

Iran says no talks with US 'under any circumstances'

AFP, Tehran

Iran will not hold talks with the United States "under any circumstances" while the rights of the Islamic republic are not respected, said an official quoted yesterday by state media.

"We have said clearly... as long as the rights of our nation are not satisfied, as long as words don't change into action, our path will stay the same as now," said Keyvan Khosravi, spokesman of the Supreme National Security Council.

"There will be no talks under any circumstances," he was quoted as saying by the official state news agency IRNA.

Khosravi said there had been an uptick in official delegations travelling to Tehran from various capitals, although "most of them are coming on behalf of America".

"Without exception we have responded with the message of the Iranian nation's strength, reason and resistance" in line with the policies of the Islamic republic, he added.

Oman's Foreign Minister Yusef Bin Alavi arrived in Tehran on Monday followed by the German foreign ministry's political director Jens Plotner yesterday.

Despite its efforts to isolate Iran, the United States said it welcomed the initiative and noted that Germany had diplomatic relations with Tehran.

"So we think that this is normal behaviour between two states. And we appreciate any efforts by the Germans to help de-escalate the situation," State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus told reporters in Washington.

Pelosi says no impeachment for Trump now

AFP, Washington

Democratic congressional leader Nancy Pelosi said yesterday that US President Donald Trump would welcome impeachment proceedings against him -- but that her party is not ready to take the "very divisive" step.

Her comments came on day two of a very public war of words between the speaker of the House of Representatives and Trump, who have sparred before -- but not at this level.

According to Pelosi, Trump's strategy is to get his opponents to commit themselves to impeachment -- a process that would almost certainly pass in the House, and then fail in the Republican-controlled Senate.

"The White House is just crying out for impeachment," she told journalists.

According to Pelosi, Trump is "disappointed" that the Democrats are holding off for now, even as they intensify their investigations into the president's links to Russia and his alleged obstruction of justice.

"We can get the facts to the American people through our investigation," she told reporters, referring to ongoing congressional probes that Trump is attempting to block.

'Drug dealer'

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officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, said Hanif was arrested in Teknaf town on Wednesday evening.

Around 4:00am, police, along with him, raided Lombori Para along Marine Drive Road to recover firearms and yaba pills.

Hanif's cohorts opened fire as soon as police reached the area, triggering a "gunfight". Hanif was hit while trying to flee from police custody, the OC claimed.

He was rushed to Teknaf Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

Three policemen were also injured in the incident and took first aid, the OC said.

Police claimed to have recovered three locally made guns, nine cartridges and 4,000 yaba pills from the spot.

"His name was on the criminal list prepared by the home ministry and he stood accused in six cases, including murder, narcotics and arms," the OC added.

UNO sues 7

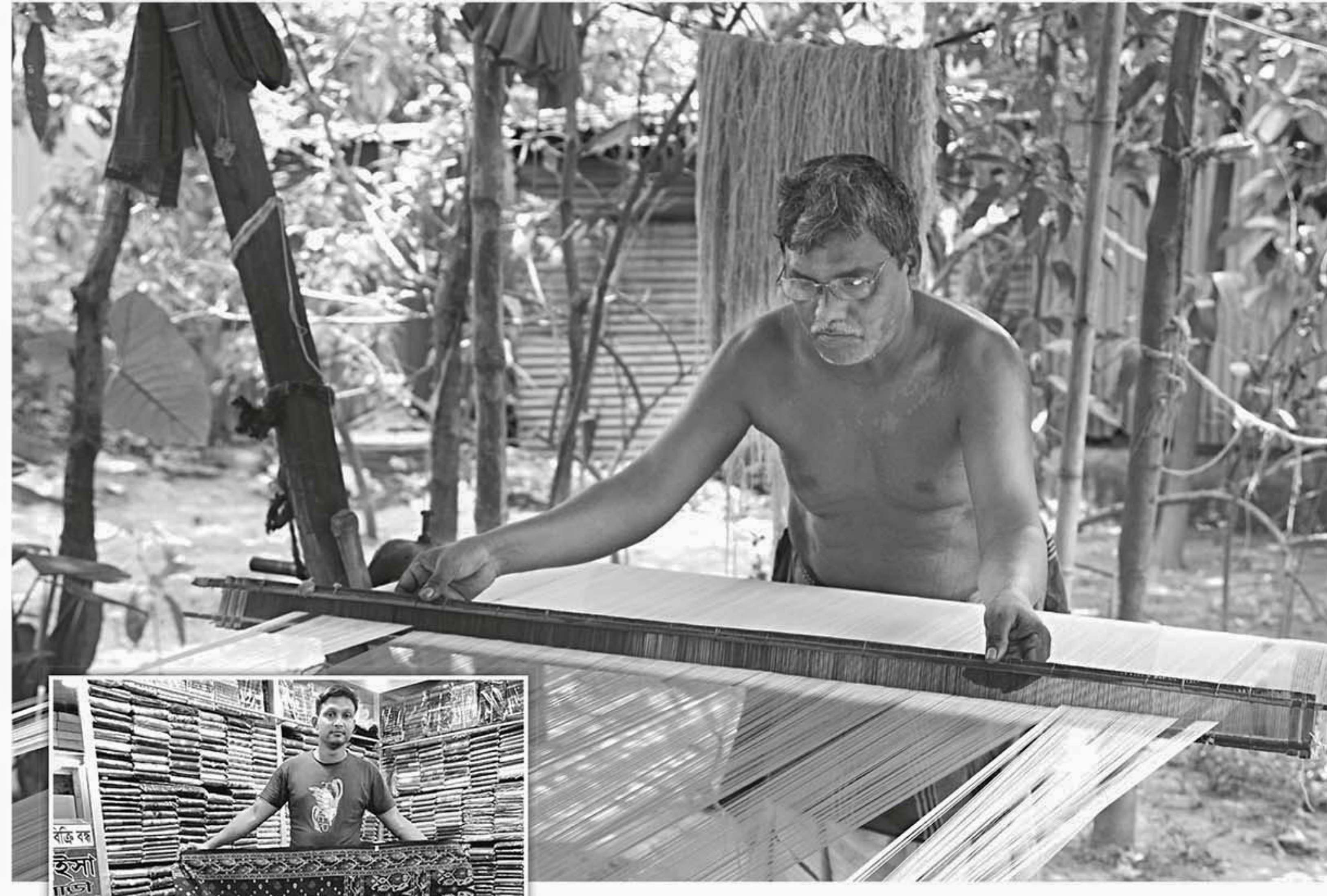
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party men's instructions. The seven accused are: Belkuchi upazila Jubo League convener Sazzadul Haque Reza, Sramik League President Arman Ali, Chhatra League leader Riad Hossain, Jubo League activists -- Ripon, Saiful, Johurul and Sohag.

Of them, Jubo League convener Sazzadul is operating multiple syndicates in the area, the UNO said, adding that he has been noticing this since he was posted in the upazila around three months ago.

Anwarul Islam, officer-in-charge of Belkuchi Police Station, said, "We have recorded the case and are taking legal actions."

The Daily Star could not reach any of the accused after repeated attempts over phone.



A man weaving yarn for making the famous Tangail sari at his home in the district's Chandi village recently. Inset, a seller shows a sari inside his shop at a shopping centre in Tangail town. Traders say the demand for the garment has increased ahead of the upcoming Eid.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

Tangail sari makers in overdrive

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places of the country come to these markets to buy saris and later sell them in their respective areas.

Gitanjali Das, a worker of a handicrafts sales centre in Bogura, was browsing through saris at local market in Pathrail. She said she came there to buy 500 saris at different prices as the sales of hand-loomed saris are high during this time.

Iqbal Hossain, from Mohammadi Sari House in Dinajpur, said he comes

to Tangail to buy saris one week after Ramadan begins, like every year, due to the reasonable prices at this time. He buys the saris from the wholesale market, and later sells them from his sari house.

"I will be back near the end of Ramadan to buy more saris if the first spell of my sales goes well," he added.

About 1.5 lakh weavers worked with around 64,000 handlooms at Tangail sadar, Delduar, Kalihati and Basail upazilas in the district for the

production of Eid saris.

Kazim Uddin, a veteran weaver of Chandi in Delduar upazila, said that earlier traditional Tangail saris were the first choice of a large number of women on any occasion, but now both the demand and sale had decreased.

Women now preferred salwar kameez over saris, he said.

The local handloom industries were also facing a shortage of efficient artisans as they were opting for other

professions, he added.

The condition of local weavers, especially owners of small handloom factories, was also bad due to a shortage of capital and price hikes of the materials with which the saris were made, he said.

Now only few wealthy weavers and traders, most of them from Pathrail, were at the helm of the whole sari business in Tangail. They manufacture the garment using impoverished weavers with little wages, he added.

Farmers' presence thin at govt depot

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When asked why Atau's paddy was not registered, Azad said the day's procurement report was already made at 3:00pm.

Surprisingly, apart from Atau, all of the five persons who had sold some 11 tonnes of paddy to the depot till yesterday belonged to various wings of the ruling Awami League.

The five include Taslim Uddin of Bakshimoil, who was seen supervising the unloading of Atau's paddy sacks.

Taslim identified himself as the president of his union's Krishak League unit and said all other four paddy sellers belonged to the group.

Asir Uddin, Abdur Jabbar, Shafikul Islam and Abu Bakar Siddik of Mougachhi union -- the other sellers -- were all supporters of the Awami League and activists of Krishak League and Jubo League.

"We purchased the 11 tonnes of paddy during inauguration function of the sale of paddy," the officer said.

The depot has so far procured 41 tonnes of paddy against a target of 2,012 tonnes in Rajshahi.

According to the officials at the depot, they are procuring 50 kilogrammes to three tonnes of paddy from each farmer, provided they could furnish their agriculture input assistance card, NID and bank account details.

While the depot at Mohonpur

was full of activity, when this correspondent visited depots at Boalia, Nawhata and Tanore, a lack of paddy supply was seen. Officials at the depot said farmers were visiting them with samples, but few were coming to actually sell product.

At Nawhata depot, some paddy was seen being dried. The officials said two farmers had left those to dry so they could attain the acceptable level of moisture after which it would be purchased by the depot.

"If we see some moisture on the paddy, we ask them [the farmers] to dry the paddy for a full day and then bring it to us," an official said.

Elsewhere at Boalia and Tanore government depots, not a single grain of paddy was procured till yesterday.

Back at Mohonpur, an altogether different picture presented itself after talking to some farmers.

None of the farmers from the village of Mahishkundu went to the Mohonpur depot to sell their rice.

Abul Kalam Azad, the in-charge, said there were thousands of farmers in the upazila. But they would not be able to buy crops from more than 100 farmers.

"We cannot make everybody happy," he said, adding they would conduct a campaign among the farmers on Sunday.

LOW PRICES, POLITICAL SYNDICATE HURTING 'REAL' FARMERS

Despite a better price being offered at the government depots -- Tk 1,040 per maund compared to the market price of Tk 620 -- most of the farmers interviewed said they were not going to the depots to avoid harassment.

They claimed the depot did not want to purchase rice from them and would force them to make two or three trips there using one excuse or another.

"We sell paddy at local markets," said Abul Kashem, a farmer who had grown paddy on seven bighas of land at Mohishkundi village in Tanore upazila.

He said the depot officials never found their paddy suitable for purchase.

Local farmers alleged that a syndicate of officials, rice traders and politicians were controlling the procurement and they were not letting real farmers sell paddy to government depots.

Nazmul Haque, district controller of food, however, said the government was keeping a close eye on the situation and it was not possible for any syndicate to supply rice to the government food godowns.

"Actually there is no such syndicate. We are going to buy rice from general farmers from next Sunday. We will conduct a campaign about it," he said.

Talking to farmers from Tanore and

Mohonpur upazila, it was found that most farmers were frustrated as the market price of their product was less than the production cost.

Abul Kashem, a farmer from Mohishkundi village in Mohonpur upazila, cultivated rice in six bighas of land in Kumari bil and harvested 118 maunds.

He sold 16 maunds of rice at Tk 720 a maund at a local haat last Saturday. But his neighbour Abdul Salam Mandal sold two maunds of rice on Wednesday at Tk 650, at least Tk 300 less than the production cost.

Abul Kashem said it cost around Tk 960 to produce a maund of rice.

From ploughing the land to harvesting the paddy, the costs came to around Tk 17,000 to 18,000 to get 18 to 20 maunds of rice.

The government price for 18 maunds of paddy is Tk 18,720 while its market price was only Tk 13,500.

Abdul Salam Mandal of Mahishkundi village said that he felt miserable after selling two maunds of rice at lower than his production cost. He was forced to accept the low price in order to pay the labourers who worked on his land.

"Please write something, so that the government increases the rice price. Otherwise, farmers will die," shouted Abdul Salam Mandal as these correspondents were leaving their village.

HC rebukes food authority for inaction

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why his office had not complied with its May 12 order. The BFSa chairman cannot go unpunished, the bench said

issuing a rule asking him to explain in two weeks as to why contempt of court proceedings should not be brought against him.

The HC bench told BFSa's lawyer Mohammad Faridul Islam that it had ordered the BFSa and the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection (DNCRP) to immediately remove the 52 food products from markets but the BFSa did not remove even a single packet of spices from any shop.

Going through a compliance report from the BFSa, the court said the BFSa has an office with 17 employees and officials, including its chairman, on Eskaton Road, but they did not take any step to comply with the order.

"What is the necessity of running the office of Bangladesh Food Safety Authority? Do they [BFSa chairman and other officials] fear big companies? If it is so, ask them to quit their jobs, go home, and start cooking or to take clerical jobs in banks for

counting money," the HC told the BFSa lawyer.

While placing the BFSa compliance report, Faridul said BFSa held a views-exchange meeting on May 19 with Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institution (BSTI), filed 52 cases and sent notices to deputy commissioners, civil surgeons, and upazila nirbahi officers asking them to take necessary steps to remove the food items.

The BFSa has also published advertisements in 13 newspapers, he said, adding that his client was yet to get reports on compliance.

The court told the lawyer, "Are you [BFSa] showing High Court to the High Court [trying to hoodwink the court]? You are trying to avoid the responsibility citing excuses. We understand these. Don't challenge our temper and don't consider our politeness as weakness. You didn't implement our order, rather staged shows with the mobile court and talked to the media."

The court, however, expressed satisfaction with the compliance report submitted by DNCRP which said it had conducted drives at

markets almost all over the country and confiscated substandard and adulterated food items.

It said the DNCRP implemented some of the court directives and hoped that it would continue its drives against food adulteration throughout the year.

The HC bench thanked the media for publishing its directives accurately.

The court yesterday observed that there would be no compromise on food safety and that no company would be allowed to supply, market, and sell food items without maintaining the BSTI set standards.

There is no distinction between adulterated and substandard food as both are not consumable by humans, it said.

The court said it would take legal action against the authorities responsible for preventing and checking adulteration of food items if they do not do their jobs properly.

The BSTI recently tested 406 food items and published the reports on 313, of which 52 were found to be substandard.

It did not publish the reports on 93, writ petitioner Shihab Uddin told

the HC in a supplementary petition and requested the court to direct the BSTI to make those public.

The court directed the BSTI to submit the test reports on June 16.

Yesterday, ACI, Pran, and Kashem Food submitted separate petitions to the HC requesting it to change its May 12 order so that they could produce and sell products that complied with BSTI standards.

The court said there was no bar for the companies to produce, market, and sell items that meet the standards.

It said if the producers of the 52 food items appealed to the BSTI, the authority should conduct further tests and submit the reports to the court by June 13.

The HC on May 12 directed the BFSa and DNCRP to immediately remove from the market the 52 food items that were found substandard by BSTI and to submit the compliance reports to the court yesterday.

Rokanuddin Mahmud, MK Rahman, and Tanjib-Ul Alam appeared for ACI, Pran, and Kashem Food respectively, while Deputy Attorney General Mokhlesur Rahman represented the state.

Focus should

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the presser revealed that Bangladesh's performances over the last four years -- since their march to the 2015 World Cup quarterfinals -- has caught the eye of people who assess the different teams' chances.

Moderator Mark Chapman asked about the nine ODI series Bangladesh have won between the two World Cups, all under the stewardship of Mashrafe. The Narail express answered on stage that they now have a good bunch of cricketers, with a nice mixture of experienced players and talented, exciting youngsters.

"Cricket is a game that on your day you can beat anybody. If you start well, you can hang in there. We are very much confident, but it depends on starting well," he said on stage.

But on the sidelines, when talking to a few Bangladeshi journalists, Mashrafe appeared pleased with the attention that Bangladesh had gotten because of the results over the past four years.

"When we [captains] were talking among ourselves, they asked about us winning nine series since the last World Cup," Mashrafe said after the event. "That they know about this, that our win percentage over the last two years is very good... these analyses, maybe once I didn't even think that they thought about these things."

"That means that big teams think about these things about us; that they know means that they have discussed about these things. This is an improvement. I hope that if we keep performing like this, we will have the ability to get to the next level. I hope we are at the next level, now it is about doing well in this tournament. But it obviously feels good that they are respecting Bangladesh cricket."

Bangladesh have a lot to be happy about heading into the official training camp in Cardiff from tomorrow, then the warm-up matches against Pakistan and India on May 26 and 28 respectively, before taking on South Africa in their World Cup opener on June 2. They just won their first ODI multi-team trophy in Ireland a week ago, and while Mashrafe thought that oft-doubted players like Soumya Sarkar, Liton Das and Mosaddek Hossain firing made them as well prepared as ever, the Tigers would do well to put the euphoria of Ireland behind them.

"I have to say that it is hard to be better prepared than we are now. And of course it is a huge confidence boost to win our first trophy after so many disappointments, but we cannot be holding on to that for long. Instead of thinking of winning our first three or four games, we have to focus on the first game. I think the Ireland win was a great thing for us, but now the focus needs to shift to June 2."

BSF tries

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Commander. Tipped off, a BGB team rushed to the spot and stopped them from entering into Bangladesh, he added.

Earlier on January 22, the BSF took back 31 Rohingya four days after a failed attempt to push them in Bangladesh through the Kaziatali border in the same district.

Last US

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children from Africa to Alabama in 1860, according to the 2007 book "Dreams of Africa in Alabama" by Sylviane Anna Diouf, who relied on testimony from the slave traders and their captives.

The ship is believed to have been intentionally sunk in 1860 to hide evidence of its use in the slave trade.

Three years later, in the middle of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation declaring the end of slavery in the United States.

"The discovery of the Clotilda sheds new light on a lost chapter of American history," said Fredrik Hiebert, archaeologist-in-residence at the National Geographic Society, which supported the search.

Hiebert spoke to National Geographic magazine, which first reported the discovery.

Researchers used insurance records to determine the Clotilda's dimensions and its other unique characteristics, such as planks of southern yellow pine over white oak frames, according to National Geographic.

The team behind the search for the Clotilda discovered a ship with its identifying features under water in a section of the Mobile River, according to National Geographic.

A representative from the Alabama Historical Commission could not be reached for comment late on Wednesday.

Among the captives on the Clotilda were Cudjo Lewis, who lived until 1935 and was long described as the last survivor of the Atlantic slave trade between Africa and the United States.

Earlier this year, researcher Hannah Durkin of Newcastle University in Britain published a paper naming the last known survivor as Redoshi, who also went by the name Sally Smith.

She died in 1937, two years after Lewis, and also was a captive of the Clotilda, according to Durkin's findings.