

## Won't take the club

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that the future may be brighter under new coach Ronald Koeman.

His reason for wanting to leave were simple: "I always said I wanted to end here. That I wanted a winning project and to win titles with the club to continue expanding the legend of Barcelona at the title level. And the truth is that there has been no project or anything for a long time, they juggle and cover holes as things go by. As I said before, I always thought about the welfare of my family and the club."

He also offered his version on the bombshell burofax to the Barcelona board, in which Messi told the club he wished to exercise an exit clause in his contract.

"The burofax was to make it official in some way. Throughout the year I had been telling the president that I wanted to go, that the time had come to seek new illusions and new directions in my career. He told me all the time: 'We'll talk, no, this and that,' but nothing. Sending the burofax was making it official that I wanted to go and that I was free and the optional year I was not going to use it and I wanted to go. It was not to make a mess, or to go against the club, but the way to make it official because my decision had been made.

Messi also spoke of the pain that he felt when his loyalty was doubted, saying: "It hurt me when my love for this club was questioned. No matter how much I go or stay, my love for Barça will never change."

He admitted to being hurt by the idea that he would leave for money. "The money? Every year I was able to leave and earn more money than at Barcelona. I always said that this was

my home and it was what I felt and feel. Better than here it is difficult. I felt that I needed a change and new goals, new things."

Ultimately, although some discontent simmered as he felt Josep Maria Bartomeu "did not end up keeping his word", Messi said he could never take Barcelona to court.

"Now I am going to continue in the club because the president told me that the only way to leave was to pay the 700 million clause, that this is impossible. And another way is to go to trial. I would never go to court against Barca because it is the club that I love, that gave me everything since I arrived, it is the club of my life, I have made my life here."

## Turkey must drop 'threats' for talks to begin: Greek PM

AFP, Athens

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis yesterday said Turkey should drop "threats" against his country if talks on reducing tension in the eastern Mediterranean are to begin.

"Let threats go away so that the contacts can begin," Mitsotakis said as he met a visiting senior member of the Chinese Communist party.

Mitsotakis said that Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias would brief UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Turkey's "lawless activity".

Greece denied late Thursday that it had agreed to hold NATO-brokered talks with Turkey to de-escalate tensions over maritime borders and gas exploration rights.

## Govt gives pry approval

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the prescribed fees following the government rules and regulations.

Most of the portals of the major dailies, including leading English daily The Daily Star and Bangla daily Prothom Alo, published from Dhaka were included in the list.

Publication of the gazette notification came two days after a team of Sampadak Parishad (Editors' Council), a platform of editors of national dailies, called on Information Minister Hasan Mahmud at his secretariat office and requested him to take immediate measures to register the online versions of newspapers.

In response, the minister said measures would be taken to register online versions of newspapers on a priority basis.

Earlier on July 31, 44 news portals and newspaper websites were picked for registration.

After amending the list, the information ministry later allowed 34 news portals to register.

The government had started accepting applications for registration of online media outlets in late 2015. Applications were received the following year by extending the deadline several times.

The government then said all online media outlets would be brought under registration to stop "misreporting".

## Samaritans step in

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made the arrangement for 30 beds so that patients who require oxygen can be shifted to those beds, when needed. And because this is a permanent set-up, other patients who require oxygen will benefit from this arrangement, said Mithun.

Currently, the team is aspiring to multiply this project in various hospitals.

"Besides, we will be glad to introduce other initiatives where we can use our technical and engineering skills," added Mithun.

The hospitals where the system has already been installed are Chattogram Field Hospital; Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID) in Fouzderhat; Manikganj Sadar Hospital; Chattogram Maa-O-Shishu Hospital in Agrabad; Hathazari Upazila Health Complex; Chakaria Upazila Health Complex in Cox's Bazar; Khulna Medical College (Flu Corner); Khulna Diabetic Hospital; and Bangladesh Cancer Society Hospital and Welfare Home in Dhaka.

## BNP needs to move forward

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The party has strength and it should move alone leaving behind the alliance partners, they added.

When the Oikyafront front was formed, senior party leaders participated in the meetings, but after the election, there was no such activity.

Besides, the BNP leaders did not like the speech of Dr Kamal Hossain.

The rift began when Oikyafront leaders went to parliament without informing the BNP leaders.

Apart from this, the BNP leaders were frustrated that Khaleda Zia's release was not among the top agenda of the Oikyafront, said party leaders.

"Since the election, there has not been a single formal meeting of the Oikyafront. Now, the front is inactive," Nagorik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna said.

The front basically exists on paper now, he said.

Since the formation of the Oikyafront, a discomfort and distance have been created between the BNP and other members of the 20-party alliance.

The alliance leaders alleged that BNP gave more importance to the Oikyafront than the 20-party.

They said since the formation of Oikyafront, no decision was made in the alliance meeting, rather the decisions made at the Oikyafront were informed in the alliance meeting.

"Forming an alliance with the Oikyafront was a major blunder made by the BNP. I said it many times. The 20-party alliance is strong, united, and working together though there is barely any activity," said Oli Ahmed, president of Liberal Democratic Party, one of the 20 parties in the alliance.



**Farmers bring vegetable seedlings to Chakhar bazar for sale by boats along a canal in Barishal's Banaripara upazila yesterday. Carrying the seedlings by boats help growers keep the seedlings fresh. Seedlings of bottle gourd, papaya, bitter gourd, bombay chilli and other vegetables were selling for Tk 5 to Tk 25 each. PHOTO: TITU DAS**

## Burglary it was?

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youth front Jubo League, said AL party sources. The two other arrestees are both painters by profession.

Jubo League has cancelled Asadul's membership soon after his arrest in Banglar Hilly area of Dinajpur on Thursday.

Meanwhile, critically injured Wahida partially gained consciousness after a surgery on her brain on Thursday night. Although her condition is stable, she is not out of danger yet, according to doctors.

Police on Thursday said unknown assailants broke into Wahida's official residence in the early hours and attacked her and her father, who came visiting from Naogaon. They were hit with a hammer.

Critically injured Wahida was airlifted from a hospital in Rangpur city and admitted to the National Institute of Neurosciences and Hospital on Thursday afternoon.

"...She is communicating sometimes; her blood pressure, oxygen level and pulse are stabilising," Dr Uzзал Kumar Mallik, assistant professor (ICU), told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

A medical board will sit today to discuss the condition of the UNO and the possible next steps for her treatment, he said.

The Rab-13 CO yesterday said the attackers entered the official residence of the UNO cutting open the ventilator of a first-floor bathroom.

Rab started a shadow investigation after the wounded UNO's brother filed a case over the attack with Ghoraghat Police Station, he said.

The CO said Asadul was arrested first and Nabirul was the key planner. He said Asadul and Nabirul were accused in multiple cases. The arrestees will be handed over to police.

In CCTV footage, a lanky man in a red t-shirt was seen. Asadul admitted to Rab that the man in the t-shirt was him. The CO added that Rab would take legal action against the accused.

He said Rab detained six other people and two of them had been released.

Jahangir Alam, convener of Ghoraghat Upazila Jubo League, was one of them.

He also said they brought Jahangir for interrogation on some specific intelligence. He, however, did not share the intelligence with journalists.

The Rab official, however, said Jahangir and others who will be allowed to go after interrogation will be under surveillance until the investigation reaches a conclusion.

The Rab captain further said that efforts were underway to arrest anyone

else involved in the attack.

**'ATTACKERS WILL NOT BE SPARED'**  
Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said, "The attackers will not be spared, no matter to which party they belong."

Speaking in a video conference from his residence, Quader, also road transport and bridges minister, said the government has taken all measures for the proper treatment of Wahida.

Echoing a similar view, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday said the government was looking into the incident and was giving it the highest importance.

It will take more time to know why and how such an incident took place, he told journalists at his Dhanmondi residence.

A three-member probe committee, formed to investigate the incident, was asked to submit the report as early as possible. Jakir Hossain, additional divisional commissioner of Rangpur, is head of the committee.

Wahida was supposed to visit the Dugdugi Haat in the upazila on Thursday to demolish an illegal structure, erected by lease owner of the haat and his supporters, locals said. But that was not to be.

Around 10 days ago, she had sent police to stop erecting the structure, locals also said.

## Afghan govt frees more Taliban prisoners, paving way for talks

AFP, Kabul

The Afghan government said Thursday it had released 400 Taliban prisoners under an exchange deal with the militants, except for "a few" opposed by foreign nations, and expected peace negotiations to start soon.

The two warring sides have grown closer this week to launching direct talks in Qatar, wrapping up a contentious and months-long prisoner exchange.

Kabul has already sent a logistical team to Doha where the Taliban's political office is based, with the negotiators expected to depart soon.

"The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has received our commandos held hostage by Taliban, after which the Gov't released the remaining 400 convicts, except the

few for which our partners have reservations," National Security Council spokesman Javid Faisal said on Twitter.

"Diplomatic efforts are ongoing. We expect direct talks to start promptly,"

Two Taliban officials confirmed the prisoners had been freed but that those opposed by France and Australia were still in government custody.

Paris and Canberra objected to the release of the militants because of their links to the murders of French and Australian civilians and troops in Afghanistan.

"Australia and France have some considerations about them," one Taliban official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"The Kabul administration will send them to Qatar where they will be in custody during the intra-Afghan

talks."

A Western diplomatic source, however, said Kabul had still not taken a decision.

A date for the resumption of talks has not yet been set.

Negotiations were initially supposed to begin in March as agreed in a deal between the Taliban and Washington in February, from which Kabul had been excluded.

But repeated squabbles over the prisoner exchange delayed the negotiations, including the Taliban's demand that 400 prisoners accused of serious crimes be among those freed.

The prisoner swap agreed between the US and the Taliban stipulated that Kabul should release a total of 5,000 militants in return for the insurgents freeing 1,000 Afghan troops.

## Australian writer detained in China denies spying: lawyer

AFP, Beijing

An Australian writer detained in China for 19 months on spying charges has insisted he is innocent, his lawyer told AFP yesterday, after being allowed to see his client for the first time.

Beijing has said little about the case of Chinese-born Yang Jun -- who also goes by the pen name Yang Hengjun -- since he was taken into custody in January last year during a rare visit to China, prompting Australian government protests.

Yang's case is one of many points of tension between China and Australia, with the two sides at loggerheads over trade and the coronavirus, and competing for influence in the Pacific.

"He denies the prosecution's allegations of espionage," lawyer Shang Baojun told AFP after the hour-long visit.

China's foreign ministry said yesterday it will "act strictly in accordance with the law, fully protecting the legal rights of relevant personnel". A spokesman did not address the issue of Yang's being held

incommunicado.

Yang is one of a string of foreign nationals to have been arrested in China on allegations of spying.

Shang said the case was currently under review by Beijing legal authorities, who will decide whether to formally charge Yang.

Australia's ABC news reported Thursday that Yang had called his situation "political persecution" in a message to family and supporters, and had spoken to Australian consular officials via video link.

He said in the message that he was "innocent and will fight to the end", adding he would "never confess" to something he had not done, ABC said.

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne decried China's treatment of Yang as "unacceptable" last December, saying he was not being allowed access to lawyers and had been interrogated while shackled.

The visit by Yang's lawyer follows the recent arrest of another high-profile Australian citizen.

Cheng Lei, an anchor for China's English-language state broadcaster, has been held since at least August 14 but Australian diplomats say Beijing has given no reason for her detention.

### 20pc

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information and also confirmed that the recovery rate has climbed further to 67 percent in Bangladesh.

Among the 29 people who lost their lives, 22 are aged 50 years.

So far, 2,134 patients have died in Dhaka division, 952 in Chatteram, 295 in Rajshahi, 365 in Khulna, 172 in Barishal, 197 in Sylhet, 202 in Rangpur and 95 in Mymensingh division.

Across the country, 19,676 people are in isolation and 52,472 people are quarantined at present.

In Bangladesh, the first three cases of coronavirus infection were detected on March 8 and on Wednesday it crossed 300,000. On July 2, 4,019 Covid-19 patients were identified in the country, the highest in a single day.

'MURDERED' GIRL FOUND ALIVE

## Accused alleges brutal torture in police custody

*Claims he was forced to give confessional statement*

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

An accused in a case who confessed of raping and killing a class-V female student, who was later found alive in Narayanganj, alleged that police brutally tortured him into confessing.

"Police beat me continuously after hanging me upside down. At one point, my condition was so critical that I was finding it difficult to breathe," said Khalilur Rahman, an accused in the case.

"But they did not stop. They intimidated me saying that they would keep beating me until my death if I don't give a confessional statement," he said.

Khalilur, a boatman in profession, was talking to The Daily Star at his home in Chhak area under Bandar upazila of Narayanganj yesterday.

"I was compelled to give a confessional statement to save my life," he said.

"They [police] asked me to give a confessional statement before the court, assuring me that they would arrange my bail within a month if I follow their directives," said Khalilur.

His wife Sharmin Akhter said her husband has become traumatised. He repeatedly wakes up from sleep due to nightmares caused by police torture.

Khalilur now wants his acquittal from the case and claimed himself to be an innocent man.

He said police picked him up from no. 5 Ghat area along with five other boatmen and took them to Narayanganj Sadar Police Station on a Friday evening about a month ago.

"After taking us to the police station, they took me to a separate room where Abdullah [another accused in the case] was also kept.

Khalilur also claimed that police earlier tortured Abdullah into framing him in the case.

"Then, Shamim sir [a policeman] showed me a photo of a girl and asked me to tell them where we had buried her body. But I said I knew nothing," he added.

A class-five girl student went missing on July 4. Her father filed a case with Narayanganj Sadar Model Police Station on August 6 over the abduction of his daughter.

Later, police arrested three people -- Md Abdullah, 22, Md Rakib, 19, and Khalilur Rahman, 36.

On August 9, the accused testified under Section 164 in separate courts of Narayanganj Senior Judicial Magistrate and Judicial Magistrate. In their confessional statement, they said that they had killed the girl after raping her and threw her body in the Shitalakkhya river, said police.

After their confessional statement, they were sent to jail.

On August 24, a police team, however, found the girl alive in Kushiara area of Narayanganj's Bandar upazila, 49 days after she had gone missing.

Later, the girl and her family members said she had no links with the three accused. Rather, she had eloped with one of her friends named Iqbal.

On August 25, the three accused filed bail petitions with a court in Narayanganj. During a hearing on their bail petitions on August 31, they appealed the court to withdraw their previous confessional statements.

Later on September 2, Khalilur was released on bail, while hearing on the bail petitions of two other accused will be held on September 7.

### OC Pradeep

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He then mentioned the names of several Rab officers and said he was given electric-shocks in the presence of a doctor so as to avoid bruise marks.

Similarly, Liaquat was seen saying, "Sir, they injured us severely. You might have given our photos to the DG of Rab who visited us and assured that nothing would happen. But actually the ADG of Rab tortured us... They left us undressed the whole night and asked why we took the photos. The next day, they gave us electric-shocks, beat us up and pushed injections."

OC Pradeep and inspector Liaquat were placed on remand in Majes.

Since the killing of Majes (ret'd) Sinha, at least seven complaints have been lodged against policemen, including Pradeep, over the killing of people in so-called gunfights.

Talking to The Daily Star, Lt Col Ashique Billah, director of Rab's legal and media wing, said the allegations of torture were completely false.

"After remand, we always take the arrestees to a doctor for complete health check-ups. If any such thing had happened, the doctor would have raised questions. Nothing like that had happened. We will not take the responsibility for what they have said," the Rab director said.

The Rab official also suggested that The Daily Star contact the police department concerned for comments about how the video was filmed in a police vehicle.

Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general (Media) at the Police Headquarters, didn't answer the phone calls made by this paper.