



Syrian men sit and talk on a rooftop as smoke rises from buildings behind them following air strikes on the rebel-held besieged town of Arbin, in the eastern Ghouta region on the outskirts of the capital Damascus yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Japanese held with 11kg gold at HSIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials arrested a Japanese national in possession of 11kg of gold at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Friday.

The arrestee Kengo Shibata, 43, arrived in Dhaka on a flight from Singapore, Mohammad Sydul Islam, assistant commissioner of customs, told The Daily Star.

Acting on a tip-off, the team searched Kengo Shibata when he was crossing the green channel without declaring any items around 12:40am. They found 11 gold bars, each weighing one kg in his possession, the AC said.

The market price of the seized gold is approximately Tk 5.50 crore, he added.

Shibata has travelled four times to Bangladesh in the recent past raising suspicion at the customs.

A case has been filed with Airport Police Station against the Japanese national.

10 found

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neither ARSA nor had any association with ARSA", the group said in a statement on Twitter.

A Myanmar government spokesman said in response to ARSA's statement that sometimes "terrorists and villagers were allied" in attacks against security forces.

"We have already said it is very difficult to segregate who is a terrorist and who are innocent villagers," spokesman Zaw Htay said. "There will be an ongoing investigating process whether they are members of ARSA or not."

The Myanmar military did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

'NEW STEP'
Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi said on Friday it was "positive" that the country's military was taking responsibility for the actions of troops.

"It is a new step for our country," she told a joint news conference with Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono in Myanmar's capital of Naypyitaw.

"I see it that way because a country needs to take responsibility for the rule of law in the country, and this is the first step on the road of taking responsibility and it is a positive thing," she said, according to a transcript of the news conference posted on her Facebook page.

On Dec. 18, the military announced a mass grave containing 10 bodies had been found at the coastal village of Inn Din, about 50 km (30 miles) north of the state capital Sittwe. The army appointed a senior officer to investigate.

A statement from the military on Wednesday said its investigation had found that members of the security forces had taken part in the killing and action would be taken against them.

The Rohingya crisis erupted after Rohingya insurgent attacks on security posts on Aug. 25 in Rakhine triggered a fierce military response that the United Nations denounced as ethnic cleansing.

Myanmar denies ethnic cleansing, saying its security forces had mounted legitimate counter-insurgency clearance operations.

Ice water

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more detailed cross-section view of thick ice sheets below a layer of ice-cemented rock and dust on Mars' surface. The 3D images were studied by scientists using the High-Resolution Imaging Science Experiment camera.

In 2001, the Mars Odyssey spacecraft discovered that a third of Mars' surface is covered in shallow ice. Also, its poles are full of ice deposits through the detection of hydrogen using gamma rays.

In 2008, the Phoenix lander analyzed and confirmed the Odyssey findings as it discovered buried water ice at 68 degrees north latitude or about one-third into the planet's pole. However, previous scans using the MRO's Shallow Radar instrument were not enough to determine the extent and makeup of ice on the Red Planet.

Scientists were astonished to discover that Mars' mid-latitudes contained pure water ice.

"It was surprising to find ice exposed at the surface at these places. In the mid-latitudes, it's normally covered by a blanket of dust or regolith," loose bits of rock atop a layer of bedrock, said Colin Dundas, research geologist of the U.S. Geological Survey's Astrogeology Science Center in Flagstaff, Arizona.

The ice sheets appear bluish in the high-resolution images and look like steep cliffs of glaciers, up to 100 meters tall. The discovery points to a vast area of underground ice buried only a meter or two below Martian ground surface. The location of the scarps was at 55 to 58 middle latitudes or the equivalent of Scotland or the tip of South America on Earth.

Shayne Byrne of the University of Arizona Lunar and Planetary Laboratory in Tucson said the discovery was like looking at an ant farm from a glass on the side and seeing what's hidden beneath the ground.

HOW SCARPS WERE FORMED

No definitive information was provided on how the scarps were formed. Scientists said once the buried ice is exposed to Mars' atmosphere, a scarp likely grows wider and taller as it retreats. It is also possible that layers of snow were compressed every climate cycle, resulting in the building deposits of ice over time.

The varying shades of light to a dark blue color of ice as shown on the images suggest that the thick slabs of ice are stacked. The ice could also be remnants of glaciers that existed millions of years ago.

UNLIMITED SOURCE OF WATER AND POSSIBLE LIFE ON MARS

The discovery is considered a game changer in mankind's exploration of Mars. Scientists have raised the possibility that the thick ice sheets could become a potential accessible source of water for future scientific exploration and visit to Mars. Byrne suggested that would-be visitors to Mars can just use a bucket and shovel and collect water from the sources.

The latest research gave scientists a glimpse of Mars' climate history and would be the basis for further study of its water sources. It will also help NASA and other agencies plan upcoming rover and human missions to Mars.

The study was published in the journal Science.

No alternative to literature

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Sattay Roy Chowdhury of Friends Bangladesh, India addressed the programme among others.

Minister for Cultural Affairs Asaduzzaman Noor recited a poem of Syed Shamsul Haque and chief coordinator of the conference organising committee Nasir Uddin Yusuf Bachhu delivered the welcome address.

India, Japan and Germany are taking part in the conference being held on the Bangla Academy premises.

Appreciating the organisers for choosing the immortal message of Gurusaday Dutt "Biswamanob hobi jodi kaimone Bangalee ha" (be a Bangalee with heart and soul if you want to be a universal figure) as the theme of the conference the prime minister said people across the world, who inherited Bangalee culture and literature, should always remember their roots in Bangla.

"They should not forget their identity. They have to possess their distinctiveness to survive in the global arena, as they have the glorious history of raising their heads against any injustice and indomitable willpower to accomplish any difficult task," she said.

Bangla literature is founded on one of the richest languages in the world in terms of vocabularies, literary repository and having roots among the people.

Hasina said the lifestyle of the people has changed in many ways with technological advancements. Lives have been made easier and faster, but appeal of the literature did not diminish.

The prime minister hoped that the international literature conference would enrich the literature of different languages through exchanges and sharing of ideas and experiences of literature lovers. Bangla literature would be more enriched through such

events.

She paid rich tributes to the martyrs of immortal Ekushey and creative poets and litterateurs of Bangla literature - Ishwar Chandra Vidyarnagar, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore, Nazrul, Jibanananda, Jasim Uddin and others -- in who's hands Bangla literature has turned into a "big tree" sprouting many flowers.

Hasina said Bangalees are the only nation in the globe who set the example of embracing martyrdom to protect the dignity of the mother language.

"No nation can tolerate disgrace of its mother language," she quoted Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and said Bangabandhu in his first appearance at the UN in 1974 delivered his speech in Bangla, aimed at establishing its grandeur and dignity at the world forum.

Since her accession to power, Hasina said she has been delivering her speeches at the UN in Bangla. Bangladesh has established the International Institute of Mother Languages for research on languages and their preservations, she said, adding that her government was continuing its efforts to make Bangla as one of the official languages of the UN.

Quoting a speech of Bangabandhu, the prime minister said people were the sources of all literature and arts. No great literature or artwork can be created being detached from the people.

She said February 21 has received global recognition as the International Mother Language Day. "We don't want any language to go to oblivion in the process of social transformation."

Africans

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therefore not welcome," Rupert Colville, spokesman for the UN human rights office, told reporters in Geneva.

Botswana summoned the US ambassador to the country to "clarify if Botswana is regarded as a 'shithole' country", according to a foreign ministry statement calling Trump's comments "irresponsible, reprehensible and racist".

Senegal followed suit with Foreign Minister Sidiki Kaba saying the government "firmly condemned the unacceptable remarks which undermine human dignity, especially of Africa and her diaspora".

'NOTHING NEW'

Trump was widely derided last year after twice referring to Namibia as "Namibia".

Social media users across the continent posted images of modern skylines and beautiful nature from their countries with the hashtag "shithole".

Many Africans reminded the US of its historic role in the continent's woes.

"President Trump, One day, I'll take you to a 'shithole' country called Ghana," wrote Ghanaian Edmond Prime Sarpong on Facebook.

"First stop would be Osu Castle, Elmina Castle, and the over 40 Forts that detained about 30 million slaves, beaten and shipped out like sardine cans and then I will tell you the history of Africa and why people like you made that a 'shithole' continent."

Prominent Kenyan commentator Patrick Gathara told AFP that Trump's words were nothing new.

"This is no different from what Hollywood and Western media have been saying about Africa for decades. We have consistently been portrayed as shitty people from shitty countries."

Some acknowledged problems in their countries, but blamed this on their poor leaders as well as Western nations.

"Please don't confuse the #shithole leaders we Africans elect with our beautiful continent... Our motherland is the most blessed continent that has been raped by imperialists in collaboration with our shitty misleaders for generations," wrote Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi on Twitter.

In South Africa, the ruling African National Congress party declared "ours is not a shithole country" and described Trump as "extremely offensive".

'IT'S OUR SHITHOLE'

Some Nigerians did not hold back, with many on Twitter saying their country was a "shithole", but that it was "our shithole" to criticise.

In Senegal's capital Dakar, administrator Idrissa Fall said "we cannot really say that he (Trump) is wrong". "African countries, and sometimes our leaders, do not exactly deal with the problems of the worst-off, that's what makes people immigrate".

Even war-torn South Sudan weighed in, with President Salva Kiir's spokesman Ateny Wek Ateny slamming the comments as "outrageous".

However, Juba businesswoman Jenny Jore, 31, told AFP that Trump's remarks were "on point".

"It is thanks to our African leaders that we are insulted that way," she said. The 54-nation UN African Group, which does not include Western Sahara, demanded a "retraction and an apology" from Trump, while thanking Americans "from all walks of life who have condemned the remarks".

Trump's latest comments provided ample fodder for talk-show hosts. South African comedian Trevor Noah, star of "The Daily Show", described himself as an offended citizen of "South Shithole" and also criticised Trump's preferred choice of Norway for immigrants.

"He didn't just name a white country, he named the whitest -- so white they wear moon-screen," he said.

Fog disrupts ferry services

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Transport Corporation (BIWTC) at Daulatdia, said ferry operation on the route remained suspended since 2:00am due to the fog.

Four ferries were forced to anchor mid river, he added.

Besides, seven ferries remained stranded at Paturia and five at Daulatdia since 2:00am due to poor visibility, causing untold sufferings to several thousand passengers in the chilly weather, the officials said.

The services resumed around 10:30am yesterday when fog cleared, Shafiqul Islam said.

"Density of the fog was so thick around the river basin that we had to wait till 10:30am to resume ferry operation on Paturia-Daulatdia route," said Nasir Mohammad Chowdhury, assistant general manager of BIWTC at Aricha.

Around 700 vehicles were seen stuck in an around six km long queue at Paturia, while around 600 vehicles were lined up on Daulatdia side, added our correspondent.

Ferry services were suspended on Shimulia-Kathalbari route for eight

hours since 2:00pm yesterday, writes our Munshiganj correspondent.

Seven ferries with more than a thousand passengers on board got stuck in the Padma for over eight hours due to the fog.

Besides, around 400 buses were stranded at Shimulia due to suspension of ferry services, said the assistant general manager of BIWTC, Shimulia Ferry Ghat.

Mohammad Shuvo, a bus passenger heading for Dhaka, said it took 12 hours for their bus to reach Daulatdia ghat from Jessore instead of the usual three hours.

"I started my journey at 6:50am yesterday and reached Daulatdia Ghat at 6:30pm," he added.

Kamal Hossain, a staff of a coach operator, said schedule of their trips has collapsed.

AKM Rezaul Karim, spokesperson, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh, said around 12 outbound flights scheduled to fly from HSIA between 7:30am and 10:40am yesterday were delayed due to the fog.

40,000 'orphans'

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Children living in those camps are vulnerable to various diseases as a large number of them suffer from malnutrition. Aid workers have expressed concerns over their safety as well as a lack of educational facilities available for them.

In such a situation, the social welfare ministry in collaboration with the Unicef has taken up a project to provide the children with educational and psychosocial support.

The Tk 17.22 crore project aims at giving financial support to around 9,000 "orphan" children. As many as 100 child-friendly spaces, 90 adolescent clubs and 90 child protection committees will also be formed to supervise around 34,000 children.

"We are now further cross-checking the survey results," Ali said, adding that the verification process would start on January 27.

"The child-friendly spaces and the clubs will remain open every day from 9:00am to 5:00pm and the children will get all sorts of support from there," Jamila Akhter, child protection specialist of Unicef, told The Daily Star.

Two volunteers would be recruited from the Rohingya community for each of the child-friendly spaces. A total of 50 social workers would be recruited to monitor the clubs and the committees, he said.

Under the project, each of the 9,000 orphans would be given Tk 2,000 in cash every month.

"We will identify the children who need the cash most and would give them the amount for the next six months," she said.

Moulana Saad

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Saad had made.

They demanded an apology from Moulana Saad for the "statements" if he wished to attend the Ijtema.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, two senior scholars of the Bangladesh chapter of Tabligh Jamaat, termed Hefajat's claims baseless and motivated.

"When an Islamic scholar of this standard talks for hours a day, he may say something not acceptable to others. But that does not make him controversial," one of the 11 Shura members of Tabligh said, asking not be named.

Even if he had said something controversial, Moulana Saad, on several occasions, apologised both verbally and in writing for them, he said. "But some people are not accepting that and trying to cash in on it for their own interests," he alleged.

He said a section has been hatching a conspiracy against Tabligh Jamaat since 2015.

The Shura member said Moulana Saad has been coming to Bangladesh for the last 20 years and no controversy ever arose regarding his comments.

"He came this year too but we did not treat him properly. He went back with a heavy heart," regretted a senior Tabligh man who was with Saad during his stay at Kakrail Mosque.

According to sources inside Kakrail Mosque, considered as the headquarters of Tabligh Jamaat in Bangladesh, all the decisions regarding Ijtema and selection of Shura members are made after consultation with the organisation's headquarters in Nizamuddin Market in New Delhi, India.

Moulana Saad played a key role in those consultations. But it didn't happen this year as the Shura members in India and Bangladesh have become sharply divided over Saad's alleged controversial statements.

A rift in Tabligh's leadership has been going on in India for the last two years but there had been no problems in Bangladesh until this year's protest by Hefajat-e-Islam.

Every year, Saad held a meeting with the Shura body for various decisions but this year members aligned with

Hefajat did not meet him, said the sources.

Many in Kakrail Mosque fear that the rivalry may hamper organising Ijtema in the future. Bangladesh has been successfully and peacefully holding it since 1998.

Tabligh Jamaat, known as a non-political global religious movement, came into being in 1927 in India. Moulana Ilyas Kandhalvi founded the religious movement, which has an estimated 70 to 80 million followers in more than 150 countries majority of whom are based in South Asia.

Its largest chapter is in Bangladesh with an estimated 15 million members. They travel in small groups from one place to another, stay in mosques and invite people to perform daily religious duties.

2 teens 'raped'

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A case was filed with Ashulia Police Station in this connection.

In another incident, a 15-year-old madrasa girl was "gang-raped" when she was returning home from a religious gathering in Joypurhat Sadar upazila, adds our Dinajpur correspondent.

On her way, some unidentified criminals took the girl to an isolated place around 9:00pm. They raped her and fled the spot, leaving the girl in a critical condition, said the victim's family.

Locals, who were returning from the same programme, rescued her and rushed her to Joypurhat Modern Hospital.

The victim's father filed a case with Joypurhat Sadar Police Station yesterday.

Selim Hossain, officer-in-charge of the police station, said they were trying to identify and arrest the rapists.

Three jailed

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buried in the presence of the mobile court.

Under the Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act, enacted in 2012, hunting wildlife without a licence, and/or killing wild or migratory birds are punishable offences.