

SOUTH KOREA SCANDAL Party split could provide opening for UN's Ban

REUTERS, Seoul

A South Korean ruling party faction said yesterday it would form a new party, and key members said they hoped outgoing UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon would join it to launch a widely expected bid to become president.

If Ban joined the new party, it would give him a conservative platform while distancing himself from the ruling Saenuri Party of President Park Geun-hye, which has become tainted by a corruption scandal that led to a parliamentary impeachment vote against her this month.

The 29 lawmakers defecting from Park's Saenuri Party were among those who supported the parliamentary motion to impeach her over the influence-peddling scandal, which was passed overwhelmingly on Dec 9.

Some analysts expect the new party to become the country's main conservative force and further defections to it from Park's party were likely, especially if Ban joined.

"We are hoping Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will join the New Conservative Party for Reform, and if he joins, it will be right that he would compete in a fair primary," Yoo Seong-min, a member of the new party and a possible presidential contender, told TV station SBS, using the new party's tentative name.

In a Realmeter poll released on Monday, 23.3 percent of respondents supported Ban, just ahead of the liberal Democratic Party's Moon Jae-in, at 23.1 percent.

The defections cut the number of seats held by Saenuri to fewer than 100 in the 300-member chamber. The Saenuri unexpectedly lost its majority in April parliamentary elections.

19 migrants feared drowned off Bahamas

AFP, Brasilia

At least 19 Brazilian migrants are feared drowned off the Bahamas as they tried to cross illegally to the United States, officials in Brasilia said Monday.

The group went missing "during a purported crossing by sea from the Bahamas to the United States," a foreign ministry statement said.

The migrants' families have not heard from them since November 6, the foreign ministry said.

"There are about 20 Brazilians (who have gone missing). So far, there is no information about their whereabouts, nor about the vessel that supposedly was going to take them to the United States," the foreign ministry added.

Brazilian media reports said there were also dozens of other migrants aboard the boat, which officials suspect went down while attempting the roughly 50-mile (80-kilometer) crossing between the Bahamas and the Florida coast.

The Brazilian embassy in Nassau, Bahamas and the Brazilian consulate in Miami, Florida, are in contact with family members and authorities to try to locate the missing persons, officials said.

The Brazilian foreign ministry said it was not ruling out the possibility that the migrants could be in prison or missing for other reasons.

But silence from everyone in such a large group, known to have been being trafficked into the US, raises many concerns.

Several Brazilian media outlets reported that family members of the missing migrants told them their kin paid thousands of dollars to "coyotes," people traffickers who smuggle them into the US.

The busiest such route was from Grand Bahama to the Palm Beach area of Florida; now it may include Bimini closer to Miami, or other Bahamian islands.

The sister of one of the Brazilians missing after allegedly traveling to the Bahamas told CBN radio station Globo that it was the third time he was trying to enter the US.

A village

He also notes that of late a rise in the price of paints used in finishing design work also offers local potters a challenge.

Pots and pans, flower tubs, vases, showpieces, lamps, umbrella stands, portraits, toys and wall tiles: the nimble hands of Bijoypur's potters bring intricate designs to any project. In recognition of their skill, buyers arrive from Dhaka and other cities to purchase in bulk. Bijoypur pottery is sold nationwide.

As with other Bangladeshi pottery centres Bijoypur these days struggles to realise reasonable profits from pottery. A few of the local potters have been able to set up their own businesses. Artisans live in the hope that future initiatives such as flexible loan facilities and export development will be able to turn the tide and help their heritage industry survive.

Myanmar Navy shoots 6 Bangladeshi fishermen

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Six Bangladeshi fishermen were injured as Myanmar navy opened fire on their trawler in the Bay of Bengal near the St Martin's Island yesterday morning.

The injured fishermen are Osman Gani, 22, Rafiqul Islam, 30, and Nur Ahmed, 32, of Nuniar Chhara in the town, and Saiful Islam, 35, of Maheshkhali upazila. Names of two other victims could not be known immediately.

Coast Guard and locals said 14 boatmen and fishermen on a fishing trawler owned by Md Rahim Sawdagor of Cox's Bazar went to fish in the Bay four days ago. They were fishing on the

east of Chhera Dwip near the St Martin's yesterday.

A Myanmar navy ship suddenly chased their trawler and opened fire on it. The fishermen tried to escape without their fishing net but could not leave unhurt.

When the fishing trawler reached the St Martin's ghat around 5:00pm locals and Coast Guard personnel took the injured to a local health complex. From there the victims were shifted to Teknaf Upazila Health Complex with bullet injuries in their legs, hands and other parts.

Md Saiful Absar, Coast Guard official in charge at the St Martin's, said the fishermen were in Bangladeshi waters when they came under attack.

Cheetahs

FROM PAGE 16

by more than 85 percent in 16 years and fewer than 50 individuals survive in Iran, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) warned.

The report's authors said cheetahs should be listed as "Endangered" instead of "Vulnerable" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

The study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, estimated that just 7,100 cheetahs remain in the wild, occupying just nine percent of the territory they once lived in.

The cheetah is sprinting towards the edge of extinction and could soon be lost forever unless urgent, landscape-wide conservation action is taken," ZSL said in a statement.

There were an estimated 100,000 cheetahs at the beginning of the 20th century, according to previous estimates.

"Given the secretive nature of this elusive cat, it has been difficult to gather hard information on the species, leading to its plight being overlooked," said Sarah Durant, the report's lead author and project leader for the Rangewide Conservation Programme for Cheetah and African

Wild Dog

"Our findings show that the large space requirements for cheetah, coupled with the complex range of threats faced by the species in the wild, meant that it is likely to be much more vulnerable to extinction than was previously thought," she said.

Cheetahs travel widely in search of prey with some home ranges estimated at up to 3,000 square kilometres (1,158 square miles).

The study found that 77 percent of the animal's remaining habitat falls outside protected areas, leaving it especially vulnerable to human interference.

The main risks are humans hunting their prey, habitat loss, illegal trafficking of cheetah parts and the exotic pet trade, according to the study.

Durant hailed recent commitments taken by the international community, including on stemming the flow of live cats from the Horn of Africa region.

"We've just hit the reset button in our understanding of how close cheetahs are to extinction," said Kim Young-Overton, from the wild cat conservation organisation Panthera.

"Securing protected areas alone is not enough. We must think bigger, conserving across the mosaic of protected and unprotected landscapes that these far-reaching cats inhabit," she said.

Workers Party also demanded that people accused and convicted of war crimes and/or involved in any communal organisation be banned from taking part in any election.

The law should ban "money game" criminal and communal activities and direct and indirect interference of the administration in elections. The BNP and other political parties' proposal to include defence forces in the definition of law enforcing agencies in election-related law is not acceptable by any means, the delegation said.

Emerging from the meeting, Menon thanked Hamid for holding talks with political parties.

"I think the president's initiative will be a successful one."

The president assured Workers Party of considering its proposal.

"I will consider your proposal, but you will also have to think how much I can do," party member Anisur Rahman Mollick quoted Hamid as saying.

The tenure of the EC led by Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad will expire in February next year.

The president's office began the dialogues on December 18 on formation of the next EC. Hamid already sat with the BNP, Jatiya Party, LDP, Krishok Sromik Janata League and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal.

According to the schedule, he will hold talks with Bangladesh Nationalist Front (BNF) and Islami Oikya Jote tomorrow.

Workers Party proposes

FROM PAGE 1

Hamid said mutual trust and confidence is very important in democracy and that all political parties should participate in elections with "sportsman spirit".

Menon told The Daily Star that the formation of constitutional council is possible under the Election Commission law.

"If it is not possible by law, the government should amend the constitution. I don't see any problem."

The party requested Hamid to promulgate an ordinance or convene parliament session on emergency basis to enact the law, saying it would take a maximum of 15-30 days.

As an alternative to constitutional council, a search committee comprising heads of the constitutional bodies, including the chief justice, chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission, comptroller and auditor general and attorney general, can recommend three people against each post of election commission.

They will then be short-listed by the Business Advisory Committee before the president makes the appointments.

Hamid said there were similarities in the proposals put forward by different political parties during their dialogues with him.

Workers Party proposed five-member election commission with two of them women.

To this, the president assured it of appointing at least one woman since other parties also demanded appointment of women.

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Monirul also said two other women -- Trisha Moni, wife of "Neo JMB" leader Maynul Islam Musa, who is on the run, and Jebunnahar Shila, widow of Major (retd) Jahid alias Murad, who was killed during an anti-militancy

drive in Mirpur, have affection to their children and did not try to carry out suicide attacks. They surrendered to police after a successful negotiation.

According to the DMP official, the Ashkona den was basically the residence of Musa where family members of at least three dead militants took shelter.

The flat was also used as an office where some other militants used to pay visits.

Monirul said police were trying to know from the two females, now on seven-day remand each, about the sources and carriers of arms and ammunition and money, details about those who frequented the house and the plan of their next course of action.

"We are yet to get any concrete information regarding the source of arms and ammunition and the money. It could be known following the arrest of Musa," he added.

The police official said the militant group might have aimed to carry out attacks centering the Charisms as three suicide vests were kept ready and there were many grenades there.

Shakira possibly became a suicide attacker out of frustration after Sumon was arrested around a month ago. Her first husband Iqbal had died of cancer.

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Human error led to Colombia soccer plane crash

REUTERS, Bogota

Errors by the pilot, airline and Bolivian regulators are to blame for a plane crash in Colombia that killed 71 people last month, including most of Brazil's Chapecoense soccer team, Colombia aviation authorities said on Monday.

The plane, operated by Bolivia-based charter company LaMia, crashed on a wooded hillside near Medellin because the pilot failed to refuel en route and did not report engine failures caused by the lack of fuel until it was too late, officials said.

Rights activist Khushi Kabir said that someone's personal interest could not be the basis of such a decision.

The DG's job is to carry out administrative and development work of the academy and that he cannot ban any publisher, she noted.

Singer and cultural activist Kafil Ahmed said the Bangla Academy must immediately withdraw its "illegal decision".

Terming the ban an "attack" on free-thinkers, Jamshed Anwar Tapan, general secretary of Udichi, said they would continue the protest until the government met their demand.

Sharifuzzaman Sharif, general secretary of Nagorik Sanghati, said the DG made the decision out of personal vengeance as well as to please extremists. "So we demand his dismissal."

The Daily Star spoke with chief and six other members of the 12-member executive council of the Bangla Academy. One member said the decision was made because of Shrabon Prokashani's stance against the academy.

"There's nothing personal here," the member claimed.

Four other members said they could not remember if any such decision was made and that they needed to check before making any comments. A sixth member said he was not aware of the decision as he was not present at the meeting.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, Bangla Academy Director General Prof Shamsuzzaman Khan, also chief of the executive council, said they had every right to take such actions against any publisher.

"The decision was made [against Shrabon] for its stance against the fair, not for any personal vengeance," he added.

"He [Robin] actually wants to foil the book fair. He is doing it as part of a certain quarter," he claimed.

During this year's book fair in February, the academy closed down Ba-Dwip Prakashan's stall for selling a book that "hurt religious sentiments". Later, law enforcers arrested three people, including the editor of the book.

At the time, Robin took a stance so that the book could still be sold at the fair, Jalal Ahmed, a director of Bangla Academy, told The Daily Star.

The academy's executive council

Govt blocks

FROM PAGE 16

After receiving the list the operators have started to comply with the directive. However, a few of the websites could not be blocked immediately due to technical challenges, said BRTC officials.

The government actually wants to create massive awareness about the issue and as much hurdle as possible in browsing those sites, said Tarana Halim, state minister for post and telecommunications division, over phone yesterday.

"Initially we have decided to block around 500 websites that contain pornography, obscene pictures and video contents. In the first phase we will go for blocking the locally hosted sites," added Tarana.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of an email that contained a list of 510 websites branded as pornographic by an offensive online content control committee. The BRTC has directed the operators to block those sites.

About 70 to 80 percent of the pornography sites, operated from overseas, would also be blocked in phases, Tarana observed.

"We are trying to impose some restrictions and trying to create hurdles for random pornographic site browsing, particularly for those who are under 18," Tarana added.

The telecom division also plans to tag with the information ministry to launch a massive awareness programme targeting guardians and teenagers.

MA Hakim, president of the Internet Service Providers Association Bangladesh, said they had got a letter from BRTC and were complying with it.

"We take bandwidth from the IIG's and IIG operators and have already blocked those sites. For double protection we have also taken some other measures," Hakim added.

Pornography creates massive problems in our society and the telecom division had taken it as a challenge, said Tarana.

Earlier on November 28, Tarana conducted a meeting with the BRTC, law-enforcement agencies, ICT division, telecom department and information ministry officials to discuss the issue through talks with all parties.

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