



PHOTO: AFP

Syrian children pose for a photo near their house in the rebel-held town of Douma, on the eastern outskirts of Damascus yesterday. Fighting subsided in Syria after a deal signed by government backers Russia and Iran and rebel supporter Turkey to create four safe zones began to take effect.

# AL leaders' wives have properties in Canada

Says Rizvi Ahmed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the ruling Awami League have bought pieces of land and apartments in their wives' names in Canada with siphoned-off money from the country, the BNP said yesterday.

One particular area where they have purchased these properties is now known as "Begumpara", said BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed at a party meeting at Khulna Press Club.

"Awami League leaders are making money in the name of development, through corruption and looting of banks. They are buying land and flats in different countries, including Canada."

The BNP is now preparing for a movement to force the government to create an environment conducive to election and to hold the next general election under an impartial administration, Rizvi said.

He, however, didn't specify the time frame and nature of the movement.

The BNP leader criticised the government's move to enact a law to punish people for distorting the history of the Liberation War and the mass killings during the period, saying those who want to write objective and impartial history of any incident will not do so in fear of being punished.

"The aim of the law is to throw those into jail who want to write true history."

The parliament on Thursday unanimously adopted a resolution aimed at enacting a law to punish those who distort the history of the war and the mass killings that happened at the time.

Law Minister Anisul Huq told the House that the government had drafted a law titled "Bangladesher Muktiujudder Itihas Bikritikoron Oporadh Ain" to prevent distortion of the history of 1971.

The draft bill will be placed before the cabinet soon and will be passed in the ongoing parliamentary session, he added.

Meanwhile regarding the Rampal power plant, the BNP leader said the government was not shifting location of the plant despite huge criticism as it wanted to please India.

"We want power plant, but we will not be able to protect the Sundarbans -- the source of oxygen -- if the coal-based power plant is set up in Rampal [near the mangrove forest]," Rizvi said.

# Abandoned

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asked her relatives to take the body but they requested him to hand it over to Anjuman Mofidul Islam, a charity organisation.

Talking to The Daily Star, Shahnaz's distant uncle Golam Hossain Golap, a resident of Gopibagh, said he was unable to take the body.

Asked why he doesn't contact the graveyards for her burial, he said it matters little who buries the body.

He said around Tk 2,500 was needed for the burial.

Golap said now it was up to the morgue to decide when the body would be given to Anjuman Mofidul Islam.

However, Golap said he would take the responsibility of Shahnaz's younger sister Shahinur, 12, a sixth-grader. "I will educate her like my own daughter," he said.

Shahnaz used to pay for her sister's education.

# Syria fighting

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"Despite these violations, we can still say that hostilities have dropped," said Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman.

The Britain-based Observatory said it had recorded no civilian casualties yet yesterday, but that several fighters were killed in regime bombardment of Daraa and Aleppo provinces in the first reported deaths since the deal came into effect.

Several ceasefire deals have been agreed since Syria's conflict broke out in March 2011 but they have failed to permanently stem the fighting.

The new deal was penned by Turkey, which backs the opposition, as well as Russia and Iran, both supporters of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

It was reached in Astana during another round of negotiations to shore up a faltering truce deal brokered in December.

The agreement would initially last six months but could be extended by the guarantors.

It does not specify that the safe zones take effect immediately, but gives the three guarantor countries two weeks to form working groups to delineate them and then until June 4 to come up with the definitive boundaries.

Access to the areas will be controlled via security zones complete with checkpoints and observation posts.

The deal also calls for a continued fight against the Islamic State jihadist group and former al-Qaeda affiliate Fateh al-Sham Front, which could pose challenges.

In Idlib province in particular, Fateh al-Sham is a major component of the rebel forces that control the area.

The Syrian government and rebel groups are not signatories, and both sides spoke vaguely about "violations" of the agreement on Saturday.

A senior military source in Damascus said the army had noted breaches but was waiting for the zones to be fully delineated.

And a member of the rebel delegation to the talks told AFP yesterday that the opposition was "recording violations of the deal committed by the regime and its militias".

"We will send this list to the Russians via the Turks," the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Several members of the rebel delegation to the talks left the room shouting in protest as the signing ceremony got under way in Astana, angered by Iran's role.

Syria's leading opposition High Negotiations Committee also expressed "concern" about the deal, saying it "lacks safeguards and compliance mechanisms".

Germany's foreign ministry on Saturday said it was concerned about reports of violations but that the successful implementation of the deal could be the first step towards a real ceasefire in Syria.

Washington has given the deal a guarded welcome, and United Nations chief Antonio Guterres said he was "encouraged" by it.

The UN is hoping that success on the ground could pave the way to a new round of political talks in Geneva later this month.

More than 320,000 people have been killed in Syria since the country's war began with demonstrations against Assad six years ago.

# Day out to Cox's Bazar

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projects to make Cox's Bazar even more attractive," she added.

Speaking at a public rally in Cox's Bazar town later on, the PM warned that those involved in Yaba business in the district would face punishment.

"Those who are involved in Yaba business will definitely face punishment, no matter who they are...there's no mercy for them," she said.

Addressing the inauguration ceremony of the marine drive, the premier said the government decided to turn the two-lane Chittagong-Cox's Bazar road into a four-lane one to make road trips more comfortable for tourists.

She said modernisation of Cox's

Bazar Airport would also be ensured. A Boeing 737-800 aircraft touched down at the airport yesterday as its runway has already been expanded.

About the existing communal harmony in the country, the PM said people of all religions would live in the country enjoying equal rights.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Army Chief General Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiqul Huq and Bridges Division Secretary MAN Siddique also spoke on the occasion.

The premier took a walk on Inani Beach after inaugurating the marine drive. Some photos of the PM wading through ankle-deep water went viral in social media.

# Line for help gets longer

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Abdur Rouf, acting district food controller, said the government had allotted only rice to be sold in open market at Tk 15 per kilogram. He added they did not have any plan yet to extend the programme to sell other items like oil or salt.

According to the Food Control Office, the OMS support has been spread to union level through appointment of one dealer each in 88 unions, one in 10 upazila headquarters, three in the Sadar upazila and one in nine municipalities each. The dealers are selling one tonne of rice each every day with condition that one person can buy maximum five kilograms at Tk 15 per kg.

The officials say 150,000 families will get the VGF support in the district - 30kg rice and Tk 500 per month -- for three months.

Shukur Ali of Sahapur village in Bishwambarpur upazila admitted that he was getting the VGF support. He however claimed the amount was barely enough to feed his family.

"I have a family of six members. Neither 30kg rice nor Tk 500 a month is enough for us. Moreover, should we eat rice only? We need oil, salt and many other things to survive," he said.

Kamruzzaman Kamrul, chairman of Tahirpur upazila, told The Daily Star, "My upazila alone has the demand for 50,000 VGF cards. But we have got only 15,400."

"We need necessary VGF support, not only rice and Tk 500, for the distressed people. Besides, the scheme must continue for one year," he observed.

Kasim Reza, president of Paribesh O Haor Unnayan Sangstha, said the cries of haor people might not be visible in the media, but the demand for relief and other support was increasing every day.

Sheikh Rafiqul Islam, deputy commissioner of Sunamganj, claimed the support for the haor people was enough for the time, but the administration would seek more support from the government if need be.

# Police

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"Some are still on the run. But it will not be right to tell how many they are for the sake of investigation," said Monirul Islam, chief of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, yesterday.

At the DMP media centre, he said investigators would submit the charge sheet by this year.

On March 3, Monirul said 20 to 22 people had so far been found involved in the attack that killed 20 hostages, mostly foreigners.

Two police officials were also killed during the overnight siege.

Monirul earlier said he believed 30-35 people had links to the attack, and of them, some were killed in several anti-militancy drives after the incident.

Three suspects have been arrested so far. They are Jahangir Alam alias Rajib Gandhi, arms supplier Mizanur Rahman alias Boro Mizan and Rakibul Hasan alias Rigan, according to the CTTC unit.

Hasnat Karim, a former teacher of North South University, is also behind bars as a suspect in the case filed over the attack. Police have been trying to find out if he had any role in it.

Replying to a query, Monirul said investigators would interrogate Ahmed Azwad Imtiaz Talukder alias Omi, who was arrested along with another "Neo JMB" operative on March 7 in Comilla, in the café attack case.

Omi, who had been missing since February 29 last year, was a close associate of Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury killed in the police raid in Narayanganj in August last year.

Monirul said the ongoing anti-militancy drive would wipe out the existence of "Neo JMB" within one and a half years, but another militant outfit may arise.

# People

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After being quizzed on their preferences for books, TV and plays, 123 participants were tested on interpersonal skills including how much they considered other people's feelings and whether they acted to help others.

The study, conducted by Kingston University in London, found that readers were more likely to act in a socially acceptable manner compared to those who preferred watching television.

Instead, TV lovers came across as less friendly and less understanding of others' views.

But, no ordinary book will do because it turns out the type of literature you choose also has a huge impact on your emotional intelligence.

The study revealed that fiction fans showed more positive social behaviour while readers of drama and romance novels were found to be the most empathic.

Similarly, lovers of more experimental books showed the ability to see things from different perspectives but it was comedy fans who scored the highest for relating to others.

"Exposure to fiction relates to a range of empathetic abilities," researchers said.

"Engaging with fictional prose and comedy in particular could be key to enhancing people's empathetic abilities."

That being said, the authors were keen to highlight that the study did not prove cause-and-effect as it could just be that more thoughtful people are more likely to prefer reading.

# Rights activists

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area and talk to the victims and the local administration, Pankaj Bhattacharjee, one of the team members, said.

"However, a security official, citing security reasons, advised us not to go to Lama. When we pressed for it, he told us he was unable to allow us in as he was following an instruction from his higher authorities," he said.

Asked, the official refused to give the team any details about the authorities, Pankaj, president of Oikya Nap, added.

Ziauddin Tariq Ali, acting president of Sammilito Samajik Andolon, another member of the team, said they were told the "situation in Lama was not good".

Ziauddin, also a trustee of the Liberation War Museum, said on being obstructed, they wanted to go to Bandarban to hold a press conference. But they were not allowed to go there either.

He said they also wanted to talk to the deputy commissioner of Bandarban about the alleged eviction of the indigenous people in Lama.

"But the security forces did not even allow us to meet the DC," Ziauddin added.

The team arrived in Bandarban yesterday morning. Most of its members were from Dhaka. They were heading towards Lama following media reports on the eviction. The Daily Star's Bandarban correspondent Sanjay Kumar Barua accompanied the team.

Pankaj Bhattacharjee alleged that land grabbing by settlers has been going on unabated in the CHT areas for years.

Contacted, Sanjith Kumar Roy, superintendent of Bandarban police, said they were not aware of any "unwanted situation" in Bandarban. He, however, said as far as he knew, there was a "blockade in Lama".

# Asia's new growth-engines

FROM PAGE 1

investments in infrastructure to support continued growth in the Asia-Pacific region and combat climate change.

"Today, we begin a new chapter in the history of ADB and the region. Building on our achievements of the past 50 years, ADB will continue to work together with our partners to build a more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific," he said.

The ADB president said investment in infrastructure would remain a priority for the bank as it prepares a new long-term "Strategy 2030" to respond to rapid regional changes.

"While the region has done remarkably well, we can't be complacent. Several challenges remain and new ones have emerged in Asia. About 330 million people still live in absolute poverty on less than \$1.90 income a day."

Noting that implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the climate actions agreed at COP21 in 2015 are collective priorities for Asian economies, Nakao said there were new challenges from urbanisation, aging and widening inequalities.

He also touched upon five priority areas of the Manila-based lending agency such as supporting infrastructure development through incorporating more advanced technologies, prioritising social sectors, further promoting gender equality, stepping up efforts to mobilise private resources for development and prioritising Strategy 2030 under which reforms would continue in the ADB itself.

Investment in infrastructure will be an ADB priority under Strategy 2030, including enhanced support for infrastructure projects that incorporate advanced technologies, the ADB chief said.

"Asia will need \$1.7 trillion per year in investments in power, transport, telecommunications, and water through 2030."

Support for social sectors, especially health and education, is a second ADB priority area under Strategy 2030. For this, Nakao said, the ADB "will support universal healthcare systems and cross-border initiatives to combat communicable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV."

According to the ADB president, the bank will design projects to help women and girls secure higher skills, better health, more jobs, and a larger voice in decision-making.

Nakao highlighted the bank's progress in 2016. He noted that total ADB operations last year, including cofinancing and technical assistance, reached \$31.7 billion. The bank's loan and grant approvals reached a record high of \$17.5 billion, a 9 percent increase from the previous year. Besides, climate finance reached \$3.7 billion, up from \$2.6 billion in 2015.

Cofinancing with public and pri-

vate partners increased to \$13.9 billion. This includes ADB's first two cofinanced projects with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank for roads in Pakistan and a natural gas project in Bangladesh.

Crown Prince of Japan Naruhito said over 300 million people were still living in poverty in this region and poverty reduction through sustainable and inclusive growth remains an important agenda to his country.

"The region is also faced with a range of challenges, such as developing infrastructure including power supply networks, and transportation facilities, as well as addressing natural disasters and climate change. Against this backdrop, I hope that the bank will play an important role in addressing these issues," he added.

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister of Japan Taro Aso mentioned that the infrastructure needs in Asia were getting larger both in terms of quality and quantity due to the economic development.

"The bank's recent estimates point to huge infrastructure needs in developing Asia, amounting to \$26 trillion over the next 15 years. Against this backdrop, I would expect the bank to continue to promote infrastructure development, and to further mobilise private sector financing including through PPPs."

He said Japan would remain committed to working hard for the development of the Asia-Pacific region, in close cooperation with the ADB.

**HIGH-LEVEL TECHNOLOGY FUND**  
The ADB has decided to set up a trust fund to promote the integration of high-level technology (HLT) and innovative solutions in the design and implementation of its projects.

Japanese deputy premier Taro Aso, also the chair of ADB Board of Governors, yesterday announced that his country would provide \$40 million over the next two years.

The HLT fund will provide grants for technical assistance and investment projects, and recruitment of technology experts to promote the integration of HLT and innovative solutions throughout the project cycle of the ADB-financed and administered projects.

The fund will encourage more widespread adoption of HLT to address development challenges in the ADB's developing member countries.

"Japan has been promoting quality infrastructure in Asia, collaborating closely with ADB. To further strengthen the partnership, Japan will provide \$40 million over 2 years to the new trust fund for HLT," said Taro Aso.

The HLT fund will be operational by July. It will support a broad range of technologies and innovative solutions that are either new or need scaling-up.

The fund may be used for feasibility studies, detailed designs, knowledge transfer and policy.

# Supplies yet to reach

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The food crisis that began three months ago stemmed from low production of rice during last season. Besides, high price of rice in local markets forced many families to go hungry.

Barha Hrishi Chakma, chairman of Baghaichhari upazila, said, "We distributed rice on behalf of our upazila parishad, but it was not enough. We need more food assistance. The government should take immediate steps so that more rice reach the affected areas quickly."

Contacted, Rangamati Deputy Commissioner Manzarul Mannan said 20 tonnes of rice would be distributed among affected families within a few days. Each family would get 20kg of rice.

Not only Sajek, food crisis also gripped Baghaichhari union.

Sunil Bihari Chakma, chairman of Baghaichhari union, said at least 300 families of 25 remote villages in the union were facing food crisis. "I contacted the authorities and they told me that they would distribute rice as soon as possible."

# Univ girls

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now want justice.

The girl alleged that Banani police registered the case after a long delay.

As she first went to the police station on Friday evening, officers refused to record the case. She could manage to lodge a written complaint yesterday morning and it was filed as a case last night.

Five youths, including the two alleged rapists, were made accused in the case.

Around 10:30pm yesterday, the girls were sent to the Victim Support Centre in Tejgaon, SI Sohail Rana from Banani Police Station told this newspaper.

ASI Afroza Khatun, duty officer at the centre, said they received the two around midnight.

Talking to this reporter over the phone, the plaintiff said she and the other girl got acquainted with the two culprits through one of their friends early March.

based on what the other university girl had told her.

The fifth accused is the person who introduced the girls to the alleged rapists. He had left the hotel soon after the party, she added.

The plaintiff alleged that police were dilly-dallying while filing the case because the accused were from rich families and that there could be an underhand dealing.

Contacted, Abdul Matin, inspector (investigation) of Banani Police Station, refuted the allegation, saying they took time for primary investigation as the girl came to the police station more than a month after the incident.

When this correspondent visited the hotel, an official said there was a birthday party on the night of March 28 and two rooms were booked by the host and one of his friends for that day.

Around 9:00am the next day, the youths along with two girls left the hotel, he added. "Nothing seemed unusual when they checked out. None made any complaint to us."

However, the plaintiff told this newspaper over the phone, "Both of us [the girls] were crying while leaving but no hotel official came to help us. We could not make any complaint as the rapists were with us."

The hotel authorities said they don't have any CCTV image of that day as they have the capacity to store footage of one month only.