

## Saudi airstrike

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said, quoted by state television. "The Saudi government is responsible for the damage caused and for the situation of members of staff who were injured," Ansari added, without specifying when the alleged strike took place or the seriousness of the injuries. "The Islamic republic reserves the right to pursue its interests in this matter," he said.

Iran also announced that a ban on Iranians travelling to the Saudi holy city of Makkah for the umrah pilgrimage would remain in place indefinitely, reports AFP. Longstanding frictions between the Middle East's foremost Sunni and Shia Muslim powers exploded into a full-blown diplomatic crisis at the weekend when Riyadh executed Shia cleric and activist Nimr al-Nimr along with 46 others.

Meanwhile, the deputy head of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) told Saudi Arabia yesterday it would "collapse" in coming years if it kept pursuing what he called its sectarian policies in the region.

"The policies of the Saudi regime will have a domino effect and they will be buried under the avalanche they have created," the IRGC's second-in-command, Brigadier General Hossein Salami, was quoted as saying by the Fars news agency.

"If the Saudis do not correct their path, their regime will collapse in coming years."

Salami compared Saudi policies with those of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi president overthrown by US forces in 2003, reports Reuters.

"The path the Saudi regime is taking is like the one Saddam took in the 1980s and 90s. He started a war with Iran, executed prominent clerics and top officials, suppressed dissidents and ended up having that miserable fate," he said.

China has sent an envoy to Saudi Arabia and Iran amid an escalating feud, the Chinese foreign ministry said yesterday, calling on all sides to exercise restraint.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming was currently in Saudi Arabia and would travel on to Iran, ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a daily news briefing.

"We hope the situation in the Middle East can move in the direction of amelioration," Hua told reporters.

"We hope that all parties can remain calm and exercise restraint and appropriately resolve relevant issues via dialogue and consultation," Hua added.

## Teachers stage

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continued for two hours with participation of some 200 teachers.

While bringing to a halt all academic activities of the public universities across the country, teachers threatened to declare stern programmes unless the government restores selection grade and time scale in the eighth pay scale.

They have been waging a peaceful movement for nine months but have not held any programme hampering students' education, said Maksud Kamal, general secretary of the teachers' association, addressing the rally at DU in the capital.

"But as we have been pushed to the wall, we have no choice," he said, adding they would go for non-stop work abstention if their demands were not met by January 11.

If the regular academic activities at universities are hampered, bureaucrats will be responsible since they have been conspiring against teachers, Maksud said.

"We are not demonstrating for salaries but for our dignity that is undermined in the new pay scale," he added.

At the programme, the association leaders alleged that a section of bureaucrats was trying to create confusion about the status, age limit and job nature of public university teachers.

Referring to a meeting with Finance Minister AMA Muhiith on December 6, they said the minister had assured them of retaining the selection grade and time scale in the pay scale.

Besides, the minister had said all facilities ensured in the seventh pay scale would be retained in the new one, but he did not keep his words, the protesters said.

Public university teachers have been waging a movement, demanding a review of the pay structure, retention of the selection grade and time scale, and that a certain percentage of the university professors should enjoy the status of senior secretaries.

Teachers of all 37 public universities under the association have been protesting against the new pay scale since May, saying it downgrades their status.

Since then, they advocated a four-point charter of demands, including formation of a commission to prepare

## Not ready to face

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uncompromising stance to reclaim, save and find new open space for management of a possible earthquake disaster," he observes.

Buildings are still being constructed without proper soil tests and compliance with the national building code, leaving those extremely vulnerable to earthquakes, Qayyum adds.

Fourteen government organisations including health, city corporations, fire service, utility service authorities and Rajuk, which have direct links with earthquake disaster management, seem reluctant to put earthquake as a priority agenda, he informs.

Prof Maksud Kamal, chairman of disaster science and management department at Dhaka University, said those organisations lack preparedness as well as coordination with each other with no central "incident command system" for coordination.

He added many of the trained volunteers are going off track, as they know that the organisations do not own them.

According to Prof Kamal, who led the CDMP earthquake technical team, in the event of a 7.5 magnitude earthquake within the Bangladesh territory, more than 1.4 lakh one-to-four-storey masonry buildings in a 300-sqkm area of Dhaka city might collapse.

Brig Gen Ali Ahmed Khan, director general of Fire Service and Civil Defence, echoed the same and added that his department and armed forces have some isolated contingency plans.

Whatever plan is there, it is all on papers, said Ali, adding, it has to be put into ground exercise to see how far it works.

The fire service has 57 sets of rescue and search equipment like cutting tools and drilling hammers. The army also has some heavy equipment like concrete breakers and excavators.

Ali said gas explosion, fire from electricity with chemical warehouses and factories in residential areas, and water contamination following an earthquake might take the situation out of control.

Only 300km out of total 2,300km road network in the city corporations is accessible to fire service rescue vehicles and heavy equipment, he said, adding, even the accessible roads might be blocked in case of building collapse.

Md Shah Kamal, secretary to the disaster management and relief ministry, said 32,000 volunteers for urban areas would be trained under a five-year resilience project.

"We are making a disaster management plan with whatever open space is available. We have already requested the city mayors to reclaim and conserve the designated open space," he added.

"A devastating earthquake looms large over Bangladesh with the January 4 earthquake being a precursor and a wakeup call for us," said eminent seismologist and geologist Prof Syed Humayun Akhter.

Two potential sources of major earthquakes in Bangladesh are Dauki fault and the "Fold and Thrust" belt of Chittagong, Myanmar, Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram, he said. The amount of energy caused by India-Burma tectonic plate contraction is trapped along these two sources and is enough to trigger an eight magnitude earthquake, he observed.

The 1548 Assam earthquake and the 1762 Chittagong-Arakan coast great earthquake released a significant amount of energy, but the Feni-Sylhet section of the fault line has not released any energy in the last 1,000 years, he said.

"This section right in the middle of Bangladesh remains the most potential threat of earthquake in the country," Prof Akhter observed.

Mohammad Abu Sadeque, general secretary of Bangladesh Earthquake Society and director of Housing and Building Research Institute, said preparedness taken so far to respond to

### HIGHLIGHTS

No central 'incident command system' for coordination

Lack of adequate open space for disaster management

Government organisations lack coordination

More than 1.4 lakh out of around four lakh one-to-four-storey buildings in Dhaka city apprehended to collapse with a 7.5 magnitude earthquake

More than 70,000 buildings in Dhaka city apprehended to be damaged with a 7.5-magnitude earthquake

Only 300km out of 2,300km roads in city corporation areas accessible to rescue vehicles

Only 57 sets of rescue and search equipment belong to fire service and some concrete breakers and excavators to armed forces

earthquake devastation is not worth mentioning.

"It has become evident during dealing with just a single incident of collapse of ten-storey Rana Plaza," he said.

He suggests that the government should immediately procure early warning devices for auto-trip to shut down electricity, gas and water supply just prior to a jolt to avoid catastrophe caused by fire.

"The state of overall preparedness is very unsatisfactory," said Mehedi Ahmed Ansary, professor of civil engineering and founding general secretary of Bangladesh Earthquake Society, adding that the government should seek collaboration with professionals and academic institutions to tackle the possible debacle.

The 6.7-magnitude January 4 earthquake with the epicentre in Imphal of Manipur, 353 kilometres off Dhaka, strongly shook Bangladesh. Five people reportedly died of cardiac arrest being panicked and 100 were injured during the jolt.

The World Bank and the UNDP conducted two studies on earthquake impacts in Bangladesh in 2010 and 2012 respectively. The reports estimate about 2-3 lakh people will either die or get injured and the nation would suffer an economic loss of \$10 billion.

## World's first slum

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Slumdog Millionaire.

Now the slum, which is one of the largest in Asia, is set to become home to the world's first slum museum next month.

According to organisers, the museum will showcase some of the myriad of objects that are produced every year in Dharavi.

"It will be the first museum ever created in a slum," Spanish artist Jorge Rubio, who is behind the initiative, told AFP.

The small mobile museum will open in February for two months and display everything from pottery and textiles to recycled items, he added.

The organisers of 'Design Museum Dharavi' say they want to challenge people's perceptions of slums by highlighting the creative talent that resides in them.

More than a million people live in the maze of alleyways that make up Dharavi with many working in the area's mini-factories, which produce every kind of goods imaginable.

Following the success of Slumdog Millionaire, the slum has become a tourist attraction and guides offer tours of its hundreds of workshops.

In 2010, Prince Charles cited Dharavi as a role model for sustainable living, praising its habit of recycling waste. Last year, the slum hosted its first art biennale.

More than half of Mumbai's 20 million inhabitants live in slums, enduring cramped conditions, poor ventilation and a lack of toilets.

## A haven for migratory

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They fly here from Siberia, searching for food during winters, said Pijush Kanti Hori, former chairman of the zoology department of Patuakhali Government College.

Like previous times, they came in hundreds in early December and will stay until the winter retreats at the end of February.

The land of the shoal, about 35 kilometres south of Patuakhali town, is soft and so is not cultivable or fit for building any structure, local people said.

Devoid of people, it thus became a sanctuary for migratory birds that live off a plenty of crabs, small fishes and snails.

However, small fishes are their favourite, local fishermen said.

These birds look like geese and weigh about 5 Kgs, said Abul Kalam, a fisherman of Bogi village under Dashmina upazila.

Its beak, legs and neck are longer than the goose.

These migratory birds are also found in many other remote shoals in

Patuakhali, where people's movement is very little, said Abdul Mannan, another fisherman of the area.

Female birds lay three to six eggs, and young birds come out within 22 to 28 days. As the winter ends, the mother birds return to Siberia with the young ones.

These guest birds enrich the natural beauty of the area, said Toufiq Sarder, leader of Manta community, adding a gang of hunters often kill these birds by laying poisonous traps and other means.

These birds are sold privately and secretly. Each of them fetches Tk 400 to Tk 500, Toufiq said.

Stringent actions should be taken against poachers to save all kinds of migratory birds, said Pijush, ex-chairman of the zoology department of Patuakhali Government College.

He suggested declaring some shoals to be sanctuary for migratory birds that come during the winter season.

"If we fail to ensure safe haven for these birds, they will not come in future."

## Man with knife

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under his coat with a wire hanging from it, but the device "contained no explosives", a source close to the investigation said.

With France also still grieving after the massacre of 130 people by jihadists in Paris in November, Hollande used his speech to call for greater cooperation between the security services.

"Faced with these adversaries, it is essential that every service -- police, gendarmerie, intelligence, military -- work in perfect harmony, with the greatest transparency, and that they share all the information at their disposal," the president said.

Many of the jihadists in both January's rampage and the attacks in November were known to French security services, having either travelled abroad to fight with extremists or been prevented from doing so.

Hollande said that since the attack on Charlie Hebdo, nearly 200 people in France had been placed under travel restrictions to prevent them joining up with IS in Syria or Iraq.

The president said the three police officers killed in January's attacks "died so that we could live in freedom".

A police bodyguard who was guarding the newspaper's editor, Charb, was killed alongside him by brothers Cherif and Said Kouachi and they shot dead another policeman, Ahmed Merabet, as he sprawled on the pavement near Charlie Hebdo's offices.

The next day, a policewoman was killed by jihadist Amedy Coulibaly in the southern suburb of Montrouge, apparently as he was heading to attack a Jewish school.

Among changes set to be introduced in the wake of the November attacks are new guidelines allowing police to keep their weapons even when off-duty.

The president reiterated his pledge to boost the number of police and armed gendarmes by 5,000.

## Govt to form

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During the meeting, the Prokrichi-BCS Somonnoy Committee demanded the restoration of time scale and selection grade and the removal of inter-cadre discrimination, sources said.

Leaders of the committee were asked to submit their demands to the taskforce.

The taskforce will scrutinise the proposals in the next three months and come up with a decision, said an official.

It will also create new posts so that the government officials are promoted regularly, according to the official.

On Monday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina instructed the principal secretary to sit with the protesting government officials and deal with the differences.

In a separate meeting at the finance ministry, the secretaries of the finance division, the education ministry and the public administration ministry also discussed the demands of public university teachers.

The intervention from the prime minister came after different sections of professionals, including public university teachers, raised concerns about the new pay scale's "discriminatory provisions".

Since the issuance of the eighth national pay scale gazette on December 15 last year, public university teachers have been protesting the exclusion of selection grade and time scale.

They have threatened to go on an indefinite work stoppage from January 11 if "the discriminatory provisions" are not cancelled by January 10.

Doctors, engineers, agriculturists and scientists have also been pressing for fixing "anomalies" in the new pay scale.

### CONVICTED ASYLUM SEEKERS

## Germany divided

### over their

### expulsion

AFP, Berlin

German politicians waged a heated debate yesterday over whether to make it easier to expel convicted asylum seekers, after a series of sexual assaults on New Year's Eve blamed on men of foreign origin.

Authorities have said there is no concrete proof that the perpetrators of the attacks in Cologne were asylum seekers, but critics of Chancellor Angela Merkel's open-door approach to those fleeing war have seized on the opportunity to draw a link.

Victims described their attackers as being "Arab or North African" in appearance, and 16 suspects are being investigated, but no one has yet been charged.

As outrage grew in Germany over the assaults, which included two rapes and several accounts of gropings, Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said foreigners who commit serious crimes "must assume they will be deported".

# As population soars, India battles to tame malnutrition

AFP, Darbhanga

As another dangerously underweight toddler balances precariously on his set of scales, Dr Om Prakash knows he has to move fast to avert tragedy.

"The children who are severely malnourished can die between a few hours to a few days," says the doctor during a shift at an intensive care unit exclusively for children in India's poorest state.

"For the health of any person, nutrition is the first requirement. When nutrition is affected, all of the body's functions are deranged."

The 30-bed hospital at Darbhanga in the eastern state of Bihar teems with children with protruding bellies and sunken eyes -- telltale signs of wasting and stunting, owing to severe malnutrition.

While its economy is growing at a healthy rate, India still lags behind some of its poorer neighbours on child nutrition with more than 40 million stunted children, according to a recently released report.

Despite the government spending billions of rupees on tackling the scourge, it has yet to make a serious dent in a problem perpetuated by poverty, gender inequality, and disease.

"India actually houses the largest number of malnourished children in the world, larger than in sub-Saharan Africa," Sashwati Banerjee, Managing Director, Sesame Workshop India told AFP.

These children, if they survive, will grow up shorter and weaker, with their brains and immune systems compromised, more vulnerable to illness.

Between 2006 and 2014, stunting levels in children under five declined from 48 percent to 39 percent, accord-

ing to the Global Nutrition Report.

But it still far exceeds a global average of 24 percent, found the report, which was overseen by the International Food Policy Research Institute.

Shrivelled and scrawny, the children at the Bihar centre are weighed in bright blue plastic tubs, normally used to carry water or laundry.

There are no toys or drawings on the walls, only the sound of children wailing while others sit motionless and stare, dazed.

Doctors feed them a special concoction of sugar and milk based on how much they weigh.

"It would be a disaster if normal food was given to them. So we give them food that has lower calories and is easily digestible," said Prakash.

"Over time we increase the amount, then we switch to semi-solid food and gradually to the locally available food."

Zalunum Khatoon's four-year-old grandson Shahadat Hussein weighs eight kilos, just half of the normal weight for his age.

"He was on medication for nine months, then he had a fever all the time and he started to lose weight," she said, as doctors and nurses busily zipped in and out of the facility.

While overall levels of malnutrition are on the slide, eradication efforts are also being undermined by the rapid rise in India's population which is expected to surpass China's by 2022, according to UN projections.

Bihar, which already has a population of 104 million, has one of the fastest rates of growth in the country with the average woman giving birth to four children. Often this is more mouths than they can afford to feed.

## Suicide bomb kills 50

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There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack but the Islamic State jihadist group, which has been growing in power in Libya, has previously carried out many suicide bombings in the country.

A spokesman for the Zliten hospital, Moamer Kadi, told AFP it had received at least 40 bodies and was treating 70 wounded.

"We don't have a clear idea of the total toll, other victims were taken to hospitals in Misrata and Tripoli," he said.

The hospital in Misrata, about 55 kilometres east of Zliten, said it had received at least four bodies and was treating some 50 wounded.

The UN envoy to Libya, Martin Kobler, denounced the attack and called for national unity.

"I condemn in the strongest terms today's deadly suicide attack in Zliten, call on all Libyans to urgently unite in fight against terrorism," he wrote on Twitter.

Libya has been beset by chaos since the 2011 overthrow of long time dictator Moamer Gaddafi and IS has been gaining influence.

The country has had rival administrations since August 2014, when an Islamist-backed militia alliance overran Tripoli, forcing the government to

take refuge in the east.

The United Nations is pressing the rival sides to accept a power-sharing deal.

On December 17, under UN guidance, lawmakers from both sides and a number of independent political figures signed a deal for a unity government, but the agreement has yet to be implemented.

It has so far failed to win unanimous backing from Libya's two rival parliaments, one based in the eastern city of Tobruk and the other in Tripoli.

In a statement after yesterday's attack, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini urged Libyans to back the agreement.

"Once again the Libyans are mourning victims of an attack," she said. "The people of Libya deserve peace and security and... they have a great opportunity to set aside their divisions and work together, united, against the terrorist threat facing their country."

World powers fear Libya could descend further into chaos and become a stronghold of IS on Europe's doorstep.

The group claimed a string of atrocities in Libya last year, including the January attack on a luxury hotel in Tripoli known for hosting foreign diplomats and Libyan officials, which killed nine people.

## Dhaka, Riyadh

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its mandate, how it will function, operate, and coordinate.

But the foreign ministry press release did not mention anything about the discussion on the Islamic alliance. Ali paid a three-day visit to Saudi Arabia from January 5-7.

The press release said the two foreign ministers reviewed "the whole gamut of bilateral relations between the two countries as well as exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest, including mutual cooperation at the UN and other international fora, including the OIC".

It said both the ministers "agreed to work on a number of instruments for cooperation on investment, culture and education, agriculture etc" ahead of the probable visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina so that "those could be signed during the visit".

At the meeting, Minister Adel al-Jubeir lauded the role of the Bangladesh community in the Kingdom which is contributing to economic development of both nations, the release said, adding that he also agreed to have further cooperation in recruiting more skilled and semi-skilled workers, including doctors and nurses, from Bangladesh.

In this regard, both the foreign ministers agreed that a delegation from the Saudi health ministry "may undertake a visit to Bangladesh to inspect the medical degrees and other facilities for future recruitment of Bangladeshi health professionals".