



Three Venezuelan troops use their jeep to smash through a security barrier on the Simon Bolivar bridge yesterday, as they desert to neighbouring Colombia. According to Colombian authorities, four soldiers of the Venezuelan guard deserted yesterday after crossing two border bridges with Colombia, closed by order of the government of Maduro before the announcement of the entry of aid shipments.

PHOTO: AFP

Assam cracks down on Rohingyas

STAR REPORT

The Assam government has ordered a crackdown on Rohingyas believed to have been settled systematically by a network of sympathisers in minority-dominated districts of the Indian state in large numbers, reported Times of India yesterday.

"We have been able to arrest only those who have been detected so far. We fear there could be more who have come in multiple streams and we do know how many of them are settled here now. We have asked our police force to detect each and every one of them as their top priority," Finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Friday.

He added that since the detection of the first Rohingyas in the state in 2009, infiltration from Myanmar has been ongoing.

"Very recently, when the state machinery was focused on the unrest in the state [following protests against the Citizenship Bill], there has been a systematic effort to settle the Rohingya Muslims, who have been either living in the three refugee camps set up by India in Telangana, Delhi and Jammu, or infiltrated from across the border," Sarma said.

Some 750,000 Rohingyas fled brutal the military campaign in August 2017 to Bangladesh and took shelter, creating a humanitarian crisis. Earlier, some 300,000 others had fled to Bangladesh.

India has been criticised for alleged forced deportation of Rohingyas in recent months. According to the UN, some 1,700 Rohingyas infiltrated Bangladesh from India since the beginning this year.

Sarma further said, "Certain organisations are making concerted efforts to push Rohingya Muslims into Assam and a network has developed to raise donations for them."

Sarma said police have arrested 75 Rohingyas in the state so far, who are either in judicial custody or in the detention camp in Goalpara jail or have been repatriated. He added that there is no designated camp for Rohingyas in Assam.

"Most of these Rohingya Muslims have been detected and arrested in Hojai, Luming, Cachar and Karimganj districts. These are the districts where the demography has drastically changed and the indigenous Assamese people are being pushed into oblivion," Sarma said.

The biggest batch of Rohingya Muslims was arrested in Karimganj district on January 21, he added.

Asked if these Rohingya Muslims can stay in Assam with refugee identity cards, Sarma said, "India does not recognise any such identity granted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)."

"Only the Indian government is the competent authority to issue such refugee certificates," he said.

No chemical

FROM PAGE 1
Contacted, Mofizul, convener of the probe committee, said, "Investigation is going on. I will not say anything more."

The probe committee visited the spot on Thursday and talked to witnesses, victims and locals about the cause of the fire. Besides, the committee talked with the victims at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The 12-member committee was formed on Thursday to investigate the cause of the fire, assess the damages and make recommendations to prevent such disasters in the future.

The body was asked to come up with a full probe report in five working days. "It primarily appears that there was a restaurant on the ground floor of Wahed Mansion and a cosmetics warehouse on the first floor. Besides, plastic granular of some nearby shops was stored," it reads.

"According to locals, a vehicle carrying cylinders was parked in the area. Suddenly, a cylinder at a restaurant or the vehicle exploded. The explosion caused a fire that spread in the surrounding places and an electric transformer caught fire.

"The transformer also exploded and the whole area plunged into darkness."

The vehicle carrying cylinders was completely burnt and plastic granular and bottles of cosmetics products were scattered on the road.

Contacted, Mehedi Ahmed Ansary, professor of civil engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, said, "There is no chemical factory but there were highly flammable goods."

On Thursday, Maj AKM Shakil Newaz, director (operations and maintenance) of fire service, said they found 16 types of chemicals at the basement of the building.

2 workers

FROM PAGE 16
Shahin Mia, sub-inspector of Habiganj Police Station, said six workers went to the area near the Khowai River around 11:00am yesterday to extract soil from a pit.

Suddenly, a huge chunk of soil fell onto them from an adjacent hillock, leaving Joni dead on the spot, the SI said.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Habiganj Sadar Hospital for an autopsy, he said, adding that the rest were receiving treatment at the same hospital.

In Moulvibazar, a landslide hit Harun, a day labourer, while he was extracting soil in Chondinagar area on Friday morning, said Sharif Uddin, sub-inspector of Barlekha Police Station.

The two others, who also got injured in the incident, are receiving treatment at Barlekha Upazila Health Complex, the SI added.

The body was sent to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital for an autopsy, the SI added.

Karnaphuli

FROM PAGE 16
Mahbubul Alam, president of Chattogram Chamber of Commerce and Industry told The Daily Star that the two projects will help Chattogram's economy flourish by easing communication.

'Very dangerous'

FROM PAGE 16
As international concern grows over India-Pakistan sabre-rattling, residents of Kashmir, at the centre of a decades-old struggle between the nuclear-armed neighbours, reported heightened military activity.

About 10,000 paramilitaries started arriving in Kashmir yesterday, a day after India ordered the reinforcements.

Modi told a rally in Rajasthan state that the country was "angry" about the attack in the Pulwama district of Indian-held Kashmir.

"After the Pulwama attack, you must have seen how Pakistan is being brought to account one step at a time. They are in a state of panic because of our government's decisions," Modi said, speaking in Hindi.

"We will not sit quietly after taking this pain. We know how to crush terrorism," he added. "We have given full freedom to the military."

Among those taken into custody in the crackdown in Kashmir were senior figures in Jamaat-e-Islami, the region's biggest religious organisation, and the Hurriyat Conference, a coalition of local political parties.

Jamaat and Hurriyat Conference both strongly support Muslim Kashmir's right to choose whether it wants to be part of India or Pakistan, which have been fighting over the region since independence in 1947.

"Police and other agencies launched a mass arrest drive and raided many houses in the valley with dozens of... central and district-level leaders arrested," Jamaat said in a statement, adding that those detained included central leader Abdul Hamid Fayaz.

Police linked the arrests to security preparations for upcoming elections in India and a Supreme Court hearing on Monday on a challenge to a constitutional provision that gives Kashmiris special rights to property and jobs in the territory.

But the arrests drew widespread criticism from Kashmir political leaders.

"Fail to understand such an arbitrary move which will only precipitate matters," Mehbooba Mufti, a pro-

Two students

FROM PAGE 16
The duo hacked various educational and business websites between December 2018 and January 2019, claimed police, adding they recovered 36 gigabytes of files related to hacking from the duo's computers.

A case was filed under the Digital Security Act with Bogura Police Station in this regard.

Emran Mahmud Tuhin, inspector of Detective Branch of Bogura police, claimed they recovered 3689 website defacements from the Black Web team. The team consists of eight to 10 hackers, he added.

Ali Ashraf Bhuiyan, superintendent of police in Bogura, also the head of the district's cyber unit police, said the hackers aimed to steal information from the hacked websites and wanted to be popular among local and international hackers' communities.

Police claimed to have recovered two desktops, one laptop and three mobile phones from the arrestees.

Police also prayed for a 5-day remand for the duo to a Bogura court which is yet to be heard.

India former chief minister said on Twitter. "You can imprison a person but not his ideas."

"Such illegal and coercive measures against Kashmiris are futile and will not change realities on ground," wrote Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, an influential separatist leader, on Twitter.

Businesses across Kashmir were shut yesterday, some in protest at the arrests and with others fearing conflict between India and Pakistan.

Many in Kashmir are wary of a military strike over the suicide bomb and residents in several areas reported unusual military air activity on Friday night. Authorities did not comment on the reported fighter aircraft and helicopters flying over the territory.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan has vowed retaliation if his country is attacked. In a letter to the UN Security Council released yesterday, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi accused India of "warmongering".

Pakistan's military on Friday warned India against any "misadventure," saying it was capable of responding.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three full-fledged wars over Kashmir since their partition at independence from Britain in 1947.

Earth

FROM PAGE 16
That can only be done at certain times, and the new research is the result of fortunate timing that allowed the spacecraft to spot the edge.

The new research could allow scientists to better look for other planets like ours, with hydrogen in their atmosphere and where water vapour is often seen closer to the surface.

Scientists famously captured stunning images of the geocorona around Earth in pictures that were taken using the first ever telescope places on the Moon, which arrived with Apollo 16 astronauts in 1972. But scientists didn't know that they themselves were still wrapped in the edges of the geocorona.

The extra source of hydrogen laying far out from Earth is not enough to allow space exploration, or to support any kind of human life. Down here, it would be referred to as vacuum.

But fortunately those particles do not pose any threat for anyone interacting with them, such as future space travellers that hope to journey to orbit around the Moon.

"There is also ultraviolet radiation associated to the geocorona, as the hydrogen atoms scatter sunlight in all directions, but the impact on astronauts in lunar orbit would be negligible compared to the main source of radiation -- the Sun," says Jean-Loup Bertaux, co-author and former principal investigator of SWAN, the instrument that made the finding.

But it could get in the way of future observations around the Moon, the researchers caution.

"Space telescopes observing the sky in ultraviolet wavelengths to study the chemical composition of stars and galaxies would need to take this into account," adds Jean-Loup.

US bans DR Congo election chief, top judge over polls

AFP, Washington

The United States said Friday it will refuse visas to the Democratic Republic of Congo's election chief and top judge on charges that they undermined long-awaited presidential polls.

Washington said it wanted to send a clear signal of the need for accountability in the conflict-torn nation but stressed that it will still work with the controversially elected new president, Felix Tshisekedi.

The State Department said it would reject any visa request from five senior Congolese figures as well as their immediate family members over "involvement in significant corruption relating to the election process."

They include Corneille Nangaa, president of the Independent National Election Commission, Constitutional Court president Benoit Lwamba Bindu and Aubin Minaku Ndjalandjoko, president of the National Assembly.

The State Department said it was also imposing visa restrictions on an unspecified number of other military and government officials over human rights abuses related to the election.

"These individuals enriched themselves through corruption, or directed or oversaw violence against people exercising their rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression," the State Department said in a statement.

Rohingya man

FROM PAGE 16
recovered from near Block-A area of the camp.

Around an hour later, a gang of armed cadres came to the grocery shop of Hasan Ali at Block-C Mochoni Nayapara camp and shot him. He suffered two bullet injuries and was taken to Cox's Bazar District Sadar Hospital where he is now undergoing treatment.

Speaking to The Daily Star, several refugees of the camp said the attackers might be "followers of Rohingya robber Nurul Alam", who was killed in "gunfight" with Rab in the early hours of Friday at Damdamia area of the district.

Nurul's followers may have launched the attack to take revenge on their opponents, they said, adding that tension prevailed in the camps since the incident.

Two killed

FROM PAGE 16
Talking to The Daily Star, Mohammad Alamgir claimed his rival Momtazul Islam had formed a cadre group in the area and were illegally occupying others' land. They launched the attack yesterday to grab the land, he alleged.

On the other side, Momtazul said he had taken lease of the land through legal procedures and was preparing to set up a fish enclosure there. But, Alamgir demanded extortion and attacked them as he refused to pay, he alleged.

Contacted, Mizanur Rahman, inspector (Investigation) of Pekua police, said law enforcers rushed to the scene and brought the situation under control. The police recovered several sharp weapons and arrested five people including a woman.

The bodies were sent to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital for an autopsy. Tension was prevailing, he said.

BORDER WALL

Democrats move to halt Trump's emergency

AFP, Washington

US Democrats on Friday rolled out their measure aimed at blocking President Donald Trump from circumventing Congress to seize federal dollars for construction of his controversial southern border wall.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the chamber will vote next Tuesday on the so-called disapproval resolution to terminate the national emergency that Trump declared last week, an exceptional step that sparked fierce political and legal battles.

The legislation is expected to clear the Democrat-held House of Representatives, then head to the Senate where it is guaranteed a vote under the rules. Its fate however is anything but assured in the upper chamber, which is controlled by Trump's Republicans.

Trump swiftly weighed in to say he would reject the measure if it reaches his desk, deepening a showdown with his Capitol Hill opponents.

"Will I veto it? 100 percent," Trump said, expressing confidence that Congress would not be able to override his objection.

Overriding a presidential veto requires a two-thirds majority in both chambers, meaning substantial numbers of Republicans would have to break with Trump in order for his emergency declaration to be blocked.

Pelosi meanwhile hammered away at Trump's "lawless" declaration, saying it had no valid rationale.

UN demands pullback of forces from Yemen ports

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council on Friday called on the warring parties in Yemen to immediately implement a deal to pull their forces out of three key ports and a key grain depot.

In a unanimous declaration, the 15-member council welcomed the recent UN-sponsored agreement between Huthi rebels and the Saudi-led coalition fighting them.

They called for "the immediate implementation" of the first step of the deal, which includes the various factions pulling their fighters first back from the ports of Saleef and Ras Issa and then from the port city of Hodeida.

Martin Griffiths, the UN special envoy in Yemen, said on Tuesday he hoped the redeployment of forces would happen as early as Tuesday or Wednesday but there was no indication that it had happened.

On Thursday, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres held a meeting on the issue in New York with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Under the agreement struck in Sweden on February 17, fighters would redeploy outside the ports and away from areas that are key to the humanitarian relief effort in Yemen, devastated by famine and outbreaks of disease after years of conflict.

"There is no evidence to support the president's false claim of a crisis on the border," Pelosi told a conference call Friday from Laredo, Texas, where she and fellow lawmakers were visiting a bridge connecting the US and Mexico.

Trump announced the emergency last week in order to bypass Congress, which did not approve the \$5.7 billion he wanted for his wall, a longstanding promise from his 2016 presidential campaign.

The spending bill, which he reluctantly signed in order to avert a government shutdown, included appropriations of just \$1.4 billion for fencing and other barriers along the border, but specifically not for Trump's proposed wall.

Democrats -- and some wary Republicans -- condemned Trump's unilateral move as an effort to usurp the powers of the purse, which under the US Constitution are reserved for Congress.

"We do not have a monarch, we have a separation of powers in our country," Pelosi said, adding she was urging Republicans to join Democrats in pushing back against the president.

The call to action comes as Trump and the White House press on with plans to repurpose more than \$6 billion from other sources, mostly already-allocated funds in the Defense Department budget.

Trump has repeatedly declared that rampant illegal immigration is fueling a crisis along the border, leading to higher crime and strains on public services such as health care.

The ports are in the Huthi-held west of the country. The agreement also sets out free access to the grain warehouses at Red Sea Mills, under control of the Saudi-backed government forces.

The UN has not had access to the grain depots since September and estimates that the stockpiles there could be enough to feed 3.7 million people for a month.

The Security Council members also "expressed concern at continued reports of violations of the ceasefire" which has been in place since December.

"They called on the parties to seize this opportunity to move towards sustainable peace by exercising restraint, de-escalating tensions, honoring their commitment to the Stockholm Agreement and moving forward with its swift implementation."

About 80 percent of Yemen's population, or around 24 million people, are in need of food aid, including 10 million who are one step away from famine, according to the UN.

The country's economy has been brought to its knees by restrictions placed by the Saudi-backed government for deliveries of imports. The war has cost an estimated 10,000 lives since it began in March 2015.