

## India slams bid to ban Gita in Russia

*AFP, New Delhi*

India's foreign minister condemned yesterday a "patently absurd" court case in Russia seeking to ban a version of one of Hinduism's most important and sacred texts, the Bhagavad Gita.

The case filed by state prosecutors in the Siberian city of Tomsk claims that a renowned translation of the text, titled "Bhagavad Gita As It Is" is "extremist literature" and should join Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf on a list of banned books.

Speaking in parliament, Foreign Minister SM Krishna said the lawsuit was the work of "ignorant and misdirected or motivated individuals" and an attack on a religious text that defines the "very soul of our great civilisation".

"While this complaint is patently absurd, we have treated this matter seriously," Krishna said, adding that formal protests had been registered with senior government officials in Moscow.

## 7 killed

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The identity of two other deceased could not be known immediately.

Witnesses and police sources said a Dhaka-bound onion-laden truck fell into the ditch as it veered off the road to give side to a Meherpur-bound passenger bus, leaving seven dead on the spot.

The injured were rushed to Meherpur General Hospital and Kushtia General Hospital.

Of the injured, the condition of four was stated to be critical.

Jahangir Alam, officer-in-charge of Meherpur Sadar Police Station, confirmed the incident.

## Transport

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Committee enforced a wild-cat strike on 19 routes between Chittagong and southern districts including the busy Chittagong-Cox's Bazar and Chittagong-Bandarban routes.

Their demands included repair of dilapidated roads, withdrawal of cases against transport leaders and stopping of extortion at Cox's Bazar Bus Terminal.

The strike was postponed in the evening following a request by Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) of Chittagong Ehsan E Elahi. The prime minister is scheduled to inaugurate a parade at Bangladesh Military Academy at Bhatiyar today using one of these routes.

Our Chittagong correspondent reported that the workers claimed they have submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner of Chittagong on December 14 but received no response.

Transport workers agreed to meet with administrators in the next few days to discuss their demands, convenor of the committee Mohammad Musa said.

The other strike called by Barisal road transport owners and workers was called off at 2:00pm following authorities' assurance to meet their demands.

Our Barisal correspondent reports leaders of road transport owners and workers' association met with officials of the district administration and Roads and Highways Department for talks at the office of the deputy commissioner at noon. Awami League lawmaker Talukdar Mohammad Yunus was also present at the meeting.

They demanded repair of dilapidated roads and highways before construction of any new bridges or roads. Claiming that 80 percent of roads in Barisal division are badly damaged, they claimed that drivers are usually held responsible for accidents but the fact is derelict roads are also to blame.

Local officials assured them that repair work of the Bhurghata-Barisal highway will begin today.

"On basis of these promises, we have decided to postpone the strike from 2:00pm," Alamgir Hossain, Secretary of Barisal Bus Owners Association, told The Daily Star.

## Babu murder

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municipality unit.

Public Prosecutor Sirajul Islam said the court had rejected the bail prayers of four others -- Hashem, Moazzem, Selim and Jamil -- as they had specific roles in the killing of Babu, chairman of Baraigram upazila.

Talking with The Daily Star, Mahua Noor Kochi, widow of Babu, expressed dissatisfaction over the public prosecutor's handling of the matter.

"I've prayed to the deputy commissioner and the district magistrate in Natore for permission to appoint some lawyers as the public prosecutor, who is an Awami Leader, hardly has moved in the court," she said yesterday, adding the authorities did not grant her prayer.

According to rules, her prayer can be accepted if the public prosecutor seeks any lawyer to help him, said Mazibur Rahman, the district commissioner. "I sent the prayer to the public prosecutor for his opinion, but he has not responded yet."

Contacted, Sirajul Islam said it would take time to make the arrangement to appoint some other counsels. He claimed he had tried his

best to get the bail prayers scrapped.

On October 8 last year, some activists of the ruling Awami League attacked a BNP procession at the district's Bonpara Bazar.

They beat to death Babu, also the president of Bonpara municipality BNP, and injured around 30 others, including the then Bonpara municipality mayor Ishaq Ali and three journalists.

The following day, Mohua Noor Kochi filed the murder case accusing the 27.

Earlier on November 20, Baraigram Cognizance Court sent to jail all the accused, rejecting their bail prayers after they had surrendered before the court on expiry of their six-month bail terms.

The accused, including 11 arrested, earlier on several occasions had got bail from the High Court.

However, police have yet to file a charge sheet in connection with the murder but they claim the probe is in progress.

Ahamad Ali, assistant superintendent of police at Rajshahi Criminal Investigation Department, yesterday said "The investigation is going on in full swing. We have talked with several

witnesses."

Defence lawyer Ariful Islam said the post-mortem report did not match with the case statement. In the case, Mahua Noor Kochi alleged Babu was hit in his head, but the post-mortem found no such injury mark, he claimed.

## Mind reading

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"From Houdini to Skywalker to X-Men, mind reading has merely been wishful thinking for science fiction fans for decades, but their wish may soon come true," IBM said in its annual assessment of innovations on the horizon.

"IBM scientists are among those researching how to link your brain to your devices, such as a computer or a smartphone," it continued.

IBM gave the examples of ringing someone up just by thinking it, or willing a cursor to move on a computer screen.

Biological makeup will become the key to personal identity, with retina scans of recognition of faces or voices used to confirm who people are rather than typing in passwords, the company forecast.

"Imagine you will be able to walk up to an ATM machine to securely withdraw money by simply speaking your name or looking into a tiny sensor that can recognise the unique patterns in the retina of your eye," IBM said.

"Or by doing the same, you can check your account balance on your mobile phone or tablet," it continued.

Technology will also be able to produce electric power from any types of movement from walking or bicycle riding to water flowing through pipes of homes, IBM predicted.

Mobile phones will narrow the digital divide between "haves and have-nots" by making information easily accessible and junk email will be eliminated by smarter filtering and masterful targeting of ads people like, according to IBM.

## Stop intelligence

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at its next session, he told newsmen at the Jatiya Sangsad Media Centre.

The House sub-committee formed to probe the campus violence yesterday submitted its report to the parliamentary standing committee on the education ministry, both headed by Menon.

"We have decided to request the Speaker to ensure elaborate discussion on the report in the House," he said.

The report blamed former Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) officials ATM Amin, Fazul Bari and Shamsul Alam Khan for the DU incident and asked for legal action against former inspector general of police Nur Mohammad for not discharging his duties properly.

The probe revealed that the release of the teachers and students detained following the violence was delayed due to DGFI interference.

The other suggestions of the House body include compensation and cost of treatment of those injured in, and exempting the teachers and students from penalty and updating the Dhaka University Act, 1973.

The sub-committee had taken testimony of over 68 people including Moeen in connection with the violence.

Earlier, it had asked Fakhruddin and Moeen -- both in the US now -- to appear before it. But they replied to its questions through e-mails and teleconference.

Hundreds of DU students clashed with police on August 20-21 in 2007 demanding removal of an army camp from the campus and apology from the army for allegedly beating up three students.

Eleven DU and Rajshahi University teachers, and eight DU students were arrested following this.

Facing strong protests, the then caretaker government released them in January 2008.

## War crimes trial

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other misdeeds he committed during the Liberation War," Mizanur said concluding his statement before the court yesterday.

Sayedee is facing charges of crimes against humanity during 1971 at the International Crimes Tribunal.

The three-member tribunal led by its Chairman Justice Nizamul Huq finished recording the third prosecution witness' deposition yesterday after which Sayedee's counsels began cross-examining the witness.

His cross-examination will resume today.

"Delawar Hossain, also known as Sayedee, was directly and indirectly involved in all the misdeeds that took place in the Pirojpur area including arsons, killings, lootings, abuse of women and forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam and handing over women to Pakistani army for rape when the Pakistani army and collaborators set up a camp in Parerhaat (of Pirojpur) after May 7, 1971," he told the tribunal yesterday.

Soon after his deposition ended, defence counsel Mizanul Islam began the cross-examination of Mizanur.

During the cross-examination, Mizanur said the peace committee was functioning underground in Pirojpur before the Pakistani army went there. The committee had started its operations openly with the army's arrival.

He also said he received two to three days' training in Pirojpur stadium to become a freedom fighter.

Counsel Mizanul Islam then told the witness that there was no stadium in Pirojpur during the Liberation War, and the place where the current stadium stands used to be a paddy field.

Mizanur said it was not true.

At one point of the cross-examination, defence counsel Kafil Uddin Chowdhury asked the witness when after the independence of Bangladesh he was registered as a freedom fighter.

"I've been a freedom fighter since I joined the Liberation War," was the response from Mizanur.

Kafil tried to clarify his question by asking when was Mizanur "officially enlisted as a freedom fighter".

He said he was officially enlisted as a freedom fighter in the "first published list".

When the defence counsel asked the date when

Mizanur's name was included, Mizanur, seemingly irritated, replied, "I don't remember."

Kafil then told Mizanur that he went to India during the Liberation War and returned after the independence of Bangladesh.

Mizanur said it was not true.

Later, defence counsel Manzur Ahmed Ansari took over the cross-examination and told the witness that the allegation of Sayedee and other collaborators torturing his brother during the war was not true.

Mizanur said they are all true.

Five Jamaat and two BNP leaders including SQ Chowdhury are facing charges of crimes against humanity. Nearly 30 lakh Bangalees were killed and two lakh Bangalee women were violated by the Pakistan occupation forces and their Bangladeshi collaborators during the nine-month-long Liberation War.

Meanwhile, the tribunal yesterday deferred the date for hearing the contempt of court rule against the editor, publisher and a journalist of the daily New Age for publishing an article on October 3.

It fixed January 19 for the hearing on the rule.

## Investigators link Manning to Assange

*AFP, Fort Meade*

US Army investigators presented evidence for the first time Monday directly linking the US soldier accused of spilling secrets to WikiLeaks to the founder of the site, Julian Assange.

Testifying at a hearing to determine if US Army Private Bradley Manning should face a court-martial, the investigators said contact information for Assange was found on a computer hard drive belonging to Manning.

The digital forensics experts also said they had found evidence of online chats between Manning and a computer user with the screen name "Julian Assange."

A message allegedly from Manning described the cache as being "one of the most significant documents of our time, removing the fog of war and revealing the true nature of 21st century asymmetric warfare."

## AL, allies

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A 24-year-old youth was killed in a bomb explosion at the capital's Motijheel while another man died when some unruly people torched two vehicles in Sylhet, police said.

The government and the opposition blamed each other for the incident.

AL acting general secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif told The Daily Star after the meeting, "We along with all the pro-liberation war political parties will have strong presence on the streets to mobilise public support in favour of the war criminal trial."

The meeting decided to hold street programme programmes including mass gatherings, rallies and human chain across the country to drum up public support against the opposition's "conspiracy", meeting sources said.

Starting from the capital, the programmes will be held at the division, district, upazila and union levels. Awami League has already launched street programmes to politically challenge the opposition.

Some senior leaders of the 14-party alliance, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Abdul Jalil, Rashed Khan Menon and Hasnul Haque Inu, who were present at the meeting, was directed by the premier to make a detailed programme schedule, the sources added.

The leaders will sit today at 11:00am to prepare the plan and finalise it after consulting the Jatiya Party (JP) tomorrow. JP is the key ally of the AL-led grand alliance government.

On Monday, AL discussed with the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) about its plan to forge a greater political unity. CPB, which is not in the AL-led alliance, agreed to be on the street with the ruling coalition.

Alliance members at the last night's meeting observed that BNP is giving all out support to the anti-liberation war forces that have resorted to violence and other criminal activities for the last few days.

Briefing journalists after the meeting, Amir Hossain Amu said the war crimes trial is not a matter of a party or the government; rather it is a national issue.

"But the BNP-Jamaat alliance has been trying to foil the trial by creating unrest in the country," he said, adding that they would resist the opposition by uniting the pro-liberation forces.

Tofail said Khaleda Zia had taken a stance in favour of the war criminals. But the AL will foil the move.

Menon, president of Workers' Party of Bangladesh, and Inu, president of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, said they would launch simultaneous street programmes to counter the BNP-Jamaat.

Some of the alliance leaders at the meeting, however, expressed dissatisfaction over not holding meetings more frequently.

Also present at the meeting were Suranjit Sengupta, Obaidul Quader, Abdul Latif Siddique, Bimal Biswas, Sharif Nurul Ambia, Dilip Barua, Hazi Samad, Nurur Rahman Selim, Enamul Haque and Asit Baron Roy, among others.

## AL's reward

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lawmakers of the districts.

"The appointments will help reduce the gaps and conflicts amongst the party leaders, lawmakers and ministers," said another AL leader.

Party insiders said AL had been working on selecting prospective leaders from each district for about a year. The party then made a list of one or two senior leaders in each district and handed the list over to LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam to proceed with the appointments.

The LGRD ministry on December 15 issued a circular regarding the appointments of the district council administrators, which drew huge flak from the civil society and local government experts. The main opposi-

tion BNP termed the recruitment unconstitutional.

Asked why only the ruling-party men have been appointed, AL acting General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said, "The dedicated, honest and competent party leaders have been recruited to make the Zila Parishad effective."

Hanif, also a special assistant to Sheikh Hasina, said the appointment have been made in a bid to "decentralise" the local administration and coordinate development projects.

He said the administrators will remain in office until the local body election is held. He, however, could not say when the election would be.

Meanwhile on Sunday, the Local Government

## Making money

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Using the cards, the fraudsters purchase valuables from posh shopping centres and sell those at lower prices at other shopping malls or to individual buyers.

"So far, I've stolen four parcels containing credit cards at the request of gang leader Kamal. I got Tk 40,000 for the job," Abdur Rouf, the arrested postman of the capital's Gulshan Post Office, told The Daily Star on December 11 at the Detective Branch Headquarters of the police.

Ring leader Kamal Ahmed alias Nurul Amin was once arrested in 2006 for stealing credit cards. But he came out on bail within a month and resumed the old business, police sources said.

On December 9, the detectives arrested Rouf, Kamal, and Md Russell. Rouf and Kamal are from Barisal while Russell is from Tangail.

In the last three months, police captured at least seven other members of such gangs from in and around the capital.

DB officials said the rackets misappropriated several hundred crores of taka by stealing around 1,500 credit cards in the last 20 years.

Moshiur Rahman, assistant commissioner of DB, said the gang led by Kamal stole at least 1,200 credit cards since 1996 in collusion with some postmen of different city post offices.

"We've stolen more than 1,000 credit cards, but we could use only 60 percent of those, the rest we could not use for various reasons," said Kamal.

When asked how did they activate the stolen credit cards, the arrested thieves said not all credit

cards require activation, many are pre-activated. Many also come from abroad they added.

Kamal's 15-member gang has in it five postmen from the city's Banani, Gulshan, Bashabo, Uttara and Badda post offices.

Talking to this correspondent at the DB office, Rouf said he never thought of getting caught.

"Being a postman for 20 years, it was not difficult for me to detect the parcels that contain credit cards. I never record those in the register," he said adding that he knew by names some other postmen involved in the gang.

Gang leader Kamal said he got the idea of stealing credit cards from a man named Hamid Akhter, who was his boss and is now in the US.

Another man named Rahman, who was a postman at the General Post Office, was the first to help him in this, he added.

He also gave names of several postmen and other gang members involved in his ring.

Russell said he worked in a private bank till 2008. Then he joined the group. "I mainly do the buying from shopping centres with the credit cards and then sell those."

Contacted, Mobashwer-Rahman, immediate past director general of the Directorate of Bangladesh Post Office, said during his tenure till September this year, he received a number of complaints about missing credit cards and other parcels.

"I believe some postmen and other employees of some post offices are involved in the illicit activities. We tried in different ways to track them, but

failed," he added.

"Missing parcels tarnishes the image of the state-run postal service," he noted.

Over the last few days, this paper tried to contact the present DG of the postal department, Nayeb Delwar Hossain, for his comment over the phone, but he did not take the calls.

This correspondent also sent him a text message on December 12. He did not respond to that either.

## Cold claims

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Fahimul Islam Mondol, a doctor of Pargachha Upazila Health Complex in Rangpur, said about 24 people, including four kids, suffering from pneumonia, cold diarrhoea, asthma and other cold related diseases were admitted to the hospital yesterday, our district correspondent reports.

In Khulna, as many as 1,783 people, mostly from areas hit by cyclone Aila, were hospitalised in the past five days, reports our correspondent from the district.

BSS adds an extreme weather was disrupting normal life in Bandarban. Freezing cold accompanied by dense fog hampered traffic on the bumpy hilly roads and also ferry services.

However, weather is likely to remain dry with a partly cloudy sky over the country in 24 hours till 6:00pm tomorrow, reports UNB.

The lowest temperature in the country was recorded yesterday in Jessore where mercury went down to 10.3 degrees Celsius. In the capital, it was 12.5 degrees C.

Moderate to thick fog might cover the country from mid night till noon today, the Met office said.