

Japan vows to 'never give up' search for ISIS hostages

AFP, Tokyo

Japan yesterday vowed to "never give up" its struggle to save two Japanese hostages held captive by Islamic State militants after the deadline to pay their ransom passed in agonising silence.

Whether freelance journalist Kenji Goto and Haruna Yukawa, the self-employed contractor he had gone to rescue, were alive remained unknown a day after the deadline to secure their release expired with no word from their captors.

The Islamist militants had threatened to kill the hostages if they did not receive \$200 million in 72 hours, which Tokyo interpreted as meaning 2:50 pm (0550 GMT) on Friday.

Deputy Foreign Minister Yasuhide Nakayama, who was heading Japan's efforts to rescue its two nationals out of Jordan's capital Amman, told reporters: "It is a very difficult path to see their release, despite a variety of routes."

"We are focusing on scrutinising information over again. We will never give up. We will bring them home."

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters there was "nothing new to report" after holding a meeting of an emergency taskforce on Saturday morning.

Islamic State militants released a video this week in which Goto and Yukawa, apparently kneeling in the desert, are threatened with execution by a man with a British accent.

The jihadist group, which rules large swathes of Iraq and Syria under a strict form of Islamic law, has murdered five Western hostages since August last year but this is the first time it has threatened Japanese captives.

Junko Ishido, Goto's mother, on Friday launched an emotional appeal begging for mercy for her son.

"I say to you people of the Islamic State, Kenji is not your enemy. Please release him," she said.

68 BNP-Jamaat

FROM PAGE 1

information report filed with Jatrabari Police Station mentioned that the accused carried out the attack following Khaleda's instruction to enforce a nationwide indefinite blockade on January 5.

Eighteen BNP and Jamaat leaders were implicated for planning the attack while 50 others were accused of executing the assault on the bus, which left 28 people seriously burnt, said Jatrabari police.

BNP leaders Rafiqul Islam Miah, MK Anwar, Selima Rahman, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed, Aman Ullah Aman, and Barkat Ullah Bulu were accused of planning.

Former BNP lawmaker from Jatrabari Salauddin Ahmed and local BNP leader Nabiullah Nabi were accused of carrying out the attack.

Meanwhile, Jatrabari police arrested Selim Bhuyan, principal of AK High School in the capital's Dania, in connection with the case.

Now 36-hour hartal

FROM PAGE 1

the commoners.

On top of the bloodstained blockade, they yesterday called a nationwide 36-hour hartal from 6:00am today, saying it was a protest against the proposed power tariff hike, arrest of alliance men and "the government's conspiracy for subversive activities".

"Where would the two ladies' fight lead us? We're doomed," said Mohammad Saiful, perhaps summing up the bitter disappointment that is growing with each passing day among the general people over the ongoing violence in the name of politics.

To this trucker, who is in his early twenties, Khaleda Zia's obstinacy and Sheikh Hasina's defiance bear little meaning. All he knows is that this politics of vendetta has thrown him in hot water. He is forced to stay indoors in the daytime and take the wheels of his goods-laden truck only in the dark, that too risking his life, day in and day out.

"We can't rely on this rogue politics. We have to survive. And at the end of the day, we've to earn our bread under any circumstances."

Students graduating to higher classes saw the New Year bringing in an uncertainty as their schools were struggling to make schedules for the new classes.

Several thousand O- and A-level examinees have already missed out on a few exams. Uncertainty looms large among more than a million prospective candidates of Secondary School Certificate and equivalent public examinations scheduled to begin from February 2.

"I am tense as it is not certain whether the examinations will be held as per the routine. This tension is severely hampering my preparation," said Adeeba Naz, an SSC candidate from Viqarunnisa Noon School.

"I am preparing myself, keeping in mind the intervals between the exams. I will be in problem if the routine changes due to the blockade," she said.

Adeeba was also worried over how she would travel to and from the exam centre if the blockade violence, that is mainly targeting vehicles, continues.

Businesses are losing more than Tk 2,277 crore every day due to the blockades and shutdowns, and the economy lost at least Tk 36,445 crore in first 16 days of political unrest, according to Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The sum is equivalent to 2.69 per cent of the GDP, said the DCCI which made the estimate by calculating the losses in all financial sectors, including apparel, agriculture, real estate, and wholesale and retail markets.

"Blockades and hartals are affecting people and the country ... Violence cannot be a means of solution," DCCI President Hossain Khaled told The DailyStar last night.

He said the BNP must stop the violence and should withdraw the ongoing blockade for the sake of the country. "There should be a dialogue to solve the problem."

SA Kader Kiron, chairman of Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity that claims to represent 25 lakh shop owners of the country, said the owners are about to go bankrupt due to the blockade.

"Burning people to death! What

kind of a movement is this? ... This must be stopped," he said.

He urged all political parties to reach a consensus through discussion. "We respect the politicians but we doubt whether they will be able to retain it."

Md Abdul Momin of Rangpur's Pargachha cultivated cauliflowers on his 60 decimals of land, spending Tk 40,000. So far, he has managed to sell worth Tk 20,000 of yield only though the season is almost over.

"We have no idea how we will survive," said Momin in utter despair.

Around 1:00am yesterday, Al-Amin was waiting in the corridor of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital's burn unit. His elder brother Salauddin Bhuiyan was burnt along with 27 others when his bus was firebombed in the capital's Jatrabari area Friday night.

"I had requested my brother not to go to Dhaka amid the blockade as people were being killed in arson attacks. But he didn't pay heed saying, 'If I don't go to work, how will we survive?'" said Al-Amin of Narayanganj's Arahazar.

"We have no links to politics. Why then it's always we who fall victims to its wrath?" he said with tears clouding his eyes.

As many as 81 people took treatment at the DMCH burn unit in the country's worst bout of political violence since last year's national elections in which the ruling Awami League was re-elected after a boycott by the opposition. Fifty-one victims are still being treated there.

At least 30 people were killed in the violence since January 5. Of them, 19 had no involvement in politics.

Pak move to ban JuD a significant move Says Indian army

PTI, Srinagar

Army on Saturday said the announcement of ban on Hafiz Saeed-led Jamaat-ud-Dawah by Pakistan were "good moves" but the effect of these steps needs to be gauged on ground.

"It is a significant move (by Pakistan). We are waiting and watching as to how the ban on JuD would manifest on ground," General Officer Commanding of Army's Srinagar-based 15 Corps, Lt General Subrata Saha told reporters here.

He said all necessary precautions have been taken in view of the high profile visit of US President Barack Obama.

"Adequate care is being taken to foil all (nefarious) designs in view of the visit of the US President," Lt Gen Saha said.

He said while security forces had good success against militants during the last year, there were reports of over 150 militants waiting at various launch pads on the other side of the Line of Control (LoC) to infiltrate in the Valley.

"According to our assessment, there are 150 to 160 militants waiting at launch pads to sneak in ... there are around 17 launch pads," he said.

Blockade spikes

FROM PAGE 16

Usually 3,000 to 3,500 bulls are brought to the capital from different districts including Kushtia, Chuadanga and Sathkira every day for slaughtering. But the figure has now come down to only 1,000 to 1,200, said Shamim Ahmed, general secretary of Dhaka Metropolitan Mangsho Beboshayee Samity.

The dearth in supply has pushed up the price of bulls, he mentioned. "We are buying a 100-kg bull at Tk 40,000 to Tk 42,000 which was Tk 30,000 to Tk 32,000 earlier."

A trader at Kaptan Bazar said they used to spend Tk 12,000 to Tk 14,000 for hiring a truck to carry bulls from Jessore to Dhaka. "Now we are spending Tk 30,000 to Tk 35,000 per truck," he added.

Traders, however, mentioned that the supply of cattle from India has also declined in last one and a half months due to the strict monitoring of the border areas.

Indian bulls and cows meet a significant portion of the country's total demand for beef.

Shibir leader

FROM PAGE 16

Mahmud, 25, and Abu Sayed, 35 -- to a hospital in Narayanganj. Mahmud's condition was stated to be critical.

Police seized five petrol bombs and gunpowder from them.

Witnesses said a gang of some 15 barricaded a stretch of Dhaka-Narayanganj road to stop a Dhaka-bound bus of Dighirpar Paribahan around 1:30pm.

When the attackers vandalised the bus and tried to throw petrol bombs at it, passengers got off the vehicle in panic.

Locals chased the arsonists and captured the trio.

Narayanganj Additional Police Super (administration) Md Sajjadur Rahman said the three were caught while trying to set fire to a bus.

Meanwhile, two arrestees who were nabbed on Friday in connection with another arson attack gave confessional statements before a Narayanganj court saying that a Chhatra Dal leader hired them for torching buses in exchange for financial benefits, police said.

Mohammad Shamim, a motor mechanic of Jamtala area in Narayanganj town, and Shafiqul gave the statements before the court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Ishrak Ahmed Siddique, said Manjur Quader, officer-in-charge of Narayanganj Sadar Model Police Station.

They had carried out the arson following orders given by Rashidur Rhaman Rusho, Chhatra Dal leader and also nephew of Narayanganj district BNP president Taimur Alam Khandaker, the duo were quoted as saying by police.

President

FROM PAGE 16

Riyadh by a special flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines at 10.30am," BSS reported, quoting the president's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim.

Senior ministers, bureaucrats and chiefs of the three services saw off the president at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. Hamid is likely to return home today.

Bacteria

FROM PAGE 16

Aliya Naheed said vendors' lack of awareness on hygiene practices, inadequate access to potable water supply and use of unsafe water, and overall unsanitary environmental conditions were the major factors behind high contamination of street foods with human faecal pathogen.

As part of the study, 115 vendors were provided training on hygiene practices, narrow-mouth water reservoir and water purification tablets, liquid soap for washing hands after toilet and hand sanitiser for cleaning hands after touching dirty surface.

After monitoring them for 12 weeks, significant change was found in their hygiene behaviours, said Aliya. The amount of E coli too was found fewer than what was found before the intervention.

Aliya Naheed said an estimated one lakh mobile street vendors are there in Dhaka city, and they provide a great service to the urban people. Also, it is a livelihood option for them.

She suggested awareness on hygiene practices and providing necessary infrastructure to the vendors to ensure safe street food.

Aliya, for example, recommended providing the vendors with access to pure water and proper food preparation training.

Contacted, DSCC Health Officer Mir Mustafizur Rahman said authorities now enforce the Pure Food Ordinance 1959 to ensure safe food anywhere in the country as rules are yet to be formulated on the basis of the Safe Food Act 2013.

"However, the problem in ensuring safety of street foods is that the sellers do not have any holdings or licences," he told The Daily Star.

The DSCC is considering different options like providing improved food carts and registering the vendors so they can be facilitated in improving hygiene and also held accountable, Mustafizur Rahman said.

Apps trumps

FROM PAGE 16

support more jobs in America than Tinseltown.

The study showed that total App store revenues since 2008 now stand at \$25 billion with no sign of slowing down.

Industry analysts Asymco looked at the figures for apps sold by Apple through its iTunes service last year. It found that the app industry is 'healthier' than Hollywood even though last year's hit films included Guardians of the Galaxy, The Lego Movie and the second Hobbit film.

Producers behind huge apps such as Angry Birds, which has been sold more than 12 million times, earned Finnish Developers Rovio Entertainment, now earn more than even the biggest stars like Tom Cruise.

Asymco also pointed out that the average app developer who has a medium sized hit would earn more than their Hollywood equivalent, as many actors only earn a few thousand for small roles.

Asymco did not reveal its final figure for US box office sales but analysts have put it in the region of \$10 billion, slightly lower than its app counterpart.

In their report they said: 'This is quite a story. Put another way, in 2014 (Apple) app developers earned more than Hollywood did from box office in the US.'

Asymco said that looking at apps sold on the iTunes store was not the full picture and that its survey did not include revenue from Google's Android operating system apps.

Likewise Hollywood makes other money from merchandising and other sources.

However, the trend shows how tech is taking over from the silver screen - and will continue to do so.

Asymco said that in the first week of January, a fallow time for Hollywood consumers had already spent \$500 million (£333 million) on apps through the iTunes store.

According to Apple, last year the most popular paid for app for the iPhone was Minecraft, a game which allows users to build their own world from scratch.

The most popular free app in 2014 was Facebook's messenger app, followed by messaging services WhatsApp and Snapchat.

Obama to skip

FROM PAGE 16

Obama will hold talks with Narendra Modi during his visit to New Delhi, which comes just months after the Indian prime minister made a high-profile official visit to the United States.

As well as holding bilateral talks, the leaders of the world's two largest democracies will address business leaders and appear on a radio phone-in tomorrow.

Besides discussing to boost counter-terrorism efforts, Obama is expected to lobby Modi to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and boost clean energy production, although White House aides say a formal agreement is unlikely.

While observers do not expect any major policy breakthroughs on the curtailed three-day trip, both sides say the invitation to Obama for the Republic Day celebrations emphasises a new closeness.

Modi was effectively blacklisted by the US until last February when it became clear he had a real prospect of winning elections against the ruling centre-left Congress party.

The Hindu nationalist was chief minister of Gujarat when deadly communal violence erupted in 2002, lead-

ing him to be be shunned by Washington and Europe.

In an interview published Friday, Obama said "the stars are aligned" to enable the United States and India to forge a global partnership and expressed hopes of making "concrete progress" on a range of issues during his visit.

But the cancellation of the Taj Mahal visit will deprive the country's top tourist attraction of publicity at a time when the government is trying to boost visitor numbers.

Hundreds of cleaners had been hired to spruce up the white marbled mausoleum in Agra in preparation for the Obamas' arrival.

Their time in Delhi will be covered by a massive press pack and organisers wanted to ensure a picture-perfect backdrop.

Twitter users rushed to thank the president for orchestrating a clean-up of the mausoleum in the town of Agra, built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan for his beloved empress who died during childbirth in 1631.

"It was just Obama's clever plan to get Agra cleaned up. Thank you Obama," posted one under the name Anamika.

Santal houses

FROM PAGE 16

men including Joseph Tudu, Stephen Tudu and Masrui Tudu.

Witnesses said when Zahurul Islam and his son Sohag started tilling the land around 9:30 am, Santal people protested, claiming it was their property. Soon the two groups were locked in wranglings. As a few more Bangalees joined hands with Zahurul and Sohag, it turned into a violent clash.

Zahurul had tried to grab this land many times before, locals claimed.

In yesterday's clash, Santals used their traditional weapon bow and arrow. Sohag died on the spot as he was hit in the middle of the chest by three arrows. Zahurul was also injured in the clash, said locals.

Police recovered the body from the spot and sent it to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital for an autopsy. Zahurul too was sent to the hospital for treatment.

Before Zahurul was admitted to the hospital, our Dinajpur correspondent asked him whether he had any legal document proving his ownership of the disputed land. He however could not say if he had any papers.

When the news of Sohag's death spread, around three to four hundred people from nearby villages rushed to the Santal village and vandalised their houses and looted food grains, utensils, furniture and cattle.

The angry mob also set fire to at least 12 houses in the village, Joseph

Tudu claimed.

The arson attack and looting continued for nearly two hours.

"There is not a single grain of food left in the village. They've even taken away the tubewells after dismantling them," said a Santal woman requesting anonymity.

A team of police from Parbatipur police station arrived in the village around 11:40am. However, they could not bring the situation under control. Later, additional forces of police, BGB and Rab members from Dinajpur and Phulbari went there and controlled the situation.

Ahmed Shamim Al Raji and Ruhul Amin, deputy commissioner and superintendent of police of Dinajpur, visited the village around 1:40 pm. They said police and BGB forces would guard the area for maintaining peace.

Rabindranath Soren, president of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, said: "The dispute began soon after the independence, which saw several clashes in the past decades. In fact, there were several attempts to grab the land of indigenous people here."

At least 2,500 acres of land belonging to the Santal people were grabbed by Bangalees with forged documents in Dinajpur alone since 1975. At least 40 Santal people who used to own land or protested attempts at grabbing their land were killed over the years in the district, added Rabindranath.

Koko dies of heart attack

FROM PAGE 1

said Atiqur after talking to Shimpu over the phone.

Koko was 45.

He had left the country for Bangkok for treatment in July, 2008 after getting out of jail on parole.

However, his parole was cancelled on August 19, 2010 for violating its terms, and was asked to return home. But he didn't come back and moved to Malaysia, along with his wife and two children.

In September 2007, he, along with his mother, was detained by joint forces from their cantonment residence in connection with the Gatco corruption case during the tenure of the last caretaker government that assumed office following a political turmoil.

While in jail, he was accused in four other cases on various charges including money laundering and extortion.

Koko was awarded six years' imprisonment on June 23, 2011 in the money laundering case.

Khaleda last met her two sons together in July, 2011 in Singapore when she went there for treatment.

Tarique, who left the country for the UK after his release from prison on parole, went to Singapore from London and Koko from Malaysia.

The wife of Khaleda's younger brother Shameem Iskander informed her about Koko's death around 2:30pm, said party insiders.

As the news of Koko's death spread, leaders of BNP and its allies thronged the BNP chief's Gulshan office to console her.

Khaleda has been staying there since she was barred from getting out early this month. She, however, refused to leave the office even after additional law enforcers, deployed there at that time, were withdrawn on

January 19.

Koko's body was kept at the mortuary of Malaysia University Hospital in Ampang.

His first namaz-e-janaza will be held at Nagala Mosque in Kuala Lumpur after Zohr prayers today. His body may be flown to Dhaka either tomorrow or the day after.

Koko left behind his wife Syeda Shamila Rahman, and two daughters -- Zafira Rahman and Zahiya Rahman.

Koko's sudden death has put BNP policymakers in a dilemma whether to continue the ongoing nationwide blockade or suspend it for his burial.

However, minutes after meeting Khaleda yesterday evening, BNP leader Rafiqul Islam Mia, said the BNP chairperson urged the party men to carry on the agitation to restore people's democratic rights.

Eight hours after Koko's death, BNP in a press release at 8:00pm officially informed the media about it. The party announced programmes including recitation of the Holy Quran and doa mahfil in mosques across the country today and tomorrow.

CASES AGAINST KOKO
Like his elder brother and Senior BNP Vice Chairman Tarique, Koko was accused of making money by abusing state power when his mother was prime minister between 2001 and 2006.

He was sued for his alleged involvement in corruption, extortion and money laundering.

MONEY LAUNDERING
On June 23, 2011, Koko and Ismail Hossain Saimon, son of former shipping minister, were sentenced to six years' rigorous imprisonment for laundering over Tk 20 crore to Singapore.

They were fined Tk 38.83 crore each in the case filed by the Anti-Corruption

Commission on March 17, 2009.

According to the charges, Koko and Saimon received Tk 19.71 crore in bribe from German telecom giant Siemens and Chinese engineering firm China Harbour Ltd to win them telecom and terminal-building contracts. They later siphoned the money off to Singapore.

The ACC said it brought back 20.41 lakh Singapore dollars laundered by Koko and his associates in 2012.

GATCO GRAFT CASE
Koko also faced another corruption case filed by the ACC on September 2, 2007.

Koko and his mother were charged for illegally awarding container-handling job at two container depots in Dhaka and Chittagong to Global Agro Trade (Private) Co Ltd (Gatco). The High Court stayed the case proceedings.

ILLEGAL WEALTH
Koko was sued by the ACC on April 23, 2008 for concealing information about properties worth Tk 11.20 lakh and illegally amassing wealth worth Tk 2.23 crore which was disproportionate to his known sources of income.

The case was stayed in 2008.

EXTORTION

He was also accused in an extortion case filed by a proprietor, Add Media Ltd, on May 16, 2007. The plaintiff alleged that Koko and two of his brothers-in-law extorted Tk 1.20 crore from him.

The case was stayed following an HC order.

TAX EVASION
National Board of Revenue on March 1, 2010 filed a case against Koko, accusing him of evading Tk 52.39 lakh of his income tax between 2002-2003 and 2006-2007 fiscal years.



The case is pending at Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court.

Child killings in I Coast raise fears of ritual sacrifices

AFP, Abidjan

More than 20 children have been kidnapped in recent weeks in the Ivory Coast, most of them later found dead with mutilated bodies, police said Friday, raising fears of a wave of ritual sacrifices.

"The phenomenon is real and unusual. Our services have registered 21 cases from December to yesterday (Thursday)," police chief Brindou M'Bia told a press conference.

Heart Problems

Advised Heart Surgery?

Trust the experts in Complete Heart Care for over last 25 years

Call between 10am & 6pm
+91 9830110888

birlaheart.org 1/1 National Library Avenue, Kolkata - 700 027