

NEWS IN brief

Israel must withdraw all settlers: UN

AFP, Geneva

Israel must immediately stop all settlement activity and start to withdraw its settlers from the Palestinian territories, a United Nations report said yesterday.

"Israel must ... cease all settlement activities without preconditions (and) must immediately initiate a process of withdrawal of all settlers" from the occupied territories, a UN fact-finding mission concluded.

Obama's popularity highest in 4 yrs

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama's popularity has hit 60 percent, the highest level since he first took office four years ago, according to a poll released Wednesday. But it also found that his popularity is slightly less than that enjoyed by two other re-elected presidents -- Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan -- at the start of their second terms.

Iran to accelerate nuke fuel work

REUTERS, Vienna

Iran has told the UN nuclear agency that it will deploy more modern machines to refine uranium, a defiant move that may further complicate diplomatic efforts to resolve the dispute over Tehran's atomic activities peacefully.

The Islamic Republic said in a letter to the International Atomic Energy Agency that it will use the new centrifuges at its main enrichment plant near the central town of Natanz, according to IAEA.

Hazare rejects new Lokpal draft

IANS, Patna

Activist Anna Hazare yesterday rejected the new draft of the Lokpal Bill with amendments proposed by the central government and announced that he would continue his fight for the Jan Lokpal Bill.

"The proposed new draft of the Lokpal Bill is useless. We will continue our fight for the Jan Lokpal Bill and force the government to pass it," Hazare told reporters here. He said his campaign for the Jan

Brazil club owner attempts suicide

AFP, Santa Maria

An owner of the Brazilian night club where 235 people perished in a weekend fire tried to commit suicide, police said Wednesday, as the number of survivors seeking medical treatment after the disaster continued to rise.

Elisandro Spohr tried to kill himself with a plastic shower hose, said a senior police official.

Spohr's doctor told the Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper that since the tragedy, his client -- who is one of two owners of the night club -- cries incessantly, has had to be put on a prescription of tranquilizers, and is emotionally "destroyed."

Tension flares after Israel hits Syria sites

AFP, Damascus

Syria yesterday threatened to retaliate over what it says was an Israeli air raid, as President Bashar al-Assad's allies rushed to denounce the strike that threatened to take the conflict beyond Syria's borders.

Israel maintained a stony silence over Syria's claims, as well as over separate reports that its jets had struck a weapons convoy near the Lebanon border.

Syria's foreign ministry said Israel "and the states that protect it" are responsible for the air strike, and "affirms Syria's right to defend itself and its territory and sovereignty," state news agency SANA reported.

It called on "all the competent UN bodies to take the necessary steps given this grave Israeli violation, and to guarantee that it will not happen again."

Damascus's ambassador to Lebanon, Ali Abdel Karim Ali, stressed Syria's right to respond to "the Zionist aggression."

Hezbollah denounced "a new Zionist aggression."

Reaction from close Damascus ally Iran was strident, with Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian warning of severe fallout.

In the past, Iran has said that any Israeli attack on Syria would be considered an attack on the Islamic republic.

Russia's foreign ministry said it was "deeply concerned" but was still trying to verify the Syrian allegations.

"If this information is confirmed, then we are dealing with unprovoked strikes against targets located on the territory of a sovereign state, which brazenly infringes on the UN Charter and is unacceptable, no matter the motive used for its justification," it said.

Israel has frequently warned that if Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons fell into Hezbollah hands, this would be a casus belli.

It has also raised the alarm over long-range Scud missiles or other advanced weaponry, such as anti-aircraft systems and surface-to-surface missiles, being transferred to Hezbollah.

'Chinese hackers' attack NY Times

AFP, Washington

The New York Times said it had fallen victim to hackers possibly connected to China's military, linking the sophisticated attacks to its expose of the vast wealth amassed by Premier Wen Jiabao's family.

China, which has blocked the US newspaper's website ever since its report on Wen's relatives came out in October, said it was "groundless" to suggest any state-endorsed program of hacking.

"To arbitrarily assert and to conclude without hard evidence that China participated in such hacking attacks is totally irresponsible," Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei told reporters in Beijing.

But computing experts hired by the New York Times to clean up its systems said the attack bore all the hallmarks of other hacking cases where China's military has stood accused of directing intrusions into IT systems.

The hackers have over the past four months infiltrated Times systems and snatched staff passwords, and their probing has been particularly focused on the emails of Shanghai bureau chief David Barboza, the newspaper said.

According to a Barboza story published on October 25, close relatives of Wen have made billions of dollars in business dealings over the years while he has been in day-to-day charge of China's government machinery.

The paper said that with the help of outside computer experts, it had managed to kick out the intruders and prevent them from breaking into its systems again.



Japan moves to change 'pacifist' constitution

AFP, Tokyo

Hawkish Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday told lawmakers he intends to change the post-WWII constitution that imposed pacifism on Japan, in a move likely to stir suspicion in China and beyond.

Abe, who thundered to general election victory in December, has long harboured ambitions to re-write a document critics say hampers effective self defence, but supporters say is a bulwark against the militarism that blighted Asia last century.

"I will start with amending Article 96 of the constitution," Abe told upper house lawmakers, referring to a clause stipulating that amendments require a two-thirds majority in parliament.

The well-funded and well-equipped military -- one of the world's most technologically-advanced -- is referred to as the Self-Defense Forces, and barred from taking aggressive action.

US occupying forces imposed the constitution on Japan in the aftermath of World War II, but its war-renouncing Article Nine became part of the fabric of national life, engendering a pacifism that remains dear to many Japanese.

Constitutional amendments in Japan require a two-thirds majority of lawmakers in both houses, and must be ratified by a referendum, where they can pass with a simple majority of those voting.

Obama's inauguration performer shot dead

AGENCIES

A 15-year-old girl who performed at President Obama's inauguration last week was shot dead Tuesday while hanging out with friends after school in bullet-scarred Chicago.



Hadiya Pendleton

Hadiya Pendleton -- described by family as a "walking angel" -- was standing under a canopy in Vivian Gordon Harsh Park when a gunman ran down an alley, opened fire and fled in a white car, police said.

Pendleton was shot in the back but managed to run about a block before she collapsed, officer Laura Kubiak said. She died at the hospital.

A 16-year-old boy was wounded in the 2:20 pm incident. Police said Pendleton, who had no criminal record, was probably not the intended target.

No meat a day keeps the doctor away

AFP, Paris

A vegetarian diet can cut the risk of heart disease by as much as 32 percent, according to a British study published on Wednesday.

Researchers who followed more than 44,500 volunteers for about 11 years on average, found vegetarians were significantly less prone to cardiac trouble.

In the 50-70 age group, 6.8 percent of people who ate meat or fish were hospitalised or died from heart disease, compared to 4.6 percent of vegetarians.

Previous studies have found that vegetarians have a reduced rate of bowel disease and cataracts, but no difference in cancer risk from meat-eaters, said Crowe.

Egypt factions seek dialogue to end crisis

AFP, Cairo

Rival factions yesterday condemned the violence which has killed dozens in a week of unrest and pledged support for a national dialogue to resolve the political crisis gripping Egypt.

"We come out of these talks with some sort of optimism," despite "the difficult challenges ahead," former UN nuclear watchdog chief Mohamed ElBaradei, a leader of the opposition National Salvation Front (NSF), told reporters.

Top Islamic scholar Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayyeb chaired talks between liberal opposition heads, Islamists, youth groups, independents and church members at the headquarters of Al-Azhar, Sunni Islam's highest seat of learning.

They signed an Al-Azhar document vowing to support "a serious dialogue" and "condemn all forms of violence and incitement to violence", and stressing "the responsibility of the state and its security apparatus to protect citizens."

Even with few concrete points agreed, the talks marked a coup for Egypt's Islamist President Mohamed Morsi whose calls for dialogue were snubbed by the opposition only last week.

But it remained to be seen whether the Al-Azhar document would carry weight on the streets, where clashes between protesters and police have killed dozens since rallies marking the second anniversary of Egypt's uprising last week.

Killing, violence mark hartal

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and torched over 25 vehicles including four police vans.

The half-day hartal in Dhaka and Chittagong, dawn-to-dusk elsewhere, was also marked by explosions of homemade bombs, violence and detention.

The rampage comes a day after Jamaat-Shibir men vandalised and torched vehicles in the capital supporting the hartal. Yesterday, the violence was scattered across the country.

In Bogra, some unidentified people launched an attack on a group of pickets, including Abu Ruhani, in front of Govt Mojibur Rahman College in the town around 12:30pm, witnesses said.

Ruhani along with other injured were rushed to a local hospital where doctors declared Ruhani dead.

He is the president of Shibir unit of Azizul Haque College (old building) and a third-year student of the sociology department.

Witnesses said unidentified people dragged Mizanur, owner of Bhai-Bon Hatchery (fish fry farm) at Subgram, out of his establishment and hacked him with sharp weapons around 12:45pm.

Seriously injured, he was rushed to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital where he was pronounced dead at

1:15pm.

Jamaat-Shibir men armed with lethal weapons brought out a procession in the town carrying the two dead around 4:30pm but police obstructed them.

Around 5:30pm, the pickets set fire to a students' dorm at Jamil Nagar area of the town. Pro-ruling party activists allegedly dominate the dorm.

Police and Rab personnel came to disperse the protesters, triggering a 40-minute clash that left Abdullah, 21, a Shibir activist of Bogra Shaheed Chandu Stadium Unit, killed.

Presidents of Bogra District Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jubo League Mashrafi Hero and Manzurul Alam have claimed that they were not responsible for the deaths.

"None of our activists staged any demonstrations yesterday," said Mashrafi of the pro-ruling party student body.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (A-Circle) Maqbul Hossain and Officer-in-Charge Syed Shahid Alam of Bogra Police Station told The Daily Star that all the three dead in Bogra belonged to Jamaat-Shibir.

Meanwhile, Zahirul Haque, 50, constable of Monirampur Police Station in Jessore died of cardiac arrest just after a clash between police and

Jamaat-Shibir men early yesterday. He had sustained injuries during the clash.

In Feni, driver of a CNG-run auto-rickshaw Mohammad Emon, 25, succumbed to his injuries at Feni Sadar Hospital after he suffered serious injuries when his vehicle hit a tree.

Emon, the lone bread earner of his family, was going to Sharshadi from Feni when pickets chased his vehicle and he tried to escape with his vehicle.

Three passengers on his vehicle were also injured.

In the capital, Jamaat-Shibir activists launched an attack on law enforcers from a procession at Bijoy Nagar around 7:00pm.

"Over 100 Jamaat-Shibir activists equipped with sticks and brick chips made the attack but police dispersed them after a half-hour-long clash," said the officer-in-charge of Paltan Police Station.

Earlier in the day, Jamaat-Shibir men set fire to three vehicles in Mirpur-11, two each in Postagola and Shonir Akhra.

They also vandalised nine buses and exploded eight homemade bombs in the city while the law enforcers rounded up 15 pro-hartal activists.

In Chittagong, pickets exploded homemade bombs, torched at least seven vehicles and vandalised two minibuses.

woman and had three children from the marriage, denied marrying Fatema and refused to admit paternity when she became pregnant.

He refused to provide any support to Fatema, who came from a poor family background, even after the child was born. Meanwhile, Fatema had to face criticism for giving birth to a fatherless child.

She later approached a human rights organisation in the capital to seek help in getting Jahangir to admit paternity, said her elder brother Abdur Rahim.

Infuriated at her for consulting the organisation, he attacked her the next day, on January 3, when she was in the kitchen in her house. He came from behind, threw kerosene on her and set her on fire, said her mother Rokeya Begum.

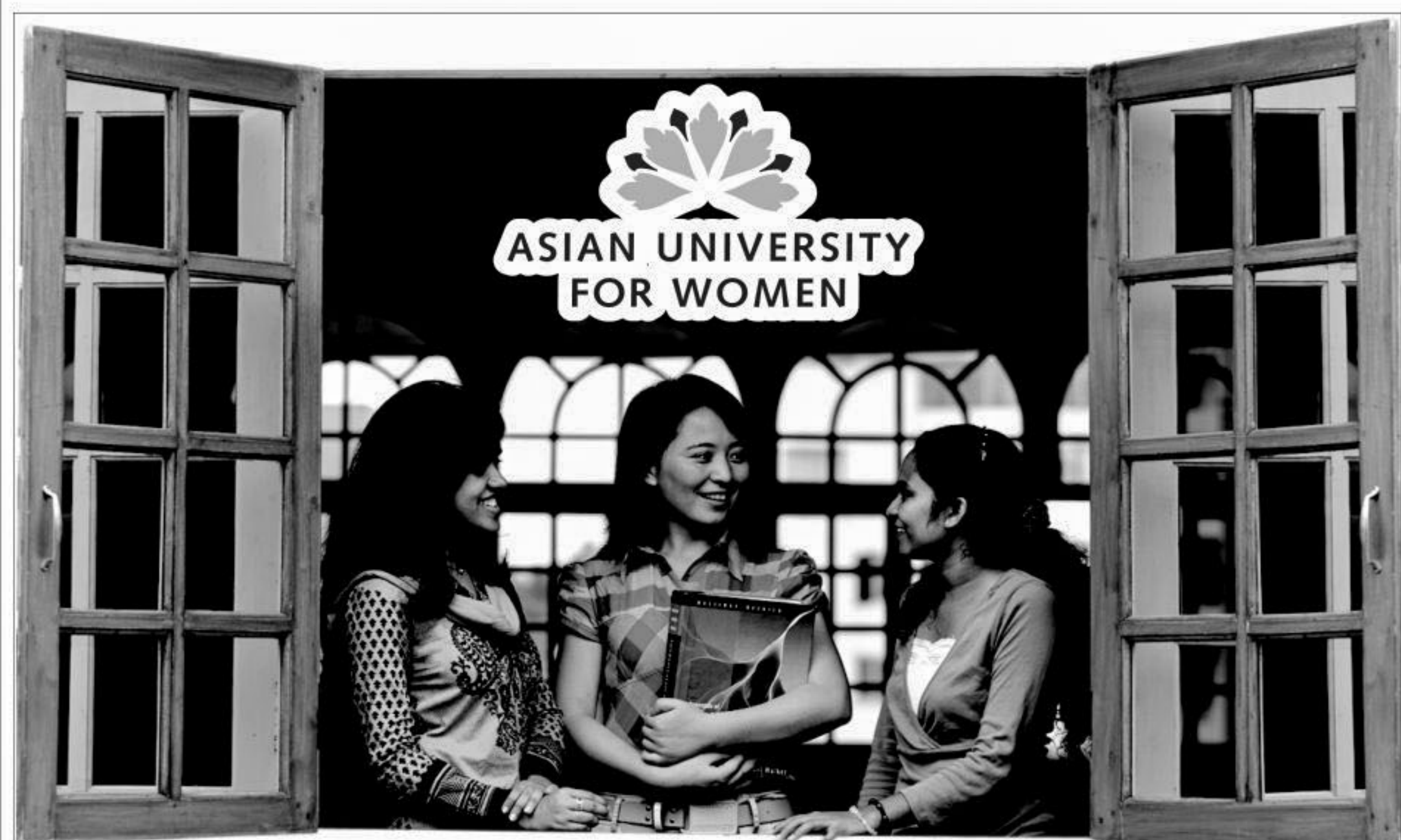
She had heard Fatema scream out Jahangir's name and seen "someone" run away from the kitchen. Matiur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Bhandaria Police Station, told The Daily Star that he had spoken to the victim and that she had pointed the finger at Jahangir.

A case was filed against Jahangir with the police station. He has been on the run since then, said the OC. Police and her family said a case was filed with a Pirojpur court last year with the help of a rights organisation to contest Jahangir's denial of marriage to Fatema.

After the attack, a local doctor was sent for and Fatema was treated at home.

She was admitted to a hospital in Pirojpur on January 9. She was transferred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital three days later.

Fatema had been married once before but her husband had left her around 14 years ago. She had a 15-year-old son from the marriage.



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Application Deadline: February 20, 2013

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