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PHILIPPINES CHURCH

20 killed in
twin blasts

Involvement of IS-linked militant group suspected; 81 injured

REUTERS, Manila

The Philippines vowed to destroy those behind twin bombings that killed 20 people during a Sunday church service in the country's restive south, six days after a referendum on autonomy for the mainly Muslim region returned an overwhelming "yes" vote.

The attack wounded 81 and was one of the deadliest in recent years in a region long plagued by instability. It came amid hope and excitement about the ratification of a devolution plan that aims to bring development, jobs and peace to one of Asia's poorest and most volatile places.

The first explosion went off inside the cathedral on Jolo island, in Sulu province, and was followed by a second blast outside, which was detonated as security forces raced to the scene, officials said.

"The enemies of the state have boldly challenged the capability of the government to secure the safety of the citizenry in that region," said Salvador Panelo, spokesman of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

"The armed forces of the Philippines will rise to the challenge and crush these godless criminals."

There was no immediate claim of responsibility but police suspect the bombings were the work of Abu Sayyaf, a militant group that has pledged allegiance to Islamic State and is notorious for its bombings and brutality.

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This handout photo released by Philippines Armed Forces yesterday shows debris inside a Catholic Church where two bombs exploded in Jolo, Sulu province on the southern island of Mindanao.

PHOTO:
AFP



'DEFAMING' JOURNO

Mainul
released
on bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former caretaker government adviser barrister Mainul Hosein was released on bail last night, over three months after he was sent to jail on charges of "defaming" a female journalist during a television talk show.

He walked out of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) around 9:00pm, where he had been undergoing treatment for 10 to 12 days in police custody.

Mahbubul Islam, jailer of Dhaka Central Jail, told The Daily Star that they received Mainul's bail order in the afternoon. "After verification,"

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UPAZILA POLLS

LDA, several
Islamist parties
won't take part

RASHIDUL HASAN and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Left Democratic Alliance and several Islamist parties may boycott the upcoming upazila polls as they do not see any prospect of a free and fair election.

Leaders of the parties said the Election Commission controlled by the government might stage "a farce of an election" like the 11th national polls held on December 30.

The BNP has already announced its decision not to join the polls. LDA, a combine of eight left-leaning parties, and Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan and Bangladesh Muslim League are likely to follow suit.

Top LDA leaders told The Daily Star in the last few days that they would formally announce their decision soon.

"Right now we don't see any situation, in which we can join the polls. The Election Commission does not have our confidence in the least. The ruling party is arranging the election to ensure absolute control," said Saiful Huq, general secretary

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Rare carnivorous
plant discovered

*Teachers, students spot it on
Dinajpur govt college campus*

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A rare carnivorous plant has found its way into the campus of Dinajpur Government College, triggering curiosity among students and teachers, particularly those studying botany.

Sundew, a carnivorous plant of around an inch in height, is mostly found in Australia and South Africa. Students and teachers of Dinajpur Government College discovered three such plants on their campus on January 15.

The tiny reddish plant lives on insects and has unique trap mechanism to catch preys, said Delwar Hossain, assistant teacher of botany at the college.

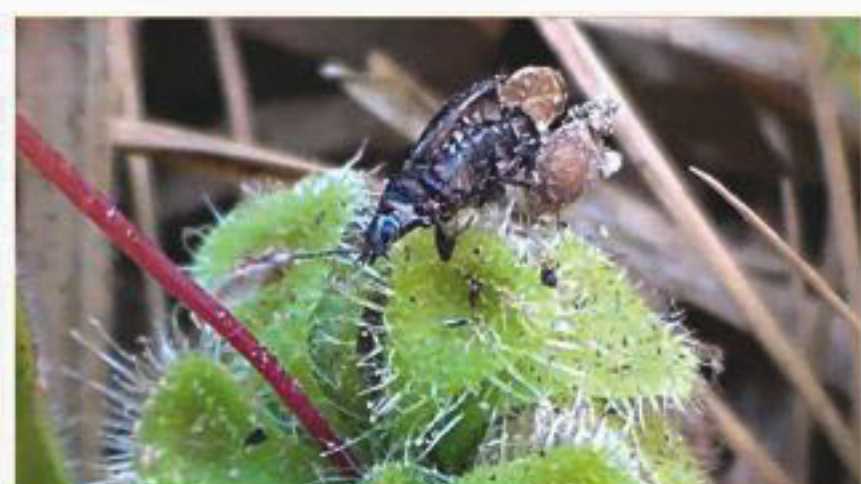
"Its tiny arms or stems are covered with sticky filaments which not only catch but also digest small insects. The arms or stems fold in to hold the insect inside until it is completely digested."

According to botany teachers at the college, Drosera Rotundifolia, the scientific name of the plant, is almost never found in Bangladesh and is usually seen in northern Europe, Siberia, Japan, Korea and northern north America.

A total of 130 species of the plant are found across the globe. They once used to grow in some parts of Dinajpur and Rangpur districts, Delwar noted.

"In 1997, former head of the botany department, Razab Ali Mollah,

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AL candidate
wins by-polls in
Gaibandha-3

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Gaibandha

Awami League candidate Yunus Ali unofficially won the 11th parliamentary polls from Gaibandha-3 yesterday, defeating his nearest contestant Jatiya Party's (Ershad) Dilara Khandker Shilpi.

Yunus bagged 1,21,163 votes while Shilpi got 24,385, declared Abdul Matin, returning officer of the constituency.

Along with the two, SM Khadimul Islam Khudi of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Mizanur Rahman Titu of National People's Party and independent candidate Abu Zafar Muhammad Jahid contested the polls.

Suspecting vote rigging, three aspirants -- Moniul Hasan Sadik of BNP, Shafiqul Islam of Socialist Party and Hanif Dewan of Islam and Islami Andolon - withdrew their candidacy

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Look inside the first
luxury space hotel

CNN ONLINE

Want to see 16 sunrises in one day? Float in zero gravity? Be one of the few to have gazed upon our home planet from space?

In just two years' time, and for an astronomical \$9.5 million dollars, it's claimed you can.

Interior renderings of the world's first luxury space hotel, Aurora Station, were unveiled Thursday for the first time.

Developed by US-based space technology start-up Orion Span, the fully modular space station will host six people at a time, including two crew members, for 12-day space travel tours.

It plans to welcome its first guests in 2022, with the station's launch happening in 2021.

"Our goal is to make space accessible to all," Frank Burger, CEO and founder of Orion Span, said in a statement last year. "Upon launch, Aurora

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HUAWEI CONTROVERSY

Canada PM
fires envoy
to China

AFP, Ottawa

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Saturday said he had sought and accepted the resignation of Ottawa's ambassador to China, days after the diplomat sparked controversy with criticism of the US extradition request for a top Huawei executive.

"Last night I asked for and accepted John McCallum's resignation as Canada's Ambassador to China,"

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PRAYER TIMING JANUARY 28

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 5-35 12-45 4-15 5-46 7-15
JAMAAT 6-10 1-15 4-30 5-50 7-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Cop arrested
over child
prostitution

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Rab yesterday arrested a sub-inspector of Armed Police Battalion and a woman on charges of forcing children into prostitution in Sylhet.

Rab said it rescued two 12-year-old girls and recovered 60 yaba pills from a flat in the city's Dariapara area around 12:45am.

Rokon Uddin Bhuiyan, 40, of Armed Police Battalion-7 in Sylhet, had brought the girls from villages in the district, promising their parents of finding work for their children. But they were engaged in prostitution, said Moniruzzaman, public relations officer of Rab-9.

His accomplice Rima Begum, 35, of Netrakona, was also arrested, the officer said, adding that the suspects also forced the children to take yaba.

"Tipped off, a Rab team raided the rented flat and busted the gang at night."

The suspects were handed over to Kotwali Police Station.



Workers sorting out dried fish (shutki) in Cox's Bazar's Nazir Tek village, locally known as "shutki polli", which meets 85 percent of the demand for the fish. A 2016 study by Chittagong Medical College Hospital identified the toxins used for drying fish as "one of the main causes of cancer". But the practice of using it still continues. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA YUSUF

Dried fish
still laced
with toxins

*NGO's efforts to popularise
organic method not working*

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, back from Cox's Bazar

Dried fish producers in Cox's Bazar's Nazir Tek village, the largest dried fish producing village in the country, are still using toxins even though an NGO has been putting in efforts to make them switch to organic fish-processing methods.

Many of the producers use pesticides like Dithane-M 45, Shobicon, and Diazinon to ward off maggots and flies.

A 2016 study by Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) identified the toxins used for drying fish as "one of the main causes of cancer". It said Chattogram saw a rise in number of cancer patients in recent times and the reason was the high consumption of dried fish.

The following year, Md Idris, a dried fish producer in Nazir Tek of Cox's Bazar, was jailed for a year for using toxins in the fish. But soon after getting out of jail, he was again caught red-handed using the toxins on dried fish, said Mizanur Rahman, a field-level worker of "Coast", the NGO discouraging the use of pesticides in dried fish.

Mizanur and five other field-level workers of Coast keep an eye on dried fish producers in the village.

Coast started a three-year campaign to promote organic dried fish in February 2017 as part of its project "Promoting Agricultural Commercialisation Enterprise".

The campaign received little to no response from the producers who believe the new method would raise production cost, drive down profits or worse, cause losses.

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