



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina meets the pilot, co-pilot and crew member of the Biman aircraft which was tried to be hijacked on February 24. PHOTO: BSS

PM terms

FROM PAGE 2
situation every minute during that episode and that her biggest concern was the security of the passengers, pilots and crew.
"I had issued directives for safe evacuation of all passengers, pilots and crews," she added.

Jubo League

FROM PAGE 2
After conducting election campaign, Khalek, along with other supporters of the party nominated candidate, was taking his meal at Chukaibari Union Parishad around 11:30pm, said Aminul Islam, officer-in-charge of Dewanganj Police Station.

At that time, supporters of AL rebel candidate Solaiman Hossain attacked them and opened fire, killing Khalek on the spot and injuring five others, he said.

Three of them sustained bullet injuries.

Bullet-hit Muslim, 40, Rubel, 30, and Anar Ali, 48, were admitted to Jamalpur General Hospital and two others to Dewanganj Upazila Health Complex, said the police official.

A murder case was filed against 31 people, including Solaiman, with Dewanganj Police Station yesterday morning.

Solaiman went into hiding after the incident, police said.

Police arrested one of the accused.

Journalist

FROM PAGE 2
Meanwhile, President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed profound shock and sorrow over the death. They prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and expressed sympathy for his bereaved family members.

Alamgir's journalism career started from his student life through joining the first child-teen weekly Kishore Bangla. He worked there as a co-editor from 1980 to 1984.

Then he worked with Dainik Janata, Banglar Bani, Daily Azad and Daily Sangbad. He was involved with Bangla daily Prothom Alo from November 1998 to September 2001.

Then he started working in the television media. He worked at Channel 1 as the Chief News Editor, Ekushey Television as the Head of News, Jamuna Television as the Director (News), and Maasranga Television as the Head of News.

Alamgir also served as the president and the general secretary of Dhaka Union of Journalists.

He was buried at a graveyard at sector 12 in capital's Uttara after four namaz-e-janazas at Goran, his ancestral house, PIB, his last workplace, Jatiya Press Club and Uttara, an official of PIB told The Daily Star.

Chinese rights lawyer disappears after release

AFP, Beijing

A prominent Chinese human rights lawyer went missing after he was scheduled to be released from jail yesterday following a two-year prison sentence for state subversion charges, said rights activists.

Jiang Tianyong -- who had taken on many high-profile cases including those of Falun Gong practitioners and Tibetan protesters -- was one of more than 200 lawyers and activists detained since 2015 in a sweep aimed at courtroom critics of Communist authorities.

Supporters of Jiang, who traveled to the No.2 Henan prison where Jiang was held, told AFP that police outside the jail said the 47-year-old lawyer was "taken away" but did not specify by who.

"Police officers drove away people who went near the entrance of the prison," said Yuan Shanshan, the wife of human rights lawyer Xie Yanyi, who was also targeted in what is now known as the "709" crackdown because arrests started on July 9, 2015.

Saudi sisters appeal for safety as HK clock ticks down

AFP, Hong Kong

Two Saudi sisters marooned in Hong Kong after fleeing their family appealed to authorities not to deport them while they seek sanctuary in a third country as the clock ticked down yesterday on their permission to stay.

The siblings are the latest example of Saudi women escaping the ultra-conservative kingdom only to find themselves stranded in foreign cities and making public appeals for their safety.

The young women, aged 20 and 18, said they made a break from an abusive family during a holiday in Sri Lanka last September, with the intention of heading for Australia.

But they only made it as far as Hong Kong.

The two women -- who use the aliases Reem and Rawan -- said they were intercepted by Saudi consular officials at Hong Kong's airport and had their air tickets cancelled.

Fearful they might be abducted, they entered Hong Kong as visitors where they say they have had to change locations 13 times to stay hidden. Their passports were later revoked.

Michael Vidler, a lawyer for the pair, said city immigration authorities had previously indicated the pair would be "tolerated" until February 28.

As that deadline loomed they issued a fresh appeal yesterday asking authorities to allow them to remain as "tolerated overstayers" while they seek "emergency rescue visas to a third country".

"We are in fear every day we are in

Hong Kong," the two sisters said in a statement posted late yesterday on the Facebook page of their lawyer's firm.

"We want to leave to a third country place of safety as soon as possible. We hope that this will happen soon and that the Hong Kong government will continue to allow us to stay here until then," they added.

Immigration authorities in Hong Kong have so far refused to comment on the case. The city itself has a poor record on refugees, only granting sanctuary to less than one percent of claimants.

The two women told AFP last week that chronic physical abuse by male family members prompted them to flee. They said they had also renounced Islam, a crime technically punishable by death in Saudi Arabia.

Fat rat rescued

FROM PAGE 20
that way. And we knew we needed to get help."

Rescuers blamed the rotund rodent's "winterspeck", which translates as "winter bacon" or "winter fat", for landing it in the sticky situation.

The local fire brigade said it had dispatched firefighters to the incident, who were able to remove the drain cover, before pushing the rodent's rear through the gap.

"To free it gently, the grate was raised by the fire brigade, so the rat could be removed from the other side," Berufstierrettung Rhein Neckar said in a statement. "The rat was released unharmed."

Crackdown begins

FROM PAGE 1
Polymer Industries were disconnected for storing polypropylene, a flammable chemical.

"Storing or using such flammable substances at factories in a residential area is banned. They [owners] were asked to relocate [their establishments] by February 27. Since they had not, we have taken actions," Commodore Zahid told reporters.

As two factory officials sought more time to relocate their factories, Zahid said, "You had not done this in the last nine years. You were asked to leave after Nimtoli fire, but you haven't. Now, stop working and leave."

On Boubazar lane, the taskforce entered Santo Metal Industries. As per its trade licence, the factory was supposed to be in Mitford area, but it has been operating there.

The factory has no environmental clearance and was caught using illegal polythene. Its clearance from the fire service had expired in June 2016, officials said.

Across the street from Santo Metal, the taskforce found a locked building full of polythene and disconnected its utility lines.

As the taskforce was about to wrap up its drive around 1:30pm, it found Rita Plastic, a factory producing different poultry farm equipment.

Massive piles of plastic materials were found in the basement and on ground floor while tenants lived on the first floor. The kitchen of an adjacent building is dangerously close to the building, officials said.

Saiful Ashraf, assistant director of the Department of Environment [DoE], told this newspaper that none of the penalised factories had the required environmental clearance.

The DoE has not been issuing environmental clearance for factories in Old Dhaka since Nimtoli fire, he said.

A fire service official said most of the penalised factories did not have fire service clearance either.

Mahmud Ashik Kabir, assistant inspector of the explosives department, said in most cases, the taskforce

found PVC and polypropylene materials that intensify a fire.

Commodore Zahid said utility lines would remain disconnected until they moved from Old Dhaka.

ISLAMBAGH DRIVE
Another team led by Brig Gen Sharif Ahmed, chief health officer of DSCC, disconnected utility lines of eight buildings that housed many chemical warehouses and a shoe factory in Islambagh area of the old town.

Chemical warehouses will not be allowed in Old Dhaka's residential area, he said and urged owners to relocate the facilities by tomorrow or face legal actions.

The team first snapped the utility lines of two buildings housing warehouses of calcium carbonate.

When Farid Uddin, owner of the warehouses, said calcium carbonate was not in a government list of 29 "dangerous chemicals", Sharif said no warehouse would be allowed there.

The team also found a shoe factory running without any environmental clearance.

Abu Motaleb, director of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, told the officials that shoe factories were not in the list.

Asked about the environmental clearance, Motaleb said almost none of the factories in Islambagh had it.

The team then disconnected the utility lines of the building.

Commodore Zahid said anyone found storing dangerous chemicals would be arrested.

Locals who gathered during the drive told reporters that such actions didn't yield lasting result because of a lack of continuous monitoring.

Engineer Abdur Sobhan, general secretary of Poribesh Bachao Andolon, said, "Lack of continuous monitoring will create scope for them [penalised factories or warehouses] to return."

Besides the city corporation, the departments of environment and explosives must play their roles too, he added.

MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

Dhaka lays importance on geopolitics

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has underscored the importance of geopolitics to improve global migration governance in the context of the Rohingya humanitarian crisis.

Speaking as a panelist at the "High-level Debate on International Migration and Development", Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque on Wednesday shared Bangladesh's National Migration Framework with the audience.

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, president of the 73rd UN General Assembly, convened the meeting as part of Migration Week at the UN headquarters in New York yesterday, said a press release of the Bangladesh permanent mission to the UN.

Prior to participating in the event, Shahidul moderated a high-level briefing session, organised by the co-chairs of the Friends of Migration.

He informed the audience about the usefulness of Bangladesh's National Migration Framework in solving complex issues such as mixed migration, human trafficking, and irregular migration through a comprehensive approach.

His idea of dealing human mobility comprehensively under such a framework received sincere appreciation from the IOM director general, Ireland's permanent representative to the UN and many others.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh foreign secretary held a meeting with UNGA President María on the sidelines of the UN Migration Week.

María lauded Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's proactive leadership on issues pertaining to climate change, culture of peace and Rohingya humanitarian crisis.

She also praised Bangladesh's responsible role as the chair of the "Platform on Disaster Displacement" in protecting the safety, dignity and rights of the people displaced as a result of climate change.

Shahidul invited María to attend a multi-stakeholder conference on migration, to be held in Cox's Bazar in May.

The UNGA president lauded Bangladesh for attaching high importance to multilateralism and acknowledged its constructive engagement in various UN discussions.

The foreign secretary also took part in a day-long event titled "Expert symposium on international migration and development", organised by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

He announced that a multi-stakeholder event on migration would be hosted by the Bangladesh government in Cox's Bazar in May and all the stakeholders would work actively to combat the challenges of implementing both the Global Compact on Migration and Global Compact on Refugees.

Questionable

FROM PAGE 1
having snacks, sitting beside the policeman.

This was how the polling officials and law enforcers had passed their time in the school during the by-polls day because of a dearth of voters.

"What will we do if the voters do not come to the centre?" asked the Ansar woman after she woke up being poked by his colleague when this correspondent took snaps.

Asked, the polling officials, who were chatting over phones, echoed the Ansar woman.

Seeking anonymity, an assistant presiding officer said, "I never saw such a poor presence of voters."

The four centres, dedicated to only female voters, had a total of 9586 voters. However, only 92 votes were cast in the centres till 11:30am. Of the four centres, two got one vote each till that time while 20 votes were cast in another centre.

Seventy voters cast their ballots in the fourth centre till the time, according to polling officials.

This correspondent saw only two females casting their votes during his half-an-hour stay on the school compound.

The ballot boxes in several booths of the centers were found totally empty.

Besides, presence of males, carrying badges of boat, was much higher than that of voters till 1:30pm at the school compound, although the centres there were dedicated to female voters only.

This correspondent stayed at the entrance of the school till 1:30pm. Till the time, the number of females who entered the compound was only 12.

However, when the voting ended at 4:00pm, the number of votes cast in the voting centres was much higher.

Of the four centres, the first three got 889, 377 and 473 votes respectively. The number of votes cast in the fourth centre could not be known.

Kishore Kumar Das, presiding officer of one of the centres, said people swarmed into the polling centres after 2:15pm and most of the votes were cast after that time.

Ominous

FROM PAGE 1
casting ballots as the election result was almost predetermined. Besides, the Election Commission (EC) and the candidates have also failed to attract voters to the polling centres.

"In the previous elections, people were deprived of casting their votes and the EC did not play its due role. As a result, people have lost faith in the country's electoral system," said former election commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hussain.

"It is an ominous sign for the country's democracy," he added.

Tofail Ahmed, a local government expert, said, "A new trend has been set in the country's electoral system; and that is the voting will take place no matter who is joining and who is boycotting."

Earlier, a person could vote for the candidate of his choice, but now it has turned out that an individual's vote is cast by the choice of someone else, Tofail added.

"Why people will cast their votes? What is the rationality of voting as they know who is going to be elected as the mayor? It is already decided," Tofail also said.

The by-election lost its appeal as the BNP and most other parties had boycotted it alleging that a free and fair election was not possible under the

incumbent EC and the government.

Asked why the voter turnout in the poll was low, noted right activist Sultana Kamal said, "People feel that they have no role to play in the electoral process. They feel totally disconnected from the process."

She also warned that the country's democracy would be in a deeper crisis if such a situation continued.

She also asked the EC, political parties and the state to bring back people's confidence in the electoral system.

The poor presence of voter was the talk of the town yesterday. Even the Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda also admitted that the presence of voters was low in the morning.

After casting his vote in Uttara Huda said it was the responsibility of the candidates and political parties, not the EC, to bring voters to the polling centers.

Badiul Alam Majumdar, Secretary of Sushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan), termed yesterday's election as a "mere formality to elect someone".

Pointing out the reasons for low turnout, Majumdar said firstly, people have lost their trust in the electoral system and secondly, the outcome of the election was pre-determined.

Kurdish forces poised

FROM PAGE 20
The SDF also announced yesterday its forces had secured the release of 24 of their comrades who had been captured by the jihadists but did not specify how.

There has been little fighting recently, with the use of human shields by the jihadists preventing major air raids to prepare for a ground assault.

The US-backed SDF is ready to move from the west and north of Baghouz while the Syrian regime fighters and Iraqi paramilitaries sealing the siege are stationed across the river and border.

Accounts from women who have left the enclave in recent days suggest IS is allowing many families to go, sending them to a hill from which they can walk to an assembly point and hand themselves over.

"We have been waiting here a long time for the vehicles that will take us out," said Nadia al-Hamid, a woman from the nearby city of Mayadin.

"Some of the Islamic State fighters say they want to die there," she said, claiming only foreign jihadists are left inside.

Thousands of women like Nadia, usually veiled in black from head to toe and their arms loaded with scruffy infants and bulging bags, have been trucked to the camp of Al-Hol in recent days.

The wave of arrivals has overwhelmed the Kurdish authorities, who have urged the world to step up the aid

effort.

SLEEPING ROUGH
Many of the civilians who spent months holed up in the last dreg of the "caliphate" proclaimed almost five years ago, are in bad physical and mental health.

"There have been more than 100 cases of diarrhoea among new arrivals and efforts are ongoing to prevent an outbreak of dysentery," the International Rescue Committee said.

"We are now seeing thousands of people sleeping rough in the arrivals area at the camp, where they are exposed to the cold, wind and rain," said Misty Buswell, the IRC's Middle East advocacy director.

"Many of the children are having to cope without shoes or coats," she added.

Save the Children has also said much more should be done to treat the trauma suffered by the hundreds of children emerging from the ruins of the IS "caliphate".

Many of them have witnessed atrocities such as beheadings and stonings, experienced hunger and lived through daily bombardment, the British charity said.

Among the men suspected of being IS fighters, some are sent to different camps in the northeastern region of Syria administered by the Kurds.

Detained jihadists' countries of origin are reluctant to repatriate them, fearing a public backlash and security threats.

US, North Korea

FROM PAGE 20
missile testing -- something he previously identified as a yardstick for success -- and reiterated their "close relationship".

"We just like each other... there's a warmth that we have and I hope that stays, I think it will," he said.

'MAJOR FAILURE'

The outcome in Hanoi fell far short of the pre-meeting expectations and hopes, after critics said their initial historic meeting in Singapore was more style over substance.

The leaders walked away with no set plans for a third meeting, though Trump said he hopes to see Kim again soon.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who accompanied Trump to Vietnam, said both sides "need to regroup" before agreeing to another meeting, adding: "My sense is it will take a little while."

Pompeo, who flew to the Philippines after leaving Vietnam, said there was much goodwill between Trump and Kim, and "there's still a basis for believing that we can move forward" even though the Hanoi talks had fallen short.

Ankit Panda, from the Federation of American Scientists, warned on Twitter that the White House's expectation of further talks "does not have to be a perception shared in North Korea".

"Kim may have left irate, for all we know. He may have no intention of continuing this," added Panda.

In the original White House programme, a "Joint Agreement Signing Ceremony" had been scheduled in Hanoi and a working lunch for the leaders.

Instead both men left the summit venue without signing anything and Trump moved up his news conference by two hours.

"This is a major failure," tweeted Joe Cirincione, president of the Ploughshares Fund peace foundation, saying it showed the limit of summitry, with "not enough time or staff" to work out a deal.

Trump flew around the world for the meeting and Kim undertook a mammoth two-and-a-half-day trek through China in his olive green train, travelling 4,000 kilometres (2,500 miles).

Kim will stay on in Vietnam for a state visit, which will include a wreath-laying ceremony at the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum, before his expected departure tomorrow.

The US president, who touted his