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'Criminals' torch high school in Gaibandha

600 students face uncertainty

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A high school that has more than 600 students went up in flames in a remote char of Kunderpara in Sadar upazila in the early hours yesterday.

The fire reduced to ashes seven classrooms and the school office along with furniture, equipment, papers and documents, causing an estimated loss of more than Tk 1 crore.

Local NGO Gono Unnayan Kendra set up Gono Unnayan Academy High School in 2003 on 51 decimals of land. The NGO also arranged boat services for students from remote areas and set up a hostel for poor students and those who come from distant chars, said M Abdus Salam, chief executive of the organisation.

Locals said they had rushed to the school seeing flames, which rose as high as 20 feet. They added despite their maximum efforts they could not save the school.

It is a great loss for the students, whose academic activities have now become uncertain, as this was the only high school in the area, said Abdus Salam, chairman of Kamarjani Union Parishad.

"Some influential people were trying to stage jatra and gambling in the area. Locals stood against the move and held a protest meeting at the school ground on Thursday afternoon. This might be the reason behind a possible arson attack," said Aftab Hossain, programme manager of the NGO.

Talking to The Daily Star, SSC candidate Bilkis Akhter burst into tears, saying how they would appear in the examination.

"We never thought in our worst nightmare that our school would be gone. Now where would we go for our education?" said Liton Sarker of class X.

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Students of Gono Unnayan Academy High School in Gaibandha break down in tears at the sight of their burned down school. Seven classrooms and the office room along with furniture, equipment and documents were gutted in an arson attack committed by unknown person(s).

PHOTO: STAR

REPORT ON ANOMALIES CCC probes info leak

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The Chittagong Chemical Complex (CCC) authorities have formed a probe committee to find out how information regarding a Tk 115 crore project to restart the country's lone state-owned chemical factory was leaked to the media.

CCC Managing Director (MD) Bidyut Kumar Biswas formed the three-member committee following directives from top officials of Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), CCC's supervisory authority.

The move came after The Daily Star published a

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সমাজ ইসলামিক ব্যাংক লিমিটেড

PRAYER TIMING JANUARY 28
Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5-35 12-45 4-15 5-46 7-15
JAMAAT 6-10 1-15 4-30 5-50 7-45
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEARCH COMMITTEE FOR EC BNP expresses reservation about five members

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday alleged that the search committee formed for constitution of the next Election Commission was not neutral as five out of its six members were controversial.

The party said it would decide whether to accept or reject the committee once the new EC is formed.

"The inclusion in the search committee of those faithful to the Awami family and awarded by the government for helping fulfil its desires has not only made it controversial, but also set another undemocratic example of ignoring public opinion," BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan central office.

The press meet was organised to give the party's formal reaction to the formation of the search committee.

Fakhru said there was no scope for considering the committee to be non-partisan and neutral as it was formed with such members.

"It would be insanity to expect that non-partisan, impartial, honest, brave and competent persons would be made the chief or commissioners of the next Election Commission by such a search committee," he added.

Headed by Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain of the Supreme Court, the committee is expected to hold its maiden meeting at the SC today, sources said.

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It's collision, not torture

Home minister claims about Thursday's police action on journalists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police do not torture journalists. Sometimes, there may be some collision, which is normal, said Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday.

"Thursday's incident was something like that ...

Police are now much better," he said, referring to beating of two journalists by police during the eight-hour shutdown enforced by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports.

"If two friends walk side by side, they collide with each other," he said.

The minister made the remarks while replying to journalists at an event in Shamsheernagar Railway Station area of Moulvibazar's Kamalganj.

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Went for better life, came back dead

Mother of expatriate woman worker alleges her daughter died of torture by Omani employer, death certificate says it's suicide

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and PORIMOL PALMA

Divorcing her abusive husband just two and a half years into marriage, Khoko Moni took up a job in Oman as a domestic help with hopes for a new lease of life.

But as fate would have it, she endured further physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her employers. Barely two months after she went there, she was brought back home, but in a coffin.

Now her 60-year-old mother Mariam Begum is going from door to door for justice, saying it was a murder being passed off as a suicide.

"Khoko has a three-year-old son. Who will take care of the boy? I am completely undone," sobbed Mariam as she talked to The Daily Star recently.

Khoko, 27, was working at a Gazaria factory in Munshiganj following the separation in early 2014 when two relatives convinced her to travel to the Arab country for a

monthly wage of Tk 20,000.

A broker, Abdul Quader, who is also a distant relative staying in Oman, processed her papers through an agency in Fakirerpool, and assured Khoko that the employer was a "good man".

This was proved wrong a day or two after Khoko reached Muscat, the capital of Oman, on November 27 last year when the employer raped her in the dead of the night, Mariam alleged recalling phone conversations with her daughter.

Khoko complained to the employer's wife, but it resulted in beatings. She had to work 18 to 20 hours a day not only in the house of her employer but also for two of his relatives, who lived far apart, said the grieving mother.

"My daughter would call me to bring her back home fast. She would say that she was often being beaten."

The Omani death certificate was based on a police letter stating it was a suicide by hanging on December 25.

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Khoko Moni

World edges too closer to doom

'Doomsday Clock' set at 2.5 minutes to midnight amid Trump fears



AFP, Washington

Comments by US President Donald Trump on nuclear weapons and climate change have helped make the world less safe, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists warned Thursday, moving its symbolic "Doomsday Clock" 30 seconds closer to midnight.

The clock -- which serves as a metaphor for how close humanity is to destroying the planet -- was last changed in 2015, from five to three minutes before midnight.

It is now set at two and a half minutes to midnight, SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



A flat at a building in Chittagong's Dewan Bazar is in ruins following an early-morning explosion yesterday. Some other flats also got damaged in the incident. Bottom right, an injured admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Mysterious blast damages port city flat

3 critically burnt

ARUN BIKASH DEY and SHAHADAT HOSSAIN, Ctg

It was around 5:15am yesterday. Most of the people in Bakalia Dewan Bazar area, including the residents of a six-storey building in Nirapod Housing Society of Chittagong city, were asleep. A huge bang, apparently from an explosion, woke them up.

The explosion happened at a flat on the second floor of the building. Four people, including three of a family, were burnt in the explosion. A portion of a wall on the floor and most of the doors and windows of the building, where 36 families reside, were damaged.

Residents in the area said it could not be a mere gas explosion because of large-scale damage and noise created by the explosion. Police said explosive experts were working to find out the reason.

Mostaim Hossain, deputy commissioner (south zone) of Chittagong Metropolitan Police, said they primarily suspected that knob of gas burner in the kitchen inside the flat was somehow left open at night and gas accumulated throughout the night. The explosion

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