PBI looking

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While investigating, PBI found no CCTV footage as Al Jameyatul Ahlia Darul Ulum Moinul Islam Madrasa, popularly known as Hathazari madarasa, campus had no camera inside, said officials.

As a result, the investigating team is now looking for physical evidence, they added.

Meanwhile, the submission date for the report had passed on February 9. Thus, PBI sought more time from court.

Contacted, Nazmul Hasan, superintendent of police (SP) of PBI in Chattogram, said, "We have recorded the deposition of 26 persons under section 161 and already visited the spots including the Hathazari madrasa.

"In the madrasa, there are no CCTV cameras which would record what actually happened on that day [during the unrest]. Now we are looking for physical evidence to dig out the case more."

Six to die for murder

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home in Diadanga village on the night of January 14, 2014 and hacked Sultan, 57, his wife Hazera Begum, 44, and their granddaughters Romana, 8, and Anika, 10, to death with sharp weapons.

Sultan's son Hafizur Rahman filed the case against the seven with Bhurungamari Police Station the next day.

The case statement says Mamtaz had a land dispute with his younger brother Sultan and he hired the other accused for Tk 5 lakh to kill the victims. Mamtaz also promised to give them one bigha of land after the execution of the "killing mission", the statement says.

PP Lincoln said the verdict was pronounced after the charge sheet was filed in the case. He hailed the judgment and hoped that it would be executed soon.

The six given death penalty are Mamtaz, Nazrul Islam Majnu, Amir Hamza, Zakir Hossain, Jalal Gazi and Hasmat Ali. Of them, Jalal is a fugitive. Accused Nainul Islam has been acquitted in the case, added the PP.

Taliban call on US to honour withdrawal deal

AFP, *Kabul*

The Taliban yesterday urged the US to honour a landmark withdrawal deal under which all foreign troops would exit Afghanistan in the coming months, even as violence continues to rage in the war-ravaged nation.

In an 11-point statement, the insurgent group called for the Americans to stick to the agreement ironed out in Qatar last year that paved the way for ongoing peace talks between the Taliban and the Kabul government.

"We urge the American side to remain committed to the full implementation of this accord," wrote the group's co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in an open letter addressed to the American public.

"It is the responsibility and in the interest of all to bring an end to this war, and the implementation of the Doha agreement is the most effective way of ending it."

The statement comes a day ahead of a major Nato summit where the alliance is set to hold its highest-level talks since US President Joe Biden took office vowing to work more closely with allies after four years of tensions under Donald Trump.

The war in Afghanistan and withdrawal plans are expected to be among the most pressing issues discussed during the summit.

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Monday said the alliance would not withdraw its troops from Afghanistan "before the time is right".

Biden's administration is reviewing the deal, while the Pentagon has accused the Taliban of not fulfilling promises that include reducing attacks and cutting ties to insurgent groups such as Al-Qaeda.

Strong 6.2-magnitude quake rocks Vanuatu capital

AFP, *Port Vila*

A strong earthquake struck Vanuatu's capital Port Vila yesterday, with eyewitnesses reporting violent shaking and the US Geological Survey measuring a shallow 6.2-magnitude quake just off the South Pacific island's coast.

"Wow, haven't felt one like that in years. My heart's still in my mouth," local journalist Dan McGarry posted on Twitter, "very large lateral movement".

Authorities said the quake occurred 90 kilometres (56 miles) west of the city at a depth of just 10 kilometres (six miles). According to the Pacific warning centre, there was no immediate tsunami threat.

It was followed by two strong aftershocks of magnitude 5.5 and 5.7, but there were no immediate reports of damage or injuries.

Last week a much larger 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck the region, causing a small tsunami, which was felt as far away as New Zealand.

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TENDER NOTICE FOR ENLISTMENT

(of firm(s) for repairing, servicing and upgrading of computers, printers and other hardware for one year)

1. Sealed tenders are invited from bona-fide repairing firms for enlistment in the following groups:
   Group -1. Repairing, Servicing and Upgrading of Computers, UPS and Scanners
   Group –2. Repairing, Servicing and Upgrading of HP LaserJet Printers
   Group –3. Repairing, Servicing and Upgrading of Xerox Laser Printers
   Group –4. Repairing, Servicing and Upgrading of Samsung Laser Printers
2. For group – 1 and group – 2: the participating company must have at least 3 (three) years' proven experience in repairing items mentioned in these groups in any scheduled Bank in Bangladesh / Bangladesh Bank or must have previously been enlisted as a repairing firm in BASIC Bank Limited. Copy of previous work order(s) must be supplied along with the tender as proof in this regard.
3. For group – 3 and group – 4: the participating company must have at least 3 (three) years' proven experience in repairing items mentioned in these groups in any scheduled Bank in Bangladesh / Bangladesh Bank or must be a supplier (having repairing and servicing facilities) of same brand printers in any scheduled Bank in Bangladesh / Bangladesh Bank or must have previously been enlisted as a repairing firm in BASIC Bank Limited. Copy of previous work order(s) must be supplied along with the tender as proof in this regard.
4. The participating company may submit tender for any or all groups.
5. Tender schedule with detailed specifications and terms and conditions may be collected for a price of Tk 500/- only in cash (non refundable) per schedule for each group from the ICT Division (Peoples Insurance Bhaban - 5th floor, 36 Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka) of BASIC Bank Limited up to March 03, 2021 on any working day between 10:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M.
6. Sealed tenders have to be dropped in the tender box kept at the ICT Division (Peoples Insurance Bhaban - 5th floor, 36 Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka) of BASIC Bank Limited on or before March 04, 2021 by 03:00 P.M. and the tenders will be opened at 03:15 P.M. on the same day in presence of bidders, if any.
7. Other terms and conditions can be found in the tender schedule.

Deputy General Manager
ICT Division

PHOTO: AFP

A man shovels snow from under a car stuck on a hill in East Austin, Texas, USA on Tuesday. Winter storm Uri has brought historic cold weather to Texas, causing traffic delays and power outages, and storms have swept across 26 states with a mix of freezing temperatures and precipitation.

Myanmar junta promises

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change, it remained open for business and deals would be upheld.

The military will be hoping its reassurances will dampen the campaign of daily opposition to its rule and to the ousting Suu Kyi and her government.

UN ambassador Christine Schraner Burgener spoke to junta number two Soe Win on Monday and warned him that the regime's network blackouts "undermine core democratic principles", according to a spokesman.

As well as the demonstrations in towns and cities across the ethnically diverse country, a civil disobedience movement has brought strikes that are crippling many functions of government.

The unrest has revived memories of bloody outbreaks of opposition to almost half a century of direct army rule that ended in 2011 when the military began a process of withdrawing from politics.

While violence has been limited this time, police have opened fire several times, mostly with rubber bullets, to disperse protesters. Six people were wounded in the central town of Maungmya yesterday when police fired rubber bullets to break up a protest over an arrested teacher, a witness said.

A woman who was shot in the head in Naypyitaw last week is not expected to survive. Zaw Min Tun said a policeman had died of injuries sustained during a protest.

He said the protesters were starting violence while the campaign of civil disobedience amounted to the illegal intimidation of civil servants.

"We will wait patiently. After that, we will take action according to the law," Zaw Min Tun said.

The army has given itself extensive search and detention powers and has made penal code amendments aimed at stifling dissent with tough prison terms.

Another UK variant causes

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More than 100 cases of B.1.525 have been identified globally in total, according to the University of Edinburgh report.

But the roots of the variant go back as far as late December in Nigeria, where 12 cases have now been found, reports thesun.co.uk.

The Edinburgh researchers did not describe if the new variant caused different symptoms, more severe disease or was more infectious.

"We don't yet know how well this [new] variant will spread, but if it is successful it can be presumed that immunity from any vaccine or previous infection will be blunted," Dr Simon Clarke, an associate professor of cellular microbiology at the University of Reading, said.

Meanwhile, UK's vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi said yesterday Britain will provide Covid-19 vaccine certificates for its residents if they are required by other countries, although it is not planning to introduce them for use at home.

"Internationally, if other countries will require a vaccine certificate, then I think it's right that we facilitate it," Zahawi told the BBC in an interview.

'TRIED TO HACK' PFIZER

North Korean hackers tried to break into the computer systems of pharmaceutical giant Pfizer in a search for information on a coronavirus vaccine and treatment technology, South Korea's spy agency said yesterday, according to reports.

The impoverished, nuclear-armed North has been under self-imposed isolation since closing its borders in January last year to try to protect itself from the virus that first emerged in neighbouring China and has gone on to sweep the world, killing more than two million people.

Leader Kim Jong Un has repeatedly insisted that the country has had no coronavirus cases, although outside experts doubt those assertions.

Seoul's National Intelligence Service "briefed us that North Korea tried to obtain technology involving the Covid vaccine and treatment by using cyberwarfare to hack into Pfizer", MP Ha Tae-keung told reporters after a parliamentary hearing behind closed doors.

In South Africa, the government wants to return the one million Covid-19 vaccine doses it has received from Serum Institute of India, The Economic Times reported yesterday, a week after the country said it would put on hold use of AstraZeneca's shot in its vaccination program.

Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said yesterday Malaysia will receive its first batch of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines over the weekend for a Covid-19 inoculation drive that is set to begin on February 26, adding that he will be the first to be vaccinated.

Australia's medical regulator granted provisional approval for AstraZeneca Plc's vaccine, bolstering a national inoculation programme it plans to begin rolling out next week.

A Dutch court yesterday told the government to immediately lift a nationwide coronavirus curfew that sparked the worst riots in the Netherlands for decades.

The government wrongly used emergency powers to bring in the first curfew since the Nazi occupation in World War II, a judge at The Hague district court ruled.

City mice smarter than country

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contributing factor to the successful coping with the rapid and recent expansion of human-altered environments," the researchers write in their study.

Thirty-one striped field mice were captured from the wild as part of the study; 14 mice came from Berlin and 17 from the countryside.

Researchers from the University of Potsdam and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Biology then put them in a custom-built enclosure with a challenge.

A Lego house inside the cage contained food, but the mice had to figure out how to open it in order to get to the meal.

Another challenge involved seeing if the mice could slide open the metal lid of a plastic box which stood between them and a reward.

While the city mice were smarter and showed a greater ability to navigate the obstacle, rural rodents were more determined and showed greater persistence.

Researchers believe this is likely because in their natural habitat of the big city, the urban mice would be better off pillaging another source of litter rather than sticking with one that is particularly difficult.

But for mice living outside of towns, food opportunities are sparser, so it is important to make the most of an opportunity when presented with one.

"Investing too much time in attempting to get one item would create a higher missed opportunity cost compared to rural habitats where food sources could be more unevenly distributed in space or time, thus making persistence advantageous," the researchers explain in their paper, published in the journal Animal Behaviour.

Bangladesh calls

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Referring to the increased multidimensional and multifaceted threats to international peace and security, Fatima said there is no alternative to stronger peacekeeping.

She acknowledged the continuous reform undertaken by the UN in this regard, including implementation of the Action for Peacekeeping agenda, and welcomed its review.

She also called for systematic efforts to incorporate the inputs coming from the peacekeepers on the ground in the major policy documents of the UN.

The Bangladesh ambassador condemned the attacks on peacekeepers and called for accountability for the crimes against the peacekeepers.

On the question of performance, Fatima stressed the need for ensuring conducive operational environmental coupled with required human and other resources.

"The mandates of the peacekeeping operations must remain clear, realistic, and achievable, commensurate to the capabilities, ground realities, and available resources," she added.

Fatima highlighted the importance of increased participation of women in peacekeeping and called for increased resource allocation for creating an enabling environment for women in peacekeeping, and for diversification of women's role through training and capacity building.

Referring to the National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security, she reiterated Bangladesh's readiness at all levels, including in command positions, and in diversified roles.

Trying a few foot soldiers

FROM PAGE 1

Sayed Ziaul Haque, the top commander, and Akram Hossain, the top operative of the militant group that attacked us -- have never been caught," Bonya said in the statement uploaded on her verified Facebook profile.

She was also injured in the attack that killed her husband in 2015.

"Last week, in the verdict following the murder of Avi's publisher, Faisal Arefin Dipan, in 2015, we learned that Haque continued to mastermind the serial killings of other secular writers and publishers for eight months after Avi and I were attacked. And yet, Bangladeshi authorities failed to put him behind bars."

"Avi died, I barely survived and then the killing spree continued for another year," she put simply.

She pointed out that Dipan's verdict from last week includes a line that states, in 2015, money used to flow in to kill "bloggers, publishers and homosexuals in the country".

"I want to know who has investigated this flow of money." she said.

"What will these verdicts accomplish, if we don't get to the source of the money -- or rather, to the source of the killings?"

She also said that in the last six years, not one person investigating the case in Bangladesh reached out to her, even though she is a direct witness and victim of the attack.

"In January, the state lawyer in the case publicly lied, saying that I did not agree to be a witness in the trial. The truth is, no one from Bangladesh's government or the prosecution has ever contacted me."

However, the Assistant Public Prosecutor Golam Shariar Khan claimed to The Daily Star that she was summoned on December 11, 2019, to appear as a witness on December 30.

In the statement, Bonya questioned certain aspects of the investigation.

"On February 26, 2015, Avi and I were invited to meet a group of science writers. The people who organised that event kept us waiting for hours. Finally, we met the group in the evening. After the event, we were attacked and Avi was killed. Were the organisers of that event ever investigated? What was the outcome?" she asked.

She further questioned why an alleged militant involved with the attack on her and her husband was killed in an extra-judicial killing.

"Today, civilised countries cannot get away with extrajudicial killings. But in 2016, Bangladeshi police carried out the extrajudicial killing [or 'crossfire', as it's commonly called in Bangladesh] of Mukul Rana 'Sharif.' He was reportedly a top operative of the militant group that attacked us. Sharif was in police custody for months before the authorities killed him. Why was Sharif killed?"

Bonya concluded by saying, "Bangladesh's government has become more autocratic since we were attacked. Freedom of speech has been restricted further, secular writers, bloggers, activists were forced to leave the country during and after 2015, a harsher Digital Security Act has been enacted, and bloggers, writers, publishers have been persecuted for their writings on a regular basis.

"Bangladesh's authorities are increasingly friendly with Hefazat-e-Islam, the Islamist group of madrasa teachers and students that demanded 'the heads' of secular writers and bloggers in 2014."

Large plan for big stretch

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has to change. It is needed to go to the east horizon. And this project is the way to that," he said.

One of the major issues involving the project is its cost. Some media outlets have reported that around Tk 81 crore will be spent for the upgradation of per kilometre of the highway.

As the minister's attention was drawn to the cost and asked whether it was high, he said, "We are spending as much as required. This is not too much."

He also said the economic returns would be much higher. "Toll money will be collected …. There will also be a five-kilometre-long elevated bridge under the project."

Replying to a question, Mamun-Al-Rashid, member of the planning commission, said the project cost was not higher than that of highways under the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) project.

The Dhaka-Sylhet highway upgradation is one of the 26 projects for which China had committed $21.5 billion in soft loan. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Dhaka and Beijing was signed during the Chinese president's Dhaka visit in 2016.

But the government later decided to do the work using its own resources, following failed negotiations with a Chinese company.

Besides, there was an allegation against the Chinese company of offering bribes to a top government official to give a go-ahead to the work at inflated costs. At that time, the estimated cost of the project was Tk 11,412 crore.

However, the government finally decided to implement the project mainly with the ADB fund.

The proposal was placed before the project evaluation committee (PEC) on November 23 last year. The Development Project Plan was reconstituted following the recommendations of the PEC meeting.

Apart from upgrading the highway, two service lanes will be constructed for slow moving vehicles. The other objectives of the project are to straighten the existing curves of the highway and build necessary U-loops and intersections, said planning ministry officials.

The main project operations include 245.42 lakh cubic metres of earthworks, 72.73 lakh cubic metres of flexible pavement, 2.92 lakh cubic metres of flexible concrete pavement on service lanes, and construction of culverts, bridges, flyovers, railway over bridges, footbridges, they added.

The project will be completed between January, 2021 and December, 2026.

Infection rate drops

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drive is underway.

But the mortality rate remained at 1.53 percent for the past few days, including yesterday, said a DGHS handout.

So far, 488,621 patients (90.25 patients) have recovered from novel coronavirus.

As of now, 3,877,042 samples have been tested, including 14,788 in the same 24-hour period.

The countrywide Covid-19 vaccination drive kicked off on February 7.

Bangladesh inked an agreement with the Serum Institute of India Pvt Ltd, the world's largest vaccine maker, for 30 million doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. Serum will send five million doses each month between January and June.