

Foreign secretary to brief officials in Washington

Dec 30 polls may come up in consultation next week
DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and the United States will hold a crucial political consultation in Washington DC next week. The US had earlier expressed concern over irregularities in the December 30 polls. Dhaka is sending the foreign secretary to hold talks with the US administration officials.

Apart from political discussions, Dhaka may offer defence purchases, including aircraft, from the US to boost the capability of Bangladesh military, a diplomat in Washington said.

Diplomatic sources in Dhaka and Washington said Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque would meet Under Secretary for Political Affairs of the Department of State David Hale on January 22.

"It is obvious that the election will be high on agenda during the meeting," a diplomatic source in Washington DC told The Daily Star yesterday.

The US government after the election in Bangladesh has noted with concern credible reports of harassment, intimidation, and violence in the pre-election period that made it difficult for many opposition candidates and their supporters to meet, hold rallies and campaign freely, the source said.

During his five-day visit to the US, the foreign secretary will hold a series of meetings with senior officials.

The issues of Rohingya refugees will also be discussed in the meetings.

Settle problems

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Nafar added that the Iranian government is working to reduce tensions in the region. "We aren't a war-monger country ... we would like to have the best of relations with the countries in the Gulf."

PM's Principal Secretary Nojibur Rahman and PMO Secretary Sajjadul Hassan were also present.

Sixers' fireworks

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14.5 overs) in BPL history the day before against Comilla Victorians, Sylhet bounced back magnificently as they posted 187 for five – the current edition's highest total – thanks to furious innings from opener Liton Das and Sylhet skipper David Warner.

After being sent in to bat, Sylhet opens Liton and Sabbir Rahman gave a blistering start as they staged a 73-run opening stand before the latter was dismissed for a run-a-ball 20. Skipper David Warner and Liton then continued to entertain the crowd as they strung a 56-run second-wicket stand off just 36 balls. While Liton was unlucky to be run out after having scored 70 off just 43 balls, Warner remained unbeaten for his 61 runs. The left-handed Australian made a mockery of Rangpur's Chris Gayle as he struck the West Indian for a six and two boundaries in the 19th over while batting as a right-hander to bring up his fifty.

However, it was a low scoring affair in the day's first game as Dhaka Dynamites failed to chase a low total of 136 for six posted by Rajshahi Kings. Rajshahi's left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny orchestrated the first downfall of Shakib Al Hasan's Dhaka as the 32-year old ended with figures of three wickets for eight runs in just four overs.

Criminal killed

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Rumman, son of Mizanur Rahman of Madhurgati village under Sadar upazila, was shot during the shooting, he added.

He was pronounced dead when he was rushed to Narail Sadar Hospital, the OC said.

Three policemen were also injured during the "gunfight" and were given primary treatment at the hospital, he added.

A foreign-made pistol, two round bullets and a magazine were recovered from the spot, he further said.

In Satkhira, the police recovered the AL activist's bullet-hit body from Sukdevpur More of Tentulia union under Tala upazila around 6:00am yesterday.

The body was riddled with bullets in the head, chest and leg, said Mehdi Rasel, OC of Tala police.

A motorcycle and a number of bottles of phenisidyl were found near the body, he added.

He was a drug trader and the killing was the result of internal conflicts among the drug traders, the OC alleged.

Golam Morshed, vice-chairman of Sadar Upazila Parishad and joint secretary of Sadar unit AL, said Tulu was a dedicated AL activist and BNP-Jamaat men burned his house during the violence of 2013.

He was on bail in four to five drug related cases and went missing on Tuesday evening, Morshed added.

China takes lead in some military tech: Pentagon

AFP, Washington

China is on the cusp of fielding some of the world's most advanced weapons systems -- and in some cases already has surpassed its rivals, a Pentagon assessment released Tuesday found.

An unclassified report by the Defense Intelligence Agency says Beijing has made enormous military strides in recent years, thanks partly to domestic laws forcing foreign partners to divulge technical secrets in exchange for access to China's vast market.

As a result of "acquiring technology by any means available," China now is at the leading edge on a range of technologies, including with its naval designs, with medium- and intermediate-range missiles, and with hypersonic weapons -- where missiles can fly at many times the speed of sound and dodge missile-defense systems.

"The result of this multifaceted approach to technology acquisition is a PLA (People's Liberation Army) on the verge of fielding some of the most modern weapon systems in the world," states the report, entitled "China Military Power."

"In some areas, it already leads the world."

China's increasing military might means it has advanced capabilities in the air, at sea, in space and in

cyberspace that will "enable China to impose its will in the region," the report notes.

A particular focus for Beijing has been the prospect of an eventual conflict with Taiwan, which China sees as part of its territory.

Beijing has said it will not hesitate to use force if Taipei formally declares independence, or in the case of external intervention -- including by the United States, the island's most powerful unofficial ally.

Speaking to Pentagon reporters, a senior defense intelligence official said he was worried China's military is now advanced enough that PLA generals could feel confident they could invade Taiwan.

"The biggest concern is that as a lot of these technologies mature... (China) will reach a point where internally within their decision-making they will decide that using military force for a regional conflict is something that is more imminent," the official said on condition of anonymity.

Taiwan is a self-ruled island and has its own currency, flag and government, but is not recognized as an independent state by the United Nations.

Still, the official noted, China has not fought in a war for 40 years and its massive military and joint command structure lacks experience in real-world conflict.

25 workers held

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stations against 215 named and more than 1,000 unnamed garment workers for their alleged involvement in vandalism and looting, police officers said.

Sha Migan Shafiur Rahman, superintendent of police (SP) in Dhaka at a press conference said so far 25 workers had been arrested for their involvement in the weeklong unrest.

Upon restoration of normalcy in the zones and amid deployment of a large number of law enforcers following eight days of unrest in the RMG sector, many workers were seen filing into work in the Ashulia zone yesterday.

The number of workers returning to work yesterday was significantly higher than that of the previous day, said factories sources. Members of law enforcing agencies were seen at different points of Ashulia and Savar yesterday.

Sana Shaminur Rahman, SP of Dhaka-1 industrial police, said workers went back to the factories which were all running in full force.

Although all the factories were now

running in Ashulia and Savar, a large number of workers in the large industrial belt were worried about suspension or termination as some of the factories started suspending and terminating workers for their alleged involvement in the unrest.

So far more than 800 workers of different factories had been laid off. The factory managements also put up lists and photographs of the terminated workers at the entrance of the factories.

Talking to The Daily Star, workers said they had to stay out of their homes as police were carrying raids there almost every night. They also alleged that factory authorities have filed false cases to harass them.

Many suspended workers alleged that they had only demonstrated inside the factory peacefully to reform or eliminate the new wage structure. Factory authorities, however, suspended them illegally.

Earlier, thousands of garment workers demonstrated on streets demanding revision of the new wage structure.

HC clears way

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But the polls could not be held as the HC stayed the election schedule for six months. The court order came following the filing of three writ petitions that challenged the legality of the schedule.

Jahangir Alom, chairman of Beraid union parishad, and Aatur Rahman, chairman of Bhatara union parishad, filed two petitions with the HC on January 16 last year.

They challenged the legality of the schedule for the polls to the posts of the mayor and the councillors of 18 new wards under the DNCC.

Mozammel Mia, a voter in Demra union, filed the other writ petition with the HC, challenging the legality of the schedule for the elections to the councillors' posts in 18 wards included in the DSCC in 2016.

Following the filing of three leave-to-appeal petitions by the EC, the Supreme Court on February 25 last year asked the HC bench led by Justice Gobinda Chandra Tagore to expeditiously hear and dispose of the petitions.

Yesterday, the HC bench of Justice Gobinda and Justice Mohammad Ullah withdrew the stay order and rejected the three writ petitions as no lawyer appeared at the court for the petitioners.

Contacted, Jahangir Alom told The Daily Star that they could not follow the HC proceedings on the petitions as they were busy with the December 30

election.

Asked about the next course of action, Jahangir, also general secretary of Badda thana Awami League, said they will go through the verdict first and then decide on it.

Deputy Attorney General ASM Nazmul Haque told this newspaper that following the HC order, there is no legal bar on the EC to holding the DNCC and DSCC elections.

He, however, said the EC will have to announce a fresh schedule for the polls.

The DNCC is now being run by a panel mayor.

The absence of a mayor has resulted in a slowdown of work of the city corporation, affecting the services in the DNCC area.

In terms of population, the DNCC is the country's largest city corporation with 23.45 lakh voters.

5G licence

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He described the 4G service launched in February last year as a massive success. "... In 4G we already got a total of 1.17 crore users and this numbers is increasing every day."

Haque said the number of 3G users stood at 6.35 crore at the end of the year.

With 4G, a consumer could get at least 7.5mbps speed in Bangladesh. In theory, 5G could deliver over 1gbps speed.

He said at the beginning of 2018, Bangladesh was using 575 Gbps of bandwidth, but at year end, it was 913 Gbps, which proves that growth lies with data and that's why faster data transmission system is required.

At the meeting held at his office, Haque said 1.19 crore new mobile connections and 1.08 crore internet connections were added in 2018.

There were 15.70 crore active SIMs and 9.13 crore active internet connections as of December 2018, according to the BTRC.

With the Mobile Number Portability introduced last October, 1.06 lakh customers switched carriers keeping their phone numbers.

Haque said as per the regulator's decision, carriers would not be able to sell data packages with less than seven day's validity from January 27.

Amanullah Kabir

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two daughters, three sons and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

His first namaz-e-janaza was held at Kalyanpur Darussalam Furfura Sharif mosque.

His body was taken to the Jatiya Press Club around 11:30am where his second janaza was held. Various journalist organisations paid their last respect to Amanullah there.

In the afternoon, his body was taken to his home district Jamalpur where local journalists and eminent citizens paid their tributes to him at Jamalpur Press Club.

The mortal remains were taken to his home in Rekhirpara of Melandah upazila.

Family sources said Amanullah, also the former member of the Jatiya Press Club Managing Committee, would be buried at his family graveyard in Rekhirpara after another janaza there around 10:00am today.

Amanullah had been working as senior editor of online news portal bdnews24.com.

He served as executive editor of the Independent, news editor of The Daily Star, editor of Bangla Daily Amar Desh, and chief editor and managing director of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS).

Meanwhile, Jatiya Press Club President Saiful Alam and General Secretary Farida Yasmin expressed deep shock at the death of Amanullah. They also conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family members.

Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists and Dhaka Union of Journalists expressed profound shock at his death.

In a joint statement, BFUJ and DUJ leaders said a vacuum has been created in the field of journalism at his death.

"He was not only a journalist but also a torchbearer of journalism. The death of Amanullah Kabir, who had been working for realising the rights of journalists, is a great loss to the journalist community."

They prayed for the salvation of the departed soul.

Dogs detect

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to keep track of their blood sugar with a conventional device.

This was the case for Archie, who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes just after his first birthday and, after years of night-time hypoglycaemic attacks, was paired with two-year-old Labrador Domino, by charity Medical Detection Dogs (MDD).

"Before Domino we were in a void, we never knew where to turn, we were unsettled," Archie's mum Jayne said. "He has brought sunshine into our lives – he is the last piece of the jigsaw. Now we are sleeping more, relaxing and feeling like a whole family."

While Archie has a carer at school to check his blood sugar, Domino takes over the role at night and is his constant companion when the family are out, providing more than 1,300 alerts since arriving in 2015.

"He is my best buddy and he helps me feel safe," Archie says. "If I'm not well he'll tell mummy and daddy and I won't have to go to hospital. I can eat, go to bed and feel safe and happy."

The Bristol study found the dogs "vastly improved" their owners' quality of life by giving them peace of mind over their condition as well as other psychological benefits.

"Our study provides the first large-scale evaluation of using medical detection dogs to detect hypoglycaemia," said lead author Dr Nicola Rooney from the university's Bristol Veterinary School.

Some patients with type 1 diabetes are now eligible for wearable blood sugar monitors which provide a constant reading of glucose levels, but while no system is perfect Dr Rooney said the dogs sometimes outperformed these devices.

Where blood sugar falls outside of an acceptable range, the medical detection dogs are trained to alert their owners through nuzzling or licking so they can take an insulin injection to reduce blood sugar or eat something to boost it.

20 missing

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Talking to journalists, Gazaria UNO Hasan Sadi said the survivors could not identify the accident spot accurately as there was dense fog at night when the accident took place.

Meanwhile, Asadur Rahman, chairman of Khanmorich union in Pabna's Bhangura, told our Pabna correspondent that the missing men went to Munshiganj to look for work a couple of weeks ago.

Mundumala village, where 15 of the missing men lived, families are in utter shock.

Jabbar Ali, an elderly man, said his two sons Ariful and Mostafa and son-in-law had remained missing.

Brazil's anti-crime president loosens gun laws

AFP, Brasilia

Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro rolled back restrictive gun ownership laws on Tuesday to make it easier for "good" citizens to use firearms against criminals, despite fears it could aggravate already staggering levels of deadly violence in his country.

Keeping a core campaign promise, Bolsonaro signed a decree allowing residents in high-crime areas -- effectively the entire country -- to keep guns at home.

"To guarantee the legitimate right of defense, as president, I am using this weapon," he said, indicating the pen he used to sign the executive order.

Later he tweeted: "For a long time it was the State that decided who had the right or not to defend themselves, their family and their property. Today... we give Brazilian citizens the right to decide."

Brazil recorded nearly 64,000 homicides in 2017, making it one of the most dangerous countries in the world outside of a war zone.

According to a survey published last month by the Datafolha polling firm, 61 percent of Brazilians are opposed to generalized gun ownership, worrying it could usher in a Wild West mentality.

Bolsonaro, a 63-year-old former army captain and longtime lawmaker, took office two weeks ago after being elected in October on headline promises to crack down on crime and corruption.

On the campaign trail, he often mimicked a pistol by extending the thumb and forefinger of his hand.

His decree makes it much easier for adults over 25 with no criminal record to buy up to four guns and keep them at home.

Human rights

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instruction of Deputy Inspector General of Police (Chattogram Range) Khandaker Golam Faruq.

The SP also said Shahed Uddin, who was serving as inspector (investigation) of Shudharam Model Police Station, was posted as officer-in-charge of Char Jabbar Police Station.

The victim, a housewife and mother of four, has been alleging that 10 to 12 accomplices of Ruhul Amin, a former member of Char Jubilee Union Parishad, raped her for voting for the "sheaf of paddy", the electoral symbol of the BNP, in the wee hours of December 31.

Ruhul, who had been the publicity affairs secretary of Subarnachar Awami League, was sacked by the party following his arrest in connection with the police case filed over the incident.

However, an NHRC fact-finding committee did not find any link between the election and the gang rape.

Evidence of raping, severely beating the victim and inflicting grievous injuries on her has been found, read the report published on the NHRC website.

"However, no link between the beating and raping and the 11th parliamentary polls were found during investigation," it said.

The incident took place as a sequel to previous enmity with the accused as cited in the statement of the case filed by the victim's husband, it added.

In a statement yesterday, the HRFB said, "Such a report by the National Human Rights Commission has utterly surprised us."

The victim's statement in media reports and facts found by some of the HRFB members tell a different story of the incident, it said.

Ain o Salish Kendra, also a member organisation of the HRFB, has found that, alongside previous enmity, the election had a correlation with the rape incident, it added.

Another HRFB member organisation, Nijera Kori, learnt from the victim, her husband and locals that she was attacked on instruction of the accused as

Trains run

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police doused the fire within minutes, he added.

Railway Minister Nurul Islam Sujan visited the spot and directed the authorities concerned to take necessary steps to restore normalcy in train service.

Khaleda

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BNP leader AKM Mosharraf Hossain, another accused in the case, did not appear before the court also because of sickness. A time petition was filed with the court for him by his lawyer.

Fifteen accused, including BNP leaders Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain and Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, were present in the court.

The ACC filed the case with Tejgaon Police Station on September 2, 2007 against Khaleda, Galib Tanveer and several others on charges of misappropriating Tk 1,000 crore while dealing with Global Agro Trade (Pvt) Company Ltd (Gatco).

"I am very happy to be signing this decree, which is done so that many good people, good citizens, can from this moment ensure peace inside their homes," he said.

The decree does not extend to carrying weapons -- concealed or otherwise -- in public, which remains restricted to police, public or private security personnel, and the military.

What it does do is broaden the scope of who can legally possess firearms and make them more readily available.

It notably applies to residents in areas with a homicide rate of more than 10 per 100,000 inhabitants -- which means every one of Brazil's 27 states, as Bolsonaro's chief of staff Onyx Lorenzoni confirmed.

"This will apply to the entire country," Lorenzoni told Globo television.

Bolsonaro said setting the homicide threshold gets around the "subjectivity" of a previous requirement under which a prospective gun owner needed to prove the "necessity" of acquiring a firearm.

Brazil's overall homicide rate is 30.8 per 100,000 inhabitants, three times higher than the level that the United Nations classifies as endemic violence.

The country, the biggest in Latin America, has a population of 210 million.

Bolsonaro said the decree he signed was supported by a 2005 referendum in which 64 percent of Brazilians voted against a total ban on gun sales.

"The people decided to buy guns and ammunition and we cannot deprive those who wanted that at that time," he said, criticizing firearm ownership restrictions brought in under former left-wing president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who is now in prison for corruption.

revenge for not voting for the "boat", the Awami League's electoral symbol, the statement further said.

After the police case was filed, the complainant, the victim's husband, claimed to have told police that accomplices of Ruhul raped his wife as she voted for the "sheaf of paddy".

Some of Ruhul's accomplices had allegedly asked her to vote for "boat". As she did not comply, an altercation ensued and they threatened her with "dire consequences", he alleged.

The husband told The Daily Star on January 1 that police wrote the first information report (FIR) and asked him to sign it. "I am illiterate ... I could not read what was written on it. I just signed it."

"The [NHRC] report has failed to unearth the truth," said the HRFB statement.

It urged the government to form a joint probe committee comprising civil society representatives and relevant institutions.

The forum also demanded action based on investigation against those who prepared and approved the report.

"It is imperative to ensure fair probe into the incident and justice, to prevent its [such incident's] recurrence during polls," said the statement.

Forgery gang

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been carried out after the two left the port.

The CIID officials were investigating if the two officials in question had any links with the crime.

"Those consignments were released from the port between 2016 and 2018 through forgery," said Abdul Hakim, additional director general of the CIID. He added that more than 4,000 consignments may have been released from the port this way.

"We have formed a committee to investigate the matter and determine the revenue loss in the scam," he said.

According to sources at the CIID, customs officials "locked" the release order of a consignment on the server on June 25 last year, suspecting it was imported through misdeclaration.

However, the importer, with the help of the gang members, "unlocked" the consignment using Muhibul's ID on September 26 that year without permission from the CIID, the sources said. Similar things happened in the cases of around 4,000 consignments.

CIID Director General Shahidul Islam said, "It seems mysterious how the IDs of a retired officer and a transferred officer were active. As per the rules, the IDs should have been deactivated as soon as the officers concerned had gotten transferred or gone on retirement."

"It proves that this gang is well-organised. We are investigating if any NBR official is involved," he added.

Contacted, CCH Commissioner AKM Nuruzzamn said, "I have been informed about this matter. A committee has been formed to probe the incident."

He said he found evidence on 291 similar incidents last month but would not give any details.