



PHOTO: STAR

Law enforcers prevent a man from entering the Airport Railway Station yesterday.

N. Korea recalls UNESCO envoy for purge report

AFP, Seoul

North Korea's deputy ambassador to UNESCO returned home yesterday after being recalled as part of a purge prompted by the execution of the once-powerful uncle of leader Kim Jong-Un, a report said.

Jang Song-Thaek, once the North's unofficial number two and Kim's political mentor, was put to death on December 12 on an array of charges including treason and corruption.

The shock purge -- staged in an unusually dramatic and public fashion in the isolated communist state -- was the biggest political upheaval since the young ruler took power after the death of his father and the former leader, Kim Jong-Il, two years ago.

Seoul's spy chief earlier this month said two of Jang's associates had also been executed, while Pyongyang reportedly recalled some diplomats or trade officials overseas who were believed to have been close to Jang.

Hong Yong, the North's deputy permanent delegate to UNESCO, and his wife were spotted at Beijing airport yesterday before taking the flight to Pyongyang, South Korea's Yonhap news

agency said.

Hong, one of Jang's associates, took the post only six months ago, it said, quoting a diplomatic source in Beijing.

Yonhap said earlier this month that Jang's nephew and the North's ambassador to Malaysia, Jang Yong-Chol, had been recalled.

It said last week the North's ambassador to Sweden, Pak Kwang-Chol, and his wife had also been summoned back to Pyongyang.

Pak, who had taken the post in Sweden in late 2012, was seen at Beijing airport being escorted by North Korean officials before taking the flight to Pyongyang on Friday, Yonhap said.

Ryoo Kihl-Jae, South Korea's unification minister in charge of cross-border affairs, told a parliamentary committee yesterday that the North has been purging officials close to the executed uncle.

"We are seeing signs that those who were deeply involved with Jang are being recalled and purged," he said.

The purge however appears to be targeting a relatively small circle of officials, Ryoo said, rejecting speculation of a sweeping clear-out of party and military ranks.

AL man burned to death; 20 injured

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On receiving information that 18-party activists had blockaded the road, police rushed to the spot around 3:00pm.

At one stage, police said, the BNP activists besieged them from both sides to attack them.

The law enforcers fired around 30 gunshots, and lobbed around 30 teargas canisters to disperse the attackers.

Of the injured, 10 were bullet-hit. They

95pc pass Ebtedai exams

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students, including 1,29320 boys and 1,33,152 girls, have come out successful. Students sat for six subjects that have 600 marks.

The number of girls was higher than boys -- 1.61 lakh against 1.60 lakh boys -- but boys have done well in terms of pass rate and gaining GPA-5. The success rate of boys is 96.18 percent, while the pass rate of girls is 95.44 percent. A total of 4,564 boys have achieved GPA-5 against 2,689 girls.

Over 62,653 students have obtained GPA between 4 and 5, while over 52,605 examinees have secured GPA between 3.5 and 4, according to result stats.

Tanjimul Ummah Cadet Madrasa in the capital

is topping the list of 20 best performing institutions. Apart from cent percent pass, 139 out of 173 students have obtained GPA-5 from the madrasa.

Darunnazat Siddikia Kamil Madrasa in Dhaka is second and Tamirul Millat Kamil Madrasa in Tongi has secured the third position on the list.

Like the primary terminal exams, Barisal has topped among all seven divisions with 97.78 percent pass rate. Sylhet Division is at the bottom with 90.60 percent coming out successful. Dhaka Division has ranked sixth among the seven divisions with 95.35 percent success rate.

Around 7,924 madrasas have witnessed cent percent pass rate, while 294 madrasas have seen zero percent.

Arrest drive on

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The arrests were made in Khulna, Bogra, Jhenidah, Lalmonirhat, Bagerhat, Moulvibazar, Chittagong, Narayanganj and Sathkira in drives by police and the joint force that began an operation on December 15 in Sathkira in the wake of escalating political violence.

Police held 65 opposition men in nine upazilas of Chittagong in connection with sabotage in the recent blockades and hartals.

Of them, 10 were BNP activists, 16 of Jamaat and 39 of Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat, said district police sources.

Khulna police arrested 54 BNP-Jamaat men in the city and eight upazilas on charges of subversive activities.

Ten of them were rounded up in the city, said Rasheda Begum, additional police commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police.

Fifteen other BNP activists were picked up from seven upazilas of Bogra for their alleged involvement in the recent attacks on ruling party offices, government establishments and police stations in the district.

Bogra Assistant Superintendent of police Gaziur Rahman said they had made the arrests in overnight drives.

Role reversed, railway loser

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The government ordered the railway staffs to run all the passenger trains despite risks of sabotage attacks.

At least three passengers were killed and scores injured as 10 trains derailed at different places during the blockades.

Amid frequent attacks on trains that included removal of fishplates and tracks during the blockades, railway staffs on some occasions suggested the railway ministry to cancel some trains which were outright banned by the ministry, said a number of officials working at the Rail Bhaban, the railway headquarters.

"Instead, we got verbal instruction by top railway ministry officials of not making any request to cancel trains," one of them told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity.

In a desperate bid to keep train service normal during the blockades, the government deployed

more than 8,000 Ansar personnel to guard trains, stations and tracks across the country.

"We can't stop such an important public transport service just for political causes," said a railway official at the Kamalapur station.

According to railway officials, the number of passengers and revenue came down to one-third during the blockades but it has slumped further almost to zero due to the government's suspension of train operations to foil the "March for Democracy."

Railway's Director General Md Abu Taher claimed train services were normal.

When asked why no train was leaving or reaching the Kamalapur station, he said some trains were on the way.

A number of railway officials told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity, that they were strictly instructed not to give any information to media other than saying train services were as usual.

Heavy gunfire at Kinshasa airport, military HQ: residents

AFP, Kinshasa

Heavy gunfire erupted in several areas of the Congolese capital Kinshasa yesterday, including the international airport and the military headquarters, causing panic among residents.

Police also said armed youths had taken hostage several reporters from the state television station RTNC in Kinshasa.

"There's panic in the city, people are asking what is happening," a local resident told AFP, adding that he had seen police and military officers deploy around the RTNC building and the nearby Congolese parliament.

Shooting was heard near the Tshatshi military camp as well as the international airport at Ndjili, residents and a local journalist said.

A police spokesman said earlier that journalists at RTNC had been taken hostage by armed youths, and the television feed had been cut.

"They are armed with machetes and guns. They have taken reporters hostage. An operation is under way to dislodge them," spokesman colonel Mwana Mputu told AFP.

Hafiz shown arrested

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Defence lawyers claimed the charge was false and fabricated and it was meant to politically harass their client.

Ferdous Khalil, a traffic constable, was burnt to death and two more people were injured in the attack on a police-requisitioned bus in the capital's Bangla Motor on December 24.

Metropolitan Magistrate Harun-or-Rashid passed the remand order for Hafiz after rejecting his bail.

The order came after Ali Hossain, a sub-inspector of Ramna Police Station and also the investigation officer of the case, sought a seven-day remand for the BNP leader.

Detectives picked him up on Sunday evening when he came out of the Jatiya Press Club in the capital after announcing fresh agitation programme on behalf of BNP-led 18-party alliance.

Earlier, on December 26 barrister Mahbubuddin Khokon was arrested in the same case and the court asked police to interrogate him at the jail gate.

Ramna police filed the case against 40 opposition leaders, including BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

Crude bombs

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carry out subversive activities in the capital. Three of them were arrested while the others managed to flee," he added.

The arrestees are Asaduzzaman, Kamruzzaman Jewel and Sohel Rana Jahid -- all in their late teens.

Biplob said, "The Shibir activists had planned to detonate the bombs in support of the 'March for Democracy' programme of the 18-party alliance on Sunday."

Police also seized more than 200 national flags and a big number of Jihadi books from the mess, Matin added.

Pro-opposition pickets have exploded countless crude bombs on the city streets to enforce hartals and blockades in recent weeks, injuring hundreds of people and killing several of them.

On December 20 and 21, the Rapid Action Battalion recovered 132 crude bombs and huge bomb-making materials from the Geneva Camp in Mohammadpur.

Around 167 crude bombs and a big amount of explosives were seized from a house in Azimpur on November 11.

In separate drives, meanwhile, the joint forces arrested nine activists of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami in different areas of Rajshahi city early yesterday.

They recovered five kilograms of gunpowder and 45 crude bombs kept beside a wall at Binodpur around 3:00am, said Proloy Chichim, deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police.

None was arrested in this connection.

Flag-bearing sticks

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[national] flag-bearing sticks," said the DMP boss, adding that he would not consider it otherwise.

He said this at a press briefing in the DMP Media Centre on their preparation for the new year's eve.

Stick-wielding ruling party cadres were seen moving around the city streets on Sunday. They attacked the pro-opposition lawyers, teachers and journalists.

Section 28 (1) of chapter five of the DMP ordinance says, "The police commissioner may, whenever and for such time as he considers necessary for the preservation of public peace or safety, by notification publicly promulgated or addressed to individuals, prohibit at any place -- (a) the carrying of arms, swords, spears, guns, knives, sticks or lathis, or any other article, which is capable of being used for causing physical violence."

When asked why police did not take any step to remove the sand-laden trucks that were parked near BNP chairperson's residence, the DMP commissioner declined to make any comment.

Law enforcers parked four sand-laden trucks near Khaleda's residence on Saturday night.

Regarding the clashes that erupted in front of the Jatiya Press Club and on the premises of the Supreme Court, the DMP boss said the opposition men had used these national institutions as a "political shield".

"They hired cadres, who demonstrated inside the SC. I would urge the court to take necessary steps against those who were involved in such incident," he said.

Regarding the Jatiya Press Club incident, he said we should remain alert that no vested quarter can use it as a shield.

Benazir further said the police have information that terrorists had previously held a meeting in the press club. He, however, did not clarify when they had received the information.

Police had entered the SC premises after taking permission from the court authority, the DMP chief added.

Abe 'not welcome' by Chinese people: govt

AFP, Beijing

Abe told reporters that his country "should never wage war again" and that he wants to "build friendship with China and Korea with respect" in remarks after the visit.

"What Abe should do now is admit his mistakes with the Chinese government and people and change his course," Qin said.

The Global Times, a newspaper that is close to China's ruling Communist Party and often strikes a nationalist tone, after the visit suggested barring high-profile Japanese politicians and other officials who went to the shrine from visiting China for five years.

But asked if China will end high-level contact with Japan, or perhaps disinvite Abe from next year's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit -- which Beijing is hosting -- his response suggested the latter was not an option.

"On your... question about the APEC summit next year, we will deal with this issue in accordance with the regulations and common practice of APEC," Qin said.

S Korea's railway workers end strike

AFP, Seoul

Thousands of South Korean railway workers yesterday ended a three-week partial strike after lawmakers promised to reflect their opinions in the government's controversial plan to reorganise railway services.

More than 6,000 unionised workers of the Korea Railway (Korail) -- about one third of the firm's entire staff -- had been on a strike since December 9 in protest at the management overhaul plan they feared would spark mass layoffs and pay cuts.

Korail union chief Kim Myung-Hwan

said all striking workers including train drivers would return to work by 11:00 am (0200 GMT) today.

The move came after Seoul lawmakers promised to form a parliamentary committee to ensure that the workers' opinions would be reflected in the controversial reorganising process.

The eight-member committee was formally formed later yesterday.

The government this month announced a plan to spin off part of the Korail and allow several other state-run firms to buy the shares in the spinoff.

India's views on Bangladesh

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difference of approach between India and the US for quite some time.

Khurshid pointed out that India's understanding of Bangladesh should be helpful to the US. "While the US is at some distance from Bangladesh, we are right next to it. So our understanding of the region and understanding of sentiments of the people in the region should be helpful in the positions they want to take."

BNP calls hartal

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opposition BNP has called a daylong hartal in the district on the day, protesting the PM's visit.

Motaharul Haque Bablu, president of Pirganj upazila unit Awami League, said Sheikh Hasina, also president of the ruling AL, is expected to address at least five rallies in the district on the day.

The district unit of the party has taken adequate measures to make the rallies successful, he added.

Hasina was elected lawmaker from the Rangpur-6 (Pirganj) constituency in the 9th parliamentary polls held in 2008.

The AL chief is running for the upcoming elections from two constituencies --

Rangpur-6 and Gopalganj-3.

During a press briefing at a Rangpur hotel yesterday, Shamsuzzaman Shamu, a joint convener of the district unit BNP, announced the shutdown.

Abdur Razzak, Rangpur superintendent of police, said law enforcers were put on alert on the occasion of the premier's visit.