



People run toward a platform on their way to board a train at Slovyansk central station, in the Donbass region yesterday, amid Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Ukrainian leaders of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions in the Donbas have asked civilians to evacuate west in reaction to an anticipated Russian offensive to take the eastern region.

PHOTO: AFP

RISE IN RIGHTS ABUSES

US rebukes India

Blinken says Washington monitoring some recent concerning developments

REUTERS, Washington

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States was monitoring what he described as a rise in human rights abuses in India by some officials, in a rare direct rebuke by Washington of the Asian nation's rights record.

"We regularly engage with our Indian partners on these shared values (of human rights) and to that end, we are monitoring some recent concerning developments in India including a rise in human rights abuses by some government, police and prison officials," Blinken said on Monday in a joint press briefing with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh.

Blinken did not elaborate. Singh and Jaishankar, who spoke after Blinken at the briefing, did not comment on the human rights issue.

Blinken's remarks came days after US Representative Ilhan Omar questioned the alleged reluctance of the US government to criticize Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government on human rights.

"What does Modi need to do to India's Muslim population before we will stop considering them a partner in peace?" Omar, who belongs to President Joe Biden's Democratic Party, said last week.

Modi's critics say his Hindu nationalist ruling party has fostered religious polarization since coming to power in 2014.

Since Modi came to power, right-wing Hindu groups have launched attacks on minorities claiming they are trying to prevent religious conversions. Several Indian states have passed or are considering anti-conversion laws that challenge the constitutionally protected right to freedom of belief.

In 2019, the government passed a citizenship law that critics said undermined India's secular constitution by excluding Muslim migrants from neighbouring countries. The law was meant to grant Indian nationality to Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Parsis and Sikhs who fled Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan before 2015.



BIDEN-MODI TALKS ON UKRAINE WAR

Indian stance frustrates US



AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a "candid exchange of views" on the Ukraine crisis at a virtual summit Monday, but the United States appeared to have made little progress in wooing India away from its neutral stance on Russia's invasion.

"It is important that all countries, especially those with leverage, press Putin to end the war," Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters after the virtual summit, which was followed by an in-person meeting with his Indian counterpart and the defense ministers from both countries.

"And it's also important that democracies stand together and speak with one voice to defend the values that we share," Blinken said after the talks, described by one US official as "warm and productive."

Biden made no major demands of India, a key strategic ally in US plans to contain growing Chinese power in the Asia-Pacific region, and there was no indication of significant progress toward a unified posture on the Ukraine conflict.

But White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Biden "made clear that he does not believe it's in India's interest to accelerate or increase imports of Russian energy and other commodities."

Modi has tried to walk a tightrope between

maintaining relations with the West and avoiding alienating Russia, but has raised concerns in Washington by continuing to buy Russian oil.

In his talks with Biden, he merely said the situation was "very worrying" and recalled his support for talks between Russia and Ukraine, which Washington views with skepticism.

Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar showed a hint of annoyance when he told reporters asking about Biden's push for India to cut energy imports from Russia that "probably our total purchases for the month would be less than what Europe does in an afternoon."

Biden has been pressuring world leaders to take a hard line against Moscow, although a US official said there was no "concrete ask and concrete answer" on energy imports.

"India has to make its own decisions about how it approaches this challenge," said Blinken, noting however that India "has made very strong statements ... condemning the killing of civilians in Ukraine" and was "providing significant humanitarian assistance."

Failing to win over such a key ally to its cause, Washington appears instead to be heaping on the pledges of friendship to prevent India from gradually slipping into the Russian camp, with Moscow actively courting it.

'PARTYGATE' SCANDAL

UK PM Boris, FM Sunak to be fined

AFP, London

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and finance minister Rishi Sunak are to be fined for breaching Covid-19 lockdown laws in what has become known as the "Partygate" scandal, prompting calls yesterday for their resignation. "The prime minister and chancellor of the exchequer have today received notification that the Metropolitan Police intend to issue them with fixed penalty notices," a Downing Street spokeswoman said yesterday. The announcement came after London's Metropolitan Police said they had issued more than 50 fines over the parties, without disclosing the number or identities of those being fined. The leader of the opposition Labour Party, Keir Starmer, swiftly called for the two most senior members of the government to resign. "Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak have broken the law and repeatedly lied to the British public," Starmer tweeted.

Clashes rock West Bank

Palestinian stabs Israeli cop before being shot dead

AFP, Jenin

Fresh clashes between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian militants rocked the West Bank city of Jenin yesterday as a Palestinian stabbed a police officer in Israel before being shot

dead. Israeli troops launched a fourth day of operations around Jenin after an assailant from the flashpoint district shot and killed three people in a Tel Aviv bar last week in the latest of a spate of attacks that have stunned the Jewish state. Prime Minister

Naftali Bennett -- who warned in response that there would "not be limits for this war" -- overnight visited the Tel Aviv shooting scene and vowed: "We will not let our enemy stop our lives. We will continue to live our lives and at the same time we will fight where they are located, in their bases, at their source -- and, please God, we will win." The Palestinian official news agency Wafa said "clashes erupted" for a fourth day between young Palestinian men and Israeli soldiers "who fired live bullets, stun grenades and tear gas at them". The Israeli army said its "soldiers responded with live ammunition toward suspects who hurled explosive devices at them, as well as toward armed suspects in the area".



POTENTIAL INVASION THREAT

Taiwan issues wartime survival handbook

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's military published a handbook yesterday advising civilians on how to prepare for a potential Chinese invasion, including where to find bomb shelters and how to stockpile emergency supplies. China's Communist Party has never controlled self-ruled Taiwan but it nonetheless views the island as part of its territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if necessary. Those threats have turned more bellicose under Xi Jinping. Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine has also heightened fears that China might one day follow through on threats to annex its smaller neighbour.

After 18 years, verdict due today

FROM PAGE 1

Prof Azad was attacked by militants while he was about to get on a rickshaw on his way to his university residence from the Ekushey Boi Mela.

The judgment in the case against four members of the banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) is set to be delivered today.

Prof Azad was found dead at his apartment in Germany six months after the attack.

The charge sheet quoting the autopsy report said the attack resulted in the victim's death. Azad went to Germany on a research scholarship.

According to the court documents, it took eight years to complete the probe in the case while another eight and half years had gone by to complete the trial, causing frustration among his family members and admirers.

The families even stopped keeping up with the case after a while, said Mauli Azad, daughter of the victim.

"It has been 18 years," she said. "Every time my father's death anniversary arrives, journalists call us asking for updates on the case. We would call the state lawyers, and sometimes find the proceedings pretty much, where they were the year before."

A day after the murder attempt, Azad's brother Manjur Kabir filed an attempted murder case with Ramna Police Station against some unnamed people. The case was later turned into a murder case with his death.

Five days after the incident, Kazi Abdul Malek, an inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department, took the charge of the probe.

After three and a half years of the probe, IO Malek submitted a charge

sheet accusing five JMB men, including its chief Shaykh Abdur Rahman, on November 14, 2007.

However, dissatisfied with the probe, the complainant filed a petition with a Dhaka court, seeking further probe into the case.

Following the petition, the court ordered further investigation on October 20, 2009.

After the court's order, another CID inspector Mustafizur Rahman was assigned to reinvestigate the case. But he was transferred to Chattogram Range Police.

Later, the case was handed over to another CID inspector Luthfor Rahman to reinvestigate.

Investigator Luthfor took two years more time to complete the probe. He submitted a supplementary charge sheet against five JMB operatives -- Nur Mohammad, Mizanur Rahman Minhaz, Anwarul

Alam Anwar, Salehin alias Salahuddin and Hafiz Mahmud -- under murder charges on April 30, 2012.

The court framed charges against five on September 10, 2012. After three months, the trial began with the deposition of the complainant.

The prosecution produced 41 out of 58 prosecution witnesses before the court for depositions from 2013 to 2017, which delayed the trial proceedings.

"The trial proceedings in the case were delayed as some witnesses were abroad. Moreover, the court remained closed for a long time due to the Covid-19 pandemic," Additional Public Prosecutor Shaiful Islam Helal told The Daily Star.

The defence lawyers delayed the trial proceedings, taking many times during arguments, the state lawyers claimed.

However, Faruque Ahmed, a defence lawyer,

said the prosecution failed to produce witnesses before the court in time, so the trial proceedings had delayed.

"We have always helped the prosecution to complete the trial," he insisted.

Contacted, IO Luthfor Rahman said they got the autopsy report from abroad late, so they took time to submit the probe.

After the attack, Azad was treated at the Combined Military Hospital for some 24 days. Later, he was taken to Bangkok for better treatment. He returned home after 46 days.

Of the accused, Mizanur and Anwarul confessed to the attack. They are now behind bars. The remaining two accused are on the run.

On February 23, 2014, accused Hafiz Mahmud was killed in a "gunfight" with the law enforcers after he had fled from a prison van. So, his name was dropped from the trial.

Probe body visits

FROM PAGE 14

(BWDB) Additional Director General Mahbubur Rahman, chief engineer Enayet Ullah, Sunamganj's Additional District Magistrate Anwar UHakim and the ministry's Deputy Secretary Mobasherul Islam.

The probe body visited Chandra Shomar Tal Haor, Gurmar Haor, Gurmar Haor (extended) and Matian Haor, said Jahurul Islam, executive engineer of the BWDB in Sunamganj.

He said the probe body will be visiting haors in Derai and Shalla upazilas today.

After heavy torrential rainfall in India's Meghalaya, a flash flood hits country's north eastern haor region on April 1.

More than 7,000 hectares of Boro harvest were submerged, 4,900 hectares in Sunamganj alone.

Exams to be held

FROM PAGE 1

Dipu Moni said classes for the SSC candidates will continue till February next year and for the HSC candidates till March.

The minister said they were yet to decide on this year's Junior School Certificate and its equivalent exams for class-VIII students.

The exams were not held for the last couple of years due to the pandemic.

The Covid-induced closure of schools is still having a big impact on public exams.

This year's SSC exams are likely to begin on June 19 and the HSC exams on August 22, three and a half months behind schedule. Those will be held on curtailed syllabuses and with fewer marks than usual.

This year, SSC candidates will have to sit for exams on Bangla, English, mathematics and

a fourth subject apart from three optional subjects.

They will not need to sit for exams on religion, information technology, Bangladesh and global studies, and science, said Prof Tapan Kumar Sarkar, acting chairman of Dhaka Education Board.

He further said this year's HSC candidates will have to take exams on Bangla, English, the three optional subjects and a fourth subject. There will be no exams on ICT.

Last year, SSC and HSC candidates sat for tests on only three optional subjects with a shortened syllabus and fewer marks than usual due to the pandemic.

HSC exams were not held in 2020 due to the pandemic. The students were evaluated based on their results in the previous public exams.