



PHOTO: AFP

Smoke billows out of a building in a neighbourhood of West Mosul during the ongoing offensive by Iraqi forces to retake the city from Islamic State (IS) fighters. The photo was taken yesterday.

## Japan parliament passes emperor abdication law

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's lower house of parliament passed a bill yesterday that allows ageing Emperor Akihito to step down, as it also called for a rare debate on the role of women in the male-dominated monarchy.

Japan has not had an imperial abdication for two centuries and there was no law to deal with 83-year-old Akihito's surprise retirement request after nearly three decades on the Chrysanthemum Throne.

The popular monarch shocked the country last summer when he signalled his desire to hand the crown to his eldest son, Crown Prince Naruhito, citing age and declining health -- he has been treated for prostate cancer and had heart surgery. The one-off bill is widely expected to become law next week after passage through the upper house.

The abdication must take place within three years of the bill becoming law or it expires -- and it only applies to Akihito.

Some scholars and politicians feared that changing the law to allow any emperor to abdicate could put Japan's future monarchs at risk of being subject to political manipulation.

Japan has had abdications in its long imperial history, but the last one was over 200 years ago and politicians had to craft legislation to make it possible because there was no provision for it in the law.

The status of the emperor is highly sensitive in Japan given its 20th century history of war waged in the name of Akihito's father Hirohito, who died in 1989.

### RUSSIAN MEDDLING

## Putin urges end to 'harmful chatter'

AFP, Saint Petersburg

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday called for an end to allegations that Moscow meddled in the US election, as he tried to highlight a fragile economic recovery.

The Kremlin strongman launched a blistering attack on accusations he said were baseless that Moscow was behind a hacking and influence campaign aimed at getting Donald Trump elected.

"This useless and harmful chatter needs to stop," Putin told Russia's annual showcase economic forum in Saint Petersburg.

"This is a transferral, I repeat, of internal political squabbling in the United States onto the international arena," Putin said.

"It is harmful, it damages international relations and the world economy and security issues and the fight with terrorism."

US intelligence has accused Putin of ordering a hacking and influence campaign to tilt last year's election in Trump's favour, after the billionaire pledged to boost ties with Moscow.

But Trump has failed to make good on Russian hopes that he will restore relations as a series of probes into potential collusion between his camp and Moscow have made the issue politically toxic.

## Huge cache of arms

FROM PAGE 16

"We later arrested him through mobile phone tracking from Chashara area on Wednesday and started a drive with him to recover other arms," Faruk Hossain, additional superintendent of Narayanganj police, told The Daily Star.

He said based on Sharif's information, they recovered two SMGs from a sand field in Sector-3 of Rupganj around 2:00am early yesterday.

Sharif then gave police further information about arms kept in a canal of Sector-5 in Purbachal Residential Area, he added.

"You will lose your life, if anyone knows about these arms," Sharif's accomplices warned him while keeping the arms one and a half months ago, said a high official of Narayanganj police, requesting anonymity.

While searching near Kanchan bridge in Purbachal Residential Area, police found a nylon rope tied to a tree along the canal and the other part of the rope was kept in canal water. Pulling off the rope, police got a travel bag tied to it and found some arms inside the bag, said the police official.

Police then informed fire service divers of the matter. They searched the canal around 7:00am and found two walkie-talkies, two rocket launchers, 58 Chinese SMGs, five magazines of 7.62 pistol, 58 anti-tank propellants, 42 blank nose heads, 44 magazines of SMG and huge bomb-making materials and bullets.

While visiting the spot, Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque said they already arrested one who gave police information about the arms, and they were hopeful of getting clue to the arms syndicate soon.

"Some criminal gangs might have brought this huge cache of arms as part of local and foreign conspiracy for carrying out massive subversive activities. But we are hopeful of unearthing mystery behind it soon," he said.

Police Headquarters (PHQ) yesterday formed a 12-member probe body, led by Dhaka Range Deputy Inspector General Shafiqul Islam, to investigate the incident, and the body was asked to submit its report within 10 working days, according to a statement issued

## Fastest toddler

FROM PAGE 16

International Children's Day, was touch-and-go.

"We thought we wouldn't make it to the finish line. Just before it he stopped, then sat, then lay down, but finally he saw he needed to crawl to his mother" who was shaking the Lego box, Pociunas said.

Mykolas was the quickest of 25 finalists who crawled the five meter-long (16 foot) red carpet race track.

Parents and grandparents waved colourful toys, mobile phones, balloons, TV remote controls, plastic bottles and even bagels to get their tots across the finish line.

But some youngsters shunned the competition, choosing to sit it out at the starting line or turn around and crawl back less than a metre from the finish line.

A local radio station first launched the race in 1999 in a bid to raise awareness about children's rights.

"The most important rule is that the baby is still a toddler who can't walk yet. Their ages vary between nine to twelve months," organiser Jolita Pranckeviciene told AFP.

by PHQ.

CTTC bomb disposal unit and crime scene unit of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) went to the spot yesterday noon, and the bomb disposal unit diffused explosives.

Wishing not to be named, an official of bomb disposal unit told this newspaper that the bombs recovered from the canal were made in 80s and those were inactive.

Last year, police recovered 97 foreign pistols, including two 9mm pistols, about 1,060 bullets, 452 magazines and 10 bayonets from Diabari canal. No-one was arrested yet in this connection.

After the incident, two general diaries were filed with Turag Police Station and CTTC was now investigating the incident.

Police were yet to file any case in this connection as the arms were recovered in abandon condition.

Talking to reporters, Sharif's wife Fahima Begum said she got married with Sharif in 2006, when Sharif returned home from Dubai. After eight months of their marriage, Sharif again went to Dubai and came back two years later.

Returning home, Sharif started working as a source of Rapid Action Battalion-11 and left the job on health ground after two years, said Fahima.

She added that her husband got involved in drug trading after incurring a loss in his land business.

There was no involvement of Sharif in keeping any arms. Someone might have done it over enmity with her husband, Fahima claimed.

## BCL leader

FROM PAGE 2

Provost of Bijoy 71 Hall Prof AJM Shafiul Alam Bhuiyan yesterday written to the DU vice-chancellor for taking academic action against the culprits and also written to the proctor of the university for taking legal action against them for their activities.

According to the railways officials, his claimis unrealistic.

Works of Dohazari-Cox's Bazar-Gundum, Kalukhali-Bhatiyapara-Gopalganj-Tungipara, Pachuria-Faridpur-Bhanga, Ishwardi-Pabna-Dhalarchar and Khulna-Mongla railway lines are going on slowly. This means people will have to wait several more years to get the benefits.

Without outlining any plan about implementation of these projects, Muhith spoke about new initiatives--a feasibility study to construct a railway line from Bhanga in Faridpur to Payra Port through Barisal and procurement of 100 MG locomotives, and 550 MG and 150 BG passenger coaches for development of rolling stock system.

Railways officials say these will remain rhetoric as implementation of all these new initiatives would need manifold allocation, much higher than that of the proposed allocation, a clear vision and finally capacity and efficiency of the authorities concerned.

## UN urges

FROM PAGE 5

heavily hit. It is estimated that 60 to 70 per cent of homes and infrastructures in five Rohingya camps were damaged, and people living there are now short of food, fuel and electricity.

The Bangladeshi government assisted with the evacuation of over three lakh people from the affected area including Rohingyas as the cyclone approached, it added.

The UNHCR, International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) are supporting the government and civil society to restore services and provide emergency supplies to those affected. The UN has sought additional financial and material support as a more complete picture of the damage emerges.

## Hefajat

FROM PAGE 16

The statue was reinstalled a day later at a less prominent location near the Annex Building.

"The government made a joke by reinstalling the idol of Greek goddess Themis," said Nur Hossain Kasemi, president of Hefajat's Dhaka unit.

"We want the government to know that the idol has to be removed as soon as possible," he said.

Hefajat's former Dhaka unit general secretary Junaid Al Habib asked, "Will you [government] remove the idol, or should we do it ourselves? "If we do it, no idol will exist in the country, except the ones in the temples. You are very much aware of our capacity."

He also stressed that law enforcers would not be able to resist them if their activists gather together.

## Hefajat out

FROM PAGE 5

Narayanganj schoolteacher, who was forced to do squats holding ears in presence of Jatiya Party lawmaker AKM Salim Osman last year.

The Committee organised the conference on "Sluggishness of War Crimes Trial and Exhilaration of Fundamental-Communal Evil Forces", at Dhaka Reporters' Unity.

Responding to recent remarks of Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha, Shahriar said the Nirmul Committee did not have any political agenda; but rather it campaigned for trial of war criminals and a ban on religion based politics.

During the hearing of a review petition of war criminal Delawar Hossain Sayedee, the chief justice commented that a prosecutor went to a meeting of the Nirmul Committee, "which works for political agenda".

Speaking at the same programme, former Supreme Court Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik said the prosecutors of the international crimes tribunal worked under the law ministry, so the chief justice remarks were unwarranted.

The Bar Council is the guardian of lawyers, and if a prosecutor has committed any misconduct by attending the meeting of the Nirmul Committee, the council should look into the matter, he said.

Artist Hashem Khan and Sculptor Ferdousi Priyabhashini also spoke at the conference.

## Second game washed out

FROM PAGE 1

match resuming in time.

The teams took a point apiece -- a result that was arguably of most benefit to Group A rivals England, who launched a tournament featuring the world's top eight one-day international sides with an eight-wicket win over Bangladesh at the Oval on Thursday.

Only the top two sides from each of the two groups of four qualify for the semi-finals.

New Zealand were on course for a score well above 300 while Williamson was at the crease in an innings reduced from the ODI standard 50 to 46 because of rain.

But his run out sparked a slump that saw the Blackcaps dismissed for 291 after losing their last seven wickets for 37 runs in 35 balls.

Josh Hazlewood was the chief beneficiary as several batsmen carelessly holed out, with the fast bowler returning ODI best figures of six for 52.

Hazlewood took three wickets in four balls to wrap up the innings with an over to spare.

But further rain during the mid-innings break left Australia with a tough new target under the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method for weather affected limited overs matches.

Australia, trying to force the pace against accurate new-ball bowling,

were soon 35 for two after big-hitting openers David Warner (18) and Aaron Finch (eight) fell cheaply.

Warner, advancing down the pitch to cut left-arm Trent Boult was caught behind before Finch clipped Adam Milne to mid-wicket.

And when Moises Henriques (18) was caught and bowled by Milne via an inside edge off his pad, Australia were three down.

But no sooner had Henriques been dismissed then fresh rain took the players off the field.

Australia had opted against fielding all four of their out-and-out fast bowlers, with James Pattinson the man who missed out on Friday.

Pat Cummins, however, proved expensive, with New Zealand opener Luke Ronchi severe on the pacemaker during a dashing 65.

Williamson showed touch play could be effective too when he swept off-spinner Travis Head for a four between two legside fielders.

Alongside Ross Taylor (46), he put on 99 for the third wicket.

Williamson hoisted John Hastings for a legside six to go into the 90s before a flicked four and single off the same bowler saw him to a 96-ball century, his ninth at this level, with eight fours and three sixes.

But he was then run out by Henriques's throw to Cummins.

## Hike in source tax

FROM PAGE 1

a tough time," said Siddiqur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Although the finance minister proposed cuts to corporate tax for the apparel sector to 15 percent from 20 percent at present, it was not enough to satisfy the garment makers.

Rahman said the government should withdraw the source tax for at least two years, reduce the corporate tax to 10 percent and give 5 percent cash incentives on export receipts.

"The next two years are crucial for us. We need policy support to maintain even moderate growth," he said.

The BGMEA chief said earnings from garment shipments grew only 2.21 percent in the first 10 months of 2016-17 -- way below the sector's average of 13 percent in the past one decade.

The garments export receipts during the period were 6.06 percent lower than the ten-month target of \$24.62 billion. Woven garment exports fell 0.14 percent to \$11.89 billion and the export of knitwear items increased

only by 4.81 percent to \$11.26 billion, according to the Export Promotion Bureau.

Apparel exporters said a silent recession is going on in their main export destinations in Europe, brought about by general elections in four major economies in 2017.

France and the Netherlands have already held their elections. The UK is heading to the polls on June 8 and Germany on September 24.

In July-April, garment shipments to Bangladesh's single largest export destination, the US, declined 6.8 percent and the third largest export destination, the UK, 5.91 percent.

Besides, subdued demand for clothing items can be seen among consumers in the Western world in recent times, said apparel exporters.

For instance, in 2015, consumption of apparel items declined 7.9 percent worldwide as consumers shifted their focus to electronic gadgets.

In 2015-16, the contribution of exports to GDP was 15.50 percent, down from 16.04 percent in 2014-15, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

## Reconsider VAT rate

FROM PAGE 16

abroad through informal channels.

"The government should form a joint working committee with representatives from the NBR and FBCCI to resolve any disputes related to revenue collection and implementation of tax policies," he observed.

The FBCCI chief welcomed the government's proposal to increase the allocation for the power, energy and communications sectors and other physical infrastructures.

He lauded the budgetary proposals for higher allocation to poverty alleviation, human resource development, education, health and social safety net programmes.

Abul Kasem Khan, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), said the government should reconsider the corporate tax rate and the tax free income limits for individuals.

"The DCCI is overall happy with the government's move to accelerate investment in the country," he said in a statement.

The trade body called upon the government to set up 10 special economic zones and ensure all utility services there on a fast-track basis.

He said 5-6 percent of the GDP should be invested in infrastructure development. Investment in infrastructure is a pre-condition to attract Foreign Direct Investment, added the DCCI chief.

About the government's borrowing from banks, Kasem said as there was no liquidity crisis in the banking sector, it would not have an impact on the credit flow to the private sector. "Rather, we have to reduce non-performing loans."

Meanwhile, the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) said implementation of the proposed Tk 400,266 crore national budget, which is 26.17 percent bigger than the revised budget of the outgoing fiscal year, would be highly challenging.

The trade body in a statement said the GDP growth target of 7.4 percent would be achievable provided the GDP-investment ratio was maintained at a desired level.

It lauded the government's decision to increase allocations for health services, transport and communication, primary and mass education and power and energy sectors. The chamber also welcomed the proposal to introduce the online VAT registration system.

However, the FICCI expressed concern about the relatively lower alloca-

tions for social security programmes and agriculture sector.

It expressed unhappiness at the continuation of supplementary duty on locally manufactured products.

"The chamber observes that the proposed budget with necessary amendments will accelerate investment, improve the business environment and socio-economic condition of the country," the FICCI said.

Mahbubul Alam, president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said although the government was willing to introduce the online VAT registration system, most of the businesses didn't have electronic cash registers. Even the NBR officials "lacked knowledge" on the issue, he added.

He called upon the government to keep the existing excise duty on bank accounts unchanged.

Alam, however, welcomed the government's move to exclude some commodities from the purview of the uniform 15 percent VAT.

## N'ganj teacher

FROM PAGE 16

Bangladesh office in the capital.

"My family has been torn apart. It is on the verge of being destroyed," he told the event organised by Bangladesh Jatiya Hindu Mohajot.

Shyamal also demanded withdrawal of a case against him and sought the prime minister's help in this regard.

The headmaster of Piya Sattar Latif High School walked out of jail on Wednesday after staying behind bars for eight days in a case over bribery. He termed the case a conspiracy.

A Narayanganj court issued an arrest warrant for Shyamal on May 24, after taking bribery charges against him into cognisance. The court sent him to jail rejecting his bail petition that afternoon.

The case was filed by Morsheda Begum, a teacher of the same school, on July 14 last year.

Addressing yesterday's press conference, Shyamal said he suspected that a quarter recently ordered withdrawal of law enforcers who were providing security to him.

A few days after he was humiliated last year, the school's management forced him to resign alleging that he had made derogatory comments about religion.

An education ministry probe later found the allegation to be baseless and Shyamal was reinstated as the headmaster.