



Dignitaries launch a book titled Ilisher Bari Chandpur during Chandpur Zila Branding Festival-2017 at the Bashundhara Convention Centre in the capital yesterday. The programme was arranged to make Chandpur's main attraction Hilsa more popular among local and global communities.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

World edges too closer

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amid concerns about "a rise in strident nationalism worldwide, President Donald Trump's comments on nuclear arms and climate issues, a darkening global security landscape that is colored by increasingly sophisticated technology, and a growing disregard for scientific expertise," said a statement by the group of scientists and intellectuals, including 15 Nobel laureates.

Trump has made contradictory statements about climate change, at times calling it a hoax and other times saying he would keep an open mind about it.

On the nuclear issue, Trump said in December that the US must build up its nuclear arsenal.

Responding to a statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin that Moscow needs to strengthen its own nuclear force, Trump responded with a tweet: "The United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes."

"The Doomsday Clock is closer to midnight than it has ever been in the lifetime of almost everyone in this room," Lawrence Krauss, chair of the Bulletin's board of sponsors, told reporters at the National Press Club in Washington.

"The last time it was closer was 63 years ago in 1953 after the then Soviet Union exploded its first hydrogen

bomb, creating the modern arms race," he added.

"More than that, this is the first time that the words and stated policies of one or two people placed in high positions have so impacted on our perception of the existential threats we believe the world faces," he said, alluding to Trump and Putin.

Krauss cited intelligence reports that accuse Russia of interfering with the US presidential campaign to favor Trump's victory as symbolic of the "deeper global threat" posed by cyber technology.

"The question of whether the fabric of democracy may be imperiled by reducing faith in both the integrity of election and the very information on which an informed public can base their voting becomes suspect," said Krauss, a theoretical physicist at Arizona State University.

He also said the bulletin "is extremely concerned about the willingness of governments -- including the current US administration -- to ignore or discount some science or evidence during their decision-making process."

Last year, the warmest year in modern times due to human-driven climate change, world leaders "actually increased the threat of nuclear war and unchecked climate change through a variety of provocative statements and actions including careless rhetoric about the use of

nuclear weapons," said Krauss.

An amid escalating rhetoric on the nuclear front, he called on Russia and the United States, which possess the large majority of the world's nuclear weapons, to focus in the coming year on reducing their arsenals.

"President Trump and President Putin, who claim great respect for each other, can choose to act together as statesmen or act as petulant children risking our future," he said.

"Regardless, these issues are too important to be left in the hands of a few men. We therefore call upon all people to speak out and send a loud message to your leaders that you will not allow them to needlessly threaten your future and the future of your children."

In an opinion piece published in the New York Times, Krauss and another bulletin scientist, David Tidley, wrote that Trump was a key factor in their decision.

"Never before has the Bulletin decided to advance the clock largely because of the statements of a single person," they wrote.

"But when that person is the new president of the United States, his words matter."

The Doomsday Clock was created in 1947. It has changed 19 times since then, ranging from two minutes to midnight in 1953 to 17 minutes before midnight in 1991.

Mysterious

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might have happened in the morning when somebody tried to ignite the burner.

Abdul Motaleb, an expatriate in Oman, had rented the flat around 10 years ago. He along with his family used to live there. Motaleb and his wife were not in the house yesterday as they were in their village home at Amirabad of Chittagong's Lohagara.

His mother Samuda Khatun, 70, elder son Ariful Islam, 27, and younger daughter Tanima Afrin Chowdhury Ifti, an SSC examinee, were critically injured in the explosion. They were undergoing treatment at Chittagong Medical College Hospital's burn and plastic surgery unit.

Of them, Ifti and Samuda sustained 100 percent burn injuries, said Fakhrunnesa, on-duty doctor of the unit.

Arif suffered 25 percent burns and later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital's burn unit. Syed Mahmudul Haque, a resident on the third floor, who sustained seven percent burns, took primary treatment.

Arif told The Daily Star that he heard a big bang and when he opened his eyes he saw fire in their flat.

"I rushed to our dining room and found my grandmother in the middle of fire," he said, adding, "I screamed and people came to rescue us."

DAMAGE
A wall clock in Motaleb's next-door neighbour Rakkhal Chandra Dhar's drawing room stopped when the explosion happened. Many furniture inside his flat was also damaged.

"I thought it was an earthquake when I was woken up by the loud bang," said Rakkhal, adding, "The whole building was shaking."

"My wife and I rushed outside as doors and windows of my house were already damaged," he said, adding, "I saw the fire inside Motaleb's house and could not think of anything... I do not recall what I did at the time... minutes later, I discovered myself on the road."

NIRAPOD HOUSING SOCIETY
The six-storey building was built around 12 years ago in Nirapod Housing Society by Madrasa Arabia Khairia and Orphanage in Raipur village of Chittagong's Anwara.

Maulana Muhammad Sohail Saleh, principal of the madrasa, said their family funded and ran the madrasa and the orphanage. The income from the building was spent to run the orphanage.

"I don't understand why the explosion happened... the law enforcement agencies should find out the reason," he said.

Contacted, Saleh Mohammad Tanvir, additional commissioner (crime and operation) of the CMP, said bomb disposal unit of the CMP was working on the spot. "It's too early to make any comment about the reason of the explosion."

Stand released!

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holding religious scriptures like the holy Quran and the Gita, asking them not to speak against him, officials alleged.

The company has nearly 150 officials.

A high official seeking anonymity said, "He [Aurangajeb] along with two Muslim priests went to the officials' rooms on Sunday [January 22] and forced us to swear. The next day, he asked the DGMs to go to a room and forced them to swear as well."

The action triggered widespread protest among the officials and staff. "The MD hurt religious sentiments," the official added.

The letter sent to the PM was signed by a deputy general manager on behalf

of the officials. It said as the MD took Tk 23 lakh from the staff by threatening them that he would not sign the profit-sharing bonus files.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the letter.

As per the company's rule, officials would get five percent of its annual profit, but the MD was not entitled to the profit bonus.

Another allegation against Aurangajeb was that he had been using three cars against the official allocation of one.

He was appointed as the MD of the country's lone coal producing company in October last year.

Officials also alleged that after being appointed, Aurangajeb reshuffled some officials, which disrupted

smooth operation. He allegedly removed Habib Uddin from his position and put him in the marketing department. Deputy General Manager (mining operation) KM Zafar Sadiq was made deputy general manager of marketing.

Two managers of mining operation - Mamunur Rashid and Yunus Ali -- were transferred to the surface operation department. Besides, Masudur Rahman Howladar, manager (administration), was shifted to store operation.

Contacted, Aurangajeb admitted that oath-taking incidents took place on January 22 and 23. He claimed he asked officials to take oath as there were allegations against some of them and that the oath would deter those officials from indulging in corruption.

It's collision, not torture

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Two journalists of ATN News -- Abdul Alim and Ishan Bin Didar-- were assaulted while covering the shutdown called for protesting the Rampal Power Plant, which the government plans to build, near the Sundarbans.

Alim needed three stitches on his right eyebrow and Ishan took treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Ishan, who has been advised by doctors to remain in bed for about a month, said he was deeply upset by the home minister's comment.

"What is more shocking than being beaten up by police for no reason is the home minister's comment. Some slight push don't break people's bones, skulls or injure their spinal columns," he said.

With a fractured bone in his leg, and blood clots on his left shoulder and back, Ishan said he could not move at all due to severe pain. On top of that, he complained of having visions of policemen beating him up whenever he dozed off.

The other journalist, Alim, also complained of being traumatised and suffering from severe back pain. "Doctors said they will perform some tests to see what was wrong with my back."

Meanwhile, pro-shutdown activist Mizanur Rahman who was also beaten up

by policemen during the hartal was bed-ridden because of pain all over his body.

"I thought I was going to die for sure when so many of them swooped on me and dragged me inside Shahbagh Police Station premises. I was lucky that an officer saw what was happening and asked his men to spare me," he said.

A general diary was lodged over the police assault on two journalists.

In the complaint, it was mentioned that besides Assistant Sub-Inspector Ershad of Shahbagh Police Station, who was suspended for his alleged involvement in the assault, constables Mokhlesur, Hossain Kabir and Sobuj Khan and 10-12 other policemen were responsible for the incident, said a reporter of ATN News.

"Except Ershad, the other accused policemen are from Public Order Management Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police. We have written to the division to take action against them," said Maruf Hossain Sorder, deputy commissioner (Ramna division) of the DMP.

A three-member probe committee, led by additional deputy commissioner (Ramna division) of DMP Navid Kamal Shaibal, was formed following the incident. It would submit report within two working days.

Mosharraf Alam Siddique, deputy manager of ATN News, filed the complaint with Shahbagh police on Thursday night.

Several photographs of the police attack went viral on social media, sparking public outcry, demanding punishment of the policemen responsible.

Ain o Salish Kendra, a rights body, also condemned the assault yesterday.

Israeli PM expects Trump to end Iran silence

AFP, Jerusalem
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday he was hopeful the election of US President Donald Trump would end the world's "deafening silence" on Iranian aggression.

Speaking to dozens of diplomats from around the world ahead of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Netanyahu warned that Iranian officials were pushing for the extermination of Jews.

"The greatest danger we face, of the hatred of the Jewish people and of the Jewish state, comes from the east, from Iran," he said.

BNP expresses reservation

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Five other members of the committee are Justice Obaidul Hassan of the High Court; Muhammed Sadique, chairman of Bangladesh Public Service Commission; Masud Ahmed, comptroller and auditor general of Bangladesh; Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam, trustee board member of Transparency International Bangladesh; and Shireen Akhter, pro-vice chancellor of Chittagong University.

Formed on January 25 by President Abdul Hamid, the search committee was asked to submit recommendations to the president in 10 working days. This panel will recommend two names each for the posts of the chief election commissioner and four commissioners, including a woman.

The tenure of the incumbent EC will expire next month. The new EC will oversee the next general election due in early 2019.

The BNP secretary general at the press conference called upon people to remain alert to the government's "any probable plot to influence the next parliamentary election and to get united to force it to hold a neutral election".

Asked whether his party was rejecting the search committee, Fakhrul said it was not time to accept or reject it. "This question can arise once the Election Commission is formed."

About the search committee chief, he said Justice Mahmud was the chief of the search panel formed by late president Zillur Rahman in 2012 which recommended names for constituting an "incompetent, subservient, spineless and controversial EC".

"Making him the head of the new search committee means the government wants to form another loyal and incompetent Election Commission like the one led by Rakibuddin Ahmad," he told journalists.

Fakhrul questioned the neutrality of Justice Obaidul saying that he was a former central leader of Chhatra League and was known as a pro-Awami League lawyer.

Justice Obaidul's father was an AL leader and his brother is the prime minister's personal secretary, added the BNP leader.

Criticising the inclusion of the PSC chairman in the search panel, he said Sadique was the EC secretary during the controversial national election on January 5, 2014.

"After retirement, he was made the PSC chairman on political consideration as a reward for legalising the election full of irregularities."

Fakhrul said it is usual that Sadique would try to fulfil "the government's

desires as he is grateful to it and known as a former pro-AL bureaucrat".

He also claimed that Shireen Akhter was not an impartial person as she was elected a member of Chittagong University Teachers Association as a pro-AL teacher.

"Her father late Afsar Kamal Chowdhury was the founder president of Cox's Bazar district Awami League while she herself was the leader of Cox's Bazar Mohila Awami League. So, she in no way can be considered to be a neutral person."

About Comptroller and Auditor General Masud Ahmed, Fakhrul said being a public servant, he will not be able to do anything against the will of a political government.

He, however, did not make any comment about Syed Manzoorul Islam.

Fakhrul said the president "ignored the rational proposals of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and other parties on formation of the search panel which were submitted to the president during the month-long talks with him."

MINISTER BLASTS BNP
Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday came down hard on the BNP for being critical of the search committee.

Addressing a programme in Brahmanbaria, he said: "Those who are critical of the search committee have the habit of politicising."

He claimed the committee was neutral.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said no members of the committee were involved with the AL.

Foreign countries should not interfere in formation of the search committee, Quader, also the AL general secretary, said at a rally in Bogra.

"Are we a backboneless nation? Those days are over. Many countries now honour us. It is the president's jurisdiction to decide with whom he would meet. Foreign countries don't need to interfere in this regard. None from outside has the right to interfere in our internal matters," he added.

His comments came a day after several media outlets reported that envoys of some Western countries were not being able to have an appointment with the president to discuss his initiative on formation of the EC.

AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif urged the BNP to keep faith in the president's initiative and not to get involved in any unnecessary debate over the issue.

"Keep confidence in the president... He will constitute an Election Commission which would be acceptable to all," Hanif told a discussion in the capital.

formed the nine-member Advisory Commission as a "neutral and impartial body" with an aim to propose concrete measures for improving the welfare of all people in Rakhine state.

The commission is to meet with all relevant stakeholders, international experts and foreign dignitaries to hear their views and to analyze relevant issues with a view to finding the best possible solutions to prevailing problems.

The commission will consider humanitarian and development issues, access to basic services, the assurance of basic rights, and the security of the people of Rakhine. The commission will undertake assessments and make recommendations by focusing on conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance, rights and reconciliation, institution building and promotion of development of Rakhine State.

It will also examine international aspects of the situation, including the background of those seeking refugee status abroad. After wide consultations, the commission will submit its findings and recommendations to the Myanmar government through the state counsellor in the second half of 2017 and thereafter publish its report within twelve months of its establishment in August 2016.

Myanmar team

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registered and unregistered Rohingyas living in Bangladesh for many years since the Rohingyas are citizens of Myanmar and it is Myanmar's responsibility to resolve the problems in the country's Rakhine state, the sources said.

The delegation will be reminded of the past agreements signed between the two countries including the one in 1992 when Myanmar agreed to take back the Rohingyas admitting that the Rohingyas are legal citizens of Myanmar, they added.

A foreign ministry official said Bangladesh wants a solution to the Rohingya issue and it already expressed readiness to engage with Myanmar for discussing the process and modalities of repatriation of the Myanmar nationals.

The number of undocumented Myanmar nationals staying illegally in Bangladesh has long been a sticking point between the two countries, with Bangladesh repeatedly asking for repatriation of an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 Rohingyas.

This figure is in addition to some 32,000 registered Rohingyas who are staying in Bangladesh for over two decades.

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CCC probes info leak

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report on the project on January 22 headlined "Irregularities aplenty", sources at the CCC and the BCIC said.

The factory was supposed to resume operation in 14 months but 45 months have gone by and yet it is still not operational.

The CCC in Sitakunda has been incurring Tk 16 lakh in production loss every day because a Chinese firm failed to complete the job.

Surprisingly, neither the CCC nor the BCIC is probing as to why the factory could not start operation although Chinese contractor Wuhan Anyang Science & Technology Co Ltd (WASTCL) got several time extensions to complete the job.

A senior official said the committee, led by Additional Chief Engineer (chemical) Sen Shukhen Chandra, would enquire its officials how the media, particularly The Daily Star, got hold of the information and official documents on the project.

The other committee members are Head of Accounts Md Shamimul Ahsan and Deputy Manager (admin) Shamsul Alam.

The CCC issued letters to the committee members outlining their job, added the official requesting not to be named, fearing departmental actions.

The committee was formed despite BCIC Chairman Mohammad Iqbal's directive to the CCC managing director to provide journalists all relevant information regarding the project for the interest of the country.

The Daily Star correspondent was in Iqbal's office when he phoned the CCC MD to give him the instructions.

Contacted on Thursday, the CCC MD declined to offer details on the probe committee.

"We are public servants and we have to go through certain procedures," he said about the formation of the probe committee.

Some officials and staffers of the BCIC and the CCC now fear reprisal from the authorities. Sources claimed that the authorities were trying to conceal facts and protect the people responsible for delaying the project.

Chief Information Commissioner Prof Golam Rahman believes forming such a probe committee to single out officials was highly unprofessional.

"It seems the authorities are trying to hide something about the project which is very annoying. If the Chittagong Chemical Complex has anything to say or contradict the report, it should say it to the media," he told this paper on Thursday.

'Criminals' torch

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"Everything has turned into ashes. We could not save a single sheet. The fire burned 20,000 certificates of last 12 years. How could we recover from the loss?" said Asadur Haque, headteacher of the school.

Mehdi Hasan, officer-in-charge of Gaibandha Sadar police, said they were investigating the matter. If anyone was behind the fire, they would be arrested, he added.