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2,415 will be taken back

Says Myanmar official on their citizens living in Bangladesh; Naypyidaw to send special envoy to Dhaka

REUTERS/ UNB

Myanmar yesterday said it would take back 2,415 citizens from Bangladesh, only a tiny fraction of the 300,000 people who Bangladesh says are Myanmar citizens taking refuge there and should go home.

Tension has been rising between the neighbours over Myanmar's treatment of ethnic minority Rohingya Muslims, about 50,000 of whom Bangladesh says have fled there since the Myanmar army launched a crackdown on its side of their border in October.

Myanmar will soon send a special envoy to see and evaluate the situation of Rohingya people who entered Bangladesh since October 9, reports UNB.

Myanmar State Counsellor and leader of the National League for Democracy Aung San Suu Kyi will send the envoy, said a top Bangladeshi diplomat. However, it could not be known when the envoy will visit Dhaka.

The Bangladesh foreign ministry on Thursday summoned Myanmar Ambassador in Dhaka Myo Myint Than and demanded early repatriation of all Myanmar nationals.

Dhaka also expressed its readiness to engage with Naypyidaw to discuss the process and modalities of repatriation.

The Myanmar envoy conveyed to ministry officials that his government would send a special envoy to look into the issue.

"He [Myint Than] conveyed to us that a special envoy will come to Bangladesh. They will let us know the date of arrival of their special envoy," Foreign Secretary M Shahidul Haque was quoted by BBC Bangla as saying.

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A child swaps dry fish for spicy puffed rice near Nazirtek Shutki Mahal in Cox's Bazar. As children of Rohingya families do not have money, they give dry fish to the street vendor to enjoy the taste of spicy puffed rice. The photos were taken over a week ago.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Ekushey Book Fair Ban on Shrabon Prokashani withdrawn

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid widespread criticism and protests from writers and cultural activists, Bangla Academy yesterday withdrew its decision to ban Shrabon Prokashani from the Amar Ekushey book fair for the next two years.

Stalls would be allotted to the publishing house if it agreed to obey "some conditions", Jalal Ahmed, member secretary of the book fair committee, told The Daily Star.

The conditions include the house would not publish anything that hurts people's religious sentiments. It also must follow the policies of the book fair, said Jalal, who is also a director of the Bangla Academy that organises the fair every year.

The decision to withdraw the ban was taken at a regular meeting of the academy's executive committee, he said.

In another meeting on November 10, the executive council of the academy had decided not to allocate any stall for Shrabon Prokashani at two consecutive book fairs "for taking a stance against the Academy's action" during this year's book fair.

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No tit-for-tat move

Putin rules out expulsion of US diplomats after Washington's similar move over alleged election interference, looks to Trump to help rebuild ties

AFP, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin said yesterday he would not expel any Americans in response to Washington turfing out dozens of Russian diplomats over alleged election interference.

The Kremlin strongman's shock decision came after Russia's foreign ministry asked him to send home 35 US diplomats in a tit-for-tat retaliation for the expulsion of the same number of its staff by President Barack Obama on Thursday.

"We will not create problems for American diplomats. We will not expel anyone," Putin said in a statement, also inviting children of US diplomats to a holiday party at the Kremlin.

Putin's move was a clear sign that Moscow is pinning its hopes on President-elect Donald Trump to help rebuild ties -- which have plunged to their lowest point since the Cold War -- when he takes office next month.



"We evaluate the new unfriendly steps by the outgoing US administration as a provocation aimed at further undermining Russian-American relations," Putin said.

He said Moscow would plan its next steps "based on the policies pursued by the administration of president Donald Trump", while warning that the Kremlin reserves the right to hit back.

Putin ended his message by wishing both Obama and Trump a Happy New

Year.

GRIZZLY STEPPE

Obama on Thursday unleashed a barrage of sanctions against Russia over alleged cyberattacks aimed at tilting the election in Trump's favour.

The move came after years of bad blood with Putin that has seen Washington slap sanctions on Moscow over its interference in Ukraine and Syria.

In response to the alleged hacks, dubbed "Grizzly Steppe" by US officials, Obama announced sanctions against Russia's military and domestic intelligence agencies, and gave the 35 suspected "intelligence operatives" 72 hours to leave.

US intelligence concluded that the Kremlin had ordered a hack-and-release of Democratic Party and Hillary Clinton campaign staff emails in a bid to put Republican real estate mogul Trump in the Oval Office.

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12-yr-old girl foils her marriage

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

An adolescent madrasa student escaped marriage using her intelligence and courage in Kishoreganj upazila of the district yesterday.

Mahbuba Akhter, 12, daughter of Mahbub Hossen and Molly Begum of Putimari Kacharipara village, is a student of class V at Kishoreganj Madinatul Ullam Mahmudia Female Madrasa.

Sources said Mahbuba learned that she was secretly set to get married at her maternal grandfather's house last night. The groom, one Hafizar Rahman, 24, son of Alam Hossen of Bherveri village in the upazila, is a rickshaw-puller in Dhaka.

She immediately fled from the house and went straight to the official residence of the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO).

She met the UNO's wife and burst into tears, fervently urging her to save her from child marriage. Hearing her cries, she took the girl to her husband's office at the upazila parishad premises.

UNO SM Mehdi Hasan heard everything and instantly called police to raid the girl's house.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

China opens world's highest bridge



MAIL ONLINE

An enormous mountain overpass standing at a whopping 565 metres high (1,854 feet) opened to traffic on Thursday in south-west China.

The Beipanjiang Bridge, which reportedly cost 1.023 billion yuan (£120 million) to build, overtook the 560-metre-high (1,837 feet) Sidu River Bridge, also in China, to become the highest bridge in the world, according to People's Daily Online.

At 1,340 metres (4,396 feet) long, the four-lane structure links two of China's most remote provinces, Yunnan and Guizhou.

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PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Rickshaw puller Nissan sprinkles petals on the ground near Salimullah Muslim Hall of Dhaka University yesterday. He collects petals from flower shops in Shahbag and uses them to deter people from urinating and defecating in the area.

Clashes tarnish new Syria truce

Two previous ceasefires collapsed within weeks; peace talks between regime and rebels planned in Moscow ally Kazakhstan

REUTERS, Beirut

Clashes, shelling and air raids in western Syria marred a Russian- and Turkish-backed ceasefire that aims to end nearly six years of war and lead to peace talks between rebels and a government emboldened by recent battlefield success.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, a key ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, announced the ceasefire on Thursday after forging the agreement with Turkey, a long-time backer of the opposition.

The truce went into force at midnight but monitors and rebels reported almost immediate clashes, and violence appeared to escalate later yesterday as warplanes bombed areas in the country's northwest, they said.

The ceasefire is meant as a first step towards fresh peace talks, after several failed international efforts this year to halt the conflict, which began as a peaceful uprising and descended into civil war in 2011. It has drawn in the military involvement of world and regional powers, including Moscow and Ankara.

The agreement brokered by Russia and Turkey, which said they will guarantee the truce, is the first of three ceasefire deals this year not to involve the United States or United Nations.

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Trinamool MP Tapash held on graft charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kolkata

Famous Indian actor and also a senior leader of Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress Tapas Paul has been arrested in connection with a graft charge.

Tapas was questioned in the Kolkata's regional office of CBI for hours by its officers before his arrest, sources have confirmed.

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PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 31
Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:30 12:45 4:00 5:27 7:00
JAMAAT 6:05 1:15 4:15 5:30 7:30
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION