

NEWS IN
brief

11 die in India after drinking moonshine

Eleven people have died from drinking bootleg alcohol in India's poorest state Bihar, officials said yesterday, with their families blaming authorities for their alleged failure to crack down on illegal liquor makers. Bihar became a dry state in 2016 but a national health survey in 2019-20 found that more than 15 percent of men still reported consuming alcohol. Eight people died Wednesday and a further three on Thursday, days after one of the biggest Hindu festivals, Holi, when alcohol consumption is usually higher. Most of the victims were landless farm labourers or small land-holding peasants in rural Bihar.

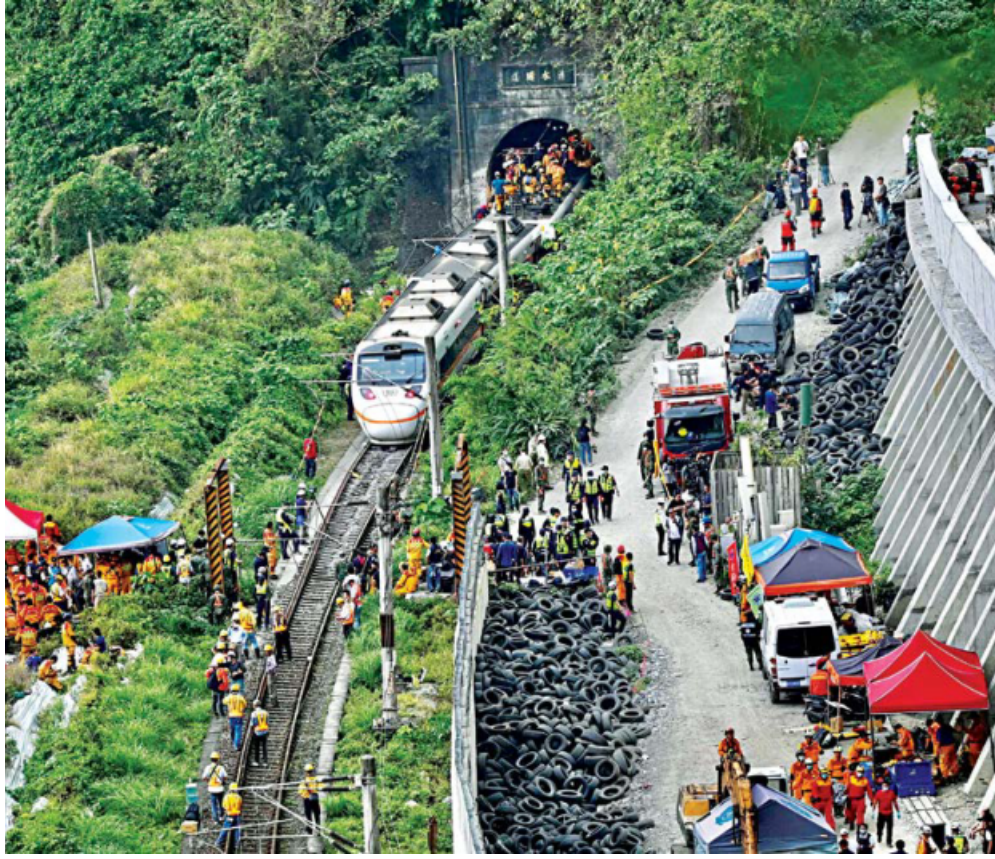
Japan PM to meet Biden on April 16

Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga will hold face-to-face talks with Joe Biden in Washington on April 16, as the first foreign leader hosted by the US president, the Japanese government said yesterday. Local media had reported the trip would take place next week, but top government spokesman Katsunobu Kato said the mid-April date would give both sides time to prepare. The trip comes at a time of renewed focus on China's role in the region, as well as its alleged abuses of the Uyghur minority and its crackdown on freedoms in Hong Kong. The talks follow a visit by the Pentagon chief and top US diplomat to Japan in March, when the two countries warned China against "coercion and destabilising behaviour".

Myanmar refuses to take Rohingya girl

Myanmar has refused to accept a 14-year-old Rohingya girl deported by India, an Indian media report said, as the United Nations refugee agency and rights groups criticised New Delhi for the move. The girl was taken to a border town in northeastern India's Manipur state on Thursday for deportation, police officials said, but the authorities in coup-hit Myanmar refused to accept her. The Hindustan Times report said that the girl will be sent back to the neighbouring state of Assam, where she had been sheltering for more than a year while her family lived as refugees in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



This photo shows trapped passengers are being rescued by emergency workers at the site where a train derailed inside a tunnel in the mountains of Hualien, eastern Taiwan, yesterday. Inset, Rescue team members are working to assess the damages. A Taiwan express train with almost 500 aboard derailed in a tunnel yesterday after hitting a truck, killing at least 51 passengers and injuring 146 in the island's worst rail disaster in seven decades.



PHOTO: AFP

RAILWAY TRAGEDY IN TAIWAN

51 killed; 146 injured

AFP, Hualien

At least 51 people were killed in Taiwan yesterday when a packed train collided with a vehicle on the tracks and then derailed inside a tunnel, in the island's worst railway accident in decades.

Officials said the devastating collision was caused by a railway maintenance vehicle which slipped down an embankment above the tracks near the eastern coastal city of Hualien.

"(The driver) was suspected of not pulling the parking brake tight enough so the vehicle slid 20 meters... onto the train line," Feng Hui-sheng, deputy director of Taiwan Railways Authority, told reporters.

Local media images from the scene showed the back of a yellow flatbed truck on its side next to the train just a few metres from the tunnel entrance.

The accident occurred on Taiwan's eastern railway line around 9:30 am (0130 GMT).

The eight-carriage train was packed with some 480 people heading down the east coast for the annual Tomb

Sweeping Festival, a four-day public holiday.

The Taiwan Railways Agency said 146 passengers were sent to hospital in addition to the 51 confirmed dead.

A French national was among those killed while two Japanese and one Macau resident were injured.

One unnamed female survivor told TVBS news channel of trapped passengers - some crying out for help, others unconscious.

"There were many people pressed under the seats and others on top of those seats too," she said.

President Tsai Ing-wen visited an emergency response centre in the capital Taipei, and said investigators would get to the bottom of how such a deadly crash could have occurred.

Pictures published by local newspaper UDN showed the front of the train inside the tunnel had been pulverised into a twisted mesh of metal.

Rescuers worked for hours to reach those trapped inside the tunnel and haul them out, using buzzsaws to slice through warped sheets of metal.

Footage released by the Taiwan Red Cross showed specialists with helmets and headlights had to use the roof of the stricken train to reach people inside the narrow single-track tunnel.

By mid-afternoon, officials said there were no people left inside the carriages but dozens of rescuers remained on site as evening set in, according to AFP reporters at the crash scene.

The annual Tomb Sweeping Festival is an especially busy time of the year for Taiwan's roads and railways. During the festival, people return to ancestral villages to tidy up the graves of their relatives and make offerings.

Friday's crash looks set to be one of Taiwan's worst railway accidents on record.

The last major train derailment in Taiwan was in 2018 and left 18 people dead at the southern end of the same line. The Apple Daily newspaper said the island's worst crash was in 1948 when 64 died. Another crash in 1961 killed 48, while a 1978 crash left 41 dead.

Muslim body in India seeks end to dowries

AGENCIES

A prominent Muslim organisation in India has released new guidelines, asking the community to shun dowries and extravagant marriages after a woman recently died by suicide due to "dowry harassment".

In an 11-point guideline issued last week, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) asked the Muslims to take an "oath" to refrain from demanding dowry and keep the marriage ceremony simple without "needless rituals, customs and extravagant activities".

The AIMPLB is widely regarded as the representative of India's Muslims, who constitute more than 14 percent of India's 1.3 billion population.

The body's guidelines, contained in a document released for Muslims to sign and follow, were released by AIMPLB chairman Maulana Rabe Hasan Nadvi.

The move comes after a Muslim woman in the western Indian state of Gujarat died by suicide last month by drowning herself in a river, alleging physical abuse over dowry by her husband and in-laws.

Her suicide set off a countrywide debate over social evils associated with marriage among Muslims and other communities. The AIMPLB said it has launched a 10-day drive to educate members of the community across the country and to raise awareness against such evils.

During the campaign, Muslim scholars and leaders will place emphasis on solemnising marriages according to Islamic customs and minimise spending during weddings.

The new guidelines prohibit wedding processions, fireworks, dancing and lavish feasts, calling them un-Islamic. It only allows "Dawat-e-Walima", a feast served by the groom's family after wedding rituals are completed.



French President Emmanuel Macron carries a child at a playground during his visit to the Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) Unit at Alpes-Isere Hospital in Saint-Egreve on the World Autism Awareness Day yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

US, Iran to go to Vienna for indirect nuclear deal talks

REUTERS, Paris/Brussels

Officials from Tehran and Washington will travel to Vienna next week as part of efforts to revive the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and global powers, although they will not hold direct talks, diplomats said yesterday.

Even without face-to-face talks, which Tehran has ruled out, the presence of both of Iran and the United States in the Austrian capital would mark a step forward in efforts to bring all sides back into compliance with the accord.

The aim was to reach an agreement within two months, said a senior official with the European Union, the coordinator of the deal.

Former US President Donald Trump pulled out of the deal in 2018 and reimposed sanctions on Iran, prompting Tehran to violate some of the pact's nuclear restrictions. His successor Joe Biden wants to revive the accord, but Washington and Tehran have been at odds over who should take the first step.

"Iran and the US will be in the same town, but not the same room," a European diplomat said. A Western diplomat said a shuttle diplomacy approach would be adopted.

The talks will seek to create negotiating lists of sanctions that the United States

could lift and nuclear obligations Iran should meet, the EU official said.

Those lists "should marry at some point. In the end, we are approaching this in a parallel way. I do think we can do it in less than two months," the official said.

He was speaking after Iran, China, Russia, France, Germany and Britain - all parties to the 2015 deal - held virtual talks on Friday to see how to progress.

"Aim: Rapidly finalize sanction-lifting & nuclear measures for choreographed removal of all sanctions, followed by Iran ceasing remedial measures," Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Twitter. "No Iran-US meeting. Unnecessary," he added.

An Iranian official said US Iran envoy Rob Malley and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan would be in Vienna, but insisted there would be no direct or indirect meetings between Iranian and American officials. U.S. officials were not immediately available for comment.

Under the accord, US and other economic sanctions on Tehran were removed in return for curbs on Iran's nuclear programme to make it harder to develop a nuclear weapon - an ambition Tehran denies.

'April fool's'

Jill Biden pranks staff, disguised as flight attendant

AFP, Washington

US First Lady Jill Biden pranked reporters and staff flying back from a trip with her on Thursday, disguising herself as a flight attendant to pass out ice cream bars for April Fool's.

Staff, Secret Service and press were treated to dessert by a woman with short black hair, a black face mask and a nametag that read "Jasmine," who made her way through the cabins as the first lady traveled home to Washington after visiting California.

Five minutes later, "Jasmine" reappeared in the press section, wig removed, revealing herself to be none other than Biden herself.

"April Fool's!" a tickled Biden told reporters.

The ice cream bar incident is not the first time Biden has tricked fellow travelers aboard her plane.



She once stuffed herself in an overhead compartment on Air Force Two when her husband Joe Biden was vice president, shouting "Boo!" at the first person to open the bin, according to US media.

A pool report on Thursday's incident admitted that the journalists had been "totally fooled" but took "comfort in the fact that none of FLOTUS' staff recognized Dr. Biden in disguise either."

The vanilla ice cream bars with hard chocolate coating "were delicious," it added.



EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW OF
GOLAM MAIN UDDIN
A PATRIOT PIONEERING AN INDUSTRY

The agro-based industry of Bangladesh has seen a tremendous growth in the last few decades and currently accounts for about 20 percent of the country's GDP. On top of helping Bangladesh reach self-sufficiency in food in the recent years, this industry makes up around one third of our total export value. While the public sector should be lauded for the policies and strategies that led to this growth, it is the private sector that accelerated it the most with the introduction of technology, modernization, and research in this industry.

Mr. Golam Main Uddin, the chairman of British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BATB), is one of the pioneers of the agro-based industry in Bangladesh. In the final episode of the first season of Prerona Kotha, a thought leadership platform, we talked to this veteran corporate personality about his illustrious professional life of over 38 years; the challenges he faced working in MNCs and how he overcame them; his faith in the country and its people; his management approach; and the future of agro based industries in Bangladesh.

He started his career in 1969 as a tea garden manager in Duncan Brothers after graduating top of his class in Masters in Soil Science at University of Dhaka. Besides the challenges of working in an organization in a war-ravaged country, there were additional challenges of promoting Bangladeshis in an MNC with primarily non-Bangladeshi employees and management.

In 1982, he joined another multinational, British American Tobacco Bangladesh, then Bangladesh Tobacco Company. When he joined BATB, the production of the company was low. One of the key issues the management faced during that time was that of sustainability. As a result, tough decisions like closing one of the two factories of BATB had to be taken... "During modernization we noticed that the way Dhaka factory accepted the modernization, the Chittagong factory didn't. Which is why we had to come up with the decision that we'll close the Chittagong factory. So, we closed the Chittagong factory. It was a very tough decision."

One of the most remarkable achievements that Mr. Golam Main Uddin is always admired for is founding the afforestation project of BATB, which is presumably the largest private sector driven afforestation initiative of Bangladesh. BAT Bangladesh has received the prestigious Prime Minister's National Award for four times in the years 1993, 1999, 2002, 2005 and the Chief Advisor's Award in 2007. The programme is designed to focus on the socio-economic needs of the communities as well as the overall environmental perspectives. The execution of the initiative came with unique challenges. Motivating the farmers and inspiring them to plant seedlings was extremely challenging initially, but Mr. Main Uddin was able to motivate them by talking to them and explaining the benefits.

Mr. Main Uddin is optimistic about the future of agro based industries in the country. He believes that with a good number of educated young people going into cow-rearing, aquaculture, and vegetable farming, the future of agriculture is in good hands. This is also reflected in the current agricultural production, which is much higher than what it was even 20 years ago.

Public private partnership was another topic that came up in the discussion. Mr. Main Uddin was the first person from BATB to join the business associations and has been part of important associations like MCCI, Bangladesh Employers' Federation, etc. As a veteran in business, he believes that while it is the duty of the Government to form policies and strategies, it is the private sector that must work on them. "If we want to drive the economy of a country, then the private sector needs to come forward. Moreover, private sector can play a vital role in economic growth." He mentioned the RMG sector of Bangladesh as an example of the wonders the private sector has achieved.

One very crucial point that came out during the discussion with Mr. Main Uddin is nation branding. A strong national brand reinforces a country to gain competitive edge over its competitors, access new global financial markets, diversify products and grab investment opportunities offered by foreign markets through internationalization.

He shared an anecdote in this regard. "We went to Japan from Bangladesh Employers' Federation. The Chairman of Japan Employers' Federation was the Chairman of Toyota Motor Company. When we asked him to relocate their sunset industries to Bangladesh, he said '50% of the time your country is flooded. So, tell me how would we do business over there?' Then I said that I was working in a multinational company and the shipment of my company never stopped even for one day; so, what you are saying is a bit exaggeration. Later, he visited Bangladesh and stayed for two days. When he went back to Japan, he promoted Bangladesh as a good place for investment. Which is why, the Japanese are getting involved in many projects nowadays."

Finally, Mr. Main Uddin urged the youth of the country to start their life with a positive frame of mind and to believe in the country. He believes that enjoying one's job is the key to bringing in creativity into work... "I strongly believe that enjoyment is a very important factor. Don't go back home with a sad face after office. Go back home with a smile and think about coming back to office the next day. I think we should encourage our next generation this way."

The interview was conducted by Dr. Melita Mehjabeen, Associate Professor, IBA, University of Dhaka as part of "Prerona Kotha", a thought leadership initiative by Prerona Foundation.

You can watch the full interview on the YouTube channel of Prerona Foundation.