



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, right, speaks at the inauguration of the biennial conference of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.



PHOTO: PID

DEATH OF RAJIB SC order on compensation next week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday fixed May 21 for passing an order on two petitions that challenged the High Court order asking the owners of two buses -- BRTC and Sajan Paribahan -- to pay Tk 1 crore to the family of Rajib Hossain, who lost his right hand in a road accident last month, and later died.

A four-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain fixed the date after hearing the petitions filed by BRTC and Sajan Paribahan.

During hearing, the lawyers of the bus authorities told the apex court that their clients were not responsible for the incident and prayed to the SC to stay the HC order.

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GULSHAN CAFÉ ATTACK Court wants probe report by June 25

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday once again asked the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police to submit by June 25 the probe report of the case filed over the Holey Artisan Bakery attack in Gulshan in July 2016.

Metropolitan Magistrate Nurunnahar Yasmin passed the order after Humayun Kabir, a CTTC inspector and the case's investigation officer, failed to submit any probe report to it by yesterday.

With this, the CTTC got extensions for 18 times for filing the report.

Earlier, the CTTC unit arrested seven people including six suspected militants and a former private university teacher. Of them, six "militants" gave confessional statements before magistrates on different dates.

In their statements, the militants, now behind the bars, said they were directly involved in the heinous offences, court sources said.

The arrestees are Hasnat Reza Karim, a former teacher of North South University; Mizanur Rahman alias Boro Mizan, an active JMB operative; Zahangir Alam alias Rajib Gandhi, one of the "key planners" of the attack; Rakibul Hasan alias Regan; and "Neo JMB" militant Sohel Mahfuz, who supplied the grenades used in the attack; "Neo JMB" militant Aslam Hossain alias Rash, "arms trainer" of the Gulshan café attackers; and "Neo JMB" militant Hadisur Rahman Sagor, the "arms supplier".

On July 1, 2016, gunmen stormed the Holey Artisan Bakery in the capital's Gulshan diplomatic zone, and killed 20 hostages, mostly foreign nationals. Two police officials were also killed during the 12-hour hostage standoff.

Later, a case under the Anti-Terrorism Act was filed with Gulshan Police Station.

STONES THROWN AT MOVING TRAINS Tk 1.45 crore loss each year, says railways secretary

AGENCIES

At least 150 incidents of throwing stones at running trains take place each year on average, causing loss worth Tk 1.45 crore to Bangladesh Railway, said Mofazzal Hossain, secretary to the Ministry of Railways.

The railways secretary came up with the information while talking to reporters at a meeting yesterday at the Rail Bhaban, organised to raise awareness about throwing stones at running trains, says a UNB report.

Glasses of 2000 doors and windows of trains were damaged while 14 people were injured last year due to the thrown stones, he said.

The stone throwing incidents mostly occur in 15 districts of the country. Of these, 70 incidents were reported from 29 spots in the western region while 80 incidents were reported from 36 spots in the eastern region last year, he added.

The Ministry of Railways has sent separate letters to UNOs and OCs of those districts through the inspector general of police for taking measures to prevent the incidents.

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Nerves of Steel

Bold role in containing ethnic clash by Bangladeshi peacekeepers

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA,
from Democratic Republic of Congo

As children, some of them learned to take "rapid action" in emergencies like cyclones and flash floods. No wonder they are now on duty in a faraway country that often requires such rapid action.

These brave men with nerves of steel from the Bangladesh Rapidly Deployable Battalion (BANRDB) have actually pacified a clash triggered by tribal rivalry in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that started in December 2017.

It was a provocative incident which could lead to the third Congolese war in less than 20 years triggered by armed rival ethnic groups -- Lendu and Hema -- in the Djugu territory under Ituri province that eventually spread to other parts of DRC. BANRDB has been playing a crucial role in maintaining peace for the last few months.

At least 100 people had been killed, thousands of houses torched, and over 100,000 people displaced in just a few weeks last December; around 42,000 of these people fled to neighbouring Uganda as refugees. It triggered once again on February 4; Bangladeshi peacekeepers instantly intervened and managed to contain the conflict.

"Hema-Lendu conflict is a decades-old problem. This time around, the situation was worsening fast but fast intervention by Bangladeshi soldiers brought us relief," Pacifique Keta Upar, vice governor of Bunia, the capital of Ituri province in Congo, told The Daily Star.

The BANRDB is a specially-trained and equipped force of the Bangladesh Army whose members have been in DRC as part of a UN peacekeeping mission's strategy of "protection through projection". They have been trained to respond to any critical situation by launching full-fledged military operation in the shortest of notices.

They arrived in Bunia for the first time in February and had to launch their first rapid operation just a few hours later to contain the Hema-Lendu conflict that broke out on February 4, subsequently rescuing a group of Uruguayan UN peacekeepers who were stranded in a remote village in the middle of the conflict zone.

"It was an 18-hour operation. The village was very remote and the journey was very hectic. The stranded peacekeepers were com-

pletely disconnected from the world," said Ihteshamus Samad Chowdhury, brigade commander of Northern Sector, MONUSCO.

The Bangladeshi soldiers not only rescued their fellow peacekeepers, but also pacified the conflicting groups in the region. However, peace in this region is very fragile and the Congolese people live in constant fear that is rooted in the history of the country.

Apart from the Hema and Lendu tribes, there are as many as 250 armed ethnic groups in DRC, which is 26 times bigger than Bangladesh.

Many remember all too well the violent conflict that ravaged Ituri between 1999 and 2003, killing 55,000 and resulting in trials by the International Criminal Court. That spate of violence also began in the Djugu territory.

Thankfully, most of the displaced people have now returned home as the Bangladeshi soldiers have brought the situation under control.

The BANRDB team has been deployed in DRC to ensure protection for civilians in the African country that has reserves of valuable minerals such as uranium,

diamond, gold and cobalt, although 63 percent of the 81 million population continue to live in poverty.

Two groups of Bangladeshi journalists are visiting some of these African countries in the second and third week of May as part of commemorating 30 years of Bangladeshi troops on UN peace missions.

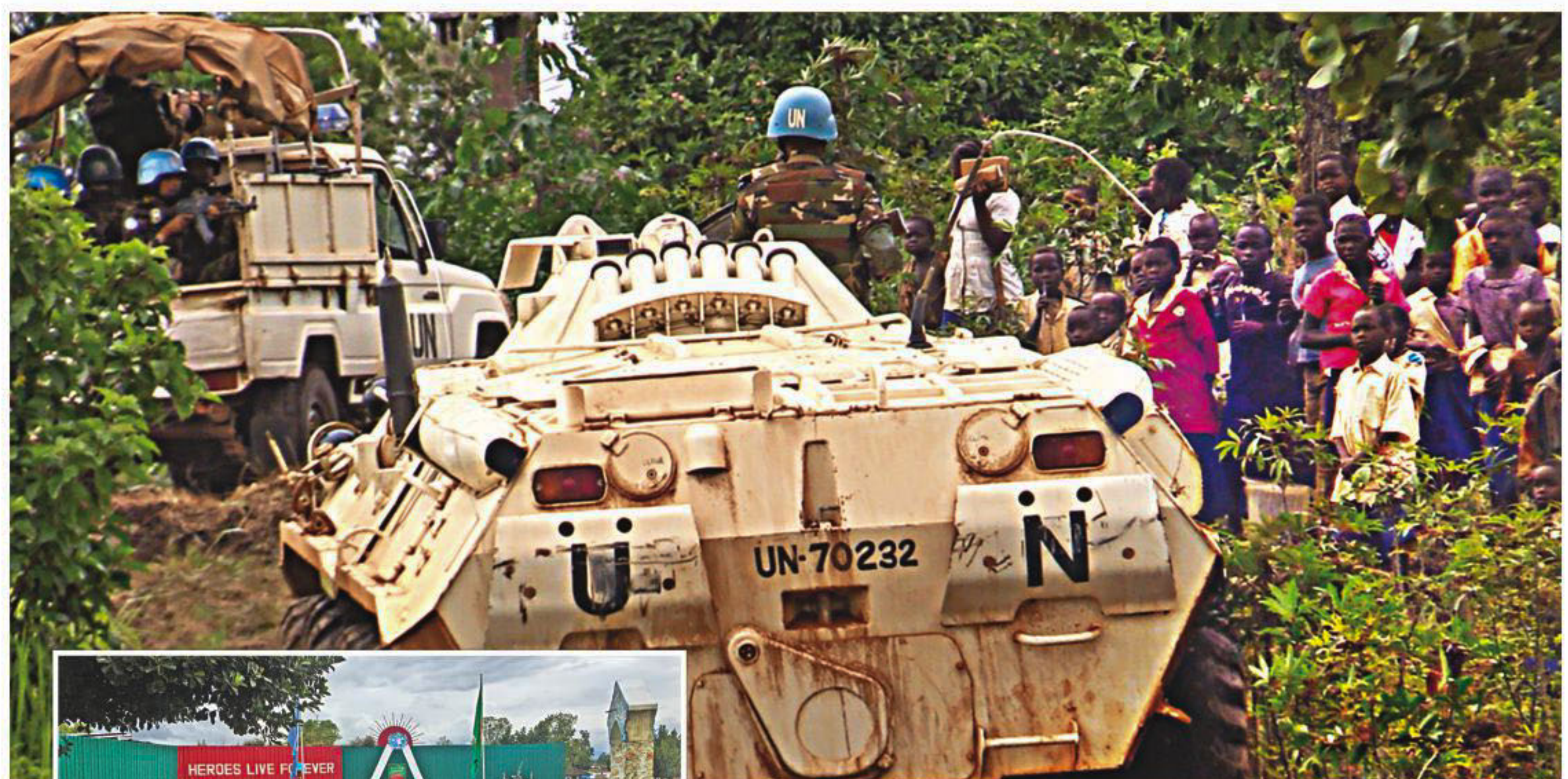
This correspondent has visited the operation area in Djugu territory. From Ndromo of Bunia to Djugu, the approximately 100km journey was very difficult.

At the operation site, all the officers and troops are staying in tents on a remote top of a mountain. The concentration of mosquitos is very high and water is scarce. The location is vulnerable to attack.

It is so remote that helicopters are the only way to rescue if any emergency situation arises and anyone falls ill. Even a helicopter cannot land due to inclement weather and lack of a helipad.

Convoy commander Capt Md Abdul Mubin Chowdhury said, "The first challenge is the hostile territory, and second is rough terrain; militia groups are fierce and violent, and environmental challenge is a big problem there."

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Bangladeshi peace troopers patrol a Congolese territory where ethnic violence is rife. Inset, the headquarters of the Bangladesh Rapidly Deployable Battalion, whose quick response helped contain conflict and maintain peace in many restive parts of the country.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

US concerned over arrest of opposition leaders

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The United States has stressed the importance of holding "free, fair and participatory election" in Bangladesh that truly reflects the will of Bangladeshi people.

"Bangladesh and the US are indeed friends. This friendship is based upon the values that we share and willing to talk to each other openly and honestly," USAID Administrator Mark Green told a roundtable discussion with a select group of journalists at American Club in the capital yesterday.

Administrator Green also voiced concern over arrest of opposition leaders, detention of journalists and also talked about Rohingya issues.

"The ongoing arrest of opposition leaders, reports that we have all seen of extrajudicial harassment and detention of journalists -- often on trumped up charges -- concern every true friend of Bangladesh, the US

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DSCC deploys 5 teams to monitor prices of essentials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five monitoring teams of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) will be deployed to check and control prices of essentials from the first day of Ramadan, DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon said yesterday.

During a visit to the capital's Hatirpool kitchen market, the mayor said these teams will ensure essentials are sold as per the prices fixed by DSCC.

DSCC fixed prices for beef at Tk 450 per kg for Ramadan. Buffalo meat will be sold at Tk 420 per kg and mutton at Tk 720.

These prices will be applicable from today and

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