

UN delegation visits missing Sumon's home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A UN delegation went to the home of missing BNP leader Sajedul Islam Sumon at city's Shaheenbagh yesterday.

Senior Human Rights Adviser of the UN's Dhaka Office Huma Khan and Human Rights Adviser Zahid Hossain spoke to his family members.

On December 14, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas went to the home of Sumon.

Sumon's sister Sanjida Islam told Bangla daily Prothom Alo that the UN delegation went there to know what kind of situation was created due to the US ambassador's visit there, how much pressure they were under, and whether they were harassed.

The members of the UN delegation also enquired about the condition of the families of victims of enforced disappearances.

Sumon went missing in 2013. His family claimed that he was picked up by the law enforcement agencies before the 2014 elections.

Sanjida is also the coordinator of Mayer Daak, an organisation comprising relatives of victims of enforced disappearances.

When Haas went to the house of the missing BNP leader, a group of people tried to surround him outside. Haas left without finishing the meeting.

Later, a spokesperson for the US embassy said Haas left due to security concerns.

They also informed the government's highest level about the matter.

Man sentenced to 7yrs for hurting religious sentiment

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Sylhet Cyber Tribunal yesterday sentenced Rakesh Roy, a leader of Bangladesh Jatiya Hindu Mahajote, to seven years' rigorous imprisonment in a case filed over "hurting religious sentiment and issuing a death threat" to the prime minister through Facebook posts.

Judge Abul Kashem also fined him Tk 1 lakh, said Mustafa Dilwar Al Azhar, acting assistant public prosecutor.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina awards the Bangladesh Police Medal for service to Sunanda Roy, assistant inspector general at Police Headquarters, at Rajarbag Police Lines. A total of 117 members of police were awarded at the inauguration ceremony of the Police Week 2023.

PHOTO: BSS

**China plays down severity of Covid wave
Slams unacceptable curbs on Chinese travellers, poised to brief WHO**

REUTERS, Beijing/Hong Kong

State media in China yesterday played down the severity of a surge of Covid-19 infections ahead of an expected briefing by its scientists to the World Health Organization, which is hoping for detailed data on the evolution of the virus.

China's abrupt U-turn on Covid controls on Dec. 7, as well as the accuracy of its case and mortality data, have come under increasing scrutiny at home and abroad.

China's foreign ministry labelled travel entry curbs imposed by some countries as "simply unreasonable", saying they "lacked scientific basis".

"We are willing to improve communication with the world," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told

reporters in Beijing.

"But...we are firmly opposed to attempts to manipulate the epidemic prevention and control measures for political purposes, and will take corresponding measures in different situations according to the principle of reciprocity."

China's shift away from a "zero-Covid" policy that had been championed by President Xi Jinping followed protests that had marked the strongest show of public defiance during his decade in power and had coincided with the economy's slowest growth in nearly half a century.

As the virus spreads unchecked, funeral parlours have reported a spike in demand for their services and international health experts predict at least one million deaths in China this year.

China reported three new Covid deaths

for Monday, taking its official death toll since the pandemic began to 5,253.

Yesterday, the People's Daily, the Communist Party's official newspaper, cited Chinese experts as saying the illness caused by the virus was relatively mild for most people.

"Severe and critical illnesses account for 3 percent to 4 percent of infected patients currently admitted to designated hospitals in Beijing," Tong Zhaohui, vice president of the Beijing Chaoyang Hospital, told the newspaper.

Kang Yan, head of West China Tianfu Hospital of Sichuan University, said that in the past three weeks, a total of 46 patients had been admitted to intensive care units, or about 1 percent of symptomatic infections.

Retaliate if you come under attack

FROM PAGE 1

Generally, field level police officers place various demands before the prime minister at the welfare parade. But this year the government high-ups instructed the police authorities not to do so due to the ongoing economic downturn, sources said.

She praised the police personnel for their service beyond their working hours.

Earlier, the premier inaugurated the six-day Police Week-2023 at Rajarbagh Police Lines, after a two-year gap due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hasina also handed over Bangladesh Police Medal (BPM) Bravery, President Police Medal (PPM) Bravery, BPM Service and PPM Service to 117 police officials for making the police force proud by setting an exemplary standard of bravery and commitment endangering their lives in 2022.

Of them, 17 received the BPM-Bravery and 25 the PPM-Bravery awards while 25 got BPM-Service and 50 PPM-Service awards.

Different police contingents staged a spectacular parade to mark the police week.

Hasina said, "... serve the people keeping humanitarian aspects in mind so that trust and confidence among the mass regarding the police force remain intact."

Police are now serving as the force of the people. The public used to live in fear of police in the past, Hasina said.

"Now they know that police serve and stand by them. Gaining the trust of people is very important for any force. You [the police force] are doing that."

She further said, "To keep up with developed countries, we want to build our police force into a skilled and smart one, and drive the country towards development."

She urged all to ensure that no one can obstruct the country's march towards development and prosperity.

The PM recalled that the opposition BNP-Jamaat alliance unleashed arson attacks on the people in 2013, 2014 and 2015. She hoped that these kinds of heinous acts would not be repeated.

"I thank all law enforcement agencies, including the police force, for their courageous role in stopping the attacks."

Riding an open vehicle, Hasina inspected the parade.

Govt all set to jack up fees for vehicles

FROM PAGE 1

the Road Transport and Highways Division then sent the draft to the Finance Division jacking up the fees.

Contacted, Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said vehicle maintenance costs had already gone up by 40 percent due to the price hike of fuel and spare parts and the rise in tolls for bridges.

"In this situation, if the authorities increase the fees ... transport owners will not agree to run buses unless the fares are adjusted," he said.

The BRTA chairman said the fees were last revised in 2014 and the Finance Division increased them this time considering inflation over the last eight years. "We don't think it would be a heavy burden on service seekers."

Saidur Rahman, executive director of Road Safety Foundation, said service seekers face hassles at the BRTA and the delivery of services is not people friendly.

"Amid such a situation, they are increasing service charges, which will put more burden on service seekers," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The BRTA should first make their service delivery up to the mark and hassle-free and then consider increasing charges reasonably, he added.

Biman failing to tap into its sleek fleet

FROM PAGE 1

Biman was not transparent in its financial statements.

MA Momen, former Biman managing director and CEO, said, "There is a large number of flyers who would not fly any other airlines. There is also a large number of passengers who assess the market and choose Biman. This alone would have been enough to sustain three more airlines if there is proper planning and management."

It is impossible to justify Biman's inability to compete in the market with the aircraft it has, he said. Since 2007, when it became a public limited company, Biman spent around Tk 19,020 crore on new planes. Its fleet now includes four Boeing 777-300ERs, four Boeing 787-8s, two Boeing 787-9s, six Boeing 737-800s, and five De Havilland Canada Dash-8 Q400s.

Biman owns 18 of the planes and has three on lease. In 2008, Biman inked a deal with Boeing to purchase 10 planes, including four 787-8s. Two more 787-9s were bought from Boeing later. The 12 planes were delivered by 2019.

Wahidul Alam said Biman lacks

experts and professionals. A Biman pilot, requesting anonymity, said it was unacceptable that Biman authorities still didn't have a fleet plan to optimally use its modern aircraft. "We are using the 787-8s, ideal for long-haul flights, to fly to the medium- and short-haul destinations like Singapore and Malaysia," he said. A 787-8 can fly 14 to 15 hours at a stretch and is best suited for flying to distant places like New York, Toronto, or Tokyo.

EXISTING AND NEW SERVICE CHARGES			
SERVICES	EXISTING FEE	NEW FEE	INCREASE RATE
Learner's licence	150	250	66.67
Driving licence issue	100	300	200
Modification fee	300	1,000	233.33
Registration of up to 31 seaters	4,600	7,000	52.17
Registration of up to 52 seaters	13,800	20,000	44.93
Registration of over 52 seaters	17,250	25,000	44.93
Registration of trucks with 3,500kg capacity	4,600	7,000	52.17
Registration of trucks with 3,500kg capacity	13,800	21,000	52.17
Registration of trucks with 12,500kg capacity	17,250	27,000	56.52
Registration of cars, SUVs, minibuses with 1,000 to 1,400CC engines	21,000	27,000	28.57
Registration of cars, SUVs, minibuses with 1,400 to 2,000CC engines	49,000	60,000	22.45
Annual fitness fee for heavy vehicles	900	1,500	66.67
Annual fitness fee for other vehicles	450	800	77.78

couldn't make profit when it flew to more destinations.

"Biman is now doing better than it did in the past. Service has improved. We are trying to improve ground handling... We will have to do better."

Shafiqul Azim told a press conference at Dhaka airport yesterday that Biman's plan was to be in the top 10 Asian airlines.

EVs make up 80 percent of new car sales in Norway

AFP, Oslo

Electric vehicles accounted for almost four out of every five new car registrations in Norway last year, setting a new record, according to figures released Monday.

Led by US carmaker Tesla, which topped the list with a 12.2 percent market share, 138,265 new electric cars were sold in the Scandinavian country last year, representing 79.3 percent of total passenger car sales, the Norwegian Road Federation (OFV) said in a statement.

Bangladesh likely to get

FROM PAGE 1

"Due to the dedicated transmission line, the power price may slightly increase," said Nasrul, adding that the coal for the plant would be imported at the international rate, which will also affect the power price.

"Now, coal is more expensive than it was when we signed the PPA [on November 5, 2017]..."

At the current exchange rate, the cost of a unit (kWh) of electricity would be Tk 17, said the state minister.

Production costs at the power plants in Godda and in Payra will be similar, he added.

The rate is Tk 4 higher than that predicted by the International Energy Agency (IEA) in November and Tk 2 higher than the forecast of the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) in December.

The IEEFA projection was two and a half times higher than the rate at which the Bangladesh Power Development Board sells electricity.

The IEEFA said the original plan for Godda was to use the coal mined in Jharkhand, but the plan was changed later to use Adani's Carmichael coal from Australia. The imported coal will be shipped 700km by train from Udisha's Dhamra port.

"The full transport cost will be borne by Bangladesh," the IEEFA report said.

Adani Power MD Anil Sardana told reporters that due to the Indian

government's policy of not exporting electricity generated by local coal, they would need to import coal from Australia, Indonesia and South Africa.

"Pricing is comparable to any other plant built at this stage," he said, adding that coal prices had gone up in recent times and so the power tariff would also be high.

In the future, coal prices will come down and so would the power tariffs, he said.

During the test run in the presence of thousands of workers, a lot of ash was coming out of the chimneys and landing on people. The state minister's black coat turned white.

The Adani Power MD said this was happening because the power plant was producing 250MW -- a fraction of its total capacity -- and the ultra-super critical system was designed to operate at a minimum of 55-60 percent of the plant's capacity.

The ultra-super critical system was being used for the first time in India by maintaining all standards of the World Bank and Indian standards, he claimed.

State Minister Nasrul Hamid said, "With the dedicated transmission line, we want to build a large-scale power connectivity with Nepal, Bhutan and Assam. And we are talking with Adani for a solar project, which would also be transmitted through the line."

Fakhrul, Abbas

FROM PAGE 1

earlier been denied bail four times by the lower courts concerned in the same case.

The case was filed with Paltan Model Police Station on December 8, a day after the clash broke out in front of the BNP's Nayapaltan office. The clash left one person dead and many injured.

Fakhrul and Abbas were picked up from their homes around 3:00am on December 9, a day

before their Dhaka divisional mass rally, and were sent to jail after Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Jashim rejected their bail petitions.

The two were shown arrested on charges of provoking party activists to attack police.

Senior lawyer Zainul Abedin appeared for the accused BNP leaders while Additional Attorney General SM Munir opposed the bail petition during the hearing.

Seven people were killed Monday in northern Mexico's Ciudad

Seven people were killed Monday in northern Mexico's Ciudad Juarez during a police operation to recapture prisoners who escaped after an attack at their facility, state authorities announced.

Gunmen attacked the border city's state prison on Sunday at dawn, leaving

nearly 20 people dead and allowing the prisoners, which include a gang leader, to flee.

Monday's deaths -- two agents from the state prosecutor's office and five alleged criminals -- took the total fatalities related to the attack to 26, according to a statement from the Chihuahua Public Security Department.

Ex-UP chairman jailed in arms case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A Narsingdi court yesterday sent a former union parishad chairman to jail in a case filed against him earlier in the day under the Arms Act.

Ashraful Hoque, 32, a former Awami League nominated chairman of Bashgari union in Raipura upazila, was arrested around 8:30am. Police also recovered a pipe gun, three rounds of bullets, and three pieces of crude bombs from the arrestee, said Mahabubur Rahman, sub-inspector of Raipura Police Station.

"The arrestee is accused in 29 other cases, including four murder cases. He has also been involved in many local riots and political clashes in the area," the SI added.

3 men get life in prison for murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A Lalmonirhat court yesterday sentenced three men to life imprisonment in a case filed over the murder of a battery-run auto-rickshaw driver in September 2020.

Judge Mizanur Rahman of Lalmonirhat District and Sessions Judge's Court passed the verdict.

The convicts are Shamim Hasan, 22, of Khalisha Madati village, Sujon Mia, 21, of Kishamat Madati village, and Sohag Islam, 20, of Purbopara village.

According to the case, the convicts killed auto-rickshaw driver Shahadat Hossain and fled with his vehicle after dumping the body in a paddy field in Bhullarhat area on September 21, 2020.

Sahida Begum, the victim's mother, filed a case with Kaliganj Police Station the next day, accusing unknown criminals.

On information, police recovered the vehicle and arrested the convicts on the same day.

A total of 12 witnesses testified in the case over the last two years.

Considering their age, the convicts were sentenced to life-term imprisonment, said Akmal Hossain, public prosecutor of Lalmonirhat District Judge Court.

The convicts are currently in Lalmonirhat District Jail.

Man killed in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Shariatpur

A man died in a road accident in Shariatpur's Damudya upazila early yesterday.

The accident took place around 2:00am in Majhetek area of Kaneshwar union of the upazila.

Kawsar Majhi, 26, died on his way to Shariatpur after the driver of the car carrying him along with five members of his family lost control and fell into a roadside pond.

"They were returning home from Dhaka airport with his Singapore-returnee brother Al Amin," said Sheikh Shariful Alam, officer-in-charge of Damudya Police Station.

Police rescued them with the help of locals and rushed them to Damudya Upazila Health Complex. Kawsar died on the way to the hospital.

The accident occurred due to low visibility on the road caused by dense fog, the OC added.