

COX'S BAZAR CAMP Rohingya leader hacked to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A Rohingya leader was hacked to death by unidentified criminals at a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar on Thursday.

Azim Uddin, 35, was the head majhi of Block-C Rohingya Camp-18, said police.

At least 10 to 15 armed men attacked some Rohingya leaders inside the camp around 9:00pm, said witnesses.

Three leaders, including Azim, were injured and rushed to MSF NGO Hospital, they added.

On-duty doctors at the hospital declared Azim dead.

Kamran Hossain, additional superintendent of Armed Police Battalion (APBn-8), said they were conducting operations to detain the criminals.

The body was taken to Ukha Police Station, he added.

ASYLUM-SEEKERS

UN accuses UK of dishonesty over deportation plan

AFP, London

The UN refugee agency yesterday accused Britain of dishonesty over London's plan to send asylum-seekers to Rwanda, as a court heard an emergency bid to block the first deportations next week.

The government intends to fly the first planeload of claimants to Rwanda on June 14, after agreeing the plan with Kigali in a bid to deter illegal migrants from undertaking perilous crossings of the Channel by boat.

Refugee rights groups and a trade union representing UK Border Force personnel are challenging the plan in London's High Court, seeking an injunction against the flight on Tuesday and any beyond then.

They argue that the plan violates asylum seekers' human rights, and say the government cannot justify its claim that Rwanda is a safe destination.

Lawyers for the claimants said that Home Secretary Priti Patel's interior ministry had even claimed endorsement for the plan from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

But the UN agency's lawyer Laura Dubinsky said it "in no way endorses the UK-Rwandan arrangement".

"UNHCR is not involved in the UK-Rwanda arrangement, despite assertions to the contrary made by the secretary of state," she told the court.

Dubinsky said the would-be refugees were at risk of "serious, irreparable harm" if sent to Rwanda, and that the UN had "serious concerns about Rwandan capacity".



A destroyed city administration building in Bashtanka, Mykolaiv region, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues. The photo was taken Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Ukraine hits Russian targets in Kherson

Zelensky says troops 'holding on' in key Donbas battles

AGENCIES

Ukraine said yesterday it had launched new air strikes on Russian positions in the captured southern region of Kherson as President Volodymyr Zelensky insisted Kyiv's forces were "holding on" in the east of the country.

Ukraine is trying to carry out a counterattack in Kherson, one of the first areas to be taken by Russia after the February 24 invasion, as Kyiv's troops struggle in the eastern Donbas region.

Russian President Vladimir Putin meanwhile compared his current actions to Peter the Great's against Sweden 300 years ago, saying the tsar "wasn't taking anything, he was taking it back".

Zelensky said in his evening address that several "cities in Donbas, which the occupiers now consider key targets, are holding on".

He added that Ukrainian forces have made positive strides in the Zaporizhzhia and Kharkiv regions outside Donbas, and are in the process of "liberating our land".

He also appealed for his country

not to be left in a "grey zone" with its EU membership bid, ahead of a summit set to decide on its candidacy.

Ukraine's defence ministry said yesterday it had struck Russian military positions in Kherson, which is just north of the Crimean peninsula that was annexed by Russia in 2014, and among the first regions seized by Russia in February.

"Our aircraft carried out a series of strikes on enemy bases, places of accumulation of equipment and personnel, and field depots around five different settlements in the Kherson region," it said in a statement.

The devastated eastern port of Mariupol, under siege by Russian troops for months until it fell, is now at risk of a major cholera outbreak, Britain's defence ministry said yesterday.

There is likely a critical shortage of medicines in Kherson, the ministry said in a Twitter update. Russia is struggling to provide basic public services to the population in Russian-occupied territories, it added.

The fiercest fighting remains around the eastern industrial city of Severodonetsk, a battle that Zelensky has said is pivotal for the fate of the Donbas region.

Local governor Sergiy Gaiday said yesterday that Russian forces had destroyed a major sports centre, adding: "One of the symbols of Severodonetsk was destroyed. The Ice Palace burned down."

People in the town of Lysychansk, which is located just across a river from Severodonetsk, spoke to AFP about the stark choices the war has forced on them: either stay and brave the shelling, or flee and abandon their homes.

Western countries meanwhile reacted with outrage after pro-Russian rebels in the east sentenced one Moroccan and two British fighters to death on Thursday after they were captured while fighting for Ukraine.

Separatist authorities in the Donetsk region of the Donbas ordered the death penalty for Aiden Aslin, Shaun Pinner and Saadun Brahim, Russian media reported.

Man lands in prison in DSA case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A Sylhet court yesterday sent a man to jail in a case filed under the controversial Digital Security Act for his "derogatory" comments on expatriates' welfare minister.

Monir Ahmed, 38, of Kargram village in Jaintiapur upazila, was arrested in Sylhet city's Sobhanighat area on Thursday night.

On Wednesday, Monir posted a "derogatory" remark on Facebook on Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Imran Ahmed, also the lawmaker of Sylhet-4 constituency.

Sabbir Ahmed, a Chhatra League activist of Jaintiapur upazila, on Thursday night lodged the case with Jaintiapur Police Station against Monir under the Digital Security Act.

Golam Dastagir, officer-in-charge of the police station, said the arrestee was yesterday produced before the court that sent him to prison.

Woman suffers burn injuries in acid attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A woman sustained burn injuries in an acid attack in Khusiura village of Sunamganj's Dowarabazar upazila on Thursday night.

Sorufa Begum, 35, wife of Saudi Arabia expatriate Mozammel Haque and mother of three children, is now undergoing treatment at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital with burns on her face.

Quoting her family, Debdulal Dhar, officer-in-charge of Dowarabazar Police Station, said, "Someone threw acid on her around 8:00pm while she went out of the house to bring water from the tube well."

However, no one, even the victim, could identify the attacker, the OC said, adding that they recovered the bottle used for carrying the acid.

He said, "No one of her family is available to file the case. Once the victim gets well and comes back home, we will be lodging a case. But we are continuing our investigation."

Trader found dead in Jashore

UNB, Jashore

A 37-year-old trader was yesterday found dead with a piece of cloth stuffed into his mouth near a railway track in Jashore, police said.

The deceased was identified as Lablu, son of Abdul Mannan of the Kholadanga Colony Para area.

His body was found adjacent to Kholadanga railway track around 11:00am, said Tajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station.

Lablu's father said they found the body after they started searching for him as he did not return home on Thursday night.

OC Tajul said the body was sent to Jashore Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy. "Efforts are on to identify and nab the culprits," he said.

'Don't oppose it'

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"No matter how the finance minister explains, the opportunity to bring back money laundered abroad by paying a nominal tax is clearly unethical protection and reward for the money launderers."

Speaking at the media briefing, Kamal acknowledged that the budget implementation would have to go through a difficult period. "There will be many ups and downs. But we will be successful by overcoming the ups and downs."

According to the finance minister, the budget would benefit both the marginalised population and the business community alike.

Kamal pointed out that there is no country in the world that is clocking the

export growth akin to Bangladesh.

The budget has put a special focus on employment generation, he also said.

"Various tax rates have been cut. This will help investors to save money that they would be able to invest and set up industries. This will create jobs."

He defended his move to impose 15 percent VAT on laptop imports.

"The proposal is aimed at boosting local manufacturing. We have been putting emphasis on the Made-in-Bangladesh concept from the last fiscal year and we are giving priority to it."

Responding to a question on giving protection to the disclosures to be made to whiten the laundered money, Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem,

chairman of the National Board of Revenue, said the opportunity will be backed by a law passed in parliament.

"Nobody will be raised any question legally."

Shamsul Alam, state minister for planning, said the government usually frames expansionary budgets. "However, this budget is a little bit contractionary."

The government plans to ensure a normal demand in the economy and wants to curb additional demand to avoid fuelling inflation, he said.

He said the price of fertiliser has not been increased keeping in mind the higher inflationary pressure.

Abdur Rouf Talukder, senior secretary of the Finance Division, said the scrutiny to bring another

100 upazilas under 100 percent social safety net coverage is underway.

Once the upazilas come under the coverage, another Tk 4,000 crore to Tk 5,000 crore will be needed as safety net allocations, he said.

The size of the budget was 17.5 percent of GDP in the current fiscal year, whereas it stood at 15.2 percent for FY23, he said. "The budget size has narrowed. We are trying to reduce demand through this."

Rouf noted that some austerity measures have already been taken and there would be more such steps from July 1.

"The less important expenditure — or the expenditures that are used to buy items from abroad although they are locally available — will be cut,"

he said, adding that the government would also defer the implementation of projects that don't generate revenue, directly or indirectly.

The subsidy spending in FY23 would go up to Tk 82,000 crore from Tk 53,000 crore in the outgoing fiscal year, owing to the rise in the prices of diesel and fertiliser in the international markets.

Rouf said if the subsidy on gas, electricity, diesel, and fertiliser is withdrawn, inflation would accelerate.

"But we are not going to do that." If the prices of gas, diesel and fertiliser increase globally, the subsidy spending will rise and it would create a challenge for the economy, said the secretary.

Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur

Razzaque said the government is going to provide Tk 28,000 crore in fertiliser subsidy. This directly supports farmers.

Education Minister Dipu Moni said there is nothing to be disappointed about the allocation for the education sector.

"Now, we will have to focus on how efficiently we can implement the budgetary allocation."

A list of the schools that would come under the government's monthly payment order would be published in a week or two, she said.

Zahid Maleque, health and family welfare minister, said the budget has put emphasis on research and development, vaccine production and fighting non-communicable diseases.

Stamp duties to increase

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To attain the goal, the minister in parliament on Thursday proposed hiking the lowest rate of stamp, used for the acknowledgement of a debt of up to Tk 50,000, to Tk 20, up by 100 percent from the present duty.

If anyone wants to enter a partnership deal involving more than Tk 1,00,000, then he will have to spend Tk 4,000 to buy the required stamp for the agreement, up from the current duty of Tk 2,000.

Signing of a divorce deal will also be more expensive as the duty of the stamp required for this purpose will rise by 300 percent from the next fiscal year.

Currently, divorce registration requires a stamp worth Tk 500. But in the proposed bill, the stamp duty has been fixed at Tk 2,000.

To sign a deal for power of attorney, the cost of stamp of Tk 500 will increase by 60 percent to Tk 800.

The stamp required for obtaining loans, advances or any other credit facilities from any scheduled bank will cost an individual Tk 2,000, up from Tk 1,000.

For affidavits, a person will have to spend Tk 300, up by 50 percent from the current duty for the same stamp.

However, the mortgage deed in favour of a bank or a financial institution in respect of a loan will be cheaper as per the proposed bill.

Currently, the cost of stamp of a mortgage deed of up to Tk 20 lakh is Tk 2,000. But in the proposed

bill, the price of a mortgage deed of up to Tk 50 lakh will be Tk 2,000.

In his budget proposal, the finance minister on Thursday told parliament that the stamp duty rate has not been changed since 2012 although it can be a potent source of revenue.

"Considering our current state of development, increased per capita income, inflation over the years and other economic realities, the stamp duty rate charged is quite low," he said proposing for raising the rate of stamps.

Kamal said this will facilitate earning more revenue from this source and also make the stamp duty rate practical and realistic.

Biden faces discord at Americas summit

AFP, Los Angeles

US President Joe Biden faced open criticism Thursday at an Americas summit, along with complaints about foreign pressure by Brazil's far-right leader, as he sought progress on issues from migration to climate change.

Biden is welcoming leaders from across the hemisphere in Los Angeles in a choreographed bid to show that democracy can work, amid rapid inroads by China in a region long seen by Washington as its turf.

Businesses upbeat over tax measures

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It welcomed the government prioritising five areas in the budget — inflation containment, agriculture and overall food security, human resource development, boosting domestic investment, increasing exports and promoting export diversification, and job creation and rural development.

The Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) said the GDP growth target of 7.5 percent is achievable if, among other factors, the GDP-investment ratio increases to the expected level.

Corporate tax rate for

certain listed and non-listed companies will be reduced by 2.5 percent subject to certain conditions, according to the proposed budget.

The policy trend of corporate tax reduction is a welcome one, but upon considering the current economic condition and infrastructure, the proposed cash transaction limit must be increased, the FICCI said.

Tax deduction at source from payment to raw material supplier will be reduced to 4 percent from 7 percent, which will increase cash flow.

"Insertion of the definition of export will reduce the complexities

of export of goods and services," said FICCI said.

Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) in a statement said enhancing private sector investment, employment generation, revenue collection and financing are some of the challenges of the proposed budget.

Budget implementation is a great challenge, the DCCI said, adding that the inconsistency between income and expenditure in the proposed budget may lead to dependency on bank borrowing or loans from foreign source.

Mohammad Hatem, executive president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and

Exporters Association (BKMEA), demanded that the government consider keeping the source tax at 0.5 percent instead of 1 percent proposed in the budget.

Anwar-ul-Aliam Chowdhury Parvez, president of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI), welcomed the uniform tax rates but also demanded continuation of source tax at 0.5 percent.

He also suggested offering more facilities to start-up ventures so that they can grow and generate employment.

The president of American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh, Syed Ershad Ahmed,

expected that more incentive would be extended to the agriculture sector.

He said prices of agricultural equipment and hybrid vehicles should be reduced and that no significant economic growth is conceivable without a sustained foreign exchange reserve growth.

"Hence, instead of gross import ban, we should speed up foreign-funded projects' implementation and reconsider own-funded projects that have sizeable import components."

"We strongly recommend effective modernisation in managing all ports' operations and allowance of bonded warehouse facility for non-RMG exports too,"

Ahmed added.

Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) were pleased with the government's proposed withdrawal of 15 percent VAT on sales of PET chips and reduction of VAT on sales of man-made fibre to Tk 3 per kg from Tk 6.

Md Shahadat Hossain, president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh, said conditional reduction in tax rates for certain types of companies is a good initiative.

He said making the uniform tax rate applicable to all exporters will encourage diversification of export of goods and services.