

## Thirteen

FROM PAGE 2

the committee said unfit vehicles should be controlled to bring discipline back on the roads and prevent causalities.

Responding to a writ, a HC bench of Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Md Ashraful Kamal directed the government to form an independent national inquiry committee including at least 15 experts to conduct a survey on the motor vehicles on July 31 last year.

Following the order, the committee was formed including representatives of road transport and bridges ministry, home ministry and Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, transport owners, workers and experts. The committee was asked to submit their report within three months.

Along with the 39 buses, the committee also checked 22 trucks, and 22 CNG-run auto-rickshaws. Of those, three trucks, four CNG-run auto-rickshaws did not have fitness clearance.

## BJP, Congress

FROM PAGE 2

the Rohingyas to the Rakhine State of Myanmar.

Prime Minister Modi reiterated that India is always with Bangladesh and assured India's cooperation in this regard," said a press release by Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi.

Mamnoon Singh at a meeting with Momen noted that early repatriation of Rohingyas is a priority and assured that they will be supporting the government of India in any initiative to expedite the repatriation of Rohingyas to Rakhine State.

There was no mention in the high commission press release on whether the Bangladesh Foreign Minister discussed the much awaited issue on sharing the water of Teesta river which has been pending since 2011. During Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in April 2017, Modi assured the inking of the Teesta deal during their tenure.

However, the high commission said that Mamnoon hoped that both countries would be able to resolve the remaining outstanding issues between the two countries including the Teesta river issue.

Momen, the first senior Bangladeshi minister travelling to India since the Awami League returned to power for the third consecutive terms, reached Delhi on Thursday night and will co-chair the 5th India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission meeting with his Indian counterpart Sushma Swaraj this morning.

During the call on the Indian PM at his official residence Lok Kalyan Marg, Modi mentioned that the partnership between Bangladesh and India was "flourishing under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina."

The Bangladesh High Commission press release said Modi reaffirmed India's sincere commitment to Bangladesh's prosperity and development and said that the Bangladesh-India relation is a "model between two neighbouring countries which needs to be showcased for a wider audience around the world."

In a separate statement from the Indian Prime Minister's Office, Modi said that the India-Bangladesh relations had been on an upward trajectory in the last few years. He reaffirmed India's commitment to work with Bangladesh to build on this momentum during Hasina's new term in office.

Momen conveyed Sheikh Hasina's appreciation to Modi for being the first foreign leader to extend congratulations upon the Awami League's victory in the December 30 parliamentary election.

Momen expressed his satisfaction on the excellent bilateral relations that exist between the two countries which has grown and prospered, especially with the statesmanship of both the countries' prime ministers.

He emphasised that Bangladesh would continue its resolve in further strengthening and deepening the relationship with India in the coming days. Momen also mentioned the remarkable progress Bangladesh has achieved over the last few years in the socio-economic sectors and elaborated on the road map of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to realise the dreams of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman to build a "Sonar Bangla".

Our New Delhi correspondent reported that the Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar in a Twitter post described the Modi-Momen meeting as "Sonali Adhyay" (a golden chapter) in the India-Bangladesh relations.

Apart from meeting Mamnoon Singh, Momen also met Deputy Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Dr Anand Sharma. Momen conveyed PM Sheikh Hasina's greetings to Mamnoon Singh, who also conveyed his congratulations to Hasina for being elected as the prime minister for the third time.

## Play your due role

FROM PAGE 20

any crisis and disasters, construction of infrastructures, socio-economic development and maintaining law and order," the PM said.

Mentioning that her government wants to build Bangladesh as a developed and prosperous country, she called upon the armed forces to continue its contributions to various fields in this development journey.

Talking about the country's development, Hasina said her government accomplished tremendous development activities in all sectors in the last 10 years. "People are now reaping the benefit of our development programmes. Bangladesh is now a role model of development in the world."

"Being highly happy with the development work of my government, people have made us victorious again in the 11th parliamentary election. We'll fully implement all the pledges made to the country's people," said Hasina.

The government has a plan to set up a nuclear power plant in the country's southern region on completion of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, the PM said.

Bangladesh started constructing the Padma bridge with own funds, Hasina said, adding, "I think that this decision has changed the image of Bangladesh in the whole world."

For the graduating officers, she said, "This course will make you more confident in discharging assigned duties and

in facing any challenge more efficiently. You all be prepared to take a higher leadership role. You all will perform your duties with integrity."

Noting that 11 female officers have graduated this year, the PM said it was encouraging to see a good number of female officers graduating every year.

Hasina said Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman put special emphasis on building disciplined and professional armed forces in independent Bangladesh. In line with it, this college was established for the higher training of armed forces officers.

The PM said Bangladesh is a peace-loving country and its trust and respect for world peace is aptly echoed in its foreign policy -- "Friendship to all and malice to none on the basis of equality".

Commandant of the college Maj Gen Md Enayet Ullah delivered the welcome speech.

Some 215 officers, including 118 officers from army, 29 from navy and 23 from air force, and 45 overseas officers from 19 countries, have graduated from this college this year.

The PM also distributed certificates among the graduating officers.

So far, 3,902 Bangladeshi officers, five police officers and 1,111 overseas officers from 42 friendly countries have graduated from this college.

## Bangladesh saw decline

FROM PAGE 20

It assessed the condition of political rights and civil liberties around the world and showed ratings for 195 countries and 14 territories.

In South Asia, only India practices liberal democracy. In Afghanistan, democracy is not free at all. Partly free democracy prevails in the rest of the countries in the region, according to the report.

In terms of aggregate points, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Maldives ranked behind Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, law enforcers cracked down on the opposition ahead of parliamentary elections, intimidating and arresting prominent figures. The polls themselves were marked by widespread irregularities and interparty violence that resulted in more than a dozen deaths, said the report.

A total of 68 countries saw a decline in political rights and civil liberties last year, while only 50 registered progress in these areas, it added.

The independent watchdog found that the decline in freedom of expression over the last 13 years touched all parts of the world and affected Free, Partly Free, and Not Free countries alike.

Every region, except Asia-Pacific, has a lower average score for 2018 than it did in 2005. Even Asia declined when countries with less than 1 million people -- mostly small Pacific Island states -- are excluded.

As a group, Not Free countries suffered a more significant score drop than Free or Partly Free coun-

tries, the report said.

"More authoritarian powers are now banning opposition groups or jailing their leaders, dispensing with term limits, and tightening the screws on any independent media that remain."

Freedom of expression has come under sustained attack, through both assaults on the press and encroachments on the speech rights of ordinary citizens. Freedom of expression declined each year over the past 13 years, with sharper drops since 2012. Last year, press freedom scores fell in four out of six regions in the world, the study said.

It also mentioned that flagrant violations, like the imprisonment of journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo for their investigative reporting in Myanmar, have become more widespread.

According to the study, ethnic cleansing was another growing trend, with an increase in regimes making concerted efforts to alter the ethnic composition of their territory.

The Freedom House said liberal democracy has been in retreat for over a decade. Since 2006, a total of 116 countries have seen a decline in democratic freedoms, while only 63 countries have experienced growth.

Freedom in the World is produced each year by a team of analysts and expert advisers from the academic, think tank, and human rights communities. They use a broad range of sources, including news articles, academic analyses, reports from nongovernmental organisations, individual professional contacts, and on-the-ground research.

## One tough year

FROM PAGE 20

But the party's absence both from parliament and streets has frustrated those at the grassroots.

"Many party leaders requested the BNP high-ups to boycott the polls but the party joined it considering the move a part of the protests," a senior leader said wishing anonymity.

"Basically, we lost all our grounds by joining the election. We gave the government legitimacy and now we have no strong ground for waging any movement," he said.

After Khaleda's conviction, her party did not wage any tough movement. It believed peaceful protests would "brighten" the party's image and they would capitalise on it in the election.

In the meantime, the party failed to mobilise public support and also morally boost its leaders and activists.

Many from the grassroots are on the run.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, Abdul Hamid Mridha, a Chhatra Dal activist in Mymensingh, said, "Elections are over but still, we can't stay in our houses. Police may arrest us anytime."

In Khaleda's absence, the BNP formed an alliance -- the Jatiya Oikyafront -- with several other parties, including the Dr Kamal Hossain's Gonoforum. But that did not work out.

Another BNP leader, wishing not to be named, said, "Time has come to examine our gain from joining the alliance. To me, we achieved nothing."

Khaleda's son Tarique Rahman, the

second-in-command of the party, has also been convicted in two graft cases in absentia. A fugitive facing several arrest warrants, he has been living in London in self-exile since 2008.

With Khaleda in jail, Tarique has been instructing the party leaders about their course of action.

"Yes, the party is facing crisis in absence of madam [Khaleda] because she is incomparable and her political wisdom is unparalleled. No one can fill that vacuum," Mohammad Shahjahan, vice chairman of the party, said.

He also said, "At the same time, killing, abduction, ghost cases filed against party leaders and activists are the new edition of the repression on the opposition. We had never faced such repressions in the party."

However, Moudud Ahmed, party's standing committee member, said, "In last one year, we have developed a collective leadership under the directives of party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman."

Khaleda landed in the old central jail in Dhaka after a special court sentenced her to five years' rigorous imprisonment in Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case.

Meanwhile, the prosecution yesterday started placing arguments on BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and 16 others in connection with Gato graft case.

During the hearing, Khaleda was at the court for over an hour.

The BNP chief was brought to the courtroom in a wheel chair. She was silent the entire time.

## Amnesty

FROM PAGE 20

other opponents of Amnesty's work to undercut or dismiss Amnesty's advocacy around the world, fundamentally jeopardising the organisation's mission," the report read.

"There were multiple reports of managers belittling staff in meetings, deliberately excluding certain staff from reporting, or making demeaning, menacing comments like: 'You're shit!' or: 'You should quit! If you stay in this position, your life will be a misery,'" it added.

The independent report was commissioned by the organisation itself after two members of staff died by suicide last year within a period of six weeks. One victim explicitly blamed the stress caused by the workplace.

Gaetan Mootoo, 65, was a veteran Amnesty International worker, devoting more than 30 years to the charity. He died inside the organization's Paris office, the Guardian reported, leaving a note voicing complaints about work pressure and management's lack of support.

Five weeks later, Rosalind McGregor, a 28-year-old intern in Amnesty's Geneva's office also died by suicide. While an inquiry into her death noted that she had been troubled due to "personal reasons" and cleared the organisation of wrongdoing, her family accused the charity of being a factor in her development of "acute anxiety" during her five-month internship.

The consultants interviewed nearly 475 Amnesty staff members, with many branding the workplace environment as "toxic."

"Amnesty International had a reputation for doing great work but being a hard place to work. Across many interviews the word 'toxic' was used to describe the Amnesty work culture as far back as the 1990s. So were the phrases 'adversarial', 'lack of trust' and 'bullying,'" the report read.

Staffers also revealed instances of racism and sexism and anti-LGBTQI sentiments in the workplace, with the report concluding that some examples of alleged abuse of power, discrimination and unfair treatment may warrant a further investigation.

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Besides, three constables were sent to jail during this period in connection with similar allegations, said sources.

On the fourth day of the Police Week-2019 yesterday, the IGP also instructed SPs and police commissioners to make frequent visits to the police stations under their jurisdiction and keep those free from trade and use of narcotics.

He also directed the officials to make the on-going anti-narcotics drive visible from Sunday as the government has announced a war on drugs.

The nationwide anti-narcotics drive began on May 4 last year, but it apparently lost its pace months ahead of the December 30 parliamentary polls.

During the drive, at least 288 alleged drug traders have been killed in "shootouts" till date. Families of a number of those killed claimed their family members were innocent.

The police boss ordered his fellow officials to handle the cases filed under the Digital Security Act with "utmost carelessness".

Sources said the meeting decided to take initiatives to set up an industrial police unit in Habiganj, ensure ambulance support for each police unit, allocate fund for firing ranges and prove internet connectivity at all police stations.

Referring to the rape of a mother of four in Noakhali's Subarnachar, the police chief instructed the officers to stop recurrence of such incidents. He

## Last 4 years hottest

FROM PAGE 20

incorporated the final weeks of last year into its climate models and concluded that average global surface temperature in 2018 was 1 degree Celsius (1.8 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial baseline levels.

2016, boosted by a strong El Nino that normally tips the mercury northwards, remains the hottest year on record.

The 20 warmest years in history all occurred within the last 22 years.

"The long-term temperature trend is far more important than the ranking of individual years, and that trend is an upward one," said WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas.

"The degree of warming during the past four years has been exceptional, both on land and in the ocean."

The WMO said heightened temperatures also contributed to a number of extreme weather events such as hurricanes, droughts and flash flooding.

"Many of the extreme weather events are consistent with what we expect from a changing climate. This is the reality we need to face up to," Taalas said.

The UN body also said that 2019 had picked up where 2018 left off, with Australia experiencing its warmest January on record. It warned that intense heatwaves "are becoming more frequent as a result of climate change."

Similar reports on climate trends released by the US space agency Nasa and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) confirmed that last year was the fourth warmest in modern times.

Sea ice cover in the Arctic and Antarctic both marked the second

lowest ever observed.

As parts of the mid-western United States were gripped by a "polar vortex" last week that saw temperatures plunge to lows of -64 degrees Fahrenheit (-53C), US President Donald Trump suggested that the cold weather front cast doubt over the veracity of climate change data.

"What the hell is going on with Global Warming? (sic) Please come back fast, we need you!" he said on Twitter.

## A dream

FROM PAGE 1

got enrolled in police department as a sub-inspector. He completed his training on January 28.

"He dreamt of becoming a police officer and worked hard for it. But everything ended just a day before his joining," his uncle Nur E Alam Siddique