegations made against me, as recently circulated news report in your esteemed newspaper titled Gun in NRBC Boardroom

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

BUSINESS

Next budget may be hiked marginally

The government may cut the size of the budget for the ongoing fiscal year while the upcoming one is expected to see a marginal spike as the country's spending capacity has remained under stress.

The austerity stance, driven by the widening gap between incomes and expenses, is set to persist since the government continues to struggle to rein in inflation and reduce pressure on foreign currency reserves.

A meeting of the Fiscal Coordination Council will discuss the draft outlays for the revised budget for 2023-24 and the new budget for 2024-25 today.

STORY ON B1



This photo taken by Taiwan's Central News Agency (CNA) yesterday shows a damaged building in Hualien after a major 7.4-magnitude earthquake hit Taiwan's east.

PHOTO: AFP

Taiwan's strongest earthquake in 25 years kills nine

More than 900 injured; 50 missing; dozens of buildings damaged

REUTERS, Hualien

Taiwan's biggest earthquake in at least 25 years killed nine people yesterday and injured more than 900.

Some buildings tilted at precarious angles in the mountainous, sparsely populated county of Hualien, near the epicentre of the 7.2 magnitude quake, which struck just offshore at about 8:00am and triggered massive landslides.

Linda Chen, 48, said her apartment in downtown Hualien city had been so badly damaged in an earlier earthquake in 2018 that they had to move house. But her new apartment block was damaged too in the latest earthquake.

"We worry the house could collapse anytime. We thought we had already experienced it once in Hualien and it would not hit us again, because God has to be fair," she said.

The quake hit at a depth of 15.5 km (9.6 miles), just as people were headed for work and school, damaging dozens of buildings and setting off a tsunami warning for southern Japan and the Philippines that was later lifted.

Video showed rescuers using ladders to help trapped people out of windows. Strong tremors in Taipei forced the subway

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5