



Protesters call for the resignation of US Attorney General Jeff Sessions in front of the Justice Department in Washington, DC, yesterday. Sessions was under fire after it was revealed he met twice last year with Russia's ambassador to Washington, seemingly contradicting statements he made in Senate confirmation hearings.

Prevent misuse

FROM PAGE 1
will allow parents or, in their absence, guardians to marry off boys or girls in their "best interests" with permission from court before they reach the permissible age for marriage, which is 18 for girls and 21 for boys.

No minimum age has been specified for marriages under "special circumstances". Besides no explanation has been given as to what will be considered special circumstances.

From the government's side it was said scope of special marriages would be made clear at the time of the formulation of rules.

National Girl Child Advocacy Forum President Badiul Alam Majumdar said, "The decision to keep the provision is not right. In the long run, it'll have negative impacts. The nation will have to pay for it."

"We hope the government will understand its mistake and revise it." Secretary of the Advocacy Forum Nasima Akter Jolly said the government wants to avoid unwarranted situations like child pregnancy.

But instead of incorporating the special provision for marriage, it should have enacted a law to prevent unwarranted situations that lead to child pregnancy.

The existing act to prevent child marriages enacted in 1929 is more time-befitting than the new law to replace the earlier one once the president gives his consent, said Director of Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum Abdus Sahid Mahmud.

Senior Deputy Director of Ain o Salish Kendra Rawshan Jahan Parvin at the conference read out a statement of Child Rights Advocacy Coalition.

The coalition demanded that the roles of the stakeholders be specified in the rules, child's consent be made mandatory for marriage under special circumstances, those responsible for child marriages be punished and a monitoring cell be formed to check underage marriages.

Meanwhile, the United Nations voiced its criticism yesterday over the controversial law.

Rights groups fear without an age limit in these cases, underage children could be married off, undermining Bangladesh's efforts to curb such unions and improve women's health.

The UN's child protection agency in Bangladesh said it "remains concerned" about the special provision, and its potential impact on children's wellbeing.

"Marrying as a child has a lifelong impact on a person's wellbeing. It limits opportunities and the chance to be a child," UNICEF's representative in Bangladesh Edouard Beigbeder said in an email.

Rights organisations warned this latest legal provision could unwind those gains, forcing new brides to drop out of school and work in conditions activists compare to child labour.

ACC arrests

FROM PAGE 2
Islam was arrested in the capital's Segunbagicha in a case filed with Ramna Model Police Station on February 23 over the charges.

He was produced before a magistrate's court that sent him to jail.

ACC found the inconsistencies scrutinising his wealth statement, submitted on July 31 last year upon its request, where the properties were valued at Tk 50.68 lakh, says the case statement.

Moreover, he should not have wealth worth over Tk 81.59 lakh as his income tax papers put his legal and acceptable income at Tk 1.04 crore and expenditure at Tk 22.41 lakh, it adds.

The properties are worth Tk 1.68 crore, meaning the excess wealth was amassed through corruption and misuse of power while in office, the case's investigation officer, ACC Deputy Assistant Director Md Saiduzzaman, told The Daily Star.

Mango flowers bloom

FROM PAGE 20
been unprecedented.

About 90 percent mango trees in the orchards and homesteads have already bloomed and the flowering still continues, said Jahangir Firoj, agriculture officer of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Sadar upazila.

He said there are about 20 lakh mango trees on 26,150 hectares of land in the district. He expects a bumper mango production this season if the weather continues to remain favourable in the next few months.

Sources in the DAE said the number of mango trees and the area of the orchards have increased this year. Last year, there were 18.75 lakh mango trees on 24,470 hectares of land in the district and a total of 2.40 lakh tonnes of mango was produced.

Torikul Islam, a mango farmer of Chhatrajitpur in Shibganj upazila, said he has some 150 mango trees in his two orchards and the condition of the mango orchards is better this year. About 90 percent of the mango trees are in full bloom. One can hardly find any mango tree with no flowers, he said.

Asgar Ali, a mango trader and lease holder of mango orchards in Shibganj, said, "I bought 200 mango trees this season, and I hope to get a good yield if the weather remains favourable."

Golam Mostofa of Moharajpur village in Sadar upazila said he has 300 mango trees in his orchards and 85 to 90 percent of the trees have

Filariasis

FROM PAGE 2
sufferers are especially vulnerable. The disease isn't only a health hazard but causes social vice."

Also at the hospital was Swapna Begum, 32, the daughter of a day labourer Nur Islam from Bosontopur village in Rangpur's Bodorganj upazila. She contracted filariasis when just five years old. Due to the family's economic hardship and lack of knowledge about the disease, treatment was not forthcoming.

For many years she has been an acute sufferer. She often groans in pain. Although her parents tried to find a husband for her at a younger age, no potential bridegroom would accept her. In frustration they gave up hope, leaving Swapna most probably to live the rest of her life, alone.

Police to report

FROM PAGE 20
negligence" of police and summoned the SP to appear before it.

On January 16, the tribunal exonerated Mymensingh SP Syed Nurul Islam as he had offered an unconditional apology. But the tribunal did not accept the IGP's explanation as it was not signed by him, and directed him to submit a written one with his own signature within 10 days from the date.

On February 20, the IGP submitted his written explanation and the tribunal on Wednesday accepted his reply finding it "satisfactory."

Earlier, the IGP had sent his reply by the law officer of the IGP office as he was outside the country, AKM Shahidul said.

WHAT IGP WROTE IN HIS REPLY?

The IGP said although police always comply with the tribunal's orders, including arrest warrants, immediately, all the operational units of police were given some new directives following the incident [of Wazuddin]. He mentioned about eight directives in his reply.

As per the directives, the officer-in-charge of a police station will appoint an officer immediately after receiving an arrest warrant from the tribunal and the officer will personally go to the address of the accused to make an

already bloomed.

Sorof Uddin, senior scientific officer of Regional Horticulture Research Station, said the trees are in full buds now, which indicates there would be a good yield of mango this year.

According to scientists and agriculture officials, mangoes are the most important cash crop in the region and that the livelihood of a large number of people are dependent on the fruit.

A good number of people remain engaged in different jobs, including nursing, harvesting and packing, during the mango season every year. The region has a long tradition of producing at least 350 varieties of mangoes, they said.

Mango growers and traders who have started taking care of the mango trees from the month of December last year are upbeat that it will bring good business. Farmers have started spraying pesticides on the trees to ensure protection of the crop.

Two 'robbers'

FROM PAGE 20
which led to the "gunfight".

After the "gunbattle", the body of Billal was found on the spot. The others fled, the Rab official claimed.

Rab also claimed to have recovered five firearms and 77 bullets from the spot.

In Brahmanbaria, a suspected robber and a drug dealer were killed in separate "shootouts" with police in Bijoy nagar upazila early yesterday, reports our correspondent there.

A "gunfight" between "robbers" and detectives took place at Khetabari in the upazila around 3:30am.

Robber Bulbul Islam alias "Builla" of Kalisima village in the upazila was found dead after the "shootout", said Ali Arshad, officer-in-charge of Bijoy nagar Police Station.

Police said Bulbul stood accused in five cases.

In another incident, an alleged drug dealer, Nurul Islam alias "Prakash Nuru" of Nalgaria village under the same upazila, was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Mirasani area around 4:30am, the police official said.

Police claimed to have recovered a firearm and several sharp weapons from the spot.

arrest.

If the officer fails to arrest, he or she will collect the addresses of the accused's relatives and will send messages to the authorities concerned to secure arrest of the accused, one directive read.

Police would submit a report to the tribunal if there was no immediate prospect of arresting an accused and if the accused dies, it added.

"In future, police will give more importance and remain cautious in executing the arrest warrant of the International Crimes Tribunal and sending reports," the IGP wrote.

Asked about police's new initiatives, Prosecutor Tapos Kanti Baul welcomed it.

"On several occasions, police have shown negligence in executing tribunal's orders which ultimately allowed the accused to remain off the hook. I hope police will be more cautious in executing tribunal's orders from now on," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Until November last year, at least 87 accused and convicts were on the run after two war crimes tribunals issued warrants for their arrest since the beginning of war crimes trial in March 2010, according to the ICT's investigation agency.

Pay Tk 30cr

FROM PAGE 1

Bhuiyan appeared before the HC on February 13 as per its January 25 order and informed the court that the tannery owners had not paid the money although the government had issued a notice asking them to pay that.

On March 1, the industries secretary submitted a report to the HC, saying that owners of 154 tanneries, which are operating in the capital's Hazaribagh in violation of the SC order, had not paid Tk 30.85 crore in compensation for damaging and polluting the environment since August last year to February 15 this year.

Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh filed the contempt petition with the HC against the tannery owners for not paying the compensation.

The rights body's lawyer Manzill Murshid yesterday sought the HC's directives in this regard.

Following the petition, the HC on January 25 summoned the industries secretary to appear before it on February 13 for giving an explanation over collecting compensation from the tannery owners at Hazaribagh.

Manzill told The Daily Star yesterday that the HC in June last year directed each of the tanners to give a daily compensation of Tk 50,000 for harming the environment.

Later, the tannery owners moved to the Appellate Division against the order. The amount was later revised to Tk 10,000, he said.

On August 22 last year, the industries secretary submitted a report to the HC, saying that 98 tannery owners out of 154 deposited Tk 55.9 lakh with the national exchequer as compensation for polluting the environment from August 11 to 16 last year.

'Neo JMB chief

FROM PAGE 20

the Gulshan café siege, had been the North Bengal chief of "Neo JMB" until his arrest at Tangail on January 13 last year. Khaled Hasan alias Badar Mama succeeded Jahangir as the unit chief. He was killed in a "shootout" with police in Bogra's Sherpur on August 29 last year, said the SP.

LINKS TO MILITANCY
Amijul was the military wing chief of the North Bengal "Neo JMB" in the post-Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury days of the outfit, according to the police press release.

Tamim, a mastermind of the Gulshan café attack, was killed during a raid on a Narayanganj house in August last year.

SP Asaduzzaman said Amijul was given the codenames Al Amin and Rony in "Neo JMB". He frequented the JMB den at a house in Juanpur Kuthibari village in Bogra's Sherpur upazila.

Two militants, Tarikul Islam and Raisul Islam Russell alias Fardin, were killed as a grenade went off in the den on April 3 last year. Police filed a case against 31 militants in connection with the incident, added the SP.

"He had been involved in the JMB since 2013-14. Some of his family members were under police watch," said the police official.

Gulshan café attack mastermind Jahangir Alam alias Rajib Gandhi adorned the post until his arrest at Tangail on January 13, 2016, while Khaled Hasan alias Badar Mama, 30, led from the post until his death in "shootout" with police in Sherpur of Bogra on August 29, 2016.

Talking to The Daily Star over the phone, Amijul's mother Laili Begum said she along with her husband Ataur Rahman left her village home hours after her son's arrest.

Amijul's father Durul Huda, a mason from Godagari's Sarangpur village, married her when she was 12. The couple split when Amijul was only four months old.

Amijul stayed with her mother at his maternal grandparents' house in Char Horishpur village of Chapainawabganj until he reached the age of 12.

After the death of her parents, Laili married Ataur and took Amijul with her to Bujruk Rajarampur village.

"After that, my son's life changed," she said.

According to Laili, Amijul passed Dakhil exams from Norendrapur Dakhil Madrasa in 2008 and completed HSC in 2010 and degree (pass) course in 2013 from Godagari Degree College.

"He was an expert electrician. He used to do electrical works at homes," she added.

Amijul went home around Tuesday noon. After having lunch with family members, he took rest. Around the time of Esha prayers, he went out with a bag in his hand.

"He told me that he was going to a nearby house for a repair job. There was some equipment in the bag. He was arrested on his way to that house," said Laili.

Yaba ingredient

FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh consumes around 2 million yaba pills a day, most of it made in labs in the lawless border regions of Myanmar, according to national and transnational anti-drugs officials.

The ban on pseudoephedrine imports was approved late last month and will be announced soon, according to three officials at the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) in Dhaka. It was aimed at choking off supplies for domestic yaba production before it becomes too established, they said.

"With this decision, no neighbouring country, including Myanmar, can say that Bangladesh is a hub for producing yaba," said Nazrul Islam Sikder, a senior DNC official.

Pseudoephedrine is a decongestant used in popular over-the-counter cold remedies. But it can also be used as a so-called precursor in methamphetamine production, prompting governments around the world to impose new controls on the drug in recent years with some, such as Mexico, banning imports altogether.

Bangladesh's annual pseudoephedrine imports have jumped more than six times to around 20 tonnes from five years ago, according to the minutes of a December government meeting on the issue seen by Reuters.

A 2014 report by the US Department of State identified Bangladesh as a source and transit point for the chemical diverted to make the drug methamphetamine elsewhere.

Another senior DNC official denied any international pressure behind the latest ban. He requested anonymity.

YABA CRACKDOWN
Bangladesh has legally sourced pseudoephedrine from countries such as Brazil, Italy, India, China and Singapore for the manufacture of around eight types of cold pills, mostly by local companies.

The local unit of GlaxoSmithKline said it stopped making or selling any medicine containing pseudoephedrine in 2010, describing the move as a "decision taken by business at that time". The company said it had not received any formal communication on the ban of pseudoephedrine from the Bangladesh government.

One kg of pseudoephedrine, costing up to \$67, can be used to make as much as 400,000 yaba pills worth around \$626,000.

"This has encouraged many pharmaceutical companies into misusing pseudoephedrine," DNC's Chief Chemical Examiner, Dulal Krishna Saha, told the meeting, without naming any firm.

The DNC sources also declined to identify any company diverting pseudoephedrine into illicit channels.

The ban was unlikely to cause any shortage of cold medicine in Bangladesh because alternatives were available, said Golam Kibria, director of Bangladesh's drug regulatory authority.

Anti-narcotics officials in Myanmar say large quantities of pseudoephedrine produced in India's

huge and ill-regulated pharmaceutical sector are smuggled into the country to make yaba, and DNC officers in Bangladesh, which also borders India, and international experts acknowledged there was a risk of a similar smuggling trade developing.

"Controls can work done right, but at the same time bans can sometimes create lucrative black markets," said Jeremy Douglas, regional representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

"We often see smugglers and traffickers address demand for banned substances. Organised criminals watch markets very effectively and they will not hesitate if there is money to be made."

Apart from the ban, Bangladesh has also prepared a secret list of around 100 people driving yaba trafficking in the country, according to two DNC officials. Some of them have already been caught, police officials said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has personally monitored the campaign against

yaba, and her political adviser told Reuters last month that the influx of Rohingya Muslim refugees from neighbouring Myanmar was worsening the drug problem.

The stateless refugees, who can't easily be traced, are the preferred carriers of yaba, police officials said.

Bangladesh narcotics officials plan to visit Myanmar this month to discuss curbing the flow of yaba.

Muhith lauds

FROM PAGE 20

In 1972, some 70 percent people used to live in poverty, compelling the governments to work for poverty eradication. The rate has now come down to 22 percent, said Muhith.

"The success in poverty eradication is down to people's initiatives, spirit and courage. The governments created a congenial environment so individual initiatives can thrive."

Muhith said the governments had enabled people to utilise their capacity. "Grameen Bank has also played this role successfully in our country. Grameen Bank was established with a notion that even the extreme poor have rights to credits, and if they get loans they can change their fortunes."

Not only Grameen Bank, organisations such as Brac also came up with similar ideas for the poor, he said.

The minister, however, said 3.40 crore people were still poor in Bangladesh, with half of them living in extreme poverty. "So, the problem is acute and we have to continue with our efforts."

The minister said the government aimed at eradicating poverty from the country by 2024.

Muhith also said Grameen Bank had to change the way of providing loans. The weekly instalment system has to change, he said.

Md Eunusur Rahman, bank and financial institutions division secretary, and Qimiao Fan, country director of the World Bank, also spoke at the ceremony.

Trump facing Russia

FROM PAGE 1

Trump campaign officials had frequent contact with Russian officials last year, as Obama officials were looking into allegations that the Russian government was engaging in cyber attacks to try to tilt the election Trump's way.

Calls for Sessions to recuse himself from the Justice Department's investigation into ties between Trump and Russia have snowballed, following a Washington Post report Tuesday night exposing multiple meetings between Sessions and Sergey Kislyak, the Russian ambassador to the US, during the campaign. Those meetings, one of which occurred during the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, came amid an alleged effort by Russia to aid Trump's campaign, for which Sessions was a prominent surrogate.

Asked about connections between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign during his confirmation hearings, Sessions did not disclose his meetings with the ambassador and, in fact, told Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) that "I did not have communications with the Russians." In a set of written answers for Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Sessions said he had not been in contact with Russian officials regarding the 2016 campaign.

"This is the latest attack against the Trump administration by partisan Democrats. [Attorney] General Sessions met with the ambassador in an official capacity as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, which is entirely consistent with his testimony," a White House official said. "It's no surprise Sen. Al Franken is pushing this story immediately following President Trump's successful address to the nation."

In an interview with Fox News, White House press secretary Sean Spicer said Sessions "did his job" and had been "100 percent straight" with the Senate

Judiciary Committee during his confirmation hearings. He said Democrats were guilty of "continuing to push a false narrative for political purposes."

A spokeswoman for Sessions told the Post that "there was absolutely nothing misleading about his answer" to Franken or Leahy regarding ties to Russia. That spokeswoman said Sessions' meetings with the ambassador were related to his work as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, not his role on the Trump campaign.

A spokeswoman for Russia's foreign ministry, speaking to CNN yesterday morning, said Kislyak is a "world-class diplomat" who has "communicated with his American colleagues through decades on different fields." She said CNN had accused Kislyak of being a Russian spy and warned the network to "stop spreading lie[s] and false news" as she walked away from her interviewer.

In a brief exchange yesterday morning with a reporter from NBC News, Sessions said he would recuse himself "whenever it's appropriate" but denied that he had discussed the campaign with Russian officials. "I have not met with any Russians at any time to discuss any political campaign, and those remarks are unbelievable to me and are false," he said.

But a senior national security official from the administration of former President Barack Obama said ties between Trump and Russia were a source of grave concern for the outgoing administration in its final days. The official said he had no specific information that Sessions was among those interfacing with the Kremlin on behalf of the incoming administration, but he said former national security adviser Michael Flynn, who was forced to resign over misstatements to Vice President Mike Pence and others about conversations with the Russian ambassador, was not acting alone.