



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia holds a meeting with leaders of the 20-party alliance at her office in Gulshan last night.

PHOTO: BNP

7 football fans shot dead in Mexico

AFP, Monterrey

At least seven people watching a football match have been shot dead in Mexico, sources said Saturday, adding to the country's murder toll which last year hit a two-decade high. The latest killings -- after more than 25,000 last year -- happened in Monterrey, an industrial hub in the country's northeast. At least four hooded gunmen entered a home in the city and threatened about 20 people watching the football, a source at the local prosecutor's office told AFP. Some were herded to a bathroom where they were gunned down, the source said, citing witnesses. Like much of Mexico, Monterrey has been afflicted by drug violence in recent years. In 2006 the government launched a controversial military anti-drug operation which critics say has only led to more murders and attacks.

Japan calls on China to up N Korea cooperation

AFP, Beijing

Japan's foreign minister called on China to increase cooperation on curbing North Korea's nuclear weapons programme yesterday during a meeting with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing. The meeting between Japan's Taro Kono and China's Wang Yi comes as the rival nations aim to improve relations held back by longstanding and seemingly intractable disputes over territory and Japan's war-time legacy. While ties between Asia's two largest economies have shown signs of warming, China's president Xi Jinping and Japan's PM Shinzo Abe have yet to meet on their own soil. In remarks at Beijing's Diaoyutai State Guest House, Kono praised the progress between the countries towards improving ties, while calling on Beijing to do more to curb Pyongyang's weapons programme. "I believe it is important not only to discuss issues related to our two countries, but for Japan and China to stand side by side to deal with global issues," he said. "In particular, the North Korea issue is now an urgent issue for the whole of international society." Tokyo has been wooing China with official visits and business delegations, but an exchange of state visits has remained a hard sell. Japan is hoping that will change this year as the two countries prepare to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the signing of a Japan-China friendship treaty. Relations between the two countries are at a "crucial stage," Chinese foreign minister Wang told Kono. "There is positive progress, but many disturbances and obstacles remain," he said, adding he hoped that the two sides could work together to push ties "toward the track of normal and sound development at an early date." A major source of tensions is a long-standing dispute over islands in the East China Sea, known as "Senkaku" in Japanese and "Diaoyu" by the Chinese side. Tokyo's decision to "nationalise" some of the islets in 2012 led to a major falling out between the two countries, and the fragile relationship has been slow to recover. Chinese coastguard vessels routinely travel around the disputed islands, a practice that has elicited regular objections from Japan, which controls the region.

China tightens screws on key social media

Asks Sina Weibo to curb 'harmful content'

AFP, Beijing

Chinese authorities have ordered a major social media platform to curb "harmful content" more effectively as they intensify oversight of online expression -- even taking aim at rap music, crude cartoons, dirty jokes and celebrity gossip. The campaign is intended not just to stamp out dissent but to ensure that all media "serves the direction of socialism". Sina Weibo has failed to comply, Beijing's Cyberspace Administration said Saturday on its official WeChat social media account, berating the site for letting users post "content of wrong

public opinion orientation, obscenity, low taste and ethnic discrimination". The company "has violated the country's laws and regulations, led online public opinions to wrong direction and left a very bad influence," it said. China has some of the world's tightest controls over web content, protected by what is called "The Great Firewall". Restrictions on free speech have increased since President Xi Jinping assumed power in 2012. A controversial cybersecurity law, which took effect last June, has given authorities even more leeway to regulate a wide variety of information.

Seine swells higher, keeping Paris on alert

AFP, Paris

The swollen Seine rose even higher yesterday, keeping Paris on alert, though forecasters said the flooding should peak by the end of the day. The river had risen 11 centimetres (4.3 inches) in 24 hours by Saturday evening, more than four metres above its normal height, causing headaches for commuters as well as people living near its overflowing banks. Tourists suffered too with the capital's famous Bateaux Mouches rivercraft out of service, and only emergency services authorised to navigate the Seine. The Vigicrues flooding agency forecasts the river will peak at 5.95 metres (19.3 feet) overnight, not quite reaching the 2016 high of 6.1 metres, when the Louvre museum was forced to shut for four days. But the world's most visited museum was on high alert yesterday, along with the Musee d'Orsay and Orangerie galleries, with the lower level of the Louvre's Islamic arts wing closed to visitors at least until today. A statue of an Algerian French army soldier from the Crimean War named Zouave that has guarded the river at the Pont d'Alma bridge in central Paris since 1910 was drenched up to the thighs in the muddy waters of the Seine. Police again warned Parisians against bathing or canoeing in the river, saying it was "forbidden and extremely dangerous". More favourable weather is expected for the week ahead, and Vigicrues has lowered its warning level from orange to yellow in several areas upstream of the capital. But even once the water levels start to recede, forecasters and officials say it will be a slow process, since much of the ground in northern France is already waterlogged. "If we're talking about things getting completely back to normal, that's going to take weeks," said Jerome Goellner, regional head of environmental services. Around 1,000 people have been evacuated from their homes in the greater Paris region, according to police, while around 1,500 homes were without electricity. Some basements in Paris began to see leaks on Friday, and a health centre in the city's northwestern suburbs, where 86 patients were receiving care, was evacuated because of flooding. The December-January period is now the third wettest on record since data collection began in 1900, according to France's meteorological service. However, fears of flooding like that of 1910, which saw the Seine rise to

8.62 metres, shutting down much of Paris's basic infrastructure, appeared unfounded. A main commuter line, the RER C, has halted service at Paris stops indefinitely, and some expressways that run alongside the Seine have been closed. In Paris the Seine flows through a deep channel, limiting the potential flooding damage to riverside structures. But several areas on the city's outskirts are under water, such as the southern suburb of Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, where some residents were getting around by boat and dozens have been evacuated from their homes. Syria says Turkish shelling damaged ancient temple REUTERS, Beirut The Syrian government and a war monitor said yesterday that Turkish shelling of the Kurdish-held Afrin region of Syria had seriously damaged an ancient temple. Ain Dara is an iron age temple with remains of large carved basalt blocks and wall reliefs. Pictures circulating online, which Reuters could not independently verify, showed an apparent shell crater in the site. A statement from the Syrian government's antiquities department carried by Syrian state media called for international pressure on Turkey "to prevent the targeting of archaeological and cultural sites". The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said Ain Dara was exposed to Turkish shelling, causing significant damage but no casualties. The Turkish military was not immediately available for comment. Turkey's operation against the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia in Afrin began a week ago and has included heavy bombardment but limited advances by its army or allied Syrian rebel groups. The Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad has condemned the Turkish assault, but it also opposes the YPG and Kurdish aspirations for autonomy in northern parts of Syria. Syria's civil war which began in 2011, has led to major damage to many historical remains including widespread destruction in the UNESCO World Heritage sites of Palmyra and the Old City of Aleppo.

Bangladeshi

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camp in India's Cooch Behar district caught Manjurul after he had entered Indian territory illegally to bring cattle from there. After the BSF men left Manjurul on no-man's land, local people rescued him but he died while being taken to Patgram Upazila Health Complex, the OC said. Victim's father Asadul Islam said, his son went to India to bring Indian cattle in the early hours of yesterday. "My son went to India accompanied by five other cattle traders during the night. All of them returned unhurt but my son returned as a dead body," he said, adding, "Two cattle traders called me and informed me that my son was caught by BSF."

Islam said he would lodge a murder case after the postmortem. Nayek Subedar Wahedul Islam, camp commander of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) at Burimari, told the correspondent that they were yet to confirm whether Manjurul was tortured to death by the BSF. "We have sent a message to BSF asking about the incident this morning, and in reply, BSF said they were not aware of such an incident," he said. The camp commander said they were trying to find out the cause behind Alam's death.

HC rejects

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asking the government to explain why its action of keeping the post of the chief justice vacant and not appointing a new chief justice should not be declared illegal. He also said the post of chief justice cannot be kept vacant even for a day as per the constitution, but the government has not appointed a new chief justice after Justice SK Sinha resigned on November 10 last year. Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah of the Appellate Division of the SC has been discharging the duties of chief justice since October 3 last year, when then chief justice SK Sinha went on a leave before finally stepping down.

Was the UNO

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The HC also issued a rule asking the respondents to explain why the jail sentence should not be scrapped and why legal action should not be taken against the officials responsible for sentencing him. In the rule the court also asked the UNO and the three police officers to explain why they should not be directed to give Tk 20 lakh in compensation to Belal. Citing the writ petition, Belal's lawyer Manzill Murshid told this correspondent police arrested his client on October 13 last year in a criminal case and produced him before the court on October 14. However, a mobile court led by the Lohagara UNO sentenced Belal to eight months on October 14 on charge of possessing some cannabis, according to the statement of the mobile court order. Advocate Manzill further said a mobile court must sentence a person after finding him guilty on the spot, but Belal was sentenced through a concocted mobile court while he was in custody which is contrary to the constitution and law. Manzill yesterday told the HC that the mobile court has lost its popularity due to abuse of power. He prayed that the HC strips Mahbub of his power to conduct mobile court and allows the withdrawal of the OC.

Israel, Poland in row over Holocaust bill

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Poland on Saturday of denying history with a bill outlawing any reference to the Nazi death camps in the country as being Polish. "The law is baseless. I strongly oppose it. One cannot change history and the Holocaust cannot be denied," the premier said in a statement. As a diplomatic row brewed on the day the world marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Poland's charge d'affaires to Israel has been summoned to the foreign ministry yesterday, the ministry said. A foreign ministry official told AFP the Polish bill was "an attempt to rewrite and falsify history, something that the Jewish people and Israel will never accept". Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki responded via Twitter late Saturday saying: "Auschwitz-Birkenau is not a Polish name, and Arbeit Macht Frei is not a Polish phrase" in reference to the words posted on the Nazi camp's infamous wrought-iron gate that mean "Work makes you free" in German. "Auschwitz is the most bitter lesson on how evil ideologies can lead to hell on earth. Jews, Poles, and all victims should be guardians of the memory of all who were murdered by German Nazis." Earlier on Saturday he marked the 73 anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz on site at the former Nazi death camp in Oswiecim, southern Poland. Poland's rightwing-dominated

parliament on Friday adopted legislation that sets fines or a maximum three-year jail term for anyone who refers to Nazi German death camps as being Polish. The measure is intended to apply to both Polish citizens and foreigners. It is expected to easily pass in the Senate before being signed by the president. Poland was attacked and occupied by Nazi Germany in World War II, losing six million of its citizens, including three million Jews in the Holocaust. Polish officials routinely request corrections when global media or politicians describe as "Polish" the former death camps such as Auschwitz set up by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland. The Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem said it "opposes the new legislation passed by the Polish parliament, which is liable to blur the historical truths regarding the assistance the Germans received from the Polish population during the Holocaust". But it added: "There is no doubt that the term 'Polish death camps' is a historical misrepresentation." On a sterner tone, Israel's Education and Diaspora Affairs Minister Naftali Bennett instructed schools to dedicate two hours this week to study about the involvement of European nations in the Holocaust. "This is a shameful disregard of the truth. It is a historic fact that many Poles aided in the murder of Jews, handed them in, abused them, and even killed Jews during and after the Holocaust," he said.

Section 57 to be there

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propaganda against the Liberation War or the Father of the Nation, using digital devices, will risk being sentenced up to 14 years' jail or a fine of up to Tk 50 lakh or both. In the previous draft, the highest punishment for the offence was life imprisonment or a fine of Tk 1 crore or both. The new law stipulates some crimes as "non-bailable", considering the gravity of crimes and magnitude of punishment, sources added. In August last year, the cabinet approved a draft of the Digital Security Act and the prime minister then directed the law ministry to scrutinise the draft to avoid any repetition, contradictory provision or inadequacy. After holding three meetings with different ministries and two with other stakeholders, the law ministry sent the final draft of the act to the ICT Division on January 18 with some amendments to the previous draft, sources said. The new draft is likely to be placed before the weekly cabinet meeting today, they added. The government move comes at a time when the demand for the repeal of section 57 is already loud and clear. Rights activists and journalists are also expressing deep concern over section 19 of the draft Digital Security Act as the provision contains all the elements of section 57 that goes against the freedom of the press, speech and expression. Section 19 of the first draft of Digital Security Act says a person may face up to two years in jail or Tk 2 lakh fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast something false or obscene and something that pollutes the human mind, defames someone and hurts religious sentiments. As per the draft, sections 19 and 20 of the proposed Digital Security Act are related with section 499 of the Penal Code and section 57 of ICT Act. "Considering the existing reality, elements of section 57 were split into four separate sections [section 25, 28, 29 and 31 of Digital Security Act]," reads the summary. Section 20 of the previous draft said a person may face a maximum sentence of seven years or a fine of Tk 7 lakh or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast something which can spread hatred and created enmity among different groups and can cause deterioration of law and order. Section 499 of Penal Code reads, "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 of such person, is said, except in the cases hereinafter excepted, to defame that person." According to the summary, sections 54, 55, 56, 57, and 66 of the ICT Act will be abolished once the Digital Security Act comes into operation. Sections 17 and 18 of the previous draft of Digital Security Act, which are related to pornography and child pornography, have not been incorporated into the final draft as there is

already the Pornography Control Act to deal the issue. A new section was incorporated in the final draft allowing the judge, who will deal with a case under the law which is technical in nature, taking opinion from experts concerned. The first draft had seven chapters and 45 sections while the final draft has nine chapters and 63 sections, said the summary. Asked about the new draft, eminent rights activist Nur Khan Liton said the government has made some amendments and changes, mainly regarding the punishment, in section 57 of the ICT Act incorporating it into the proposed Digital Security Act but people's expectation was not fulfilled. "Still there is scope that vested quarters can misuse the new act as they have misused section 57," he told The Daily Star yesterday. There should be a section in the new act binding the authority concerned to do scrutiny before taking cases for defamation or hurting religious sentiments, he said. CONTROVERSY Rights activists and journalists have been critical of section 57 of ICT from the very beginning, and the debate over the provision and demand for its repeal intensified following the arrest of journalist Probir Sikdar in 2015. The senior journalist was arrested under the ICT Act for one of his facebook posts. Experts say the section goes against people's right to freedom of expression and free speech and it contains vague wordings, allowing its misuse against newsmen and social media users. Journalists took to the street last year after more than two dozen journalists were sued under the section. The Editors' Council in July demanded the government fully repeal section 57 and refrain from taking any initiative to reintroduce similar provisions in any new law. Amid widespread criticisms, Law Minister Anisul Huq on several occasions said section 57 would be removed and the Digital Security Act was in the pipeline. In 2016, the government took initiative to enact the law to ensure national digital security and prevent rising digital crimes. Next polls FROM PAGE 16 election was held on January 5, 2014, amidst controversy as the BNP -- the main opposition -- and most other political parties boycotted the polls. As a result, 154 lawmakers were elected unopposed in the 10th parliament. Quader also came down heavily on his political counterpart Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir for his remarks over the verdict in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case, scheduled to be announced on February 8. "Fakhrul has already committed contempt of court by issuing a threat that they will not accept the court verdict in connection with the case. The court should take cognisance of the matter," Quader said. "If the BNP wants to create anarchy centring the verdict, then not only the government but also the country's people will resist it," he said.