

US House passes controversial bill

BBC ONLINE

The US House has passed a bill approving the construction of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline. The Senate is expected to pass a similar bill soon, which President Barack Obama has said he will veto. Earlier in the day, a court in Nebraska dismissed a case that would have stalled construction of the pipeline. The project has been one of the most contentious issues between Mr Obama and Republicans who now lead Congress. It is 1,779-mile (1,897km) extension of an existing pipeline that would bring additional oil from the tar sands of Alberta, Canada, to refining facilities near the Gulf of Mexico. The bill was the first piece of major legislation to be introduced by the newly Republican-controlled Congress. It passed the House by a vote of 266-153, with 28 Democrats supporting the measure. "We shouldn't be debating it, we should be building it," House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy said. The Senate will consider a similar bill on Monday, which it will likely pass in the coming weeks. The \$5.4bn (£3.6bn) project was first introduced in 2008. The bill is controversial because the tar sand oil that the pipeline will transport is said to be more polluting than other types of oil. But an official environmental review released last year raised no major environmental objections to the pipeline's construction. Many Republicans and some trade unions support the bill because they say it will generate jobs. Because the pipeline would cross an international border, the state department has to grant a permit for its construction. But in voting today, Congressional Republicans have set the stage to bypass this review process and allow construction to begin immediately. Earlier in the week, the Obama administration said it opposes the bill because it "prevents the thorough consideration of complex issues that could bear on US national interests," and because of "uncertainty due to ongoing litigation in Nebraska."

On Friday morning, the Supreme Court in Nebraska dismissed the lawsuit on which Mr Obama's veto threat was party based. The lawsuit was considered a major obstacle to the pipeline's construction. "Today's ruling provides the perfect opportunity for the president to change his unproductive posture on this jobs project and reverse his veto threat," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said following the court's decision.

Pope's Asia trip to address poverty, climate change

REUTERS, Colombo/Jutanic City

Pope Francis returns to Asia for the second time in less than six months, traveling to Sri Lanka and the Philippines in coming days to underscore his concern for inter-religious dialogue, poverty and the environment. Security will be a main issue in both countries, particularly in the Philippines, Asia's only majority Catholic country, where up to six million people are expected to attend an outdoor Mass on Jan 18.

Solidarity

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Iconic quiff created by Georges Remi, better known as Hergé, appeared for the first time in 1929, January 10 in the comic strip called "Le Petit Vingtième", together with his trusted canine companion Snowy. Among his friends, Snowy comes first — the faithful companion with a generous spirit. Secondly, Tchang appears in the family circle and becomes a lifelong friend of Tintin and almost a brother. Thirdly, Captain Haddock whose debut was to come a good 10 years later is ready to sacrifice his own life for Tintin. Not forgetting all the others, Castafiore, Calculus, Thomson and Thompson who form Tintin's family circle. Since 1929, more than 230 million Tintin copies have been sold. The Tintin adventures have been translated in more than 70 languages. Reprinted and published in ever greater numbers, the books are a source of inspiration for artists, writers, producers, and directors. Tintin has indisputably earned his place among the great figures in world literature. In 1999, following a survey by Le Monde, readers of this newspaper ranked The Blue Lotus 18th among books that left their mark on the 20th century. Tintin found himself in distinguished company with Aldous Huxley, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn and Anne Frank.

East Africa ministers meet in Somalia for peace push

AFP, Mogadishu

East African foreign ministers met in Mogadishu on Saturday to push peace efforts in war-torn Somalia, the first time the regional bloc has met in the country for almost three decades. Dozens of heavily armed soldiers and police patrolled the streets, where Al-Qaeda-affiliated Shebab militants regularly carry out bombings and killings. Ministers from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda -- who have contributed troops to the 22,000-strong African Union force in Somalia -- all took part in the one-day meeting, organised by the regional IGAD bloc, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. Held in a heavily guarded hotel near the main government district in Mogadishu, it was one of the largest and highest profile meetings in the capital for years. Key issues included security and

Another face-off?

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[today], a BNP leader close to Khaleda told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity. According to BNP sources, the party will seek permission for the rally today. If the government does not give the permission and continues to keep Khaleda confined to her Gulshan office, the 20-party alliance might enforce nonstop countrywide hartal, the sources said. Earlier on Monday, the BNP was prevented from holding a rally on the first anniversary of controversial January 5 election, boycotted by the party and its allies. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) banned rallies and demonstrations in the capital from that day onwards for an indefinite period. BNP leaders said the DMP has to withdraw the ban if the AL holds its rally. And in that case, the BNP too will take the opportunity to hold its rally. A BNP standing committee member said the BNP chief has instructed the district, upazila and Dhaka city leaders of the party to intensify the ongoing blockade after the first phase of Biswa Ijtema ends tomorrow, to put pressure on the government for a dialogue with the opposition on holding an inclusive election under a non-partisan administration as soon as possible.

Another senior BNP leader said they have no alternative to continuing and intensifying the ongoing anti-government movement, including blockades, to materialise the demand. The BNP high-command is hopeful that the ongoing blockade programme will gain momentum as, it believes, more people will participate in it after the Ijtema. Meanwhile, the ruling party has asked its grassroots leaders to remain alert to any sabotage bid of the BNP-Jamaat alliance.

AL Joint General Secretary Mahabubul Alam Hanif made the call at a meeting at party president Sheikh Hasina's Dhanmondi office yesterday, sources said. Central leaders of the AL, leaders and MPs of Dhaka city and its adjacent district units, and representatives of its front organisations were present at the meeting, convened to ensure a massive gathering at the party's rally at Suhrawardy Udyan tomorrow. The party sought permission from the DMP on Friday. Quoting intelligence reports, Hanif said criminals backed by the BNP-Jamaat alliance have gathered at Biswa Ijtema ground and after the Ijtema, they might move towards Khaleda

Padma bridge

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A total of 300 pillars will be used. Chinese company Sinohydro Corporation Ltd has shipped three dredgers on December 18 from China that would be used for the river training work. The river training is expected to be completed in four years. "Padma Bridge is not a dream but a reality now. We will be able to complete the bridge by 2018 Inshallah," Obaidul Quader, minister for road transport and bridges ministry, told The Daily Star. The government signed a deal with China Major Bridge Engineering Construction Company Ltd in June for the construction of the bridge. South Korea's Korean Expressway and Bangladesh Army are the construction supervision consultants. The Awami League in its election manifesto in 2008 pledged to construct this bridge. The Padma Bridge project hit a roadblock in 2012 when the World Bank, a key financier of the project, cancelled its \$1.2 billion credit upon allegations of corruption. Subsequently, the government in early 2013 decided to implement the project with its own resources.

political reconciliation within the Horn of Africa nation, riven by conflict since 1991. Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud described it as "an important regional event" that took place in the country "for the first time in 28 years." Amid constant threats of Shebab attacks, the president took to national television appealing to citizens that "IGAD is a guest of the Somali people." Leaders including UN chief Ban Ki-moon have visited Mogadishu in recent years, but important visitors rarely leave the fortified walls of the airport zone to travel through the dangerous city streets. "We are very happy that Mogadishu is secure enough to host such an international conference," said Abdurahman Duale Beyle, Somalia's acting foreign minister. Mohammed Affey, Kenyan official and IGAD envoy to Somalia called the meeting "historic."

Zia's Gulshan office. Gazipur district unit leaders were asked to remain alert so that none can create any unwanted situation. State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal asserted at the meeting that law enforcement agencies are ready to resist "any evil design of the BNP-Jamaat alliance". AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam, who chaired the meeting, said the government will tackle all conspiracies of the BNP with an iron hand. He also termed false the touted telephone conversation between Khaleda Zia and Bharatiya Janata Party President Amit Shah, and some US congressmen's statement on Bangladesh's political situation, meeting insiders told The Daily Star. After the meeting AL Joint General Secretary Jahangir Kabir Nanak told the press that arms and jihadi books and leaflets have recently been recovered from places adjacent to the Ijtema ground. This means the BNP-Jamaat people might carry out subversive activities after the Ijtema.

9TH DAY OF KHALEDA'S CONFINEMENT

The BNP chief's confinement to her Gulshan office enters its 9th day today. With law enforcers still guarding her office, Khaleda Zia is unlikely to attend the Akheri Munajat of the Ijtema today amid the BNP-led alliance-sponsored blockades. "In that case, Madam [Khaleda] will take part in the Akheri Munajat from her office as the programme will be live telecast on different TV channels," a staff of the BNP chief's media wing told The Daily Star. Two police vans and a water cannon were blocking both ends of the road to Khaleda Zia's office yesterday as well. Some female BNP leaders and the family members of missing BNP leader M Ilias Ali were allowed to go inside and meet Khaleda. Emerging from the office, Ilias Ali's wife Tahsina Rushdir said the BNP chief was "feeling better".

Police on January 5 sprayed pepper spray while she was trying to come out of the office premises to attend the Nayapaltan rally. BNP leader Sabihuddin Ahmed, a delegation of pro-BNP lawyers and former cabinet secretary Abdul Halim also visited Khaleda yesterday. Meanwhile, BNP Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi told some TV reporters at an undisclosed location that the government agents are carrying out "subversive activities" during the ongoing blockade and blaming the opposition for those.

No phone call to Khaleda

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The BJP chief told BSS over the phone that he never talked to Khaleda, the agency reported from New Delhi yesterday. The BNP, however, stuck to its claim. Party chairperson's Press Secretary Maruf Kamal Khan in a fresh statement yesterday said he was present when Khaleda talked to Amit Shah over the telephone from her Gulshan office. The Daily Star tried many times to reach the BJP president over his mobile phone, but none answered. Two private TV channels, however, reported that the BJP leader, when contacted, said the news of the phone call was fake. The phone call controversy got a new dimension after it was proved that a fraudulent statement on Bangladesh politics was run by some media in the name of US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman along with five members of the US Congress. The International Business Times (IBTimes UK) yesterday made it clear that it received the fraudulent statement from a senior aide to Khaleda's son and BNP Senior Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman, now in London. A day ago, stepping into the debate over the reported phone call, the ruling Awami League slammed the BNP saying the conversation never took place and it was nothing but a lie. Private television channels Ekattor TV and Channel 24 in their breaking news and news bulletins yesterday said they talked with Amit Shah over his phone. The phone conversations, said to be between the BJP boss and TV stations, were also aired. Asked by Ekattor whether he talked to Khaleda, a voice purportedly of Amit Shah replied in English: "No. No. This is fake news. There was no call from our side." The TV channel claimed to have got Amit after 20 hours of frantic efforts. In the Channel 24 news, a voice was heard saying there was no call to Khaleda from his side and "it's totally a rumour." In a statement last night, Maruf Kamal Khan said as per the information they gathered from those close to Amit Shah, the BJP chief didn't have time to give interview to any Bangladeshi media as he was very busy in electioneering and his party's recruitment. It was Maruf who at a press confer-

ence on Thursday said Amit Shah called Khaleda at 10:30pm on Wednesday and inquired about her physical condition. In last night's statement, Maruf said what he had told the media was hundred percent correct. "In the wake of some media reports aimed at proving wrong my information about the telephone conversation, I want to reiterate firmly that the information given by me is hundred percent correct." He said the telephone conversation between the chiefs of two major parties of the two neighboring countries took place in his presence. The BNP chief's press secretary urged all to refrain from diverting people's attention from the country's persisting serious issues. He also hoped that the controversy over the conversation between the two leaders will end with his statement. Our New Delhi correspondent added that BJP spokesmen in India were tight-lipped over the phone call controversy. "How can I comment on an issue for which I have not been authorised to say either by the party chief or the party", said a leader who requested anonymity. However, a mid-level BJP leader said it is impossible that Shah, an astute politician, would talk to the opposition leader of a foreign country at a juncture when that country is passing through political turmoil. Earlier, according to a report of India's leading Anandabazar Patrika yesterday BJP spokesperson Ravi Shankar Prasad during his briefing on January 7, the day Amit and Khaleda reportedly talked, spoke on a variety of issues but did not say anything on the reported telephone conversation. The Anandabazar Patrika said the Indian high commission in Dhaka drew the attention of the Indian external affairs ministry to the phone conversation issue. Quoting Indian diplomatic sources, Anandabazar said External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj herself wanted to know the fact from Amit Shah. Amit informed that he did not make any such phone call. Rather, BNP side called twice at his office. But there was no conversation as Amit was outside Delhi. **FRAUDULENT STATEMENT** Meanwhile, the IBTimes UK has withdrawn the fake press statement and ran

Ship surveyor

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mendment that his suspension be withdrawn. An HC bench, however, upheld the suspension order for three months following a writ petition and ordered the authorities concerned to explain by January 11 why the withdrawal of suspension should not be declared illegal. The HC also directed the country's lone marine court along with the shipping ministry and the DoS to explain as to why Mirza should not be implicated in a case filed in connection with the Pinak tragedy. Eight people, including present owner of the launch Abu Bakkar Siddique Kalu, his son Omar Faruk Limon, previous owner Moniruzzaman Khokon, sukani Golam Nobi Biswas, greaser Sabdar Molla, terminal lease holder Motaleb Howlader, Yakub Bepari and Abdul Hai Sikder have been sued in connection with the disaster. All the accused except Kalu and Limon are at large despite an arrest warrant issued on October 2. Mirza Saifur said he would fight the case at the court.

Sabihuddin's car

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policemen rushed to spot after the incident and found that locals had already doused the fire. Sabihuddin was inside the BNP chief's office during the arson attack. The arson attack took place amid a countrywide nonstop blockade enforced by the BNP-led alliance. **Ctg teacher** **FROM PAGE 16** brandishing firearms, police added. Anjali was admitted to the hospital around 9:45am. She died in the intensive care unit around 12:00 noon, said in-charge of CMCH police camp. Rajendra said, "My family has no feud with anyone. I cannot suspect anybody for murdering my wife." Minara Begum, principal of the nursing college, said, "As far as I know, she [Anjali] was on good terms with her students and colleagues. And I never heard of any complaint against her who had been working in the college for nearly 34 years." Around 400 students of the college brought out a procession in the afternoon, demanding the arrest of the perpetrators. Mohiuddin Mahmood, officer-in-charge of Panchlaish Police Station, said, "It does not seem like a case of mugging as the attackers did not take away Anjali's mobile phone, money and handbag. It appears to be a pre-planned murder. We are investigating to find out the motive behind the killing and the culprits."

a report headlined "US Foreign Affairs Committee blasts 'fraudulent' statement on Bangladesh". The report, which contained the group's official statement condemning the fraudulence, also named Tarique Rahman's aide Humayun Kabir. "The IBTimes UK ran the 'fraudulent' release [on January 8] after being sent the document (found below) from a senior aid to Tarique Rahman, the senior vice chairman of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)," according to the news report. "But Humaiun Kobir told IBTimes UK that his party has since launched an investigation, which is ongoing, after the House Foreign Affairs Committee released its statement." Humaiun said the episode was "embarrassing" but did not comment further on the matter, citing the ongoing investigation, it added. IBTimes UK contacted the House Foreign Affairs Committee for further comment but was referred to the group's official statement. "Though the Committee and many members of Congress continue to monitor the political situation in Bangladesh, the Committee did not -- and the Members did not -- issue any such statement. It is unacceptable that any party would seek to use a fraudulent press statement from the US Congress to advance their political goals," read the committee's statement.

US-led air strikes focus on Kobani

REUTERS, Washington

American-led forces launched 12 air strikes against Islamic State militants in Syria since Friday, all but one of them near the contested city of Kobani, the US military said. The strikes near Kobani hit two large Islamic State units and destroyed 15 of its fighting positions, the Combined Joint Task Force said in a statement Saturday. They also destroyed an Islamic State building and one tactical unit, it said. Another strike in Syria, near al Hasakah, destroyed two Islamic State guard facilities, the statement said. US and partner nations also launched three air strikes in Iraq, striking an Islamic State-controlled bridge near Erbil, destroying two militant vehicles near Ramadi and two Islamic State fighting positions near Mosul, it said.

France fears more terror

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President of Switzerland Simonetta Sommaruga, Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, Denmark's Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, US Attorney General Eric Holder, Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, European Council President Donald Tusk and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov are among the leaders who have confirmed their participation. The defence ministry said it was sending another 500 soldiers into the greater Paris area, bringing current numbers to what will be some 1,350 troops. After Friday's dramatic events, Hollande warned grimly that the threats facing France "weren't over", comments followed by a chilling new threat from a Yemen-based al-Qaeda group. Security forces were focused on hunting down 26-year-old Hayat Boumeddiene, the "armed and dangerous" partner of Amedy Coulibaly who took terrified shoppers hostage in a Jewish supermarket on Friday, killing four of them. Before he was killed by elite police in a massive assault on the store, he told journalists he was a member of the Islamic State jihadist group. Coulibaly and Boumeddiene are the prime suspects in the murder of a policewoman on Thursday just outside the French capital. That attack further spooked a nation still reeling from the Wednesday assault at the Charlie Hebdo satirical weekly in Paris that saw two gunmen mow down 12 people including some of the country's best-known cartoonists. In a sombre address after Friday's sieges, Hollande said: "I call on all the French people to rise up this Sunday, together, to defend the values of democracy, freedom and pluralism to which we are attached." But as leaders urged the country to pull together in grief and determination, questions were also mounting over how the three men -- brothers Cherif and Said Kouachi, and Coulibaly -- had slipped through the security net after it emerged that all three were known to the intelligence agencies. France's darkest week in decades came to an explosive end on Friday after the gunmen holed up in two hostage dramas some 30 kilometres apart. The massive manhunt for the two Kouachi brothers developed into a car chase and then a tense standoff as they held a hostage in a printing firm north-east of Paris. The small town of Dammartin-en-Goele was transformed into what looked like a war zone, with elite forces

deploying snipers, helicopters and heavy-duty military equipment as they surrounded the pair. With all eyes on the siege outside Paris, suddenly explosions and gunfire shook the City of Light itself as Coulibaly stormed a Jewish supermarket on the eastern fringes of the capital. In what Hollande called an "appalling anti-Semitic act", Coulibaly took terrified shoppers hostage hours before the Jewish Sabbath, killing four. As the sun set on the horrified capital, the brothers charged out of the building with guns blazing in a desperate last stand, before being cut down. Within minutes, elite commando units moved against Coulibaly, who had threatened to execute his hostages unless the brothers were released. Coulibaly had just knelt for his evening prayer when the special forces struck. Explosions rocked the neighbourhood -- one lighting up the shopfront in a fireball -- and shooting erupted as the commandos burst in. As the drama reached its climax, links emerged showing the brothers and Coulibaly were close allies and had worked together. All three had a radical past and were known to French intelligence. Cherif Kouachi, 32, was a known jihadist who was convicted in 2008 for involvement in a network sending fighters to Iraq. His brother Said, 34, was known to have travelled to Yemen in 2011, where he received weapons training from AQAP. It also emerged that the brothers had been on a US terror watch list "for years". Cherif told French TV he was acting on behalf of the Yemen-based al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula while Coulibaly said he was a member of the Islamic State group. Coulibaly, 32 -- who met Cherif Kouachi in prison -- was sentenced to five years in prison in 2013 for his role in a failed bid to break an Algerian Islamist, Smain Ait Ali Belkacem, out of jail. Boumeddiene and Cherif's girlfriend spoke "more than 500" times by phone in 2014, said Paris's chief prosecutor Francois Molins. Prime Minister Manuel Valls said the carnage they left in their wake showed there had been "clear failings" in intelligence. The Islamic State group's radio praised them as "heroes" and Somalia's Shebab militants, al-Qaeda's main affiliate in Africa, hailed their "heroic" act. Meanwhile AQAP top sharia official Harith al-Nadhari chillingly warned France to "stop your aggression against the Muslims" or face further attacks, in comments released by the SITE monitoring group.