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CELEBRATING TRADITION



Over 2,000 people of villages near the Madai Beel in Bishwanath of Sylhet take part in a hundreds-year-old fishing festival. Armed with whatever fishing gear available, they waded into the drying water-bodies and spend a day of festive fishing on the last Saturday of February every year. Even some well-off Bangladeshi expatriates, living in the UK and the Middle East, fly in to take part in this.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

SYRIA 'CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES'

Truce takes hold

Russia halts all bombing sorties as guns mostly fall silent in the war-torn country; UNSC backs plan

Fighting subsided across much of Syria yesterday as the first major ceasefire of the five-year war took hold and an international task force prepared to begin monitoring the landmark truce.

Guns fell silent at midnight in suburbs around the capital and the bomb-scarred northern city of Aleppo, AFP correspondents said, after a day of intense Russian air strikes on rebel bastions.

State media said "terrorist groups" fired a number of shells at residential neighbourhoods in Damascus, but it did not report any casualties and appeared to play down the attack.

Rebels also accused the government of intermittent "truce violations" in parts of the country.

The nationwide cessation of hostilities, brokered by Washington and Moscow, is seen as a crucial but fragile step towards ending a war that has claimed 270,000 lives and displaced more than half the population.

It faces formidable challenges including the exclusion of the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group and al-Qaeda's Syria affiliate Al-Nusra Front which control large parts of the country.

"Honestly, I was surprised that the calm lasted through the night," said Ammar al-Rai, a 22-year-old medical student in Damascus.

"I think this is the first time we've woken up without the sound of shelling." United Nations envoy Staffan de Mistura said peace talks would resume on March 7 if the truce holds and more aid is delivered -- a key sticking point in negotiations.

The special task force was due to meet in Geneva yesterday at 1400 GMT to oversee developments.

Its co-chairs Moscow and Washington have set up rival offices to monitor

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UTTARA GAS FIRE

After two sons, now father dies

The father of the five-member family that got burnt in a fire at an Uttara flat on Friday died of his injuries yesterday, raising the death toll from the incident to three.

Mohammad Shahnawaz, 50, a maintenance engineer of the US embassy in Dhaka, breathed his last at 5:55pm at the burn unit of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), said resident surgeon Partha Sankar Pal.

He had 95 percent of his body burnt. On Friday, his sons Sharleen bin Nawaz, 15, and Jian bin Nawaz, 1, died of their burn injuries.

Shahnawaz's wife Sumaiya Khanom with 90 percent of her body burnt was undergoing treatment at the burn unit, said doctors there. She lost her eyesight and was in a critical condition.

Their other son nine-year-old Jarif bin Nawaz had six percent of his body burnt. He was released from hospital and is now with his relatives.

The fire broke out around 6:30am when Shahnawaz lit the gas stove to make tea in their rented flat on the top floor of a seven-storey building. Sumaiya was praying and their sons were asleep. The fire engulfed the flat within a minute, giving them no time to escape, said relatives quoting the injured.

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PRIEST KILLING

3 suspects remanded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A Panchagarh court yesterday placed three men on 18 days' remand in two cases over the killing of a Hindu priest in Debiganj upazila.

Judge Marzia Khatun of the Cognisance Court-2 granted 10-day remand for each of them in the murder case filed by the victim's family.

In the other case, filed by police over illegally possessing firearms and explosives, the court placed the three on eight-day remand each.

The accused are Alamgir Hossain, 35, Ramzan Ali, 22, and Hares Ali, 35.

After the suspects were produced before the court, the prosecution claimed that the three were members of the banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

"They were arrested in different raids on Thursday night, police claimed on Friday but refused to

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USING WOMEN AS SEX SLAVES

Two ex-military men get 360 years' jail in Guatemala

BBC ONLINE

A Guatemala court has sentenced two former members of the military to 360 years in jail for the murder, rape and sexual enslavement of indigenous women.

Francisco Reyes and Giron Heriberto Valdez Asij were found guilty of crimes against humanity.

The historic ruling is the first successful prosecution for sexual violence committed during Guatemala's military conflict in the 1980s.

There were jubilant scenes in court as the judge read out the sentence.

"This is historic, it is a great step for women and above all for the victims," said Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu, who attended the hearing.

Francisco Reyes Giron, who was the commander of the Sepur Zarco military base, was found guilty of holding 15 women in sexual and domestic slavery and for killing one woman and her two daughters.

Heriberto Valdez Asij, a paramilitary who carried out commissions for the army, was convicted for the same enslavement, as well as the forced disappearance of seven men.

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Two children strangled by 'stepbrother'

A CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

Two children were strangled to death allegedly by their stepbrother in Comilla city yesterday.

The dead are Mejbaul Haq Moni, 6, and Mehedi Hasan Joy, 8, sons of Abul Kalam of Dakshin Rasulpur area. They were kindergarten and class-I students at local Holy Child Ideal School.

Police, following primary investigation, suspect that the children were killed by their stepbrother Sofiul Islam alias Choton, a fourth year student at World University in the capital.

Sofiul was absconding.

Police, quoting locals, said the victims were the children of Kamal, a grocer, and his second wife Rekha Begum.

The couple were out visiting a relative around 10:00am yesterday and the children were at school.

Later, the victim returned home and fell asleep. Sofiul, who used to stay at the house occasionally, strangled them with a

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ICT PROSECUTION

Law minister believes CJ would make observations

BSS, Dhaka

Against the backdrop of the apex court's dissatisfaction with the way the prosecution and the investigation agency of the ICT are handling the war crimes cases, Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said he believed that the chief justice would give observations about the matter in an upcoming verdict.

"Whatever the chief justice has said is discernible. I learned about it [the issue] from the reports appearing in the media. The thing for me to do now is to know why the honorable chief justice has said that," he said.

The minister was talking to reporters after a seminar on arbitration organised at

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Heart of gold

Noakhali teashop feeds the mentally ill for free

ANDREW EAGLE

Far from home and still further from peace of mind, nobody knows how the handful of mentally ill outsiders arrived over the years, in Sagoria Bazar of Noakhali's Hatiya Island. Locals speculate they accidentally hitched a ride on a Hatiya-bound ship and, once on the island, never found a way off.

Without local kin or lifetime neighbours, without organised support, the mentally ill outsiders rely on islanders' kindness to meet daily needs. In teashop proprietor Abu Kalam, 48, in particular, they have found a loyal friend.

"Anwar likes to shred paper," Kalam says. "He likes to clean. If Anwar sees any dirty area in the market he ties it."

Anwar has lived in the area for over a decade and villagers say he's Indian because originally he only spoke Hindi. It's also possible he's from a tea garden.

"Once I tried to ask where he was from. He just stayed silent," says Kalam. "He knows some Bangla words now."

Anwar reaches Kalam's teashop daily. He feels comfortable enough at Abu Kaka's, as the teashop is called, to voice food preferences in Bangla words: tea,

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Abu Kalam in his tea and snacks stall in Sagoria Bazar of Hatiya. The local mentally challenged know whenever hungry, they can go to Kalam who always treats them with free food.

SCRAP SHOP FIRE

2 more die; toll now 4

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two more people, who suffered burns in a fire at a scrap metal shop in the capital's New Market area on February 24, died yesterday, raising the death toll to four.

Shohag, 15, breathed his last around 5:30am while Mehedi Hasan, 20, around 8:45pm at the burn unit of

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PRAYER TIMING
FEBRUARY 28

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5-15 12-45 4-30 6-05 7-30
JAMAAT 5-50 1-15 4-45 6-10 8-00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION