

Dhaka College, Ideal College students clash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two groups of higher secondary students at Dhaka College and Ideal College were caught in a clash in the capital's Science Laboratory intersection around 11:00am yesterday.

The violence injured two Dhaka College students and caused interruptions to traffic at the intersection, said SM Qayyum, officer-in-charge of New Market Police Station.

Later on the day, Dhaka College students tried to move towards Ideal College in flocks, but police barred and dispersed them, he added.

The teachers of the respective colleges also came to the streets to cool down their students and get them back to their campuses.

According to some students, the clash took place after a group of Dhaka College students harassed an Ideal College student and his female friend on Thursday.

Clashes between students of Dhaka College and other adjacent colleges are nothing new. Frequently, they locked themselves into clashes over trivial matters that made headlines.

On March 30, at least 12 were injured in the clashes between Dhaka College and Teachers' Training College students.

The clash ensued over a brawl at a tea shop.

Not only with the students, brawls between the shopkeepers of the New Market area and Dhaka College students also take place quite frequently.

In the latest such event, New Market storekeepers and Dhaka College students fought pitched battles for two days starting on April 18 night, resulting in the deaths of two youths and damage to properties.

Five cases including two murder cases were filed in this connection.



Journalists pose for a photo during a discussion on World Press Freedom Day yesterday at the capital's CIRDAP auditorium. The Editors' Council organised the discussion.

PHOTO: STAR

Sri Lanka eases curfew

New PM begins forming cabinet without opposition support

AGENCIES

Sri Lanka lifted a nationwide curfew for 12 hours yesterday, further easing tight curbs as new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe made first his cabinet appointments after clashes between pro- and anti-government groups killed nine people.

More than a month of predominantly peaceful protests against the government turned violent this week after supporters of former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa stormed an anti-government protest camp in the commercial capital Colombo, burning tents and clashing with protesters and police.

The initial violence and reprisals against government figures also left more than 300 injured.

Hit hard by the pandemic, rising oil prices and tax cuts by the populist government, Sri Lanka is in the throes of its worst economic crisis since independence from Great Britain in 1948.

The government lifted the curfew from 6:00am (0030 GMT) yesterday until 6:00pm. A 24-hour curfew imposed on Monday had been lifted for a few hours on Thursday and Friday to allow purchase of essential supplies.

Mahinda Rajapaksa stepped down after violence flared on Monday, leaving his younger brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa to rule on as president.

Mahinda has since been banned by a court from leaving the country and has taken refuge at the Trincomalee naval base in Sri Lanka's east.

Troops have since restored order and a nationwide curfew has been in effect for most of the week.



Wickremesinghe, a five-time prime minister, was appointed to another term late on Thursday.

He appointed four ministers from the Rajapaksas' Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), a decision unlikely to satisfy the protesters demanding the removal of the party from power.

The appointments, announced by the president's office, include G.L. Pereis, the SLPP chairman who had held the post before resigning on Monday.

However, the all-important finance ministry post remains vacant at a time when Sri Lanka is in negotiations for a much-needed International Monetary Fund bailout.

Wickremesinghe is the sole lawmaker from his United National Party to hold a seat in parliament, and is reliant on other

parties to form a coalition government. The SLPP has pledged to support him.

The main opposition has ruled out supporting him, but several smaller parties have said they would back policies by the new prime minister to stabilise the economy.

Foreign diplomats in Colombo were among the first to call on Wickremesinghe after he officially assumed duties on Friday.

Envoys from China, neighbour India and Japan all pledged to continue providing Sri Lanka with assistance through the crisis, the prime minister's office said.

Wickremesinghe is seen as a pro-West, free-market reformist, potentially making bailout negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and creditor nations smoother.

PK Halder arrested

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government was yet to be formally informed of the arrests.

PK Halder's arrest is good news, he said, adding that bringing him back to the country won't be a problem.

Prior to the arrests, the Indian Directorate of Enforcement in a statement released on Friday, said PK Halder and other associate individuals were accused in a multi-million financial fraud in Bangladesh. They laundered thousands of crores of Bangladeshi Taka to India and other countries.

The directorate is carrying out search operations on different premises linked to Halder, Pritish Kumar Halder, Pranesh Kumar Halder and their associates across the state of West Bengal.

PK Halder has been posing himself as an Indian citizen named Shibshankar Halder after having managed to fraudulently obtain the government Ration Card, Indian Voter ID card, PAN and Aadhar card, said the statement.

There are similar allegations against PK Halder's associates, it added.

"The directorate ascertained that these Bangladesh nationals have also managed to float companies in India on the basis of fraudulently obtained identities and have even purchased immovable properties at various places including in the posh areas of the Metropolis Kolkata."

An officer of the directorate told our New

Delhi correspondent: "The money taken by the accused was taken as loan from various banks by companies that only exist on paper. Realising that they had been cheated, the banks informed the financial intelligence unit of the Bangladesh police that subsequently approached the Indian government."

Halder's name came in discussions during the "anti-casino" drives in Bangladesh in 2019.

The financial institutions swindled by PK Halder between 2009 and 2019 are: People's Leasing and Financial Service (PLFS), International Leasing and Financial Service Limited, FAS Finance, and Reliance Finance.

PLFS is now in the process of liquidation while the rest are in bad shape.

An ACC investigator said the ACC will press charges against PK Halder in three cases soon.

So far, 34 cases have been filed against PK Halder and his cohorts. The authorities have frozen the bank accounts of 83 and seized properties worth around Tk 1,000 crore.

The Immigration Wing of the Special Branch of police in March informed the High Court that PK Halder fled the country by road through the Benapole land port at 3:38pm on October 23, 2019.

He left minutes before the travel ban against him and his accomplices reached the immigration police.

Pressure now brews over wheat

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this, Dhaka would have to reach out to New Delhi through official channels.

The world's second-biggest wheat producer is likely to be sensitive to the concerns and requirements of Bangladesh and Nepal, they added.

However, wheat import through the Hili land port in Hakimpur upazila was on pause yesterday because of the Indian government's export restriction even though the ban is not applicable for shipments for which letters of credit had already been issued, reports our Dinajpur correspondent.

The Indian customs authority did not get any official order on this, so they did not allow any wheat-loaded truck to cross the border, said Harun Ur Rashid, the president of Importers and Exporters Group of Hili land port.

Consignments of two lakh tonnes of wheat through the land port have become uncertain now after India's decision, he added.

Abul Bashar, chairman of BSM Group, one of the

country's leading wheat importers, remains hopeful that there would not be any crisis for wheat and flour as the country meets 15-20 percent of the demand from domestic production and the local harvests will be available in the market by the end of the month.

In addition, Canada and Australia will go for wheat harvesting in the next one and a half months.

Over the last decade, most of the country's wheat imports were from India, Russia, Canada and Ukraine.

"But our dependence on India has been increasing over the last few years due to low prices and short shipment time," he added.

There is still no alternative to increasing contacts with alternative countries at the government and private levels, he added.

"Options for Bangladesh are low. Canada, Australia and the US could be options but the prices there are too high for us to afford," said Taslim Shahriar, senior assistant general manager of Meghna Group of Industries.

He went on to urge the

government to take steps to ensure import through government-to-government contracts.

In Bangladesh, wheat is imported from 16 countries, including India, Canada, Russia, Ukraine, the US, Australia, Cyprus, Italy, Argentina, Estonia and Belgium, according to the data from the National Bureau of Revenue.

Regardless, a global wheat supply shortage is brewing because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Ukraine and Russia together account for nearly 30 percent of the exports of the world's wheat.

Russia, the world's biggest exporter of wheat, has largely been unable to export food because of sanctions that have effectively cut it off financially, while Ukraine has been cut off physically after Russia blocked the Black Sea for exports.

And Ukraine, the fifth-largest exporter, lacks enough rail cars to transport food overland.

India was looking to fill the supply gap in the international wheat markets

left by the two countries but the export restriction amid the drought is derailing its designs.

Inventories are already tight in the US and Canada, according to the UN, while Argentina is limited exports and Australia is already shipping at full shipping capacity.

Following India's announcement of the export ban on May 13, wheat futures in Chicago, the international benchmark, closed at \$11.6725 a bushel, up 50 percent from the start of the year, while the European wheat futures market was 410.75 euros a tonne, just of its record high in March.

Meanwhile, poor harvests in China, the world's biggest producer and consumer of wheat, is a major cause for concern: the country has the world's largest foreign currency reserves, so it can buy as much wheat as it needs from the world markets.

Pallab Bhattacharya, Kongkon Karmaker, Mohammad Suman and Sukanta Halder contributed to the report

Parts of Sylhet submerged

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The low-lying areas in Sylhet division have submerged due to excessive rainfall in the country's north-eastern region and in India's Assam and Meghalaya.

Because of the heavy rainfall, the Surma river was overflowing at 98 centimetres above the danger level in Kanahat upazila point in Sylhet, reported the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) of the Bangladesh Water Development Board.

According to FFWC, the water level of the upper Meghna Basin rivers – Kushiya, Bhugai-Kongsho, Dhanu-Baulai, Manu and Khowai – will rise fast in the coming 48 hours.

Due to excessive rainfall, many low-lying areas in Sylhet's Gowainghat, Kanaighat, Companiganj, Jaintiapur and Sadar upazilas flooded.

In Sunamganj, a few areas in Bishwambharpur, Tahirpur and Sadar upazilas are submerged due to flashfloods triggered by excessive rain.

In Bishwambharpur, 15 houses were damaged on Friday due to the flash flood and while Boro harvest went submerged in Korchar Haor's high grounds.

Earlier on last month, 8,852 hectares of Boro harvest were damaged in six districts due to flash flood while Sunamganj were the worst hit where 5,775 hectares of the harvest were damaged.

7 of organ trading gang arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Seven suspected members of an organ trading gang, who are mostly engaged in kidney trading, have been arrested from different places in Joypurhat on Friday night, said police.

Masum Ahmed Bhuiyan, superintendent of Joypurhat police, confirmed it.

All the arrested persons have been sent to Joypurhat jail after producing them before a local court yesterday, said the SP Masum.

The SP also said that the organ trading gang members are operating a network in the district.

They often target the impoverished family in Kalai upazila of Joypurhat and trap the people in loan circles. Later, they forced the loan taker to repay their amount by selling their organs, especially the kidney.

Man killed in landslide

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A man was killed while his brother injured after a huge chunk of earth from a hillock fell onto a house in Sylhet's Golapganj upazila early yesterday.

The dead is Apu Paul, 30, of Chakrabarty village in the upazila's Laksmanabandh union. He was an NGO official at Association for Social Advancement (ASA).

His brother Pappu Paul, 28, was also injured during the landslide.

Golam Kabir, upazila nirbahi officer of Golapganj, said, "After cutting a hillock, the house was built right in the bottom of the trimmed edge. Due to excessive rainfall, the hillock landslide damaged two adjacent houses."

"In one house, where the brothers were, one died and another injured. There was no one in the other house that was damaged in the landslide," he said adding that the family was handed over Tk 20 thousand as temporary help.

Journalists decry DSA

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"The digital ecosystem has opened up the possibilities to further journalism but, at the same time, has brought us under surveillance," said AK Azad, publisher of Samakal and president of the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh.

M Abdullah, president of BFUJ (BNP faction), commented, "Journalists already operate in a culture of surveillance, where their movements are monitored."

Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, editor of Manabzamin, said, "Our corporate owners censor us. They tell us not to publish reports – they kill

reports even before we get to see them."

Shyamol Dutta, editor of Bhorer Kagoj, stressed on the importance of maintaining unity as a community and casting aside any political bias to tackle the crisis, while Omar Faruk, the chairperson of BFUJ, echoed the same thoughts.

"None of the governments have fully supported the press. They have always seen us as adversaries," said Golam Rahman, editor of Ajker Patrika.

Devan Mahmud, editor of Bonik Barta and general secretary of the Council, moderated the event.

Tigers face new-look SL

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the premier all-rounder is confirmed to start today after testing negative in his latest Covid test.

A young Sri Lankan side, on the other hand, will begin a new journey under head coach Chris Silverwood. Skipper Dimuth Karunaratne is expected to add some experience along with the likes of Kusal Mendis, Dhananjaya de Silva and Lahiru Thirimanne in the team.

The Lankan team will also be in focus as the country has been going through a huge political and economic crisis in recent times.

Meanwhile, there is a heavy chance of rain disrupting the most of the five-day contest despite the severe cyclone, brewing in the Bay of Bengal, weakening into a cyclonic storm a couple of days back.

New York subway shooting suspect pleads not guilty

AFP, New York

The 62-year-old man arrested for allegedly shooting 10 people on the New York subway last month pleaded not guilty on Friday to federal terrorism charges.

Frank James was taken into custody a day after the April 12 attack, which took place as a crowded subway train pulled into a Brooklyn station.