

Earthquake shakes Afghanistan

AFP, Kunduz, Afghanistan

An earthquake with a magnitude of 5.1 struck in the northern Hindu Kush region of Afghanistan yesterday, but there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties.

The quake hit at a depth of 33 kilometres some 48 kilometres southeast of Kunduz, capital of Kunduz province, in the early afternoon, according to a preliminary report by the US Geological Survey.

Local officials in four provinces in the region told AFP they had received no reports of damage or casualties.

Northern Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the collision of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

Govt alerts

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The warning came after the government recently took steps to sign a deal with Malaysia to send workers under state arrangements, bypassing private manpower agencies.

The private agencies have reportedly cost job seekers over Tk 2 lakh each for a job in Malaysia in the past.

A five-member Bangladesh delegation is likely to visit Malaysia next week to sign a memorandum of understanding between the countries.

The deal is expected to end complications in sending workers to Malaysia, which stopped recruiting Bangladeshi workers in 2009 due to reports on malpractices in the recruitment process.

With the deal yet to be signed, some people are defrauding the job seekers, particularly in rural areas, said Shamsun Nahar.

"We have already notified people through newspapers and requested job seekers to refrain from financial transactions with any broker or middleman," she added.

The job seekers will be informed through newspaper and TV advertisements and they have to register online, the newspaper notification said.

In the meantime, they can manage machine-readable passports as an MRP will be necessary during the registration, said Shamsun Nahar.

Ex-MP Jalal

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elected MP for three times (1979, 1986 and 1996) from Netrakona-1 constituency.

"A rival group has killed my father for their political interests," Kutubuddin Talukder Royel, only son of the deceased, told The Daily Star.

After being shot around 4:00am, the AL leader was rushed to Durgapur Upazila Health Complex by a group of party men.

Later he was shifted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH), where doctors declared him dead.

Alamgir Hussain, officer-in-charge of Durgapur Police Station, said Jalaluddin died of a bullet injury in his head.

His body has been kept at the MMCH for an autopsy.

Police seized a personal revolver of the lawmaker and sent it for a ballistic test, said Delwar Hossain, additional superintendent of police (Netrakona).

The law enforcers also picked up Ayesha Khanam, second wife of the deceased, for questioning.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday condoned the death of Jalaluddin, said Mahbulul Haque Shakil, the PM's special assistant (media).

In her condolence message, the premier, who is now on a visit to the USA, said in his death the nation has lost a veteran freedom fighter.

His demise is a great loss for the secular democratic politics in our country, she mentioned.

Acting chief of AL Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and its General Secretary Syed Ashraf Islam also expressed grief over the death of the former lawmaker.

'Real culprits'

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Hasina was addressing Bangladesh Awami Swechhasebak League's USA unit council 2012 at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York on Monday night.

"We will not spare those responsible for the scrapping of World Bank funding...we are determined to find out the real culprits," the premier asserted.

Hasina also told the function that she had talked to the World Bank president at a programme here and informed him about her desire.

"We welcome the decision of the World Bank. But I have told the World Bank president that I also want a full inquiry into the matter."

"I want to know why the previous funding was cancelled. I am determined to get at the real story behind the cancellation of the fund," she said.

Without mentioning any name, the premier said one individual, merely for the post of managing director of a bank, had influenced the World Bank to cancel the funding.

"I do not want to mention the name, everybody knows it. That person does not have the age to remain managing

director of the bank, but he had wanted to be there in the post," she told the function.

Hasina said the Awami League had never ever patronised any sort of corruption, and graft in the Padma bridge project was beyond imagination.

In this connection, she mentioned that the Anti-Corruption Commission was running its inquiry and would finish the job. "We told the World Bank to engage their people in helping the inquiry."

Hasina said the World Bank had stopped all of their funding for the road and bridge construction in Bangladesh since 2005.

"The BNP was in power at the time, and it was done just because of their corruption," she said.

Listing various development activities of the government, the premier said the government had come to power just to serve the people and not to build its own fortune.

Presided over by the convener of the Bangladesh Awami Swechhasebak League USA unit, Mahiuddin Dewan, the function was addressed, among others, by Foreign Minister Dipu Moni.

Google services

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19, as the site contained the trailer of a controversial anti-Islam film. The film had triggered massive protests in Muslim countries.

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) is aware of this problem with Google services but technical issues prevent it from solving the problem, claimed an official of the commission.

The official said content management of Google was very dynamic and when an IP address (internet protocol address) of any Google site is blocked, it affects other Google sites as well.

The official also said blocking or unblocking any site depends on the government's decision and the BTRC just follows government orders.

Smartphone users in the country were reportedly the hardest hit in this service disruption as the popular Android operating system for Smartphone heavily depends on Google services.

However, the most popular service of the giant company, Google search, seems to be unaffected.

WB wants

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documents and materials or any other information related to the alleged graft, by the ACC inquiry team.

Based on the advice and input from the panel on whether the investigation and related legal processes are proceeding in a full, fair and expeditious manner, the WB will decide on whether to delink future procurement and contracting decisions from the progress of the inquiry, according to the draft ToR.

On Sunday, Economic Relations Division Secretary Iqbal Mahmud told reporters, "Normally investigation and implementation remain separate. We hope that the two issues will not be linked."

The WB team, which is expected to be in town next week, will hold talks with the co-financiers, ADB and Jica, about the investigation and implementation of the project. An ADB official has already flown to Dhaka from Manila to join the talks, a finance ministry official said.

The WB had first suspended its deal in September last year, raising allegations of corruption in the project and asking the government to take action against those involved.

In June this year, the bank cancelled the deal, setting four conditions for its return to the project. The conditions included sending former communications minister Syed Abul Hossain and prime minister's adviser Mashur Rahman on leave.

On September 20, the bank in a statement said it had revived the deal after the government "took actions necessary to fulfill the measures."

To probe the WB allegations, the ACC will set up a special inquiry and prosecution team.

During the final negotiations with the Bangladesh delegation in Washington last week, the WB sought to include its representative in the ACC team but the Bangladesh side disagreed with the proposal, a top government official with knowledge of the negotiations said.

Meanwhile, Jica yesterday welcomed the WB decision to return to the project.

In a statement, Jica also appreciated the Bangladesh government's "firm commitment" to build the bridge and its efforts toward meeting all the measures set by the WB to ensure a corruption-free and transparent implementation of the work.

Although considerable time has been lost, Jica strongly believes that it can be compensated through the concerted efforts of all the stakeholders, said the statement.

Mystery might be solved by Oct 10

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"We don't want to arrest any innocent person like Joj Miah. To ensure this, we need to identify the killers first before making an arrest."

Sagar Sarowar, news editor at the private TV channel Maasranga, and his wife Meherun Runi, a senior reporter at another TV channel ATN Bangla, were killed on February 11 at their rented apartment in the capital's West Rajabazar.

Alamgir claimed that many more reporters had been killed between 2001 and 2006 than in the last three years.

Refuting his claim, Shawkat Mahmud, secretary general of a faction of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), said since the country's liberation in 1971, a total of 29 journalists had been killed by criminals, of whom 17 were killed over the last three and a half years.

Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury and Abdul Jalil Bhuyian, president and secretary general

respectively of a faction of BFUJ and Shakhawat Hossain Badsha, president of Dhaka Reporters Unity, spoke at the meeting, among others.

The journalist leaders told the minister that they would hold their pre-scheduled rally today before the Jatiya Press Club to demand the arrest of the killers of Sagar and Runi.

Frustrated over the Detective Branch's failure to identify the killers of the journalist couple, the High Court on April 18 ordered the authorities concerned to transfer the Sagar-Runi murder case to Rab.

During the BNP-Jamaat alliance rule in 2005, Joj Miah, a petty criminal, was implicated in the August 21 grenade attack cases. Later he was cleared of the charges through investigation.

RAB QUIZZES MAHFUZUR Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday grilled ATN Bangla Chairman Mahfuzur Rahman at the Uttara headquarters of the elite force in connection with

the murder of journalist couple Sagar and Runi.

Rab summoned the businessman for quizzing and accordingly he went to the office, Director General of Rab Mukhlesur Rahman told The Daily Star.

During the two-hour interrogation from 11:00am, the Rab members mainly asked the ATN Bangla chief to explain the comments he made about Sagar and Runi at a press briefing in London, said sources in Rab.

"We also asked him whether he had been to Runi's house," said Lt Col Ziaul Hasan, director of Rab's Intelligence Wing.

In his replies, Mahfuzur claimed that he had made many remarks on the basis of a CD containing the statements of Megh, the only child of Sagar and Runi.

He also insisted that he had made some other remarks about the lifestyle of the couple after getting annoyed at some questions posed by the newsmen at the London

briefing.

At the press briefing, Mahfuzur had said that Sagar and Runi were victims of an extra-marital affair.

He also claimed that he had video footage relating to the motive of the murder.

MOZENAMEETS HOME MINISTER

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Dan Mozena yesterday called on Home Minister Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir at the latter's secretariat office and requested him to beef up security around the US consulate in the capital's Baridhara.

The home minister assured the US envoy that the government had already taken appropriate measures in this regard.

On Monday, some youths, believed to be members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, gathered near the US mission to protest a movie demeaning Prophet Mohammad (SM).

Jobs at stake, for Biman

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He said the officials rescheduled their flight on the excuse that their visa and passports would not expire soon.

As the flight was delayed, they contacted the manager of their company and briefed him about the situation. They told him that their flight was delayed as Biman had employed all its flights for carrying hajj pilgrims.

"The manager said the company cannot do anything beyond the rules," said Nasir, adding, "Even if we don't lose our jobs, they will not pay us the salary and allowance for the week lost."

Ekhlasur looked quite sure about facing trouble when they returned to the factory. "If we lose our jobs, we will become illegal workers and may not be able to stay in that country."

Ekhlasur, of Khalishpur in Khulna, and Nasir, of Matlab in Chandpur, had to go back to their home towns on September 18, when their flight was rescheduled for the second time. This caused them additional transport expenses.

They said they had to spend the night of September 17 in the open on

the airport premises.

In case of losing jobs, Ekhlasur, who got married last month, will comparatively be more affected since he also feeds for his parents and three school-going siblings.

He said it might have been convenient if Biman could provide papers mentioning the reason for their late return. "I would have been able to show the document at my workplace. But Biman officials said they cannot provide such documents."

Ekhlasur and Nasir are the two latest victims of the flight disorder caused by Biman's decision to carry more hajj pilgrims than it can afford. As a result, the state-run airliner has suspended all its domestic flights and employed the aircraft on international routes.

Since the flight chaos began on September 10, around 5,000 passengers have had to change their travel plans.

Many passengers said their flight schedule had been deferred by as many as five times stretching over several days. Many who do not have relatives in the

capital were seen waiting at the entry of the airport for several days as they could not afford hotels and had to take extra trouble of feeding themselves.

In contravention of international practice, they were not provided with food and accommodation, which caused them extra expense.

Cousins Main Uddin and Kawser Hossain, who have been working at a hotel in Riyadh for the last four years, have also got caught up in the flight chaos.

They said they needed to reach Saudi Arabia by September 27, before their visa expired.

"We have to complete some documentation in Riyadh," said Main, adding that they, like many others, had spent a night at the entry of the airport.

The suspension of domestic operations is also taking a toll on many passengers.

An elderly passenger said he had planned to board his flight from Sylhet, but could not do so as the airliner had cancelled its domestic operations.

As a result, the Jeddah-bound passenger had to come to the airport in the

capital on personal arrangements.

PILGRIMS' PLIGHT

Mohammad Jamal Uddin, president of Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (HAAB), said the private Saudi Arabian airline did not operate three flights since Monday night, leaving over 1,000 hajj pilgrims stranded.

He said he had contacted National Air Services, which said the problem would be resolved by last night. However, no flights of NAS Air arrived at the airport as of 11:00pm yesterday.

Jamal quoted an NAS Air official saying the pilgrims have been kept at several hotels in the capital.

The Daily Star could not reach any official of NAS Air for comments.

NAS Air is one of three airlines officially appointed by Bangladesh to carry hajj pilgrims. The airline will carry about 16,000 people for hajj.

The Saudi national carrier Saudi Arabian Airlines will ferry about 40,000 pilgrims while state-run Biman Bangladesh will carry 56,500 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia as Bangladesh plans to ferry 1,12,568 Bangladeshi pilgrims this year.

Most Razakar, Al-Badr men

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statement regarding the presence of Jamaat members in those forces was untrue.

"It's not true," Muntassir said, adding, "Jamaat leaders never disclose the number of their party members."

Mizanul objected and pleaded before the tribunal to append its objection to the parenthesis.

The prosecution objected to that.

However, Muntassir then said had the party published the names of its members, it would be clear as to how many members of the Jamaat worked for the forces. And that his claim was right since the Jamaat never revealed its members' count.

The tribunal did not record the witness's explanation but noted the defence objection.

Mizanul then asked the witness whether he could mention the political identity of the members of these auxiliary forces of the Pakistani army.

Muntassir said he had never specified anyone other than the people whose names had been published in newspapers and where they had been labelled as such.

Mizanul then made a suggestion that the statement Muntassir gave against Ghulam Azam was made up and untrue.

"With your political point of view, you have taken a position against the Jamaat and are carrying out a false campaign against the party's leaders," suggested the defence counsel.

The witness denied it and said, "You [Mizanul] have to tell me which political ideal I nurture."

Mizanul refused to answer. The tribunal recorded Muntassir's reply as "it is not possible for me to reply to the suggestion made without

detecting my political belief. However, the defence suggestion is not true".

Mizanul then suggested that accused Ghulam Azam's role during the Liberation War of 1971 was only political.

"If mass killing, looting and rape, etc., are part of political principle, then your statement is right," Muntassir replied.

"Ghulam Azam was not involved in killing, looting during the Liberation War; you have given untrue statement against him," said the defence counsel.

It was not true, Muntassir said.

In reply to a question, Muntassir said he interviewed Gen Rao Farman Ali, Gen Niazi and other policymakers of Pakistan and asked questions about the killings of intellectuals.

In response to another question, the witness said Gen Niazi might have mentioned in his book that the Razakars were controlled and directed by the Pakistani army. Nonetheless, political parties and their leaders assisted them during the Liberation War.

Pointing to a section of the interview, Mizanul then told the historian that Gen Niazi had said they did not trust political parties and their leaders and in the case of policymaking, the army alone made the decisions.

"Niazi is a well-known joker. What he had said was not valued even in Pakistan. Whatever be his speech, it was later analysed with other information ...," replied Muntassir.

Muntassir testified in the case as the first prosecution witness on July 1.

As the defence had failed to complete cross-examination even after 14 hours, the tribunal on July 5 allowed the

defence a session to finish off but said the date would be according to the wish of the witness.

On Monday, the prosecution informed the tribunal that Muntassir would appear before the tribunal yesterday. The defence cross-examined him for two and a half hours yesterday.

Ghulam Azam, facing five charges based on 60 acts of crimes against humanity during the Liberation War, was brought to the tribunal but was not produced before the court.

The proceedings of the case were adjourned until today.

NIZAMI'S TRIAL

Defence counsel yesterday cross-examined Bangladesh Islami Oikya Jote Chairman Misbahur Rahman Chowdhury for about two and a half hours in the war crimes case against Jamaat chief Motiur Rahman Nizami.

In response to a question of the defence, prosecution witness Misbahur said after liberation and before he left for London, he went through several newspapers where Nizami was mentioned as the chief of the Al-Badr force.

The defence could not complete cross-examining him yesterday. The court fixed September 30 for completing the cross-examination.

Nizami, who is facing 16 charges of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War, was produced before the tribunal yesterday.

MOJAHED'S TRIAL

International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday continued recording the cross-examination of second prosecution witness Zahir Uddin Jalal in the war crimes case against Jamaat leader Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahed.

The three-member tribunal headed by its Chairman Justice ATM Fazle Kabir recorded the cross-examination before adjourning the case proceedings until tomorrow when Jalal will face further cross-examination.

During his testimony freedom fighter Jalal had said Jamaat leaders Motiur Rahman Nizami and Mojaheed tortured martyred freedom fighter Rumi, musician Altaf Mahmud and himself at a camp of the Pakistani army in Nakhalpara of Dhaka during the Liberation War.

Jalal, also known as Bichchu Jalal, gave his testimony on September 20.

Mojahed's counsel Syed Mizanur Rahman cross-examined the witness for three and a half hours and asked him over 100 questions.

Mojahed is facing seven charges of crimes against humanity, including murder, genocide and hatching a conspiracy to kill intellectuals during the war.

KAMARUZZAMAN'S TRIAL

Tribunal-2 also completed the cross-examination of Abul Kashem, the ninth prosecution witness in the war crimes case against Jamaat leader Muhammad Kamaruzzaman.

The tribunal adjourned the case proceedings until tomorrow when the 10th prosecution witness is expected to testify.

Narrating his torture at the Al-Badr camp in Mymensingh during the Liberation War, Kashem, a freedom fighter, testified that Al-Badr leaders Kamaruzzaman and Ashraf had controlled Mymensingh during the war.

Kamaruzzaman is facing seven charges of crimes against humanity.