



Sri Lankans walk past a Christmas tree displayed in Colombo yesterday. Sri Lanka surpassed the world record for the tallest artificial Christmas tree despite building delays forcing organisers to prune the structure by almost half, an official said. Cricket legend Arjuna Ranatunga initiated plans to build the record-breaking tree in Colombo, but ran into opposition from the Catholic church which said the money would be better spent on charity. PHOTO: AFP

HRW urges Libyan govt to protect civilians from Sirte

AFP, Tripoli

Human Rights Watch on Saturday urged the Libyan government to protect civilians who were detained after fleeing former Islamic State group stronghold Sirte.

"Libyan authorities should ensure the safety of and urgently provide medical care for more than 120 women and children being held in a Misrata prison" on suspicion of jihadist links, it said.

Forces allied with Libya's unity government said on December 5 that they had ousted IS from the coastal city, 450 kilometres east of Tripoli, after seven months of fighting.

The jihadists had seized Sirte, the hometown of slain dictator Moamer Gaddafi, in June 2015 amid the chaos following Gaddafi's downfall in 2011.

Obamas send their final Xmas message

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama sent their final Christmas salutations from the White House on Saturday, highlighting common values uniting Americans of all faiths.

"The idea that we are our brother's keeper and our sister's keeper. That we should treat others as we would want to be treated," Michelle Obama said.

"Those are values that help guide not just my family's Christian faith, but that of Jewish Americans, and Muslim Americans; nonbelievers and Americans of all backgrounds," the president added.

The Obamas' seasonal greeting comes at a time when America is deeply divided after a brutal presidential campaign that pitched populist Donald Trump and his frequently incendiary rhetoric against Hillary Clinton.

The Obamas appeared jovial in their greeting, showing a flashback to the filming of their first Christmas message in 2009, when the president couldn't stop giggling.

Barack Obama also used the address to re-cap his time in office, saying the country was much stronger than it had been when he succeeded George W. Bush.

"Together, we fought our way back from the worst recession in 80 years, and got unemployment to a nine-year low," he said.

"We made America more respected around the world, took on the mantle of leadership in the fight to protect this planet for our kids, and much, much more."

As is custom, the couple also thanked US troops and their families.

Police arrest

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A case was filed with Bandarban Sadar Police Station in connection with the incident on Saturday night.

Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of the police station, said they were interrogating the arrested to determine whether he was involved in the crime.

The victim has been undergoing treatment at Bandarban Sadar Hospital.

Christmas celebrated

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programmes. The day was a public holiday.

Security in the capital city and different places around the country was beefed up to ensure peaceful celebration of Christmas.

Shorot Gomes, auxiliary bishop of Dhaka, said Christmas brings happiness and peace among the people, and it is also a day of forgiveness.

"In our prayers, we prayed for peace and prosperity of our country as well as mankind," he told The Daily Star at Kakrail Church.

Moni Gomes, a music teacher who participated in prayers at Rani Jompsona church in the capital's Farmgate area, said Christmas is the celebratory day among the Christian community as they can meet their friends and relatives at church and also have lots of fun.

"The greatness of the day will be fulfilled if we can make our souls pure following the ideals of Jesus Christ," she said adding, "We prayed to God for the salvation of corrupted

souls who are involved in terrorist activities and pray and wish that they are brought to live a normal life."

Nine-year-old Peter D'Rozario who came to the church with his parents said, "This is a special day for us as we go to churches and homes of our relatives and get different presents."

In Barisal, more than 20,000 members of the three major Christian sects, amid tight security measures, celebrated the Christmas with lot of joys by arranging special prayers and discussions.

Six Christian Churches of the city, including Mother Teresa's Home and Christian Religious Training Centre, and other Christian institutions organised different types of programmes to mark the holy day.

In Narayanganj, Saint Paul's Church and Baptist Church organised several programmes to celebrate the day. Deputy Commissioner Rabbi Miah and Police Super Moinul Haque inaugurated the day's programme.

AL tries to quell

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Narayanganj City Corporation polls were the best example of party unity yielding good results. In the elections, AL-nominated mayor candidate Selina Hayat Ivy defeated her rival BNP's Shakhat Hossain by a large margin.

As the first of the AL initiatives, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday held a closed-door meeting with Chittagong city AL President ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury and the unit's general secretary and also city mayor AJM Nasir Uddin to resolve the longstanding rivalry between the two at Mohiuddin's Chashma Hill residence in the port city.

In the meeting, Quader also called upon Chhata League leaders of the Chittagong city and Chittagong University units to refrain from any activity that would tarnish the image of the party and the government, said party sources.

"We are going to take an all-out preparation for the national elections and we have started our journey today from Chittagong. I hope all of us will work together and will be able to create a strong team here like we did in Narayanganj," the sources quoted Quader as saying.

He said the party started the "journey" from Chittagong "considering its importance after the capital".

"We have just two years before the elections. We want to solve all the problems inside the party. We will conclude the conferences of our front organisations within the next six months," Quader was quoted as saying by the sources.

Chittagong city AL has two rival factions led by Mohiuddin and Nasir. In 2015, Mohiuddin had declared to contest for the mayor in the Chittagong City Corporation elections. However, the party nominated AJM Nasir as its candidate, dissatisfying the supporters of Mohiuddin.

Contacted, Mohiuddin yesterday told The Daily Star that the BCL in Chittagong has some "issues" and that they were trying to solve them through discussions.

"The elections are coming. We hope we will be able to build a strong base at the root level [of the party] before the elections," he said.

Asked about the "distance" between the two top AL leaders in Chittagong, AJM Nasir said, "There is

no distance or gap within the AL. What you see is the differences of opinion. He [Quader] has instructed us to speed up the organisational activities."

Asked about the AL initiative, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, organisational secretary of the party, said, "We are working to rejuvenate and strengthen the party resolving all the conflicts."

Mahbubul Alam Hanif, joint general secretary of the AL, told The Daily Star, "The Awami League does not want any sort of feud at any level of the party. We will sit with the leaders of the districts having internal conflicts and bring back party discipline there by resolving the crisis."

Garment

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days the factories remained closed, he said.

About the cases filed against the workers, Siddiqui said those would be handled under the law of the country.

On the workers who have been terminated during the unrest, the BGMEA chief said the respective management of the factory would make the final decision in this regard.

When asked, he could not instantly say the exact amount of losses the factories incurred due to the closure.

Talking about the workers' problems, he said if any house owner in Ashulia area increases house rent in the next three years, local workers can complain about the matter to the nearby police station or local union parashad chairman or any local public representative.

The workers can also make complaints to the BGMEA office as there is a hotline, he said.

Ashulia is considered one of the important industrial hubs and it is home to most compliant and large factories. The factories there mostly supply high-end products to upscale customers.

More than 350 factories are located in the area and their contribution in FY2015-16 was over 20 percent of the \$28 billion garment export, according to industry insiders.

Earlier, a factory owner had told The Daily Star that over 1.5 lakh workers were in trouble following the closure of the factories in Ashulia.

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Some 520 people applied after the authorities had published a job vacancy notice on October 31 for the posts of nine teachers, an assistant accountant, an office assistant and two general staff at Sheikh Russel Model School.

Of them, only 329 applicants sat for the examination.

Amir Jafar, a deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, said they deployed additional policemen on campus to avert any untoward incident following the university authorities' request.

Meanwhile, Rajshahi city AL leaders said they decided to postpone their movement against RU recruitment following a "discussion" with the university's vice-chancellor.

Rajshahi city AL President AHM Khairuzzaman Liton said the university's vice-chancellor called him on Saturday and assured him of sitting with them to hear their objections to the recruitment.

"After the talks, I understood that the university's pro-VC took some initiatives without discussing with us, and it caused a misunderstanding between the university authorities and the Awami League leaders," he said.

Contacted, RU Vice Chancellor Prof Mizan Uddin admitted to calling Liton and said he would sit with Liton after returning to Rajshahi.

Prof Chowdhury Sarwar Jahan, RU pro-VC, said the university authorities did not do anything which could lead to any misunderstanding.

"We want to clearly say that the recruitment process will follow standard rules," he said.

RU correspondent contributed to this report.

Suicide bomber

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certainly targeting a religious site, but we cannot say exactly which one. It's Christmas day and there are prayers being said everywhere, Midjiyawa Bakari, governor of the Far North region of Cameroon, told AFP.

"We have two deaths reported at the site, the suicide bomber and a member of a security committee, and a third person died at hospital," he said, referring to a 19-year-old student.

The governor added that there were also five others wounded and hospitalised but their condition was not life-threatening.

Police have surrounded a Christian church in the town of Mora which has been locked down by soldiers, a Christian teacher there who requested anonymity told AFP. The region is home to Christians, Muslims and animists.

Northern Cameroon, bordering Nigeria and Chad, has been frequently targeted by Boko Haram Islamists who have waged an insurgency in northern Nigeria since 2009. The Cameroonian army has joined a regional offensive to end Boko Haram's brutal insurgency that has left at least 20,000 people dead and some 2.6 million displaced.

Poor show

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BB now using 3-tier security

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Bank is implementing a "remediation plan" to build a foolproof security system to prevent any further breaches in its overseas transactions, following the \$81 million heist incident in February 2016.

"We've started the implementation of the remediation plan after the February heist. The governing board of the Bangladesh Bank approved the plan in May this year," said a top official at the central bank.

He said implementing the "remediation plan" will need at least another six months, including installation of a new security mechanism to prevent all kinds of threat from international cyber hackers.

According to official sources, Bangladesh Bank, Federal Reserve Bank of New York and the Swift authorities have taken some short- and long-term measures to check any further fraud immediately after the February incident.

But the trio had to take up a coordinated plan to make their overseas transaction system a foolproof one, said a top official at the Bangladesh Bank.

"We're now implementing the plan which needs some procurement of hardware and software. We hope, will be able to complete the implementation of the plan within the next six months," said a senior official of the central bank who preferred not to be named as the matter is "very sensitive".

Official sources said Bangladesh has long been using the SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Inter-bank Financial Telecommunication, an inter-bank messaging system that allows for large cash transfers between banks) system for its overseas transaction since it provides an exclusive online channel to transfer money.

But in November 2015, Bangladesh Bank launched "Real-Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) system" with the help of SWIFT to facilitate local businesses' international transactions on a real-time basis.

"The new system virtually made infiltration easier to get the access to the exclusive SWIFT channel which ultimately brought on the disaster in February last," the central bank source told UNB.

According to him, RTGS is an open system used by multiple users from local and international arena to make

their business transactions, while SWIFT is an exclusive online platform used by the central banks of different countries and also by leading international financial institutions to send and receive their transaction-related messages.

The source said that soon after the heist in February, all the parties primarily identified "the connectivity between SWIFT and RTGS" as the main loophole that provided cyber criminals an entry into the system.

The international hackers even broke the firewall which was being used to protect the system, he added.

"So, we instantly suspended the joint operation of SWIFT and RTGS and the connectivity between them.

The central bank board endorsed the decision," he said, adding that this measure was taken in consultation with the two other parties (Swift authority and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York).

Since then, Bangladesh Bank has been operating the Swift and RTGS systems separately, and now there is no connectivity between them anymore, said the BB top official.

Bangladesh Bank, Swift and the US Federal Reserve are now using a three-tier system for making the overseas transactions more secure.

In the three-tier system, Bangladesh Bank now sends and receives messages online, then checks it manually and then communicates over telephone to confirm the transaction. In the current system, voice identification is also being used by the parties.

Besides, the Federal Reserve and SWIFT introduced 24-hour service in their operations, with no stoppage for holidays following the Bangladesh heist incident, said the BB official.

But all of these are short-term measures and Bangladesh Bank has been advised to implement a long-term plan under which Bangladesh Bank has floated a number of international bids to procure some hardware and software to make its system more secure. The remediation plan is intended for that purpose.

Contacted