

4 journalists beaten up in Pabna

Minister's son led the attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Four journalists were beaten up allegedly by some Jubo League men, led by the son of Land Minister Shamsur Rahman Sherif, in Pabna's Ishwardi yesterday afternoon. They were gathering information about the preparation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit there today.

The victims are Saikat Afroz, 35, Pabna correspondent of Somoy TV, Rizvi Joy, ATN News correspondent of the district, Partho Hasan, Pabna correspondent of DBC News, and ATN News cameraman Milon Hossain, 25.

The four were admitted to Pabna General Hospital. Of them, Saikat and Rizvi are undergoing treatment there.

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C'NAWABGANJ RAID

Identity of 3 dead 'militants' not known yet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Rab has collected fingerprints and DNA samples to identify the three militant suspects killed in Tuesday's anti-terror operation in Chapainawabganj.

"We are trying to identify them," Lt Col Mahub Alam, commanding officer of Rab-5, told The Daily Star.

The suspected members of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh were killed after they had allegedly detonated suicide vests during Rapid Action Battalion's raid on a house at Moddho Char village in Chapainawabganj sadar.

"It seems they exploded their suicide vests," said Mufti Mahmud Khan, Rab's legal and media wing director.

The suspects were buried after autopsies at Chapainawabganj Sadar Hospital morgue yesterday.

Nadim Sarkar, residential medical officer at the hospital, said they died in the explosions.

Rab officers said they were searching the remote area for more suspects, explosives, arms and ammunition.

Three improvised explosive devices, seven detonators, 12 packs of explosive gel and two pistols were recovered from the scene of Tuesday's raid.

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Keep up

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influx of Rohingyas from Myanmar. She stressed the need for full implementation of the report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

Hasina said Bangladesh already faced a prolonged flood this year. "The Rohingya crisis has become an additional burden on Bangladesh."

About Bangladesh's journey towards being a middle-income country, the PM said the government has already adopted Vision 2021 and formulated five-year plans accordingly.

She mentioned that poverty reduction, rural development and women empowerment were on top of the list of the government's prime tasks.

She said the GDP has reached 7.28 percent while the per capita income now stands at \$1610.

About the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the premier said Bangladesh has achieved the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in due time and would surely attain the SDGs.

The government has given importance to the research works for inventing various crops to face the adverse impact of climate change, she added.

Appreciating Bangladesh's development in various sectors, Utoikamanu said the UN was carrying out a review to continue its assistance for Bangladesh despite the country was on the way to graduate from an LDC to a middle-income country.

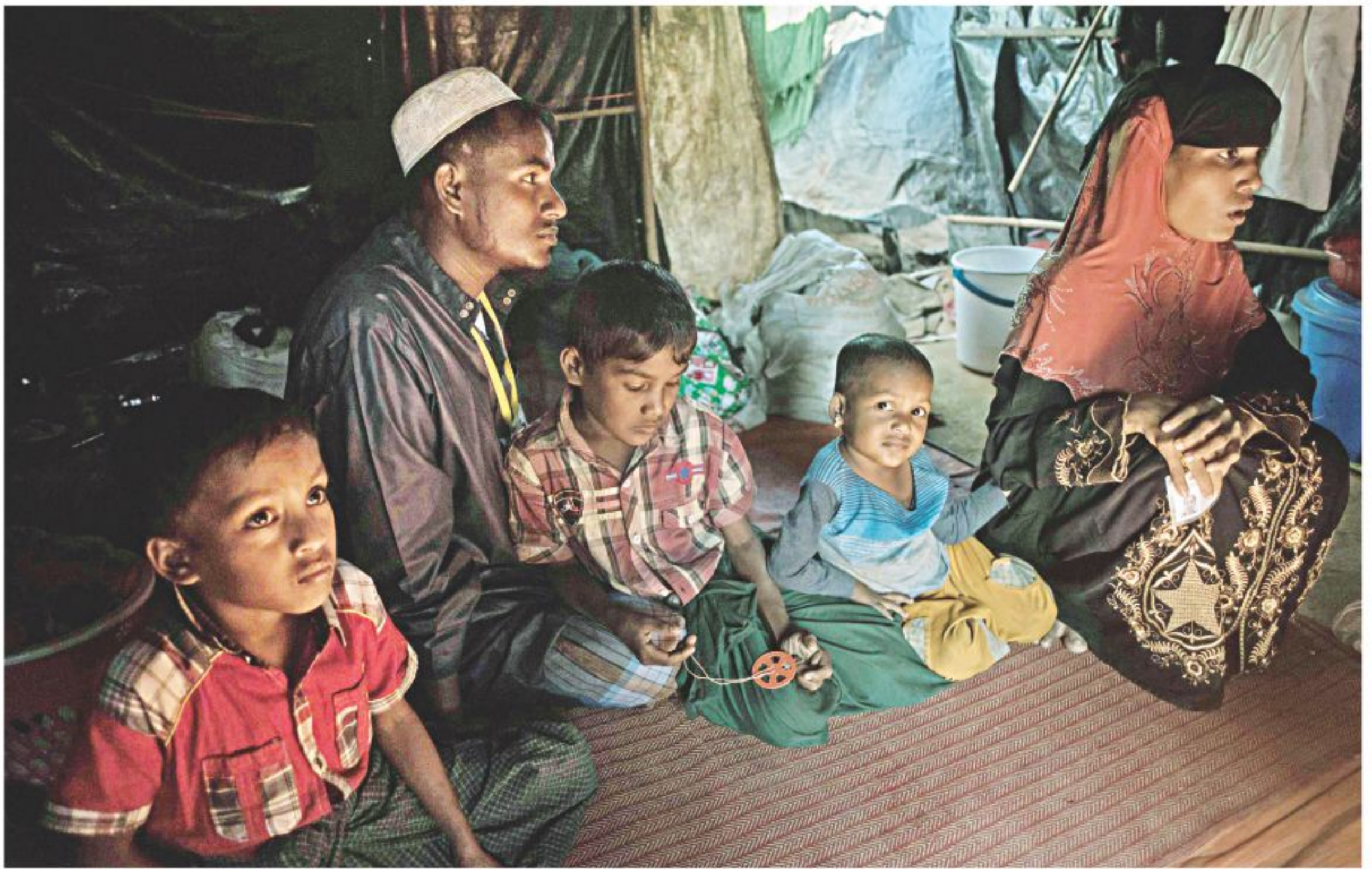
The UN official said assistance can't be stopped if a country is graduated to a middle-income one from LDC.

She said the UN was revisiting rules and laws about how to provide the assistance to every country even after graduation to a middle-income state.

Ishanul said the UN would extend its assistance depending on the requirement, needs and vulnerability of every country.

He said the UN used to give such assistance under a single policy for all countries.

PM's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi and Principal Secretary Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury were present.



Rohingya refugee Mohammad Nurulla and his wife Hajera Khatoon with their children are due to meet Pope Francis during his upcoming visit to Dhaka. The picture was taken at their makeshift home at a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Celebration of harmony

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"People here have a unique cultural identity and tradition. There is great inter-religious respect and harmony. His visit is a celebration of this culture of human values," said Archbishop Patrick D' Rozario, who was appointed cardinal last year, the first cardinal from Bangladesh.

Church officials say the Pope's appointment of a cardinal from here and his visit to Bangladesh means he cares about the small church here and that the Vatican wants to strengthen ties with the country.

The Vatican recognised Bangladesh immediately after its independence and established diplomatic relations in February, 1973.

"Bangladesh has an exceptional relationship with the Vatican. It is not economic but based on humanity, morality and spirituality," the cardinal told The Daily Star.

The small Christian community plays a significant role in socio-economic development of Bangladesh, which has made remarkable progress in reducing poverty, improving health and education status, he said.

Pope Francis is very eager to learn of these aspects and talk about the marginalised people-- farmers, workers, climate change victims-- who are always a concern for the Vatican, the cardinal added.

POPE'S VISIT BRINGS JOY AND HOPE

Alo D' Rozario said the fact that Pope comes to celebrate peace and harmony in Bangladesh is a matter of immense joy, hope and pride for the Christian community.

There are not many countries in the world where Muslims and Christians have such peaceful and harmonious living. There are some scattered incidents of attacks on minorities, but that is not always because of religion, but for other socio-economic reasons, he said.

During his visit from November 30-December 2, Pope Francis, spiritual leader of the world's 1.29 billion Catholics and head of Vatican, will meet the President, Prime Minister, high officials, diplomatic corps, civil society, Catholic and inter-religious leaders.

Jude Quiah, 45, a lab officer at Notre Dame College, said Christians

are proud of the papal's visit because he is not only concerned with Catholics, but of the communities that are poor and oppressed. He is also raising a voice for the Rohingyas, he added.

"We live in a country far from where the Pope is. I am excited to see him and attend a prayer he leads," he said of the prayer service at Suhrawardy Udyan to be held tomorrow where over 80,000 Catholics would gather and pray for peace and harmony.

Pope's humility and liberal remarks have already made him more acceptable to the youths, said Quiah, former leader of Bangladesh Catholic Students' Movement.

"I am more inspired by the human values he preaches. I take pride of it," he said.

CHRISTIANITY IN BANGLADESH

The Portuguese were the first to begin preaching Christianity in this region, building the first churches in the 16th century, in Chittagong. Eventually, missionaries from Italy, England, US, Canada and some other European countries also arrived.

At the same time, they established schools, hospitals, dispensaries, boarding schools, hostels and orphanages. Now there are some eight lakh Christians in the country-- four lakh Catholics and the rest Protestants.

CONTRIBUTION

The Catholic Church runs some of the finest educational institutions in Bangladesh, notably Notre Dame College, Holy Cross College, Saint Joseph School and College, Saint Gregory's High School in Dhaka, Saint Placid's School in Chittagong and Saint Philip's School in Dinajpur etc.

Brother Bijoy Herold Rodrigues, secretary of Bangladesh Catholic Education Board, said there are nearly 500 primary and high schools run by the Catholic Church. At any given time, some 60,000 students study in these schools.

Besides, the church runs 124 hostels and orphanages, 75 hospitals and dispensaries, 25 vocational training institutes, 13 colleges, and one university.

There are eight geographical regions of Catholic Church - Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Dinajpur, Mymensingh, Barisal, Sylhet - known as diocese. Each diocese has a

bishop. Under a bishop, there are several Catholic communities, known as the parish.

According to the Catholic directory, there are a total of 97 parishes - each led by a priest in Bangladesh. Under each parish, there is at least a primary and a high school or both. Based on the needs, there are hostels, dispensaries, hospitals or orphanages run by the Catholic religious personnel - Brothers and Sisters.

There are a total of 416 Catholic priests, 123 Brothers and 1218 Sisters serving the needs of spirituality of the Christians, and working for education, healthcare and other social welfare activities for all.

Protestant churches too have a good number of educational and healthcare institutions providing quality services all across Bangladesh.

"We are a small community, but our work is not. We are also not limited to working only for the Christians, but for all. This is because Jesus Christ has asked us to serve humanity," said Bishop Gervas Rozario, vice president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB).

Missionary schools are reputed because teachers here provide not only education, but also human and moral values and discipline, he told The Daily Star.

CBCB's Healthcare Commission Secretary Dr Edward Pallab Rozario said most of the Christian hospitals and dispensaries are located in the rural areas and provide much-needed services to the people.

Nursing has been a traditional profession for Christian women as they have been attached to foreign missionary doctors and nurses since the early days of Christianity here. There are some 5,000 Catholic nurses, almost 1200 only in Dhaka, serving in private and public hospitals, he said.

Dr Alo D' Rozario, former executive director of Caritas Bangladesh, social services wing of the Catholic Church, said they began operations with the rehabilitation programme after the cyclone in 1970.

Eventually, the NGO, one of the biggest in Bangladesh, began to work in education, vocational training, economic and environmental sectors all across Bangladesh, he added.

Overcome 'prejudice and hatred'

Pope to Buddhist clergy in Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

Pope Francis called on Myanmar's top Buddhist monks to conquer "prejudice and hatred" in a country ravaged by communal divisions, after holding the nation's first-ever papal mass attended by 150,000 Catholics yesterday.

The pontiff's four-day visit has so far been marked by his avoidance in public of the crisis in northern Rakhine state and Myanmar's treatment of its Rohingya Muslim community.

Francis has previously spoken out strongly in defence of the Muslim group, whom the UN and US say are victims of an ethnic cleansing campaign by Myanmar's military that has driven 620,000 of them into Bangladesh since late August.

"If we are to be united, as is our

purpose, we need to surmount all forms of misunderstanding, intolerance, prejudice and hatred," the pope told the orange-robed monks of Myanmar's highest Buddhist body, called the Sangha Maha Nayka.

Radical monks have played a key role in fanning Islamophobia in Myanmar and hardening attitudes towards the Rohingyas.

In recent months the Sangha has moved to rein them in, especially in banning sermons by Wirathu -- a monk whose vitriolic rants were widely disseminated via social media.

Welcoming the pope Sangha chairman, Kumarabhivamsa, who oversees Myanmar's estimated 600,000 monks, expressed sadness at "extremism and terrorism" conducted in the name of

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Now BIFC faces

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The BIFC has been in trouble recently after it had failed to repay Tk 200 crore loans taken from 14 banks. It has asked the Bangladesh Bank for a bailout.

"If the central bank does not provide the fund immediately, we will have to go for liquidation," said the BIFC in a letter to the Bangladesh Bank in July.

The central bank has barred the company from lending money and receiving deposits.

A Bangladesh Bank official told The Daily Star yesterday that such incidents create risks in the banking sector.

"Banks and NBFIs are the safest place to keep money and if these institutions fail to pay liabilities on maturity, depositors' confidence will erode," said the official requesting not to be named.

Earlier this month, The Farmers Bank Ltd had twice failed to honour a cheque of Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd worth Tk 35.44 crore because of fund shortages.

The state-run telecom company eventually got its money.

According to the Bangladesh Bank, the BIFC has been incurring a loss of Tk

6.40 crore every month and could not maintain the required Statutory Liquidity Ratio and Cash Reserve Ratio. It has been facing penalties from the central bank continuously, according to a central bank report.

The company saw its default loans spiral in the last five years, from 12.21 percent in December 2012 to 90 percent in December 2016. The BIFC's total default loans stood at Tk 780 crore at the end of last year. It was Tk 84.28 crore at the end of 2012.

At the end of last year, its total deposits stood at Tk 508.62 crore, down 13.25 percent from that of the year before. Its loan portfolio shrunk to Tk 876 crore at the end of last year from Tk 1,063 crore of the previous year.

The BIFC submitted to the central plan a recovery plan containing three options. One of them involves taking Tk 500 crore from the Bangladesh Bank to pay off its bank loans.

Another is to inject fresh equity by raising the paid-up capital. The third option is to prevent the banks from realising loan repayments and rescheduling of the payments with a year's grace period.

Yetis are bears!

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Genetic analyses of nine "yeti" bone, tooth, skin, hair and faecal samples indicate they derive from bears.

The one exception was a single tooth collected from a stuffed museum exhibit, which came from a dog.

"Clearly, a big part of the yeti legend has to do with bears," said Dr Lindqvist.

Though the idea that yetis might arise from sightings of bears is not new, the study - published in Proceedings of the Royal Society B - is the most comprehensive analysis conducted so far.

A previous paper linked two yeti samples to a prehistoric polar bear, but it has since been called into question.

By conducting a comprehensive genetic survey of a variety of samples, and comparing them with samples taken from bears, Dr Lindqvist and her collaborators aimed to put the matter to bed once and for all.

The analysis revealed that the team's samples came from modern bear species:

specifically, Himalayan brown and black bears.

"Our findings strongly suggest that the biological underpinnings of the yeti legend can be found in local bears, and our study demonstrates that genetics should be able to unravel other, similar mysteries," said Dr Lindqvist.

Besides solving monster mysteries, the scientists' in-depth genetic analysis allowed them to learn more about bear populations in the Himalayan region.

According to Dr Lindqvist, understanding the genetic diversity of bears in the region can be beneficial when working on management strategies for these mammals, many of which are critically endangered.

"Further genetic research on these rare and elusive animals may help illuminate the environmental history of the region, as well as bear evolutionary history worldwide - and additional 'yeti' samples could contribute to this work," she said.

Section 57 in new garb

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act, said the sources.

Section 30 of the draft act says that if any person or group deliberately publishes or transmits on a website or in any other electronic form any material which creates enmity and hatred among different sections or communities or hurts communal harmony, or creates instability or anarchy or the possibility of deterioration in law and order, the activity will be regarded as a crime.

Such an offence will carry a maximum punishment of five years' imprisonment or a fine of Tk 5 lakh or both.

If anyone commits the crime twice or more, he or she will face a maximum punishment of seven years in jail or a fine of Tk 10 lakh or both.

In section 27 of the draft law, it has been mentioned that if any person or group deliberately publishes or transmits on a website or in any other electronic form any material which hurts anyone's religious sentiment, the activity will be considered a crime, and the offender will face a maximum jail term of five years or a fine of Tk 10 lakh or both.

If any person commits the offence twice or more, he or she will face a maximum punishment of seven years' imprisonment or a fine of Tk 20 lakh or both.

According to section 28 of the draft act, if anyone, through any website or in any other electronic form, commits any crime that falls under section 499 of the Penal Code, the person will face two years' imprisonment or a fine of Tk 3 lakh or both.

If anyone commits the crime twice or more, the punishment will be five years

in prison or a maximum fine of Tk 10 lakh or both.

Section 499 of the Penal Code says, "Whoever by words either spoken or intended to be read, or by signs or by visible representations, makes or publishes any imputation concerning any person intending to harm, or knowing or having reason to believe that such imputation will harm, the reputation or such person, is said, except in the cases hereinafter excepted, to defame that person."

Another section of the draft act mentions that if any person keeps, sends or preserves any secret information by intruding into any government, semi-government, autonomous or statutory body through computers, digital machines, computer or digital networks or any electronic medium, the activity will be regarded as a computer or digital espionage crime.

Such an offence will carry a maximum jail term of 14 years or a fine of Tk 25 lakh or both.

If anyone commits the offence twice or more, the punishment will be life imprisonment or a maximum fine of Tk 1 crore or both.

The draft act contains another section which says that if a person, through digital or electronic devices, spreads or helps spread any propaganda against the spirit of the 1971 Liberation War or the Father of the Nation, he or she will face life imprisonment or a fine of Tk 1 crore or both.

After yesterday's meeting, Law Minister Anisul Huq said the provisions of section 57 will not be kept in the draft

law in the same form.

Checks and balances could be kept in the Digital Security Act and also in the proposed Broadcast Act for ensuring people's freedom of speech, he said.

Earlier on several occasions, the law minister said the government would scrap the section and make things clearer in the Digital Security Act.

Yesterday, the information minister said the new act was formulated to ensure digital security of 16 crore citizens of the country.

"I hope the draft will be placed in parliament in the coming winter session," he said.

The next session of the House is scheduled to begin in mid-January.

Before the ICT act was amended in 2013, the maximum punishment for offences under section 57 was 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of Tk 1 crore. Besides, police had to seek permission from the authorities concerned to file a case and arrest any person under the law.

But through the amendment, the maximum jail term was raised to 14 years, and law enforcers were empowered to make arrests without a warrant.

Rights activists and journalists have been critical of section 57 from the very beginning. They say the section goes against the people's right to freedom of expression and free speech as it contains vague wording, allowing its misuse against newsmen and social media users.

The debate over the section and demands for its repeal intensified following the arrest of veteran journalist Probir

Sikdar in 2015.

The journalist was arrested and sent to jail after he posted a status on Facebook.

Amid widespread criticism, Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque on August 2 instructed all police stations to consult the legal wing at the police headquarters before registering any case under the section.

The ruling Awami League also directed its activists to take permission from its central unit before filing any case under the section.

Around 300 cases were lodged under the section in the first seven months of this year. More than two dozen journalists were sued and several of them were arrested.

BNP supports

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unit to come into effect from December.

Soon after the announcement, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) and other left-leaning political parties called for a half-day hartal in protest of the decision.

The six-hour-long strike will start at 6:00am today and continue till 12:00noon, according to the press release.

Later, Bikolpodhara Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and Nagarik Oikto supported and joined the left-leaning political parties' call for a countrywide half-day hartal.

They said the decision for a hike in rates illogical and demanded that it be reduced.

Family asked

FROM PAGE 16

The priest went missing just two days ahead of the landmark visit of Pope Francis to Bangladesh, a country where less than 0.5 percent of 160 million people are Christians.

It is learned that Father Walter was organising people to join a special prayer session of Pope Francis in the capital.

Demanding his immediate release, Champa Rozario, sister of the missing priest, said their family had given up the plan to take part in the holy mass of Pope Francis against this circumstance.

Shital Rozario, assistant teacher of Saint Louis High School, said, "Our Headteacher Walter William Rozario is a gentleman and a priest. He has no enmity with anybody."

"We have informed our higher authorities and they have informed the matter to the Pope. Police are apparently not doing enough. It should not be very difficult to trace him as his phone is on and within the network," Shital added.

Harun-or-Rashid, ASP of Baraigram (circle), said several teams were looking for the missing priest.

On the phone calls demanding ransom, he said criminals might have called by cloning his number.

Father Walter William Rozario, 40, went missing after he had left his Bonpara house for the Jonail Catholic Church around 4:00pm on Monday.

He is also the headteacher of Saint Louis High School in the upazila and a neighbour of slain Christian trader Sunil Gomez.