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Refugee Boat off Yemen Coast

31 killed in airstrike

Saudi-led coalition refutes Yemen rebels' claim that it's behind the raid

AGencies

Thirty-one Somali refugees were killed off the coast of Yemen late on Thursday when a helicopter attacked the boat they were travelling in, a local coast guard in the Houthi-controlled Hodeidah area said.

Coast guard Mohamed al-Alay told Reuters the refugees, carrying official UNHCR documents, were on their way from Yemen to Sudan when they were attacked by an Apache helicopter near the Bab al-Mandeb strait.

It was not immediately clear who carried out the attack.

The rebel-controlled Saba agency accused the Saudi-led coalition battling the insurgents of attacking the refugees from the air but did not provide further details.

The spokesperson for the coalition, General Ahmed al-Asseri, said they did not conduct any operations or have any engagement in the Hodeidah area on Thursday.

He said Hodeidah remained under the control of the Houthis and the port continued to be used for "trafficking people, smuggling weapons and attacks against the line of communications in the Red Sea."

UNHCR spokeswoman in Yemen, Shabia Mantoo, confirmed that a number of refugees were killed.

"We are distressed by this incident and understand that refugees were travelling in a vessel off the coast of Hodeidah which was reportedly impacted during the course of hostilities," she told Reuters by telephone.

Mantoo said that refugees and asylum seekers were moving out of Yemen and heading north because of deteriorating conditions.

A sailor who had been operating the boat, Ibrahim Ali Zeyad, said 80 refugees had been rescued.

The spokesman for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) told a media briefing in Geneva the number

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Workers transport sacks of potatoes to a cold storage in Munshiganj's Sirajdikhan yesterday. There has been a bumper production of potatoes in the district this season. Each maund of the crop is being sold at Tk 400. Inset, workers harvest and pile up potatoes in a farm.

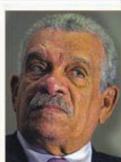
Nobel laureate poet Derek Walcott dies

Reuters, St Lucia

Poet Derek Walcott, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992 and helped thrust Caribbean writing into the global spotlight, died at his home in St Lucia yesterday.

He was 87. Jeff Seroy, a spokesman for publisher Farrar, Straus and Giroux, said Walcott died shortly after 5:00am. The cause of death was not immediately known, but Seroy said Walcott had been ill for some time and had recently returned home from a hospital stay.

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5,000 militant suspects on police list

77 held in special drive belong to JMB, other outfits

MOhammad JAmlil KHAN

Police have drawn up a list of nearly 5,000 suspected militants and a special drive is underway to arrest them.

The 10-day drive was launched across the country on March 9 upon an instruction from the Police Headquarters (PHQ) to district superintendents of police to bring the suspects to book, sources in the headquarters said.

A total of 77 suspected militants have been rounded up in the drive until Wednesday. The arrestees are from different militant outfits, including Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), its offshoot "Neo JMB", Hizb ut-Tahrir, Shahadat-e Al Hikma and Allar Dal.

The drive comes hot on the heels of some recent militant activities, including an attempt to snatch away a top militant from a prison van in Gazipur's Tongi.

Talking to The Daily Star on Wednesday, Assistant Inspector General (confidential) of Police Md Moniruzzaman said, "We sent a list of militants to all

the police superintendents and instructed them to carry out a special drive in their respective districts."

The list was prepared based on information gleaned from arrested militants and police investigations. There might be some fake names or pseudonyms in the list and the SPs would verify those through investigations, he added.

A top PHQ official, who was involved in the compilation of the list, said the list contained names of about 5,000 militants hiding across the country.

Another high official in PHQ said law enforcers arrested suspected militants Mahmud Hasan and Ahmed Azwad Imtiaz Talukder alias Omi in Comilla on March 7. The two during primary interrogation told police that "Neo JMB" operatives relocated to different bordering districts from Dhaka and that they chose Chittagong as its "capital", the official told this correspondent on condition of anonymity.

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Conflict with another 'pir' led to murder

Claim Dinajpur police on killing of 'pir', aide

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

The "pir" and his female attendant were killed inside a shrine in Dinajpur's Doula village on Monday because of his conflict with another "pir" over religious views, police claimed yesterday.

The murders have nothing to do with militancy, said Hamidul Alam, superintendent of police in the district, at a press conference at his office.

The accused "pir", Ishaq Ali, 55, and Saidur Rahman, 45, a Khadem at the shrine in Bochaganj upazila, gave confessional statements before a Dinajpur court yesterday, admitting their involvement in the double murder, said police.

The SP said there had been a longstanding conflict between the slain "pir", Farhad

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Indian farmer wins train in legal fight

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian farmer's battle for proper compensation for land seized to build a railway reached an unexpected conclusion this week when a court awarded him a train.

Sampuran Singh has been fighting for the money since 2015, when he went to court to argue that Indian Railways had underpaid him for a piece of land in the northern state of Punjab acquired to build new tracks.

He won his case, but the railway refused to pay and he filed another plea in January.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Battery-run three-wheelers, also known as Easybike, parked along Dhaka-Mawa highway in Nimtoli. Defying a government ban, such small, flimsy vehicles ply the highway while the authorities look the other way. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Military action an 'option'

US warns N Korea; Tillerson says 'strategic patience' ended; Russia accuses US of fuelling tension

AFP, Seoul

Military action by the United States against nuclear-armed North Korea is an "option on the table" if the threat from the rogue regime escalates, Washington's top diplomat Rex Tillerson said yesterday.

The strong comments from the secretary of state, in Asia for his first foray into crisis management, appear to signal a sea change in American policy towards the isolated country.

Tillerson's tour comes after a missile launch last week that Pyongyang described as a drill for an attack on US bases in Japan.

The US has 28,000 troops stationed in South Korea to defend it from the North, but the capital Seoul is within range of Pyongyang's artillery and analysts believe any conflict could risk rapid escalation and heavy casualties.

Even so, Tillerson announced the end of United States' "strategic patience" -- the stance of the previous administration under Barack Obama.

Under that previous policy, the US ruled out diplomatic engagement with the North until it made a tangible commitment to denuclearisation, hoping that internal stresses in the isolated country would bring about change.

"We are exploring a new range of diplomatic, security, economic measures. All options are on the table," Tillerson told reporters at a joint press conference with his South Korean counterpart Yun Byung-Se.

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'Robber' killed in Kushtia 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

An alleged robber was killed in a "gunfight" with police at Adabaria village in Kushtia's Daulatpur upazila early yesterday.

The deceased, Abdus Selim, 40, was from Modhugari in the upazila. He was a listed robber and a member of an inter-district robber gang, police claimed.

Selim was accused in 10 cases, including one for murder, four for robberies,

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PRAYER TIMING MARCH 18

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5-00 12-45 4-30 6-14 7-45
JAMAAT 5-35 1-15 4-45 6-18 8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION