

UK government adviser quits over race comments

AFP, London

An adviser in British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's office resigned on Monday after online comments resurfaced where he linked intellect to race and seemed to advocate a eugenics policy.

Andrew Sabisky once suggested that black Americans had a lower average intelligence than white Americans.

He also said in a 2014 web post that one way to stop unplanned pregnancies "creating a permanent underclass" was to force people to use contraception.

Sabisky said he was in the middle of a "giant character assassination" and was stepping down because he did not want to be a distraction.

"The media hysteria about my old stuff online is mad but I wanted to help HMG, not be a distraction," he said on Twitter using the initials for Her Majesty's Government.

Leadership

FROM PAGE 16 ensure that those who had collaborated with the occupation army are effectively dealt with in due process of law. They also note with grave concern the harassment of Bangalees in Pakistan and urges the government to take all possible measures to ensure their safe return. The committee also urges for initiatives to rehabilitate the families of martyrs, particularly the widows, orphans, and women who were victims of brutal torture by the Pakistani occupation forces.

The working committee suggests certain steps to commemorate the historic events which formed part of the national liberation struggle: 1) compilation of a comprehensive history of the national liberation struggle, 2) establish of a museum of the national liberation struggle, 3) erection of a monument at Mujibnagar, the first seat of Bangladesh government and 4) renaming the country's capital as Mujibnagar, erstwhile 'second capital' as Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and Race Course Maidan as Suhrawardy Udayan.

BHUTTO AGAIN PROPOSES TO MEET BANGABANDHU Pakistan President ZA Bhutto has once again proposed talks with Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, sidestepping the issue of Bangladesh's recognition -- a precondition set by Bangabandhu for talks with Bhutto.

FREE BOOKS UP TO CLASS V The government has taken a decision to provide free textbooks on all subjects to students of up to class V. It will benefit students in over 28,000 primary schools in the country. The government will also provide books to students of classes above V at a commissioned price with 40 percent reduction.

LESS EXPENDITURE ON DEFENCE Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad declares that Bangladesh will not spend much money for her defence as the government wants to depend on the people for the country's defence. The foreign minister shares, "our foreign policy will be such that we can develop friendship with all countries, including those who behaved like enemies. For this we want to avoid power blocs and military alliances."

POPOV CALLS ON BANGABANDHU The Russian Ambassador to Bangladesh Valentin Popov calls on Bangabandhu today. He is understood to have finalised details of the tour programme of the prime minister's visit to Moscow.

SOURCES: February 20, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Daily Ittefaq, Azad, Morning News, The Bangladesh Observer and Purbodesh.

Lamia

FROM PAGE 16 of Primary and Mass Education looked into the matter and found that the school building is in a dilapidated state. It appeared that the building might collapse any time and iron rods poked out at places.

Classes were being held at temporary tin-roofed rooms made with money allocated for repairs. On January 27, the ministry approved the construction of a new building with five rooms for Lamia's school, which was established in 1975.

"Our field-level officers should have informed us about the matter before the child had to write to the prime minister. Soon after the news report was published, we decided to build a new building for the school," Md Akram-Al-Hossain, secretary of the ministry, told The Daily Star.

He also said the ministry was planning to build 60,000 new classrooms across the country. "There will be no rundown school building at any primary school in the country by 2023. And by 2024, there will be no crisis of class rooms and teachers," the secretary added.

Contacted, Md Nurunnabi, senior assistant secretary at the ministry, said a cyclone shelter was needed to be built on the premises of Lamia's school, which has rivers on its southern and eastern sides.

Saidpur airport to turn regional

FROM PAGE 1 Nepal with significantly lower cost and time if Nepalese flights can operate from Saidpur Airport, she said.

Similarly, Nepalese or international tourists too can use the air route from Nilphamari's Saidpur to Nepal and vice versa, Mashfee said.

However, technical details need to be worked out, especially the types and commercial viability of flights to be used on the route, she said, adding that the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh will be conducting those assessments.

The Nepali foreign minister said that though Bangladesh and Nepal are good friends and have immense potential for enhancement of trade and connectivity, they could not be used fully.

The present trade volume hovers around \$50 million, with Bangladesh exporting some \$40 million to Nepal

and importing around \$10 million. Gyawali said Bangladesh and Nepal will form a taskforce to review the present status of connectivity and trade between the two countries and recommend ways to improve it.

A draft preferential trade agreement and a bilateral agreement on investment are under discussion. About an agreement between Bangladesh and Indian company GMR Upper Karnali Hydropower Limited, the Nepali minister said the company is going to start construction of a hydropower plant in Nepal, and Bangladesh can import 500MW power in five to six years.

Momen said there are some hindrances in trade and commerce, including high tariffs that need to be reduced. Both the sides agreed to work on it. Bangladesh wants to improve tourism between the two countries, as

well work together to bring in more international tourists, he added.

At a discussion on Nepal-Bangladesh relations organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) later in the day, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam said there can be packages prepared by both Bangladesh and Nepal that can provide reduced prices for visiting both countries.

In that case, the international tourists coming to Nepal for mountain hiking can also visit the sea beaches of Bangladesh, he added.

Mashfee Binte Shams told The Daily Star that once the Motor Vehicle Agreement among Bangladesh, India and Nepal is implemented, connectivity via road and use of the Mongla and Chattogram ports by the three countries will be significantly increased.

Air strikes hit hospitals, camps

FROM PAGE 16 The offensive has also disrupted a fragile cooperation between Ankara and Moscow, who back opposing factions in the war. They began a new round of talks in Moscow on Monday after demands by Ankara that the Syrian army should back down and a ceasefire be put in place.

UN human rights spokesman Rupert Colville, asked if Syria and its ally Russia were deliberately targeting civilians and protected buildings, said: "The sheer quantity of attacks on hospitals, medical facilities, and schools would suggest they cannot all be accidental."

The attacks could constitute war crimes, Colville told a briefing in Geneva.

The UN human rights office said it had recorded 299 civilian deaths since Jan. 1, about 93% caused by the Syrian government and its allies.

The swift advance of government troops, backed by Russian air strikes, through northwest Syria has also

caused the biggest displacement of the war as people flee towards a shrinking pocket near the Turkish frontier where insurgents hold their last strongholds.

A UN spokesman, David Swanson, said close to 900,000 people have fled conflict zones in Idlib province and western Aleppo since December, more than 80% women and children.

Many have been unable to find shelter and are forced to sleep outside in freezing temperatures and burn plastic to stay warm, risking disease and death.

"Only half of all the health facilities in northwest are still functioning now," Swanson said.

Hurras Network, a Save the Children partner in Idlib, said seven children including a seven-month-old baby had died from freezing temperatures and bleak conditions in displaced persons camps.

The Syrian army said on Monday it had taken full control of dozens of

towns in the Aleppo countryside.

The M5 highway linking Damascus to Aleppo, the focus of recent fighting, was re-opened to civilian traffic yesterday after government forces recaptured it last week, the Syrian Observatory war monitor reported.

The opposition also said air strikes in southern areas of Idlib province had left dozens of towns and villages in ruins in what it called a "scorched earth policy".

Alarmed by the new refugee crisis on its border, Turkey has sent thousands of troops and hundreds of convoys of military equipment to reinforce its observation posts in Idlib, established under a 2018 de-escalation agreement with Russia.

Trucks carrying aid supplies still cross from Turkey into northern Syria in a U.N. relief operation, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said yesterday.

About 525,000 displaced children are among those trapped, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said.

When Lundy met Herman

FROM PAGE 16 Herman was found over a year ago in a car dealership parking lot, where he sat on the pavement, unmoving, for three whole days. Eventually his rescuers realized the poor pigeon couldn't fly.

Neighboring wildlife rescues said he couldn't be rehabilitated and would need to be euthanized, so Rogers took care of him herself.

He now rests in a baby crib for some of the day, but she takes him outside daily to stimulate him.

Little Lundy, an infant chihuahua, is a new arrival. His breeders in South Carolina sent him to Rogers because he had trouble using his hind legs, a condition known as swimmers syndrome.

At just 6 ounces, he was small

enough to fit in a shirt pocket. Rogers said she suspects Lundy's difficulty walking is due to damage to his teeny spinal cord.

The two were bound to meet eventually. Rogers set them together while attending to Lundy and saw the way the two snuggled up almost immediately -- Herman didn't peck, and Lundy didn't nibble.

No excess in celebrations

FROM PAGE 16 "Trust," a lawmaker, who was present at the meeting, told The Daily Star quoting Hasina as saying.

The government will celebrate "Mujib Borsho" from March 17, 2020 to March 26, 2021. By doing so, it aims to present Bangabandhu's life and works before the new generations.

The PM, also the Awami League chief, expressed dissatisfaction over the absence of some senior party lawmakers who sit beside her in parliament.

She said the seats of those lawmakers in the House would be rearranged by sending them far away from her seat if they didn't join parliament sessions regularly, an MP from Dhaka division quoted Hasina as saying.

"During the live telecast of the prime minister's speech [on TV], it seems most of the seats near me remain empty as many lawmakers whose seats are beside mine remain absent in parliament," an AL MP quoted the PM as saying.

Addressing the meeting, Awami

League lawmaker Mrinal Kanti Das cautioned all not to create any distance between the party and its lawmakers during the celebration of "Mujib Borsho".

Several MPs demanded inclusion of lawmakers in different coordination committees in their respective areas to ensure their role in those.

They also pressed for inclusion of MPs in the government's ongoing initiative to provide home to the homeless people within the "Mujib Borsho".

Tea estate feasting on reserve forest

FROM PAGE 16 Bengal forest department, as per the documents seen by The Daily Star.

But in the '80s, the plots were recorded as khas land in BS (Bangladesh Survey).

Baktiar Nur Siddiqui, divisional forest officer (north) of Chattogram forest circle, said the forest was recorded mistakenly as khas land, allowing the district administration to lease out the land.

But a reserve forest cannot be leased out until it is declared de-reserved by the president of the country and receives approval of the prime minister, he explained.

Baktiar told The Daily Star that Halda Tea Valley, taking advantage of the forest department's poor manpower, has been encroaching on the forest for over a decade.

Whenever forest staff tried to prevent them, tea estate staff have attacked, threatening forest staff at gunpoint, and vandalised vehicles, the official said.

The forest department has filed 17 cases since 2006 over incidents of encroaching, grabbing, razing forest and attacks on forest department officials by tea estate staff, led by its manager Jahangir Alam.

The cases were filed in 2006, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

He added that the department needs more support from the administration and police to stop such encroachment, given the shortage of manpower.

On January 1 this year, at least three excavators were seen cutting hills at Badurkhill block of the reserve forest which is under the status quo. Subsequently, a team of the Department of Environment (DoE) visited the spot on January 5.

Ferdous Anwar, then deputy director of DoE Chattogram, told The Daily Star that they found preliminary evidence of hill cutting in order to build a road. Ferdous was transferred that month and does not know the current status of the matter.

Harunur Rashid Patan, inspector of DoE Chattogram, said they have not yet submitted a report on the matter.

A forest court sent tea estate manager Jahangir Alam to jail on January 14 this year in connection with a case filed in 2017 for encroaching on the forest and assault. The case is currently under trial and Jahangir obtained bail this month.

Contacted, Md Jana Alam, senior assistant secretary of AC Land and acting UNO of Fatikchhari upazila, told The Daily Star that the land claimed by the forest department was not under the reserve forest.

In a digital survey at Badurkhill point, the reserve forest was found to be 100 metres away from the disputed leased land, the acting UNO claimed.

"As the forest department filed a case seeking amendment to the BS ledger, the court imposed a status quo at Badurkhill. So, both parties have to follow the status quo until the court delivers its verdict," he said.

Baktiar said that the forest department has been complying with the status quo since the court imposed it. But, he says, Halda Tea Valley continued grabbing forest land as forest staff could not prevent them adhering to the court order.

He added that the digital survey was incorrect, as it did not include the Badurkhill point as part of the reserve forest.

Elias Hossain, deputy commissioner of Chattogram district, told The Daily Star that the land is recorded in the

name of deputy commissioner in the BS and the court verdict on the land record amendment case will show if the forest department has a valid claim or not.

Asked about forest encroachment by Halda Tea Valley, the DC said the forest department can guard their forest with their own forces. "If they seek any help, we will consider it," he added.

Nader Khan, managing director of Pedrollo Group, which owns Halda Tea Valley, denied the allegations of grabbing forest land, assault on forest staffers, and destroying saplings.

He said the digital survey was conducted in presence of everyone, including forest department officials, and the land they claim to be reserve forest was found to be 100 metres away from the leased land.

"We did not attack anyone or raze any hills within the reserve forest. All we did was within our leased area," he added.

SPATE OF ATTACKS Tea estate staff first attacked in March 2006 by removing the demarcation pillar and cutting down around 100 trees at Balukhali beat of Ramgor-Sitakunda reserve forest.

Just two weeks later, led by tea estate manager Jahangir Alam, another attack was launched on forest staff at Edilpur beat to expand the estate's territory.

Halda Tea Valley also built a bridge within the reserve forest, destroying trees under social afforestation projects and hill cutting using an excavator at Edilpur block in 2017. Forest staff tried to stop them, but in vain.

In August 2019, forest officials were prevented from planting saplings at Anandapur of the Ramgor-Sitakunda reserve forest by Halda Tea Valley staffers.

7-yr-old raped

FROM PAGE 16 several hours, they started looking for her and rented a loudspeaker to make announcements in the area. Failing to find Rima, he lodged a general diary with the sadar police station on Monday night.

On Tuesday morning, Ruhul received a call from a relative that locals had found his daughter's body.

Ziaur Rahman, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of the sadar police station, confirmed that the victim's father, Ruhul Amin, filed a case with the station on charge of murder and rape. Police are trying to nab the culprit, said the OC.

Ruhul demanded exemplary punishment of the killer.

In Brahmanbaria, a single mother of two children was raped by her neighbour at Mohisher village in Nasirnagar upazila on Sunday night. The 25-year-old was admitted to Brahmanbaria General Hospital on Monday evening, reports our Brahmanbaria correspondent.

Shipon Mia, the survivor's brother, who was attending his sister at the hospital, told The Daily Star that their neighbour Akbar forcibly took her to the adjacent field when she went outside to the tubewell. Akbar then raped her, with her hands and feet bound, he said. Her family members heard the struggle and found her there, the rapist having fled the scene.

The alleged rapist Akbar Mia, 30, a carpenter by profession, is in hiding since the incident, Shipon said.

Dr Sharmin Hoque Sumi, medical officer of the gynecology department of Brahmanbaria General Hospital, said they conducted a medical check-up of the survivor and sent it to the forensic department of Chattogram Medical College and Hospital. They are awaiting the report, she said.

When contacted, Nasirnagar police station OC Shazedur Rahman said no one came to file a case yet, but if anyone comes, necessary action will be taken forthwith.

In Habiganj, a woman was allegedly raped by a neighbour in Nabiganj upazila on Monday evening, family members said. She was taken to Habiganj Sadar Hospital by her father later that evening.

The hospital's emergency department doctor Koli Akhter said they did a medical test of the victim but are yet to get the medical examination report, reports our correspondent.

The survivor said she came to her parents' home from her in-laws' last week. Salamat Miah, 25, a grocer from the same village, raped her inside his empty store when she went to buy groceries on Monday evening, she said.

Nabiganj police station OC Azikur Rahman confirmed the incident and said the family were yet to file a case, till the report was filed yesterday afternoon.

Family members of both rape survivors were preparing to file cases.

In Gazipur, two men were sued yesterday in a rape incident at Shaheed Rowshan Sarak area of town.

The main accused, Imran Hossain, 45, hailing from Barishal, used to live in a rented house in the area. The identity of the other accused is not yet known.

Police said Imran and the victim were acquainted with each other. On Saturday morning, Imran made a phone call to the victim, aged around 30, and asked her to come to his residence saying that he would arrange a job for her.

When the victim went, Imran proposed that the women have physical relations with him. As the woman declined, Imran raped her while one of his associates acted as guard, said KM Kawsar Ahmed Chowdhury, OC of Basan police station under Gazipur Metropolitan Police.

Later yesterday, the victim filed a rape case against the duo, who has been on the run since the incident, the OC added.

Police also arrested a youth, Shahin, 30, yesterday from a village under Digholia upazila of Khulna on charge of gangraping a minor girl.

The other two accused -- Shariful Islam, 32, and Kajol, 19 -- are on the run, said Monzur Morshed, OC of Digholia Police Station.

The trio gangraped the eight-grader in a residence at Fulbari Gate area in the city on February 14. On Monday, the victim's family members filed a case against the three men.

Rape incidents

FROM PAGE 1 Going by the PHQ statistics, the alleged rape victims included children below six; girls in schools, colleges and universities; middle-aged female domestic and garment workers; and elderly women. Some of the victims were raped allegedly by police members or while in the custody of law enforcers.

The conviction rate in such cases is extremely low.

Between 2012 and 2016, less than 2 percent of all reported rape incidents ended in conviction, shows the PHQ data. During that period, 18,668 rape cases were lodged with police stations across the country.

The latest PHQ statistics shows that out of the 6,321 rape cases filed last year, charge sheets were filed in 4,231 cases, while police found no evidence of rape in 745 cases.

The rest of the 6,321 cases are now under investigation.

Incidents of rape are continuing unabated at a time when public outcry against the crime is getting louder.

Recently, even some lawmakers, both from the treasury and opposition benches, demanded in parliament that rapists are killed in "crossfire".

On January 19, the High Court directed the government to form a commission within 30 days under the law ministry to stop rape and violence against women.

Hearing a writ petition filed in the form of public interest litigation, the court also issued a rule asking the authorities to explain why rapists should not be awarded capital punishment if the victims are under 16.

Experts and rights activists blame the culture of impunity, low conviction rates, degradation of moral and social values, easy availability of pornography, culprits getting political backing and the use of rape to show dominance over women as primary reasons behind the rise of sexual violence, including rape, in the country.

"Androcentric thinking by police, lawyers and others associated with the judicial system and the absence of strong protests against rape are also to blame," said noted rights activist Rokeya Kabir. "Those committing the crime are hardly being punished," she said.

Prof Mahjabeen Haque, chairperson of Dhaka University's educational and counselling psychology department, sees another reason for the rise in rape cases.

"Sometimes, wide media coverage of rape incidents, especially the detailed description of the crime, instigates rapists to look for targets," she said, suggesting that the media should be more careful and act more sensibly while reporting on rape.

Saying that the existing law was stringent, Salma Ali, another rights activist, stressed the need for ensuring modern forensic labs in hospitals with adequate experts and logistic support for victims.

Enactment of a witness protection law and proper use of the evidence act are also crucial to prove a case in the court, she said.

Salma suggested rape cases be tried

under the Speedy Trial Tribunal Act so rapists can be handed punishment quickly. "The government should research why rape incidents are increasing and take measures accordingly."

Asked about the increasing number of rape incidents, Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general (media and PR) of the Police Headquarters, said there was a time when rape victims tend not to speak up as they feared being socially disgraced.

But women's awareness on their rights is increasing every day. Also thanks to technology and social media, no information or (rape) incidents remain secret, he said.

"The number of formal complaints is on the rise. Police are recording cases soon after receiving complaints and arresting the accused in quick time," said the AIG.

He, however, said not all the allegations were true and that there were allegations of harassing people by filing false cases.

Sohel Rana also said police were proving shelter, treatment and legal services to the victims through the victim support centres. "Police attach the highest importance to every incident of women and children repression. They submit probe reports completing investigation in due time."

He, however, said enforcement of law would not be able to stop rape unless preventive measures were taken to address various social, cultural, and psychological issues which turn someone into a rapist.

Drug dealer

FROM PAGE 16 his home in Rail Colony Para on Wednesday night.

Ferdous Ali, inspector (investigation) of Bochaganj Police Station, said a team of the Detective Branch of police went to Haatrampur village in the upazila on information that a "gunfight broke out between two groups of drug peddlers" around 2:00am yesterday.

He said police fired seven blank shots after reaching there. Hearing the shots, members of both the groups fled the area.

Police later found Ayub lying there badly injured. He died of his wounds on way to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital, the inspector said.

Loveley Yasmin, elder daughter of Ayub, alleged that two cops in plainclothes picked up her father from their home around 11:30pm on Wednesday when he was watching TV.

He was taken to Bochaganj Police Station. Later that night, he was boarded on to a microbus and was shifted to somewhere else, Loveley told The Daily Star.

However, Inspector Ferdous refuted the allegations made by Ayub's family. Ayub's body was sent to the medical college morgue for an autopsy.

Police claimed to have recovered a pistol, two bullets, crude bombs, and two yaba pills from the spot. They suspected that a feud over sharing money from the sale of drugs triggered the "gunfight".