



Former US president Barack Obama tries his hand at kite surfing during a holiday yesterday with British businessman Richard Branson on his island Moskito, in the British Virgin Islands, in a picture handed out by Virgin.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Afghans dig with 'any tools' for avalanche survivors

AFP, Kabul

Afghan villagers were digging with shovels and whatever else they could find in a desperate race yesterday to save survivors days after avalanches buried whole villages in the mountainous north and east.

Army helicopters were sent to deliver aid as rescuers on the ground battled snowdrifts to reach remote towns.

But blocked roads and difficult terrain meant rescue equipment was in short supply in villages in worst-hit Nuristan province, where at least 66 people have died -- including 53 in one village.

Abdul Rahim, a villager in Barg-e-Matal district in Nuristan, said residents had used "any tools possible" to shift piles of snow as fears grow for those still buried underneath.

"We have no contact with several villages and districts. A lot of people are still under the snow, we have to rescue them as soon as possible," he told AFP by phone.

Withdraw SP

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All police personnel deployed in the area that day were not involved in the misdeed, the court said, adding that the entire police department should not be blamed for the incident.

However, for removing suspicion among people about the police force, all police personnel who had gone to the Chamgari Beel area that day should be withdrawn.

The court then directed the home secretary, the inspector general of police, and the deputy inspector general (Rangpur range) to comply with its orders.

The court also asked the IGP and the DIG of Rangpur range to inform the court within four weeks what they have discovered from the footage.

It fixed March 9 for passing the next order in the case.

Yesterday's order came following a writ petition filed by Ain o Salish Kendra, Brotee, and Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) on November 16.

On December 14 last year, the HC bench directed the chief judicial magistrate to find out whether police were involved in setting fire to Santal houses during the eviction drive in the district's Gobindaganj upazila.

The directive came after different national and global media outlets ran a video that showed a policeman in uniform and a man in a half-sleeve shirt joined another man in a pink T-shirt to set fire to a Santal shanty. The video clip went viral in social media.

AM Amin Uddin stood for the writ petitioners while Deputy Attorney General Motahar Hossain Saju represented the government.

Charge sheet

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senior judicial magistrate court in Bogra on January 18. The court fixed March 08 as the hearing date.

In the attack at the Shia mosque at Chokkanapur village of Shibganj on November 26 last year, the muajjin was killed and at least four others were injured.

Following the attack, Shona Mia, of the local Shia community, filed a case against unidentified people.

UK Speaker slammed

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Westminster Hall, and that he was "even more strongly opposed" after the president's travel ban on visitors from seven Muslim-majority countries.

But Conservative MP Nadhim Zahawi, who has been critical of Trump's travel ban, said the fact that the speaker had become the story was "a bad place to be".

He pointed out that the speaker had welcomed Chinese president Xi Jinping, despite human rights concerns, and the emir of Kuwait, which bans British dual nationals of Israeli origin, to speak in parliament.

"I am against the travel ban... but it's unwise to ban the legitimately-elected president of the United States of America, our closest ally, when we're trying to urge them not to shoot from the hip," he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

Many opposition Labour and Scottish National Party MPs applauded the speech, while Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn backed the speaker on Twitter, calling on Prime Minister Theresa May to cancel the state visit.

The government has insisted the visit will go ahead.

"We're looking forward to the visit and we're sure it will be a success," May's spokesman said yesterday.

"What John Bercow suggests to parliament is a matter for parliament," he said.

The House of Lords speaker is expected to make a statement on the issue later yesterday.

However, Tory MP Crispin Blunt warned that Bercow would have to deal with "the consequences" of his comments, stressing that speakers "do not express their opinion."

"That's the entire point, otherwise they can't remain neutral and above the political fray," he said.

Israel legalises settler

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The legislation has been condemned by Palestinians as a blow to their hopes of statehood. But its passage may only be largely symbolic as it contravenes Israeli Supreme Court rulings on property rights.

Israel's attorney-general has said it is unconstitutional and that he will not defend it at the Supreme Court.

Though the legislation, passed by a vote of 60 to 52, was backed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing coalition, it has raised tensions in the government.

A White House official said that, given the new law is expected to face challenges in Israeli courts, the Trump administration "will withhold comment on the legislation until the relevant court ruling."

Palestinian politicians and human rights groups warned that the new law violates international laws and is a step towards Israel annexing the occupied West Bank.

"The law sets a new legal framework that implements the Israeli political interest and puts it above international humanitarian law," Suhad Bishara, a lawyer at the Adalah legal centre for Arab minority rights in Israel, told Al Jazeera.

The United Nations said yesterday the new Israeli law crossed a "thick red line" towards annexation of the occupied West Bank.

"This is the first time the Israeli Knesset (parliament) legislates in the occupied Palestinian lands and particularly on property issues," UN envoy for the Middle East peace process Nickolay Mladenov told AFP.

The Arab League accused Israel of "stealing the land" of Palestinians after

US Republican Congressman Joe Wilson called the comments "very disappointing" during an interview with BBC's Newsnight, saying it was "a slap at the Republican Party."

May has come under intense pressure over the invitation, which she extended while visiting the White House just hours before he announced his travel ban.

The ban has since been temporarily suspended by a federal judge.

More than 1.8 million people have signed a public petition calling on ministers to cancel Trump's visit, which MPs are due to debate later this month, although a recent poll showed that only 36 percent of Britons opposed the visit.

The date and details of the state visit are still being worked out and a spokeswoman for the speaker's office said the government had not made any request for Trump to address parliament.

But a speech to both Houses of Commons and Lords has been a feature of many previous state visits, including one by Barack Obama in 2011.

The House of Lords speaker Norman Fowler was expected to make a statement on the issue later yesterday. More than 160 of parliament's 650 MPs have signed a parliamentary motion opposing an address by Trump, citing the travel ban and his comments on torture and women.

May on Monday told MPs that last week she had urged her fellow European leaders to "engage patiently and constructively" with the new US administration.

Trump's criticism of the NATO military alliance and his prediction that the EU could fall apart following Britain's vote to leave has caused alarm in European capitals.

the parliament passed the law.

"The law in question is only a cover for stealing the land and appropriating the property of Palestinians," said the head of the Cairo-based League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit.

Political sources have said Netanyahu privately opposes the bill over concerns it could provide grounds for prosecution by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. The White House official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Washington would oppose any such international legal action.

But the far-right Jewish Home party, a member of the coalition looking to draw voters from the traditional base of Netanyahu's Likud, pushed for the legislation after the forced evacuation of 330 settlers last week from an outpost built on private Palestinian land, reported Reuters.

With Netanyahu under police investigation on suspicion of abuse of office, an allegation he denies, Likud has been slipping in opinion polls. Opposing the law would have risked alienating his supporters and ceding ground to Jewish Home.

Last-minute appeals this week by Netanyahu to postpone the vote until after he meets US President Donald Trump in Washington on Feb 15, were refused by Jewish Home, political sources said.

In London, where he met Prime Minister Theresa May on Monday, Netanyahu told Israeli reporters he did not want to delay the vote and that he sought only to update Washington ahead of time - which he said he did. Israeli officials did contact their US counterparts at the "staff level," the White House official said.

Bullet-hit

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night. Later, they introduced themselves as Detective Branch (DB) of police and picked up Al Amin.

Contacted, Md Mofiz Uddin, officer-in-charge of the DB in Brahmanbaria, said they were not involved in the incident. "None of our teams raided the area," he said.

Al Amin was a "notorious drug peddler" in the district. He was killed in a "gunfight between two rival groups of drug peddlers" in Medda area, said Mainur Rahman, OC of Brahmanbaria Sadar Model Police Station.

He also claimed to have recovered some locally-made weapons and bullets from the spot.

The body was sent to the district sadar hospital for autopsy, he added.

Docs hopeful

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prickly heat rashes on her face when she was only one year old. By the time she turned six, those began to grow and spread in other parts of her body.

Two years later, rashes grew on her ears and right knee. Shahjahan took her to a homeopath who prescribed the schoolgirl medicines for a month, but her condition remained unchanged.

He got his daughter admitted to the DMCH on January 28 after knowing that treatment at the hospital would be free.

Allegation

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our children," she added.

The SSC and equivalent examinations began on February 2 with more than 17.86 lakh students taking the tests. The examinees took Bangla first paper on the first day.

Briefing reporters two days before the examinations, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid had said, "There is no possibility for the original question paper to be leaked..."

Contacted, Dhaka Board Chairman Prof Mahabubur Rahman told The Daily Star that although there was an allegation of leak of Bangla first paper questions, they found no such evidence.

"Neither had we found any evidence of question leak of Bangla second paper and English first paper questions. Our 10 teams visited different exam centres to check it, but they found no such evidence. It's all rumour," he added.

Contacted, Nahid said following the allegation of leak of English first paper question on Facebook, the officials of Dhaka Board checked with the original questions on Monday midnight and became certain that the questions were not leaked.

"We are alert and our law enforcing agencies are continuing their monitoring," he said, requesting the parents and students not to go after the fake question paper.

There have been allegations of question leak in the SSC and HSC examinations in the past several years. In most of the cases, questions were leaked allegedly through Facebook and SMS.

In 2014, a government inquiry committee found question papers of English second paper, and Mathematics second paper of the HSC examination under the Dhaka Board were leaked.

RU replies

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Moreover, the RU statement claimed they followed direct procurement method (DPM) as their initiative for the procurement in open tender method (OTM) became unsuccessful for twice.

A government procurement expert said the procurement of land and building did not fall under the conditions of DPM that are only followed in the cases of monopoly of the product.

It's a reflection of PM's

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It was the alliance's first formal reaction on the constitution of the new EC.

On Monday, President Abdul Hamid formed the commission, making former secretary KM Nurul Huda its chief.

The president also appointed four new election commissioners. They are former additional secretary Mahbub Talukder, ex-secretary Rafiqul Islam, ex-district and sessions judge Begum Kabita Khanam and Brig Gen (ret) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury.

The CEC and his fellow commissioners will conduct the next general election scheduled for January, 2019. The tenure of the current EC, led by Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad, ends on February 14.

After yesterday's meeting, Fakhru said people "doubt the neutrality" of the new EC.

Terming its CEC an AL-blessed person, he claimed that the commission chief was an organiser of Janatar Mancha, a platform which was against the then BNP government, in 1996.

"For valid reasons, we can think that the commission reflects the liking of the prime minister," he said.

Meeting sources said although the 20-party alliance spoke against the new EC, the combine was not taking a tough stance against it right now.

"We are neither rejecting nor accepting the new Election Commission," National Peoples Party chief Fariduzzaman Farhad, a meeting participant, told The Daily Star.

He, however, said Khaleda voiced her frustration over the EC formation, saying another "Rakib-styled" commission has been formed.

The Rakib-led current EC drew heavy flak for holding the January 5 one-sided elections where 153 lawmakers were elected unopposed in 2014.

On Monday night, Khaleda sat in an emergency meeting with the party standing committee members to have their opinions on the new EC and work out the party's strategy to deal with it.

Most of the standing committee members in the meeting strongly opposed the appointment of KM Nurul Huda as the CEC, saying he was an "organiser" of the Janatar Manch.

Talking to The Daily Star, Nurul Huda dismissed reports linking him with Janatar Mancha (People's Platform), saying he was posted as deputy commissioner of Comilla at that time. "How can I join the Janatar

Mancha in Dhaka?"

JP REACTION

Jatiya Party yesterday expressed its satisfaction over the formation of the new EC. It hoped that the commission would set an example by holding a fair, neutral and acceptable national election.

The JP came up with its formal reaction on the EC formation at a press conference at the party chairperson's Banani office.

Party co-chair GM Quader said the way the new CEC and other commissioners were appointed was logical and acceptable.

"We will observe its activities. We will make comments only after evaluating those," he said when he was asked for comments on the commission.

ELECTION EXPERTS' OPINIONS Election experts hoped that the new commission would work independently and hold the next general elections in a free and fair way.

Election Working Group Director Abdul Alim said, "Two of the new commissioners have the experience of working with the Election Commission in the past. I think it would help the new commission to a great extent."

The CEC and other commissioners definitely have the capability to run the EC in a proper way, said Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shushashoner Jannoy Nagorik (Shujan).

Landmark EU-US data privacy court case opens in Dublin

AFP, Dublin

A campaign by Austrian privacy lawyer Max Schrems against Facebook's transfer of personal data from Europe to the US was being heard in an Irish court from yesterday, the latest twist in a long legal battle.

The landmark case in Ireland, where the US tech giant has its European headquarters, will have serious repercussions for personal privacy policies and trans-Atlantic business.

The US government will be allowed to make representations to the court, underlining the importance of the case.

Weak immune system

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informing anyone when doctors were preparing to operate on them.

Talking to this newspaper, Tajul had claimed that his father had died of the same disease. Tajul's elder brother Baset Ali too had the warts on his legs. Later, doctors in Rangpur cut them off.

Dr Samanta Lal Sen, national coordinator of the burn services, told The Daily Star that he received a phone call on Friday and was told that another person in Khulna was showing the "tree man" symptoms.

"As the news about the disease and its treatment at this hospital is spreading, many are reporting their cases here. I think we will get more of these in the upcoming days," he said, expressing concerns over the situations.

Expressing concerns over the situation, the physician said he was working to meet health ministry officials to conduct a research on the disease.

"Tree man" illness is usually a genetic disease, which is mainly characterised by persistent "human papilloma virus" (HPV) infection, according to an article published by the International Journal of Allied Medical Sciences and Clinical

Research of India.

"These diseases carry higher risk of skin cancer [squamous cell carcinoma] when exposed to the sun," it said.

There is no treatment to prevent new lesions from occurring. But it is important to reduce the risk of skin cancer by strictly avoiding the sun, the journal said in its April-June issue last year.

Kabir Chowdhury, visiting professor at the DMCH, said "tree man" syndrome can be inherited or acquired. However, the one carrying the virus will not essentially be affected, if his or her immune system is strong.

Skin specialist Prof ASM Zakaria of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University echoed Dr Kabir's views.

However, he said it is a matter of scientific research to find the relation between weak immune system caused by malnutrition and the "tree man" syndrome.

According to health experts, immune system can be weak for poor diet, stress, taking excessive alcohol, lack of sleep, obesity, lack of exercise, medications, lack of hygiene, radiation exposure, smoking and dehydration.

'Stonehenge' found

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"The fact that these sites lay hidden for centuries beneath mature rain-forest really challenges the idea that Amazonian forests are 'pristine ecosystems,'" said Dr Jennifer Watling, a post-doctoral researcher at the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, University of Sao Paulo.

"We immediately wanted to know whether the region was already forested when the geoglyphs were built, and to what extent people impacted the landscape to build these earthworks."

The researchers reconstructed 6,000 years of vegetation and fire history around two of the geoglyph sites, revealing heavy alterations by ancient humans.

Humans altered the bamboo forests for millennia, they say, creating small, temporary clearings to build these mysterious structures. The team collected soil samples from pits dug within and outside of the geoglyphs.

Then, they analysed 'phytoliths' - a type of microscopic plant fossil made of silica.

This allowed them to reconstruct the ancient vegetation and charcoal quantities, assess the amount of forest burning and carbon stable isotopes, and determine how 'open' the vegetation used to be.

The investigation revealed that the indigenous people didn't burn large tracts of forest, whether for geoglyph construction or agricultural practices.

Instead, they concentrated on economically valuable tree species, such as palms, transforming their environment in the process to create a 'prehistoric supermarket.'

And, the biodiversity of some of Acre's remaining forests may have roots in these ancient 'agroforestry' practices, the researchers say.

The findings will be published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Six to hang

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District and Sessions Judge Reza Mohammad Alamgir Hasan Islam announced the verdict in presence of the convicts.