

11 ZEBRAS' DEATHS High nitrate levels in grass linked: probe

STAR REPORT

High levels of nitrate in the grass led to zebras at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Safari Park in Gazipur was linked to the deaths of 11 of the animals last month.

A member of the probe committee investigating the deaths revealed this information yesterday after the probe report was submitted on Sunday. The environment, forest and climate change ministry on January 26 formed the probe committee, led by Sanjay Kumar Bhowmik, additional secretary of the ministry.

Dr Noor Ali, the committee member and a professor of the pathology department of the veterinary science faculty at Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), said the samples of the zebras were tested at the university's pathology and pharmacology departments.

Noor Ali, also the director of BAU Research System, said the park authorities had asked the contractor to supply "tender" grass instead of "mature" grass for zebras since December 18 last year.

The presence of trace amounts of nitrate was higher than the normal limit in the tender grass, resulting in nitrate poisoning of the zebras, he said quoting the probe report.

In many cases, the cultivators of the grass use excess doses of urea for rapid growth and in those cases, they have to wait for a few days so that the concentration of nitrate naturally decreases, he said. Since the park authorities wanted tender grass for the zebras, they possibly did not wait long enough, he added.

Another member of the committee said nitrate was not the single cause of the deaths; the concentration of nitrate weakened the immune systems of the zebras, leading to the

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In an unknown location, Ukrainian soldiers taking part in military exercises, shows this handout picture released yesterday by the press service of the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

PHOTO: AFP

UKRAINE PEACE SUMMIT PLAN

Russia pours cold water

Says it's 'premature' to organise Biden-Putin meeting; UK claims Russia's plan to invade has 'already begun'

AGENCIES

The Kremlin warned yesterday there are no concrete plans for a summit between the Russian and US leaders, as diplomats scrambled to head off the threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The idea of a meeting between presidents Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden has been championed by France and cautiously welcomed by Ukraine as a way to avert a catastrophic war in Europe.

But Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "It's premature to talk about any specific plans for organising any kind of summits" adding that no "concrete plans" had been put in place.

France's President Emmanuel Macron called Putin on Sunday and afterwards his office said that both the Russian and Biden were open to the idea.

The summit would go ahead, however, only "on the condition that Russia does not invade Ukraine."

"There is a diplomatic hope," France's minister for European Affairs Clement Beaufort told LCI television.

"If there is still a chance to avoid war, to avoid a confrontation and build a political and diplomatic solution, then we need to

take it," he said.

But in Washington, a senior US administration official told AFP: "Timing to be determined. Format to be determined. So it's all completely notional."

Visiting Brussels, Ukraine's foreign minister welcomed the French effort. "We believe that every effort aimed a diplomatic solution is worth trying," Dmytro Kuleba said.

Kuleba also said the European Union had agreed "in principle" to set up an advisory military instructor mission in Ukraine, but the details have yet to be thrashed out.

Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said there was no sign of Russian forces withdrawing from the border, and that Moscow-backed rebels continue to shell Ukrainian positions.

"Since the beginning of this day, as of 09:00, 14 attacks have already been recorded, 13 of them from weapons prohibited by the Minsk agreements," he told reporters in Kyiv.

Ukraine yesterday firmly denied Russian claims that Russian forces had killed five Ukrainian "saboteurs" who allegedly crossed the border to stage an attack.

Putin told his security council it was

necessary to consider an appeal from the leaders of two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine for Russia to recognise them as independent.

Putin also said in televised remarks yesterday that the threat to Russia would substantially increase if Ukraine were to join Nato.

In recent weeks, according to US intelligence, Moscow has massed more than 150,000 troops and sailors around Ukraine's borders in Belarus, Russia, Crimea and the Black Sea, reports Reuters.

A spokesman for UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson told a media briefing yesterday that intelligence reports suggest Putin intends to launch an invasion of Ukraine, reports BBC.

"The intelligence we are seeing suggests that Russia intends to launch an invasion and that President Putin's plan has already begun," the spokesman said.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said yesterday intelligence suggests any Russian invasion of Ukraine would employ a particularly brutal strategy to "crush" the civilian population.

The foreign ministers of the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will travel to Ukraine this week, officials said.

Man's death sparks protest

Family says he was tortured in custody

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A man's death sparked protests in Shantiganj, Sunamganj, amid allegations that he was tortured in custody at a police station.

Wazir Mia, 40, of Shatruramdan area, died at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital yesterday, 10 days after he was released on bail.

Grieving family members said he died because police tortured him at Shantiganj Police Station after arresting him in the early hours of February 10.

Villagers later blocked Sunamganj-Sylhet road at Pagla Bazar for three hours, demanding justice for Wazir.

Police said Wazir was arrested on charges of stealing cows.

His brother Dalim Mia said, "He was severely tortured. He was released on bail the next day, but fell ill. We took him to the hospital in critical condition."

Superintendent of Police in Sunamganj Mizanur Rahman said there will be an autopsy and actions will be taken if evidence of torture is found.

College student dies in garage collapse

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

A college student working at the garage of Gangachara upazila nirbahi officer got killed yesterday after the ceiling collapsed on him.

Police said Dipak Roy, 23, who was a student of Gangachara Government College, was painting the garage.

He died at the scene around 10:30am, said Sushanta Kumar Sarkar, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Election officer suspended for bribery

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

An election officer has been suspended for allegedly taking Tk 4 lakh in bribes from a man running for membership in a union parishad of Rangpur's Mithapukur.

Abdul Hannan was suspended by the Election Commission Secretariat after the leaked audio clip of a phone conversation said to be between him and the man went viral on Facebook, officials said.

In the clip, Hannan is heard making promises of providing the caller with 300 ballot papers in exchange for Tk 5 lakh. They eventually settle for Tk 4 lakh.

Both sections questioning

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told The Daily Star.

In the proposed amendments, section 155(4) will be repealed and a proviso will be incorporated into section 146(3) so that none can question the characters of the witnesses, including the rape victims, in court, he said.

The draft recently submitted to the High Court, proposing to amend only section 155(4), was not "final or effective", he added.

Contacted, Supreme Court lawyer ZI Khan Panna, also an eminent rights activist, said he

was satisfied with the government's move to stop all scopes for questioning a rape victim's character.

"I must congratulate and appreciate Law Minister Anisul Huq for his sincerity in taking steps to amend sections 155(4) and 146(3) of the Evidence Act. Such provisions formulated during the British period against the prestige and dignity of women cannot be in effect in Bangladesh ..."

Panna, a trustee member of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) and former chairperson of Ain O

Salish Kendra (ASK), said the government can issue a circular, urging courts to stop the use of 155(4) and 146(3) for a temporary period before the parliament passes the bill on the amendments.

According to section 155(4), "When a man is prosecuted for rape or an attempt to ravish, it may be shown that the prosecutrix was of generally immoral character."

"Explanation: A witness declaring another witness to be unworthy of credit may not, upon his examination-in-chief, give reasons for his belief, but he may be

asked his reasons in cross-examination, and the answers which he gives cannot be contradicted, though, if they are false, he may afterwards be charged with giving false evidence."

Section 146(3) allows the imposition of questions that may injure the character of the witness in order to verify their credibility.

According to it, "When a witness is cross-examined, he may, in addition to the questions hereinbefore referred to, be asked any questions which tend — to shake his credit, by injuring his character,

although the answer to such questions might tend directly or indirectly to criminate him or might expose or tend directly or indirectly to expose him to a penalty or forfeiture."

The government on February 17 submitted a draft proposal for the amendment of only section 155(4) to the HC through the attorney general's office in compliance with its November 16 directive.

On February 20, the HC fixed February 22 for hearing the writ petition by BLAST, ASK and Nari Pakkho seeking the cancellation of both sections.

3 children burned dead

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work, and the house was locked from outside.

Sumon is a day labourer while Modina works at a garment factory. They are from Netrakona's Kalmakanda area. They moved to the house only a month ago. They had locked it from outside for the children's safety, he also said, quoting locals.

The children were buried in Netrakona's Dhitpur Sunoi village yesterday,

Mamun added.

Kalmakanda UNO Mohammad Sohel Rana handed Tk 30,000 to the family as financial support on behalf of the Netrakona district administration.

In another incident, two men, who sustained critical burns after the gas cylinder of a truck exploded in Narayanganj Sadar's Aliganj area around noon on Sunday, died at a hospital in Dhaka yesterday.

Alam, 45, passed away

around 12:30am and Joj Mia, 45, around 8:00am at the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, said Partha Sanker Paul, a resident surgeon at the institute.

At least 10 people sustained burns in the incident. Six were admitted to the institute in a critical state.

[Our correspondents in Mymensingh and Narayanganj contributed to this report]

Senior secretary pulled strings

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land ownership and pay money to individuals who did not actually own the lands acquired by the government.

The ACC recently launched a fresh investigation into the land acquisition scam. Contacted on February 19, Jahurul Haque, commissioner (investigation) of the ACC, said he could not remember why a fresh investigation was being done in the case.

Sharif, whose investigations often made headlines, was sacked on February 16 without prior notice. His termination caused much speculation, especially since he filed a general diary mentioning threats over his life just days before he lost his job.

Sharif said the senior secretary, Mayor Mujibur, and a former deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar met ACC Commissioner (enquiry) Mozammel Haque Khan several times to get him sacked.

Several ACC officials in the capital said they saw the aforesaid individuals meet Mozammel at his office.

Sharif said some of the individuals found involved in his investigation met Mozammel on February 12 in Chattogram where Mozammel went to attend an event organised by Bangladesh Scouts.

This correspondent yesterday called Mozammel several times and texted him, asking for his comment on the allegations. He neither received the calls nor replied to the text.

Contacted over the phone around 6:00pm yesterday, Mayor Mujibur said he would call back this correspondent regarding the allegations after a meeting he was at.

Mujib switched off his two phone numbers after the meeting ended around 7:00pm.

This newspaper published several reports in 2020 and 2021 on the land acquisition scam

in Cox's Bazar where the government has acquired thousands of acres of land. The scammers stole around Tk 78 crore from three projects with forged documents of land ownership.

In June, 2021, the senior secretary lodged complaints with the ACC, accusing Sharif of obstructing the implementation of government projects.

Unicef stipend for Afghan teachers

REUTERS, Kabul

The United Nations children's agency would pay Afghan teachers a monthly stipend for at least two months, the organisation said, with salaries unpaid for months as the country is plunged into economic crisis due to sanctions on the Taliban administration.