

NEWS IN brief

Watergate conspirator Colson dies

AFP, Washington

Charles Colson, a Watergate scandal conspirator who emerged from prison to become an evangelical Christian leader, died Saturday. He was 80 years old.

A self-described "hatchet" man for Richard Nixon, Colson compiled an infamous "enemies list" of major political opponents of the president, including politicians, journalists and activists.

Illustrating his ruthless nature, Colson had a sign in his office that read "When you've got 'em by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow," according to various accounts.

The former US Marine captain, who served as special counsel to Nixon from 1969 to 1973, played a key role in the former president's downfall in the wake of one of the nation's worst political scandals.



Charles Colson

Maoists kidnap official in India

AFP, Raipur

Maoist rebels in India have taken a government official hostage and killed his two bodyguards in the central state of Chhattisgarh, police said yesterday, in the latest of a series of kidnappings.

The guerrillas shot the two guards dead when capturing Alex Paul Menon on Saturday as he toured a village in Sukma district, 320 kilometres from the state capital Raipur, police said.

Menon, 32, is Sukma's district collector, a role that makes him the most senior civil servant in the area.

Menon's kidnapping comes 10 days after Maoists in the neighbouring state of Orissa released an Italian tour guide whom they had held hostage for nearly a month.

Tea to be India's national drink

AFP, New Delhi

India is to declare tea as its national drink to celebrate the life of a pioneering tea-planter who was hanged by British colonial rulers for taking part in the rebellion of 1857.

Planning Commission deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia on Saturday announced the decision while on a visit to Assam, the tea-producing northeastern state that borders on Bhutan and Bangladesh.

"The drink would be accorded national drink status by April 17 next year to coincide with the 212th birth anniversary of first Assamese tea-planter and Sepoy Mutiny leader Maniram Dewan," Ahluwalia said.

The Asian Age reported that awarding the tea status of national drink may stir up trouble among "naturopaths" who suggest popular Indian beverages such as coconut water, lemon water and yoghurt-based lassi are healthier options.

Afghanistan, US finalise draft of post-2014 deal

AFP, Kabul

Afghan and US officials have finalised the initial draft of a strategic partnership agreement that will govern relations between Kabul and Washington after 2014, a presidential statement said yesterday.

"The draft agreement on Afghanistan and US long-term partnership was finalised and initiated on Sunday in Kabul by the heads of the two negotiating delegations in Kabul", a presidential statement said.

"The agreement is now ready for signature by both the Presidents."

US ambassador Ryan C Crocker and Afghanistan's national security adviser Ranganin Dadfar Spanta agreed on the wording of the draft, titled "Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between Afghanistan and the United States".

The US ambassador said in the statement that the agreement will cement a long-term strategic partnership between "two equal and sovereign States".

No details were released of the content of the draft agreement, which will now be

reviewed by the US and Afghan presidents, the US Congress and the Afghan parliament.

The 130,000-strong US-led Nato force helping the Afghan government fight a decade-long Taliban insurgency is due to end combat operations and pull out by the end of 2014 and the two countries are in talks about their future relations.

Kabul has already achieved two preconditions for signing the treaty -- full control over the US-run Bagram prison and controversial special forces night raids against Taliban insurgents.

Afghan forces are now in control of night raids and the main US prison is in the middle of a six-month transfer.

Night operations by international special forces against insurgent hideouts had triggered popular anger and were a key factor fraying Washington and Kabul's relationship.

But the agreement will not cover the crucial issue of the status of US troops remaining in Afghanistan after the withdrawal. The issue will be discussed after the strategic partnership deal is signed, according to the US embassy.

Poor watch misses it all

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livestock department sources claim that the real figure of infected ones is much greater than the reported numbers of culled fowls since around half of 1.5 lakh poultry farms were closed over past two years mainly due to bird flu.

A total of 5,79,850 birds were culled last year while 1,75,085 in 2010, according to the DLS.

Poor surveillance over the years on commercial and backyard poultry farms and absence of compensation for culled fowls this season led to the closure of the farms, said experts and leaders of farm owners' associations.

Several high officials in livestock department admitted that they apparently have no arrangement to conduct surveillance work in rural areas since they have no staff except three workers under Avian Influenza Preparedness and Response Project (AIPRP) in each upazila.

Sources at the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) on April 6 said they got reports of fresh bird flu outbreaks in Pabna, Khulna, Rajbari, Jessore and

Chapainawabganj districts in the last two weeks.

The livestock department sources said usually the intensity of flu prevails from November to April, but last year they received outbreak reports till July.

Amid such a situation, the government in the beginning of this month set up check posts at 13 entry points to the capital and some other important points across the country in a bid to detect infected fowls and cull them on the spot.

The government also for the first time decided to bring the farm owners under the Animal Disease Act to check supply of infected fowls in the markets.

The act has provisions for two years' imprisonment and a fine of Tk 10,000.

Following reports confirming the closure of huge number of poultry farms, a committee with Chief Veterinary Officer of Bangladesh Dr Musaddique Hossain in the chair was formed in the first week of this month to find out the exact number of the closed farms, determine the extent of loss that each closed farm accrued and make neces-

sary recommendation, said a high official in the DLS preferring not to be named.

If a country falls victim to bird flu outbreaks, it cannot eradicate the disease completely but can check it by adopting strict bio-security measures in commercial and backyard poultry farms, said Dr ASM Alamgir of IEDCR.

Dr MM Khan, secretary general of Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association, said this year's catastrophe could be averted had the government timely come up with compensation for culled chicks.

The authority of AIPRP, which is entitled to arrange compensation to the affected farm owners, could not distribute the World Bank (WB) portion of fund this year.

AIPRP Director Nazrul Islam said "We have received WB portion of compensation, but could not distribute those as the government is yet to disburse its own portion which is 50% of the total compensation amounting Tk 7.70 crore for the season."

According to the livestock department, there are 67,000 registered poultry farms across the country at present.

Lawmen failing to function

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has demanded that the government put "highest importance on neutrality and objectivity of the law enforcers".

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman in a statement yesterday said politicians, media personalities, and the common people as a whole have become victims of the recent killings and "forced disappearances".

"Due to lack of specific actions to prevent these incidents, it is clear that the law enforcers are not being able to carry out their due role with transparency and accountability as expected," he said.

The TIB also called upon all the political leadership, especially the two main political parties, to turn away from "negative and confrontational" politics, the root of ever-increasing crisis, and come to a consensus through dialogue to establish rule of law.

Regarding the recent incidents of "recruitment business" in the Railway Ministry and "conflict of interest" in Padma bridge project, the TIB said the authorities have failed to

remain influence-free in taking specific and stern measures for the sake of fair and impartial probe into the allegations.

Iftekharuzzaman said such failures were ominous signs of corruption which was taking control of the state, adding that it was suicidal for the government from the political perspective.

It is also an indicator of failure in meeting the people's expectations in preventing corruption and irregularities, he mentioned.

The TIB statement said a full, transparent and objective investigation into the role of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) regarding the disgraceful railway bribery scandal was imperative.

"It will be impossible to take any action in that incident without a proper investigation whether BGB played any dubious role in any context, following an instruction or influence, or any transaction or negligence in duty."

Expressing concern over the missing driver, Iftekharuzzaman demanded that the government take all necessary measures to find

the driver and ensure safety of his family.

BGB personnel detained Omar Faruq Talukder, the sacked APS of ex-railway minister Suranjit Sengupta, his driver Ali Azam Khan, Bangladesh Railway General Manager (East) Yusuf Ali Mridha, and its Dhaka Division Security Commandant Enamul Haque with Tk 70 lakh after the driver drove the APS' microbus into the BGB headquarters on April 9 night.

Even though the BGB claimed that they released all the four detainees the next morning, the driver was yet to be traced.

On April 15, the railway's recruitment process was suspended, while measures were taken against Mridha and two others for their alleged involvement in the Tk 70 lakh scam that was reportedly a part of the bribe money collected from the prospective job seekers.

In a dramatic move, the government on April 17 made Suranjit a minister without portfolio, just a day after he stepped down as railway minister amid the railwaygate scandal.

Qatar emir to visit Dhaka

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Sheikh Hasina at Qatar National Convention Centre here on the sidelines of the 13th United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XIII) conference yesterday.

The prime minister is now on a visit to Qatar with a high-level delegation to attend the conference.

PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad briefed the newsmen about the outcome of the meeting.

During the meeting, the two leaders discussed in detail about how to boost bilateral cooperation in different areas particularly the way of increasing investment by the gulf state of Qatar in Bangladesh's infrastructure sector.

Referring to the recent visit of a Qatar investment team to Bangladesh, Emir Sheikh Hamad said Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Attiyah would visit Bangladesh as soon as possi-

ble in preparation for his visit.

The emir recalled his memories with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family. He also referred to the common historic and religious ties between the two countries.

Prime Minister Hasina thanked the Qatar government for creating employment opportunities for around 130,000 Bangladeshis who are contributing to the economies of both countries.

She requested Qatar to recruit more Bangladeshis, especially in the sectors of information technology, engineering, management, accounting and banking.

The prime minister said Bangladesh's trade may increase if Qatar imports ceramics, pharmaceuticals, readymade garments (RMG), frozen fish and leather goods which are being marketed in the US and Europe.

She said Qatar may also help Bangladesh in constructing community health clinics

and nursing training institutions, in gas exploration and liquefied natural gas export to Bangladesh and in the Balancing, Modernisation, Rehabilitation and Expansion of the country's lone oil refinery, Eastern Refinery.

Hasina also requested Qatar to invest in Bangladesh's power and energy sectors, textiles, information and communication technology, real estate, agro-processing, and other attractive sectors.

She thanked the Qatar government for arranging the UNCTAD XIII in Doha, giving her the opportunity to visit the gulf state for the second time in her present tenure.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Ambassador at Large M Ziauddin, Principal Secretary to the PM Sheikh M Wahid Uz Zaman, Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes and Bangladesh Ambassador to Qatar Md Shahdat Hossain were also present.

Poultry stares death

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sell infected birds in the market, they said.

And livestock officials' reluctance to record infected chickens, and poor monitoring and surveillance by government agencies have fuelled the spread of avian influenza virus, they added.

Industry leaders shared these views at a roundtable on the poultry sector organised by The Daily Star at its office yesterday.

The surveillance of DLS (Department of Livestock) has been zero in recent period in stamping out affected birds as per government policy. They have failed because of their negligence, said Md Rafiqul Haque, secretary of World Poultry Science Association-Bangladesh Branch.

Dr MM Khan, secretary general of Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association, also blamed livestock officials.

He said when farmers go to local livestock offices with avian influenza-infected chickens, officials decline to accept those as bird flu-affected. "They rather say the birds are infected by other disease," said MM Khan.

Livestock officials show reluctance to record the farms concerned as bird flu-affected because of fund constraint, he mentioned.

"This tendency of hiding is dangerous for the whole sector. The countries that hide the outbreak suffered a lot for bird flu," he said, citing the cases of Thailand, Vietnam and China.

At the discussion, operators demanded the government allow vaccination to curb bird flu, tax exemption till 2025 to encourage closed farms to resume production and bring in fresh investment.

They also wanted a policy allowing foreign investment

in poultry sector and criticised the government for violating its own rule that prohibits imports of poultry products from bird flu-affected countries.

But the government has allowed import of eggs and day-old chicks from India, a bird flu-affected country.

On vaccination, discussants said controlling bird flu is tough in a densely populated country like Bangladesh where poultry farms sit close to one another due to scarcity of land.

"Bio-security is the main tool to control bird flu. But if farms are established close to each other without maintaining a certain distance, it becomes difficult to control bird flu," said Moshir Rahman, convener of Bangladesh Poultry Industries Coordination Committee.

"We are unable to control bird flu by ensuring bio-security, that's why we need vaccination," he said.

Fazle Rahim Khan, managing director of one of the leading poultry breeders -- Aftab Bahumukhi Farms Ltd -- said a precondition of bio-security is isolation.

"But in a densely populated country, is it practically possible to keep birds isolated and maintain bio-security?" he questioned.

He suggested the government should follow examples of those countries that became successful in tackling bird flu.

MM Khan said, "Bio-security can be applicable to those countries that have vast land. Even after following bio-security, farms are being affected," he said.

The World Organisation for Animal Health says in a guideline the countries which cannot enforce bio-security can allow vaccination to control avian influenza.

Momin Ud Dowlah, president of Animal Health Companies Association of Bangladesh, said the industry was urging the government to allow vaccination for the past several years, but it did not pay heed to that.

Beginning its journey in the early 90s, the poultry industry maintained 15-20 percent growth a year and became self-sufficient in meeting domestic demand until the bird flu hit the sector in early 2007.

After recovering in 2010, the sector was again seriously affected by bird flu attack by the end of last year and early this year, eroding much of the investment of Tk 15,000 crore and forced many more out of jobs.

Since March last year, 25,000 farms quit the industry causing a huge slump in production of chicken and eggs. The shortfall led to higher prices of those.

Government estimates show that only 21 farms have been affected by bird flu this year. "But the reality is we are producing half of our capacity," said Saidur Rahman Babu, secretary general of Breeders Association of Bangladesh.

"We want strict compliance (of rules) and monitoring to control bird flu, along with vaccination," said Shamsul Arefin Khaled, director of Nourish Poultry.

He opposed government permission to import poultry products from a bird flu-affected country.

"We are importing eggs from India which is bird flu-affected," questioned Ihtesham Shahjahan, general secretary of Feed Mill Association of Bangladesh.

Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam welcomed participants, and Deputy Editor Sharier Khan moderated the discussion.

Leave economy

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"They [the political leaders] must resolve their problems themselves, because they are the caretakers of the nation," he added.

Nasir Uddin Chowdhury, a vice-president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the foreign apparel buyers always ask about the production and shipment of goods during hartals.

"Shipments are delayed for the political strike as the transportation of goods is also hampered and ports cannot function normally," he said, adding, "We want an alternative to strikes for smooth production at the garment factories."

AKM Salim Osman, president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association said the knitwear manufacturers and exporters face problems in carrying the exportable goods due to hartals. "We want a good political environment for smooth running of business," he said.

Syed Ershad Ahmed, president of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said businessmen had always been urging political leaders to shun hartals.

"Political strikes leave a long-term negative impact on both the economy and the image of the country," he said.

BNP enforce a dawn-to-dusk hartal today (Monday) for the second consecutive day demanding the return of its leader M Ilias Ali and his driver who have gone missing.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, acting secretary general of BNP, yesterday also threatened to continue the hartal until they were found.

"Our movement will gradually get tougher until Ilias is found," Fakhrul vowed while speaking at a press briefing at the end of Sunday's hartal.

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