

It is Pakistan's proxy war with Chinese help

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"There is a party called AIUDE. If you look at it, they have grown in a faster time-frame than the BJP grew over the years," Gen Rawat mentioned, referring to the BJP winning only two seats in 1984.

"The AIDUF is moving at a faster pace in Assam," he said at a conference in New Delhi on bridging gaps and securing borders in the Northeast region.

The Army chief then went on to stress that the "proxy game" was being executed by "our western neighbour [Pakistan]", with support from across the "northern border [China]", to keep the area disturbed.

"They will always try and ensure that this area is taken over, playing the proxy dimension of warfare. The solution lies in identifying the problem and holistically looking at it," he said.

Gen Rawat pointed out that it was no longer possible to change the population dynamics of Assam, with Muslim majority increasing from five districts to eight to nine districts now.

Efforts should be made to "amalgamate" the people living in the region, said Gen Rawat.

"I think we have to understand, we have got to appreciate to live with all the people we live in the region, irrespective of their caste, creed, religion or sex. I think if we understand that, we can live together happily but the best part is to amalgamate the kind of people that are living there, than identifying the people trying to create trouble for us," he noted, according to a report of The Indian Express.

"We will have more trouble in segregating people, identifying people. Yes, some people have to be identified who are creating trouble for us, who are illegal immigrants. But as was brought

out, the Muslim population actually started coming into Assam from 1218 to 1226, that was the first time that the Muslims actually entered Assam.

"We have to understand that they are not late arrivers, they are the early arrivers, came concurrently with the Ahoms. Both these people have claim to the state of Assam and, therefore, to the North-East region," he noted.

"Migration from Bangladesh is due to two reasons. One is they are running out of space. Large areas get flooded during the monsoon and they have constricted area to stay. The other issue is planned immigration, which is taking place because of our western neighbour. They will always try and ensure that this area is taken over. It is the proxy dimension of warfare," Gen Rawat said.

The Union government is taking several measures to ensure development of the entire region, which will help sort out many problems, he added.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh government has not yet come up with any formal reaction to the Indian army chief's comments.

But several senior officials of the foreign ministry told The Daily Star that Gen Rawat's remarks were unexpected as he tagged Bangladesh with Pakistan and China.

They said his statement has stunned Dhaka as it comes at a time when bilateral ties between Bangladesh and India have reached a new height.

The Indian army chief's comments may create serious controversy and also provoke reactions both in



General Bipin Rawat

Bangladesh and India, they added.

Considering the importance of bilateral relations between the two countries, Gen Rawat visited Bangladesh in his maiden foreign tour as the army chief from March 31 to April 2 last year. He was appointed the army chief on January 1 the same year.

Yesterday, the Indian army defended its chief's comments, saying there was "nothing political or religious in the talk".

The response came after AIUDE President Badruddin Ajmal questioned if the army chief was "indulging in politics" which is against the constitutional mandate given to him, reports The Hindustan Times.

"Gen Bipin Rawat has made a political statement, shocking! Why is it a concern for the Army Chief that a political party, based on democratic & secular values, is rising faster than BJP? Alternative parties like AIUDE, AAP have grown because of the misgovernance of big parties," tweeted Ajmal, according to the news report.

The Indian army, however, said, "There is nothing political or religious in the talk. The army chief just mentioned amalgamation and development in the seminar on North-East organised at DRDO Bhawan on February 21."

The AIUDE, formed in 2005 with an aim to champion the cause of Muslim community, currently has three MPs in the Lok Sabha and 13 legislators in the state assembly, mentioned The Hindustan Times report.

Teacher held for 'raping' student

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A teacher at a private nursing school was arrested in connection with the alleged rape of a student in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila yesterday.

The arrestee, Asaduzzman Asad, 35, of Khatapara village in the upazila, is a director and teacher of Manasika Medical Institute in the village.

The case was lodged with Aditmari Police Station yesterday morning and police arrested Asad in the afternoon, said Hareshwar Roy, officer-in-charge of the police station, adding that he would be produced before a court today.

According to the case statement, the police official said the arrestee "raped" the victim, 20, when she went to the teacher's house beside the institute to have her exercise book signed around noon on February 5.

In the statement, it has been mentioned that nobody was at the house then, the OC said.

On Wednesday, Asad allegedly called the victim over the phone and told her to go over to his place or else he would divulge the rape incident to her husband, the OC added.

The woman's medical test was done at Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital yesterday. The result of the test would be known on Sunday, said Monjur Morshed Dolan, resident medical officer of the hospital.

Sale of rice

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could only get 2.5 lakh tonnes against a target of 12 lakh tonnes of rice from the local market.

The minister said the Food-Friendly Programme is a key initiative of the prime minister and it would not be suspended in future.

The minister said now they have a food stock of 14.2 lakh tonnes, including 10.40 lakh tonnes of rice.

The highest food reserve in the country's history was 16 lakh tonnes and he was hopeful that the record would be broken next month.

He said during the aman season, they had a target of procuring 3 lakh tonnes of rice, but the government later signed an agreement with millers for 6 lakh tonnes and 5.50 lakh tonnes of that was already in government silos.

According to the food minister, they had inked agreements for importing 15 lakh tonnes of rice and the import of 2 lakh tonnes was later cancelled. At least 8.2 lakh tonnes of that have reached government warehouses.

The minister said when the programme was first introduced in September 2016, it faced severe criticism for various irregularities. Later, 130 dealerships were cancelled, 2.56 lakh cards were scrapped, and 37 cases were filed.

More than Tk 10 lakh was realised in fines, he said.

He said now there are district- and upazila-wise lists of beneficiaries on the food directorate website.

Qamrul said from next month, Open Market Sale of rice would start throughout the country.

Charge sheet

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Mizanur Rahman Bhuiyan, an expat businessman living in the United States.

Police mentioned Shafik Rehman and Mahmudur Rahman as the masterminds behind the "conspiracy to kidnap and kill PM's son Joy" in the charge sheet, court sources said. Mamun aided and abetted, they said quoting the charge sheet.

Caesar collected information on Joy from the FBI and sent it to the others accused in the charge sheet. Mizanur financed, aided and abetted.

In August 2015, the DB filed the case with Paltan Police Station in connection with attempting to abduct and murder Joy.

On April 16 the following year, detectives in plainclothes arrested Shafik at his Eskaton Garden Road home.

According to the case statement, Mamun and a number of top leaders of the BNP and its allies met in the UK, the US and various places of Bangladesh before September 2012 and conspired to abduct and kill Joy.

In March 2015, a US court convicted Caesar of bribing an FBI special agent to collect information on a Bangladeshi political figure.

The US justice department did not name the politician, but it is believed to be Joy.

In a Facebook post on March 9 last year, Joy, also the ICT affairs adviser to the prime minister, accused BNP leaders of conspiring to abduct and kill him.

Shafik, also a British citizen, worked in various media outlets, including the BBC. He came to the limelight after becoming the editor of the weekly Jai Jai Din in 80's.

Mamun and Mizanur are on the run.

Solving salinity

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on a regular basis during the dry season.

Ideally, water fit for human consumption has less than one gram of salt per litre. The World Health Organisation recommends that adults shouldn't consume more than five grams of salt per day. But according to a scientist at the Bagerhat Shrimp Research Institute, in parts of that district water contains between three and nine grams of salt per litre, depending on the season.

"Nationally, around 20 million people are affected by high salinity in their drinking water," says Sabrina Rashid Sheonty, a student from Buet's water resources engineering department who led the team which developed the new desalination system. "It's an environmental disaster that negatively impacts the health of both adults and children, especially in low-income households of the south-western coastal belt."

Sheonty and three of her fellow Buet students decided to work towards addressing this problem in preparing their winning entry for the 2018 Hult Prize, held at the university and sponsored by the Clinton Foundation. "In the competition we were required to submit new ideas to solve longstanding problems using renewable energy," she says. "The freshwater crisis in south-western coastal areas came to mind."

The result is an affordable and portable desalination device made of stainless steel, a poly-carbon sheet and small pipe. "Our device can make up to 10 litres of salt water potable at a time; but there is scope to develop larger models too," says Sheonty.

"To buy, drinking water can cost over Tk 1 per litre," observes Mubasshir Tahmid, another project team member from the naval architecture and marine engineering department. "Our device costs Tk 1,500, can be installed on a rooftop or in a courtyard and be used to produce drinking water for over a decade."

"We are currently in the process of further developing the system, to represent both the university and

Bangladesh at the Hult Prize regional finals to be held in Kuala Lumpur in mid-March," says Sheonty. "We are also aiming for commercial production."

University students Asif Hossain Tamim and Sabbir Rudro are also a part of the team.

Our Bagerhat correspondent contributed to this report.

Settle rule

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A four-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain passed yesterday's order during hearing a petition filed by rights activist Sultana Kamal, seeking stay on a High Court order.

Following a writ petition by the victims' father U She Ching Marma, the bench led by Justice Naima Haider and Zafar Ahmed on February 13 ordered the authorities concerned of the government and Rangamati Sadar Hospital to hand the girls over to their father.

The bench also issued a rule asking the authorities to explain why the confinement of the girls should not be declared illegal and why the Marma sisters would not be handed over to their parents.

On February 15, the two Marma sisters were handed over to their parents in police presence.

The same day Sultana Kamal filed a petition with the SC seeking a stay on the HC order.

In the petition, she claimed that the girls wanted to go under the custody of Chakma Circle Chief Raja Debashish Roy, who would ensure their security.

The elder sister has recently sent a letter to the civil surgeon of Rangamati to this end and a writ petition over this issue has been pending with the High Court, Sultana said in the petition.

Yesterday, Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud, the lawyer for the writ petitioner, U She Ching Marma, told the apex court that the two sisters are now under the custody of their parents.

Barrister BM Elias Kachi, another lawyer for U She Ching Marma, told The Daily Star that the sisters would remain in the custody of their parents following the SC order until disposal of the HC rule.

Barrister M Amir-Ul Islam appeared for Sultana Kamal.

A quest for eagle nest

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along the edge of water and Drongos remained perched on solitary poles waiting for insects. The day starts early for women and children as well: kids gather around the edge of their houses to bask in the morning sun, while women visit Pukur Ghats to fetch water for the day. Hundreds of cattle were grazing around the dry area of the Haor Basin.

We were spending dawn to dusk in Sunamganj, hopping from one village to another, one Haor to another, looking for a creature that had visited this rich land for hundreds of years to build nests and produce offspring. Our days were fascinating in the plains where Hason Raja fell in despair and rose in love with the landscape, where water controlled life more than any other element of nature. We visited a minimum of 40 villages to find the mighty Pallas's Fish Eagle and its nest.

This dark-brown eagle is very large, almost as large as a domestic goose! As the name suggests, it mainly eats freshwater fish and is largely dependent on our Haors. Increased population of Bangladesh has resulted in the conversion of natural wetlands into farm lands, and commercial fisheries. The area is under constant change as many other human activities have created an immense pressure on resources available to native biota. A victim of this environmental degradation is the Pallas's Fish-eagle and is now consid-

ered as globally endangered. This breeding visitor was quite common in our country, especially in the freshwater areas and along the major rivers with regular nesting records. However, this species has become a rarity and scientists know only a few nesting sites.

The near holy reputation and the cultural values, with which this eagle was held by the villagers, helped us to find nests, at least one new nest almost every day and we ended up finding 12 nests near Sunamganj city alone! The locals say that the eagle nests in the villages where good people live and avoid those that hold the greedy ones.

Hason Ali, a village elder shared a fascinating story about the Pallas's Fish Eagle and local people. He said when technology didn't reach this land, the unique call of the eagles used to tell them about the hours after dark and woke up people who wanted to pray past midnight. He said the eagle was attuned to their biological clock.

I write this piece with the sheer emotion that I have seen in the eyes of the people while they spoke about their days in this harsh condition, seasons of drought and flood, and the relationship between the eagles and their forefathers. Perhaps one day the eagle will die in the hearts of these people if we continue to ignore life beyond us. Will the locals ever remorse, I wonder, if the Pallas's Fish Eagle goes extinct?

Nigeria rescues 76

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Islamist insurgent group Boko Haram attacked Dapchi in the northeastern state of Yobe on Monday evening.

Police and state officials said on Wednesday that there was no evidence that the girls had been abducted, though the Yobe government later said in a statement that the military had rescued some of the students from Boko Haram.

Nigerian authorities often deny or downplay such incidents, including the Chibok girl kidnapping and more recent abductions, as well as the scale of Boko Haram attacks in the northeast.

Nigeria is still haunted by Boko Haram's abduction of more than 270 schoolgirls from the town of Chibok in 2014. That case drew global attention to the nine-year insurgency, which has sparked what the United Nations has called one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

President Muhammadu Buhari dispatched his foreign and defence ministers on Wednesday to Yobe to investigate the situation, said Information Minister Lai Mohammed, who was also headed there. He declined to confirm whether any of the students were missing.

Parents and witnesses who told Reuters of the missing students spoke on condition of anonymity because they said they had been warned by Nigerian security and government officials not to

disclose the disappearance.

The Boko Haram militants arrived in Dapchi on Monday evening in trucks, some mounted with heavy guns and painted in military camouflage, witnesses told Reuters.

They went directly to the school, shooting sporadically, sending students and teachers fleeing, the witnesses said, adding that some people had returned to Dapchi after spending the night hiding in the bush.

Yobe state Police Commissioner Sumonu Abdulmaliki told reporters on Tuesday that Boko Haram had also abducted three people from nearby Gaidam.

More than 20,000 people have been killed and two million forced to flee their homes in the northeast of Africa's most populous nation since Boko Haram began its insurgency in 2009.

Of about 270 girls abducted from their school in Chibok in April 2014, about 60 escaped soon afterwards and others have since been released after mediation. Around 100 are still believed to be in captivity.

Last month, Boko Haram released a video purporting to show some of the Chibok girls still in its custody, saying they do not wish to return home.

Aid groups have said that Boko Haram has kidnapped thousands more adults and children, many of whose cases have been neglected.

Major shake-up at edn ministry

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officials had been in their posts for five to 10 years, using influence.

Some of them had allegedly been involved in irregularities, two ministry officials told The Daily Star wishing not to be named.

They said another bulk transfer was likely in a few days.

The transfers were made after two officials of the ministry -- Nasir Uddin, upper division assistant of the ministry, and Motaleb Hossain, personal official of Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid -- were allegedly involved in a bribery incident recently.

The 30 officials are of the Bangladesh Civil Service's (BCS) general education cadre.

Eight of them are from Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), six from Dhaka Education Board, nine from National Curriculum and Textbook Board, one from Directorate of Inspection and Audit, and six from other education boards.

Manmatha Ranjan Baroi, deputy inspector of colleges under Dhaka Education Board and former APS of education minister, was among the

transferred.

Baroi was earlier moved to the education board from the post of APS over allegations of irregularities.

Others transferred include Dhaka Education Board Inspector for Colleges Ashfaqus Salehin, Inspector for Schools ATM Mainul Hossain, and DSHE Director Md Selim.

In December, graft watchdog Anti-Corruption Commission pointed fingers at officers in the education board and other government officials for incidents of question paper leaks and other irregularities in transfers and promotions of teachers.

Sohorab Hossain, secretary of Secondary and Higher Education Division, could not be reached over phone for comments despite several attempts.

Question papers of 11 of this year's SSC examinations had allegedly been leaked in social media and messenger apps hours before the exams began. Only one exam of Arts group is yet to be held.

This is the largest-ever reported spate of SSC question paper leak that has drawn fierce criticisms from

educationists and guardians.

The government took several measures to find the sources of the leaks, but all went in vain.

The education minister also announced Tk 5 lakh bounty for help in catching those involved in leaking.

Arrests had been made almost regularly and cases were filed, but finding the actual culprits behind the leaks remains a far cry.

Failing to check the leaks, the education ministry is now planning to take steps to hold future SSC exams under a new arrangement.

Like previous SSC exams of this year, yesterday's higher mathematics questions were also leaked.

Images of the "Kha" set of the MCQ question paper and their answers were available on social media platforms around 9:00am. They were identical to the actual question papers.

So far, the 11-member inter-ministerial committee formed to investigate the allegations of question paper leak has found only one paper to be "fully" leaked and some others to be "partially" leaked.

Arm the teachers!

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criticism of Trump's apparent need for help in sounding compassionate to people who are suffering.

Trump's proposal to arm educators received a cool response, too, from a teacher who survived the shooting as well as the local sheriff at a town hall meeting in Florida.

"A gun-free zone, to a maniac -- because they are all cowards -- a gun-free zone is 'Let's go in and let's attack,'" Trump said.

"If you had a teacher who was adept at firearms, they could very well end the attack very quickly," Trump said, suggesting that 20 percent of a school's teachers could be trained to carry concealed weapons.

"This would only be obviously for people who are very adept at handling a gun," Trump added.

The televised White House meeting came as students staged street protests across the country to demand stricter gun laws following the murder of 14 teens and three teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Holding signs reading "Never Again" and "Be The Adults, Do Something," teenaged survivors of last

Wednesday's shooting rallied outside the Florida state Capitol in Tallahassee.

The White House meeting was attended by Stoneman Douglas students, their parents and also the parents of victims of the Columbine, Sandy Hook and other shootings.

Andrew Pollack, whose 18-year-old daughter Meadow was among the Stoneman Douglas victims, told Trump he was there "because my daughter has no voice. She was murdered last week."

"We protect airports. We protect concerts, stadiums, embassies," Pollack said, his voice seething with rage. "I can't get on a plane with a bottle of water. But we leave some animal to walk into a school."

Samuel Zeif, who lost a close friend at Stoneman Douglas last Wednesday, said it was important to "be strong for the fallen who don't have a voice to speak anymore."

"Let's never let this happen again. Please," he told the president, later adding: "I don't understand why I can still go in-store and buy a weapon of war."

Urgent calls for action following the 2012 Sandy Hook massacre, which left 20 children and six teachers dead in Connecticut, failed to break the national deadlock on gun control.

But students have vowed to make the Parkland tragedy a turning point, with youths inspired on social media by the activism of their peers staging walkouts from high schools in Florida and elsewhere on Wednesday and demonstrating in cities including Minneapolis, Chicago and Washington.

Students are planning a march on Washington on March 24, with sister rallies planned across the country.

And students and teachers who survived the shooting challenged politicians over their positions on gun control at a town hall meeting in Florida.

Trump -- who received strong backing from the NRA during his White House run -- has shown a new-found willingness to take at least some steps on gun control following the Parkland shooting.

But his suggestion of arming teachers drew scorn at the town hall meeting.

Scott Israel, the local sheriff, announced that "deputies who are qualified and trained will be carrying rifles on school grounds," but also pushed back against arming teachers.

"I don't believe teachers should be armed -- I believe teachers should teach," Israel said.

involved in a tense months-long border dispute in Doklam -- a thin strip of land bordering both countries and Bhutan -- in the Himalayas. Though not a part of Indian territory, the area is close to the "chicken's neck," a strategic corridor that serves as a vital artery between Delhi and its far northeastern states.

The stand-off was sparked after Bhutan accused China of constructing a road inside its territory in "direct violation" of treaty obligations. China, which does not have formal diplomatic relations with Bhutan, denied the accusation, contending that Doklam is part of Chinese territory.

Beijing accused India of sending troops into Bhutan, further escalating the dispute and resulting in both sides temporarily upping their military presence in the region.

Diplomatic efforts ended the stand-off in late August.

Beijing upgrades

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Previously commanded forces in India's northeast, China's J-11 fighter jets have been in use for at least five years in the Tibetan area, and therefore the timing of the media report may be viewed as a "hint."

"It's not India threatening China, it's that they're threatening India," said Matheswaran. "I don't think India has the force size to threaten China at the moment."

The J-11 jets are China's answer to India's Sukhoi-30 fighters, which are Russian in origin. While the Chinese report claims the J-11 are "3.5 generation jets" and outclass India's third generation jets, Matheswaran said that both sides are in actual fact operating "fourth-generation jets."

Earlier this month, China announced its newest domestic stealth fighter jet, the fourth-generation J-20,

was combat ready.

Seen as China's answer to US F-22 and F-35 stealth fighter jets, the J-20 is intended to improve the air force's overall fighting ability.

A spokesperson for India's Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment on the report, saying they only comment on official statements from the Chinese government.

TERRITORIAL FLARE-UPS

The newest media reports are just the latest step in a decades-long contest between the two rivals for dominance in South Asia, and come at a time of steadily deteriorating ties, say analysts, who point to Chinese investment in countries in the Indian Ocean like the Maldives and Sri Lanka, and Chinese frustration with India's unwillingness to join its One Belt One Road (OBOR) development initiative as recent points of contention.

In 2017, the two countries were