

Sherpa climbs Everest twice in a week for record 24th

AFP, Kathmandu

Only last week Nepali mountain guide Kami Rita Sherpa set a new record by climbing Everest a 23rd time. On Tuesday for good measure he did it again, expedition organisers said.

"This is historic. He made his record climb this morning, guiding a team of Indian police," Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks told AFP.

A guide for more than two decades, Sherpa first summited the 8,848-metre (29,029-foot) peak, the world's highest, in 1994 while working for a commercial expedition.

In the 25 years since, the 49-year-old has made 35 summits on five 8,000-metre peaks, including the world's second-highest mountain, K2 in Pakistan.

Last year he ascended Everest for the 22nd time, breaking the previous record of 21 summits he shared with two other Sherpa climbers, both of whom have retired.

Returning last week to a colourful welcome at base camp after his 23rd climb, Sherpa had already said that he wanted to go up for a second time this season.

"I am very happy and proud, I think I might go up the mountain again this season," he had said over a crackly phone line after his descent.

The accomplished climber has often said he did not intend to make records, but accumulated his summits in course of his work as a guide.

"I did not climb for world records, I was just working. I did not even know you could set records earlier," he said last month before setting off for Everest base camp.

With their unique ability to work in a low-oxygen, high-altitude atmosphere, ethnic Sherpa guides are the backbone of Nepal's climbing industry, helping clients and hauling equipment up Himalayan peaks.

Mountaineering has become a lucrative business since Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay made the first ascent of Everest in 1953.

Nepal has issued a record 381 permits costing \$11,000 each for this year's spring climbing season, sparking fears of bottlenecks en route to the summit if poor weather cuts down the number of climbing days.

Most Everest hopefuls are escorted by a Nepali guide, meaning over 750 climbers will tread the same path to the top in the coming weeks.

And at least 140 others are preparing to scale Everest from the northern flank in Tibet, according to expedition operators. This could take the total past last year's record of 807 people reaching the summit.

Many Himalayan mountains -- including Everest -- are at peak climbing season, with the window of good weather between late April and the end of May.

Govt plans

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The decreasing remittance inflow has also resulted in the country's foreign reserve not growing.

On May 15, the reserve was US\$31.12 billion down from US\$32.94 billion on June 30 last year.

The government could not fix the mechanism to give such incentives earlier, fearing misuse of the fund reserved for it.

Finance ministry officials said they would prepare a regulation soon to ensure the fund allocated as incentive for migrant workers cannot be misused.

15 survivors

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his cousin landed and he had been waiting to receive since 10:00am. Fahe left around 9:00pm as the immigration police did not allow Himal of Noakhali to leave.

The Bangladesh government, in cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration, brought back the 15 survivors.

The boat they were on had around 80 migrants, mostly Bangladeshis. At least 60 of them are believed to have been killed. Bodies of four Bangladeshis have been recovered so far.

According to survivors' earlier accounts, they were in the sea for about nine hours before the boat went down. In the morning, Tunisian fishermen fished them out. They were later helped by the Tunisian navy and sheltered by the Tunisian Red Crescent.

Monowara last night said she had none who could go to Dhaka to receive Rashed from the airport.

"We spent more than Tk 9 lakh to send Rashed to Italy. We are totally penniless now," she told The Daily Star.

She said she has two school-going children and her husband is sick. Her husband had sold off land and taken out loans to manage the money for Rashed.

"Baba, please help me get back the money we spent," Monowara told this correspondent while crying.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina talks to distinguished guests at an iftar party for professionals at the Gono Bhaban yesterday evening.

PHOTO: BSS

Rice prices hit 3-year low

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(DAE), rice millers and traders.

In addition, fresh imports and carryover stocks have added to the overall domestic supply, said rice millers and traders.

"We've a huge stock of rice," said Chitta Majumder, managing director of Majumder Group of Industries, which owns several rice mills.

He said prices of rice and paddy are interrelated and when the prices of paddy fall, rice prices follow suit.

Depending on quality, prices of paddy dropped as much as 23 percent during the current Boro harvesting season from the same period a year ago, according to DAM data.

Coarse paddy producers were hit the hardest followed by fine and medium grain producers as current prices are much below the government-estimated production cost of paddy at Tk 993 per maund (37.20 kilogram).

As of May 15, coarse paddy dipped to Tk 540 each maund from Tk 702 for the same quantity a year ago.

Chitta said the response for paddy from millers remains lukewarm, as they could not clear their previously purchased grains for a dearth of buyers.

"There was no large buyer in the paddy market," he said, adding, "There is no way but to export."

Nirod Boron Saha, president of the Naogaon Dhan O Chal Arathdar Babshayee Samity, an association of rice wholesalers and commission agents, said the prices were unlikely to increase soon unless millers could sell their rice from the stocks.

"Our hands are tied. The government is not willing to receive aman from us nor does the market have demand for the rice. How would we get money to buy paddy if we cannot sell [the rice]?" he asked.

Saha said there was no sign yet of the paddy market to rebound to ease the lives of tens of thousands of farmers.

"Farmers are in real trouble. They have to pay very high wages to hired workers to harvest paddy during this peak season, but they sell their produces at nearly half the production cost. It's a terrible situation," he said.

He also said the demand for rice remains low because of good harvest of Boro, the biggest crop, almost throughout the country.

He also said export could be a solution. But it may take time to find market. Government-to-Government contracts can be explored for quick exports, he added.

Md Arifur Rahman Apu, director general of Directorate General of Food, said the commerce ministry would ultimately decide on export.

He said there has been a delay in purchasing paddy from growers

because of a delay in preparing a list of the farmers.

Apu claimed that the food directorate has little to influence the paddy market. "We will buy only 12 lakh tonnes of rice and that will be added to our stock of nearly 13 lakh tonnes of cereal. We have a capacity of storing 21 lakh tonnes [of grains]," he said.

"We have instructed all our field offices to start buying paddy and rice," he said.

DAE Director of Field Services Wing Md Abdul Mueyed said the Boro rice output was likely to be 2 lakh tonnes higher to 1.97 crore tonnes this year from the previous year owing to favourable weather and DAE support.

The DAE had earlier estimated production of Aus and Aman rice crops at 29 lakh and 1.53 crore tonnes for this fiscal. Those are higher than that of the previous fiscal year.

BB patronises big defaulters

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Petitioner's lawyer Manzill Murshid told The Daily Star that following the HC order, the defaulters will not be able to have their loans rescheduled upon a down payment of 2 percent of their total loan amount.

"The status quo will continue till June 23," he added.

At the end of last year, the total defaulted loans in the banking sector stood at Tk 93,370 crore, up by 25.66 percent year-on-year, according to the BB.

The court said, "The BB has given the big loan defaulters opportunities to get further loans by rescheduling their existing ones at 9 percent interest. At the same time, it is compelling genuine businesspeople to pay 14 to 15 percent interest, which is a discrimination."

"Bangladesh Bank is an

independent entity, but how could it work in favour of the loan defaulters?" the court questioned.

It observed that the central bank is yet to implement the prime minister's instruction to bring down the lending rate for bank loans to a single digit.

During the court proceedings, M Moniruzzaman, counsel for the BB, told the court that his client has the authority to issue a notice for rescheduling bank loans.

The BB issued the notice on May 16 to bring the loan defaulters to book, he argued.

Manzill opposed Moniruzzaman's argument, saying the BB committed a fraud with the HC by issuing this notice.

The lawyer for the BB had told the HC on May 16 afternoon that the central bank would not issue any notice allowing loan defaulters

to reschedule their loans, Manzill mentioned.

But only a couple of hours later, the BB issued the notice at 4:00pm, allowing the loan defaulters to get further loans, which is a "fraudulence" with the HC, Manzill said.

Deputy Attorney General ABM Abdullah-Al-Mahmud Bashar represented the state.

HC PROCEEDINGS

On May 16, the same HC bench ordered the BB to submit by June 23 a list of names and addresses of borrowers, who defaulted on loans of over Tk 1 crore each.

It also asked the BB governor to submit to it a report by the same date with details on the money laundered to different countries and the steps taken to recover it.

The court said it would take necessary action against the BB if it

fails to submit the list and the report to it.

The HC will go on annual vacation on May 24 and reopen on June 16.

Earlier on February 13, the HRPB moved the writ petition at the HC, which issued a rule asking the authorities to explain why their failure or inaction to stop various irregularities and corruption in sanctioning loans and offering waiver of interest payments against bank loans in the last 20 years should not be declared illegal.

Those made respondents to the rule are secretaries to the Cabinet Division, the Prime Minister's Office, the finance ministry, the financial institutions division and the law ministry, the BB governor, and the chairmen of the National Board of Revenue and the Anti-Corruption Commission.

Opposition parties allege vote fraud

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emphatically and unambiguously clarify that all such reports and allegations are absolutely false, and factually incorrect," it said in a statement.

"The visuals seen viral on media do not pertain to any EVMs (electronic voting machines) used during the poll."

It also said candidates and their agents could be present in strongrooms "for 24x7 vigil at all times".

The BJP and the main opposition Congress Party, led by Rahul Gandhi, have fought the most acrimonious election campaign in decades, exchanging almost daily barbs and

insults.

A slew of exit polls released Sunday projected the BJP and its allies would win between 282 and 313 seats of the 543 available in India's lower house.

While the BJP has appeared cautiously optimistic about the projections, Congress and other opposition parties

have sought to downplay them.

Priyanka Gandhi, a popular politician who is the sister of Congress president Rahul Gandhi, has urged her party not to be disheartened by the exit polls.

"These are crafted to undermine your spirits," she said, according to the Press Trust of India.

Tigers settled before WC charge

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World Cup squad as the pacer had been shoehorned into the Ireland squad at the eleventh hour.

Even with four extra members in the Ireland squad -- Taskin, Forhad Reza, Yasir Ali and Naem Hasan -- Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's pre-tour words held true. He had said before departing for Ireland that the 15 members picked for the World Cup would be given priority, and that is what has happened. The players who played the four matches in Ireland were all from the original World Cup squad.

That Bangladesh won their maiden tournament silverware in Ireland could

be seen as a product of that settled mindset and the courage it imbued to the lesser lights of the squad. During Bangladesh's run to their maiden World Cup quarterfinal in 2015, then coach Chandika Hathurusingha and captain Mashrafe had presided over a mindset and an atmosphere that stressed on the need for togetherness, and that would not have been possible this time around if the team management kept looking for solutions outside the group that had originally been entrusted with driving Bangladesh's campaign.

Whether it was because of this trust, or in batting consultant Neil McKenzie's words the stiff competition for places, a lot of unusual suspects put their hands

up to be counted in Ireland. Taskin's candidacy was thwarted by the till-then uncapped Abu Jayed taking a five-for against Ireland in his second game. Soumya Sarkar -- against whom inconsistency used to be the most persistent charge -- hit quickfire half-centuries in each of the three matches he played.

Last but in no way least, Mosaddek Hossain was a surprise inclusion in the World Cup squad because while he has always impressed in domestic matches, he had not set the world alight in his international outings. His unbeaten 24-ball 52 in the Ireland tri-series final against the West Indies, however, did what none of his more celebrated

teammates were able to do -- deliver triumph in a tournament final.

All of this has led to a very positive vibe within the team in Leicester. Most auspiciously, it is not even the full squad that was enjoying a rest day yesterday at the Hilton Leicester. Mashrafe, their leader both spiritually and on the field, and Tamim Iqbal -- their best batsman and the member who leads them in culinary and recreational endeavours on tour -- will rejoin the team in Cardiff from May 24 after returning from a break following the Ireland triumph.

The good vibes are only about to pick up, and the selectors' decision two days before the ICC deadline for final squads could not have come at a better time.

SC believes in freedom of press

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"It has been noticed recently that some electronic and print media are giving scrolls or publishing news on ongoing cases, which is absolutely unexpected."

"Under the circumstances, it is being requested, upon orders, that all concerned refrain from publishing news

or put up scrolls about ongoing cases," the notice had read.

Soon after the notice was issued, Law Reporters Forum, a platform of reporters who cover law, human rights, and constitutional issues, had said they were saddened and shocked by the notice.

Editors Guild, Bangladesh, had also

urged the SC Secretariat to clarify its instructions to the media.

On May 19, Law Minister Anisul Huq, however, told reporters at his secretariat office that there was no bar to reporting on ongoing cases but reporters cannot give personal opinions about the cases.

"In my opinion, the notice issued

by the Supreme Court authorities on May 16 has not given any directive to stop reporting on ongoing cases. If you [reporters] come up with opinions about the ongoing cases, that will be a media trial and therefore, the learned judges concerned might feel pressured," he said.

2 shown arrested in terror case

Families claim they were picked up three years ago

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A former teacher of Lakehead Grammar School and a British-Bangladeshi were shown arrested yesterday in a case filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act, although their families claim they were picked up three years ago allegedly by law enforcers.

The Detective Branch of Police said they arrested Tehzeeb Karim, former teacher of Lakehead Grammar School and Yasin Mohammad Abdus Samad Talukder, a British-Bangladeshi, on May 17 from in front of Gausul Azar Mosque in Banani.

Family members, however, alleged that Tehzeeb went traceless from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on his return from Bangkok in the afternoon of May 17 in 2016.

Similarly, Yasin's family alleged that some people claiming to be law enforcers picked up Yasin from Kakoli bus stand on July 14 of the same year.

After the arrest, Inspector Rabiul Alam of DB South's Dhanmondi Zonal Team placed the duo before a Dhaka court last Friday, with a prayer for a 10-day remand in the case filed with Gulshan Police Station on January 30 last year.

The court fixed today for hearing of the case.

In the remand prayer, Rabiul mentioned that the direct patronisation of the two accused led to the formation of Jama'atul Muslemin, a militant organisation which follows the ideology of al Qaeda, for the first time in Bangladesh.

He also said Tehzeeb was an active member of the organisation. In 2010, the former teacher went to Yemen to meet radical preacher Anwar al-Awlaqi, a key al-Qaeda figure. While there, Tehzeeb was arrested and imprisoned for 10 months.

Tehzeeb once also visited Pakistan.

The DB inspector also mentioned in the remand prayer that the two formed an NGO, the Research Centre for Unity Development, through which they used to recruit members and expedite the militant activities of Jama'atul Muslemin.

Besides, Yasin was a follower of the Amir of Ansarullah Bangla Team Jashim Uddin Rahmani, who is also an accused in the case.

The remand prayers added that Yasin used to visit Rahmani at his Hatembagh Mosque. He would edit and upload videos of Rahmani's radical lectures on Rahmani's instructions.

According to the remand prayer, Yasin maintained close contact with Rizwan Haroon, former owner of Lakehead Grammar School and another accused in the same case.

Earlier on January 20, detectives arrested Rizwan from the capital's Dhanmondi area over his alleged link to Jama'atul Muslemin.

Contacted yesterday, Tehzeeb's mother Mumtaz Karim claimed that her son had no links with any militant group. He had become quite religious, but since 2010 he started becoming more moderate and focused on his teaching profession, she said.

Meanwhile, Yasin's mother Suraya Parveen Talukder, a retired government physician, yesterday claimed that her son was not involved in militancy. She claimed that members of law enforcing agencies took him away soon after he returned from the UK.

She said she had given an informant Tk 50 lakh to know the whereabouts of her son, although the informant was later arrested by Rab and her money was not returned.

She also said that two days after Yasin went missing, law enforcers searched her apartment and took away Yasin's laptop and computer. This made her strongly suspect that her son was taken by them.

"I was all along aware of my son's whereabouts through different sources. However, I am happy he has finally been produced before court," Suraya told The Daily Star.

EU leaders sound alarm over populist polls threat

AFP, Brussels

Two days before voting begins in European parliamentary elections, national leaders are scrambling to mobilise their supporters to resist a populist challenge.

European governments fear a good showing for eurosceptics in the vote, which begins on Thursday and runs to Sunday, will disrupt Brussels decision-making.

Opinion polls predict a significant advance for nationalist and populist forces opposed to closer European Union integration and threatening mainstream reform efforts.

French President Emmanuel Macron called the vote the most important European parliamentary election since the first in 1979 and warned the EU faces "an existential threat".