

Army chief

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Chief of Army Staff Gen Manoj Mukund Naravane visited Bangladesh and invited the chiefs of Bangladesh army, navy, air force and other senior officers of the army to visit India.

He also paid tribute to the members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces who laid down their lives during the Liberation War of 1971 by laying wreath at the altar of Shikha Anirban in Dhaka Cantonment.

Rab arrests

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Later, four JMB members were arrested, he said, adding that they seized firearms, explosives and sharp weapons from their possession. No casualties was reported, he added.

Commander Khandaker Al Moin said the arrestees confessed their involvement in various militant activities during primary interrogation.

The arrestees recently took a special training at a secret place in Jamalpur and were tasked to rob financial and business institutions to render financial support for JMB, he claimed.

Tajuddin urges

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unseated by him were supporters of his regime.

YAHYA'S LIMITED AMNESTY OFFER President Yahya Khan today granted amnesty to all persons accused of anti-state activities during 'disturbances' between March 1 and September 5 except for those already charged.

Officials said that Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was not included in the amnesty order. The amnesty also did not apply to members of the National Assembly and Provincial Assembly of the eastern wing of Pakistan.

A number of people held for offences alleged to have been committed in the 'disturbances' in East Pakistan were released today from detention camps and jails in Dhaka, Cumilla, Jashore, Chattogram, Natore, and Rangpur. The release followed the general amnesty signed by President Yahya Khan.

ON THE WAR FRONT

In Rangpur-Dinajpur Sector, Muktibahini today killed 4 Pakistani soldiers in Dimapara area. They also demolished two transmission towers in Thakurgaon and Pirganj disrupting power supplies.

On the same day, Muktibahini successfully engaged enemy troops moving in vehicles towards East Godagari-Barakhata and killed 8 troops.

Muktibahini also damaged roads between Phulthola-Thakurgaon.

In Kushtia-Jessore-Khulna sector, Muktibahini exchanged fire with Pakistani troops in Goalhati area. As a result, 5 enemy soldiers were killed. In Asra area they killed one troop on the same day.

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US seen funding humanitarian aid for Afghanistan, but not its govt

REUTERS, Washington

The U.S. Congress is likely to finance U.N. and other agencies providing humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan but there is virtually no chance it will directly fund a new Taliban-led government, congressional aides said on Friday.

The United States has been a massive funder of Afghanistan since its 2001 invasion to topple the Taliban, setting aside roughly \$130 billion for security, governance and development and humanitarian needs.

Aides to the Democrats who control both houses of Congress and to Republicans said lawmakers were nearly certain to provide humanitarian aid for internally displaced Afghans and refugees but not to the government itself, at least for now.

"It would be difficult to convince members of Congress to do anything that would appear to be supporting the Taliban government," said a senior Senate Democratic aide, citing the absence of oversight and a reluctance "to support a government that is anathema to us."

A senior Senate Republican aide concurred.

"Republicans would absolutely not support giving money to the Taliban," the Republican aide said, saying they do not want to provide any money until Americans and Afghans who worked with the United States can leave Afghanistan.

While aides said there was an understanding that agencies such as the World Food Program and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees would need funds, the Republican said lawmakers would want strict conditions on how it is spent.

"There needs to be a distinct look at what this is going to look like and how this is going to flow," he said.



Health workers wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) administer a Covid-19 coronavirus nasal swab during a round of testing of workers outside a market in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Erosion now causing headaches

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flowing above the danger line.

Over in Manikganj, more than 1,000 houses of different areas in all the seven upazilas have been eroded in the last one month and about one lakh people of the upazilas are still marooned, according to locals.

"My two bighas of cropland have been devoured by Kaliganga river. Now that the river has come nearer to my house, it may go into the water anytime," said Ananda Rajbongshi, 45, a resident of Joynagar Majhipara area of Sadar upazila.

Jamuna was flowing 40 centimetres above the danger mark at Aricha point yesterday afternoon, according to

FFWC.

In Gaibandha, about 400 families have shifted to another safe place in the last two weeks as their household and croplands have been devoured by the Brahmaputra River at Char Kochkhali and Char Kharjani char area under Sadar upazila.

"We have become homeless as our house has gone into the river. We don't know how we will survive in the coming days," said Sheikh Siraj, 60, a resident of the Char Kochkhali area.

In Nilphamari, houses of about 200 families at the Bhendabari area of Dimla upazila were washed away by the Teesta river on Thursday

night after a spur of the Bangladesh Water Development Board was eroded.

Some 5,000 people of the upazila's low-lying areas have been remaining waterlogged for the last three days.

At Sirajganj's Kazipur upazila, two culverts and more than 100 metres of roads have been eroded by floodwater in the last two days. More than 1.5 lakh people of 35 unions are still marooned in the district's five upazilas.

In Tangail, several hundred people are passing days in fear of losing their homesteads and croplands as multiple cracks have been developed in the Silimpur-Karatia embankment

due to the huge current of the Pungli river, a branch of Jamuna.

In Lalmonirhat, about 30,000 people are passing hard days as they were hit by the flood. Teesta and Dharla, the two major rivers, were flowing above the danger level.

Over in Faridpur, nearly 20,000 families of 4 upazilas are affected by floodwater as the Padma river is flowing above its danger level.

In Bogura, Jamuna was still flowing 66 cm above the danger level as of yesterday afternoon.

Meanwhile, the government officials of the flood-hit districts said they were providing relief assistance to the victims.

RHD asked to explain delays, cost escalation

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delay.

Speaking to The Daily Star, the project authorities blamed delayed start of the physical work, rutting in the road, Covid-19 pandemic; and changes in road design for the delay and cost escalation.

Amid such a situation, the project evaluation committee will hold its meeting tomorrow, with Mamun-Al-Rashid, member (Physical Infrastructure Division) of the Planning Commission, in the chair, sources said.

This development comes at a time when failing to meet deadlines and cost escalation of development projects have become a major causes for concern for the government, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressing discontent over the delays on several occasions.

Every year, the government is allocating huge sums of money for the projects. But the projects' rate of progress seems to be quite different

from the rate at which the allocations are being raised every year due to a range of reasons.

The RHD alone has sought time extensions for about 80 projects in the last fiscal year for a host of reasons, said sources in the department.

PROJECT UNDER QUESTION

The Ecneec had approved the project in March 2017 to reconstruct a 38km stretch -- from Paullbari to Rajhat -- of Jashore-Khulna National Highway. Although the highway is being used for transportation of import and export goods through the Mongla Port, thickness of its pavement was not enough, warranting the reconstruction work, shows Planning Commission document.

As the project authority could not meet the December 2019 deadline, the road transport and bridges minister approved a revision of the project, raising the project cost to Tk 358.12 crore and extending the deadline to June 2020.

In May 2020, deadline of the

project, along with many others, was extended up to June 2021 as per the decision of the National Economic Council due to the pandemic.

Later, the Planning Commission, following a request from the project authorities, extended the deadline to June 2022.

But that was not the end of it.

The project authorities sought another revision of the project cost mentioning that they have to do some more work. If approved, the project cost would go up to Tk 371.52 crore. **WHAT PROJECT AUTHORITIES SAY** Project Director Syed Aslam Ali, also the additional chief engineer (Khulna Zone) of RHD, said they would require the additional money as they would raise the height of the shoulder of the road to widen it.

Asked why they were going to do the work now, he said overloaded trucks created ruts in the two-lane road and as per the suggestion of their consultant, they were going to do it.

Besides, they would build three

more truck bays, he added.

Enquired about the delay, SM Moazzem Hossain, executive engineer of Jashore RHD, said after the completion of tendering process, they were able to award the work to the contractors in March and May 2018 respectively for competing the work within two years.

Besides, complexities over cutting roadside trees also caused delays, leading them to seek six months' time, he added.

Meantime, movement of "overloaded" trucks created ruts in the road, forcing the project authorities to change the road design as per the instruction of the consultants. Completion of all these processes took more time due to the pandemic, Moazzem added.

The RHD official refuted the allegation that poor quality of work resulted in development of ruts in the road during the reconstruction period. He said movement of a large number of overloaded trucks led to the ruts.

Illegal weapons sneak in on credit

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DB police arrested Akul and the four others on Thursday after they came to Dhaka to deliver an arms consignment. The four are Ilias Hossain, Abdul Azim, Faruk Hossain, and Fazlur Rahman. The arrestees are now on three-day remand each, said DB officials.

Detectives said Akul mainly used to sell three types of firearms -- 9mm, 7.65mm 5-inch barrel and 7.65mm 3-inch barrel.

"Indian smugglers charged 61,000 Rupees for a 9mm, 51,000 for a 7.65mm 5-inch barrel and 41,000 for a 7.65mm 3-inch barrel. Akul used to sell those for Tk 1.20 lakh, Tk 90 thousand and Tk 80,000 respectively," a top official of DB police, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star yesterday.

In primary interrogation, Akul admitted that Indian smugglers used to make the firearms and bullets in factories in India. Those would then make their way to Kolkata and finally to Bangladesh.

The Daily Star has obtained a video clip of a conversation between of Akul and an Indian arms smuggler.

In the clip, Akul is heard asking

the Indian smuggler for 20 pieces of 7.65mm pistols. The Indian smuggler replies that he has only three in his hand, but he will be able to deliver the full consignment on September 6.

As Akul asks about the price, the Indian smuggler replies that it will be 41,000 Rupees for each firearm.

During the conversation, Akul and the Indian smuggler is heard using code words like Khabar (food) for bullets. For a consignment of 400 to 500 bullets, the Indian smugglers demands 800 Rupees for each.

Mashiur Rahman, deputy commissioner (Gulshan Division) of DB police, told The Daily Star that the arms smugglers were also found involved in gold and narcotics smuggling.

"Akul primarily has admitted that he used to bring in arms from three dealers in India. They used to keep the arms and bullets hidden in some border areas after wrapping them in plastic bags," he said.

The smugglers send the consignments to the Bangladesh side when vigilance on the border become a bit relaxed, said DB sources.

The DC said the criminals use some

day labourers for the crime and the labourers get their share of the money.

"The payment for the arms and bullets is done through hundi. Bangladeshi smugglers pay Bangladeshi currency to some local cosmetic shops and the Indian smugglers collect Indian Rupee from some shops in their country," said the deputy commissioner.

"We have got the list of smugglers and hundi traders in Bangladesh. We are now analysing their activities and carrying out drives to arrest all of them," he said.

Asked about the buyers of the illegal arms, he said the list includes criminals and land grabbers.

This correspondent has managed to talk with a criminal who admitted to be involved in the transnational syndicate.

He claimed that the price of arms has recently gone up as an arms factory in India was shut down due to the Covid.

DB DC Mashiur said, "We have come to know from smugglers that earlier the price of each firearms was on average 28 to 30 thousand Rupees in India and they used to sell it in

Bangladesh for Tk 45 to 50 thousand. But now, the prices have doubled."

"These firearms are automatic and 'made in USA' is written on them," he said.

The arms smuggling syndicate member also said in Bangladesh, they mainly bring the arms consignments when any part of the Indo-Bangla border is found unguarded.

Asked about it, Lt Col Foyezur Rahman, director (operation) of BGB headquarters, told The Daily Star yesterday that the border never remains unguarded.

"But we have only 56,000 members in BGB and Bangladesh and India border is the fifth largest border in the world. One patrol team has to patrol around eight to nine kilometres at a time," he said.

He also said that they have increased the number of border outposts and taken steps to increase their manpower.

"We are doing our best with our limited resources," he added.

Meanwhile, the central BCL yesterday suspended Akul for violating discipline of the organisation, it said in a statement.

Chinese woman

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China claimed to have gone 40 years without any sleep, a feat confirmed by her husband and their neighbors, some of whom actually put her to the test, only to fall asleep themselves. Li last remembered getting some sleep when she was five or six, but now in her mid-40s, sleep is nothing but an old memory.

A resident of a village in Zhongmou County, Henan Province, Li is somewhat of a local celebrity in her community, because of her alleged ability to stay up all through the day and the night.

Li's husband, Liu Suoquin, also confirmed that his wife didn't seem to need any sleep at all. Ever since they got married, he noticed that she stayed awake night and day, doing chores around the house even in the dead of night. She kept telling him that she couldn't sleep, so he blamed it on insomnia and bought her some sleeping pills. That didn't work on her either.

According to Bastille Post, Li Zhanying sought medical help for her condition many times, but doctors never found anything suspicious. However, after recently visiting a medical center in Beijing, the mystery of her decades-old lack of sleep was finally solved. A team of doctors used advanced sensors to monitor the woman for 48 hours, and discovered that she did in fact sleep, just not the way most of us do.

Data gathered during the 48-hour brainwave monitoring showed that Li did get light and moderate sleep like ordinary people, only not while laying down in bed with her eyes closed, but while conversing with her husband. Doctors described this phenomenon as "sleep when awake," a state similar to sleepwalking, where some of Li Zhanying's nerves and organs are still active.

Doctors said that Li was actually deceived by her own brain. When she was resting, part of her body had already entered dormancy, but she didn't have to close her eyes to do so. For example, when talking to her husband, Li Zhanying sometimes had slow eyeblinks and hollow eyes, which indicated that she was resting during those moments.

Because of her unusual way of resting her body and brain, Li continues to believe that she has not slept in 40 years. She doesn't spend more than 10 minutes with her eyes closed every day, so she's technically right.

Banani cop

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official communication in this regard.

They may soon communicate with the Police Headquarters (PHQ) about the police officer's arrest, he said.

Contacted, Md Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general (media) of the PHQ, told The Daily Star last evening he has heard about the arrest from some unofficial sources.

With a photo of the inspector surrounded by BSF officers, an Indian media platform -- Uttar Banga Sambad -- reports that the BSF on Friday detained a Bangladeshi named Sohel Rana from the Changrabandha border in India's Cooch Behar district on charge of entering India illegally.

It added that the arrestee works at the Dhaka Metropolitan Police. Passports, multiple mobile phones and ATM cards were seized from his possession.

Nur-e-Azam Mia, officer-in-charge of Banani Police Station, said Sohel Rana left office on Thursday night and did not come to the station in the last two days.

He learnt from the media that Sohel had been detained by the BSF.

Police officers working in the Gulshan Division confirmed that the man arrested by the BSF is indeed Sohel Rana.

He is allegedly involved with e-orange, which made headlines for reportedly embezzling crores of taka by not delivering customers' products. His sister and brother-in-law used to run the company.

On August 16, customers filed a case against owners and staffers of e-orange for embezzling around Tk 1,100 crore by not delivering products.

Md Abu Taher, a resident of Dhaka's Azampur, filed the case on behalf of 37 customers with Gulshan police accusing Sohel Rana's sister Sonia Mehjabin, her husband Masukur Rahman, Chief Operating Officer Amanullah Chowdhury, Bithi Akter, Kausar and all other owners of e-orange.

Sonia, Masukur, Amanullah and former COO Nazmul Alam Russel are currently in jail.

Since the filing of the case, Sohel had been denying allegations of his involvement with e-orange.

However, the name of his name appeared as the director in the TIN certificate taken to open the company called Orange Bangladesh, which is located in the same area as e-orange.

There are allegations against him regarding withdrawing Tk 2.5 crore from the company at different times.

Aminul Islam, inspector (investigation) of Gulshan Police Station, said when they asked Sonia about it, she told the investigators that Sohel withdrew the money on her request, adding that e-orange's ownership was recently transferred to Bithi Akter.

Earlier, VAT intelligence filed another case against the company on charge of tax evasion.

US Covid-19 booster shot campaign to start with only Pfizer: source

REUTERS, Washington

A White House plan to offer COVID-19 booster shots will most likely start this month only with the vaccine made by Pfizer Inc and BioNTech, a narrower initiative than anticipated, a source familiar with the matter said on Friday.

President Joe Biden had expected to launch a campaign to administer 100 million booster shots on Sept. 20. But U.S. vaccine makers other than Pfizer

have lagged in seeking authorization of an additional dose.

Moderna Inc only started submitting data for regulatory approval of a booster shot on Wednesday and said on Friday it had completed its submission.

A panel of experts that advises the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on vaccines plans to meet on Sept. 17 to discuss additional doses of Pfizer's shot.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, Biden's chief

medical adviser, told MSNBC in an interview on Friday that it did not appear the information needed for Moderna would be available in time for a Sept. 20 rollout.

"It may be a delay for a few weeks. We don't know," Fauci said.

Johnson & Johnson has not yet asked regulators to approve a booster for its one-dose shot, and last week said it was in discussions with the FDA on the subject.

Earlier, the New York Times reported that the officials told the White House on Thursday to scale back a plan to offer the booster shots to the general public later this month.

As infections from the Delta variant rise, the Biden administration is concerned that COVID infections among people who are fully vaccinated are a sign that vaccine protection is waning. It has pushed boosters as a way to rebuild immunity.