



People hold pictures of jailed Catalan pro-independence leaders during a demonstration in Barcelona, yesterday, in support of twelve pro-independence leaders that were transferred from Barcelona to Madrid ahead of the start of their trial over a failed attempt to separate the northeastern region of Catalonia from the rest of Spain in October 2017. PHOTO: AFP

Venezuela's opposition to up pressure on Maduro

AFP, Caracas

Opposition leader Juan Guaido appealed to his countrymen to take to the streets at the weekend for "the biggest march in the history of Venezuela" in a new bid to up pressure on embattled President Nicolas Maduro to call early elections. Major European countries have set a weekend deadline for Maduro to call such elections or they will join the United States in recognizing Guaido, the speaker of the national assembly, as Venezuela's interim president. "We must all take to the streets of Venezuela and the world with a clear goal: to accompany the ultimatum given by members of the European Union," Guaido said Thursday. "We are going to stage the biggest march in the history of Venezuela and our continent," he added. He called the rally to coincide with one convened by government supporters to mark the 20th anniversary of the socialist movement founded by the late Hugo Chavez. Guaido said elite security forces went to his home to threaten his family, blaming the government of Maduro as international support grew for his bid to oust the embattled president. The move heightened fears for the security of the 35-year-old National Assembly leader, who declared himself acting president last week in a bold challenge to Maduro's authority. The police's special action force, FAES, had gone to his home to interview his wife Fabiana Rosales, Guaido said during a speech at Caracas university. "At this moment the dictatorship believes that it will intimidate us," Guaido said, his wife at his side. Earlier, European lawmakers recognized Guaido as the acting head of state -- another step forward in his bid to force out the socialist leader who has presided over the oil-rich country's economic collapse. Several opposition leaders have been jailed in recent years as Maduro cracked down on growing dissent in the Latin American country, where resistance has escalated with Guaido's spectacular self-proclamation. Previously unknown to the public at large, he has become the standard bearer of the opposition to Maduro, whether on the streets or on social networks.

Home minister

FROM PAGE 2

and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," he added. Chattogram-15 lawmaker Abu Reza Muhammad Nezamuddin, DIG of Chattogram Police Khondakar Golam Faruk and Chattogram Deputy Commissioner Md Ilias Hossain were with the minister.

SSC student

FROM PAGE 2

came out of house with his two friends on Thursday evening and did not return. Police recovered his body from a pond near Kumarbhog Rehabilitation Centre yesterday afternoon. A case was filed with the police station. The victim's two friends were arrested for interrogation, the OC said, adding that the reason behind the murder could not be known immediately.

SEX ABUSE IN CATHOLIC CHURCH US bishops release names of 300 clergy

AFP, Chicago

Catholic officials in the US state of Texas on Thursday released the names of approximately 300 clergy who have been accused of sexual abuse dating back 70 years. The revelations -- which came on the same day that a law firm said that more than 80 priests sexually abused minors in a California diocese over a period of decades -- are just the latest in a clergy abuse crisis that has rocked the Catholic Church. Most of the Texas priests were dead, had been removed from the clergy, or both, according to the state's dioceses. Two priests in the Houston area were facing recent allegations, and the San Antonio diocese said one unnamed living priest was the subject of an ongoing investigation. "The Bishops of Texas have decided

to release the names of these priests at this time because it is right and just and to offer healing and hope to those who have suffered," Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of the Galveston-Houston diocese said in a statement. The 15 dioceses of the sprawling Lone Star state had promised in October to release names of clergy "credibly accused" of sexually abusing minors. The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) applauded the move but urged law enforcement to conduct independent investigations. "The only way to ensure that the bishops here in Texas are truly sincere about rebuilding their sacred trust is to allow for independent, properly trained experts in law enforcement to review all the files," SNAP said in a statement.

Oikyafont won't go

FROM PAGE 1

Distribution of the invitation letters began on January 26. Left Democratic Alliance (LDA), a platform of eight left-leaning parties, will also not attend the party. Partners of the AL-led grand alliance, Jatiya Party, Bikalpa Dhara-led Juktafont, Islami Oikya Jote, Khelafat Andolan, and Khelafat Majlish are among the parties expected to attend the event. The Jatiya Oikyafont leaders took the decision at a meeting on Thursday. In its letter, the Oikyafont said the government was formed through a farcical election on December 30. It also mentioned that many leaders and activists of the Oikyafont were behind the bars and it was not possible for the leaders to attend the tea Party in the given circumstance.

Similarly, LDA leader Mujahidul Islam Selim said, "After holding a farcical election, the government is now organising a tea party. We will not go there to legitimise the election." Meanwhile, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader said the BNP's decision not to join the tea party exposed the party's age old negative attitude, reports UNB. Speaking at a press conference at Awami League president's Dhanmondi office, he said the Jatiya Oikyafont leaders could openly discuss various political issues by joining the programme. "Many things can be discussed while taking tea as politicians are used to talk about politics. So, the BNP's representatives could talk to the prime Minister at the tea party. They could openly tell her if they have anything to say," Quader said.

Modi woos farmers

FROM PAGE 16

Goyal said that under the cash dole scheme for farmers called Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, Rs 6,000 will be transferred into bank accounts of farmers holding up to 2 hectares of land in three equal installments. This, he said, will benefit 12 crore farmers. He said Rs 20,000 crore have been provided under the scheme for the current fiscal year ending on March 31 and announced an allocation of Rs 75,000 crore for the next fiscal. Goyal also announced a 2% interest subvention to farmers pursuing animal husbandry and fisheries. The Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party hopes to cash in on the budgetary sops after it lost assembly elections in three major heartland states last year. Goyal also announced that over 8 crore free cooking gas connections will be given in the new financial year beginning on April 1. At present, the government is providing around 6 crore connections. For the salaried middle class, Goyal said people with an annual income of Rs 5 lakh would not have to pay income tax.

"India is solidly back on track. We have created the foundation for growth and prosperity for all people and create a new India by 2022," the finance minister said. Highlighting the achievements of the BJP-led NDA government, he said India is now among the fastest growing major economies in the world and the GDP growth in last five years is higher than under any previous government. He said India is poised to become a \$5 trillion economy in the next five years and aspire to become a \$10 trillion economy in the next eight years. Goyal made a strong defence of Modi's shock demonetisation in 2016 saying that due to the ban on Rs 500 and Rs 1000 currency notes, over 1 crore people have filed tax returns and anti-black money measures taken by the government last year uncovered undisclosed income of Rs 1.3 lakh crore. "Our government is committed to eliminating the ills of black money," he said in the backdrop of reports that demonetization also led to big job losses by affecting small and medium enterprises.

ABT targeted

FROM PAGE 16

secular online activists. He also recruited Rabiul, who had completed a diploma in electric engineering from Bogura in 2015, the officer said. Last week, he even went to Bogura from Dhaka with sharp weapons to kill an activist there. But the mission failed as the activist did not meet him, said the Rab spokesperson. Rasel, a garment worker, also joined the ABT in 2017. He used to collect funds and recruit new members. He was radicalised by watching inflammatory posts on Facebook. He had recruited Malek. The ABT first came into light after the murder of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider in 2013. Its chief Jashim Uddin Rahmani has been convicted for the murder. The government banned the outfit in 2015. Its members then regrouped with the name Ansar Al Islam. After the government banned Ansar Al Islam in 2017, the suspected militants took up the name Al-Qaeda Indian Subcontinent, law enforcers said.

Malaysian firm

FROM PAGE 2

same dignity accorded to Malaysians. "There were no complaints by their local workers as the company knows they will go to the Labour Department, but what about the foreign workers? That is not fair," he said. The minister pointed out that there were over one million Malaysian workers abroad and asked locals for their response if they were subject to similar abject treatment there. WRP Chief Executive Lee Son Hong had dismissed the allegations of forced labour as "baseless". Around one million Bangladeshis work in Malaysia, but allegations of fraudulence, non-payment and underpayment are rife. Malaysia suspended labour recruitment from Bangladesh since September last year on charges of monopoly by a syndicate of 10 Bangladeshi recruiting agencies and a Malaysian company.

The gate

FROM PAGE 16

are either crossing a barbed-wire fence adjacent to the gate or scaling the gate. Chandraputi Tongchangya, a 53-year-old woman, said, "Every day I use the road to fetch water but now it has become really difficult to do so because I need to cross the barbed-wire fence." "The situation becomes very difficult when someone is sick at night and has to be taken to hospital," said Shorbolota Tanchangya, another villager. Demanding immediate steps to free the road, resident Ria Tongchangya said, "My child studies in class-I. He was seriously hurt in the head while scaling the fence on his way to school recently." DC Daudul brushed off the villagers' claims and said, "I ordered to keep the pocket gate open until 3:00pm every day." Nolinisen Tonchangya, however, said nothing of that sort was happening. Dilip Banik, former DC of the hill district, said, "I had the gate built two years ago to expand tourism. It was done upon consultation with the villagers. I kept the pocket gate open for the villagers and a key was also given to them. "We had assured them that the gate would remain open all the time... It is sad that gate has been closed."

Myanmar using

FROM PAGE 2

"Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy promised a new Myanmar but the government still prosecutes peaceful speech and protests and has failed to revise old oppressive laws," Linda Lakhdhir, Asia legal adviser at HRW and the report's author, said in a statement. There was no immediate comment from the Myanmar government. Under nearly 50 years of notorious military rule, the country's government had placed severe restrictions on freedom of expression. Reforms undertaken by the quasi-civilian administration that came to power in 2010, including the abolition of censorship, had "positive implications for speech and assembly", HRW said in its report, titled Dashed Hopes: The Criminalisation of Peaceful Expression in Myanmar. However, the government led by de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi had made "only marginal changes" to oppressive legislation and continued to use "overly broad, vague, and abusive laws" to prosecute peaceful speech and assembly, it said. Speaking to Al Jazeera from Yangon in southern Myanmar, Lakhdhir focused on the plight of journalists in Myanmar, specifically when they cover issues considered sensitive by the government. "There are certain topics that seems to be off limits such as criticising the military, talking about military abuses, criticising the government or government officials and talking about corruption," said Lakhdhir. "If you report on ethnic armed groups or travel to conflict areas to report then you risk getting arrested." Myanmar free speech group Athan, whose report was quoted by HRW, said some 140 cases had been filed since 2016 under the Telecommunications Act, at least half of which involved prosecution for peaceful speech. Parliament made some amendments to section 66(d) of the act, which punishes anyone who "defames" someone using a telecommunications network with up to two years in prison, but rejected calls to repeal the provision. Reporters were especially vulnerable to prosecution and attacks, HRW said,

with threats coming from authorities as well as nationalists and "militant" supporters of the government or army. "The result has been a climate of fear among local journalists," the HRW report said. Laws criminalising defamation, the Official Secrets Act, the Unlawful Associations Act, the 1934 Aircraft Act, and section 131 of the Myanmar Penal Code have all been used against journalists in recent years. **Leopard** FROM PAGE 16 and backstreets of the Punjab city of 800,000 people for more than six hours before it was caught. Viral videos showed crowds gathering to watch the cat as it jumped at inhabitants in gardens on Thursday. It was also seen leaping across walls and pushed one man off a ladder as he tried to spread out a net to catch the animal. Those attacked all escaped serious injury. Most of those hurt had been drawn to the area hoping to see the leopard and then became victims of its desperate attempt to escape the city. Some reports said people had thrown stones at the animal in a bid to scare it away to nearby open fields. The leopard pulled one man to the ground and gnawed at his arm before leaping over a nearby wall, seeing another man and wrestling him to the ground as well. Punjab state wildlife officials said the animal had strayed from the hills of nearby Himachal Pradesh state and then reached Jalandhar through fields and forests. The leopard was eventually cornered in a house and sedated, media reports said. Wildlife officials initially tried to capture the animal using nets but later switched to tranquiliser guns. The crowds attempting to see the leopard also made the operation more difficult. Police eventually blocked some streets to keep people away from the district. The sedated animal was put in a cage and taken to Chhatbir zoo. Officials said it would remain under observation for several days before deciding its future.

Dhaka's rope running out

FROM PAGE 1

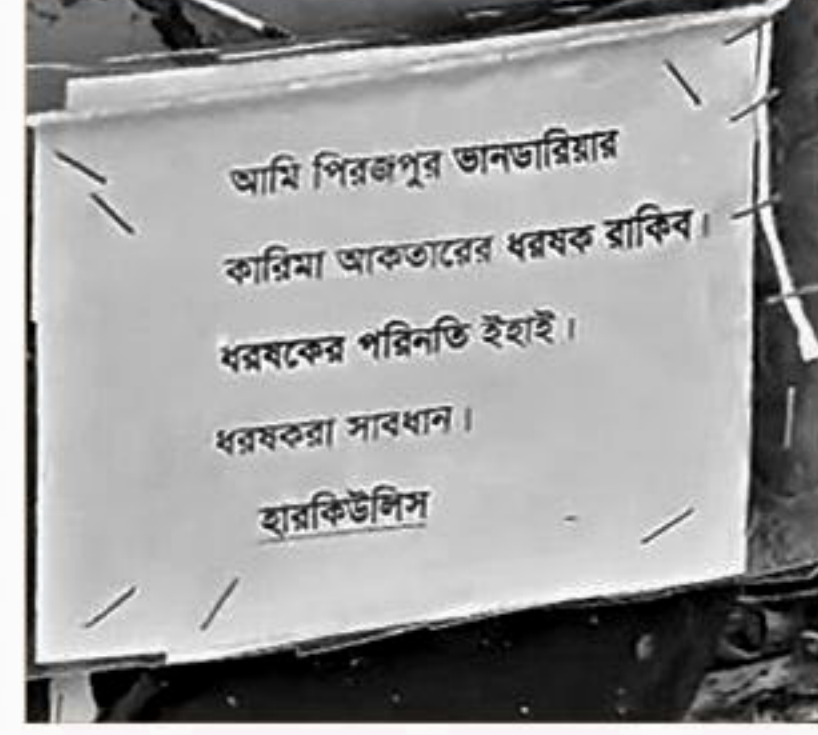
completed a consolation 29-run win over Chittagong Vikings. Mushfiqur Rahim's Vikings -- one of three teams through to the playoffs -- were bowled out for 136 in response to Sylhet's 165 for five. It was Dhaka that had the most promising start to this year's BPL, winning four matches on the trot and being on top of the points table for a considerable amount of time. Dhaka had last won against Sylhet Sixers by six wickets in their final game of the Sylhet leg. Since then the tournament had moved to Dhaka, saw its most exciting phase in Chattogram and returned to the capital. Shakib's team, however, could not register a win in the meantime, losing

all matches during the second Dhaka leg and the Chattogram phase of the tournament with their latest defeat being yesterday's nail-biter against top-placed Comilla. That makes Dhaka's encounter with Khulna Titans today a must-win one for the home side if they are to ensure a spot in the last four. If they fail to win today, Rajshahi Kings, on 12 points from 12 games, will go through. After bowling Comilla out for 127, Dhaka's batsmen could not back up the good work done by their bowlers. However, credit should be given to the Comilla bowlers, especially Mohammad Saifuddin, who returned figures of four for 22 and defended 13 runs in the last over against Dhaka's power hitter Andre Russell. Saifuddin's heroics landed him the player-of-the-match award.

Who is this Hercules?

FROM PAGE 1

Rakib's family members could not be reached for comment. On January 14, a madrasa student was allegedly gang raped by two men when she was on the way to her grandparents' house. Her father filed a case with Bhandaria Police Station accusing Sajal and Rakib on January 17. On January 24, police recovered Sajal's bullet-hit body in Jhalakathi's Kathalia upazila, with a similar note hanging round the neck. Sajal's father Shah Alam Jomadar lodged a case with Kathalia Police Station over his son's murder on January 26, said Md Eanamul Haque, officer-in-charge of the police station. The rape victim's father has been named prime accused in the case, he said. Citing the first information report, the OC said Sajal was kidnapped on January 22 from Dhaka. Later, he was shot or hacked by sharp weapon to death. The case is under investigation, he added. With the two, police recovered the bodies of at least three suspected rapists killed in similar manner over the last two weeks. On January 17, police found the body of Ripon, 39, a key suspect in the gang rape and murder of a female garment worker, in Savar on the outskirts of the capital, with a similar note hanging around the neck. In the early hours of January 7, an 18-year-old girl was found dead in her house in Ashulia's Berun area, hours after she had filed a case with Ashulia Police Station against Ripon and three other co-workers for raping her. Later, the girl's father filed another case with Ashulia Police Station accusing Ripon and the three others of murdering his daughter. Raising concern over the incidents, Shepa Hafiza, executive director of rights group Ain O Salish Kendra, said killing people "extra-judicially" and leaving a note could not be acceptable. "We have to be cautious. We have to look very carefully into why such incidents are taking place," she said while talking to The Daily Star yesterday evening. The country's law enforcement



agencies are well capable of conducting fair investigation into each incident and leading it to trial process, she added.

SSC exam

FROM PAGE 16

The board authorities made this arrangement after the examinee applied for this opportunity a few days after the publication of the exam schedule. In his application, the boy requested the authorities to arrange his exams between 6:00pm and 9:00pm for the papers scheduled for every Saturday on religious grounds. The board authorities have decided to accept his request and published a circular on their website saying that his exams on Saturdays -- February 2, 9, 16 and 23 -- will be arranged separately in the evening on those days, Madhab Chandra Ruddro, controller of examination of the board, confirmed the matter. "The decision was made at a board meeting," he added. Mahtab also mentioned that the boy would have to enter the exam hall at 9:00am, along with all other students, and stay there for the whole day. "He would not be allowed to make any outside communication during the period," the exam controller said, adding that they would ensure food and other arrangements for his exams. Contacted, Ricky said he was thankful to the board authorities for their consideration. Some nine families of the community are living in greater Kushtia, including Chuadanga and Meherpur Christian dioceses.