

No rally in Bhola amid transport ban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Yesterday was the first Friday after the fierce clash in Bhola's Borhanuddin over a hate conversation, and the day passed peacefully, amid the authorities' restrictions on plying launch and bus, and holding outdoor programmes.

The district administration imposed the restrictions on movement of launch and bus on internal routes yesterday morning. It also restricted holding of outdoor programmes on Thursday as a preventive measure ahead of Friday's Juma prayers.

Bhola Deputy Commissioner Masud Alam Siddique said both the decisions were made to maintain law and order. "There were no reports of any untoward incident in the district."

The district's overall situation had been volatile as two Islamic parties planned separate programmes for yesterday to hold special prayers and agitations for protesting the death of four people in Sunday's clash with police during a protest rally over hate speech spread through Facebook messengers in Borhanuddin.

The rally was organised to protest anti-religious messages, sent from Biplob Chandra Baidya's hacked Facebook account, at Eidgah Maidan in Borhanuddin.

As the authorities refused to give permission for holding any outdoor events yesterday, Sharbadalia Muslim Oikya Parishad and Islami Adolon Bangladesh postponed their agitation programmes on Thursday night.

Launch and bus operators said the authorities around 6:00am yesterday asked them to stop their services until further orders.

The internal road communications, including Bhola Sadar with Char

Fashion route to Borhanuddin, and ferry service between Bhola and Barishal, and Bhola and Laxmipur remained suspended until 3:00pm.

This sudden disruption in communications caused immense sufferings for travellers. Many launch passengers were seen waiting at terminals while many returned home.

"We need to go to Dhaka for an urgent work, we planned to travel by a launch that leaves Barishal for Dhaka around 3:00pm. But we cannot reach Barishal, we are stuck here," said Raushan Ara and her family at Bheduria launch terminal in Bhola.

DC Masud said the launch and boat services resumed around 3:00pm.

Police beefed up security at important locations and around main mosques of the district town. BCB, police, and Rab stepped up their patrols as a precaution, although there was no sign of any specific threat.

Many plainclothes policemen also kept their eyes on situation, said the law enforcers.

Shajahan Mia, who runs a grocery shop in the town, said it was really a good news that no untoward incident happened in the district.

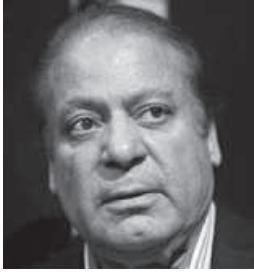
Meanwhile, Sharbadalia Muslim Oikya Parishad Joint Member Secretary Mizanur Rahman alleged that the law enforcers harassed many alems.

The parishad formed after Sunday's clash placed a six-point demand at a press conference at Bhola Press Club.

The demands include immediate withdrawal of the superintendent of police in Bhola and the officer-in-charge of Borhanuddin Police Station, and capital punishment for the Hindu youth who they claimed was responsible for the spread of the hate speech.

Former Pakistan PM Nawaz gets bail on medical grounds

AFP, Lahore



A Pakistani court yesterday bailed former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif indefinitely on medical grounds, court officials said, days after he was taken to hospital from prison where he is serving seven years for corruption.

The Lahore High Court granted Sharif -- who was PM three times before he was ousted over corruption allegations in 2017 -- bail at 10 million Pakistani rupees (\$63,900) on medical grounds "for an indefinite period", a court official told AFP.

A second court official said the ruling had come after doctors confirmed Sharif was suffering from an autoimmune blood disorder requiring immediate medical attention.

It was not immediately clear where Sharif would receive treatment or how severe his condition is.

The 69-year-old was taken to hospital on Tuesday when his blood platelet count dropped to dangerous levels, local media reported.

The Supreme Court disqualified Sharif from politics for life over graft allegations in 2017, and he later received a seven-year jail sentence.

He denies all the corruption charges against him and claims he is being targeted by the country's powerful security establishment.

Corruption is widely entrenched in Pakistan, with politicians regularly accused of misusing or stealing public funds and whisking the money out of the country.

US senators call for security probe of TikTok

AFP, Washington

Two senior US senators called for the government to study national security risks possibly posed by Chinese-owned video app TikTok, saying it could leave American users vulnerable to Beijing's spying.

With 500 million users worldwide, TikTok has exploded in popularity in the past two years, offering a platform to produce and publish music-synced videos up to 60 seconds long.

In a letter to acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck

Schumer and Republican Senator Tom Cotton suggested that TikTok's owner ByteDance could be forced to share user information with Chinese intelligence.

It could also conceivably offer Beijing's spies a backdoor into users' smartphones and computers, similar to allegations against Chinese telecoms giant Huawei.

"With over 110 million downloads in the US alone, TikTok is a potential counterintelligence threat we cannot ignore," they wrote, urging the intelligence community to "conduct an assessment of the national security risks" posed by the app.

Onion prices

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of the Bhomra Clearing and Forwarding Agents, said onion prices jumped in Indian wholesale markets since the third week of September, resulting in a hike in the import cost in Bangladesh.

The price restriction heated up the onion market in Bangladesh as the country meets a portion of its annual demand through imports because of inadequate domestic production.

Traders earlier said onion production also suffered locally because of rains during harvesting season.

The surging prices raised concerns among consumers. Later, state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh began selling the tuber at Tk 45 per kilo through five mobile vans in Dhaka.

The scale of the operation, however, was too small to make an impact in the market, said a trader

at Shyambazar, a major wholesale market for onion in the city.

The spiral in price continues despite a commerce ministry official -- after a meeting with traders on September 19 -- said the government's measures and adequate supply in the market would bring down the prices within 24 hours.

The government took several steps, including imposing fines through mobile courts for selling onions at high prices. In face of the measures, the prices went down a little, but started increasing again recently.

Mohammad Abdul Mazed, general secretary of Shyambazar Onion Wholesalers Association earlier, said they expected that the prices would drop.

"But what can you do if prices shot up at the source of supply? If prices of onions rise in India, the prices go up here too," he added.



Riot police stand guard next to Hezbollah supporters during ongoing anti-government protests in downtown Beirut, Lebanon, yesterday. Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah yesterday urged his group's supporters to stay away from nationwide protests aimed at ousting the country's ruling elite. In a televised speech Nasrallah said Lebanon was being "targeted" internationally and regionally, and he expressed fear that someone was looking to plunge the country into civil war.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Nigeria to lift ban on aid groups in northeast soon: UN

AFP, Lagos

United Nations humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock yesterday said that Nigeria has promised to lift a ban on two international aid groups working in the restive northeast in the "next few days".

The army closed down the offices of Action Against Hunger (ACF) and Mercy Corps in northeast Nigeria in September, sparking fears it could worsen the humanitarian crisis caused by the Boko Haram insurgency.

The military accused Paris-based

ACF of "aiding and abetting terrorists and their atrocities" by supplying food and drugs to the jihadist fighters.

Lowcock said after meeting local officials and military chiefs in the conflict zone that he had "received assurances from the relevant authorities that the suspension of the activities of Mercy Corps and Action Against Hunger announced in September will be lifted in the next few days".

"That should allow an immediate resumption of life-saving assistance

to nearly 400,000 people who have been without food and other essential help for the last month," he said in a statement.

The decade-long conflict in northeast Nigeria has killed an estimated 35,000 people, spilt into neighbouring countries and forced millions from their homes.

Lowcock said renewed violence this year has displaced 140,000 people and that over three million people are food insecure as farmers have been unable to plant crops.

EU shelves Brexit delay decision

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requested by Johnson, or even longer should it be clear that Britain is headed for an early election.

Any delay can only be granted unanimously and it could come as little as 60 hours before Britain would otherwise crash out.

According to a draft document seen by Reuters ahead of yesterday's meeting, a delay was to be granted "with the view to allowing for the finalisation of the ratification" of the divorce agreement sealed with Johnson last week.

The draft text left the Brexit date blank, but said the split could take place earlier if ratification was completed -- an idea dubbed a flexible extension or "flextension".

A two-tier delay was also on the cards, meaning one decision might come with two possible dates for Brexit, depending on if and when the deal is ratified.

The bloc is still intent on preventing the most damaging no-deal split.

But it is also tired of the intractable divorce.

A joke in that spirit was being shared among EU diplomats: "The year is 2192. The British Prime Minister visits Brussels to ask for an extension of the Brexit deadline. No one remembers where this tradition originated, but every year it attracts many tourists from all over the world."

BREXIT PARALYSIS More than three years after Britons voted 52%-48% to be the first country to leave the European project, the future of Brexit is unclear and the country still bitterly divided.

Johnson won the leadership of the ruling Conservative Party in July with a pledge to get Brexit done by Oct. 31. But parliament's rejection of his timetable on Tuesday means he will fail to do that.

His predecessor Theresa May resigned after parliament defeated her Brexit deal twice, forcing two delays from an initial date of March 29.

Johnson told opposition Labour

Party leader Jeremy Corbyn on Thursday he would give parliament more time to approve his Brexit deal by Nov. 6 if lawmakers back a December election in a vote on Monday -- his third attempt to try to force a snap poll.

Corbyn replied he would wait to see what the EU does on a Brexit delay before deciding which way to vote, repeating that he could only back an election when the risk of a no-deal Brexit is off the table.

It is not clear how Corbyn will respond now that the EU has shelved its decision on a new Brexit date. A spokesman for Johnson said he would push ahead with plans to leave the EU if lawmakers reject a pre-Christmas election.

Ladbroke's said betting odds indicated an election in 2020.

"It's looking like Boris Johnson will have to write a new letter to Santa Claus for his Christmas wishes this year," said the bookmaker's spokeswoman, Jessica O'Reilly.

A bridge that is also an art museum

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connects the two sides of the Randselva River via a multipurpose walkway.

The museum's name comes from the rolled roof, an intriguing stylistic choice.

"The Twist is a hybrid spanning several traditional categories: It's a museum, it's a bridge, it's an inhabitable sculpture," says Bjarke Ingels, Founding Partner & Creative Director, BIG.

Visitors to Kistefos can cross the Twist to complete their circuit of the park, while also admiring the bridge as an attraction in its own right.

The museum is made up of three distinct galleries with sweeping views over the river and sculpture park.

The double-curve of the museum's exterior is created via straight aluminum panels arranged, as BIG describes it, "like a stack of books" -- each panel is shifted ever so slightly forward.

This oxymoron is at the heart of the Twist's aesthetic appeal: straight panels creating a curved effect.

Photographs of the building have an eerie, otherworldly feel -- this manmade bridge-museum-hybrid seemingly rising inconspicuously out of its natural surroundings.

Inside, the vibe is just as notable, a space-age aesthetic heeding inspiration from the natural landscape.

"The Twist has been an extremely complex building to construct, yet

the result is simple and striking," says David Zahle, Pamer at BIG. "From an array of straight elements, the museum was constructed in an industrial manner as both a piece of infrastructure and as a building reflecting its natural surroundings."

Kistefos Sculpture Park is located at the site of a former wood pulp mill. It's been a staple of the Norwegian cultural scene for the past two decades, spotlighting work by prolific Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama and Icelandic environmentalist Olafur Eliasson, to name just two.

Officially opened as of September 2019, the Twist is a compelling new edition to this Scandinavian art hub.

Govt to provide

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The act has been updated in order to bring discipline on the roads and to ensure transparency in getting driving licenses, he added.

FAMILY RECEIVES THREATS

Meanwhile, the victim's family member alleged that they have been receiving threats from some unknown callers after the verdict was announced on Thursday.

Nusrat's elder brother Mahmudul Hasan Noman said he had received threats over phone before Jumma prayer yesterday.

His mother Shirin Akhter was threatened in a similar way a few days ago.

Noman said that they have informed the matter to the local administration.

He also said the cable connection to their house cut off on Thursday morning, hours before the verdict was announced.

Later, the cable operator fixed the

connection in presence of the law enforcers.

Khaled Hossain, officer-in-charge of Sonagazi Police Station, said they were closely looking into the threats on Nusrat's family.

The OC said some 10 to 12 policemen were deployed at Nusrat's house for the family's security.

Besides, several police teams are patrolling different points of the city to avert any untoward incident, the OC added.

Visiting Nusrat's house yesterday, this correspondent saw many people, including their relatives and neighbours, went to the house to express sympathy to the aggrieved family.

Shirin, mother of Nusrat, said all she wanted was to see the quick implementation of the verdict.

"I am surviving only to see the deaths of the killers," she added.

Nusrat was set on fire on April 6 on the roof of Sonagazi Islamia Fazil

Madrasa by a group of people loyal to sacked madrasa principal Siraj Ud Doula, whom she had earlier accused of sexually harassing her.

Nusrat succumbed to her injuries four days later at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Khaleda

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She was found guilty in another corruption case later the same year, though her party claims both cases are politically motivated.

The BNP chief has been receiving treatment at the BSMMU since April 1 this year.

Earlier on October 1, BNP lawmakers including Harunur Rashid, Ukil Abdus Sattar and Aminul Islam met Khaleda Zia at the BSMMU and expressed their party chief's willingness to go abroad for better treatment if she gets bail.

Schoolgirl raped in Moulvibazar

One arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A seventh grader was raped by two men on her way home from school in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila on Thursday.

Victim's father filed a case with Kulaura Police Station accusing two men Shanu Mia, 35, and Anish Mia, 32, on the same night, said Sanjoy Chakrabarty, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Hours later, police arrested Shanu from Bhatara area of the upazila, the OC said, adding that they were looking for the other accused.

Police said when the girl was returning home after classes in the afternoon, the two took the girl to a nearby rubber garden and raped her.

Hearing screams, locals rushed to the spot and rescued the girl, OC Sanjoy said, adding that the perpetrators had fled the scene before the locals arrived.

The girl is currently being treated at Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital.

Dr Partha Sarathi Datta, superintendent of the hospital, said they had found rape evidence after conducting some initial tests on the girl.

US 'concerned' as Pakistan activist says father detained

AFP, Washington

Washington said it was "concerned" late Thursday by reports that the father of a Pakistani activist who fled the country has himself been detained, the latest incident to fuel fears of a clampdown on dissent.

Alice Wells, assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia, tweeted her concern over "reports of the continued harassment of Gulalai Ismail's family, and her father's detention today".

She said the US called on Pakistan to "uphold citizens' rights to peaceful assembly, expression, and due process".

Wells tweeted after Ismail -- a women's rights activist who fled to the US and is seeking asylum -- said her father Mohammad Ismail had been taken away by unknown men earlier Thursday outside a court in Peshawar, a western city near the border with Afghanistan.

Rabia Mehmood, a Pakistan researcher for Amnesty International, tweeted that he was in the custody of the cybercrime wing of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).

His lawyers "do not know" what he has been charged with, she added.

The independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has called for his release.

FIA officials had no immediate comment. A senior Pakistani security source who spoke to AFP over WhatsApp said: "We (have) nothing to do with this."

Gulalai Ismail is an international award-winning activist who has championed the rights of Pakistani girls in a deeply patriarchal country.

Then she began speaking out against sexual violence and disappearances allegedly carried out by the army in northwestern Pakistan -- a red line for the powerful security establishment which has run the country for much of its history.

Fearing for her life, she went on the run for four months before turning up in the US in September.

She told AFP during an interview in Washington last month that she fears for her parents, saying they have become socially isolated, with security forces interrogating anyone who so much as texts them.

Mehmood tweeted that the couple had "continuously been harassed by the law enforcement agencies" through late night raids, surveillance and false cases.

A witness told Ismail her father was "was dragged into the vehicle while being physically tortured & abused", she tweeted.

"I knew they wouldn't spare me... but I hadn't imagined them persecuting my elderly parents," she added later.

Rights watchdogs have long warned of a shrinking space for dissent in Pakistan, one of the most dangerous places in the world for activists and journalists.

They can face abductions, torture, even killings if they cross red lines that a journalism watchdog last year said had been "quietly, but effectively" set by the army.

Quader

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Referring to the ongoing "correction drive", Quader said although it hurt the interest of some people, the drive was being carried out across the country.

He said wrongdoers were not being spared despite their affiliation with the AL. "If any party man gets involved in wrongdoings, organisational and administrative actions are being taken against that person."

The AL leader said there was no example of taking organisational and administrative actions against BNP men during the party's rule.

Dhaka South City Corporation Mayor Sayeed Khokon, among others, also addressed the programme.