



People watch from the edge of the stone quarry as rescuers dig for survivors yesterday after a landslide killed four people in the pit at Jafalong in Gowainghat upazila of Sylhet.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

4 killed

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Bishwajit Kumar Paul, upazila nirbahi officer of Gowainghat, said manually extracting stones in the area is legally permitted, but the workers dug the trench too deep violating the limit of a maximum of 10 metres.

A taskforce was formed several years ago with representatives from Gowainghat upazila administration, police and Border Guard Bangladesh to stop illegal stone extraction in the upazila. But casualties have not ceased.

According to local NGOs, thousands of workers work at stone quarries in Sylhet without any safety gear.

At least 30 workers were killed during stone extraction in five upazilas of Sylhet in 2017. However, the actual figure has never been confirmed by the authorities concerned. UNO Bishwajit said workers' safety is a serious issue, but the taskforce has only been working to stop illegal stone extraction.

"We have put red flags in the area and banned all stone extraction for now to avoid further casualties. We are also trying to trace the employers of the victims to take legal action against them," he added.

Adding new

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worried that who would be interested to teach the students there as it takes around four to five hours to go to the islands from mainland," she said.

Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT, said none can achieve success in the education and health care system without using ICT. "Friendship has added a new dimension to education and it has become a role model," said Palak.

The state minister also promised to facilitate the Friendship-run secondary schools by establishing digital laboratories.

Currently 4,686 students are enrolled in Friendship's 79 primary schools and 244 in its seven secondary schools. This year, the number of students in PEC exam increased to 543 from 375. Of them, 260 are from Gaibandha, 126 from Kurigram and 157 from Chilmari.

Prof Syeda Tahmina Akhter, director of institute of education and research at Dhaka University, and Aysha Taasin Khan, director and head of good governance and education at Friendship, also spoke.

Three students and one facilitator also shared their experiences at the event.

Iran reopens all border posts with Iraqi Kurdistan

AFP, Ulaimaniyah

Iran yesterday reopened the last two border posts with Iraqi Kurdistan that it closed in response to an independence vote rejected by Baghdad and neighbouring countries, officials said.

The Iranian consulate in the Kurdish autonomous region's capital Arbil announced the Parwez Khan and Haji Omran posts were beginning work again "from Tuesday".

A Kurdish spokesman at Parwez Khan confirmed the post had "reopened officially at 0900 (0600 GMT)" after notification was received from the Iranian side.

The opening of the two posts means that all crossings on the border between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan are now up and running after a third post at Bashmaq started working again in October.

Iran first announced on December 18 the reopening of all its border posts with Iraqi Kurdistan, without setting a specific date.

President for unity

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its performance that had helped restore people's democratic rights particularly through declaring void the fifth and seventh constitutional amendments.

The president also appreciated the apex courts' judges for their role in establishing the rule of law in the country.

The president asked the judiciary to bring dynamism in case management by using the facilities of information technology (IT). "Necessary steps will have to be taken to carry out official activities of countrywide courts in a digital system," he said.

Noting that the "online cause-list" was introduced in the Supreme Court and the "online bail confirmation system" appeared effective there, the president emphasised digitising all files and records as the "Supreme Court is the Court of Records" also.

He also asked the SC administration to take pragmatic steps for preserving all the activities-- from filing cases to pronouncing judgments-- in digital system.

"Measures can be taken to produce the accused before court from jail and take deposition of witnesses through a videoconference. The Supreme Court will have to be active to implement the e-Judiciary in days to come as the govern-

ment is very sincere about it," he said.

Hamid also recalled the significant role of lawyers in establishing justice and the rule of law, and hoped that they would help ensure quick justice for the litigants with their talent, intelligence, honesty and sincerity.

"There is no alternative to democracy and good governance... Maintaining good relations and coordination among legislature, executive and judiciary is very urgent."

At the outset of his speech, the president paid rich tribute to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who presented a constitution on November 4, 1972, aimed at building a hunger and poverty free Bangladesh with no discrimination between the rich and the poor.

Law Minister Anisul Huq, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, Bangladesh Bar Council Vice Chairman Abdul Basat Mojumder, Supreme Court Bar Association President Joynul Abedin and Judges Committee President Justice Mirza Hossain Haider also spoke. Judges, senior lawyers, high civil and military officials were present on the occasion.

Earlier, Justice Wahhab and other judges welcomed the president on his arrival on the SC premises, where he planted a Spanish Cherry sapling.

Defying age for schooling

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themselves in his school.

These men, while having to sign documents and use their intellect in different areas and aspects of their lives, realised that education has no alternative. And so, they took the leap and began shaping their futures immediately.

Six of them-- Siddique Mia, Bazlur Rashid, Shahinur Alam, Abdul Latif, Badsha Mia and Bodiuzzaman-- successfully completed their class one education from Mahmudpur Government Primary School and have now graduated onto class two. Clad proudly in their school uniforms, they went to their school with their younger classmates on Monday, January 1, 2018, to collect the textbooks for their new class.

"It's a great day for us! We have never had such an experience before," said an ecstatic Badsha Mia, after collecting his new textbooks. Talking to The Daily Star, Badsha, a day labourer in the area, said he began studying after it dawned upon him that life is next to nothing for an illiterate man.

"I used to use my fingerprint, but

now I can actually make signatures to sign documents!" he said.

According to their teachers, these men rarely ever missed their classes, including physical education, throughout their first year at school. They are also known to be warm and friendly with their younger classmates.

"I learned how to sing our national anthem in school," said Shahinur Alam who wishes to continue studying for as long as he lives. "The teachers and our classmates are so very helpful," he said, extending heartfelt gratitude towards them.

Taking care of his family since he was just a teenager, Harun Ur Rashid, could never attend a school. "But here I am, at the age of 55."

Those who could not pass, on the other hand, did not lose hope in the slightest. Instead, they have gained inspiration from the others to try harder at their next attempt. "So what we didn't pass at our first try? We will keep trying. We will keep moving ahead," said Asad Mia.

They say it's never too late to chase your dreams, and these 11 men stand as a perfect testament to that.

Chocolate

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within a very limited strip of land located roughly 20 degrees north and south of the equator. In growing cacao plants, location is the key. At the aforementioned place, temperature, rain, and humidity remain constant all year long. As a result, nearly half of the world's chocolate production originates from Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, two West African countries.

In the next few decades, however, those areas won't be suitable for growing cacao plants. By 2050, rising temperatures will push present-day chocolate-growing regions over 1,000 feet uphill -- areas populated with mountains, much of which is reserved for wildlife, says the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. As a result, the plants could potentially be put at risk.

So, what's being done to prevent the catastrophic disappearance of cacao plants from happening in the next few decades? The report says that candy company Mars has collaborated with University of California-Berkeley scientists to keep cacao seedlings in

refrigerated greenhouses, with the hope that they can grow into cacao plants that won't wilt or rot at present-day elevations. If the experiment is successful, cacao plant farmers wouldn't need to relocate their farms to grow the plant.

To do this, the scientists are using CRISPR, a highly controversial gene-editing tool. They hope to manipulate the DNA of cacao plants to make them withstand dryer, warmer climates in the years to come. It's been used to alter crops and make them cheaper and more reliable.

So, should you worry about cacao plants going extinct? Probably not. Actually, this isn't the first time there's been panic on the extinction of chocolate. Back in 2014, a handful of reports said chocolate could disappear as soon as 2020, which were ultimately debunked. Even still, it was proven that droughts around the globe did lead to the longest streak of chocolate deficits in 50 years.

Now, go on and tell climate change deniers that chocolate will soon be gone.

India eyes major weapons purchase

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman yesterday gave the go-ahead to two major proposals for procurement of precision-guided bombs from Russia and surface-to-air missiles from Israel with the deals together worth Rs 1,714 crore.

One proposal relates to procurement of 240 precision-guided bombs at a cost of Rs 1,254 crore from JSC Rosonboron Exports, Russia, an official statement said.

These bombs are used by the Indian Air Force (IAF) and "will address the deficiency of Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs) in the IAF arsenal, besides enhancing the offensive capabilities of the IAF," said the statement.

The other project pertains to procurement of 131 Barak missiles and associated equipment from Rafael Advance Defence Systems Ltd of Israel at a cost of Rs 460 crore. These are surface-to-air missiles designed to be used as a ship-borne anti-missile defence system against anti-ship missiles.

The nod to the Missile Defence System from Israel came ahead of a proposed visit to India by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the middle of this month. Modi visited Israel last year.

The precision-guided bombs for the IAF are designed to hit a specific target, to minimise collateral damage and increase lethality against intended target.

The IAF arsenal has an acute deficiency of PGMs and the procurement from Russia will not only address the shortage but also enhance its offensive capabilities.

The procurement of the anti-ship missiles means India is looking to augment its naval strength at a time when China is stepping up its naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

OIC team

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places of residence and that the authorities must take concrete steps to address the root causes of tensions in Rakhine State.

Meanwhile, Indonesian President Joko Widodo is likely to be here on a two-day official visit this month to discuss bilateral, regional and global issues, including the Rohingya issue.

The two countries are now in discussion to finalise the visit, a foreign ministry source said.

The Indonesian president, during the visit, would have meetings with President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

In September last, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi visited Dhaka and discussed the Rohingya issues.

16 students

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general secretary of the Polytechnic Institute unit of the ruling party's student front Bangladesh Chhatra League, said that he knew about 19 injured who received treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital and the nearby Shamarita hospital.

The clash erupted when a student of Latif dormitory of the institute was beaten up by some residents of the nearby Begunbari slum in the evening, said Biplob Kumar Sarkar, deputy commissioner of Dhaka metropolitan police's Tejaon division.

Following the incident, a number of students from the dormitory went to the slum and beat up six or seven residents. As the students were returning, residents of the slum began chasing them.

A clash ensued near the dormitory and soon police intervened to calm the situation, said Biplob.

"As the agitated students started throwing brickbats at police, [we] had to open fire to bring the commotion under control," he said.

German far-right MP faces police complaint over 'incitement'

AFP, Berlin

German police have filed a complaint against a prominent member of Germany's far-right AfD party over a tweet on New Year's Eve which they say violated anti-incitement laws.

Beatrix von Storch, deputy leader of the party's parliamentary faction, had criticised Cologne police for sending a New Year's greeting in Arabic on Twitter.

"What the hell is going on with this country? Why is an official police site... tweeting in Arabic?" she wrote. "Did you mean to placate the barbaric, Muslim, gang-raping hordes of men?"

Von Storch's tweet appeared to reference chaotic 2015 New Year's Eve celebrations in Cologne, which were marred by mass sex assaults on women by men of mostly North African origin.

Silk industry

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I took 25 days' training from the Bangladesh Sericulture Board. I planted mulberry trees. From the Board I bought silkworms and the equipment one needs. I've been doing well with it. Last season I produced 7.5 kilograms of silk."

Her neighbour Shantunu Rowaza is following in her footsteps. "We've planted mulberry trees in unused land beside the house," she says. "I hope we can produce silk from next season."

As the favourite food of silkworms, a supply of mulberry leaves is essential. The silkworm, which was originally domesticated in China, has been producing silk commercially in that country for at least 5,000 years. The domesticated variety produces more silk than its wild cousin.

According to Sericulture Development Board officials, the average life cycle of a silkworm is 25 days. With a healthy supply of mulberry leaves, the caterpillars then metamorphose into moths, producing silk cocoons in the process.

As an agricultural enterprise, raising silkworms is relatively easy. It's possible for family members of any age to participate and doesn't require much space. In Beltali Para and also in Kongchiri Para in Bhaibon Chara union in particular, housewives, children and the elderly are involved. Though the industry is new, many families are already achieving solvency.

"At first many villagers were hesitant," recalls Tripura Khaeshwar, a field worker with the Board. "After

some consideration, a few agreed to try sericulture. The situation changed rapidly after that: in key villages most families now produce silk or are planning to. To succeed, it's most important to have quality mulberry trees and quality silkworms; we help with this."

"The potential for sericulture in the hill tracts is quite bright," remarks Mizanur Bhuiyan, the Board's manager in Khagrachhari. "So far we have trained more than 1,000 locals concerning the silk production process. At this stage we also buy the silk produced at an appropriate rate."

Israel

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Jerusalem," Education Minister Naftali Bennett, who heads Jewish Home, said after the vote.

"The Mount of Olives, the Old City and the City of David will forever remain ours," he wrote on Twitter.

Dov Henin of the opposition's mainly Arab Joint List said the new law should be called "the law to prevent peace".

"Without an agreement on Jerusalem there will be no peace," he said ahead of the final vote. "The law means that there will be bloodshed."

Trump's December 6 decision upended decades of precedent and broke with international consensus, but maintains that Jerusalem's final status would have to be decided in negotiations between the two sides.

The new law is however not necessarily definitive. It can be changed by a regular parliamentary majority of 61.

BNP to take part in polls

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to hold a programme there at 2:00pm to mark its 39th founding anniversary. Khaleda, a former prime minister, was supposed to join the programme as the chief guest.

But, JCD activists found the gate of the institution locked at 10:00am with police on guard.

As they tried to approach the institute authorities to know the reason, law enforcers said the authorities had taken the steps "for the safety and security of the president".

President Md Abdul Hamid had joined a programme in the Supreme Court located next to the institution.

Later in the afternoon, several hundred activists of JCD took position in front of the main entrance of IEB and staged demonstrations to press home their demand for opening the gate.

Khaleda joined the agitating JCD men at 4:25pm and stayed there sitting in her car until 5:20pm when the authorities opened the gate.

Addressing the programme, the former premier alleged that the Sheikh Hasina-led government did not come to power with people's mandate and said her party would not join the elections if it is held under the AL government.

"As the government is not elected through peoples' vote, election would not be held under them. Parliament should be dissolved," she said.

Referring to wholesale arrest of BNP leaders and activists, the former premier said, "By repressing our leaders and activists, holding of another farci-

Khamenei blames 'enemies'

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A Revolutionary Guards spokesman said they had not been requested to intervene directly, but they requested the public to report "seditionist elements".

"We will not permit insecurity to continue in any way in Tehran. If it continues, officials will take decisions to finish it," said Esmail Kowsari, a deputy commander for a local branch of the Guards, on state television.

Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, described the unrest as a "proxy war against the Iranian people".

"Hashtags and messages about the situation in Iran come from the United States, Britain and Saudi Arabia," he told local media.

'SEDITIONIST ELEMENTS'

President Hassan Rouhani has tried to play down the unrest, which began over economic grievances Thursday but quickly turned against the regime as a whole with chants of "Death to the dictator".

"This is nothing," he said in a statement on the presidency website on Monday, vowing the nation would deal with "this minority who... insult the sanctities and values of the revolution".

Pro-regime rallies were held across several towns and cities -- reflecting continued support among a large conservative section of society.

"With every day that passes, the crimes of those arrested become more serious and their punishment will become heavier. We no longer consider them as protesters demanding rights, but as people targeting the regime," the head of Tehran's revolutionary court, Mousa Ghazanfarabadi, told the conservative Tasnim news agency.

Rouhani came to power in 2013 promising to mend the economy and ease social tensions, but high living costs and a 12 percent unemployment

rate have left many feeling that progress is too slow.

The young are most affected, with as many as 40 percent out of work according to analysts, and rural areas particularly hard-hit.

'PEOPLE HAVE HAD ENOUGH'

"People have had enough, especially the young people. They have nothing to be happy about," Sarita Mohammadi, a 35-year-old teacher in Tehran, told AFP.

"The situation is far worse in provinces. Agriculture has been destroyed. I know many who have left the north of the country to come to Tehran to work," she added.

Rouhani acknowledged there was "no problem bigger than unemployment" in a speech on Sunday, and also vowed a more balanced media and more transparency.

US President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly criticised Tehran over four days of demonstrations, said it was "time for a change" and that Iran's people were "hungry" for freedom.

The European Union on Monday pushed Iran to guarantee the right to protest and separately British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said "the UK is watching events in Iran closely".

"We believe that there should be meaningful debate about the legitimate and important issues the protesters are raising and we look to the Iranian authorities to permit this," Johnson said in a statement.

Turkey on Yesterday expressed concern about the protests in a statement that called for "common sense" to "prevail to prevent any escalation".

In 2009, authorities ruthlessly put down protests against the re-election of hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. At least 36 people were killed in 2009, according to an official toll, while the opposition says 72 died.