



A Nepali child eats next to the debris of damaged homes at Purainiya village in Nepal's southern Bara district near Birgunj following a rare spring storm. A freak storm tore down houses and overturned cars and trucks as it swept across southern Nepal, killing at least 27 people and leaving more than 600 injured. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

# One killed, 20 hurt in post-polls violence

OUR CORRESPONDENTS, Patuakhali and Brahmanbaria

At least one person was killed and more than 21 were injured in post-upazila polls violence in Brahmanbaria and Barguna districts Monday night.

A youth was killed and at least five others were injured during a clash between the supporters of a newly elected chairman and his defeated rival at Kurighat village under Nabinagar upazila in Brahmanbaria.

Saidul Islam, 36, a supporter of Awami League rebel and independent candidate Moniruzzaman Monir, who won the upazila election at Nabinagar, was stabbed to death, reports our correspondent in Brahmanbaria.

Saidul, who hailed from Nandura village of Natghar union, was severely stabbed when he took part in a victory rally at Kurighat village around 8:00pm, locals said.

They added Saidul had an altercation with Musa Mia and Yousuf Miah, supporters of AL candidate Kazi Jahir Uddin on the voting day on March 31. Saidul opposed their appointment as polling officers of the AL candidate.

Mohsin Mia, supporter of Moniruzzaman, said they were preparing for a victory rally when a group of rival people swooped on them with lethal weapons.

"Saidul was stabbed in his chest by a sharp weapon and he died on way to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital," added Mohsin.

Five others including Mohsin were undergoing treatment at the same hospital.

Officer-in-Charge of Nabinagar police Ranjeet Roy said law enforcers rushed to the spot and detained one Humayun Mia.

In Barguna, at least 16 were injured in a clash between the supporters of Golam Sarwar Forkan, the newly elected chairman and defeated candidate Shamsuddin Saju at Arpangashia Bazar under Amtali upazila.

Both contested the March 31 polls as independent candidates, reports our correspondent in Patuakhali.

Of the injured, five were sent to Barishal Sher-E-Bangla Medical College Hospital and five to Patuakhali General Hospital. The rest were undergoing treatment at Amtali Upazila Health Complex.

Nurul Islam, OC (investigation) of Amtali police, said a team of law enforcers rushed to the scene and brought the situation under control.

Seven people were arrested for their involvement in the clash, he added.

# India, Pak

FROM PAGE 16 There was also firing and shelling by Pakistan troops in Shahpur sub-sector in Poonch and Nowshera yesterday, they said.

In the retaliation carried out by Indian troops, seven Pakistan posts across the LoC in Rakhchikri and Rawalakote forward areas of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) were destroyed, they said, adding there have been several casualties on the Pakistan side.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) of Pakistan has said three Pakistan Army soldiers were killed yesterday in retaliation carried out by Indian forces along the LoC, reported PTI.

Subedar Mohammad Aziz from Jhang, Lance Havaldar Aziz Ullah from Noshero Feroz, and Sepoy Shahid Mansib from Abbottabad embraced martyrdom while one soldier got injured, said the military's media wing.

The ISPR said that the Army responded to Indian firing in a befitting manner, adding there were reports of casualties on Indian side of the LoC.

Pakistan has been using heavy weaponry and 120 mm mortar bombs to target civilian areas along the LoC in Poonch, triggering panic among villagers.

Amid the ongoing shelling by Pakistan, people have been advised to stay indoors, the officials said.

Tensions have been running high between India and Pakistan in the wake of a suicide attack on an Indian military convoy in Pulwama district of Indian-occupied Kashmir on February 14, which killed more than 40 paramilitary troops.

In what was the most serious military crisis in South Asia since 2008, Indian and Pakistani warplanes engaged in a dogfight on February 27, a day after a raid by Indian jet fighters on what New Delhi said was a militant camp in Pakistan. Islamabad denied any militant camp exists in the area and said the Indian bombs exploded on an empty hillside.

Pakistan downed an Indian plane for violating its airspace and captured its pilot after he ejected in AJK, reported Dawn online.

The tensions de-escalated after Prime Minister Imran Khan decided to release the Indian pilot as a peace gesture, and following concerted diplomatic efforts by countries including the United States, China and the UAE.

Nevertheless, ceasefire violations along the de-factor border have been occurring regularly.

# Buildings outside Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1

Contacted, Brig Gen (ret'd) Abu Nayeem Md Shahidullah, former director general of Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence, said, "Whenever there is a fire incident, the victims are the first responders. They should know what to do right away."

"It's clear from the study that 90 percent of the people in Bangladesh are not trained to do much in case of a fire."

**SITUATION IN DIVISIONAL CITIES** The bodies tasked with overseeing the matter -- either city corporations or city development authorities -- face manpower crisis in overseeing fire safety.

In Rajshahi city, there are around 18,000 buildings, including 163 high rises, approved by the Rajshahi Development Authority.

But both the city corporation and the city development authority lack the capacity to examine fire safety in those buildings, said officials from the authorities.

"Before approving plans for high rises, Rajshahi Development Authority requires checking whether the buildings have approval from the fire department," said RDA's Authorised Officer Abul Kalam Azad.

"But once the buildings are constructed, the RDA can't go and see for itself whether the plans from the department have been implemented," he said.

The RDA requires 30 to 50 employees to oversee the matter but it has only three, said its sources.

According to the Rajshahi City Corporation, the city has around 60,000 households with no fire safety at all.

Around 97 percent high-rise buildings in Chattogram city lack adequate fire safety measures, posing a serious risk of casualties in case of fire, according to a survey conducted by the Fire Service and Civil Defence.

The 2018 survey further revealed that 93 percent high rises did not even take "no objection certificates" from the fire service, said its officials.

In Sylhet city, there are around 54,000 holdings and around 200-250 buildings have more than six floors, according to the city corporation.

Nur Azizur Rahman, chief engineer of Sylhet City Corporation, said fire safety measures are absent in most of the high rises and that the fire department should regularly monitor the issue.

There are around 71,000 houses in

Khulna City Corporation areas. Among them, 49 are high rises, said Md Wahiduzzaman Khan, revenue officer of KCC.

Every year, around 1,200 to 1,400 building plans are approved by the Khulna Development Authority, said Shamim Zihad, authorized officer of KDA.

"We do not look after the fire safety issue. It is taken care of by the Fire and Civil Defence," he said.

In 2017, 45 people were killed in 18,105 fire incidents across the country. The incidents caused a loss of nearly Tk 257 crore. Last year, at least 130 people died in 19,642 fire incidents; the monetary loss was Tk 385 crore.

In the first three months of this year, fire has already claimed at least 96 lives in the capital -- 71 in Chawkbazar and 26 in Banani.

Talking on the safety, experts said any building has to maintain three kinds of safety measures -- structural, electrical and fire protection.

On average, Tk 1.5 crore is needed to ensure fire safety at a high rise. Besides, regular maintenance requires a good amount of money.

"Because of this, building owners and developers tend to ignore the extremely crucial issue," said Brig Gen (ret'd) Shahidullah.

He also said owners often get approval for their buildings by showing the authorities the plans given by the fire department.

"It takes three to five years to erect a high rise and the fire department does not have the resources to check whether the building implemented the plans. The owners take advantage of this," he said.

He suggested that the government makes it mandatory for buildings to ensure fire safety for getting utility connections.

Talking to The Daily Star, Brig Gen (ret'd) Ali Ahmed Khan, the immediate past director general of the fire service, said making schools and colleges ready to fight fire does not require huge investments.

"Wide staircases, fire escape routes, extinguishers, water reservoirs and installing some basic equipment are good enough," he said.

Ali also said that government and individual initiatives in this regard should be the first and foremost priority now.

# Khaleda

FROM PAGE 2

Last year, a debate raged between the government and the BNP about whether Khaleda would be treated at BSMMU or her preferred United Hospital.

Though the BNP chief initially refused to take treatment at BSMMU, she finally agreed and was shifted there on October 6 that year.

Khaleda has been in jail since February 8 last year when a special court awarded her five years in prison in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

The High Court later extended her jail term to 10 years in the case. She was also convicted in the Zia Charitable Trust graft case and handed a seven-year term.

# Jute mill workers

FROM PAGE 2

by March 28. But they had failed to do it. So, the workers had no alternative to this demonstration, he added.

Besides the two mills, seven other mills are MM Jute Mills, KMD Jute Mills, RR Jute Mills, Gul Ahamed Jute Mills, Galaxa Habib Jute Mills, Dhaka Carpet and Mill Furnishings.

In Khulna and Jashore, around 40,000 workers under the banner of collective bargaining agent and Non-CBA Oikya Parishad of nine state-owned jute mills in this region staged demonstrations and blockaded roads and railways at different points in the two districts around 8:00am, adds our Khulna correspondent.

Three trains -- Chitra Express, Rocket Express and Mohananda Express -- could not leave the Khulna Railway Station in the morning due to the blockade, said Manik Chandra Sarker, manager of the railway station.

"If our demands are not met, we will go for a tougher movement," said Sahanaj Sharmi, a workers' leader in Khulna.

# Three more

FROM PAGE 1

Court-2 with a seven-day remand plea. Judge Masfiqul Haque ordered to send the duo to jail and fix today for hearing the remand petition.

Resident Medical Officer of Noakhali General Hospital Syed Mohiuddin Abdul Azim said the victim underwent all the required medical tests.

It may take some time to prepare the final reports, he added.

The woman, aged about 48, was allegedly gang-raped in Noakhali's Subarnachar upazila on Sunday evening over "campaigning for an upazila vice chairman candidate".

The incident happened barely three months after a mother of four was gang-raped by 10-12 people in the same area allegedly for voting for "sheaf of paddy" in the December 30 national election.

# Suprobhat bus

FROM PAGE 2

and torching of the vehicle. He added that he ran over and killed Abrar, a first-year honours student at Bangladesh University of Professionals, near the Bashundhara Residential Area around 7:30am on March 19.

Metropolitan Magistrate Sadrir Yasir Ahsan Chowdhury recorded the confessional statement of Yasin after Detective Branch Inspector Kazi Shariful Islam placed him before the court.

Another Metropolitan Magistrate Md Sarafuzzaman Ansary recorded the statement of bus helper Mohammad Ibrahim where he admitted that he was on the bus when Sirajul was steering the bus and hit the college girl. But he was not on the bus when conductor Yasin was driving the vehicle that killed Abrar.

After recording their confessional statements, both the conductor and the helper were sent to Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj.

On March 28, driver Sirajul confessed to a magistrate that conductor Yasin was at the wheel and killed Abrar after he hit the college girl.

# BCL activists assault

FROM PAGE 1

Monday's attack on Farid Hasan, who contested the March 11 hall union polls as an independent candidate for the post of general secretary.

They later went to Farid's room (no-159) where some BCL men, led by its hall unit President Tahsan Ahmed Rasel and General Secretary Mehedi Hasan Taposh, confined Nur and Akhtar.

SM hall union VP Kamal Hossen and General Secretary Zulias Cizar hurled abuse at Nur for not taking permission before entering the hall, according to witnesses.

At one stage, Kamal assaulted Nur and some other BCL men beat up a companion of the Ducsu VP.

The BCL activists also threw eggs and trash at Shamsunnahar Hall union VP Emi, Shotontro Jote leader Auroni Semonti Khan and DU Chhatra Federation President Umme Habiba Benojir, who were accompanying Nur.

Around 6:15pm, hall Provost Prof Mahbul Alam Joarder went to the room and tried to rescue Nur, but the BCL men barred him.

The hall union leaders, including the VP, demanded Nur sign a bond saying that he would never enter the hall again without their permission. But the Ducsu VP refused to comply.

The standoff continued till around 7:00pm when the provost finally managed to get Nur out of the room.

Some eggs thrown at Nur and his fellow students hit the provost when he was coming out of the room.

A few students alleged that BCL activists beat up some female protesters who were standing outside the main entrance to the dormitory.

**SIT-IN BEFORE VC'S RESIDENCE** Protesters started a sit-in in front of the DU vice-chancellor's residence around 7:30pm, demanding punishment of those who confined Nur and attacked Farid. They also demanded expulsion of outsiders from the SM Hall.

Around 30 students, including Ducsu VP Noor, were continuing the sit-in till filing of the report at 12:30am today.

Farid, a master's student of Urdu department, was beaten up allegedly by some BCL men on Monday night over contesting the SM Hall union polls.

He was also ousted from the hall allegedly by BCL men for the same reason days before the March 11 Ducsu

# US suspends F-35 program deliveries to Turkey

AFP, Washington

The United States said Monday it was halting all deliveries and joint work with Turkey on the F-35 fighter jet program after the Nato ally insisted on a major arms purchase from Russia.

After months of warnings, the United States said that Turkey's decision to buy Russia's S-400 missile system was incompatible with remaining part of the emblematic US warplane program.

"Until they forgo delivery of the S-400, the United States has suspended deliveries and activities associated with the stand-up of Turkey's F-35 operational capability," Pentagon chief spokesman Charles E. Summers Jr. said.

"Should Turkey procure the S-400, their continued participation in the F-35 program is at risk," he said in a statement.

US officials have voiced concern that, with Turkey in both camps, Russia could obtain F-35 data to improve the accuracy of the S-400 against Western aircraft.

The Pentagon said that it had started to look at secondary sources to produce parts for F-35s that were being developed in Turkey.

# Singapore gets its first

FROM PAGE 16

It's the first time a "net zero energy building" has been built from scratch in the city-state.

Home to the university's School of Design and Environment, the building features an overhanging roof to create extra shade and help keep rooms cool.

Covering the roof are more than 1,200 solar panels that should generate about 500 megawatts of energy a year, slightly more than the faculty and its students are expected to use, according to Lam Khee Poh, dean of the school.

Any excess electricity that might be generated is fed into the school's main power grid, which also acts as a backup supply for the building.

"Everything is plugged back into the grid," said Lam. "Whatever we collect, we bank it in, and then we draw it out for usage. So we keep account of how much comes in and how much goes out every day."

Still, researchers at the school kept working on prototype designs and in 2016 the university broke ground on the new building.

And despite the initial scepticism, the dean says he's been encouraged by feedback so far.

"The message is spreading. It can be done," he said.

Ex-CJ SK Sinha

FROM PAGE 2

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# No tax hike

FROM PAGE 1

"We have a lot of scope for widening the tax net. We will use this opportunity," he mentioned.

Kamal also said multiple rates will be introduced in the new VAT law from the next fiscal year, and that 15 percent VAT will be imposed at the import stage.

Fresh university graduates will be recruited under special arrangements for collecting VAT from businesses.

"We will train fresh graduates in VAT collection, and I am hopeful that they can perform well," the minister added.

About the banking sector, the minister said the government has a plan to raise the paid-up capital for a bank to Tk 1,000 crore and for an insurance company to Tk 500 crore.

He, however, did not say when the raise will come into force.

Currently, the paid-up capital for a bank is Tk 400 crore and for an insurance company Tk 30 crore.

On relaxing the rescheduling policy for bank loan defaulters, the minister said if businesspeople are sent to jail, there will be no business.

An "exit policy" should be in place so that they can free themselves from the

# burden of defaulted loans.

Citing his own case as an example the minister said he had lost Tk 1,800 crore when he was arrested during the tenure of a caretaker government.

"I lost the amount because I was in jail," Kamal said.

All people, government assets and also private sector assets such as commercial buildings will be brought under insurance coverage, he noted.

Mega projects, including the Padma Bridge, will also be brought under the coverage, he added.

"The government plans to bring the mega projects under the insurance coverage so that important installations can be taken care of in case of a disaster."

The minister also said he will take steps to strengthen the capital market so that it can generate employment and attract investment.

Kamal said he will sit with the stakeholders of bourses every month to discuss ways to boost the markets.

He also mentioned that if needed, the government will even offer tax benefits to the stakeholders for the revival of the capital market.

# Service shut

FROM PAGE 16

Dhaka route also remains inoperative. Aboni has been running the show since 1999 but recently Arun started his new venture and got the lease for Shouhardo Paribahan on the Kolkata-Dhaka-Kolkata route.

The lease rate for this route ranges from Rs 80,000 to Rs 1 lakh a month but Arun's company paid Rs 6 lakh per bus every month to get the lease.

However, investigations have revealed that the state government of West Bengal suspended the lease on March 19 as the company failed to pay the lease money regularly. One bus could not even cross the border on that date for lacking clearance from the government.

This correspondent talked to transport department officials and workers of different tiers of both the factions of Shyamoli Paribahan and came to know that a familial conflict over the ownership was to blame for the situation.

Two buses of Shyamoli Jatri Paribahan, each worth Rs 4 crore, are lying in garage. Four drivers, eight supervisors, and 10 helpers are now jobless.

Two buses of Shyamoli Paribahan are also lying idle at the terminals.

When contacted, Aboni Ghose said, "My own brother has caused this massive damage to our family business by initiating an unhealthy competition. This commercial imbalance was created because one organisation, out of the blue, started paying Rs 6 lakh whereas the rate is Rs 1 lakh for the route."

Contacted, Arun Kumar Ghose admitted that he did invest a huge sum to win the contract. "I thought it would bring profit but after some days, I found that this route is unprofitable," he told this paper.

He further said that he was gradually clearing his dues through cheques.

None of the governments has made

a comment over the impasse in the last two days.

One official of the West Bengal transport department, on condition of anonymity, said, they could not float tender because of the approaching national elections in India. Therefore, the service may not resume before the elections.

Although Shouhardo Paribahan has been on halt, Shyamoli Jatri Paribahan is carrying passengers on the Kolkata-Khulna-Dhaka-Kolkata route.

Counter Manager of the Paribahan, Shoumik Bhowmick said, "Two buses are in operation. They are leaving Kolkata and going to Dhaka via Khulna every day. Passengers are not being charged extra for that."

"This has triggered anger among passengers and we are regularly facing the wrath," added Bhowmick.

One passenger of the route, Sujan Chowdhury, said, "It is surprising that the service on this international route is not available. The government must look into it."

The Daily Star has learnt that both Shyamoli Private Ltd and Shyamoli Jatri Paribahan are owned by Indian nationals. They are implementing the agreement as "passenger carriers" of India.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority and West Bengal Transport Corporation implemented the lease.

As per the agreement, the private companies operating under these agencies get leases from respective countries. Therefore, they pay the license fees to the respective governments.

The two buses on Dhaka-Kolkata route operate three days a week. Shyamoli Jatri Paribahan is running two buses on the Kolkata-Khulna-Dhaka-Kolkata route. About 160 passengers regularly travel on the route. Some 60 passengers on the Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala route daily.