

CLASH WITH POLICE Bhola JCD president dies from injuries

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Noor-e-Alam, president of Bhola Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, who was injured during a clash between cops and BNP men on Sunday, died in a hospital in the capital yesterday.



Speaking to The Daily Star, Golam Nabi Alamgir, president of Bhola BNP, said, "He [Alam] was admitted to Comfort Hospital in Dhaka soon after the clash, and succumbed to his injuries around 3:00pm yesterday."

In protest, the district BNP has called a dawn-to-dusk hartal in Bhola for today, Golam Nabi confirmed.

Noor-e-Alam had been on life support for three days before passing away. He left behind his wife and a five-year-old daughter, a party source said.

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The Joint Coordination Centre officials are seen onboard Sierra Leone-flagged cargo ship Razoni, carrying Ukrainian grain, during an inspection in the Black Sea off Kilyos, near Istanbul, Turkey yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Ukraine grain ship sails through Istanbul

Int'l team overseeing its passage to Lebanon; Russia continues to pound southern Ukrainian cities

AFP, Istanbul

The first shipment of grain from Ukraine since the Kremlin's invasion five months ago passed inspection and sailed through Istanbul yesterday under a landmark deal designed to help alleviate a global food crisis sparked by the war.

The Sierra Leone-flagged Razoni's voyage from the Black Sea port of Odesa to Lebanon is being watched closely for signs of how the first agreement signed by Moscow and Kyiv since Russia invaded its pro-Western neighbour holds.

A deal brokered by Turkey and the United Nations last month lifted a Russian naval blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea cities and set terms for millions of tonnes of wheat and other grain to start flowing from Ukraine's filled silos and ports.

Ukraine exports roughly half of the sunflower oil used on the world market and is one of the world's main supplies of grain.

An almost complete halt to its exports helped push up global food prices and make imports prohibitively expensive in

some of the poorest countries in the world.

The Razoni took 26,000 tonnes of maize through a specially designated corridor in the mine-infested waters of the Black Sea before reaching the northern edge of the Bosphorus Strait on Tuesday.

A team of 20 inspectors from the two warring parties and the UN and Turkey strapped on orange helmets and boarded the ship early yesterday for a mandated inspection that officials said lasted less than 90 minutes.

The ship's passage is being overseen by an international team that includes Russian and Ukrainian officials in Istanbul.

"This marks the conclusion of an initial 'proof of concept' operation to execute the agreement between the Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Nations," the centre said after the ship was cleared for passage.

The 186-metre (610-foot) long vessel will move on to the Marmara and Aegean seas before reaching the coast of Lebanon in the coming days.

Kyiv says at least 16 more grain ships

are waiting to depart. Turkish hopes that the grain deal could help build trust and lead to ceasefire talks have so far been disappointed.

UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said that more outbound movement was being planned from Ukraine yesterday.

Meanwhile, Russia has continued to pound southern Ukrainian cities near the Black Sea with missiles and pressed on with its grinding ground assault across the east.

Officials in Mykolaiv said no one was killed in shelling on one of the southern city's supermarkets that came just days after the region's grain mogul and his wife died in a targeted strike on their house.

Moscow said yesterday that it had destroyed another foreign arms depot in western Ukraine -- a region the furthest removed from the fighting.

Kyiv has launched mandatory evacuations from the eastern Donetsk region -- now bearing the brunt of Russia's offensive -- because the government does not expect to be able to provide it with heat in the cold winter months.

Man found dead in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Police yesterday recovered the body of a man, wrapped in a sack, in Kushtia's Bheramara upazila.

Lokman Hossain, 36, of Kushtia town, was the area manager of Roxi Pain, said police.

The victim went missing on Monday, said Mojibur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Bheramara Police Station.

His body was found near Bheramara Pilot School, he added.

"Primarily, it appears to be murder," the police official said.

The body was sent to Kushtia General Hospital for autopsy.

NILA MURDER CASE

Court indicts three accused in Savar

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against three people in a case filed over Nila murder in Savar.

The trio are Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, the prime accused, and his accomplices Selim Pahlam and Sakib Hossain.

Of them, Mizanur is now in jail whereas Selim and Sakib are on bail.

Judge Ismot Jahan of the 5th Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka read out the charges, said additional public prosecutor MA Kayum Mollah.

The judge also fixed September 28 for starting trial of the case.

Nila Roy, a grade-X student in Savar, was stabbed to death on September 20, 2020. Her brother Alok witnessed it.

BGB seized \$80,000 in Chuadanga

Suspect carrying currency flees

UNB, Chuadanga

Border Guard Bangladesh yesterday seized \$80,000 in a drive near Phulbari border in Chuadanga's Damurhuda upazila.

"Primarily, we're suspecting that the foreign currency was being smuggled from Bangladesh to India," said Lt Col Shah Md Ishtiaq, director of 6th BGB battalion in Chuadanga.

The suspect who was carrying the foreign currency could not be detained, BGB said at a press briefing.

On information, BGB conducted a drive along Phulbari border and found a person trying to cross the border with a bag through pillar-85.

He left the bag and fled when BGB members chased him.

The BGB men found eight bundles of US dollars amounting to \$80,000 inside the bag, the BGB official said.

A case was filed with Darshana Police Station in this connection.

Dark clouds starting to clear

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Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, said: "If the power supply is not normalised, how can you say that the economy will get back on track soon?"

The government has been rationing the electricity supply as part of its austerity measures to preserve the country's foreign exchange reserves, which stood at \$39.49 billion on July 27 -- enough to cover just about five months' import bill.

As a result of the power rationing, irrigation of the dry season rice crop boro has been disrupted, which can again cause food inflation.

Hussain, though, acknowledged that the current account deficit, which is the shortfall between the money received by selling products to other countries and the money spent to buy goods and services from other nations, is unlikely to widen further.

In June, the current account deficit

stood at \$18.7 billion -- the highest in Bangladesh's history.

"But by how much and how fast the current account deficit narrows is hard to say at this point. The international commodity prices are declining but whether the trend sustains remains to be seen," Hussain said.

The pressure on reserves will ease too.

"That came from the current account deficit and that deficit will narrow unless another global disruption comes up. Remittance will increase as some 12 lakh fresh migrant workers left Bangladesh in the last two years. The import bill will drop as the international commodity prices have stabilised."

If the austerity measures are complied with fully and some flexibility is brought in the interest rate, inflation will drop in line with the decline in international commodity prices, Hussain added.

Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished

fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the ordinary people will not get relief from the precarious state of the economy that soon.

"Since inflation is already at an elevated level, July's drop in inflation will not lessen the pressure on ordinary people. The cumulative effect is still high."

July's inflation means the price level is well above the budgetary target of 5.6 percent for fiscal 2022-23.

"If the trend is sustained, then the pressure will drop on the exchange rate," he said, while advising the government to heighten its monitoring to curb hundi and the practice of mis-invoicing.

But, there were some green shoots in July's data so far.

"We are seeing positive signs. Whether the trend sustains for another 3-4 months remains to be seen. But we will have an idea after another 2-3 months," Rahman added.

Gang robs bus, 112 hospitalised in India rapes passenger industrial gas leak

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valuables from everyone and raped a woman, leaving her injured, the OC said.

Around 3:30am, they left the bus with its right wheels in the air by the Tangail-Mymensingh highway at Roktipara in Madhupur, Tangail, about 60km away from where they took control of the vehicle.

Informed by locals, a team from Madhupur Police Station later rescued the victims.

A passenger of the bus filed a case with the police station, the OC said, adding that police were looking for the suspects.

Asked whether the crew members could be involved in the racket, the OC said the investigators would take them in custody if they find a link between them and the crime.

AFP, NEW DELHI

At least 112 women have been hospitalised after a gas leak at an apparel manufacturing plant in India, police said yesterday.

The workers complained of nausea and vomiting at a plant in the Atchyutapuram district of the southern state of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday night.

"The women are all stable. There are no deaths. Investigations are going on," senior police official M. Upendra told AFP.

The hospitalisations follow a similar accident in June when around 200 women fell unconscious after a gas leak in the same area, broadcaster NDTV reported.

In 2020, at least five people were killed and hundreds were hospitalised after a gas leak at a chemical plant in Visakhapatnam, an industrial port city in the same state.

In 1984, India witnessed one of its worst industrial disasters in history when gas leaked from a pesticide plant in Bhopal, a city in central India.

Around 3,500 people living around the plant operated by Union Carbide died in the days that followed the leak. People continue to suffer the effects of it to this day.

Children are still born disfigured, with webbed feet and hands, and stunted growth because of the gas that affected their mothers.

Taiwan defiant, China fumes

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crossed the median line separating the island from China.

Pelosi arrived with a congressional delegation on her unannounced but closely watched visit late on Tuesday, defying China's repeated warnings, in a trip that she said demonstrated unwavering US commitment to Taiwan's democracy.

"Our delegation came to Taiwan to make unequivocally clear that we will not abandon Taiwan," Pelosi told Tsai Ing-wen, who Beijing suspects of pushing for formal independence - a red line for China.

A long-time China critic, especially on human rights, Pelosi met with a former Tiananmen activist, a Hong Kong bookseller who had been detained by China and a Taiwanese activist recently released by China.

Later, arriving in Seoul, South Korea, Pelosi said Beijing cannot prevent world leaders from travelling to Taiwan.

The last US House speaker to go to Taiwan was Newt Gingrich in 1997. But Pelosi's visit comes amid sharply deteriorating Sino-US relations, and during the past quarter century China has emerged as a far more powerful economic, military and geopolitical force.

China considers Taiwan part of its territory and has never renounced using force to bring it under its control. The United States has warned China against using the visit as a pretext for military action against Taiwan.

In retaliation, China's customs department announced a suspension of imports of citrus fruits and certain fish - chilled white striped hairtail and frozen horse mackerel - from Taiwan, while its commerce ministry banned export of natural

sand to Taiwan.

Fury on the mainland over Pelosi's defiance of Beijing was evident all over Chinese social media, with one blogger railing: "this old she devil, she actually dares to come!" Pelosi is 82.

Before Pelosi's arrival, Chinese warplanes buzzed the line dividing the Taiwan Strait. The Chinese military said it was on high alert and would launch "targeted military operations" in response to Pelosi's visit.

White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said after Pelosi's arrival in Taiwan that the United States "is not going to be intimidated" by China's threats or bellicose rhetoric and that there is no reason her visit should precipitate a crisis or conflict.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed the potential for Pelosi's visit with counterpart Wang Yi during a G20 meeting in Bali last month, and said any such trip would be entirely Pelosi's decision and independent of the US government, a senior US official said yesterday.

The United States has no official diplomatic relations with Taiwan but is bound by American law to provide it with the means to defend itself. China views visits by US officials to Taiwan as sending an encouraging signal to the pro-independence camp on the island. Taiwan rejects China's sovereignty claims, saying only the Taiwanese people can decide the island's future.

Despite all its aggressive posturing, few believe Beijing wants an active military conflict against the United States and its allies over Taiwan -- just yet.

"The last thing (Chinese President) Xi Jinping wants is an accidental war ignited," Titus Chen, an associate

professor of political science at the National Sun Yat-Sen University in Taiwan, said.

Multiple scholars noted that Beijing's military capabilities still lag behind Washington's, and told AFP that recent military drills, while clearly intended to be intimidating, fell short of targeting areas immediately adjacent to the Taiwanese coast.

According to analysts who talked with AFP, Xi Jinping is anxious to project strength against the United States -- its greatest military and economic rival -- ahead of a key political meeting expected to secure him an unprecedented third term.

Drumming up nationalist sentiment also serves to distract from China's slowing economy and growing public impatience with Beijing's harsh zero-Covid restrictions that have dampened the mood in what would have been a jubilant year for Xi.

However, the risk of escalation can't be ruled out during military drills.

Singapore-based security scholar Collin Koh said the Pelosi visit had trapped China between having to show a resolute and sweeping response while avoiding a full-blown conflict.

"Even if they want to avoid that outcome, there are still significant possibilities for an accidental escalation," said Koh, of the of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

Song Zhongping, a Hong Kong-based military commentator, said it appeared the People's Liberation Army wanted to practise blockading the island if it had to in a later war.

"The goal of these exercises, to put it bluntly, is to prepare for the military fight with Taiwan."