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KHALEDA'S RELEASE

No tough programme right now

BNP to wait till Thursday's court hearing on her bail plea

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The BNP may go for street agitation across the country for the release of its Chairperson Khaleda Zia if she is denied bail in a corruption case.

It will hold peaceful programmes from tomorrow till the hearing on Khaleda's bail appeal at the Supreme Court on Thursday, according to party sources.

The party will also ask the pro-BNP lawyers to stage demonstrations at courts all over the country with a slogan "we want justice" on the day of the SC hearing.

The decisions came at a meeting of senior BNP leaders at the party chief's Gulshan office on December 5 night. Through Skype, acting BNP chairman Tarique Rahman joined the meeting convened to decide the party's next course of action, a senior BNP leader told this newspaper yesterday.

Tarique told the meeting that the issue of Khaleda's release has to be resolved politically, said the BNP leader on condition of anonymity.

The party leaders also discussed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's statement that Khaleda is having a good time in hospital under the jail authorities' supervision.

Several BNP leaders told this correspondent that the



Students of Stamford University bring out a procession in the capital's Siddeshwari area yesterday, demanding justice for fellow student Rubaiyat Sharmin Rumpa. Her body was found on Siddeshwari Circular Road on Wednesday night.

RUMPA'S DEATH

Cops work on clues to solve mystery

MUNTAKIM SAAD

Footprints on the edge of a building's roof and a pair of sandals found near the body.

Investigators were working on these clues to crack the mystery surrounding the death of Stamford University student Rubaiyat Sharmin Rumpa.

Twenty-two-year-old Rumpa, a second-year English student of the private university in the city's Siddeshwari, was found dead on an alley near the building on Wednesday night. Police learned about her identity the next day.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, a police official, involved in the investigation, said Rumpa was wearing the sandals



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

It's at low ebb in Bangladesh, elsewhere

Says UK-based Article 19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Global freedom of expression has been at its lowest for a decade, and Bangladesh is no exception with record numbers of attacks on journalists and cases of "legal harassment", many perpetrated by state and political actors, says a UK-based rights body report.

Repressive responses to street protests are contributing to the decline in freedom of expression around the world, reads the Global Expression Report 2018-19 released on December 2.

The rights organisation, Article 19, has prepared the report based on qualitative data and analysis of last year's events and trends.

The Global Expression Report, covering 161 countries, conducted a study on 39 indicators, and applies them across five pillars of freedom of expression: transparency, civic space, protection, digital, and media.

The report says Bangladesh scores significantly below the regional average in digital, protection, and transparency --

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT

US lawmakers focus on charges to be brought

REUTERS, Washington

Democrats in the US House of Representatives were set to focus yesterday on the serious business of deciding what charges to bring against President Donald Trump, after Speaker Nancy Pelosi ordered the Judiciary Committee to draft formal articles of impeachment.

The committee could draft and recommend the articles by December 12, after more than two months investigating, interviewing witnesses and holding hearings into whether the Republican president abused the power of his office.

Saying democracy is at stake, Pelosi said in a dramatic televised announcement on Wednesday that she had directed Jerrold Nadler, the Judiciary panel's chairman, to draw up the formal charges, which later would be voted on by the full House.

At the heart of the Democratic-led House impeachment inquiry that Pelosi opened in September is Trump's request that Ukraine launch an investigation targeting Joe Biden. The former vice president is a top contender for the Democratic nomination to face Trump in the November 2020 presidential election.

Trump denies wrongdoing and has not cooperated with the investigation, which he calls a hoax. He could face an impeachment charge of obstruction of Congress in addition to one alleging abuse of power. Some lawmakers and legal experts have also speculated that he could face charges of bribery or obstruction of justice.



SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

BSF returns 2 fishermen after a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) yesterday handed over two Bangladeshi fishermen to Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), a day after they picked them up from the Padma in Rajshahi's Godagari upazila.

The returnees are Abdur Rahim, 55, and Omar Ali, 44, of Premtoli Kathalbaria village of the upazila.

They were returned through a flag meeting held near Vatopara border at 4:30pm, said Lt Col Ferdous Mahmud, director of BGB Battalion-1.

During the meeting, BSF personnel claimed to have detained the fishermen as they entered Indian territory while fishing in the river.

BSF however, returned them as they were not included in the list of identified smugglers, said BGB officials.

Meanwhile, other

SEE PAGE 10 COL 3

The new world of China's digital courts

AFP, Hangzhou

Artificial-intelligence judges, cyber-courts, and verdicts delivered on chat apps -- welcome to China's brave new world of justice spotlighted by authorities this week.

China is encouraging digitisation to streamline case-handling within its sprawling court system using cyberspace and technologies like blockchain and cloud computing, China's Supreme People's Court said in a policy paper.

The efforts include a "mobile court" offered on popular social media platform WeChat that has already handled more than three million legal cases or other judicial procedures since its launch in March, according to the Supreme People's Court.

The paper was released this week as judicial authorities gave journalists a glimpse inside a "cyber court" -- the country's first -- established in 2017 in the eastern city of Hangzhou to deal with legal disputes that have a digital aspect.



AFP, Hangzhou

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

'Saudi trainee' kills 3 at US Navy base

REUTERS, Miami

A Saudi national visiting the United States for military training was the suspect in a shooting attack at a US Navy base in Florida in which four people were killed yesterday, three US defense officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Four people including the shooter were killed in the episode at Naval Air Station Pensacola, the Navy and local sheriff's office said, the second deadly shooting at a US military installation this week.



SEE PAGE 10 COL 2

3 of a family killed in road crash

Five others injured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Three members of a family were killed and five others were injured as a microbus they were in rear-ended a covered van in Tangail's Bhuapur upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased were identified as Haji Abdul Karim, 60, of Sirajganj Sadar upazila, his wife Matoara Sarkar, 50, and their daughter Kanij Fatema, 30.

Karim's son-in-law Haji Selim, 32, grandson Sami, 3, and three other relatives Imdadul Haque, 40, Runa, 27, and Meghla, 17, suffered severe injury. They were being treated at a hospital, police said.

They all were going to attend a wedding in Tangail town.

Quoting witnesses, Officer-in-Charge (OC) Kazi Iyubur Rahman of Bangabandhu Bridge East Police Station said the microbus hit a covered van from behind at speed in Golchakkar area beside the



The mangled remains of a microbus after it rammed into a truck from behind on the eastern side of Bangabandhu Bridge in Tangail's Bhuapur upazila yesterday. The accident left three members of a family dead and five others injured.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

DEADLY MEASLES OUTBREAKS

1.4 lakh died last year

Says WHO; most of them below 5; 10m infected across world

REUTERS, London

Measles infected nearly 10 million people in 2018 and killed 140,000, mostly children, as devastating outbreaks of the viral disease hit every region of the world, the World Health Organization said on Thursday.

In figures described by its director general as "an outrage", the WHO said most of last year's measles deaths were in children under five years old who had not been vaccinated.

"The fact that any child dies from a vaccine-preventable disease like measles is frankly an outrage and a collective failure to protect the world's most vulnerable children," said the WHO's director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The picture for 2019 is even worse, the WHO said, with provisional data up to November showing a three-fold increase in case numbers compared with the same period in 2018.

The United States has already reported its highest number of measles cases in 25 years in 2019, while four countries in Europe - Albania, the Czech Republic, Greece and Britain - lost their WHO "measles-free" status in 2018 after suffering large outbreaks.

An outbreak in the South Pacific nation of Samoa has infected more than 4,200 people and killed more than 60, mostly babies and children, in a battle complicated by a vocal anti-vaccination movement.

In 2018, measles hit hardest in Liberia, Ukraine,

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4