



Sagor Howlader undergoing treatment at Jhalakathi Sadar Hospital yesterday. The 10-year-old schoolboy from the district's Alipur was brutally beaten up by some locals on May 21 on suspicion of stealing Tk 2,000.

PHOTO: M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL

Zakir Naik

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enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony. Sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) have also been slapped on him.

The Centre had declared Islamic Research Foundation (IRF), an NGO based at Dongri in south Mumbai, an unlawful organisation under the Unlawful Activities [Prevention] Act (UAPA).

The Delhi High Court had recently upheld the decision to immediately ban IRF saying the organisation and its president and members were indulging in "unlawful activity".

Besides the IRF, Naik is also founding trustee of the IRF Educational Trust and the Islamic Dimensions Trust.

The speeches of Naik are banned in the UK, Canada and Malaysia.

Naik has rejected all allegations of involvement in terror-related activities and opposed the ban on the IRF.

Afghan Taliban launch assault on Ghazni city

AFP, Ghazni

Taliban fighters launched a three-pronged attack on parts of the central-eastern Afghan city of Ghazni overnight, driving a Humvee packed with explosives into the entrance of a district governor's compound during the assault, police said yesterday.

The assault on Ghazni, on the highway linking the capital Kabul with the southern city of Kandahar, ramps up the Taliban's spring offensive and comes as U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis prepares to present recommendations to President Donald Trump on future troop levels in Afghanistan.

In the north of the country, the Taliban has stepped up its operations and targeted Kunduz, a city that they have twice managed to seize for brief periods in the past.

The Taliban have had a strong presence in the province of Ghazni for years, but provincial police chief Aminullah Amerkheil said the overnight attack from three directions was the fiercest launched by the insurgents. However, he said his men had held out.

Hashim Zwak, the police chief of Waghaz district, was wounded in the hand during the fighting. He described how the militants drove a Humvee packed with explosives into the entrance of the district governor's compound and blew it up before other fighters tried to overrun the police defenders.

"They put all their effort into it but they could not defeat us," Zwak told Reuters from a hospital in Ghazni city.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said, however, that the fighters had gained control of Waghaz district, straddling the highway to the south of the city and fighting was continuing in other areas.

He said several members of the security forces had been killed and many vehicles destroyed along with weapons and ammunition.

The provincial police chief said the Taliban had suffered far heavier casualties, with 25 fighters killed, while only two members of the security forces died.

Brutal torture

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yet another victim of a persisting mentality plaguing the society.

A local watchman along with a group of villagers stopped him, saying his elder brother asked him to go near the local mosque.

"So I went with them. As soon as I reached the mosque, they all started to beat me while asking me why I had stolen money," said the boy, now lying on a hospital bed in Jhalakathi sadar.

He was so beaten because someone broke into the room of the imam of Alipur Jame Masjid and stole Tk 2,000. No one actually knew the culprit(s), but his captors blamed it on him, said Sagor, son of late Sultan Howlader at Alipur of Jhalakathi sadar.

"Please give me some water, I am very thirsty; I am going to die. Please let go of me. I did not steal the money..." he remembered crying out.

At one point, the perpetrators put him in a sack and tortured him some more in front of dozens of villagers. No one came to his rescue.

"Finally they injected needles into the fingers of my legs and hands to force a confession; I kept crying out in pain," he said.

When a bystander finally brought some water, he was sent away by the watchman.

The officer in charge of Jhalakathi Police Station said Sagor was tortured on Sunday night and admitted to the hospital on Monday morning.

"The torture continued from 6:00pm to 9:00pm before my mother and I rescued him," said Rabea Aktar Sume, the elder sister of Sagor.

She filed a case against 10 people, including Sohorab, Atahar, Rob, Jamal, and Anwar on Thursday night.

"We finally filed the case when

journalists stood beside us because we were afraid before," said Sume

Sume and other members of the family have been threatened continuously for filing the case, she added.

The Daily Star has obtained an audio recording of the threat.

In the audio, a man, who identified himself as information ministry staffer Shamsul Haque, is heard threatening the victim's family and the journalists who reported on the incident.

The man, who also said that one of the accused was his brother, boasted that no one could touch his brother, not even police.

Sagor is out of danger though his leg is badly fractured, said Mehedi Hasan, the on-duty doctor.

This reporter tried to reach the imam but his cell phone was found switched off.

"Two of the accused have already been arrested and police are raiding different places to nab the others," said the OC.

PM off

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During the visit, the PM will perform Umrah at the Haram Sharif in Makkah and ziyarat of the Rawza Mubarak of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Medina.

Hasina will attend the Arab Islamic American Summit at King Abdulaziz International Conference Centre in Riyadh today.

She will also take part in the inauguration of "Global Centre for Combating Extremist Thought" and attend a lunch to be hosted by Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

The PM is scheduled to return home Tuesday.

Abdullah Khalid

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mosque of the DU after Zohr prayers. Johir said they wished to bury him at the Mirpur Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard after that.

Khalid left behind his wife, two sons and a daughter and a host of friends, relatives, admirers and well-wishers to mourn his death.

The creator of Aparajeyo Bangla, one of the most iconic sculptures in Bangladesh, Khalid not only excelled in sculpture but also made a great impression with his vibrant paintings.

He was honoured with Ekushey Padak this year for his lifetime contributions to arts.

Khalid was a professor at the sculpture department of Faculty of Fine Arts at Dhaka University.

He was born in Sylhet. He completed his Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting in 1969 from East Pakistan College of Arts and Crafts (now Faculty of Fine Arts, DU) and did his MFA in painting and sculpture from Chittagong University in 1974.

Imagination, love for nature and the motherland drove his artistic endeavours. The reflection of time and the conspicuous connotations of life and nature are noticeably highlighted in his creations.

In an interview with The Daily Star in February this year, he said he felt that a strong urge from within, together with artistic conceptualisation, was necessary for the creation of great works.

"Life and death are not the themes I think much on. The greater truth is the feeling of time. I do accept that truth in my life," the sculptor added.

Khalid's "Aparajeyo Bangla" is a reflection of the Bengali conscience and indomitable yearning for free-

dom. The project was launched in 1973. When he was a young faculty member at the Department of Fine Arts of Chittagong University, the DUCSU (Dhaka University Central Students' Union) committee commissioned him to build a monument that would depict the glory of the Liberation War.

"I started looking for people who would model for my miniature scale structure. In my layout, I planned for three figures where the centre one would be a farmer with a rifle on his shoulder and grenade in his hand. On the left side there would be a lady with a first aid box in her hand and on the right side there would be a student who would represent the young student body who took part in the war," said Khalid.

On August 15, 1975, the work suddenly came to a halt after the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Political instability and the arrest of the then Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University, Abdul Matin Chowdhury, also disrupted the work.

Throughout the making of the sculpture, Khalid had to face anarchy and negative reactions from religious fundamentalists. The project remained incomplete till the end of 1978. Some fundamentalist groups tried to demolish the sculpture in 1977.

However, the valiant students of Dhaka University fiercely guarded the work. After a long hiatus, the work began again in early 1979 with a new vision and dream. At last the project was finished on December 16, 1979. The sculpture was inaugurated by wounded freedom fighters.

Pippa Middleton takes spotlight in star-studded British wedding

REUTERS, London

Pippa Middleton, younger sister of Kate, Britain's Duchess of Cambridge, was married in a small English country church on Saturday surrounded by royals and celebrities but those hoping for a dash of Hollywood were left in the cold.

The event had been at risk of being overshadowed by the most high-profile appearance yet of Prince Harry's girlfriend, Meghan Markle. But the U.S. actress failed to appear before cameras.

Three-year-old Prince George, third in line to the throne after grandfather Charles and father William, took a starring role with his younger sister as attendants to the bride.

Middleton, 33, who married financier James Matthews, wore an elegant white lace gown with a cut-out in the back and a full long skirt. She arrived in an open-top car accompanied by her father, smiling broadly and waving to crowds gathered near St. Mark's church in Englefield, about 50 miles west of London.

Matthews sported a three-piece morning suit with a pale waistcoat and tails.

Prince William walked up to the church accompanied by younger brother Harry. Celebrity guests included 18-times grand slam tennis champion Roger Federer and the fashion editor of British Vogue magazine.

Middleton took the spotlight by surprise when she acted as maid of honour at the 2011 wedding of her sister to William mainly due to her svelte figure, the back of which was captured by many a camera.

Chinese navy ships visit Myanmar for joint drills

REUTERS, Shanghai

Chinese navy ships are visiting Myanmar and will conduct communications, search and rescue, and other joint exercises with the Myanmar navy, China's defense ministry said on Saturday.

The ships arrived in Yangon on Thursday for a four-day visit, spokesman Wu Qian said in remarks posted on the ministry's website.

Wu said China was willing to strengthen strategic communication and deepen cooperation with Myanmar, while making joint efforts to safeguard regional peace and stability and promote bilateral ties.

The ship visit started the day China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations agreed to a framework for a long-mooted code of conduct for the disputed South China Sea.

It comes after Chinese President Xi Jinping met Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi - who serves as Myanmar's foreign minister while also being de facto head of its civilian government - in Beijing earlier this week following China's Belt and Road Forum.

China had a close relationship with Myanmar's former military-run government, and has carefully watched the democratisation process in its strategically located southern neighbour.

New leaks haunt Trump

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alleged links to Moscow.

Air Force One had barely taken off when it was announced late on Friday that James Comey, the former FBI chief fired by Trump, had agreed to testify publicly about Russian interference in the US elections.

Reports also emerged that Trump had called Comey "a nut job" and that the FBI had identified a senior White House official as a "significant person of interest" in its probe of Russian meddling.

The president and first lady Melania Trump were welcomed by Saudi King Salman as they disembarked at King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh on Saturday morning.

Trump and his wife, who dressed conservatively in black but did not cover her hair as Saudi women are required to do, walked side-by-side to the tarmac where they both shook hands with the 81-year-old king.

After a welcoming coffee ceremony, Trump and his entourage were brought to the royal court where the president was awarded the Collar of Abdulaziz Al Saud, Saudi Arabia's highest civilian honour.

The arms sale agreement was just one of a series of deals to be announced during the visit, with US conglomerate General Electric saying it had also signed agreements and memorandums of understanding worth \$15 billion.

"This package of defence equipment and services support the long-term security of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region in the face of Iranian threats," a White House official said in announcing the deal.

Trump held talks with Salman and was to meet the kingdom's two powerful crown princes later, before giving a speech on Islam to leaders of Muslim countries today.

For Riyadh the visit is an opportunity to rebuild ties with a key ally, strained under Trump's predecessor Barack Obama who Sunni Arab Gulf states suspected of a tilt towards their Shiite regional rival Iran.

A more muted focus on human rights should also please Washington's traditional Sunni Gulf allies, analysts say.

Today's speech to dozens of Muslim leaders has been touted as a major event -- along the lines of a landmark address to the Islamic world given by Obama in Cairo in 2009.

The speech will be especially sensitive given tensions sparked by the Trump administration's attempted travel ban targeting several Muslim majority nations and accusations of anti-Islamic rhetoric on the campaign trail.

Trump wants Gulf states in particular to do more to tackle extremists such as the Islamic State jihadist group.

In return he is expected to take a harder line on Iran, where it was announced yesterday that President Hassan Rouhani had won a resounding re-election victory as voters overwhelmingly backed his efforts to reach out to the world.

Before departing, Trump tweeted he would be "strongly protecting American interests" on his trip.

While most US presidents make their first foreign trip to neighbouring Canada or Mexico, 70-year-old Trump has opted instead for the Middle East and Europe.

He travels to Israel and the Palestinian Territories tomorrow and Tuesday, and then to the Vatican and Brussels and Italy for Nato and G7 meetings.

The tour has been billed as a chance to visit places sacred to the three major monotheistic religions -- Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

But it is also fraught with peril for the real estate magnate, who is known to dislike lengthy travel.

The avalanche of revelations in the run-up to his departure has eroded Trump's standing at home.

On Friday, a report by The Washington Post that the probe into his campaign's Russia ties had identified a "significant person of interest" in the White House undercut Trump's insistence his election bid had nothing to do with the Kremlin.

US law enforcement uses the term "a person of interest" to mean someone who is part of a criminal investigation but not arrested or formally accused of a crime. The person may be cooperating or have information of use to investigators.

Separately the New York Times reported that Trump boasted to Russian officials at a White House meeting last week that firing Comey relieved "great pressure" the president faced from a law-enforcement probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

"I just fired the head of the FBI. He was crazy, a real nut job," Trump said, according to the Times, which cited a document summarizing the meeting and read to it by an unnamed US official.

"I faced great pressure because of Russia. That's taken off."

Trump met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Russia's ambassador to Washington in the Oval Office the day after Trump fired Comey, who was in charge of the Russia election probe.

The Times said the document was based on notes taken from inside the Oval Office. Reuters was not immediately able to verify the accuracy of that account.

The scandals have revived questions about his ability to strike a presidential tone with his foreign counterparts.

The first leg of the trip is likely to be the easiest -- Saudi leaders are keen to work with an administration they see as more in line with their goals.

The next leg in Israel be more complicated, despite the history of warm ties between Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The visit is already awash in controversy, from a row over Trump's planned visit to Jerusalem's Western Wall, the holiest prayer site for Jews, to his alleged disclosure of Israeli intelligence to Russian officials.

After meeting Netanyahu in Jerusalem, Trump will see Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in Bethlehem, part of his efforts to revive the long-stagnant peace process.

7 directors

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officials" from their posts, said the seven directors.

The press release said if any director has to resign under duress, the others will also have to quit in similar circumstances.

The seven signatories to the statement are Syed Ahsanul Alam, Abdul Matin, Borhan Uddin Ahmed, Syful Islam, Qazi Shahidul Alam, Abdul Mabud and Helal Ahmed Chowdhury.

On Thursday, Arastoo Khan, chairman of the bank, alleged that Vice-chairman Ahsanul Alam violated his oath of office by spreading propaganda about the bank.

The chairman admitted that a division was created within the board of directors which was unfortunate.

Contacted, Director Shahidul Alam said he signed the media statement protesting the threat to his colleague.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent couldn't reach the bank chairman over the phone for comment.

In January, the IBBL appointed its director Arastoo as the new chairman and brought major changes to key positions.

At that time, Ahsanul was also elected as the vice-chairman.

China taps gas from 'ice'

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"flammable ice" -- methane hydrate trapped in ice crystals -- and converted it to natural gas on a floating production platform in the Shenhu area of the South China Sea, about 300km southeast of Hong Kong, said the Ministry of Land and Resources.

It is "a major breakthrough that may lead to a global energy revolution", Land and Resources Minister Jiang Daming told the Xinhua news agency. "The production of gas hydrate will play a significant role in upgrading China's energy mixture and securing its energy security."

The Chinese authorities hope to commence commercial exploitation of the resource before 2030.

Methane hydrate is an enormous untapped energy source formed under high pressure and low temperatures in permafrost or under the sea. It is considered a clean energy option with high energy density and releases less than half the amount of carbon dioxide as oil and coal when burned, said ministry officials.

Methane hydrate is formed in such abundance that the United States Department of Energy has estimated the total amount could exceed the combined energy content of all other fossil fuels, reported the South China Morning Post (SCMP).

In China, the substance has been detected in abundance in permafrost

in areas like the Qinghai-Tibet plateau, as well as under the South China and East China seas.

The US, Canada and Japan have been leading research into it, reported the SCMP. Japan said earlier this month that it had successfully produced natural gas from methane hydrate off its Pacific coast, and plans to conduct continuous production for three to four weeks.

China has been catching up fast since the discovery of promising reserves in the South China Sea in 2007, according to the SCMP. Earlier this year, scientists built the country's first land-based drilling platform on the Tibetan plateau, where abundant methane is trapped under the permafrost.

In the South China Sea operation, the gas is being extracted at a test site from a depth of 1,266m below sea level by an ultra-deep-water semi-submersible drilling rig called Blue Whale 1. The test production began on May 10, and has reached a steady output. As of Wednesday, it had yielded 113,200 cubic m of natural gas, with average daily production of just over 16,000 cubic m, the China Daily reported.

Going forward, two or three more drilling tests will be conducted in nearby regions so that more experience and data can be accumulated, ministry officials said.