

Shazneen

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In July 2006, the High Court upheld the death penalty of five of the convicts but acquitted Shaniram. Later, the five lodged appeals with the Supreme Court. Their appeals are pending with the Appellate Division of the SC.

Like every year, Shazneen's family has arranged a milad mehfil after the Asr prayers at 5:30pm today at their residence -- House# NE(J) 4, Road# 83, Gulshan-2 in the capital.

Shazneen's father Latifur Rahman, chairman of Transcom Group, and mother Shahnaz Rahman have requested all relatives, friends and well-wishers to attend the milad mehfil.

Uzbek bank

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their bulky yet small fortune.

The suspects, who reportedly include a former security guard at the bank, were subsequently arrested, and now face up to 16 years in prison.

The major problem for anybody carrying cash in Uzbekistan is that the largest denomination note is the 5,000 som bill, worth \$1.73 (£1.20) on official currency markets, but trading for as little as 80 cents on the black market.

Low value coins and banknotes are virtually worthless, and the bank raid would have comprised of many thousands of notes.

A local businessman told Radio Ozodlik that the episode shows how poor some Uzbek banks are, as well as the benefits of carrying any other currency than the som: "A gang attacks one bank, breaks its window and safes. But their fortune is just 2,500 dollars. It's a joke - I have the same amount of money in my pocket."

The CA-News website says that due to the absence of cash in the country, companies in Uzbekistan complain that they cannot get money from banks to pay their employees.

Pensions have also been delayed, and citizens experience difficulties accessing bank remittances sent to them by relatives abroad.

Huda reveals

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SZM Salehuddin secretary general. He announced the names of 71 leaders of the committee, including himself, at the capital's Jatiya Press Club.

On November 20 last year, Huda floated Trinamool BNP for what he said "beginning a new journey of BNP" as a political venture. It is the fifth party launched by the former minister since he quit BNP in June 2012.

In recent times, Huda has been found to be on good terms with the ruling Awami League.

He is still chairman of Bangladesh Manabdhikar Party and head of Bangladesh Nationalist Alliance, a platform of 30 political parties. Neither is registered with the Election Commission.

Huda founded Bangladesh Nationalist Front (BNF) in August 2012 and Bangladesh National Alliance in May last year.

Within two months of forming BNE, its member-secretary Abul Kamal Azad sacked Huda from the party and became the party chief. Huda later formed Bangladesh National Alliance.

"We have started our journey with some known and unknown faces. They may not have any political experience, but it does not mean they do not understand politics," Huda said yesterday.

"We realise that alternative politics is necessary in the country, in which people will have their faith," said Huda, who was also a minister in two regimes of BNP.

Huda also announced 62 district committees at the programme.

However, Jahanara Begum and Arif Moinuddin were not present at the programme.

Contacted, Jahanara, also adviser to the primary and mass education ministry, admitted that she was with the newly formed party and that she would work with Nazmul Huda to make the party strong.

RU professor

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the student of the university submitted a written complaint to the university authorities on October 21, 2014 accusing Prof Quamrul of sexually harassing her.

Later, on April 27 in 2015, a probe committee formed by the authorities recommended suspending the teacher as he was found guilty in the incident.

Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof Chowdhury Sarwar Jahan asked the probe committee to re-investigate the matter when the recommendation was made.

Later, a four-member review committee, headed by Treasurer Prof Sayen Uddin Ahmed, was formed, which also found him guilty, syndicate sources said.

Prof Mahbuba Kaniz Keya, president of the Committee against Sexual Harassment and Repression, said the accused teacher had sent many objectionable proposals to the female student via SMS.

The accused teacher was not available for comments despite several attempts to contact him over cellphones.

US buys Iranian heavy water

Pushes sanctions relief

AFP, New York

The United States said yesterday it would buy heavy water from Iran despite angry claims at home that it has already gone too far in granting Tehran nuclear sanctions relief.

Officials said the purchase would cost \$8.6 million, even as Republican lawmakers pressed for Iran to be excluded from any use of the US dollar or financial system.

The deal was announced as Secretary of State John Kerry was to meet his Iranian counterpart to discuss ways of ensuring Tehran benefits from the nuclear deal it signed last year.

Kerry was to see Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on the sidelines of the United Nations as the agreement came under sustained attack from critics in both countries.

Hardliners in Tehran argue that President Hassan Rouhani has been tricked into surrendering control of Iran's nuclear program without getting much in return.

And in Washington, President Barack Obama's critics claim he plans to allow an unreformed Iran access to US finance despite separate sanctions remaining in place.

Nevertheless, the State Department said the United States will buy 32 tonnes of heavy water from Iran.

"This transaction provides US industry with a critical product, while also enabling Iran to sell some of its excess heavy water," spokesman John Kirby said.

Kirby confirmed that the purchase was designed to help Iran meet its obligations under the nuclear accord implementation process, known as the "JCPOA."

"Iran's compliance with the JCPOA meant that this material had already been removed from Iran, ensuring it would not be used to support the development of a nuclear weapon," he said.

"Our purchase of the heavy water means that it will instead be used for critically important research and non-nuclear industrial requirements," he added.

The heavy water purchase is likely to come under attack in Washington as another concession to Tehran and a crack in the wall barring Iran from the US financial system.

But a US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP that the transaction did not break any rules.

Bangladesh envoy

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amount as well as the balance.

"On the forfeiture case, I was told that it can be summarily disposed if there's no other claimant," Gomes said, adding that naturally, no one would come forward because it had been established that this was part of the money stolen by hackers from the central bank of Bangladesh.

Based on an April 20 report by a Bangladeshi newspaper, Prothom Alo, citing initial findings on the cyberhacking, the IP address of the hackers was traced to Cairo, Egypt.

On the basis of the United Nations Conventions against Transnational Organized Crime, the DOJ is the one representing the government of Bangladesh in the local forfeiture case.

"This is fine," Gomes said, adding that whatever amount is collected would hopefully be sent this month to Bangladesh.

Gomes appealed to various players involved, including the casinos and remittance firm Philem Service, to return whatever money was still left with them.

In the case of casinos, he noted that these had already made a profit out of

the dirty money that was used to play on their gaming tables.

"Since they already made the profit out of the money which doesn't belong to them, they should return the whole amount," he said.

For instance, he noted the P107 million that was confiscated in Solaire and another P903 million in the hands of Macau-based casino operator Sun City.

The ambassador said the positive side of the incident was that the money amounting to \$9.8 million from Kim Wong was already in the hands of the authorities. "I feel the others who hold the money (which can be returned) should be returned forthwith."

Only \$17 million of the entire \$81 million dirty money flow has been unaccounted for. Wong suspects that the amount is still with Philem but the firm has denied his allegation.

Gomes welcomed a statement by RCBC president Lorenzo Tan that he would recommend to the board to set aside some money to give back to Bangladesh if the bank were found liable. On average, Tan said the bank could provide P1 billion to P2 billion a year for such types of provisions.

Bid to improve service

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a queue on the ground floor. But I actually should have gone to the second floor," said Afroza Begum who had paid Tk 6,900 -- twice the fee for normal passports -- for getting her machine readable passport (MRP) in three days.

It took her 20 days to get the passport, she told this correspondent last month. As per the DIP rules, an express or urgent passport should be delivered within seven working days and a normal passport in 21 working days.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal on many occasions have told the media that people can get their passports by five or seven days after submitting the application.

But that barely happens in reality. Mizanur Rahman of Mirpur needed his passport urgently to go on an official tour to Malaysia. He paid the express fee and applied for the passport on April 5 and he was given April 18 as the date for its delivery.

But when he came there on April 19, he was told that the passport was not ready yet.

"I have only a week before the Malaysia trip. If I don't get my passport timely, I may face problems in getting the visa. I might even miss the tour," a frustrated Mizanur told this correspondent at the DIP Agargaon office on Wednesday.

People are often made to go through unnecessary hassles if they do not want to pay the brokers, alleges Swapan Ahmed, who works at a private firm in Dhaka.

"I went to the DIP office to submit the application for an MRP as my manual passport had expired. When I reached the service counter after standing in a queue for two hours, an employee there asked for my identity card issued by my office.

"I insisted that it wasn't required but he was unyielding... Some fellow service-seekers then told me to pay the brokers or bribe the Ansar men on duty there but I would not."

Swapan had to go back home and come back the next day with the photocopy of his ID card.

"See, this is how the brokers are encouraged to fleece people," he said.

The Ansar members are supposed to

help the people but they hardly do it, alleged Rafik Ahmed, another private service-holder.

"The Ansar men are the bosses of the brokers. They are the real brokers who take bribes for speeding up the application procedures and delivery of passports," he said.

"This correspondent managed to talk to a broker at the DIP. He explained how they work with the Ansar men.

"We make the underhand dealings with the service-seekers. But it's the Ansar men who have connections with some DIP officials. So, they get the jobs done for us. In exchange, they get a cut of the money we take from the service-seekers."

However, Uzzal, the platoon commander of Ansar at the DIP, denied the allegations.

"My men here help the applicants only if they ask for help," he claimed.

Contacted, DIP Director General Brig Gen Masud Rezwana admitted that there were "some problems" in the service operations.

"It is true that people are fed up with the brokers. But we are conducting regular drives, catching them and handing them over to the police," he told The Daily Star, adding that many difficulties can be avoided if people become aware of their services.

Interactions

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and less reliance on lectures, and highlighted the need for developing skills at an early stage.

Prof Mesbahuddin Ahmed, head of quality assurance unit of University Grants Commission, Prof M Omar Rahman, vice-chancellor of IUB, and Dr Mahub Alam, sub-project manager of pedagogical development, also spoke.

Researchers warn

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The Paris Agreement on climate change was supposed to be signed yesterday in New York and was prepared at last December's UN climate conference.

It aims to keep global average temperatures "well below" the 2°C previously agreed -- and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C.

Cuba to lift cruise ship ban for citizens

Clears way for Carnival voyage

REUTERS, Havana

Cuba said yesterday it would lift a ban on Cubans and Cuban-Americans entering and leaving the Caribbean island by commercial vessels, opening the way for cruise operator Carnival Corp to set sail for the country next week.

Carnival's May 1 cruise, the first from the United States to the Communist-run country since the 1959 revolution, was thrown into doubt when the company triggered a backlash by refusing Cuban-Americans passage due to a Cold War-era law.

A statement carried by state-run media said that starting April 26, Cuban citizens would be authorized "independently of their migratory status to enter and leave as passengers and crews of cruise ships."

"This is a positive outcome and we are extremely pleased. We want to extend our sincere appreciation to Cuba and to our team who worked so hard to help make this happen," Carnival Chief Executive Arnold Donald said in a statement.

Carnival received approval from the United States last year to sail to Cuba, and the green light from Havana a day after US President Barack Obama's historic visit to the country in March.

UN rights chief urges Thailand to roll back military's powers

REUTERS, Bangkok

The top UN human rights official called on Thailand yesterday to suspend "dangerously sweeping" powers handed to the military and he encouraged dialogue on a draft constitution the military hopes will win approval in an August referendum.

The military has ruled since a May 2014 coup and has banned political gatherings, censored media and tried dissenters in military courts.

Junta chief Prayuth Chan-ocha has stressed the need to restore political stability after year of fractious and at times violent politics and he has promised to hold an election in mid-2017.

Last month, the junta gave soldiers powers of arrest and detention, including the authority to seize assets and search premises, a move rights groups say would only help strengthen the crackdown on critics.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a statement extending the military's powers was not the answer to "rebuilding Thailand's political landscape".

Strike

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Officials of the ministries of shipping, and labour and employment and representatives of vessel owners and workers are likely to attend the meeting.

Chowdhury Ashiqul Alam, general secretary of the BWTWE, said, "We will not lift the strike until our demands are met."

Mahub Uddin Ahmed Bir Bikram, chairman of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport (passenger carriers) Association, said, "We hope to reach a solution through negotiations tomorrow [today]."

Passengers, patients, workers and businesspeople are the worst victims of the strike, reports our Jhalokathi correspondent.

"I could not buy food for my family as I had no work at the terminal," said Nur Alam, a load and unload worker of Jhalokathi Launch Chat.

"The salt industries in Jhalokathi have thousands of workers, who will be jobless if the strike continues two or three days more. The industries are fully dependent on water communications," said Mahabub Hossen, president of Jhalokathi Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

Engine boats and trawlers carrying passengers were charging additional fares in the southern region taking advantage of the launch strike, reports our Barisal correspondent.

Buses were also overcrowded and tickets were not available for long route destinations.

Storm kills 2

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Chhatak upazila of Sunamganj. Anwara Begum, 55, of Marfir Char village, died when a tin-shed house collapsed on her during the storm, said Arifuzzaman, upazila nirbahi officer of Chhatak.

He said around 100 houses were also damaged. People in Charmahalla and Dakshin Khurma unions in the upazila were badly affected.

10 killed in 3 months

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oppress the minorities, said the report titled "Human Rights Situation of Minorities in Bangladesh- Jan-March 2016".

The report was released at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity. It was prepared based on reports run by 14 newspapers and case documents.

The media reported that some ruling Awami League lawmakers, leaders and their supporters were involved in the attacks. But they haven't been brought to book yet, read the report.

Speaking at the press conference, General Secretary Rana Das Gupta of the Parishad said: "We have noticed that influential people and some ruling party men committed the crimes. Besides, local administrations failed to protect the religious minorities."

Most of the attacks were carried out on the minorities for grabbing land, he added.

The Parishad demanded the government probe all the incidents of repression and take stern action against the offenders.

Local activists of the AL, the BNP and other political parties join hands to evict religious minorities from their homes. All the parties show a similar attitude to

the minorities, said the report.

The police and local administrations, according to the study, in many instances were reluctant to record complaints. They even backed the influential people to grab land.

Vandalising temples and desecrating idols have also become common. Criminals sexually harass and rape religious minority girls to create panic among the community, it added.

The report also stated that the attacks on minorities increased significantly since the beginning of the union parishad polls across the country last month.

At least 8,250 families and institutions of the minorities have come under attack. The supporters of the AL and its rebel candidates and the followers of the BNP and other party candidates carried out attacks on the minorities over the elections in Barisal, Bhola, Patuakhali, Bagerhat, Khulna, Satkhira, Faridpur, Nilphamari and some other districts.

Because of such incidents, religious minorities are compelled to leave their houses, land and even the country. Things have worsened due to the culture of impunity. If such a situation continues, minorities will become extinct in Bangladesh, said the report.

Top leaders of the rights platform were present.

Probir appeals for security

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minister and Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina, please save me immediately," he said in a Facebook post on Thursday.

"Please ensure that no one harasses me through false cases or no one posing as detective picks me up for so-called interrogation and makes me a victim of forced disappearance."

He said the cause of his apprehension was that his only lawyer in Faridpur had been failing to collect a copy of the charge sheet in a case against him for the last three days.

"Who else is there other than you with whom I can share my pain?"

Probir also said he was not worried at all about the case filed in Faridpur under the Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act and the charge sheet in the case.

He expressed his hope that he would survive "if the judiciary functions independently".

Recently, a Faridpur court accepted a charge sheet in the case filed last year over one of Probir's Facebook posts.

Sub-inspector Monir Hossain of

Faridpur Kotwali Police Station, also the investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet to a cognisance court in the district, said Subir Roy, an inspector of the court.

Additional Judge Masud Ali also ordered transferring the case to the Cyber Tribunal in Dhaka and set May 25 for a hearing.

Probir, 55, editor of Bangla daily Bangla 71 and online news portal u71news.com, was arrested on August 16 last year at his office in the capital after a Faridpur Awami League leader, Swapan Kumar Paul, filed the case over the Facebook post of Probir.

In that post, the journalist said his life was under threat and that now Local Government and Rural Development Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, businessman Moosa Bin Shamser and condemned fugitive war criminal Abul Kalam Azad would be responsible if he was killed.

The AL leader sued Probir for "tarnishing the image" of the minister.

Police produced Probir before the court on August 17 and took him on a three-day remand. However, he was freed on bail two days later.

Hasina made member

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implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6), was launched at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland last January.

The SDG6 focuses on ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, at a time of unprecedented challenges.

Apart from Hasina, the other newly-appointed panel members are Ameenah Gurib, president of Mauritius (co-chair), Enrique Peña Nieto, president of Mexico (co-chair), Malcolm Turnbull, prime minister of Australia, János Áder, president of Hungary, Abdullah Ensour, prime minister of Jordan, Mark Rutte, prime minister of the Netherlands, Jacob Zuma, president of South Africa, Macky Sall, president of Senegal, and Emomali Rahmon, president of Tajikistan.

The two special advisers are Han Seung-soo, former prime minister of South Korea and Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, minister of state for the environment of Peru.

"Ensuring water and sanitation for all is crucial for reducing poverty and achieving other Sustainable Development Goals," said Ban Ki-moon in a statement issued by his

spokesperson.

The UN chief urged all partners to mobilise SDG6 with political, financial and technological support.

Today, more than 2.4 billion people lack access to improved sanitation and at least 663 million do not have access to safe drinking water, says the UN News Centre report.

Poor sanitation, unsafe water, and the lack of hygiene lead to about 6,75,000 premature deaths annually, and estimated annual economic losses of up to seven percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in some countries.

Floods and droughts impose huge social and economic costs globally, and climate variability will make water extremes worse. If the world continues on its current path, projections suggest that it may face a 40 percent shortfall in water availability by 2030.

The UN panel will provide the leadership required to tackle these challenges and champion a comprehensive, inclusive and collaborative way of developing and managing water resources, and providing improved access to clean water and sanitation, adds the news report.

China, US sign

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agreement becomes operational possibly as early as late 2016 or in 2017.

Caught in election-year turmoil, the United States plans to ratify the Paris accord with an executive agreement, bypassing the Senate and setting up a complex process for any future president wishing to pull out.

Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he would ask parliament next month to endorse the accord with a vote this year and pledged to help developing countries confront the challenge.

"They shouldn't be punished for a problem they didn't create nor should they be denied the opportunities of clean growth," said Trudeau, drawing loud applause.

Actor and environmental campaigner Leonardo DiCaprio urged leaders on, telling them: "The world is now watching".

"You will either be lauded by future generations or vilified by them," he said.

A total of 15 countries or parties, most of them island-states, formally

presented the completed ratification to the United Nations.

"Some may say it's only a small step. We need to make it a huge one," said the prime minister of the Polynesian island of Tuvalu, Enele Sosene Sopoaga.

Agreed by 195 nations, the Paris deal sets the goal of limiting global warming to "well below" 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit (two Celsius) above pre-industrial levels, by moving to clean energy.

Ban stressed that the window for keeping the global temperature rise in check was rapidly closing.

Last month was the hottest March in modern history and 2016 is shaping up as a record-breaking year for rising global temperatures.

This year's El Nino -- dubbed "Darth Nino" -- is wreaking havoc, with droughts, floods, severe storms and other extreme weather patterns.

The signing ceremony was seen as a triumph for Ban, who pushed for the deal throughout his tenure and has listed the agreement in Paris as one of his proudest moments as UN chief.