



Debris are seen next to a house after a tailings dam owned by Brazilian miner Vale SA burst in Brumadinho, Brazil. The photo was taken yesterday. Story on page 8.

PHOTO: REUTERS

UK govt may scrap MPs' holiday to pass Brexit laws

AFP, London

British MPs could sit longer hours and their February holiday may be scrapped as the government races to pass its Brexit legislation before Britain leaves the EU on March 29, Downing Street said yesterday.

Prime Minister Theresa May's government is looking at making the House of Commons sit on more Fridays -- which it does not normally do -- and extend debating time well into the evening on some days.

It is also "reviewing" the week-long February recess, a Downing Street spokeswoman said.

There are still eight laws the government wants to pass to prepare the statute books for Brexit, covering areas of trade, fisheries and agriculture, immigration, the environment and healthcare.

These includes any bill needed to implement a divorce deal with the EU, which MPs have yet to agree to.

"We remain committed to ensuring all necessary legislation is in place for exit day on March 29, 2019, and it is important to stress we are confident of meeting that commitment," the spokeswoman said.

"We are aware this is a challenging timetable, so as a precautionary measure we are in preliminary discussions about extending sitting times -- but only if necessary."

She said MPs would have a chance to debate and vote on any decision, adding that the government recognised the need to balance their constituency and family responsibilities.

Andrea Leadsom, the leader of the House of Commons, suggested this week that Brexit could be delayed if necessary by a few weeks to get the bills through.

"I'm absolutely certain that if we needed a couple of extra weeks or something, that that would be feasible," she told the BBC's "Newsnight" programme.

But she added that "with goodwill and a determination, we can still get the legislation through in time".

Mainul released

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we gave clearance for his release." BSMMU Director Brig Gen Abdullah Al Harun said, "Mainul had been admitted to cabin no 520 under police guard. He left the hospital around 9:00pm after the jail guards came with his bail-related documents."

On October 22 last year, the Detective Branch of police arrested Mainul from the capital's Uttara in a case filed against him for "defaming" journalist Masuda Bhatti in a talk show of a private television channel.

As many as 23 cases were filed against him across the country over the incident.

On January 13, the HC granted ad-interim bail to Mainul for six months in 11 cases lodged against the publisher and editorial board chief of The New Nation newspaper.

It also stayed the trial proceedings of 15 defamation cases for the next six months and issued separate rules asking the government to explain why the case proceedings against him should not be stopped.

On January 3, an HC bench directed the government to immediately admit Mainul to BSMMU for treatment.

Irregularities found

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BRTA official, the statement read.

It did not mention what irregularities it found at Khulna and Sylhet offices or what actions would be taken by the anti-corruption watchdog.

"The ACC will act against corruption and irregularities if discipline is not restored at the BRTA," said Mohammad Munir Chowdhury, director general (administration) of ACC.

There is no alternative to automation and digitalisation to bring changes to the BRTA, he added.

The Daily Star correspondent could not reach BRTA Chariman Moshir Rahman over phone after repeated attempts.

WHERE ARE THE TEACHERS? ACC Chairman Iqbal Mahmud yesterday visited six schools in Chattogram and found only one out of eight teachers at a primary school.

During the visit at Kattoli Nurul Haque Chowdhury Government Primary School in the port city around 9:00am, Mahmud found only the acting headmaster.

He also noticed students whiling away around the school premises, Chattogram ACC Deputy Director Lutful Kabir Chondon told The Daily Star.

Many parents of the students told the ACC chairman about their dissatisfaction over the absenteeism of the teachers, Lutful added.

The ACC chairman then went to

Bhatiari Government Primary School where two out of 11 teachers were absent.

"We have a special focus on the education sector, because it is involved with everything, including the country's development," he told government officials at Chattogram Circuit House in the afternoon.

He said many school teachers had not been attending classes regularly while the managing committees were also not discharging their duties properly.

He directed the officials concerned to strengthen their vigilance to bring order to the education sector.

"If you are forced to do any unethical work by higher officials, then tell them to give it [the instructions] in writing. Otherwise you will be held responsible for it."

"If you have any written documents or orders, then the ACC will not take any action against you," Mahmud said.

He directed the Chattogram Customs Commissioner to provide a list of businessmen who were fined for over-invoicing related to money laundering.

Talking about the tax office, he said the tax officers should work to improve the public perception of them.

Our Chattogram correspondent contributed to this report.

Dried fish

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After netting the fish, producers separate loitta, chhuri, poa etc for drying. The pesticides, usually meant for paddy fields, are mixed in water in which the fish are soaked before being dried in the sun.

Every year the village, locally known as "shutki (dried fish) palli", produces 1.50 lakh tonnes of dried fish meeting 85 percent of the country's demand, according to data of Coast.

Abdul Jabbar, whose family has been making dried fish for generations, admitted to using pesticides, particularly during the monsoon.

"During monsoon, we do not have any alternative. If we don't [use pesticides], insects will get on the fish and ruin them," Jabbar said.

Another producer Helal Uddin said the fish start decomposing fast. "Adding the pesticides is the only option since healthier methods require more time and money."

Tanzira Khatun, value chain facilitator of Coast, said fishermen usually mix pesticides in water at night.

Buyers want dried fish at low costs which prompts producers to opt for such unhealthy methods, she said.

"Around 18 ribbon fish are needed to produce one kilogram of dried fish in the proper organic and healthy ways, whereas only eight to 10 are enough using pesticides," Tanzira said.

According to her, there are 1,200 dried fish producers in Nazirar Tek. The project is trying to train them on non-toxic production methods through meetings and seminars.

"We have set up a fish dryer in the village which can produce two tonnes of dried fish a year. We need more such dryers," she said.

Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute designed the fish dryer -- a box with six electrical fans and two 4kw heaters.

Md Mizan, a field-level worker of the project, said they take strolls through the alleys during the day to see if anyone is using toxins. "As soon as we get the smell of toxins, we inform the upazila fisheries officer who takes action against the perpetrators," Mizan told this paper.

Cox's Bazar Sadar Upazila Fisheries Officer Moinuddin said at least four people were penalised last year. "It is difficult to keep an eye on them 24/7 because they soak the fish in toxins secretly at night."

LOUISIANA SHOOTINGS 5 dead; suspect still at large

AP, New Orleans

Authorities say shootings in two parishes in Louisiana have left five people dead. Authorities identified a suspect, Dakota Theriot, who is still at large.

Officials say the Saturday morning shootings happened in Ascension and Livingston parishes, about 70 miles (113 kilometers) west of New Orleans.

Livingston Parish Sheriff Jason Ard confirmed on Facebook that three deaths happened in his parish on Saturday. The victims' identities were not disclosed.

Separately on Facebook, the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office said two people were shot to death in the city of Gonzalez. The victims were identified as a husband and wife.

Their 21-year-old son was being sought by authorities and was wanted on first degree murder charges.

Ascension sheriff's spokeswoman Allison Hudson says authorities believe the shootings in the two parishes are connected, and investigators from both jurisdictions are working together.

Authorities in Livingston Parish say the suspect is believed to have gone to his parents home after first killing his other three victims, Billy Ernest, 43, Tanner Ernest, 17, and Summer Ernest, 20, in Livingston Parish, south of the city.

A motive in the killings has not been revealed, but authorities believe it was a "boyfriend [and] girlfriend type of dispute".

Sudan's Bashir visits Egypt to meet Sisi

AFP, Cairo

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir yesterday arrived in Cairo for talks with his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, airport sources said, as deadly protests rock his country.

Bashir's visit to Cairo is his second trip abroad since the demonstrations erupted in Sudan last month against worsening economic hardships before mushrooming into calls for an end to his three decades in power.

Sisi and Bashir were expected to hold a joint news conference later yesterday, the Egyptian presidency said in a statement.

Bashir's trip comes as the Sudanese Professionals Association that is leading the campaign against his government called for sit-ins yesterday across several districts of the capital Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman, across the Nile.

AL candidate

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on January 10, the last day of candidacy withdrawal.

Earlier on December 23, the Election Commission suspended voting in Gaibandha-3 following the death of BNP-led 20-party candidate TIM Fazley Rabbi Chowdhury on December 20, 10 days ahead of previously scheduled date, and declared January 27 as fresh date.

Amid tight security, the voting took place in 132 polling stations of the constituency with a 39.17 percent voter turnout rate.

With this, the number of total seats won by Awami League-led alliance increased to 289 in the 11th parliamentary polls.

Church hasn't known 'how to listen': Pope

AFP, Panama City

Pope Francis yesterday acknowledged that the Catholic Church was "wounded by sin" in a message addressed to priests and seminarians reeling from sexual abuse scandals and cover-ups.

In a mass that he officiated at the centuries-old Cathedral of Santa Maria La Antigua in Panama City, Francis warned of the "weariness of hope that comes from seeing a Church wounded by sin, which has so often failed to hear all those cries."

Later, at a massive vigil that the organizers said drew 600,000 pilgrims to a park outside Panama City, the pope called on young people to reject the temptation to live their lives online and get involved in their communities.

Life was not "in the cloud, waiting to be downloaded, a new app to be discovered, or a technique of mental self-improvement," the 82-year-old pontiff said during a grandfatherly discourse.

He urged them "to embrace life as it presented itself," and look for areas where "with your hands, your heart and your head, you can feel part of a larger community that needs you and that you yourselves need."

The pope arrived in his Popemobile, waving to the cheering crowd who welcomed Francis with a sea of waving national flags. A choir of hundreds swaying and clapping pilgrims welcomed him onto a vast multi-tiered stage amid a sophisticated light-show.

Stop earth-filling

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waterbodies and lowlands in Purbachal New Town (spread over Narayanganj's Rupganj and Gazipur's Kaliganj).

The rights body filed the petition challenging the inaction and failure of the respondents to take effective steps to protect the water reservoirs, waterbodies and lowlands in the areas.

The petitioner also sought HC directives on the respondents in this regard.

In response to the petition, the court asked the district administrations concerned to submit reports after complying with the directives before it in two months.

It also issued a rule asking the respondents to explain in four weeks why their inaction and failure to take effective steps to protect the water reservoirs, waterbodies and lowlands within the areas should not be declared illegal.

In the rule, the court asked them to show causes why they should not be directed to stop earth-filling and encroachment on in the areas.

They were also asked to explain why setting up signboards by housing companies in the areas should not be

declared illegal.

Secretaries to the ministries of forests and environment, housing and public works, and land, chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk), director general of Department of Environment and its deputy director (enforcement), deputy commissioners and superintendents of police in Narayanganj and Gazipur, upazila nirbahi officers of Rupganj and Kaliganj and officers-in-charge of Rupganj and Kaliganj police stations were the respondents.

During the hearing, Manzill Murshid told the court that some housing companies -- Platinum Purbachal City, City Cloud 9, Canada City, Zamindar City, Rimjhim, Dreamland, Homeland Purbachal City, Hometown Purbachal City, Pretty Real Estate, Mascot Green City, Nandan City, Bestway City, Malum City, Marine City and Sopan City -- were filling up and encroaching on waterbodies and lowlands in the areas, violating relevant laws.

But the respondents are not taking effective measures to protect the areas, he argued.

20 killed in twin blasts

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"They want to show force and sow chaos," national police chief Oscar Albayalde told DZMM radio, suggesting Abu Sayyaf was the prime suspect.

Jolo is a stronghold of the group, which runs a lucrative piracy and kidnapping operation that successive governments have failed to break up. The group, which operates in the waters and islands of western Mindanao, has beheaded numerous foreign captives when ransom demands were not met.

Pictures distributed by the military of the inside of the Jolo church showed several rows of wooden pews destroyed, with debris strewn across a blackened floor.

'DASTARDLY ACT'

The attack followed Friday's announcement that the region, a mainly Muslim part of the predominantly Catholic Philippines, had ratified the creation of an autonomous area called Bangsamoro, with 85 percent of voters behind it.

Although Sulu was among only a few areas that rejected autonomy, it will still be part of the new entity when it is fully formed in 2022.

Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana called the attack a "dastardly act" and urged the local population to cooperate and "deny terrorism any victory".

National Security Adviser, Hermogenes Esperon, called those responsible "mass murderers" and "extremist criminals".

"We will not allow them to spoil the preference of the people for peace," he added.

Civilians bore the brunt of the attack, which also killed five soldiers. Police lowered the death toll from 27 to 20, after discovering duplications in initial records.

The referendum came amid concerns about the presence of extremists in the Philippines and the possibility that foreign radicals will join those of Indonesia and Malaysia in gravitating to Mindanao to capitalise on porous borders, jungles and mountains, and an abundance of arms.

The Philippine military in mid-2017 countered its biggest and longest battle since World War Two when an alliance of extremists loyal to Islamic State, among them foreigners and children, overran Marawi City and tried to establish a caliphate.

Canada PM fires envoy

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China," Trudeau said in a statement that did not explain why the decision had been taken.

McCallum has been making headlines in recent days over comments regarding Meng Wanzhou, Chinese giant Huawei's chief financial officer who was arrested in Vancouver on December 1 and is facing extradition to the United States.

Accused of fraud linked to violations of American sanctions on Iran, she is out on bail, but her arrest has sparked an escalating diplomatic crisis between Ottawa and Beijing.

McCallum briefed lawmakers Tuesday on the plight of two Canadians detained in China and a third placed on death row in what are widely seen as retaliatory moves by Beijing.

After the briefing he told Chinese-language media in Markham, Ontario that he believed the US extradition request was seriously flawed.

He cited political comments on the case by US President Donald Trump, the "extraterritorial aspect" of Meng's case and the fact that Canada did not sign on to the Iran sanctions that Washington wants her extradited for.

McCallum's remarks were immediately panned by opposition parties

and others for seeming to undercut the strict hands-off approach to judicial matters touted by the Canadian government.

The following day he issued a statement saying that he "misspoke," and "regrets" that his comments "have created confusion."

But on Friday, McCallum told The Vancouver Star that it would be "great for Canada" if the US dropped its extradition request.

"From Canada's point of view, if (the US) drops the extradition request, that would be great for Canada," he told the newspaper at a charity function.

"We have to make sure that if the US does such a deal, it also includes the release of our two people. And the US is highly aware of that," he said.

Trudeau's statement hailed McCallum's almost two decades of public service, which it said he carried out "honorably and with distinction."

McCallum previously held a number of cabinet posts, including defence minister, minister of veteran affairs and immigration minister.

The statement added that, effective immediately, McCallum's deputy Jim Nickel would represent Canada in Beijing as its charge d'affaires.