

## Putin says finalising 'large-scale' prisoner swap with Ukraine

AFP, Vladivostok

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said Moscow was completing negotiations on a "large-scale" prisoner swap with Kiev, in what could be a step towards easing tensions between the neighbours.

"We're reaching the final stage of talks on the swap... it will be large-scale," he told an economic forum in the Russian city of Vladivostok, adding that the date of the exchange would soon be announced.

Putin's comments are the first time he has directly addressed the possibility of a prisoner swap, after weeks of reports that Ukraine and Moscow were planning the move.

They came as a court in Ukraine released from pre-trial detention a man suspected of involvement in the downing of flight MH17, amid speculation he could be part of the swap.

Last week Ukraine released Russian state media journalist Kyrylo Vysnyansky, who had been in custody for more than a year, pending a trial for "high treason".

Ukraine's new President Volodymyr Zelensky offered to hand Vysnyansky over to Moscow in exchange for Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov, who is a prisoner in a penal colony in the Russian Arctic.

But Zelensky, whose election earlier this year raised hopes of an easing of tensions with Russia, declined to comment on whether the director would be part of any swap.

Putin said yesterday it was a "difficult to make the decision" to swap the people requested by Ukraine, but did not name any names.

The swap "will be a huge step towards normalising (relations)," he said.

Sentsov, 43, has become Ukraine's most famous political prisoner. He was arrested in 2014 and is serving a 20-year sentence for planning "terrorist attacks" in Crimea.

Among other prisoners who could be eligible for an exchange are 24 Ukrainian sailors captured last year.

Russia has been holding the sailors since seizing their three vessels off Crimea last November, in the most dangerous direct clash between Russia and Ukraine in years.

Some 13,000 people have been killed in Ukraine's conflict with Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, which broke out shortly after Moscow annexed Crimea in 2014.

### XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS S Africa shutters Nigeria embassy

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa yesterday said it had temporarily closed its diplomatic missions in Nigeria following violence against South African businesses carried out in reprisal for attacks on foreign-owned stores in Johannesburg.

"After receiving reports and threats from some of the Nigerians we decided to temporarily close while we are assessing the situation," foreign ministry spokesman Lunga Ngqengele said.

The embassy in Abuja and consulate in Lagos were shut on Wednesday, he said.

He told AFP the decision was made to protect employees after "groups of people" tried to force their way into the Lagos consulate.

"We will be monitoring the situation," said Ngqengele. "When we see it necessary to open, we will re-open."

Nigeria stepped up security on Wednesday after xenophobic violence in Johannesburg triggered reprisals against South African businesses in Nigerian cities.

South African telecoms giant MTN temporarily closed its Nigeria outlets on Wednesday after protesters attacked South African-owned firms in a number of cities.

Foreign workers are often victims of anti-immigrant sentiment in South Africa - the continent's second economy after Nigeria -- where they compete against locals for jobs, particularly in low-skilled industries.

Deadly attacks broke out in and around Johannesburg this week, leaving seven dead and dozens of shops destroyed, mostly foreign-owned.

More than 350 people have been arrested since Sunday.

Diplomatic ties soured between the continent's superpowers, with Nigeria boycotting the World Economic Forum on Africa in Cape Town this week, which was to be attended by its vice president, Yemi Osinbajo.

Nigeria also summoned the South African ambassador for talks on Tuesday and said it would be sending an envoy to convey "Nigeria's displeasure over the treatment of her citizens".

South Africa is a major destination for economic migrants from neighbouring Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. But others come from much farther away, including South Asia and Nigeria.



Students and alumni of high schools in the Tuen Mun district of Hong Kong take part in a joint "school human chain rally" yesterday. Millions of people have taken to Hong Kong's streets since June in the biggest challenge to China's rule of semi-autonomous Hong Kong since its handover from the British in 1997.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'Defecting' N Korean waitresses abducted to South: lawyers

AFP, Seoul

A group of North Korean waitresses who "defected" to Seoul in 2016 were actually abducted by the South, a fact-finding team of international lawyers has concluded after a visit to Pyongyang.

The case has long been controversial, with Pyongyang saying the 12 women were kidnapped from

a North Korean state-run restaurant in China while Seoul insists they defected of their own free will.

During their six-day stay in the North Korean capital, the lawyers said they spoke to seven former waitresses who claimed they managed to escape while their colleagues were tricked into coming to Seoul.

The seven North Korean women

said they were able to escape -- and eventually return to the North -- only because their team leader overheard a conversation between the restaurant's manager and a representative of the South Korean intelligence service, who had come to take them to the airport.

While they escaped, the 12 other waitresses had already left without

knowing they were being taken to South Korea, the joint fact-finding committee of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers said in a statement.

The 12 women were "taken away by deception ... against their will, separated from their families and country", it said after taking evidence from their seven colleagues.

## 5-year-old, nurse die of dengue

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looking after him.

Chameli got married about a year ago. Her husband Sabuj Mia, who previously ran a small business, is jobless now.

In Khulna, five-year-old Sharabonti died of dengue fever at Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) yesterday afternoon.

Hospital sources said Sharabonti from Jashore's Bagherpara upazila was admitted to the hospital on August 31.

Partha Protim Debnath, assistant registrar of medicine department at the KMCH, said Sharabonti had been suffering from dengue fever and other complications for the last few days. She died around 2:30pm yesterday.

Atiar Rahman Sheikh, assistant civil surgeon of Khulna, said nine people, including six women, died of dengue fever in Khulna division this year. Of them, seven died at the KMCH.

With the two deaths in Dhaka and Khulna in the last two days, a total of

131 people have died of dengue fever in the country this year, according to The Daily Star statistics. However, the government put the death toll at 57.

The pressure on hospitals eased in the last few days as the number of newly admitted patients came down.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), 3,371 dengue patients were undergoing treatment at hospitals across the country yesterday. Of them,

1,729 were receiving treatment in Dhaka.

The DGHS said 788 dengue patients were admitted to hospitals across the country in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday. Of them, 331 were admitted to hospitals in Dhaka.

A total of 74,353 people got infected with dengue across the country this year. Of them, 42,514 were infected in Dhaka.

Our Manikganj and Khulna correspondents contributed to this report.

## UK PM seeks snap polls to break deadlock

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An opinion poll conducted by YouGov on Monday and Tuesday showed Johnson's Conservatives leading Labour by 35 to 25 percent.

The pro-European Liberal Democrats were on 16 percent while the Brexit Party of populist Nigel Farage was in fourth place with 11 percent.

### NO REAL NEGOTIATIONS'

Parliament is rushing through legislation designed to keep Johnson from breaking Britain off from its closest trading partners without a negotiated agreement with Brussels.

MPs appeared on course to do so by Monday -- a victory that would be accomplished just ahead of a five-week shutdown of parliament that Johnson controversially ordered at the end of last month.

The pound surged to a one-month

high against the dollar on rising market hopes of a chaotic breakup being avoided next month.

The parliamentary bill forces Johnson to seek a three-month Brexit extension until January 31 should an EU summit in Brussels on October 17-18 fail to produce a deal.

It passed the lower House of Commons with the support of 21 rebel Conservative MPs -- who were promptly kicked out of the party.

The upper House of Lords ended an all-night filibuster by Johnson's supporters early yesterday and agreed to finish voting on the bill by tonight.

The bill could end up back in the House of Commons on Monday for it to consider any changes.

It would then go to Queen Elizabeth II for final approval.

Johnson rose to power in July on a pledge to deliver Brexit next month

-- "deal or no deal" -- and refuses to seek a delay.

There is also no guarantee that the other 27 EU leaders will grant one for the third time this year.

"We can see that another six months would not solve the problem," France's European Affairs Minister Amelie de Montchalin said yesterday.

Greens European Parliament leader Philippe Lamberts said after a meeting with EU negotiators on Wednesday: "For all the PM's bluster about getting a deal, there are no real negotiations going on in Brussels."

### 'HE'S GOING TO BE OKAY'

The main debate within Labour and the smaller pro-EU parties is when to schedule Britain's third general election in four years.

Labour says it will only back the poll once it is sure that Johnson is unable to take Britain out without a deal.

"The problem that we've got is that we cannot at the moment have any confidence in Boris Johnson abiding by any commitment or deal that we could construct," Labour's finance spokesman John McDonnell told BBC radio.

"So we're now consulting on whether it's better to go long therefore, rather than to go short. And that decision will be taken."

The prime minister was also set to face a legal challenge yesterday against his decision to order the suspension of parliament from next week until October 14.

Undeterred by the political crisis, Johnson also yesterday hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US Vice President Mike Pence.

Pence told Johnson that the US was "ready, willing and able to immediately negotiate a free trade agreement with the UK" after Brexit.

## High official not at fault, finds probe

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Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Abdullah-Al-Mahmud Bashir, who received the probe report, told The Daily Star that he would submit the report to the HC when it reopens on October 13 after its annual vacation.

Citing the report, DAG Bashir said the three Ghat officials were aware that Titash's condition was critical and that he was being taken to Dhaka for treatment.

But, they did not provide any assistance and let the ferry depart around two hours after the scheduled

time.

Therefore, they cannot avoid their responsibility in causing the "unexpected incident," the DAG added.

Even, the three officials did not inform Abdus Sabur, for whom they kept the ferry waiting, that an ambulance carrying a critical patient was waiting for the ferry to depart, DAG Bashir said, citing the report.

Titash, a student of Kalia Pilot Secondary School in Narail, was critically injured in a motorbike accident in the district on July 24.

A day later, doctors of a local hospital referred him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for an emergency operation.

The family was taking him to Dhaka in an ambulance, which arrived at the Kathalbari Ferry Terminal around 8:00pm on July 25.

"Ferry Cumilla" was already at the pontoon, but it had its gate closed and was not loading vehicles.

Ferry authorities said they were waiting for the arrival of Abdus Sabur, the head of Digital Service and Public Service Innovation Cluster and

E-Service Implementation Specialist of the Access to Information (a2i) Programme at the Prime Minister's Office.

The ambulance was stuck on the pontoon and could not reverse or shift to another hospital because of the queue of vehicles in front and behind it.

The ferry started loading vehicles around 10:20pm when the authorities learnt that the government official was close by. Around 11:00pm, the official arrived and the ferry started moving.

Titash died on the ferry, family sources said.

## River Lapwings visit Dhaka

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the bank of a dying river in Purbachal, a site that birdwatchers in the capital have fondly termed "the local patch" for themselves, I came across something rather exciting.

Right before my eyes, two River Lapwings, grey-brown and sporting jet-black mohawks, flew slowly and noiselessly, and landed on the sludge piled up by mindless earth-movers on the bank.

It was the first time this species of birds considered it worthwhile to make an appearance anywhere near our capital.

The River Lapwing is a rare bird

infrequently on the untrdden banks of the Padma, Jamuna and Sangu.

These birds feed mostly on worms and insects living in sand or mud in large riverbanks. The birds also lay eggs there and rear their chicks till the end of winter.

For survival, therefore, this species of Lapwing needs predator-free riverbanks.

It is no wonder the birds are not flourishing in the country, as our riverbanks are where all human activities seem to converge, and Lapwings can hardly find a patch of sand or mud on banks where our farmers, fishers, traders and their pet

or farm animals are not frequenting.

In 2000, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List listed the River Lapwing as an "Endangered Species" of Bangladesh.

In 2015, however, Bangladesh Red List reclassified it as "Near Threatened" which, unfortunately, is also its global status. This means the River Lapwing is not thriving well anywhere in the world.

There are 25 species of Lapwings in the world; only six of which are seen in Bangladesh. Three species, namely the River Lapwing, Red-wattled Lapwing and Yellow-wattled Lapwing are resident; and the other three, namely

Grey-headed Lapwing, Northern Lapwing and White-tailed Lapwing are winter visitors to Bangladesh.

Two of Lapwings species, the Javan Lapwing and Social Lapwing, are Critically Endangered and are in dire straits around the world.

The scientific name of River Lapwing is Vanellus Duvaucelli -- after French naturalist Alfred Duvaucel who worked in Bengal from 1818 till his death in 1824.

We hope the two River Lapwings in Purbachal will continue to find enough food on the riverbanks to give birdwatchers of the capital an opportunity to revel in this rare sight.

## Killed

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Police then returned fire, triggering a "gunfight", said the OC, adding that after the "gun battle", police found the bullet-hit body of Belal on the spot.

He was declared dead after being taken to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), added the OC.

Talking to this correspondent, a family source said around seven to eight months ago, two narcotics cases had been filed against Belal and he fled to Dhaka to avoid arrest.

Belal returned to Chattogram three to four months after the death of his father. The then OC of the police station arrested him at the city's AK Khan, the source said.

His family gave Tk 5 lakh to the OC as police threatened to kill Belal in a "