

Australian minister resigns over funding scandal

AFP, Sydney

Australia's agriculture minister has been forced to resign after she was found to have steered public money to sports clubs in seats the conservative government was targeting ahead of an election.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Bridget McKenzie -- a former sports minister -- had resigned for failing to reveal she was a member of one of the shooting clubs that received taxpayer cash.

Morrison, who is already facing heavy criticism for his handling of Australia's months-long bushfire crisis, insisted he had dealt with the week-long grants scandal in a "stable, calm and careful" manner.

McKenzie had reportedly ignored recommendations from Sports Australia about who should get the money, instead funnelling it to areas that would help the ruling coalition.

The issue was politically fraught for Morrison, with McKenzie also acting as the deputy leader of his vital coalition partner, the Nationals.

Iranians must have 'right to choose' at polls: Rouhani

AFP, Tehran

Iranians must have the "right to choose" between different political movements, President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday, as controversy grows over the disqualification of thousands of candidates in upcoming polls.

Speaking at the mausoleum of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini during annual celebrations of the 1979 revolution, Rouhani, a moderate conservative, praised the political heritage of the Islamic republic's founder.

"The imam (Khomeini) insisted on the fact that people must participate in all elections and have the right to choose", Rouhani said during the address, broadcast on state television.

"Whoever prevents people from choosing, and does not allow them to choose between different (political) tendencies, and whoever discourages people from going to the polls, is certainly far from the approach of the imam", he added, surrounded by members of the government.

Controversy has been raging for the last fortnight, pitting the coalition that supports Rouhani's government against the Guardian Council, which oversees Iran's elections and is dominated by ultra-conservatives.

The council says it has barred some 9,500 potential candidates from standing in the February 21 legislative polls -- almost two thirds of the 14,500 hopefuls -- including 92 sitting MPs from of all political stripes.

Those who are barred are allowed to appeal before the election.

4-year-old killed

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As she had not returned home after several hours, her parents started looking for her around 4:30pm and called the police later that night, Nasir said.

A team of police and villagers then found her body in the orchard, he added.

Her body was sent to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Nasir filed a case with Damurhuda Model Police Station yesterday afternoon.

Border killings

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Indian High Commission in this regard.

Momen said some Bangladeshis also sometimes cross the border, which they should not do.

There is an agreement between Bangladesh and India on not using lethal weapons, he added.

Besides, meetings between the border forces of the two countries also agreed that the killings will be brought to zero, he added.

Stone quarry

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Environmental Lawyers Association, the death toll with the two rose to 78 in the last three years since January 23, 2017.

Besides Companiganj upazila, illegal stone extraction is going on in different areas of Gowainghat, Jaintipur, and Kanaighat upazilas.

A taskforce, formed with representatives of administration, the department of environment, BGB, and police, is conducting drives at different illegal stone extraction sites, said the UNO.

Shah Shaheda Akhter, regional coordinator of BELA in Sylhet, said only the taskforce drive was not enough to stop illegal stone extraction. It rather needed a strong government policy to stop it completely.



A wounded Palestinian photojournalist is evacuated during an anti-Israel protest against the U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan, in Hebron in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

White House to block

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impeachment trial. Trump and his allies have repeatedly made unfounded and false claims to allege that the Bidens acted corruptly in Ukraine.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement on Saturday, "Every single Republican Senator voted to endorse the White House cover-up of these potentially important truth-revealing emails. Make no mistake, the full truth will eventually come out and Republicans will have to answer for why they were so determined to enable the president to hide it."

The Senate on Friday defeated an attempt to subpoena documents and witnesses, which could have revealed more about the actions of Trump and the officials closest to him related to Ukraine. Senate leadership on

Wednesday plans to hold the final vote to acquit Trump on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

Government officials testified in the House's impeachment inquiry to the existence of what appears to be some of the emails.

"The day after DOD issued its June 18 press release announcing \$250 million in security assistance funds for Ukraine, President Trump started asking OMB questions about the funding for Ukraine," the House outlined in its impeachment report.

The House noted that the OMB refused to turn over any documents when subpoenaed during the probe, and that emails may exist showing acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney passing along the president's order to halt the aid to Ukraine.

Honk more, wait more

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world and lot of this noise is at the traffic signals where Mumbaikars honk even when they see the signal is red. Jointly with the FCB Interface, we have launched this innovative solution to arrest the honking menace," Pandey said.

The decibel meters have been installed and activated at major junctions or signals at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaja Terminus, Marine Drive, Pedder Road, Hindmata Cinema Dadar and Bandra.

Mumbai Police shared a video of the experiment with a short introduction by a professional actor -- in the garb of Mumbai's lovable but oft loathed 'Pandu Havaladars' (traffic police) who once used to hide behind the signals and quickly

pounce on speeding traffic violators.

In his 'Mumbaiya' style, he opens the video that has gone viral: "Welcome! To the Honking Capital of the world...! Here, people honk even when the signal is red! Its easy, noa! Maybe they think that by honking, they can make the signal turn green faster! They just don't understand...". followed by a massive cacophony at some of the signals.

The short video goes on to show how some uncontrollable honkers blared their horns, waited, again honked and then shut up -- learning the hard way that honking is not the way out (of the traffic jam).

"This is intended more for creating awareness instead of punishment. Presently it is being launched on an experimental basis to study

"The Committees also have good-faith reason to believe that the Office of Management and Budget is in possession of and continues to withhold significantly more documents and records responsive to the subpoena and of direct relevance to the impeachment inquiry," the House wrote before it voted to impeach the president for obstruction of Congress.

The filings from the executive branch came Friday to meet a court-ordered January 31 deadline. A judge had specifically asked for an email-by-email breakdown of what the Justice Department redacted or withheld in Defense Department and OMB emails about the aid, and why it did so, after the Center for Public Integrity sued and got access to them in December through the Freedom of Information Act.

the public response," Mumbai Police spokesperson and Deputy Commissioner of Police Pranaya Ashok told IANS.

Thumping the Mumbai Traffic Police on their back for the initiative, renowned anti-noise pollution crusader Sumaira Abdul Ali said this is the first time in decades that they (the police) have got around to "enforcing" something which activists have been demanding for years.

"This is a global first as we have not heard of such a thing anywhere in the world and I wholeheartedly congratulate the Mumbai Traffic Police for doing something concrete to make the city roads less noisy and eventually noise-free," Ali told IANS.

Bangabandhu's nation-building

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The Soviet delegation shows interest in helping Bangladesh for early resumption of work in Ghorashal Power Station.

KHULNA GENOCIDE

Agriculture Minister Sheikh Abdul Aziz claims that at least one lakh people were killed in Khulna by the Pakistani occupation force during the Liberation War. At a press conference organised at the Secretariat, he shares his harrowing experience of a week-long tour in the region. He specifically mentions the Rupsa industrial area, Khalishpur, Khulna Crescent Mill, Khulna Newsprint Mill, Gollamari, Khulna Customs and Forest Dock, where hundreds of bodies and skeletons were

found.

BHUTTO'S SUGGESTION FOR EARLY US RECOGNITION OF BANGLADESH

In a secret telegram issued on February 3, 1972, the US Embassy in Pakistan informs the US State Department about Pakistan President Bhutto's suggestion that the US should move soon to regularise its position on Dhaka and recognise Bangladesh shortly. The US should establish contact with Mujib without delay which, according to Bhutto, will be helpful in the context of Mujib's own problems and anticipated Indo-Pak negotiations on issues resulting from the recent war. Bhutto suggests that February 20 will be an appropriate date for the US to announce the

30 drug dealers to surrender today

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actions," he added.

The Daily Star managed to collect identification of 10 narcotics dealers who were in "safe home". They are Abdul Razzaq, Redwan, Abdul Amin Abul, Mohammad Kala, Rezaul Karim, Sharif, Mohammad Shafiq, Farid Alam, Noor Kalam, and Abdur Rahim.

Meanwhile, on January 20 this year, the district police submitted charge-sheet against the 102 top narcotics smugglers who surrendered to police last year.

NEW TECHNIQUES FOR SMUGGLING YABA

Despite these surrender programmes and continuous drive against drug dealers, smuggling of the crazy pills remained almost similar, according to sources in law enforcement agencies and locals.

The smugglers are adopting new techniques and changing routes to smuggle the pills into Bangladesh

from the neighboring country Myanmar, they added.

According to database of Department of Narcotics Control (DNC), around 2.52 crore yaba pills were recovered by law enforcers in first ten months of 2019.

DNC Officials said they could recover only 10 percent of total pills that were smuggled into Bangladesh.

Maj Gen Shafeenul Islam, director general of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), said the trend of trafficking yaba through the Naf river had decreased due to strong vigilance.

"Now, yaba is entering through Bangladesh's southern part using the northern border of Myanmar," said the BGB chief, while addressing a briefing on January 8.

On the other hand, Myanmar-based narcotics dealers have been applying "sell on credit" strategy since the law enforcers started the anti-narcotics drive in Bangladesh on May, 2018.

recognition of Bangladesh. Referring to his recent visit to China, Bhutto shares that Chinese Premier Chou En-Lai said specifically that China would wish to be guided by Bhutto's views on recognising Bangladesh. Although China has an interest in developments in Bangladesh, it can afford to get along without an ambassador in Dhaka if that is Bhutto's desire. Chou En-Lai said that China would, in that case, be prepared to use other resources available to them within Bangladesh, implying reliance on pro-Chinese elements, reads the telegram.

Sources: Documents on South Asia, 1969-1972 & February 4, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Daily Ittefaq and Purbodesh.

"For the last one year, the Myanmar based smugglers are giving the yaba pills to Bangladeshi smugglers without taking any advance payments. If the consignment is seized by the law enforcers then the Bangladeshi smugglers do not need to make any payment to their counterpart," said a high official of police, working in Cox's Bazar district.

In recent times, the technique also got popularity in local markets. Bangladeshi wholesale dealers are not taking any money to sell the pills to local retailers, if the consignment is seized by law enforcers before delivery, said the official, requesting anonymity.

Police claimed to have known the information after interrogating several arrestees.

Around 1,250 yaba dealers have been enlisted by law enforcers in eight upazilas of Cox's Bazar, showed a database of the district police. Of them, 912 are from Teknaf.

Translate more Bangla

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Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the occasion of Mujib Borsho (Mujib Year).

Hasina also distributed the Bangla Academy Sahitya Puroshkar-2019 (Bangla Academy Literature Award) at the opening ceremony.

The award recipients are former Home Minister Rafiqul Islam (Literature on Liberation War), Makid Haider (Poetry), Wasi Ahmed (Literature), Swarochish Sarkar (Essay/Research), Khairul Alam Sabuj (Translation), Rahim Shah (Children's Literature), Ratan Siddiqui (Drama), Nadira Majumder (Science Fiction), Faruk Moinuddin (Autobiography/Travelogue) and Simon Zakaria (Folklore).

Each winner received a cheque for Tk 3 lakh and crests.

Bangla Academy Sahitya Puroshkar is given by the Bangla Academy of Bangladesh in recognition of creative genius in advancement and overall contribution to the field of Bangla language and literature.

Hasina also unveiled a book titled 'Amar Dekha Noya Chin', written by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, which is the most attractive book among 100 new books to be published on Bangabandhu's life and work on his birth centenary.

The Bangla Academy has started publishing the 100 new books in phases in the Mujib Year.

Presided over by Bangla Academy President and National Professor Anisuzzaman, the inaugural function was also addressed by State Minister for Cultural Affairs KM Khalid, Cultural Affairs Secretary Abu Hena Mostofa Kamal and Bangla Academy Director General poet Habibullah Siraji.

Later, the prime minister visited different stalls of the book fair.

The fair will remain open from 3pm to 8:30pm on weekdays, from 11am to 8:30pm on weekends, and from 8am to 9pm on February 21 -- International Mother Language Day.

This year, the land earmarked for the fair was expanded to 8,00,000 sqft.

Every year the month-long book fair is arranged in February commemorating the sacrifices of eight people who laid down their lives on February 21, 1952 for establishing Bangla as the mother tongue.

Herbal remedies for the coronavirus spark debate in China

AFP, Beijing

A claim by Chinese scientists that a liquid made with honeysuckle and flowering plants could help fight the deadly coronavirus has sparked frenzied buying of the traditional medicine, but doubts quickly emerged.

As the death toll from the SARS-like pathogen sweeping the country continues to rise, shoppers have swamped pharmacies in search of "Shuanghuanglian".

The rush came after influential state media outlet Xinhua reported Friday that the esteemed Chinese Academy of Sciences had found the concoction "can inhibit" the virus.

Videos shared online showed long lines of people in surgical masks lining up at night outside drug stores, purportedly in hope of snapping up the product, despite official advice that people avoid public gatherings to prevent infection.

province, ground zero of the outbreak.

The strategy has reignited fierce and long-running debate about the efficacy of TCM, which has a history going back 2,400 years and remains popular in modern-day China.

Marc Freard, a member of the Chinese Medicine Academic Council of France, told AFP he believed traditional formulations could be used to treat people with symptoms ranging from fever to thick phlegm.

But he warned that many remedies on the market were of questionable quality and admitted that TCM "lacks scientific standards of efficacy" because it relied on "individualised treatment".

Traditional medicines were widely used in China in conjunction with Western methods during the 2003 epidemic of SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which killed 774 people worldwide.

But a 2012 study in the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews found combining Chinese and Western medicines "made no difference" in battling the disease.

The Chinese government has increasingly promoted traditional medicine abroad in recent years, often with nationalistic undertones.

Beijing issued its first white paper on TCM in 2016, laying out plans to build medicine centres and dispatch practitioners to developing countries in Africa and Southeast Asia.

President Xi Jinping has called TCM a "treasure of Chinese civilisation" and said at a meeting in October that it should be given as much weight as other treatments.

China is "working hard to spread the message internationally about its traditional culture", and medicine is a part of this, Freard said.

In 2019 the World Health Organization (WHO) even added Chinese medicine to its "International Classification of Diseases" -- a reference document for medical trends and global health statistics -- after years of campaigning by Beijing.

But the move was slammed by members of the scientific community, with the European Academies' Science Advisory Council calling the decision "a major problem" due to the lack of evidence-based practice.

The WHO did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

It quickly sold out both online and at brick-and-mortar stores, but responses to the remedy's supposed efficacy have ranged from enthusiasm to scepticism on Weibo, China's Twitter-like social media platform.

And state media sounded a more cautionary note on Saturday, with broadcaster CCTV publishing an interview with Zhang Boli, one of the researchers leading outbreak containment efforts, who warned of potential side effects from the medicine.

The People's Daily newspaper, a government mouthpiece, said experts advised against taking traditional remedies without professional guidance.

But the claim comes as Beijing looks to incorporate traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) into its nationwide fight against the virus, which has killed more than 300 people and infected over 14,000 in the country. Yesterday, the Philippines reported the first death outside of China.

Researchers at the state-run academy, a top government think tank, are also studying the potential use of a plant commonly known as Japanese knotweed to alleviate symptoms.

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Guaido calls for a 'great mobilisation' ahead of Venezuela return

AFP, Miami

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido promised "a great mobilisation in Caracas" when he returns to the country after a two-week international tour, drumming up support to dislodge President Nicolas Maduro.

Recognised as interim president by more than 50 nations, Guaido said in Miami on Saturday he would end the "tragedy" in his country, which has been battered by political and economic crises.

"In the next few days, despite the risk, we will be entering Venezuela," Guaido said at a convention center near the airport.

Guaido defied a travel ban imposed by local authorities to leave the country and meet with officials abroad.

"There is only one option -- to achieve free elections," he added, calling on Venezuelans to be "prepared for the announcement of a great mobilization in Caracas."

Trump and Guaido missed each other at the world economic forum in Davos, with Guaido saying he would try to meet with the US president.

While in the US, Guaido met with Senator Marco Rubio, who has shaped many of Washington's policies towards Venezuela.

The US was the first country to recognize Guaido as the legitimate leader of Venezuela in January 2019, when -- in his capacity as parliamentary head -- he invoked constitutional powers and named himself interim president.

Maduro won a new term in 2018 in elections that were widely criticized internationally as fraudulent, and new presidential polls are not due until 2024.

"I look forward to seeing him again in a free #Venezuela," Rubio tweeted Saturday.

But Maduro, who calls Guaido Washington's "puppet", has remained in power backed by the security forces, as well as by Cuba, Russia and China.