



Several madrasa students carrying heavy biscuit cartons on their heads to the Sadhu Hossainiya Satantra Ebtedye Madrasa in Rangpur's Kaunia upazila. Their headmaster asked them to take the cartons, given by the government as part of a school feeding programme, to the madrasa from nearby Sadhu Kutbirpara village. Contacted, the headmaster, Fakrul Hossain, admitted that he often asks his students to do so to save transport cost. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Trump comments spark Iraqi demands for US exit

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi politicians yesterday hit back at Donald Trump after the US president said he plans to keep American forces in the country to spy on Iran.

In an interview with CBS television, Trump reaffirmed his determination to pull the United States out of "endless wars" in Syria and Afghanistan but said American troops would stay on in Iraq, partly "to be looking a little bit at Iran".

"We spent a fortune on building this incredible base. We might as well keep it," he said, referring to Ain al-Asad air base in western Iraq that he visited in December.

"If somebody is looking to do nuclear weapons or other things, we're going to know it before they do," he said in the interview aired on Sunday.

His comments sparked a new round of demands in Baghdad for US forces to leave the country.

"The Iraqi constitution rejects the use of Iraq as a base for hitting or attacking a neighbouring country," President Barham Saleh said.

Saleh said US forces were in the country legally under an agreement between the two countries, but that "any action taken outside this framework is unacceptable".

Iraq's government plays a delicate balancing act between its two main allies, Washington and Tehran, which are bitter enemies.

The US has been leading a coalition to crush the Islamic State group which grabbed swathes of Syria and Iraq in 2014, and multiple offensives have since ousted the jihadists from all but a sliver of territory in eastern Syria.

Baghdad's position has also been complicated by Trump's shock December decision to pull troops out of neighbouring Syria, prompting pro-Iran factions to step up calls for an accelerated US withdrawal from Iraq.

Sabah al-Saadi, a member of parliament in the bloc led by influential anti-American Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr, has proposed a bill demanding a US pullout.

Trump's latest remarks had made passing such a law "a national duty".

Deputy speaker of parliament Hassan Karim al-Kaabi, also close to Sadr, said they were a "new provocation", weeks after the US president sparked outrage in Iraq by visiting US troops at Ain al-Asad without meeting a single Iraqi official.

Sri Lanka keeps firebrand Buddhist monk behind bars

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's president resisted calls from the island's Buddhist hierarchy to release a jailed firebrand monk yesterday, even as 518 other convicts were released to mark the island nation's Independence Day.

Galagodaatte Gnanasara has long been accused of instigating hate crimes against minority Muslims in Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka.

Since December he has been serving concurrent jail sentences over disruptive behaviour in court and intimidating a woman litigant.

Sri Lanka's Buddhist hierarchy had pressed President Maithripala Sirisena to grant an independence day reprieve but this was rejected.

"The Independence Day amnesty applied to those serving short periods of time and only those convicted for minor offences," prisons spokesman Thusahra Upuldeniya said.

Major EU powers

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elections and humanitarian aid.

In response, Maduro accused "cowardly" Spain of taking a "malign" decision. "If one day there is a coup, if one day there is a gringo military intervention, your hands will be stained with blood, Mr Pedro Sanchez," he said in a speech.

Maduro, 56, a former union leader, bus driver and foreign minister, replaced former president Hugo Chavez in 2013 after his death from cancer. But he has presided over an economic collapse and exodus of 3 million Venezuelans.

He accuses Washington of waging an "economic war" on Venezuela and harbouring coup pretensions aimed at gaining control over its oil. Venezuela's oil reserves are the largest in the world but production has plunged under Maduro.

'ILLEGITIMATE REGIME'

Critics say incompetent policies and corruption have impoverished the once-wealthy nation while dissent has been brutally crushed.

A draft EU statement said the 28-member bloc would "acknowledge" Guaido as interim president, but formal recognition was a prerogative of individual states.

"The oppression of the illegitimate, kleptocratic Maduro regime must end," said British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt as he announced London was recognising Guaido.

Russia accused Europe of meddling. "Imposing some kind of decisions or trying to legitimise an attempt to usurp power is both direct and indirect interference," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Caracas pays both Russian and Chinese loans with oil.

Maduro won re-election last year, but critics say the vote was a sham. Two opposition rivals with a good chance of winning were barred, while food handouts and other subsidies to hungry Venezuelans were linked with political support.

Italy's 5-Star Movement, which makes up half of the ruling coalition, dissents from the European stance, saying it would not recognise self-appointed leaders.

Innocent must

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your duty to maintain peace and discipline in the country."

Mentioning the police's "zero tolerance" policy against terrorism and drugs, she said the ongoing drive against drugs has to be continued.

"Besides, mass awareness about road safety has to be created among the people as there is a lack of awareness about it among pedestrians."

Referring to curbing terrorism, Hasina said a terrorist has no religion, creed and country. The drive against terrorists has to be continued because the government wants peace, discipline and stability in the country, she told the programme.

The PM said Bangladesh Police symbolises peace, security and discipline. "Imbued with the spirit of the Liberation War, its members have been carrying out their responsibilities to maintain law and order with utmost professionalism and unflinching bravery."

In the December 30 parliamentary election, members of Bangladesh Police performed their duties with professionalism to ensure peace, she mentioned.

Hasina briefly described various development initiatives taken by previous Awami League governments.

Different police contingents took part in a spectacular parade, led by Police Super Abida Sultana, to mark the Police Week-2019 with the theme-- "Build unity of police-people, elimi-

But its governing partner, the League, disagrees.

Guaido told Italian newspaper Corriere Della Sera that he would do everything possible to secure Italian support.

"All these shameless people are clinging to power," said said Luis, a 45-year-old Venezuelan outside the consulate in Madrid. "Let them hold elections so they see they won't get even 10 percent of the votes."

Italy's SkyTG24 channel quoted Maduro as appealing to the Pope to help dialogue ahead of what he hoped would be a "peace conference" led by Mexico and others on February 7. Conscious of the collapse of a past Vatican mediation bid, foes say Maduro uses dialogue to play for time and regroup when on the back foot.

Two die

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Rajib suggested that he took a small dose of the syrup named "Marigold" every day for a certain period. Nabab then bought the bottle for Tk 350.

"I stopped consuming the syrup after the first attempt as it made me dizzy," Nabab said.

On Sunday night, Nabab's neighbour Nur, a day labourer, came to his house and after learning about the syrup, he wanted to try it.

"Nur and I consumed a small amount of the syrup around 8:30pm. I was compelled to let my daughter have it too as she kept asking for it."

They fell sick around 10:00pm and were rushed to Bheramara Upazila Health Complex where doctors pronounced Shamima dead.

Nabab and Nur were taken to Kusthia General Hospital where Nur died around 11:00pm, said Taposh Kumar Paul, resident medical officer of the hospital.

The bodies were kept in the hospital for autopsies, he added.

Officer-in-Charge of Mirpur Police Station Abul Kalam said Rajib, locally known as a quack, had been detained yesterday morning.

The syrup will be sent to a laboratory in Dhaka for tests, he added.

Angelina Jolie

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also enquired about Haresha's well-being and her situation in Bangladesh, reports our Cox's Bazar correspondent.

The movie star then moved to house-285 in Block-G of the camp where she talked to some Rohingya women who faced sexual violence in Myanmar. She wanted to know about their life in Bangladesh and the relief materials they receive.

Jolie talked to several other Rohingya people and listened to their experience of torture, violence, killing and arson attacks in Rakhine State. She took their suggestions on what measures should be taken for their safe repatriation to their homeland.

She also exchanged views with volunteers from Brac before leaving for a hotel in Cox's Bazar.

The UNCHR envoy is scheduled to visit other refugee camps in Ukhia and address a press conference today.

Jolie will conclude her visit by meeting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and senior officials in Dhaka tomorrow, said a statement from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) yesterday.

The meetings would focus on how the UN refugee agency could best support Bangladesh government's efforts for the Rohingya refugees.

Jolie's visit comes just before the launch of a new appeal for the humanitarian situation in Bangladesh -- the 2019 Joint Response Plan -- which seeks to raise some \$920 million to continue meeting the basic needs of Rohingya refugees and the communities so generously hosting them, the statement added.

She had also met Rohingyas during a visit to Myanmar in July 2015 and to India in 2006.

Lewis

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Rangpur Riders in the first qualifier at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur last night.

The win ensured Comilla's second final in their third appearance while it also served as revenge for their defeat against the same opposition in contentious circumstances during last year's second qualifier, as well as for two humiliating defeats during this edition of the BPL.

West Indian batsman Evin Lewis anchored Comilla's chase of 166 with seven balls to spare with a fluent 53-ball 71, getting substantial support from Tamim Iqbal (17), Anamul Haque (39) and Shamsur Rahman (34 not out).

Earlier, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's Rangpur, playing without star batsmen AB de Villiers and Alex Hales, managed 165 for five after opting to bat, thanks to a late cameo of 53 off just 28 deliveries from English all-rounder Benny Howell. Chris Gayle scored 46 off 44 while Rilee Rossouw smashed 44 off 31 deliveries.

Ranhgpur Riders, however, will have a second chance of qualifying for the final when they take on Dhaka Dynamites in the second qualifier tomorrow. Dynamites, earlier in the day, knocked out Chittagong Vikings in the Eliminator with a comfortable six-wicket victory. Shakib Al Hasan's troops gunned down a middling total of 135 with 20 balls to spare, riding on 51 from Upul Tharanga and a 16-ball 31 from Sunil Narine after the West Indian wrecked the Chittagong batting line-up with four wickets for 15 runs.

Two shot dead

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PCJSS-MN Larma, a faction of the PCJSS, said Ashraf Uddin, officer-in-charge of Chandraghona Police Station.

Quoting witnesses, police said Mongsanu and Jahid were chatting at a tea stall in Karigar Para village around 4:30pm. Some criminals opened fire on them, who died on the spot.

Their bodies were sent to Rangamati General Hospital morgue for autopsies.

Sudhakar Tripura, information and publicity affairs secretary of the PCJSS-MN Larma faction, blamed Santu Larma-led PCJSS for the killing.

He also demanded immediate arrests of the killers.

Seeking anonymity, a PCJSS leader refuted the allegation and said the murder might be a result of the internal conflict in PCJSS-MN Larma. On January 29, criminals shot dead Pabitra Chakma alias Toshon, 42, a member of United Peoples Democratic Front, in Longadu upazila.

In the last two years, more than 50 people were killed in suspected inter-party conflicts between regional political parties in Rangamati and Khagrachhari, according to reports of The Daily Star.

In another incident, a youth was found dead in Kaptai Lake at Moddhom Para in Rangamati Sadar upazila yesterday.

The victim's identity could not be known immediately.

Police said he might have been killed a few days ago.

Jaha Alam

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Early yesterday morning, Jaha Alam was released from Kashimpur High Security Jail following a High Court order to exonerate him from 26 graft cases in which he was wrongly made accused.

The HC fixed March 6 for the next hearing on the matter.

Speaking to journalists after returning to his home in Dhuburia village, Jaha Alam said although he was feeling happy being reunited with his family, he could not forget the pain of living behind bars.

"I was deprived of hearing my daughter call me 'Baba'. ... My family turned destitute in the pursuit of setting me free. My mother had to work in other houses for a living and also moved around for my release. I want compensation for these," he said.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, eminent Jurist Dr Shahdeen Malik opined that Jaha Alam's lawyer should appeal to the HC for a compensation of Tk 10 lakh.

Only handing over punishment to the responsible persons will not heal the pain that Jaha Alam and his family member's bore in the last three years, he said.

Malik also said the people responsible for it should either be demoted or dismissed from their respective jobs.

Meanwhile, ACC Chairman Iqbal Mahmood yesterday said they had formed a one-member committee to investigate the wrongful imprisonment of Jaha Alam.

"We formed the committee to look into the irregularities in the entire matter," he said.

ACC's Director (legal wing) Abu Hasnat Md Abdul Wadud will investigate the incident.

Talking to this correspondent, Wadud said he would look into whether ACC officials had made any mistakes and or shown negligence.

In the mean time, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) expressed relief over Jaha Alam's release and said he should be given appropriate compensation for his loss.

In a press release, TIB said ACC's activities had become questionable.

"The incidents have created some more questions which need to be answered," said Dr Iftekharuzzaman, TIB's executive director.

It's Modi vs Didi

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agency summons well after the dates fixed for questioning had passed, the bench of Justice Shivakant Prasad had posted the matter for hearing on February 13.

Kumar had been caught in a tussle with the CBI over the past year or so in connection with a probe he headed into the Saradha case, a deposit-mobilising scam in which lakhs of depositors had lost their savings.

While the state police had kicked off the probe, the central agency stepped in following the apex court's orders. The CBI says it received no cooperation from state agencies and that Kumar destroyed key evidence related to the case, reported The Telegraph India Online.

"Our team visited his home this evening to question him. Had he not cooperated, we could have thought of our next course of action," said Pankaj Srivastava, the agency joint director who looks after its operations in the east.

Asked whether the team had the necessary documents to interrogate the senior officer, CBI sources said they didn't need any as they had been conducting the probe under the Supreme Court's orders.

But a retired CBI joint director told this newspaper in Delhi that since the apex court was not monitoring the case, certain permissions were necessary.

Mamata said she and the state's officers were being targeted because of the show of Opposition unity she had organised on January 19 at the Brigade Parade Grounds.

The showdown created a flutter on social media, with many users calling it a stage-managed drama by "Modi and Didi" while others went after "caged bird" CBI and expressed support for the chief minister.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court yesterday agreed to give an urgent hearing to applications moved by the CBI alleging destruction of electronic evidence related to the Saradha case by the Kolkata police chief.

The top court will hear the probe agency's applications today.

US exit

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Russia suspended the Cold War-era nuclear arms treaty on Saturday after the United States announced it would withdraw from the arms control pact, accusing Moscow of violations.

Russia would "not be drawn into a costly new arms race", President Putin said in a televised meeting with foreign and defence ministers Sergei Lavrov and Sergei Shoigu, adding it would only deploy intermediate- and short-range missiles in response to similar moves from the US.

"We will wait until our partners have matured enough to conduct an equal, meaningful dialogue with us on this important topic," Putin added.

On Friday, Trump said Washington would start a process to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement within six months.

Both countries have accused each other of violating the INF arms control agreement concluded between the US and the former Soviet Union in 1987.

Brokered by US president Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, the treaty ended a super-

Quoting media reports, he said the National Human Rights Commission had informed the matter to the ACC in May 2018. "Why [did the] ACC not take any step in eight long months? It should be investigated," said Iftekharuzzaman.

ACC should enhance the skill of its investigation officers.

"We want to believe, that others like Jaha Alam languish in jail without trial...", he said, adding the ACC should work earnestly to regain the people's faith.

AN EMOTIONAL REUNION

Jaha Alam returned home in the early hours yesterday after being released from Kashimpur Central Jail.

He burst into tears as he was embraced by his mother and other relatives. Afterwards in a customarily ritual of cleansing, his mother Monoara Begum bathed him with milk.

Speaking to reporters, Monoara Begum echoed Jaha Alam's demand for compensation.

"I want punishment of the people who had sent my son to jail without any fault [of his own]."

"I have turned destitute working for the release of my son; who will pay the compensation for it?"

Monoara also requested the authorities concerned to ensure that no mother has to see her son wrongfully imprisoned.

Several hundred people from Jaha Alam's village and those nearby it gathered at his house in the morning to catch a glimpse of him.

In 2012, the ACC filed 33 cases against a number of individuals over misappropriation of about Tk 18.5 crore from the Sonali Bank. In 26 of the cases, one Abu Salek, a businessman, was accused, ACC officials said.

Although Salek hailed from Singia village of Balia Union in Thakurgaon, in one of his bank accounts he mentioned the name of a village in Tangail's Nagarpur, where Jaha Alam lived.

During investigation of the case, Jaha Alam was wrongly identified as Salek.

Later, the ACC pressed charges before a court identifying him as Abu Salek alias Jaha Alam. He was arrested on February 6, 2016 in Narsingdi. He had been languishing in jail until yesterday.

The CBI alleged that it has moved the application as an extraordinary situation has arisen in which the top police officials of the West Bengal Police are sitting on a dharna along with a political party in Kolkata.

The applications accusing Kolkata police chief of destroying evidence related to the case and him of indulging in contempt of court was mentioned by Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta before a bench comprising Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Sanjeev Khanna.

The bench declined the plea of the SG to hear the two applications yesterday in the post-lunch session, reported TOI Online.

It said during the interregnum it will be open for the solicitor general or any other party to lay before the court any material or evidence to show that any West Bengal authority or police official is planning or trying to destroy evidence related to the case.

The top court said all material or evidence has to be placed before it by means of affidavit.

Amid ongoing tussle between the centre and the state, Mamata went into multitasking mode yesterday evening as she handed over awards to police officers.

The scene at the award function did not have anything to suggest it was out of the ordinary despite the circumstances surrounding the event.

Opposition parties led by the Congress party said they backed Mamata in her fight with Modi's administration, reported Reuters.

Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said Modi and his party were waging an "unrelenting" attack on political institutions.

"The entire opposition will stand together and defeat these fascist forces," he said.

Modi has to call the election by May. Polls suggest his alliance may emerge as the largest group in parliament but short of a majority. Regional parties like Mamata's could play a crucial role in any coalition building.

power buildup of warheads that had frightened Europe.

It banned ground-launched missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometres (300 to 3,400 miles).

The deal addressed Soviet nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles targeting Western capitals, but put no restrictions on other major military actors such as China.

The US in December gave Moscow a 60-day deadline to dismantle missiles it said breached the agreement.

But Moscow insists the disputed 9M729 missile is allowed under the treaty.

Nato has said that US allies "fully support" its withdrawal from the pact, and agreed that Russia's 9M729 ground-launched cruise missile systems violates the treaty.

Lavrov at Saturday's meeting voiced concerns that Washington's decision to withdraw from the INF could jeopardise the extension of the New START treaty.

That agreement, which caps the number of nuclear warheads held by Washington and Moscow, expires in 2021.