

Turkey, Russia

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They have established a regular dialogue over the Syrian conflict, despite being on opposing sides, but had appeared to be on a fresh collision course over Libya.

Putin arrived late on Tuesday after paying a surprise visit to Syria -- his first to Damascus since the war began -- at a moment of acute uncertainty in the Middle East following the assassination of top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani by the United States.

Syria remains a potential powder-keg for Erdogan and Putin's relationship.

Syrian government forces -- backed by Russia -- have ramped up bombardment of the last rebel strongholds in Idlib province in recent weeks, sending hundreds of thousands fleeing towards the Turkish border.

Erdogan has called for a truce in Idlib, following previous temporary halts to the fighting brokered with Russia in late 2018 and updated in August last year.

"Russia's demands are very simple," said Yuri Barmin of the Moscow Policy Group think tank. "Turkey must do more to eliminate terrorist cells in Idlib. The discussions will be around this idea."

Improved ties between the two countries have been facilitated by a number of major energy and defence deals. Russia is building Turkey's first nuclear plant and last year delivered the S-400 missile defence system, to the consternation of Turkey's NATO allies.

Putin earned goodwill in Turkey after his quick support for Erdogan following an attempted coup in July 2016.

The two men have developed a "strong personal relationship", according to Jana Jabbour of Sciences Po university in Paris, who adds that "their economic and energy plans are interdependent".

The TurkStream project, which was temporarily halted during a frosty patch in Russia-Turkey relations, includes two parallel pipelines of more than 900 kilometres (550 miles).

The pipeline links Anapa in Russia to Kiyikoy in northwestern Turkey and has already begun deliveries to Bulgaria. It is being extended towards Serbia, Hungary and Austria.

Trial starts

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court. He sought justice for the killing of his son and demanded exemplary punishment to all who were involved in the heinous crime.

Meanwhile, Public Prosecutor Sanjib Das appealed to the court for cancelling Minni's bail as she "threatened two witnesses of the case".

In another development, a juvenile court in Barguna indicted 14 juveniles in the murder case.

After hearing from the prosecution and the defence, Judge Hafizur Rahman framed the charges and set January 13 for starting their trial, said lawyer Mojibul.

Earlier, 13 juveniles accused were brought to the court from Jessore Juvenile Development Centre, while another accused, who is out on bail, appeared before the court.

Thirteen juveniles were charged under sections 302 and 34 of the Penal Code for their alleged involvement in the Rifat murder, while another accused was charged under sections 302, 120 (B) 1, and 212 for allegedly taking part in the planning of the killing and helping the accused flee, the lawyer added.

On June 26 last year, Rifat, 25, an internet service provider, was hacked to death in broad daylight in front of his wife Minni in Barguna town.

Police submitted the charge sheet against 24 accused -- 10 adults and 14 juveniles -- in the murder case in September.

On January 1 this year, Judge Md Asaduzzaman of Barguna District and Sessions Judge's Court framed charges against the 10 adult accused.

Of them, Minni is on bail, and eight other accused are in jail. Another accused Musa is absconding, and the court issued an arrest warrant against him, the lawyer said.

Police arrested Minni on July 16 for her alleged involvement in the killing. A Barguna court placed her on a five-day remand the following day. Three days later, the court recorded her statement under section 164.

On August 29, the High Court granted bail to Minni on conditions that she cannot talk to the media and she will remain in her father's custody.

Besides Minni and Musa, eight other adult accused are Rakibul Hasan Rifat Faraje, Al Kaiyum alias Rabbi Akon, Mohiminul Islam Sifat, Rejwan Ali Khan alias Tiktok Redoy, Md Hasan, Rafiqul Islam Rabbi, Md Sagor, 19, and Kamrul Islam Saimun, 21.

In a CCTV footage, Minni was seen screaming and trying to save her husband from the attackers.

Name of the key accused Sabbir Hossain Nayan alias Nayan Bond has been excluded from the charges as he was killed in a "gunfight" with police on July 2, six days after the murder.



Activists of Communist Party of India Marxist (CPIM), along with members of different workers unions, shout slogans as they block train tracks during a nationwide general strike called by trade unions aligned with opposition parties to protest against the Indian government's economic policies, near the railway station in Amritsar, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Remove all IEDs

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By Brigadier General Myoe Than.

According to the officials, both countries agreed to take action against secessionist terrorists and emphasised on sharing real-time information and frequent interactions at various levels to stop drug trafficking, human trafficking and illegal border crossing.

Myanmar troops have been accused of planting mines along border areas to prevent Rohingyas from returning to their villages in the Rakhine State. Rohingyas typically use the porous border to travel back.

At the height of a mass exodus, when tens of thousands of Rohingyas poured into Bangladesh, several were killed or seriously hurt in suspected landmine explosions along the border.

Anti-personnel mines were banned under a global treaty in 1997.

Rights group Amnesty International said then that it had documented what appeared to be the targeted use of landmines along a narrow stretch forming part of the north-western border of Rakhine.

The BGB chief said such IEDs or landmines are dangerous for both the bordering troops. The BGB

expects that Myanmar will remove the IEDs, which are planted between zero borderline and 50 yards of the bordering areas.

"Border roads will be constructed along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. A Myanmar representative team has assured that the IEDs will be removed before the construction of the roads," the BGB DG added.

Replying to a query, he said Bangladesh has undertaken a plan to construct barbed-wire fences along the Myanmar border in phases to prevent illegal intrusion, drug smuggling and border-related criminal activities.

During the seventh Senior Level Border Conference, Bangladesh declared that it will maintain a "Zero-tolerance" policy with all-out efforts to prevent the trafficking of illicit drugs and psychotropic substances, especially yaba, along the border lines, while Myanmar has agreed to continue anti-narcotics drug measures in accordance with its national drug control policy.

"Due to strong vigilance by both the bordering troops, yaba trafficking through the Naf river has decreased. Now, yaba is entering through Bangladesh's southern part using the

northern border of Myanmar," said the BGB chief.

Though he praised the Myanmar counterpart's action for curbing yaba trafficking, just a week ago the home minister at a programme in the capital, said yaba trafficking has not stopped because Myanmar didn't keep its promise. "Myanmar promised on different occasions that they would take steps to stop yaba trafficking [into Bangladesh], but they haven't taken any initiative."

Both countries agreed to cooperate with each other in fighting transnational crimes, arms smuggling, violation of rules, not to violate the sanctity of 150 feet (50 meter) on each side of the boundary line by any means without prior approval from both parties and to notify each other if any shooting incidence takes place in the border area.

In case of anyone crossing the border unknowingly, both countries agreed to return the citizens to their homeland abiding by all rules and regulations.

The next Senior Level Border Conference between the BGB and MPF will be held in Myanmar in May/June 2020 or when convenient based on a mutually agreed upon schedule.

China launches

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connects Beijing, Yanqing and Zhangjiakou, all three of which will host events during the upcoming Winter Olympics.

The route will stop at 10 stations, including Badaling Chang Cheng, the most popular section of China's Great Wall.

Chongli railway, a branch line from the Jing-Zhang railway, is also open and will ferry passengers from the capital city to Taizicheng Station -- a stone's throw away from several skiing competition venues and the Olympic Village.

The new rail line began operations on December 30, with the first train running from Beijing North Railway Station to Taizicheng Railway Station.

A quick search on the official high-speed railway website 12306 China Railway shows there are currently about 30 bullet trains running between Beijing and Zhangjiakou daily but only six of them are serviced

by the new "smart train".

Tickets range from RMB77 (\$11) to RMB231 (\$33) for a normal high-speed train and RMB90 (\$12) to RMB270 (\$38) if you're traveling on a smart train.

At the time of writing, tickets for the smart trains need to be booked two days in advance.

So what makes them "smart?" Well, the carriages are equipped with 5G signals, intelligent lighting and 2,718 sensors to collect real-time data and detect any operational abnormalities.

Meanwhile, each individual seat has its own touch-screen control panel and wireless charging docks.

Though the high-speed trains on the route are autonomous, a monitoring driver will be on board at all times. The trains can automatically start, stop and adjust to the different speed limits between stations.

Back at the station, robots and facial recognition technologies have been deployed to help passengers

with directions, luggage and paperless check-ins.

Chinese railway enthusiasts are excited about the new route for another historical reason.

Jing-Zhang Railway was originally the name of a now-defunct line. First opened in 1909, it was the first railway designed and built independently by Chinese, linking Beijing and Zhangjiakou.

Traveling along the entire route back then took eight hours.

The line's few remaining original stations closed in 2016 to make way for the construction of the new high-speed railway.

Today, China is home to the world's largest high-speed rail network, which stretches about 35,000 kilometers, and the fastest commercially operating train -- the Shanghai maglev.

Running at the top speed of 431 kph, the train links Shanghai Pudong Airport and Longyang Road in the eastern side of Shanghai.

4,000 fall ill in 24 hours

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yesterday.

So far this winter, 51 people died due to different cold-related diseases across the country since November last year. Of them, 17 were children, the DGHS official said.

Besides, over 3 lakh people have received treatment from different government hospitals across the country since last November, she informed.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Meteorological Department (Met) in its weather forecast yesterday said the intensity of cold may slightly decrease today.

"A mild cold wave is sweeping over Rangpur division and the regions of Rajshahi, Jashore, Chuadanga and Tangail. It may abate," the Met weather bulletin said yesterday.

Light rain may occur at some places of Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dhaka, Khulna, Mymensingh and Sylhet divisions, while moderate to thick fog may occur over the country from midnight till morning, the weather forecast said.

Yesterday, the country's lowest temperature was recorded as 6.8 degrees Celsius in Tentulia of Panchagrah, while the highest was 27.3 at Teknaf of Cox's Bazar.

Our correspondents from different districts reports on disruption of

public lives and communications due to the cold and thick fog.

In Tangail, poor visibility caused by dense fog forced hundreds of passengers and transport workers to suffer as a 20-kilometer-long tailback formed on the Dhaka-Tangail highway, which is considered the gateway to 26 districts, since Tuesday night

Vehicular movement was suspended on the Bangabandhu Multipurpose Bridge for 37 minutes from 4:28am yesterday due to poor visibility, according to Traffic Control Room of the Bridge.

Hundreds of vehicles were trapped from Kodim Dhalla area of Mirzapur upazila to Ashekpur Bypass area in Tangail Sadar upazila since Tuesday midnight.

"I have been trapped here since 8:30am and the vehicles could not move even few meters in one hour," said Anwar Hossain, driver of a North Bengal bound goods-laden truck, who talked to the correspondent at Jamurki area in Mirzapur upazila.

Contacted, Mirzapur's traffic inspector Sajedul Islam said traffic movement became normal on the highway yesterday noon.

In Rangpur, at least 21 people, mostly women, elderly men and children, died at different hospitals in

Rangpur Division after being infected with cold-related diseases and burn injuries since November last year.

Shamsun Nahar, 33, of Pathanpara village in Dinajpur's Khansama upazila, sustained burn injuries while trying to keep warm from a fire on December 22. She succumbed to her injuries on Tuesday at Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

Besides, over 22,000 people took treatment in different government hospitals since November last year, said Dr Mostafa Khaled Masud, director of Rangpur divisional health office.

The health department has formed 722 medical teams in eight districts in the division to deal with the situation, he informed.

In Lalmonirhat, biting cold coupled with persistent dense fog have paralysed public lives both in the urban and rural areas of five upazilas in the district.

"As we have no warm clothes and no ability to purchase them, me and my three children have been suffering from the chilling cold," said Radha Rani, 38, of Lalmonirhat.

However, the district's Deputy Commissioner Abu Jafor said the district administration has so far distributed 34,000 pieces of warm clothes to the people in five upazilas.

All 176 on board die

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Under international rules, responsibility for investigating the crash lies with Iran, and Iranian state television said both of the plane's black box voice and data recorders had been found.

The semi-official Mehr news agency quoted the head of Iran's civil aviation organisation as saying it was not clear which country Iran would send the black boxes to for analysis of the data, but it would not give them to Boeing.

An amateur video, run by Iranian news agencies and purportedly of the crashing plane, showed a flash in a dark sky descending. It was accompanied by comments that the aircraft was "on fire" and then a brighter flash as it appears to hit the ground. Reuters could not authenticate the footage.

Asked at a briefing in Kiev if the plane could have been hit by a missile, Ukraine's Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk cautioned against speculation until the results of the investigation were known.

Iran had earlier fired missiles at bases housing US forces in Iraq in retaliation for a US drone strike last week that killed an Iranian military commander.

Some airlines cancelled Iran and Iraq flights and re-routed others away from both countries' airspace following the missile strikes.

Safety experts say airliner accidents rarely have a single cause and that it typically takes months of investigation to understand all the factors behind them.

In Paris, the maker of the plane's engines, French-US firm CFM - co-owned by General Electric and France's Safran - said speculation regarding the cause was premature.

Iranian TV put the crash down to unspecified technical problems, and

Iranian media quoted a local aviation official as saying the pilot did not declare an emergency.

An official at Ukraine's embassy in Tehran said Iranian authorities had asked it to rescind an initial statement from Iran based on preliminary information that had blamed the accident on engine failure.

The plane that crashed was a three-year-old Boeing 737-800NG en route to Kiev. Its last scheduled maintenance was on Jan 6, the airline said.

"We are in contact with our airline customer and stand by them in this difficult time. We are ready to assist in any way needed," the manufacturer said in a statement.

The 737-800 is one of the world's most-flow models with a good safety record and does not have the software feature implicated in crashes of the 737 MAX. Boeing grounded its 737 MAX fleet in March after two crashes that killed 346 people.

Modern aircraft are designed and certified to cope with an engine failure shortly after take-off and to fly for extended periods on one engine. But an uncontained engine failure releasing shrapnel can cause damage to other aircraft systems.

Zelenskyy said he had instructed Ukraine's prosecutor general to open criminal proceedings, without specifying who they would involve.

Under international rules, Ukraine would be party to the investigation, and the United States would usually be accredited as the country where the jet was designed and built. France, where engine maker CFM has half its activities, may also be involved.

There was no immediate word on whether the US National Transportation Safety Board would be involved. The NTSB usually invites Boeing to give technical advice in such investigations.

Child rape

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At least 448 children were killed last year while it was 418 in 2018.

The number of children subjected to sexual harassment increased to 203 from 130 in 2018. Abduction also went up to 187 from 150, it said.

The report recommended that the government took tough measures against violence against children and ensure prompt justice.

It also urged the authorities to ensure exemplary punishment to the culprits, provide legal support and security to the victim families, and

monitor educational institutions.

The report also called upon family members to remain cautious.

BSAF Director Abdus Shahid Mahmood said, "Enforcement of law will not be enough unless moral values are established in society and the people who commit these acts correct themselves."

He also urged the government to amend the current laws to ensure exemplary and timely punishment.

National Human Rights Commission Chairman Nasima Begum said violence against children should be brought down to zero.

Intent was to dislodge

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The bench of Justice Md Shawkat Hossain, Justice Md Abu Zafar Siddique and Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder said, "It is crystal clear that the BDR rebels in collaboration with each other, sharing their common intention and object, following a criminal conspiracy hatched in secrecy, deliberately killed the army officers with a view to exterminate the army officers from the BDR and establishing their full control and supremacy over the BDR force."

"No provocation, no criminal conspiracy, no dissatisfaction and no agreement can justify this sort of atrocities and massacre committed in the Pilkhana on February 25 and 26, 2009..."

At least 74 persons including 57 upright and promising army officers were killed during the mutiny.

The court said the incident was unprecedented and the nation lost some promising, bright, distinguished, luminous, patriotic and outstanding army officers and it would take a long time to fill the vacuum.

It termed the actions of the BDR rebels shocking, gruesome, diabolical and ghastly and said no civilised society could tolerate this.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The HC recommended enquiries into the failure of then Rifles Security Unit (RSU) in providing information beforehand and making the probe reports public.

It also asked prohibiting activities that belittle or disrespect members of the BGB.

The HC said the BGB members should not carry out any activity or programme like operation Dal-Bhat which hurts their self-respect. It said the BGB should not take up any activity or programme that results in the gradual degeneration of the attitude of solidarity and behaviour of the BGB members.

The home ministry and the BGB should respond quickly to all problems of BGB members.

It asked the BGB authorities to mitigate all grievances of its members, if any remaining hidden, and disburse different arrears allowances quickly.

The court also recommended that the BGB solves the problems involving pending leaves of BGB personnel.

The solidarity between the officers and soldiers must be maintained with mutual respect for each other.

In case of misconduct by a soldier on duty, he or she should be dealt with in accordance with law, the court said.

Unwanted and unbecoming behaviour, conduct and language on the part of the officers and soldiers

must be avoided, it said in the full verdict.

Security of the arsenal at Pilkhana should be and must be brought under the strict surveillance to protect it from all kinds of danger.

It also recommended taking steps for sending BGB members to UN peacekeeping missions, like members of other forces are sent, if there is no legal bar.

The HC expunged some remarks made by the trial court about the then chief prosecutor of the state Anisul Huq (now the law minister) and its additional chief prosecutor Mosharrar Hossain Kazol saying that the remarks of the trial court have affected their reputation and social status.

Anisul Huq has successfully, efficiently and competently conducted many important cases including Bangabandhu murder case and Jail killing case, it said.

REACTIONS
After the HC released the full text of verdict, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told reporters at his office that the government would file appeals with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in 30 days against the portion of HC verdict that acquitted 283 accused.

Aminul Islam, a defence lawyer for more than 400 accused, told The Daily Star that his clients can file appeals with the Appellate Division challenging the HC verdict.

KSA deports

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alleged that although their employers were supposed to arrange residence permits for them, the employers did not do so, said a Brac official, quoting the returnees.

The employers asked for their deportation to Bangladesh when police detained the workers, he said.

Confirming the returnees' number, Shariful Islam Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said it was the responsibility of all stakeholders to stand by the "failed" migrant workers.

It falls upon the state and the Bangladesh mission concerned to ensure migrant workers do not return home after being deceived in the Gulf country, he said.

They have to ensure migrant workers get their promised jobs there and have the opportunity to change their fortunes, he added.

Recruiting agencies also have to play their due role to this end, he said.

Until mid-November last year, the Middle eastern country deported about 22,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers after detaining them on different grounds, according to Brac data.