



Smoke rises from clashes during a battle between Iraqi forces and Islamic State militants in western Mosul, Iraq, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Faced with ban, Myanmar monks change name

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's ultra-nationalist Ma Ba Tha movement announced yesterday it was rebranding under a new name, days after Buddhist authorities banned the network which has been accused of stoking Islamophobia.

The monk-led movement grew in strength under the country's previous military-backed government, peddling a form of hardline Buddhist nationalism that intensified sectarian tensions with minority Muslims.

But after months of distancing itself from the radical group, Myanmar's top Buddhist clergy on Tuesday ordered the Ma Ba Tha to cease all activities by mid-July or face prosecution.

The threat did little to deter thousands of maroon-robed monks, nuns and lay followers from attending a weekend summit at a Yangon monastery decorated with Ma Ba Tha banners, with many defiantly declaring their intention to keep the movement going.

Yesterday, the group released a statement saying they would use a new name: the Buddha Dhamma Philanthropy Foundation.

"We urge all members in all regions and states around the country to work for the country, people and religion using the name of the Buddha Dhamma Philanthropy Foundation,"

said the statement, signed by its monk leader Tilawka Biwuntha.

The new name is noticeably less controversial and confrontational than the original.

Ma Ba Tha is the Burmese abbreviation for a phrase that translates as "The Association for the Protection of Race and Religion" -- a name the group would also give as its official English title.

With the help of notorious fire brand monk Wirathu, who attended the weekend gathering and has a significant Facebook following, Ma Ba Tha became known for sermons and protests that helped foment the idea that Buddhism in Myanmar is threatened by Islam.

Muslims have lived in Myanmar for centuries but only make up around five percent of the population.

In recent months Buddhist hardliners have shut down religious events across the country and forced two Yangon schools accused of illegally doubling up as mosques to close their doors.

Police arrested several nationalists this month after a fight broke out in a Muslim neighbourhood of Yangon, when dozens of people raided a house believed to be hiding Rohingyas -- a Muslim minority maligned by many Buddhists.

Suspended

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"Once the incident was found to be true, I have submitted the charge sheet but accusing a toddler and a dead man was an inadvertent mistake," read the statement.

After hearing his statement, metropolitan magistrate Khurshid Alam fixed May 30 for deciding whether to accept the apology.

The court also asked the complainant of the theft case Habibur Rahman to explain why he accused a toddler and a dead man.

The order came after Rashedul Islam Khokon, lawyer for the infant and the dead man, submitted a petition demanding exemplary punishment of the complainant.

Rubel, a toddler, and Arifur Rahman, who died in 2013, were implicated with charges of vandalising Habibur's house in the capital's Mirpur and stealing Tk 25,000, two gold chains and a mobile phone in June last year.

Marufur, after an eight-month-long probe, pressed charges against Rubel, Arifur and 21 others.

Besides suspending Marufur, Police Headquarters on May 14 withdrew Sazzad Hossain, officer-in-charge of Mirpur Model Police Station, and Mahbulul Alam, assistant commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Mirpur) in this connection.

Sazzad was attached to the Armed Police Battalion of Khagrachhari's Mohalchhari while Mahbulul was transferred to an in-service training centre.

Five die

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The injured were taken to the sadar hospital where Aslam was declared dead and from where Bazlu, Amir and Idris were referred to Dhaka for better treatment, he said.

Nitai and Joyanta, students of class IX and VII respectively at Hargaj High School, were reportedly cutting grass when lightning struck them amidst approaching rains around 12:30pm.

Pressure on Zuma as ANC leadership meets

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's President Jacob Zuma faced further opposition at a meeting of his party's top leadership yesterday but managed to sidestep a no-confidence vote after a turbulent three-day gathering.

The meeting in Pretoria comes as Zuma faces growing criticism within the ruling African National Congress, which sharpened after a March cabinet reshuffle when he sacked respected finance minister Pravin Gordhan.

But plans to debate a no-confidence motion in Zuma were blocked by the chairman of the meeting of the ANC's executive committee (NEC), state-owned broadcaster SABC said.

Local media reports said several NEC members had tried to force a debate on his future.

Speaking to local media on Saturday, ANC secretary general Gwede said the leadership was aware of reports that there was going to be blood on the floor.

"We've not seen that blood on the floor -- yet," he said, while stressing that the removal of Zuma was "not an agenda item."

The party leadership was expected to wrap up its talks during the evening.

App that offers free meals

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It's providing an important social service too. For some families, it's become a vital source of food.

"We have people who email us to say thank you because their families would have not have eaten that night had it not been for Olio," Cook says.

The app works best when a large number of people in a small area are active in posting food. One of the challenges Olio faces when launching in new regions is reaching this critical mass. (After all, there's a limit to how far people will drive for a bag of carrots.)

It relies on 11,000 volunteers to get the word out, putting up posters, handing out flyers and posting on the app.

Cook came up with the idea for Olio when she moved house in 2014.

"I was moving country and found myself with food that we hadn't managed to eat," she recalls. "The removal men told me I had to bin it. Instead I went into the street to give the food away but I failed miserably. I thought, why isn't there an app for this?"

Cook was a managing director at

payday loan company Wonga at the time. Celestial-One, an old friend from Stanford Business School, came on board as soon as she heard the idea.

The founders believe turning a profit doesn't conflict with Olio's strong social purpose. They have plans to generate revenue with premium listings for users who want priority access to food listings, and a section for classified ads.

The app has been downloaded more than 180,000 times. It's most popular in Sweden and the United States, where Olio has just appointed its first "ambassador" to recruit volunteers and promote the app.

Olio has also worked with British supermarkets Sainsbury's (JSAIY) and Morrison's (MRWSY) on initiatives to reduce food waste.

But the founders have much bigger dreams.

"Our ambitious goal is that hundreds of millions of people of all over the world are using Olio to share our most precious resources, rather than chuck them in the bin," says Cook.

Indian state to challenge cow slaughter ban

AFP, New Delhi

A southern Indian state announced yesterday it would go to the supreme court to challenge a federal ban on the sale of cows for slaughter, stepping up a showdown with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Cows are considered sacred by Hindus and the Hindu nationalist leader has pushed for greater protection of the animals since taking power in 2014.

On Friday the federal environment ministry issued a nationwide order banning the sale and purchase of cattle from markets for slaughter.

"We are finalising our legal response and will file a plea in the Supreme Court next week," Kerala state's Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar told AFP.

The slaughter of cows, and the possession or consumption of beef, is already banned in most Indian states, with some imposing up to life imprisonment for infringements. Cases of slaughtering cows have triggered communal violence.

But Kerala and a handful of other states -- despite having Hindu majorities -- allow the slaughter and the consumption of beef.

The federal order covers trade in bulls, bullocks, cows, buffaloes, calves and camels.

The national government said it aimed to regulate the industry and ensure the welfare of animals, which often suffer cruelty in markets.

But Kumar said Modi's government was fulfilling the agenda of Hindu groups, which demand a nationwide ban on cow slaughter.

"It is unconstitutional and since the Modi government cannot ban cow slaughter, it is taking refuge behind animal cruelty to fulfil its right-wing Hindu agenda," he said.

Beef is a popular food in the coastal state, which is ruled by a left-wing government, like several states in eastern India.

On Saturday left-wing activists organised "beef fests" across Kerala to protest against the ban as state chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan wrote a protest note to Modi.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party pledged to impose a countrywide ban on the slaughter of cows ahead of the 2014 national elections.

But the federal government has failed to persuade opposition parties to back such a law, leaving radical Hindu groups furious over the government's failure to protect the animal.

Trudeau meets Italy quake survivors

AFP, Rome

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visited the quake-hit Italian town of Amatrice yesterday, where he met survivors before touring the "red zone" devastated by last year's deadly disaster.

The August 2016 quake killed nearly 300 people -- including at least 16 foreigners, one of whom was Canadian -- and damaged dozens of architectural gems in the historic town in central Italy.

"I am here with the people of Amatrice to share in the suffering caused by the earthquake in a gesture of solidarity and friendship," Trudeau said. "The Italian-Canadian community, and the entire Canadian population, was greatly affected by what happened".

PM flies to Vienna today

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Austrian Chancellor Christian Kern tomorrow afternoon. The talks are expected to conclude with the signing of a deal and issuance of joint press statement.

After the meeting with her Austrian counterpart, Hasina will also hold a meeting with President of Austria Alexander Van Der Bellen on the day at 3:30pm (Austrian time).

Agriculture and livestock cooperation and starting of direct flight and holding of regular diplomatic consultations will be some of the areas the PM will discuss, apart from trade, investment and sustainable development, the foreign minister said.

Global terrorism, migration, refugee crisis, climate change and post-Brexit Europe situation are some of the international issues they will also talk about. An MoU on foreign office consultations is expected to be inked after the bilateral talks with the Austrian chancellor, Mahmood added.

A VIP flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines carrying the PM and her 60-member entourage will depart Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 9:00am and reach Vienna International Airport at 2:45pm.

"Her participation will reaffirm and consolidate Bangladesh's strong position towards world peace, disar-

mament, curbing spread of all types of nuclear weapons and brighten the image of Bangladesh in the international arena as Bangladesh always pursues peaceful use of atomic power," the foreign minister said.

In 1972, Bangladesh became a member of the IAEA, which has now 168 member states.

Leaders from Africa, Asia, Europe, South America and Caribbean will attend the conference titled "International Conference on the Technical Cooperation Programme: Sixty Years and Beyond -- Contributing to Development".

Hasina along with presidents of Uruguay and Mauritius and high UN officials will address the opening session of the conference at 9:30am tomorrow which is expected to provide an opportunity to demonstrate how IAEA's programme can best contribute to the development and attainment of SDGs.

The PM will also hold a meeting with Director General of IAEA Yukiya Amano, who has invited her to the conference.

Hasina will leave Vienna tomorrow evening and return to Dhaka on Wednesday morning.

Foreign minister and minister for science and technology will accompany the PM.

Bodies of Indian climbers recovered from Everest

AFP, Kathmandu

Rescuers have retrieved the body of an Indian climber who died on Mount Everest and airlifted it to Kathmandu yesterday, along with those of two others who perished last year.

Ravi Kumar, 27, died this month after summiting the world's highest mountain and becoming separated from his guide soon afterwards.

His body was spotted last Monday about 200 metres from the main route which climbers follow to the summit. Rescuers said its recovery was a risky operation.

"A team of at least eight rescue workers retrieved his body and brought it down to Camp 2 on Saturday," Tashi Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks, the company overseeing the operation, told AFP.

"The body has been airlifted to

Kathmandu."

His brother Manoj Kumar was waiting to receive the body as the helicopter landed at a hospital in Kathmandu.

"It was his dream to take our country's flag to the top of Mount Everest," Kumar said. "We are deeply sad, but also proud of him."

The bodies of Goutam Ghosh and Pares Nath, two other Indian climbers who died last year but whose remains could not be retrieved due to bad weather, were also brought to Kathmandu.

All three corpses were found near the summit above 8,000 metres (26,247 feet) -- an altitude that marks the beginning of the "death zone" notorious for its difficult terrain and thin air as low oxygen levels heighten the risk of altitude sickness.

HC releases

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The verdict also mentioned the responsibilities of the state including ensuring the proper environment, provision of proper education and politics, lesser growth of population, awareness of accurate historical background of independence of the country and religious harmony with proper knowledge.

On April 2, the HC judges upheld the death penalty of two convicts, life imprisonment for one and various jail terms for five others involved in the murder.

The condemned convicts are: Redwanul Azad Rana and Faisal Bin Nayem alias Dweep.

Among the jailed convicts, Mufti Jasimuddin Rahmani, chief of banned militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment as he was found guilty of provoking Rajib's murder with his sermons.

Maksudul Hasan alias Anik was given life term imprisonment. Four other convicts -- Ehsan Reza Rumman, Nafis Intiaz, Nayem Siddar Irad and Sadman Yasir Mahmud -- had been sentenced to different jail terms.

Apart from Jasimuddin, all the seven convicts were students of North South University in 2013.

In the verdict, the HC said, "An Imam of a mosque is being deployed to hold saying the prayer perfectly and his obligation is only to give real knowledge of Islam and Prophet Mohammad [S]. Muslims always

think that Imam is a religiously gentleman perfect and his actions and activities are believed to have been gathered in the mind of Muslims. When the prayer is held in mosque under his leadership, other musulleh [devotees] have all confidence in his conduct."

"More so, he is no doubt a man of civil society and law abiding citizen of the country. He has to obey the law, binding upon him as one of the citizens of the country and cannot deliver any speech which is contrary to the laws of the land and none should take the law in his own hand and nobody should make derogatory comments about any religion. If anyone criticizes or makes defaming comments on Islam or Prophet Mohammad [S], he must be brought into book and punished if proved, as per law of the land but no one has right to say by giving special exciting statements or speeches that those who make comments abruptly on any belief to be punished without putting them on trial."

It also said, "It is very unfortunate for the society as a whole that meritorious students like the present convicts of the case have gone to the dogs for the reasons unknown".

Rajib, who was an activist in the Shabbagh movement and used to write against Jamaat-Shibir and war criminals on different blogs under the pseudonym Thaba Baba, was hacked to death near his Mirpur home on February 15, 2013.

Hefajat unhappy

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Although it was a peaceful protest procession with hardly a hundred participants, who thought the unceremonious removal of Lady Justice's statue did not go well with the country's secular fabric, police filed the attempt to murder case against them.

The court yesterday passed the order after hearing a bail petition filed by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust lawyer Sara Hossain.

Their bail would be valid till submission of the police report in the case.

The statue of Lady Justice was taken down in the late hours of Thursday night, a month after Islamist group Hefajat-e Islam demanded its removal from the Supreme Court premises.

Hours after the removal of the statue, police in the capital yesterday swung into action against demonstrators protesting against the removal, which they see as "surrender to radical Islamists".

The statue of Lady Justice was, however, reinstalled on Saturday night in front of the SC's annex building.

HEFAJAT UNHAPPY
Hefajat-e Islam ameer Shah Amhed Shafi has sharply criticised the re-installing of the statue of Lady Justice at the SC annex building.

"Reinstalling the statue of Greek goddess was nothing but making a mockery of the country's religious sentiment and belief," he said in a statement yesterday.

Terming the incident "very disappointing," the Hefajat chief said, "We

are stunned and speechless along with the whole nation."

He demanded that the authorities concerned remove the Greek statue from the country forever.

Different other Islamist organisations, including Khelafat Andolan, Bangladesh Jamiatul Ulama and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, and Islamist leaders also came down heavily on re-installing of the statue.

Bangladesh Jamiatul Ulama Chairman Farid Uddin Masuod in a statement demanded resignation of Chief Justice SK Sinha for his "controversial behaviour" over the removal of the statue of Greek goddess.

NINE ISCA MEN DETAINED
Police yesterday detained nine leaders and activists of Islami Shasantantra Chhatra Andolan (ISCA) in front of the Jatiya Press Club as they were protesting against re-installing of the statue.

Officer-in-charge of Shahbagh police last night told The Daily Star that police had detained the nine around 4:00am. "We are quizzing them to know their motives and have yet to take a decision whether they will be produce before the court," he added.

The ISCA, the student wing of Islami Andolan Bangladesh, said police attacked their leaders and activists when they were staging a peaceful demonstration in front of the National Press Club.

They also brought out a procession in the capital yesterday protesting against the detention of their leaders.