

Family burnt alive as ‘bandits’ kill 21 in Nigeria

AFP, Kano

Armed attackers burned 21 people alive, including 16 members of the same family, in a revenge attack by criminal gangs on a village in northern Nigeria, residents said yesterday.

Gunmen on motorcycles raided the village of Bakali in Kaduna state on Tuesday, shooting and burning homes and vehicles to avenge a raid on their hideout by local vigilantes, inhabitants said.

“They killed 21 people in the attack,” Bakali’s community leader, Sani Nuhu, told AFP.

Residents said the assailants burned alive 16 members of the same family, including six children, and five members of a local self-defence group after locking them in a house.

A police spokesman said the force

had “received report of an attack by bandits on Bakali village” but was “still awaiting details”.

The area where the attack happened has in recent years been a haven for criminal gangs who steal cattle and kidnap people for ransom.

Local communities have formed vigilante groups to protect themselves but this has failed to end the violence.

Residents said that prior to the attack vigilantes working together with the Nigerian security forces had stormed the criminal gang’s camp in a nearby forest.

Last week the police said it carried out a major operation in the area that saw security forces “neutralise over 250 terrorists and bandits”.

There was no independent confirmation of the toll.

Beijing outlines plans to improve air quality more in 2020

REUTERS, Beijing

Beijing will cut smog levels further this year by putting more new energy vehicles (NEV) on its roads, reducing diesel-fuelled truck numbers and tightening its supervision of vehicle emissions and refined oil products, the city said on Thursday.

The Beijing Municipality government also said it will aim to cut emissions in the petrochemical industry.

The Chinese capital recorded an average concentration of tiny airborne smog particles known as PM2.5 at 42 micrograms per cubic metre last year, the lowest level since the country began an anti-air pollution campaign in 2016.

Nevertheless, that PM2.5 level is still more than four times the World Health Organization’s guideline of 10 micrograms per cubic metre of air.

“Beijing will make its best effort to improve air quality, with annual PM2.5 concentration and three-year average concentrations continuing to fall,” the Beijing Municipality government said in a statement on Thursday.

The city said it aims to have 400,000 NEVs - plug-in hybrids, battery-only electric vehicles and those powered by hydrogen fuel cells - by the end of the year, up from the 225,000 on its roads at the end of 2018.

It aims to speed up the elimination of high-emission cars and replace diesel-fuelled trucks with NEVs, which it will use for all its postal, intra-city delivery, environmental sanitation departments and for its airport and public bus systems.

Meanwhile, Beijing said it will strengthen its supervision of in-use vehicles by carrying out checks on at

least 1.5 million heavy-duty diesel vehicles.

It will set stricter standards on gasoline and diesel, with lower olefin, aromatics and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAH) contents.

Emission levels at petrochemical firms will have to be cut by more than 30% in 2020 from the 2017 level, while industrial coating and furniture companies will undergo emission assessments by local authorities, according to the statement.

The city has seen PM2.5 concentrations of over 120 micrograms per cubic metre for five consecutive days since Sunday, despite the production and transportation disruptions due to the coronavirus outbreak.

“Pollutant emissions from heavy industry and residential heating, which account for two-thirds of the total in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, did not decline during the national holiday,” said the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) in a statement on Thursday.

While emissions from coal-fired power plants and steel mills fell by around 10% from their pre-holiday levels, there was little change in pollution level from the coke, petrochemical, glass and non-ferrous metals industries, the MEE said.

KSA sends

FROM PAGE 20

from Malaysia--were sent back home in separate cargo flights yesterday, said Shariful.

Two of the dead bodies from Saudi Arabia were of female workers, he said.

According to Brac, as many as 409 dead bodies of migrant workers were sent back home from different countries this year.

‘Bangladesh is a reality’

FROM PAGE 20

The PM replies with a smile, “My people put it on tape. I very much wanted to hear him but I had no time. So, I listened to his speech on tape.”

Earlier, Edward Kennedy addressed a jam-packed students’ meeting at Dhaka University where he said, “We are all Bengalees, we are all Americans. We are brothers in liberty, no man, no government can change the fact.

“The birth of the Bengali nation will be an inspiration to other people of the world -- a symbol to all who share your love of life and spirit of your courage but didn’t yet share your freedom.”

Commenting on a question about whether he had any discussion with Senator Kennedy regarding the recognition of Bangladesh by the US, Bangabandhu tells journalists, “Bangladesh is a reality. It has come to stay. We don’t care as to who didn’t recognise us.”

4 GALLANTRY AWARDS FOR ARMED FORCES

The Cabinet declares four gallantry awards for the Bangladesh Armed Forces, both regular and citizen soldiers. The awards are (in order of merit): Bir Sreshtha, the highest order; Bir Uttam, high order; Bir Bikram, commendable order, and Bir Pratik, gallantry certificate.

Bangabandhu presides over the cabinet meeting.

The Cabinet also declares that February 21 will be observed as Shaheed Day and the Day of National Mourning. It is also decided that the nationality of Bangladesh citizens will be termed as ‘Bengalee’.

Bangabandhu and his cabinet members listen to the recorded orchestration of the national anthem ‘Amar Sonar Bangla’ which is being sent to Moscow where it will be played during Bangabandhu’s state visit to the USSR, early next month. The orchestration has been directed by Samar Das.

SALT TAX GOES

The government of Bangladesh has decided to withdraw excise duty on salt for the current year. The decision has been taken to boost the production of salt and to provide relief to the salt producers.

LUXURY ITEMS BY GOVT. OFFICERS Air conditioners and carpets for the officers under the government of former East Pakistan cost about 2.22 crore rupees, paid from the public exchequer. A significant part of the expenditure involved hard-earned foreign exchange. Bangabandhu was shocked to find such a colossal wastage of public money. He ordered immediate and drastic curtailment of expenditure on luxury items in the offices.

SOURCES: February 15, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Daily Ittefaq, Azad, Morning News, The Bangladesh Observer and Purbodesh.

Portfolios

FROM PAGE 20

five cabinet members, curtailing the powers of two ministers and increasing the powers of two state ministers.

In July last year, Hasina reshuffled her cabinet for the second time by promoting a state minister to minister and inducting a new face.



Displaced Syrians flee the countryside of Aleppo and Idlib provinces towards Syria’s northwestern Afrin district near the border with Turkey yesterday, as regime forces push on with their offensive in the country’s northwest.

PHOTO: AFP

4th grader raped in Barishal

FROM PAGE 20

early yesterday, said Golam Sarwar, OC of Gourmadi Police Station.

The girl sent to Barishal Sher-E-Bangla Medical College Hospital for tests, the OC added.

Meanwhile, a nurse of a private clinic in Bhola sadar was allegedly gangraped by four men in Daulatkhan upazila of Bhola on Wednesday night.

The woman, 30, is now undergoing treatment at Bhola Sadar Hospital as she suffered serious injuries, police said.

Speaking to journalists, the woman said she was going to her work station after providing medical services to a patient around 9:30pm. She was on a battery-run easy bike. On her way, she stopped for a while at Miarhat area and sent the easy-bike driver to a roadside shop to buy some food.

Seeing her alone on the easy bike, four men forcibly took her to an empty area behind Halima Khatun College, covered her mouth with a scarf and gangraped her, she said.

At one stage, she managed to shout loudly. After locals heard her scream, they rushed to spot and rescued her. But the criminals managed to flee the scene, she added.

Police said she could identify two of the four alleged rapists and that

they were trying to arrest the two.

The process of filing a case in this connection remained under process till filing the report till 6:45pm last evening, said Md Siddikur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Daulatkhan police station.

In Narayanganj, two men were arrested on charge of gangraping an 18-year old girl.

The arrestees are Ronny Miah, 19, from Fatullah, and Hridoy Hossain, 19 from Kaatherpul. Another accused in the case, Md Hridoy, 22, a helper of an Allah-Bharosha paribahan bus, is absconding, police said.

OC of Fatullah police station Aslam Hossain said, “The girl’s father is a CNG driver. Through him, she was familiar with Ronny from before. On February 11, Ronny took the girl to his mess where the other two were already waiting. They then gangraped her.”

He added that the girl’s father filed a case against the three yesterday, after which police arrested Ronny and Hridoy from Shobujbagh area. Both of the arrestees confessed to the gangrape during primary investigation and police produced them before a Narayanganj court.

“The girl has been sent to Narayanganj General Hospital for

tests. Meanwhile, we are trying to arrest the other accused,” the OC said.

In Savar’s Ashuliya, a female worker of a garment factory in was allegedly raped by a local.

The incident took place on Wednesday evening in Ashuliya’s Gorat area when the woman, 19, along with two co-workers, was returning home from the RMG factory and Rana Miah, 23, and his two cohorts allegedly intercepted her and co-workers and forced them into a nearby brick kiln, reported our Savar correspondent.

There, three other associates of Rana were waiting. All of them beat up the woman’s co-workers while Rana raped her with the help of his two cohorts.

Hearing her screams, locals went to the spot to rescue her. The alleged rapists had fled the scene by then.

She later filed a case with Ashuliya police station that night, said Nahid Hasan, a sub-inspector of the station.

The woman was sent to the One-stop Crisis Centre in Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for a medical test, he said, adding that police are trying to arrest the accused.

(Our Jhalakathi, Barishal and Narayanganj correspondents contributed to the report.)

Iran starts election campaign with thousands barred from standing

REUTERS, Dubai

Iran’s week-long parliamentary election campaign started on Thursday, state TV reported, a vote seen as a popularity test for the clerical establishment at a time when relations with Washington are at their worst since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The Guardian Council, which must approve candidates, has rejected around 6,850 moderate or conservative hopefuls in favour of hardliners from among the 14,000 applicants seeking to contest the Feb. 21 vote.

About a third of lawmakers have also been barred from standing again.

“The 7,150 candidates who are running for parliamentary elections have started campaigning on Thursday,” state TV reported.

Pragmatist President Hassan Rouhani has criticised the disqualifications, but like supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei he has called for a high turnout as the country faces challenges over its disputed nuclear programme.

Tablecloth

FROM PAGE 20

at “which parts have influence,” and in which combinations.

In an initial study, diners were placed in different lighting conditions, but there was no effect on how much they ate, how long the meal lasted or how the soup was perceived to taste, except that it was reported as less salty in dim lighting. The researchers speculated that this could be because our sense of taste is heightened when our ability to see is reduced.

A second study was conducted involving 159 participants, adding table linen as an additional variable and eating in a group, rather than alone.

In the group that ate with dim lighting and a tablecloth, people consumed a mean 51% more soup than those who ate in dim light without a tablecloth. The neutral, gray-and-white checked tablecloth had a far stronger overall effect on the length of meal, amount consumed and enjoyment than lighting level.

Ströbele-Benschop said the findings could be useful in encouraging people in retirement homes, hospitals or schools to eat. While it could be difficult to improve the ambience in such settings, staff could do something as simple as choosing colorful plates, she suggested.

“It’s the combination of decorative aspects,” she said. “Any ambient factors could promote more enjoyment.”

While eating more is not always desirable, she said improving the atmosphere could help encourage diners to choose healthy food by making it seem to taste better.

The researchers wrote that the human body has a “sophisticated appetite control system which includes a variety of internal signals.”

There is an “abundance of physiological, environmental and psychological influences on our daily food intake,” including “eating with others, odor, color, physical surroundings,” they said.

An Oxford University study from 2015 found that heavy cutlery “enhances the enjoyment of food,” while 2008 research from Stanford University found that participants rated wines they were told were more expensive as tasting better.

Ströbele-Benschop said the most important factor on Valentine’s Day was to be “with the person you love” and create something you will both enjoy.

But a tablecloth can’t hurt. “Valentine’s is a day when it’s all about ambience.”

DU deans

FROM PAGE 20

UI Islam, dean of the business studies faculty, gave their opinion for halting the enrolment of new students under evening programmes, two deans told this newspaper wishing anonymity.

Prof Shibli could not be reached on his mobile phone for comments despite several attempts.

The university authorities formed the committee on May 2019. Science faculty Dean Tofail Ahmed Chowdhury was the convener of the committee.

Three other members of the committee are arts faculty Dean Prof Abu Md Delwar Hossain, social science faculty Dean Prof Sadeka Halim and engineering and technology faculty Dean Prof Md Hasanuzzaman.

The 20-page report highlights the

present scenario of the university’s evening courses and made some recommendations in light of that.

A draft of guideline for running the evening courses was also attached to the report.

According to the report, about 7,000 students are currently being enrolled in the evening courses under 36 departments of the university.

Evening courses are being operated in some departments despite teacher shortage while some departments are offering courses that are not related to their fields of study, the report reads.

Contacted, DU VC Prof Md Akhtaruzzaman said he was yet to see the report and would send the report to the Deans’ committee meeting for discussion.

Educationists split over UGC move

FROM PAGE 20

is a waste of time and money. Considering the hassles, holding a uniform admission test is logical.”

He, however, said there would be some problems with the new system. “We don’t have any institution to organise such a uniform admission test. Results of the test will not be reliable.”

The DU teacher said managing the uniform test would be another challenge. “How will the exam be managed? We are hearing that all the public universities will manage the exam in turn. How will the smaller universities manage the test? Are they capable of it?”

He said every public university is autonomous and there are two important aspects of their autonomy -- appointment of teachers and enrollment of students. “The universities should have the jurisdictions. If anyone force any decision on the universities in this regard, it would not be consistent with their autonomy.”

Former UGC chair Prof AK Azad Chowdhury said there were some positives and negatives to the new admission system.

He said the admission seekers would be benefitted as the new system would reduce their hassles.

Prof Azad said world class foreign universities generally choose their own students. The local universities, who want to reach the level of excellence, should have the jurisdiction to pick their own students, he added.

He claimed that Oxford and Harvard universities enroll students based on their scores in different tests, including SAT, GRE. Besides, they also have entrance exams. Stanford University takes students through an exam.

The former DU VC also said Jawaharlal Nehru University and Delhi University have control on their own admission system while the institutes of technologies follow a central entrance test.

Another former UGC chairman Prof Nazrul Islam said a uniform entrance test was a positive step. “It will reduce hassles of students moving from one university to another to get admitted.”

“Holding a centralised admission test will not be easy. But it would be great if we could arrange it successfully. It will be difficult to determine how the method will work and how the different departments will pick their students. But I hope the authorities will address all these issues.”

He said all public universities enjoy autonomy. “It’s not fully correct that quality of education at large universities, run under the 1973 ordinance, are far better than in other public universities.”

Former DU professor Syed Manzoorul Islam said arranging a unified admission test is a good move and all the preparations should be made properly.

He recommended holding a dialogue with all stakeholders, including the admission seekers and those favouring and opposing the

initiative, to discuss the matter.

“We have to reach a consensus on the issue after hearing all the arguments from the stakeholders. It’s not a matter of imposing something on somebody.”

Manzoorul said introducing such a test would be a daunting task. “If we don’t make proper preparations, we might have to regret the decision later.”

Immediate past UGC chair Prof Abdul Mannan refused to make any comment on the issue.

UGC Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah said there was nothing to be worried about the autonomy of any public university.

“The universities will join the system after holding discussions with the respective academic councils and other bodies. So their autonomy will not be an issue,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Shahidullah said there would be three entrance exams -- one each for science, humanities, and commerce students -- based on their HSC syllabus. “Each exam can carry up to 100 marks,” he said.

On January 23, the UGC announced that it would hold a uniform admission test for the 2020-2021 academic year.

The country’s 39 public universities enroll around 65,000 students every year through separate admission tests.

Last year, some 9.88 lakh students passed the Higher Secondary Certificate and its equivalent exams under 10 education issue.