

8 youths abducted in Teknaf

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Eight youths, including a college student, reportedly abducted from a hilly stream in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf Sunday evening, were yet to be rescued as of last night.

They were abducted while fishing in the Jahajpura area under the Baharchara union of the upazila, said their family members.

The abductors are demanding Tk 3-5 lakh as ransom for each of them, they added.

The abductees are Absar Uddin, Syed Nurul Mostafa, Karim Ullah, Noor Mohammad, Mohammad Ullah, Selim Ullah, Md Ridwan, and Nurul Haque.

Among them, Absar is a student of Cox's Bazar Government College.

They are all relatives and between 21-25 years of age.

Family members said the youths went to the Jahajpura area on Sunday around 4:00pm.

They started a search in the night as the youths did not return to their homes after hours into the evening.

"Around 9:00pm on Sunday, who I believe were Rohingya criminals,

"It is possible Rohingya criminals abducted the youths as they frequently did previously..."

Amzad Hossain
Union Chairman

called me on my mobile phone and demanded Tk 3-5 lakh in ransom for each of the boys," Md Habib, brother of Mostafa and Karim said.

Habib said, "Other abductees are also our close relatives. Some of them are involved in farming and others are preparing to go abroad. They went to the hilly stream to have fun and catch fish."

Inspector Moshir Rahman of Baharchara Police Investigation Centre said, "Police are searching the hills to rescue the missing youths.

"We are trying to find who abducted them and why."

"Other law enforcement agencies will be involved if necessary," said Teknaf upazila UNO Md Kamruzzaman.

Baharchara Union Chairman Amzad Hossain said, "It is possible Rohingya criminals abducted the youths as they frequently did previously by taking advantage of the hilly terrain. There have even been some incidents of killings after the abductions."

Locals said several people of Baharchara, Hnila, and Whykong union have been abducted by the criminal gang in recent times and were later released after ransom payments.



Traffic congestion is a daily occurrence in front of the foreign ministry gate as a large number of rickshaws and motorcycles ply the wrong way disrupting the flow of vehicles. Traffic police stationed there hardly ever take any action and often look the other way for bribes.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Russian drones hit Kyiv

Critical infrastructure facilities damaged; Putin heads for Belarus amid fears of new assault on Ukraine

AGENCIES

Moscow launched a "kamikaze" drone attack yesterday, hitting key infrastructure in and around Kyiv, hours before Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Belarus, fuelling fears he will pressure his ally to join a new offensive on Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Air Force said its air defences shot down 30 drones, in the third Russian air attack on the Ukrainian capital in six days and the latest in a series of assaults since October that have targeted the Ukrainian power grid, causing sweeping blackouts amid sub-freezing temperatures.

Officials said at least three people were wounded and nine buildings damaged in the Kyiv region. The Ukrainian atomic energy agency accused Russia of sending one of the drones over part of the South Ukraine Nuclear Power Plant, in the Mykolaiv region.

"This is an absolutely unacceptable violation of nuclear and radiation safety," Energoatom wrote on Telegram. Invading Russian forces currently occupy the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, Europe's largest, near the front line in southeastern Ukraine.

"Kamikaze" drones used in the

attacks, are cheaply produced, disposable unmanned aircraft that fly towards their target before plummeting at velocity and detonating on impact.

Under the darkness of night, a fire raged at an energy facility in the often targeted central Shevchenkivskiy district, a Reuters witness said.

"I heard an explosion. And in three or four minutes I heard another explosion," said an old man who works at a guard at a nearby hospital.

The Solomianskyi district in the western part of Kyiv, a busy transport hub, home to a train station and one of the city's two passenger airports, was also hit. Kyiv officials said 18 out of 23 drones were shot down over the city of 3.6 million.

"As a result of the attack on the capital, critical infrastructure facilities were damaged," Vitali Klitschko said on the Telegram messaging app.

"Engineers are working to quickly stabilise the situation with energy and heat supply."

Oleksiy Kuleba, governor of the region surrounding Kyiv, said infrastructure and private homes were damaged and that two people were wounded. He said the attack caused "fairly serious" damage and three areas had been left without power.

There has been constant Russian and Belarusian military activity for months in Belarus, a close Kremlin ally that Moscow's troops used as a launch pad for their abortive attack on Kyiv in February.

Putin's trip, for talks with Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko, is his first to Minsk since 2019 - before the pandemic and a wave of Belarusian protests in 2020 that Lukashenko crushed with strong support from the Kremlin.

"During (these talks) questions will be worked out for further aggression against Ukraine and the broader involvement of the Belarusian armed forces in the operation against Ukraine, in particular, in our opinion, also on the ground," Ukrainian joint forces commander Serhiy Naye said before Putin's arrival.

Moscow said yesterday Russian and Chinese forces would hold joint naval drills between December 21 and December 27, involving missile and artillery firing in the East China Sea.

While the drills have been held annually since 2012, Moscow has sought to strengthen its political, security and economic links with Beijing in recent months and sees Chinese President Xi Jinping as a key ally in an anti-West alliance.

Rab arrests fugitive in Biswajit murder case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rab yesterday arrested a fugitive who was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Biswajit murder case filed 10 years ago.

Fazlul Haque, senior assistant director (media) or Rab-2, said, Nur-e Alam alias Limon, 34, was arrested around 6:45pm from Dhaka's Mohammadpur area.

Alam had been absconding since Biswajit Das, a tailor, was hacked to death in broad daylight by activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League on December 9, 2012.

In 2013, Dhaka's Speedy Trial Tribunal-4 sentenced eight accused to death and 13 to life imprisonment in the murder case. The convicts later challenged the verdict.

On August 6, 2017, the High Court upheld the death penalty of two of the eight convicts, commuted the death sentence of four to life imprisonment, and acquitted two others.

12-yr-old killed on road

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A 12-year-old boy was killed in a road accident on his way to join Argentina's World Cup victory celebrations in Cumilla's Manoharganj early yesterday.

The dead was identified as Shaon Miah, son of Milon Miah from Purbabataria area. He was a class-V student of Khila Government Primary School.

Locals said he was hit by a motorcycle in Khila Purbabataria area around 12:30am while he was walking towards the Cumilla-Noakhali highway to join a procession for Argentina's victory.

38 BNP men denied bail

BSS, Dhaka

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected bail petitions of 38 BNP leaders and activists, including Shahiduddin Chowdhury Annie and Abdus Salam, in a case filed over the December 7 clash in the capital's Nayapaltan.

Dhaka Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Tofazzal Hossain passed the order as the defence pleaded with the court to grant the accused bail in the case.

LGED engineer attacked for second time

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

An LGED engineer was attacked by unidentified criminals for the second time in Moulvibazar's Upazila Parishad area on Sunday.

The victim, Aminul Islam Mridha, who was first attacked on August 7, said some men intercepted his motorcycle when he was on his way home from work. They beat him up and fled the area.

Hearing his screams, locals rescued him and took him to Kulaura Health Complex.

Nusrat Jahan, a duty doctor at the complex, said due to severe head injuries, Aminul had to be given stitches.

Abdus Salek, OC of Kulaura Police Station, said they were trying to arrest the attackers.

Eight employees siphon

FROM PAGE 1

president of SAOCL's management advisory committee, was found to be involved in the irregularities, the CAG report said.

The missing Tk 21.64 crore has been attributed to Mahmudul Haque, the deputy manager for accounts of SAOCL then.

Haque was hired in 2009 without any recruitment test or police verification report, according to the CAG report. Between 2010 and 2016, he was promoted thrice by Ahmed, violating the company policy of giving promotions every four years.

Between 2019 and 2020, Haque withdrew Tk 9.87 crore in the name of seven officials and Tk 11.77 crore in the name of several organisations.

There was no signature of the concerned officials on the cheques and the audit committee found no existence of the organisations.

The Daily Star managed to get in touch with three of the officials, who said they had no part in the withdrawals. One of the officials declined to comment.

"I have been working in other branches of the company outside of Chattogram for the past 10 years - I had no opportunity to withdraw these amounts in my name," said Abu Reza Moinul Haque, SAOCL's assistant manager for sales.

Some Tk 2.21 crore was withdrawn in his name.

"Moreover, the SAOCL authority said that these funds were spent on the purchase of goods but I have not purchased any goods for office needs. I am not aware how these amounts were withdrawn in my name," he said, while declining to comment on his illegal recruitment.

Fakhru Islam Bhuiyan, an officer of SAOCL's accounts department, echoed the same; Tk 32 lakh was taken out in his name.

"I have recently joined the head office which is located in Chattogram. I was working in Dhaka and other districts when these amounts were withdrawn - I have no idea about the issue."

He, however, acknowledged that

he got into SAOCL without a written examination as Ahmed being the president of the management advisory committee had recruited him.

"We were first recruited on a casual basis and later made permanent," Bhuiyan added.

About the Tk 11.77 crore cash withdrawals in the name of various organisations and individuals, SAOCL in its statement to the audit committee said the money was spent on the purchase of goods for the institutions and the debts of various institutions.

But the audit committee did not find the existence of the goods and the institutions.

On November 4 last year, the SAOCL's board of directors were informed about the embezzlement by the eight officials. But no action was taken.

"I don't remember anything about the matter," said BPC Chairman ABM Azad, who is also the chairman of the SAOCL board of directors.

Despite repeated requests, Ahmed and Haque, who was transferred from the head office to the Savar office on corruption allegations on December 15, could not be reached for comments. Shahed died of Covid-19 in December 2020.

No such irregularities will take place now as BPC has reconstituted the board and replaced Ahmed as the president of the management advisory committee with Mishu Minhaz, said Das, who is also the general manager of BPC's finance department.

Since 2020, regular audits are being conducted to bring transparency in corporate matters, he added.

SAOCL is a 50-50 joint venture between the BPC and the Asiatic Industries.

The company is involved in the blending and marketing of engine oil and lubricating oil for vehicles; the marketing of diesel oil; the marketing and distribution of bitumen, liquefied petroleum gas and furnace oil; and supplying jet fuel to aircraft at Cox's Bazar International Airport.

A fitting end to a thunderous World Cup

FROM PAGE 1

all? They were indeed! After losing their opening match against Saudi Arabia 1-2, they looked dead and buried. Since then, every game was a final and the Albiceleste rose from the ashes and won their next six matches despite suffering a lot along the way. They surrendered a 2-0 lead to the Netherlands, who struck the equalizer virtually with the last kick of the quarterfinal. But Messi and Co. held their nerves to win the shootout 4-3. And they showed that same determination in the final after suffering even more along the way.

The defining moment for Messi and his men came when Gonzalo Montiel placed the fourth spot-kick into the far corner of the net, sending Hugo Lloris to the wrong end. Messi was standing motionless mid-pitch before his teammates buried him under hysterical celebrations.

The goal completed a chequered journey for Messi, the GOAT, with the last and most important missing piece now finally in his trophy cabinet - the World Cup trophy, which eluded him in his previous four attempts since

2006. He did not miss even a moment, playing every single minute in Qatar, for a grand total of 690, and although he may have been tired by the end, he never wavered.

Watching Messi walk up to the World Cup and kiss it at the winners' podium even before it was presented to him was a fulfilling moment even for a neutral.

Four-time champions Germany were in a similar situation to Argentina, but failed to progress past the first round. Brazil, with all their talents, were not brave enough to hold onto a slender lead for a mere seven minutes exited from the quarterfinals, losing to a feisty Croatia on penalties.

When it mattered most, an impressive England team blinked against France with their trusted striker Harry Kane sending a decisive penalty kick into orbit. Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo's dream of immortality ended in tears against a dogged Morocco in a 1-0 quarterfinal defeat. Coming off the bench in the second half, CR7 tried his best to break through the Atlas Lion's iron curtains, but eventually vanished down the tunnel with his head buried

in his hands.

The lightweights also had their moments in a World Cup that was more open this time around, with European dominance challenged by Asian and African nations. Morocco's run in this showpiece event rivalled any fairytale.

It all started with a goalless draw against Croatia followed by a stunning 2-0 win against Belgium and 2-1 success over Canada. They became the first African nation to make it into the semifinal, defeating former champions Spain on penalties 3-0 in the round of 16 and then dispatching Portugal to set up a showdown with France. The Atlas Lions might have lost the game 2-0, but they desperately missed a sharpshooter to turn the table around.

This World Cup has produced a record 172 goals, beating the previous best of 171 in South Korea Japan in 2002 and Brazil in 2014. There were not many from free-kicks, but there were plenty of magnificent goals from open play, starting from Enner Valencia's header in the opening game against Qatar to Mbappe's scorching

volley in the final against Argentina. However, Brazil striker Richarlison's bicycle kick against Serbia will probably be etched in the memories of football puritans due to its sheer artistry.

Refreshingly, this World Cup has largely been free from on-field controversies thanks to the introduction of the upgraded VAR (video assistant referee) system. The technology might have disrupted proceedings for a while, but at the end of day it ensured fair judgment involving a goal or any offence in the 18-yard box.

Qatar as hosts faced a lot of criticism for its handling of migrant workers and its conservative culture leading up to the quadrennial event. But it passed the test with flying colours once the tournament started on November 23 as travelling fans enjoyed its humble hospitality.

The world will have to wait another four years before the greatest show on earth descends in the United States, Canada and Mexico in 2026.

Until then, it's time to celebrate the fulfilment of one dream and for a host of new dreams to begin taking shape.

BNP places 27-point state reform plan

FROM PAGE 1

the "Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners' Appointment Act- 2022" would be amended and voting would be on paper ballots only.

It said a "judicial commission" would be formed to reform the existing judicial system and a separate secretariat would be created under the Supreme Court.

The BNP proposed an "administrative reforms commission" to build a service-oriented public and police administration imbued with patriotism.

It said a "media commission" would be created with former Supreme Court judge, media professionals and experienced and acceptable media personalities for comprehensive reforms of the media.

"The ICT Act-2006 will be amended and Digital Security Act-2018 will be

repealed. Trials of all cases of murder and torture of journalists, including sensational Sagar-Runi murder case, will be ensured."

The party proposed bringing out a white paper on money laundering and corruption that took place over the last decade and a half. People responsible would be identified and brought to book, it said.

"Adequate administrative and legal measures will be taken to bring back the laundered money."

The party said to ensure rule of law, the culture of enforced disappearances, murders, extrajudicial killings, and physical and mental torture would be brought to an end.

"Trials of all the people directly or indirectly responsible for extrajudicial killings, indiscriminate killings in the name of crossfire, enforced disappearances, murders, abductions, rapes, physical torture

and all cruel and inhuman crimes committed over more than a decade, shall be ensured."

The BNP proposed forming an "economic reforms commission" to ensure economic justice and to eliminate disparity between the poor and the rich.

The party in its reform proposal said unemployed and uneducated youth would be given unemployment allowance for up to a year or until they get jobs.

It said it would consider increasing the age limit for getting government jobs.

Khandaker Mosharraf said the outline was prepared in line with the "19-point" of party founder Ziaur Rahman and BNP's "Vision-2030". Most of the proposals were of "Vision 2030", which BNP chief Khaleda Zia unveiled in 2016.

Jamaat-e-Islami, a key component

of BNP-led 20-party alliance, and Communist Party of Bangladesh were not invited to yesterday's programme.

"We have invited only the political parties with which we had talks on state reform proposals," BNP leader Zahir Uddin Swapan told The Daily Star.

Party sources said the reform proposals came to the fore when the BNP started holding talks with its like-minded political parties to wage a simultaneous movement.

It got momentum after Tarique asked for the formation of a national government after election. Following this concept, the BNP talked to its like-minded parties to make the outline that was revealed yesterday.

Different political parties, various professionals and senior leaders of the party were present in the programme. There was no question answer session in the programme.