

# Raise

FROM PAGE 16

attempted to marry her off forcibly when she was a student of class IX at Jhalakathi's Rajapur Pilot Girls High School in 2015.

Finding no way out, she knocked at the door of local police and sued her mother and the bridegroom for the attempt. The case is now under trial.

On March 29 this year, the US honoured Sharmin with the Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award 2017 for courageously resisting her mother's attempts to marry her off at an early age.

The US embassy in Dhaka yesterday organised a press meet programme at the capital's Edward M Kennedy (EMK) Centre for Sharmin to share with journalists her experience at winning the award.

The 15-year-old girl said to reduce child marriage, those involved in the practice should be punished.

"If people involved in child marriage are punished, others will be afraid of committing the same act," she said.

Sharmin told girls that they could also seek assistance from members and chairmen of union parishads, if their parents forcibly try to marry them off.

"I want to be a lawyer and fight for the rights of underprivileged women," said Sharmin, who sat for the SSC examinations this year.

Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, a trend that threatens the health, safety, and education of millions of girls and undermines the country's progress.

US First Lady Melania Trump and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas A Shannon presented the award to 13 women from around the world including Sharmin.

Since the inception of this award in 2007, the State Department has honoured over 100 women from over 60 countries.

Sharmin travelled across the US to engage in an International Visitor Leadership Programme with the American people. She shared her experience with the school students of the USA and discussed how they could work together to improve the lives of women and girls around the world.

# Govt moves

FROM PAGE 1

with a six-member Chinese delegation at his ministry.

The minister's comments came a day after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had said she rejected the design and feasibility study of the Ganges barrage project as it would be suicidal.

Anisul said there was no disagreement over the construction of the barrage, but opinions differed about its location and how it would be built.

Earlier, the six-member delegation, led by Chinese Water Resources Minister Chen Lei, met a 12-member Bangladesh team, headed by Anisul.

During the meeting, Chen Lei expressed China's keenness to help Bangladesh dredging rivers, the minister said.

The meeting also discussed the progress of the implementation of different deals and MoUs signed between the two countries in the water resources sector.

# Party on Everest!

FROM PAGE 16

"It was truly amazing. I feel very lucky to have played here. We did a wonderful event and had people from all over the world. I feel very blessed," Oakenfold told AFP by phone from base camp after the performance.

Base camp lies at an altitude of 5,380 metres (17,600 feet), and around 100 climbers and trekkers were there for the gig.

"It was pretty cool. I've been here many years but never seen anything like that," 38-year-old American climber Ben Jones told AFP by phone.

The number of trekkers at the camp will swell in the coming weeks as the climbing season gets into full swing.

Hundreds of climbers spend weeks acclimatising to the altitude before attempting to reach the summit during the brief spring window when the weather is at its best.

It was a dramatic departure for Oakenfold, who admitted he was more used to playing the world's top clubs and the beaches of Ibiza and Goa than the mountains of Nepal.

Oakenfold, who had never trekked before, trained for four months before arriving in Nepal, fitting in between a hectic schedule of late night gigs.

"I'm not going to pretend it was easy to get here... but it has been a wonderful trek. If you could see the view I'm looking at, it is very inspiring," he told AFP on Monday.

The gig is the first in the record producer's SoundTrek series, aimed at drawing attention to the effects of global warming and raising money for charities.

Oakenfold, whose three-decade long career has included collaborations with Madonna and U2, is also raising funds to help survivors of Nepal's devastating 2015 earthquake, which killed nearly 9,000 people and left thousands homeless.

"I want to support in the rebuilding and to shed light on the environment... I would like to do my bit," he said.

# Hasina bins

FROM PAGE 1

India visit as a "failed one", saying the PM returned home "empty handed".

"The country's people think the tour is a failed one... she [Hasina] was given nothing but assurances," Khaleda said.

About the BNP chief's claim that she did not know how to raise a thing that she wants, Hasina said, "Are we beggars? We've attained what we need through friendly relations."

She mentioned that no political party was aware like her party Awami League about the country's independence and sovereignty.

Talking about the anti-dumping clause imposed by the Indian side, the PM said India imposed the clause newly on jute items. "I talked to the Indian prime minister about this and they assured us of looking into the matter."

About Khaleda's allegation that Hasina does politics based on religion, she said she performs religious rituals and follows religious rules. "I never do politics based on religion; rather the BNP and Khaleda Zia do politics based on religion."

Hasina said the BNP was now

talking about the Teesta and other bilateral issues. "You were in power. Why didn't you raise the Teesta, LBA, maritime boundary and other issues then?"

She said Khaleda, during her tour of India when in power forgot to raise the Ganges water-sharing issue with her Indian side. "She was so much busy licking India's foot that she forgot to settle down the issues of maritime boundary and others."

Regarding the USD 500 million MoU on defence cooperation, the PM said Bangladesh would procure what it needed from any country of the world. "There's nothing binding in the MoU. And there's nothing obscure here."

The PM also described various steps taken by her government for the welfare of Islam, and said it was her government that has given recognition of 'Dawra Hadith' as equivalent to Master's degree.

She hoped the students of Qawmi madrasas would get good jobs and employment opportunities as the government was giving due importance to 14 lakh students of 75,000 Qawmi madrasas across the country.

# PM returned empty-handed

FROM PAGE 1

the sentiment of the country's Muslim majority people".

About the Tuesday's meeting between the PM and the Qawmi madrasa-based Islamic clerics, Khaleda said the premier herself "started doing religion-based politics".

"In the past, she [Hasina] had signed an agreement with a religion-based organisation aimed at introducing Sharia law in the country and starting religion-based politics."

On December 23, 2006, then AL general secretary Abdul Jalil had entered a five-point MoU with Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, making a pledge that certified Alems (Islamic clerics) would be given the right to issue fatwas (Islamic rulings) if the Awami League-led grand alliance was voted to power.

The other points of the MoU include imposing a ban on enacting any law that goes against Qur'anic values, taking steps for implementing the initiative to recognise the degrees awarded by Qawmi madrasas and banning criticism of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

However, the AL was forced to scrap the deal after around two months following criticism from different quarters.

Mentioning about the January 5, 2014 national election, Khaleda said the then Indian government had "very grossly interfered into Bangladesh's internal politics ahead of the farcical election".

She hoped the incumbent Indian government would overcome the "previous mistakes" and respect the sentiment of the people of Bangladesh.

She alleged that Hasina's tour could not yield any positive outcome on resolving the outstanding issues, including the Teesta water sharing deal, Ganges barrage project, border killing and removing tariff and nontariff barriers to Bangladeshi export prod-

# HC verdict

FROM PAGE 16

competitiveness since there is no specific guideline in this regard.

In such a situation, judges are being appointed through a very weak system, and a culture of nepotism has developed due to suggestions made by the executive, undoubtedly favouring persons with similar political ideologies and political connection with the ruling party, he said.

Following the petition, the HC on June 6, 2010, asked the government to inform it within four weeks the process or system followed for selection of persons for appointment as judges both in the Appellate and High Court divisions of the SC since independence of the country.

It also issued a rule asking the government to explain why a specific guideline to appoint its judges should not be framed to bring transparency and competitiveness in the process.

Petitioner's counsel barrister Hassan MS Azim told The Daily Star yesterday that the government did not give any reply to the HC rule and did not inform the court about the existing process for selecting candidates for the HC judges.

Azim said the HC had heard experts' opinions from four amice curiae (friends of the court) -- Dr Kamal Hossain, barrister Shafique Ahmed, advocate AF Hasan Arif and barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud -- on the petition.

During hearing on the petition, Dr Kamal, Shafique, Hasan Arif opined that the HC could frame guidelines for appointing its judges until a specific law was formulated, he said.

Rokanuddin told the HC that parliament was the authority to pass a bill for formulating a law for recruitment of its judges, he added.

ucts.

"Despite demand by the people, the prime minister didn't utter a single word about changing the site of the proposed Rampal power plant which would destroy the Sundarbans and the local environment," Khaleda said.

The BNP chief claimed none of the deals and MoUs were signed protecting the national interests.

"They [the government] are only repaying the debt of their gratitude to India. In doing so, they are sacrificing the national interests and dignity. They have dented the country's sovereignty."

She said although the PM was satisfied with the outcome of her tour, the people were "dissatisfied and worried about it". "They didn't want so many anti-nation deals and MoUs as they only wanted to realise their dues."

Khaleda said though the BNP had difference of opinions with the AL over many issues, her party favoured a common stance on protecting national interests, dignity and security.

"Had Sheikh Hasina played a strong role in upholding these issues, we could have unequivocally supported her role. Unfortunately, she [PM] totally failed to do so."

She expressed concern over the defence MoUs signed with India, saying that the PM made Bangladesh "a part of India's military plan" through the signing of the MoUs.

The former premier said the government inked the MoUs ignoring the public opinion and opposition from political parties. "Like the people, we're also worried that there could be a long-term negative impact from it [MoUs]."

About the Hefajot-e-Islam's demand for removal of the Greek goddess' idol from the Supreme Court premises, Khaleda said the chief justice had the jurisdiction to make a decision in this regard.

Even China and Iran celebrated New Year and there was no justification to mingle it with religion, Hasina said.

She also reiterated her call for not eating hilsa on Pahela Baishakh to help boost its production.

"I would like to call upon all not to catch and eat hilsa on Pahela Baishakh.... Instead, you can take khichuri [hotch-potch], panta bhat [fermented rice], vegetables, fried egg and burnt dried chilli."

Earlier, the PM administered the oath to the zilla parishad chairman.

Matin was elected unopposed the chairman of Narsingdi Zilla Parishad in the by-polls. The post fell vacant after Asaduzzaman had died on February 1.

LGRD Minister Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain, PM's Principal Secretary Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury and Senior PMO Secretary Suraiya Begum were present.

# Baishakh

FROM PAGE 16

the word *Mangal* is not derived from the Hindu religion and the practice of *Halkhata* began during the Mughal rule. There's no scope for spreading confusion about it."

She termed Pahela Baishakh a universal festival which is celebrated by the people of all faiths. "It's the only festival celebrated by the people of all religions together."

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# Nababarsha graffiti

FROM PAGE 2

while leaving," he told this correspondent when he visited the area yesterday morning.

Kamrul Hasan Bappy, one of the two conveners of the Pahela Baishakh Uddjan Committee and also a Master's student at the institute, said they had painted graffiti on around 70 feet of the wall outside the institute on the theme "Botthola Chapai Chobi".

Police could not arrest or identify any of the culprits till last night.

Visiting the spot, SM Mostain Hossain, deputy commissioner (South) of Chittagong Metropolitan Police, said, "We have got information that there were some internal conflicts among the institute students over organising the programme. We are also investigating to find out whether it was done by those who are against Pahela Baishakh celebrations."

A general diary was filed over the incident.

The students and teachers claimed that there was no such conflict among them.

Artist Prof Dhali Al Mamoon, adviser to the organising committee,

said, "Those who are against the Good have done this. They want to isolate us from our history and heritage."

# Trump spokesman apologises for Hitler reference

REUTERS, Washington

White House spokesman Sean Spicer triggered an uproar on Tuesday by saying Adolf Hitler did not use chemical weapons. He apologized after his comments drew immediate criticism on social media and elsewhere for overlooking the fact that millions of Jews were killed in Nazi gas chambers.

Spicer made the assertion at a daily news briefing, during a discussion about the April 4 chemical weapons attack in Syria that killed 87 people. Washington has blamed the attack on the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"You had someone as despicable as Hitler who didn't even sink to using chemical weapons," Spicer said when asked about Russia's alliance with the Syrian government.

# Cops arrest terror suspect

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi police arrested a suspected militant from a city house early hours on Monday.

Law enforcers cordoned off the eight-storey residential building in Kadirganj area around 11:00pm yesterday, suspecting it to be a militant hideout.

Police stormed the house around 1:00am and ended the raid about 40 minutes later.

There were no explosives or fire-arms in the house, but police recovered Tk 12 lakh from the flat, Nahidul Islam, DC of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, told reporters.

The arrested is Abir Mahmud, he added.

House owner Reyasul Islam said Abir, from Ishwardi of Pabna, rented the flat four months ago. He identified himself as a software engineer working at a private bank.

# Hill people

FROM PAGE 2

People of the Mro community in Bandarban are also prepared to celebrate their traditional 'Sankran Poi' festival in Chimbuk Bagan Para area where thousands of people will gather on the occasion.

The Tanchangya and Chakma community will also arrange their traditional 'Ghila Khela' programme to welcome the New Year.

The Chakma, Marma and Tripura communities will also organise 'Elderly Puja' as a mark of respect to the elders by giving bath and new clothes to them.

For the Chakmas, the first day of the festival is called 'Fulbiju', the second day is 'Mulbiju' and third day or Pahela Baishakh is called 'Gojija Pojija Din'.

On 'Fulbiju', the Chakmas get up early in the morning, clean their houses and decorate those with flowers.

They also take shower and float flowers in the rivers, canals and springs to seek divine blessings of the God for peace and prosperity.

On 'Mulbiju', the Chakmas cook special traditional food called Pachon.

The Tripuras also celebrate 'Boishu' for three days -- 'Harboishu', 'Bishuma' and 'Bisikatal'.

On the first day they show respect to the birds, animals and insects of the universe to please their mythical god Goriya.

Young girls scatter rice on their yard to feed birds and domestic animals and decorate their houses with flowers to welcome their guests. They also go to the river to float flowers. They believe if they can please god Goriya, the earth will be a suitable place for living.

On Bishuma, the second day of the Boisabi festival for the Tripuras, they bid farewell to the year. It is a day of self-sacrifice and self-restraint for them.

The Tripuras also cook Pachon with maximum 108 ingredients of local vegetables including broad or green beans, shimul flower, tara fig flower, banana flower, banana plant's pith, sajna (drumsticks), sajna flower, wild arum, cassava, tender cane vine, radish, and pumpkin, among others.

Traditionally, Boisabi is a cultural and religious festival of the indigenous people living in the hills but is also enjoyed and attended by a host of Bangalees as well.

# Family rejects

FROM PAGE 16

committed suicide. He said such a report might affect the investigation.

Raudha Athif, a 2nd-year MBBS student at the college in Rajshahi city, was found dead at her dormitory room on March 29.

Following primary investigation, police said they suspected it was a suicide case. Later, the autopsy report confirmed it.

However, Raudha's family members rejected the report. They have been insisting that the Vogue cover girl was murdered.

On Monday, Athif filed the murder case with a metropolitan magistrate court in Rajshahi against one of the classmates of his daughter. The accused is also a foreign student.

Directed by the court, Shah Makhdum police recorded the case and assigned Inspector Anwar Hossain to investigate it.

Anwar, also the officer-in-charge (investigation) of the police station, visited Raudha's dormitory and talked to the hostel and college authorities yesterday.

He also talked to the forensic experts who performed the autopsy on Raudha's body at Rajshahi Medical College morgue.

"I am giving top priority to the case. I hope to complete the investigation in the quickest possible time," he told this correspondent.

Meanwhile, the accused student was admitted to the college hospital for a

# US-Russia ties

FROM PAGE 16

wanted to "clarify areas of common objectives, areas of common interest -- even where our tactical approaches may be different -- and further clarify areas of sharp difference."

He was expected to challenge Russia to distance itself from Assad and his Iranian backers, an idea that the Kremlin dismissed as "absurd" amid a war of words between the two sides.

In a further indication of the stark differences, Russia also slammed as "unacceptable" a proposed UN resolution put forward by the US, Britain and France on the alleged chemical attack, and said it would veto it in its current form at a vote.

REAL INTENTIONS

At their meeting, Lavrov told Tillerson Moscow was hoping to understand Washington's "real intentions" and warned that Moscow considered it "fundamentally important" to prevent more "unlawful" US strikes against its ally Syria.

He said the visit -- the first to Moscow by a senior Trump administration official -- offered an opportunity to clarify the chances of cooperation "above all on the formation of a broad anti-terrorist front".

Despite hopes of an improvement in ties under Trump, the fallout over the alleged chemical attack and US bombing meant the Syrian conflict -- in which more than 320,000 people have died -- has dominated Tillerson's visit.

US officials have suggested Russian forces may have colluded in the latest atrocity blamed on Assad's regime, and it remained unclear if Tillerson would be invited to meet Putin.

Ahead of the talks, far from trying to calm tempers, both sides escalated their rhetoric as the US tried to prise Moscow and Damascus apart.

Putin accused Assad's opponents of planning to stage chemical attacks to be

blamed on Damascus in order to lure the United States deeper into the conflict.

The Kremlin leader again slammed the US missile strike and angrily rejected the allegation that Assad's forces were behind the suspected chemical attack on the town of Khan Sheikhun that left 87 civilians dead including children.

"Where is the proof that Syrian troops used chemical weapons? There isn't any. But there was a violation of international law. That is an obvious fact," Putin told Mir.

The United Nations peace envoy for Syria yesterday urged the United States and Russia to agree on a way forward to end the war in Syria and pave the way for a "real negotiation."

Special envoy Staffan de Mistura told the UN Security Council that he was ready to convene a new round of talks in May but that US-Russian cooperation was needed.

The two countries have "serious differences" but also a "common interest" in ending the six-year war that has killed 320,000 people, De Mistura said.

"They must find a way to work together to stabilize the situation in a deliberate, realistic and concerted way in support of the political process," he said.

# Relieved

FROM PAGE 2

the rule of law and justice. He hoped that the punishment would stop recurrence of such incidents.

Muzahid Hossain, a khadem of the Dargah who had his shop beside the main gate, went to the spot after the incident and witnessed the horrors. Police detained him the next evening for questioning, but released him a day later.

Hailing the execution of the verdict, Muzahid said, "I can't express how relieved I am now."

# Businesses get a big boost

FROM PAGE 16

local fashion boutiques, footwear, and handicrafts to sweets, traditional snacks and toys.

But fashion and lifestyle items as well as food and beverages are the major attraction.

All brands have seen a high growth in the last two years, said Tanvir Hossain, assistant general manager of Aarong, country's largest lifestyle products retailer.

"The big push came after the government started giving bonus to public sector employees for celebrating the festival."

Apart from clothing, the demand for home décor items, clay pottery and home textiles is also on the rise.

"This year, we have seen better response from customers compared to the previous year. This [Pahela Baishakh] is becoming a shopping season as more and more people celebrate the festival," Tanvir said.

However, some shop owners said their sales were not as expected.

Sales in suburbs also rise ahead of the Bangla calendar year, said SA Quader Keron, chairman of Bangladesh Shop Owners Association. Still, it is not as much as in Eid-ul-Fitre.

Along with fashion houses and lifestyles item sellers, electronics and home appliance marketers, furniture sellers and retail chains have come up with offers to secure a slice of the increased consumer spending.

"It appears that Pahela Baishakh is one of the biggest secular festivals in the sub-continent. Once it was treated as a cultural festival. Now it is more like a familial and social celebration," said Azharul Haque Azad, president of Fashion Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh (FEAB).

Customer turnouts increased since

last Friday and sales have been higher than expected this year from a year ago, he said.

"This is because of stability in politics."

Azharul said local fashion boutique houses may post sales above the target of Tk 1,750 crore during this Baishakh festival, up from Tk 1,500 crore last year.

"We apprehended that businesses might not meet our expectation level as another festival Eid is very close but shopping spree of customers proved our apprehension wrong," said Shaheen Ahmed, vice president of FEAB that represents more than 50 boutiques.

These festivals are driving force of the economy, said Syed Nurul Islam, chairman and chief executive of Well Food, food chain of Well Group.

He expected that sales of sweets will rise because of purchases by corporate clients, banks and insurance companies as well as individual customers.

Bankers also feel that growing activities centring on Pahela Baishakh are benefiting the economy.

"We have seen some demands for small loans ahead of Baishakh," said Abdul Halim Chowdhury, managing director of Pubali Bank.

Shafiqul Alam, managing director of Jamuna Bank, said rising economic activities gives "a sign of prosperity of consumers."

However, private employees don't have extra cash like those of the public sector to spend on this occasion since they don't get Baishakh bonus.

Take the case of Shaheen, an employee of a private firm. He came to Bashundhara City on Monday to buy a dress only for his wife to bring a festive mood at home.

"I cannot afford to spend a lot with my limited income," he said.