

Thirteen

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

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

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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.

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

Play your due role

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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 Mujibur 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

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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

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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 Gatco 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

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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.

Gaëtan 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.

Kumi Naidoo, Amnesty's secretary-general, according to the Guardian, described the report as troubling and pledged to come up with a reform plan by the end of March.

Elephants

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elephants coming into the camps.

After about 730,000 Rohingyas fled Myanmar into Bangladesh 18 months ago and set up camp, they realised they were not only at risk from monsoons and cyclones but also elephants, as they were blocking a migration path, with 13 people killed in six months.

Raquibul Amin, Bangladesh representative for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), said as a quick fix in February 2018 they built 95 towers and trained a team to watch, raise the alarm and guide elephants out of camps.

He said in the past year the all-male response team, who are paid to work, had steered elephants away from the former nature reserve on at least 50 occasions with no more fatalities.

But now 18 months into the crisis, Amin said it was becoming important to find a longer-term solution as the elephants were confined to a shrinking forest area, and needed an alternative corridor to move freely to find food or conflicts could resume.

"They are in a time bomb, a slow paced time bomb where not a very bright future is waiting for them," Amin told the Thomson Reuters Foundation from the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka.

"It should be OK for some time but they are now in a small area and will start inbreeding ... and food could be an issue."

Islam, 32, said he had been involved in stopping about 18 elephant incursions into some of the camps located from 40 km (25 miles) south of the beachside town of Cox's Bazar that now make up the world's largest refugee settlement.

ROUTE TO FREEDOM
More than 900,000 Rohingyas now live in the camps after the 2017 exodus, which followed an offensive by Myanmar's military that the United Nations has described as "ethnic cleansing".

With the influx, swathes of forest were cut down to make space and build shelters, threatening biodiversity, including the endangered Asian elephant. Its numbers have shrunk to about 50,000 globally, due largely to habitat loss, according to WWF.

The IUCN estimates there are about 268 surviving elephants in Bangladesh, of which about 15 per cent, or 35-45, live around the sprawling Rohingya camp area.

Kutupalong, the largest refugee camp, was well known as a corridor for elephants moving between Myanmar and Bangladesh in winter to find food and shelter, breaking obstacles in their way which led to human conflicts.

Last 4 years hottest

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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

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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 said while talking to this correspondent over the phone.

He also demanded the immediate arrest of the ambulance driver and his punishment.

Victim's younger brother Mahidul Islam filed a case with Kafrul Police Station.

Madrasa

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raped the girl for four times."

Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Charghat Police Station, said Shahjahan raped and tortured her at his home.

The girl's father came to know about the incident when she became pregnant and filed a case with the police station, the OC added.

Break the link

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Bangladesh, also proposed severing links between a section of policemen and drug syndicates. Several other officials backed the proposal.

The IGP directed the officers to stop the practice and remain alert.

A district police official said around 100 officials have been transferred or closed or attached to police lines in Cox's Bazar in the last five months for their alleged involvement with yaba syndicates.

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 countrywide 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 carefulness".

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

Fight against

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But the one-day event did not immediately produce major announcements.

The conference did not include representatives from Syria Bashar al-Assad or Russia and Iran, which have said they are seeking to defeat the Islamic State group as they shore up his iron-fisted rule.

Opening the conference, Pompeo described Trump's troop pullout as a "tactical change" with extremists increasingly scattered around the world.

"It is not a change in the mission," Pompeo said, adding "our fight will not necessarily always be military-led." "We are entering an era of decentralised jihad so we must be nimble in our approach as well," he said.

Officials say that the US withdrawal will happen, although at a slower pace than Trump first intended.

The US representative who was in charge of the coalition, Brett McGurk, resigned along with defense secretary Jim Mattis in protest over Trump's decision.

And Trump's own intelligence chief, Dan Coats, warned last week before Congress that the Islamic State group would try to stage a comeback as troops withdraw.

also asked them to remain alert to women and child repression.

He asked the officials to turn the police stations into centre points of public service and ensure good governance, transparency and accountability in the force.

MORE DEMANDS

Later in the evening, police officers held a meeting with three ministers to place another set of demands, including creation of more regular posts in the force for smooth promotion and posting of officials.

The three are Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Housing and Public Works Minister SM Rezaul Karim and State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain.

Only a month before the December 30 polls, the government gave in-situ promotions to 235 additional SP to SP.

Yesterday, police officials said it was not a permanent solution.

In reply to the demand, Mostafa Kamal Uddin, secretary of public security division of the home ministry, asked the cops to submit a proposal to solve the problem.

Cops also demanded in-situ promotions for officials -- from additional deputy inspector general (DIG) to additional inspector general -- as they did not get promotion for long.

They also want official residence for the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) commissioner and the DIG of Dhaka range.

Four more

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Housing and Public Works. The other members are Narayan Chandra Chanda, Alhaz Dabirul Islam, Bazlul Haq Haroon, Zillul Hakim, AKM Selim Osman, Monwar Hossen Chowdhury and Anwarul Ashraf Khan.

Former environment, forest and climate change minister Anisul Islam Mahmud will head the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment, with Prof Ali Ashraf, Moazzem Hossen Ratan, Mrinal Kanti Das, Didarul Alam, Begum Ayesha Ferdous, Pankaj Nath, Sadeque Khan and Iqbal Hossen as members of the committee.

Former state minister for labour Mujibul Haq Chunnun was made chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the labour and employment ministry, while other members are Shajahan Khan, Qamrul Islam, Shamim Osman, Israfil Alam, Nazrul Islam Chowdhury, Manu Majumder and Iqbal Hossen.

Awami League MP and former state minister for home M Shamsul Haq Tuku was made chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the home ministry. Members of the committee are Afsarul Amin, Habibur Rahman, Shamsul Alam Dudu, Kuzendra Lal Tripura, Faridul Haq Khan, Pir Fazlur Rahman and Nur Mohammad.

The House last night also formed a parliamentary standing committee on the railway ministry with AL MP ABM Fazley Karim Chowdhury as its chief. The other members of the committee are Asaduzzaman Noor, Shafiqul Islam Shimul, Shafiqul Azam Khan, Saifuzzaman, HM Ibrahim, Nasimul Alam Chowdhury and Gazi Shahnewaz.

A total of 24 parliamentary standing committees have so far been formed in the last four sessions of the JS.