

Taliban seize

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an offensive in May as foreign forces began the final stages of their withdrawal.

It has been a perennial target for the Taliban, who briefly overran the city in 2015 and again in 2016 but never managed to hold it for long.

The ministry of defence said government forces were fighting to retake key installations.

"The commando forces have launched a clearing operation. Some areas, including the national radio and TV buildings, have been cleared of the terrorist Taliban," it said.

Kabul's ability to hold the north may prove crucial to the government's long-term survival.

AIR FORCE PILOT KILLED
An Afghan Air Force pilot was killed by a bomb in Kabul on Saturday, officials said, in an attack claimed by the Taliban.

The pilot, Hamidullah Azimi, died when a sticky bomb attached to his vehicle detonated, officials said, adding that five civilians were wounded in the explosion.

Azimi was trained to fly US-made UH60 Black Hawk helicopters and had served with the Afghan Air Force for almost four years, the force's commander, Abdul Fatah Eshaqzai, told Reuters.

He had moved to Kabul with his family a year ago due to security threats, Eshaqzai added.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Muhajid said in a statement that the Taliban carried out the attack.

Reuters was first to detail a Taliban campaign to assassinate pilots off-base that Afghan officials say claimed the lives of at least seven Afghan pilots before Saturday's killing.

The Taliban has confirmed a program that would see US-trained Afghan pilots "targeted and eliminated."

US AIR STRIKES

Fighting was also reported on the outskirts of Herat in the west, and Lashkar Gah and Kandahar in the south.

Hilsa catch

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district's Kalapara upazila near Kuakata on Saturday afternoon after spending 10 days at sea.

The owner of the trawler spent almost Tk 60,000 for fuel and thousands more for food for those on board. The trawler, however, brought only 118kgs of hilsa, which was later sold for Tk 40,000, said Abdul Jalil, a fisherman.

"After 65 days of the ban, we went to the sea to catch hilsa but came back only to incur losses," he said.

Another fishing trawler FB Touhid returned to Alipur fish landing station on Saturday evening and sold small sized hilsa for Tk 55,000.

Sagir Hossain Gazi, the driver of the trawler, said they had spent Tk 1.5 lakh.

Ansar Uddin Molla, president of the Alipur Fisheries Owners' Association, said fishermen went to the sea hoping to catch a good quantity of hilsa, but unfortunately it is not happening.

He could not say why fishermen were not getting enough hilsa.

Hearing

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confidence (naraji) petition against the probe report will be filed on the next scheduled date, so they need time.

While talking to The Daily Star, Sarwar said the complainant was informed that a hearing on the final report would be held yesterday even though it was not the scheduled date.

Soon after the complainant informed him of the matter, he appeared before the court and submitted a petition seeking adjournment of the hearing on the final report, the lawyer added.

On July 19, Investigation Officer Abul Hasan submitted a probe report to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka, dropping the name of Bashundhara Group Managing Director Sayem Sobhan Anvir, the lone accused, from the charges in the case.

In the report, the investigator, also officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station, appealed to the court to relieve Anvir from the charges of abetting the victim of committing suicide.

In the DNA tests done after the college student's body was recovered from her Gulshan flat on April 26, the DNA of a male was found on the victim's body, the probe report said.

However, Investigator Abul Hasan did not take any steps to conduct a DNA test on the lone accused Anvir.

It is not reasonable to collect and test the samples of a suspect's DNA solely on the basis of the complainant's allegations without any supporting evidence, the investigation officer wrote in the probe report.

The case was a "matter of factual error" as no evidence against Anvir was found in the investigation, the report said.

On April 26, police recovered the body of the 21-year-old college student hanging from the ceiling fan of her bedroom in Gulshan.

After the case was filed, the court issued a ban on the accused from travelling abroad after the IO filed an application for it on April 27.

Under attack, time and again

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leaf and certain types of fruits. But their traditional livelihood has faced multiple attacks by land grabbers in the last few years.

The grabbers destroyed betel leaf gardens, cut down fruit trees, and occupied their lands.

The communities remain under threat of eviction even when the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is observed today with the slogan "Leaving No One Behind: Indigenous peoples and the call for a new social contract".

Kakrachhara Punji is adjacent to Rehana Tea Garden and the indigenous people alleged that the tea garden authorities cut down several hundred trees, destroyed crematoriums, and occupied vast areas of land in the punji over the last few years.

John Paul Chichhim, the punji's headman, said, "I had around 150 acres of land even in 2003. Now I have only 60 acres and the rest have been occupied by outsiders."

Mintu Rema, another resident of the punji, said he cultivated betel leaf trees on around two acres of land. "But the tea garden's men destroyed all of my betel leaf, cutting down many trees in December last year," he

Indo-Soviet treaty signed

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Gromyko arrived in New Delhi yesterday on a hurriedly arranged visit to demonstrate Soviet support of India in its worsening dispute with Pakistan over the Pakistan army's suppression of the independence movement in Bangladesh.

The New York Times, in an editorial published on August 10, 1971, termed this diplomatic move as "a major foreign policy coup", and said, "The decision of Moscow and New Delhi to cement their long-time cooperation with a twenty-year treaty undoubtedly was influenced by apprehension in both capitals about the growing rapprochement between the United States and China. But the moving

Govt-people disconnect writ large

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between the government and the disadvantaged people."

Although the budget took some measures on an ad-hoc basis in this regard, it could not take any concerted efforts to resolve the troubles of the poor broadly, she said.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, convener of the platform, presented the keynote paper.

He said the livelihoods of the disadvantaged people will face another stringent situation due to the latest Covid-19 wave, he said.

They (the poor and disadvantaged) are not an organised voice, he said, adding that the political leadership, which is supposed to sympathise with them, is making their situation tougher.

"Between March 2020 and July this year, the government rolled out 30 stimulus schemes worth Tk 128,194 crore, but the financial and food

KSA to reopen borders to vaccinated pilgrims

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billion annually.

Before yesterday's announcement, only immunised pilgrims residing in Saudi Arabia were eligible for umrah permits.

And last month only around 60,000 inoculated residents were allowed to take part in a scaled down form of the annual hajj.

But the kingdom is slowly opening up, and has started welcoming vaccinated foreign tourists since August 1.

Foreign pilgrims must be immunised with a Saudi-recognised vaccine -- Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson -- and agree to undergo quarantine if necessary, the SPA said quoting deputy hajj minister Abdulfattah bin Sulaiman Mashat.

He added that the kingdom was working on determining the destinations from which pilgrims can come and their numbers on a "periodic basis according to the classification of preventive measures" in those countries.

The kingdom has also begun

Prof Najma Chowdhury passes away

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Najma had established in 2000.

"Prof Najma herself was an institution and, to us, she was like tree that provided shade," Sanzida told The Daily Star.

She left behind two daughters -- Lamiya Chowdhury and Bushra Hasina Chowdhury. Bushra is a teacher at DU's international relations department.

Born in Sylhet on February 26, 1942, Najma Chowdhury was also an adviser to the caretaker government in 1996.

As her father Chowdhury Imamuzzaman was a civil engineer, she was brought up in different districts, including Dhaka and Rajshahi. Her mother Amirunnessa Khatun was a homemaker but she had a library in the house where Najma could spend hours delving into her favourite books.

She completed her SSC exams in

alleged.

Contacted, tea garden manager AK Azad denied the allegations and said they had only cut trees on the land owned by the tea garden authorities.

During a recent visit to the punji, the Sylhet divisional coordinator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), advocate Shah Shaheda Akhter observed the number of indigenous families in the punji has come down to 17 from 47 around 20 years ago.

Grinal Rangdi, the headman of Shaheb Tila punji, located in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila, said his betel leaf garden came under attack by outsiders twice this year.

"Some outsiders, along with local forest officer Zahirul Islam, forcibly entered my betel leaf garden on April 13. They destroyed around 150 betel trees and cut down 25 other large trees," he said.

"Then, some outsiders came to my gardens on May 15 and destroyed around 1,000 betel trees."

Contacted, Zahirul Islam, a local forest beat officer, denied the allegation, claiming he was not involved in any such incident.

A similar attack took place at Agarpunji in Moulvibazar's Barlekha

upazila on the night of May 30.

Around 1,000 betel trees were destroyed that night, said the punji's headman Sukhman Anse, adding that the victims incurred a loss of around Tk 8 lakh.

Some 48 indigenous families live in Agarpunji and all of them depend on betel leaf cultivation for their livelihoods.

Betel gardens in Bonakhola Punji of Barlekha upazila were also attacked, and occupied, that same month.

Headwoman Nara Dhar alleged that outsiders equipped with sharp weapons attacked their betel gardens on May 26, occupying three gardens and setting up a temporary house.

However, the local administration later drove away the outsiders and recovered the Khasi community's gardens, as reported earlier by The Daily Star.

Recently, a 10-member delegation of a citizens' platform visited Agarpunji, Bonakhola, and Kakrachhara punjis and demanded effective measures by the government to end such intimidation and eviction of indigenous people.

Writer and researcher Pavel Partha, and a member of the delegation,

Rahman would be tried by a special military court for "waging war against Pakistan" and other offences.

The announcement said the trial would begin on August 11, 1971 and would be conducted in secret.

Bangabandhu would be given a chance to prepare his defence and would be provided with all facilities permitted by law, including engaging a lawyer of his own choice, provided that the lawyer is a citizen of Pakistan, the announcement said.

The government announcement did not say where the trial would be held, nor did it identify the members of the court.

Meanwhile, the Associated Press said Bangabandhu had been reported

Bangladesh, said that the budget also "encouraged corruption" by giving people a chance to whiten black money.

Mustafizur Rahman, another distinguished fellow of the CPD, said that the economy now faces a K-shaped recovery, meaning that the recovery process is uneven.

"The rich are recovering but the situation is quite the opposite for the poor."

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, said that some female migrant workers were also repatriated to the country due to the pandemic.

"The government should about think whether any special support can be given to them," and that many children are deprived of cash incentives, which is ultimately forcing them to drop out of school due to financial hardships.

"There is no plan on how to

resolve the social problem. So, the government should emphasise on this issue," she said.

Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of the Campaign for Popular Education, said that the government should have increased the volume of stipends for students.

"We also requested the government to extend internet facilities with a low cost so that taking part in online classes can become easier, but no such initiative has been taken."

Mushtaque Raza Chowdhury, vice-chairperson of Brac, said that the rich were now benefiting from the "vaccination", while the story is different for the poor as a majority is even deprived of getting vaccinated.

Asif Ibrahim, chairman of Chittagong Stock Exchange, said that the government should take more steps to protect small businesses during economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

hours, the federal health ministry said yesterday, taking its tally to 31.93 million cases. Deaths rose by 491, taking total fatalities to 427,862.

Vietnam's health ministry reported 9,690 infections yesterday, a record daily increase and up from 7,334 cases on Saturday. Most of the new infections were detected in the epicentre Ho Chi Minh City and the neighbouring provinces of Binh Duong and Dong Nai, the ministry said.

The Philippines' health ministry yesterday recorded 9,671 new coronavirus cases and 287 additional deaths, the biggest single-day spike in the country's death toll since April 9.

In a bulletin, the ministry said total confirmed infections in the Southeast Asian country had risen to 1.66 million, while the death toll had climbed to 29,122.

Australia's three most populous states of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland reported a total of 282 Covid-19 new locally acquired infections yesterday, with authorities struggling to quell outbreaks of the Delta variant.

In 2008, She was nominated as a Professor Emeritus of the university and won the Ekushey Padak the same year.

Her husband was former chief justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury who died in 2004.

Prof Tania Haque, an ex-chairperson of the women and gender studies department, said, "She [Najma] was an inspiration and encouragement for the women in Bangladesh, she was an impossibly meritorious and wise person."

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, DU Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr Md Akhtaruzzaman, the departments of political science and women and gender studies, and Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, among others, expressed deep shock at the death of the esteemed professor.

Najma was buried at the Banani graveyard after namaz-e-janaza at Gulshan's Azad Mosque.

said these minority groups are able to balance the environment they live in for the state free of cost, and thus these pieces of land should be under their care.

"If their management is recognised, the environment will be better and the people can live in peace," he added.

Robayet Ferdous, a journalism professor at the University of Dhaka and a member of the delegation, opined that the government should formulate a separate policy for the protection of punji people.

Indigenous communities living in the punjis are struggling hard for survival as they are facing repeated attacks by outsiders, said Father Joseph Gomes OMI, coordinator of the Indigenous Environment Movement of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) in Sylhet division.

Bangladesh Adivasi Forum central committee General Secretary Sanjeeb Drong said such violence against punji people has been going on for years. "But the problem is yet to be resolved."

Contacted, Moulvibazar Deputy Commissioner Mir Nahid Ahsan said necessary legal measures will be taken to ensure the security of punji people and their property.

imprisoned at Mianwali, 100 miles southwest of Rawalpindi. The news agency quoted informed sources as saying he had refused an offer of a lawyer and that he contended that the military tribunal before which he was to appear was "not competent" to judge him.

ISLAMABAD INVITES GROMYKO

The Pakistan government invited Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko to visit Pakistan. The disclosure came as Pakistan government sources said the foreign office was studying the implications of the treaty between Russia and India.

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Six die as truck

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Hossain, 52, his wife Arifa Begum, 40, Shahidul Islam, 25, all from of Filipnagar village of Kushtia's Daulatpur upazila, Abdullah Al Mamun, 33, of Satsoil village under Tangail Sadar upazila and Jasim Uddin, 42, of Saharabati village in Gangni upazila of Meherpur district.

The identity of another deceased, a female, could not be known as of 6:00pm yesterday, said Md Mojaffar Hossain, officer-in-charge of Bonpara Highway Police Station.

The injured were taken to Gurudaspur upazila health complex. One of the injured died at the hospital, Officer-in-charge of Gurudaspur Police Station Abdur Razzak said.

Hearing news of the accident, Deputy Commissioner of Natore Shamim Ahmed and Natore SP Liton Kumar Saha rushed to the spot.

DC Shamim Ahmed said, "I visited the spot and suspect that the deceased and the injured were labourers. They were going to Dhaka by the mini-truck probably to join work."

Asked how the victims could be going to Dhaka on a mini-truck amid the nationwide lockdown imposed to curb the spread of Covid-19, the DC said, "We are allowing workers involved in construction work to move amid the lockdown. They seemed to be workers."

Md Mojaffar Hossain, OC of Bonpara Highway Police Station, said, "Amid lockdown they were going towards Dhaka by evading detection. It is not possible for us to regulate hundred percent as some people are going through anyway."

Tears, standing

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Messi, 34 and with Barcelona for 21 years, went on to mop away tears throughout the event, using a tissue handed to him by his wife Antonella Rocuzzo, who was in the front row with their three children.

The event ended in another round of applause.

"I have grown up in the club and I became the man I am here... I feel very sad that I have to leave this club, this club that I love. I wasn't expecting it," Messi said, adding that he and his family had been convinced they were going to stay in Barcelona, and "wanted that more than anything".

He said, however, he wanted to carry on competing and winning titles "as long as I can", and was talking to Paris St Germain about a potential contract.

The six-time Ballon d'Or winner has had tearful outbursts in the past, after Barcelona's stunning 3-2 defeat to Chelsea in the semi-final of the Champions League in 2012, which left him prostrated on the pitch and crying, or losing the 2016 Copa America final for Argentina against Chile.

Tears marked his emotional goodbye to his Barca team mate Andres Iniesta who left the club in 2018, and he also cried, this time with joy, when Argentina won the Copa America last month by defeating Brazil 1-0.

Both Barca, which has suffered steep losses recently, and Messi had wanted to sign a new contract.

But the Argentine's deal would have taken salaries to 110% of the club's earnings, even after he agreed to a 50% pay cut. The club said this would jeopardise its future given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to comply with the financial rules of Spain's La Liga competition.

Machu Picchu

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earlier than expected, according to a news release.

This means Pachacuti's early conquests took place earlier, helping to explain how the Inca Empire became the largest and most powerful in pre-Columbian America.

Based on historical documents, it was thought that Machu Picchu was built after 1440, or maybe even 1450. However, Burger and his team used accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) dating of human remains to get a more accurate picture.

AMS works on even small amounts of organic material, which enlarges the pool of skeletons that can be studied. The team looked at 26 individuals from cemeteries at Machu Picchu that were recovered from the site during excavations in 1912.

The bodies were buried under boulders, overhanging cliffs or shallow caves, sealed with masonry walls, according to the study. There were also grave goods such as ceramics and bronze and silver shawl pins.

"This is the first study based on scientific evidence to provide an estimate for the founding of Machu Picchu and the length of its occupation," Burger said in the news release.

The historical records were written by Spanish conquistadors following their takeover of the area, and the results of the study question the merit of drawing conclusions based on these kinds of documents, according researchers.

Although the study acknowledges the "limitations" of radiocarbon dating, the researchers said the documentary evidence is unreliable.

"Perhaps the time has come for the radiocarbon evidence to assume priority in reconstructions of the chronology of the Inca emperors and the dating of Inca monumental sites such as Machu Picchu," reads the study.