

Toxic alcohol kills 37 in 'dry' Indian state

AFP, Chapra

Toxic hooch has killed at least 37 people in the eastern Indian state of Bihar where alcohol is banned, officials said yesterday, with unconfirmed reports putting the death toll at over 70.

Selling and consuming liquor is banned in several parts of India, driving a thriving black market for potent and sometimes lethal backstreet moonshine that kills hundreds every year.

Families of the victims in the latest tragedy said that people from several villages drank a locally made tittle known as "Mahua" or "Desi Daru" on Monday at a wedding and other events.

Many then complained of stomach pain and vision loss and started vomiting. By

Police have detained more than 100 people in connection with illegal manufacturing and selling liquor in the last three days, while 600 litres of hooch have been seized.



Activists from Bharatiya Janata Party Yuva Morcha burn an effigy of Pakistani foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's over his remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during a demonstration in Jabalpur, India. This week at the UN in New York, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar called Pakistan the "epicentre of terrorism". Bilawal responded by calling Modi the "butcher of Gujarat". PHOTO: AFP

SUSPENSION BACKLASH

Musk restores Twitter accounts of journalists

REUTERS

Elon Musk reinstated the Twitter accounts of several journalists that were suspended for a day over a controversy on publishing public data about the billionaire's plane.

The reinstatements came after the unprecedented suspensions evoked stinging criticism from government officials, advocacy groups and journalism organizations from several parts of the globe on Friday, with some saying the microblogging platform was jeopardizing press freedom.

A Twitter poll that Musk conducted later also showed that a majority of the respondents wanted the accounts restored immediately.

"The people have spoken. Accounts who doxxed my location will have their suspension lifted now," Musk said in a tweet yesterday.

Twitter did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. A Reuters check showed the suspended accounts, which included journalists from the New York Times, CNN and the Washington Post, have been reinstated.

Officials from France, Germany, Britain and the European Union earlier condemned the suspensions.

The episode, which one well known security researcher labeled the "Thursday Night Massacre", is being regarded by critics as fresh evidence of Musk, who considers himself a "free speech absolutist," eliminating speech and users he personally dislikes.

The suspensions stemmed from a disagreement over a Twitter account called ElonJet, which tracked Musk's private plane using publicly available information.

On Wednesday, Twitter suspended the account and others that tracked private jets, despite Musk's previous tweet saying he would not suspend ElonJet in the name of free speech.

Nature at risk of 'cascading' species extinction: study

AFP, Paris

Climate change and habitat degradation will cause extinctions that cascade through communities of animals and plants and drive dramatic biodiversity loss, according to new research published on Friday.

The study, in the journal *Science Advances*, found that chain-reaction extinctions are unavoidable and predicted Earth's ecosystems will see average biodiversity loss of between six and 10 percent by 2050, depending on different carbon emissions scenarios.

By 2100, losses of animals and plants could rise to as much as 27 percent, they found in their research that used virtual Earths to map out thousands of food webs.

The authors said their modelling suggested that the biggest changes will come before mid-century, predicting "the bleakest time for natural communities might be imminent and that the next few decades will be decisive for the future of global biodiversity".

With life on Earth under threat from human destruction, overexploitation and pollution, scientists have warned that a million species are facing extinction in what many fear heralds the planet's sixth mass extinction event.

Climate change is expected to dramatically accelerate the losses, with impacts of warming

ranging from the effects of extreme weather, to changes in behaviour and habitat.

But authors of the new study said previous modelling has not included estimates for co-extinctions, based on the "cascading effect" of losses on interdependent species.

The researchers in Australia and Europe built hundreds of virtual Earths each populated with more than 33,000 vertebrate species in thousands of food webs across the planet — "massive computer latticeworks of 'who eats whom'," said co-author Corey Bradshaw, a professor at Flinders University.

They then simulated different climate change scenarios and projections of habitat degradation — like deforestation — to predict local biodiversity loss, the proportion of animals lost in a given area.

The virtual worlds allowed researchers to watch as species moved around and adapted to new environmental conditions and the implications of individual extinctions across food webs. They found that climate change would be responsible for the greatest proportion of extinction events.

"If you look out your window in 87 years, on average you'll see nearly 30 percent fewer animal species than you do today based on the business-as-usual climate scenario," Bradshaw told AFP.

MIGRANT TRAGEDY OFF LESBOS

2-month-old dies

AFP, GREECE

A two-month-old baby was recovered dead in the early hours of Friday from a migrant wreckage off Lesbos, a coroner told AFP yesterday. The baby boy was taken to the hospital where he was pronounced dead, coroner Theodoros Nousias said. The wreckage occurred when the plastic dinghy carrying migrants of mostly African origin hit rocks on the shore in the Fara area, Lesbos migrant reception centre sources told AFP. During the rescue operation, 34 men, women and children were recovered alive. The Greek coastguard says it rescued about 1,500 people in the first eight months of the year, compared to fewer than 600 over the same period last year. The International Organization for Migration has recorded nearly 2,000 migrants as dead or missing in the Mediterranean Sea this year.

EU, Azerbaijan launch Black Sea power link

AFP, Bucharest

Azerbaijan yesterday agreed to supply the European Union with electricity via a subsea cable, inking a deal in Bucharest as the bloc diversifies energy supply away from Russia following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen said the bloc was definitively "turning its back" on reliance on Russian fossil fuels and diversifying towards "reliable energy partners" after greenlighting construction of a 1,195 kilometre (745 mile) cable under the Black Sea. Construction on the subsea cable is due to start next year linking Azerbaijan to Hungary via Georgia and Romania, although it is not expected to come on stream before 2029. No financial details were forthcoming in a statement released by Romanian President Klaus Iohannis.

Tunisia votes

opposition boycotts polls

REUTERS, Tunis



Polls yesterday opened in a Tunisian parliamentary election that will tighten President Kais Saied's grip on power, capping what his opponents denounce as a march to one-man rule over a country that shook off dictatorship in 2011.

Taking place 12 years to the day after vegetable seller Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in an act of protest that sparked the Arab Spring, the vote is being boycotted by political parties which have accused Saied of mounting a coup. Voters will be choosing a parliament largely defanged by a new constitution, approved with a low turnout in a July referendum that was engineered by Saied to shift Tunisia back towards a presidential system.

Structural problems mainly to blame

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Planning Minister MA Mannan said the real requirement of rural people and the perceived requirement of the economists do not match.

The government's main goal is linked with the rural people's requirement and these are reducing hunger and poverty, he added.

Sobhan, however, countered Mannan.

"CPD hears the voices of the rural people through the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh. Once upon a time, it was said we are out of touch but now we are in better touch. We are neither blind nor foolish and we are fully aware of the positive achievements which take place."

Sobhan also chastised Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal for keeping a low profile during the economic crisis.

"He is like that variance of a lotus flower that blooms only at a particular time of the year. We will be waiting for the lotus to bloom again to resume the conversation on the economic situation," he added.

The central bank hints at a

contractionary monetary policy to contain inflationary pressure but does the opposite, said Zahid Hussain, former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, citing the BB's frequent participation in the repo market that increases the money supply.

A repurchase agreement (repo) is a form of short term borrowing for dealers in government securities.

The government also borrowed more than Tk 30,000 crore from the central bank until last month, indicating it is printing money and fuelling inflation, he said.

Through refinance scheme, the government is giving money to the market too.

"There should be coordination in planning and execution," Hussain added.

The crisis in the banking sector is not because of the pandemic or war but due to a lack of good governance over the years," said Salehuddin Ahmed, a former BB governor.

"The central bank is now regulating with a soft hand instead of becoming strict about the rules."

He cited the case of rescheduling

large loans by paying an advance of 2 percent and increasing the number of family members allowed in a bank board from two to five.

"It was a very sad step," Ahmed added.

Companies' business plans have been disrupted by the fluctuating exchange rate, said Rupali Chowdhury, managing director of Berger Paints Bangladesh.

The raw material prices rose but the businesses could not pass the burden to the consumers fully. When the prices were raised slightly, the demand dropped.

The ongoing economic crisis would require the policymakers to make tough policy decisions to return discipline in macroeconomic management and economic governance, said Fahmida Khatun, executive director of CPD.

Naser Ezaz Bijoy, president of the Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Shameem Haider Patwary, member of the standing committee on the ministry of law, justice and parliamentary affairs, also spoke.

Fiji vote tight with count in final stretch

AFP, Suva

Fiji's tumultuous election was too close to call yesterday heading into the final stretch of counting, with a thin margin separating incumbent Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama from bitter rival Sitiveni Rabuka.

Two-time coup leader and former prime minister Rabuka, 74, is challenging Bainimarama, 68, an ex-navy commodore who has won two elections since first seizing control of the island nation in a 2006 putsch.

Rabuka's People's Alliance party and its coalition partner held a 45 to 42 percent lead over Bainimarama's Fiji First on Saturday evening, with more than half the country's 2,071 polling stations having submitted their results.

But Bainimarama — who has been silent since votes were cast Wednesday — is widely expected to gain ground when booths in urbanised areas submit their tallies, with a final result anticipated by Sunday.

JP conflict far from over

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down heavily on those who declared Raushan as the party acting chairperson.

Speaking at a meeting of different associate organisations of JP, he called upon all not to be confused by statements of anyone outside the party.

"There is no reason to be confused by statements of those who are not part of the party. GM Quader became the Jatiya Party chairman through a council. There is no directive in the court's ruling that GM Quader cannot be the chairman of the party. Therefore, there is no reason of declaring anyone as the acting chairman," he added.

At another programme, Raushan said the JP would participate in all elections to be held in future as the party believes in election.

Joining the event virtually, she

also asked the party leaders and activists to forget all confusions and differences among them and strengthen the party by maintaining unity.

A conflict between Quader and Raushan, wife of former president and JP founder HM Ershad, started brewing when she suddenly on August 31 convened the party's 10th council for November 26.

Reportedly due to government pressure, Raushan later postponed the council.

Sources at the JP said pro-Raushan faction had planned to oust Quader, younger brother of Ershad, from the party helm in that council and take its control.

Then JP Parliamentary Party on September 1 at a meeting decided to make Quader the opposition leader, dropping Raushan.

Five children

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Jahirul Islam.

Of them, Jemi and Sayeed underwent surgery yesterday morning at the Noakhali General Hospital. The others are being treated at the same hospital, said Sayeed's mother Fahmida Akhter.

Mamtaj and Ripon fled their house after the incident.

Contacted, Ripon said his wife was also injured during the incident and the doctors at Noakhali General Hospital referred her to Dhaka.

However, a staff nurse of the hospital said that Mamtaj had arrived there for treatment later in the day but had fled the next morning. She was not referred to Dhaka by any of the doctors.

"The woman was injured by her own knife," said Dev Priyo Das, officer-in-charge of Char Jabbar Police Station.

The reporter could not contact Ripon the second time despite repeated attempts.

AL's Victory Day procession

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movements on those roads came to a halt, with commuters having to wait long hours stuck in their vehicles.

As the procession advanced through the Mirpur Road towards Dhanmondi-32's Bangabandhu Bhaban, traffic congestion extended to adjacent roads.

Activists joined the procession on motorbikes, pick-up vans, horse-drawn carriages and even on foot. They were carrying colourful banners, placards, and national flags.

Many were dressed in red and green, while patriotic songs were being played on loudspeakers.

The Dhaka city AL organised the capital's procession while different units of the party held many across the country.

The procession started from

Suhrawardy Udyan around 3:45pm. Then it marched through Shahbagh, Elephant Road and Mirpur Road before ending at the Bangabandhu Bhaban on Dhanmondi Road-32 at 5:30pm.

Before the procession, a brief rally was held at the IEB premises, where senior AL leaders, including its General Secretary Obaidul Quader, president members Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Shahjahan Khan and Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaq, spoke.

Quader said if there is any tension with the US embassy in Dhaka, they would resolve it in a diplomatic manner.

"The US is our friend; the BNP is instigating [tensions]. I am assuring everyone, including the US, that there is no lack of security for the diplomats in Bangladesh. Everyone is safe here."

AL has Tk 70.43 crore

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had Tk 50.37 crore in the bank at the time.

In 2020, the AL's income was around Tk 10.33 crore and expenditure was around Tk 9.94 crore and there was around Tk 5.76 crore in the bank.

The following year, the ruling party earned around Tk 21.23 crore and spent around Tk 6.30 crore. The AL now has around Tk 70.43 crore in the bank.

Keeping the current financial crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war in mind, the AL decided to maintain austerity at its national council. This time, it will spend Tk 3.13 crore which is Tk 30 lakh less than the budget for the last council held in 2019.

Of this year's budget, the party allocated 24 lakh for publications and

publicity, Tk 5 lakh for office expenses, Tk 10 lakh for cultural programmes, Tk 1.54 crore for food and Tk 1.20 crore for stage and decoration, according to the sources.

At the meeting, the leadership decided to grant amnesty to the leaders who wrote to the party, requesting withdrawal of their expulsion for violating party discipline and for participating in local government elections as independents.

The meeting also formed a three-member election commission led by AL Advisory Council member Yousuf Hossain Humayun to elect new leadership at the council. The other members of the commission are Prime Minister's Economic Affairs Advisor Dr Mashur Rahman and AL Advisory Council member Mohammad Shahabuddin Chuppu.