

## Hindu homes, businesses vandalised over FB post

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

At least four houses and eight shops of the Hindu community were vandalised by religious bigots in Gopalganj's Kotalipara upazila over a Facebook post on Sunday evening.

The post was uploaded from the account of a Hindu youth.

Locals said the youth left Uttar Kandi village in the upazila around seven years ago and has been living in India since then.

His mother and sister left the country around three months ago. Finally, a week ago, his father left for India selling their house and properties, added the locals.

Now, none of his family members live in Bangladesh, said a cousin of his.

On Sunday morning, the post went viral on social media.

Incensed, several hundred people from the area and adjacent villages

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IMF Deputy Managing Director Antoinette Monsio Sayeh calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhavan yesterday. The IMF official is now on a four-day visit to Bangladesh as part of her four-country Asia trip.

PHOTO: PTD

## 2 AL leaders, 2 others die mysteriously

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four people, including two local Awami League leaders, mysteriously died in 24 hours between yesterday and the day before while undergoing treatment at a hospital in Kishoreganj.

Doctors at Jahurul Islam Medical College Hospital in Kishoreganj said they were yet to identify the reasons behind their deaths, reports our Mymensingh correspondent.

However, locals seem to think the four might have died from some form of poisoning as they had dined together on Saturday night.

The deceased are Gias Uddin, 57, and Jahir Raihan, 58, organising secretaries of Kuliarchar upazila AL;

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## British tanks in Ukraine 'will burn'

Says Moscow, denies striking residential building in Dnipro

AGENCIES

The Kremlin said yesterday that tanks Britain plans to send to Ukraine "will burn", warning the West that supplying a new round of more advanced weapons to Ukraine would not change the outcome of the war.

Since President Vladimir Putin ordered troops into Ukraine on February 24, the United States and its allies have given tens of billions of dollars' worth of weaponry including rocket systems, drones, armoured vehicles and communications systems.

Britain said on Saturday it would send 14 of its Challenger 2 main battle tanks as well as other advanced artillery support in the coming weeks.

"They are using this country [Ukraine] as a tool to achieve their anti-Russian goals," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov

said when asked about the British tanks.

"These tanks are burning and will burn just like the rest," Peskov said.

Peskov said the new supplies from countries like Britain and Poland would not change the situation on the ground, but were an attempt to draw out the conflict which he said would ultimately bring "more troubles" on Ukraine, reports Reuters.

He also said Russia denied responsibility for a weekend strike on an apartment block in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro that left at least 40 people dead.

The rising cost of the strike came as Russia and its close ally Belarus announced the beginning of new joint military drills, reports AFP.

Belarus, which has been a key ally to Russia throughout the conflict, allowed Moscow's forces to launch their invasion from Belarusian territory last February.

Its defence ministry said the air force exercises would involve joint "tactical" flights and that every airfield in Belarus would be involved.

"The exercise is purely defensive in nature," Pavel Muraveyko, first deputy state secretary of Belarus's Security Council, said in remarks carried Sunday by the defence ministry.

The Institute for the Study of War, based in the United States, said in an analytical note yesterday that the risk of a new offensive from Belarus was "low" and "the risk of Belarusian direct involvement was very low".

Meanwhile, UN atomic watchdog chief Rafael Grossi was expected in Ukraine yesterday to deploy observer missions at nuclear power plants across the country that have been a key concern throughout Russia's invasion.

## TK 304CR LAUNDERING CASE SC upholds HC bail order of former NSU trustee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday upheld a High Court order that granted bail to Mohammad Shahjahan, a former member of North South University's trustee board, in a case filed against him and several others on May 5 last year for laundering Tk 304 crore.

A three-member bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Hasan Foez Siddique, dismissed a petition filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission, seeking a stay on the HC order. Other judges of the bench were Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim.

"Following the HC order, there is no legal bar to releasing Shahjahan," his lawyer Shah Monjurul Hoque told The Daily Star.

Mohammad Sayeed Ahmed Raza represented Shahjahan in court while Khurshid Alam Khan argued for the ACC during the hearing.

On December 14 last year, the HC granted a conditional bail to Shahjahan, saying that he cannot enter NSU premises and cannot leave the country without permission from the concerned court.

## Three killed in Gaibandha pile-up

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Three people were killed and two others injured in an accident involving a bus, a truck, and two motorcycles in Palashbari upazila of Gaibandha.

The collision took place on the Bogura-Rangpur highway in the district's Charmatha area around 9:00am yesterday, confirmed Palashbari Police Station Officer-in-Charge Masud Rana.

The deceased Bidyut Sarkar, 42, Suvash Chandra, 36, and Sumon Chanda, 35, were riding on the two motorcycles involved in the accident.

According to witnesses, a Lalmonirhat-bound bus from Dhaka first rear-ended a motorcycle and then collided with a goods-laden truck and then another motorcycle.

Locals rescued the victims and took them to the Palshabari Upazila Health Complex where a doctor pronounced three people dead.

The bodies were handed over to their family members.

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## US to focus on polls atmosphere

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individual sanctions. We didn't do that because we recognise the progress being made by the government and by the Rab itself to reform. We would like to see more reforms, but we mean to encourage this process going forward ... [so that] they are an effective law enforcement unit without human rights violations.

**TDS:** What more did you discuss on sanctions?

**Lu:** We have seen over the last year a dramatic reduction in the number of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. This is extraordinary and something that should be celebrated. There was a killing in November. It is Shaheen Mia. Immediately, the government appointed a magistrate to investigate the incident. This is important to show that Rab is going to be held accountable. In fact, you have structures in place to make sure that nothing inappropriate is being done. I encourage the government to report on such cases. This is a sign that Rab can function in a way that all Bangladeshi should be proud of. We want to encourage Rab to continue the progress. I have heard from the government that they're very interested in making reforms.

**TDS:** You have reiterated your commitment to democracy and free, fair and participatory elections. What was the feedback?

**Lu:** Well, let me say the main focus of my visit is to show that the US is a reliable partner and that we share the vision of Bangladeshi people for a stronger democracy, more prosperity and stability in this important country. Bangladesh is an important democracy in South Asia. Like all of us, Bangladesh has an imperfect democracy. I hope Bangladesh will be working hard to make sure that as it moves towards elections, they're focused on the ability of the government and opposition to work peacefully together, to protect freedom of assembly so people can gather peacefully, but also freedom of speech. As Americans, we'll condemn

violence where we see it -- if it's on the part of opposition or the part of government and security forces. At the same time, we are going to focus on whether there's intimidation during these elections, and if either side attempts to intimidate the voters or the leaders, we will say so publicly. I think it's important as democracies that we provide that sort of feedback and really encourage each other to be better democracies. I have every confidence that Bangladesh will be able to rise to the occasion and have a good election.

**TDS:** What was the feedback?

**Lu:** Well, everyone I talked to pointed to the prime minister's commitment to free and fair elections without violence or intimidation. And so that's what we would like as well. I hope there will be that same commitment on the part of the opposition.

**TDS:** Bangladesh wants the GSP (Generalised System of Preferences) facility back and funding under the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) but both are tied to labour reforms. How can you help here?

**Lu:** The US is the number one destination for exports from Bangladesh. So, labour rights are really important for you and the US as a consumer. We could provide technical assistance in terms of labour laws including the EPZ law. We are willing to support Bangladesh in improving the process of trade unions' registration. There are some unions that have tried to register but were unable. Improving labour rights means your reputation going up. It can also open the door to new financing from the DFC and the GSP reinstated.

**TDS:** Recently, a Russian ship with equipment for the nuclear power plant in Bangladesh was redirected to India because the ship was sanctioned. What is the magic that it could be unloaded in India and not in Bangladesh?

**Lu:** Let me broaden the question. The US does not ask Bangladesh or anyone else to choose between

Russia and the US, or China and the US. We want to compete and show that we are a reliable and constructive partner for Bangladesh. We want Bangladesh to see value in our relationship. This is important for us. The war in Ukraine has caused some very unfortunate consequences for Bangladeshis, Americans, and certainly for Ukrainians. We see high energy prices, and high food prices. So, the international community has imposed some sanctions on Russia. The point is to prevent Vladimir Putin and his military from gaining more money and power for them to use in the war. It is not to punish Bangladeshi people. And, we are talking to the Bangladesh government about how to minimise the effects of these sanctions on Bangladeshi people. About the ship, I would just pray that Bangladesh can avoid secondary sanctions. The sanctions oriented at Moscow may become a bilateral issue for us or cause problems for Bangladeshi businesspeople who might take things off of ships that were under sanction. I've had long discussions with our Indian partners about these very same issues and we're working through them.

**TDS:** Dhaka has said that foreign diplomats speaking about Bangladesh's elections and politics violates the Vienna Convention. How do you respond?

**Lu:** I have been in government service for 33 years. In all the places we served, we encourage our partners to live up to their democratic values. That's just what means to be an American diplomat. It's not something specific to Bangladesh or South Asia. It is because we believe that our partnership is stronger when your democracy is stronger; when people have the right to free speech and freedom of assembly. I believe this is what Bangladesh wants as well. We, Americans, have our own problems with democracy, but I am proud that our two countries can talk about these issues openly. We will also welcome support for improving our democracy.

[the US delegation] also praised the preparations for the fair elections."

Asaduzzaman said the US does not like vandalism, arson attacks and occupation of the streets in the name of public meetings.

Regarding the Rohingya repatriation, the minister said the US delegation pledged further support to Bangladesh in this regard and that they would continue their financial support.

## Decision on IMF loan January 30

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We discussed the impact of these shocks on Bangladesh's economy, and I welcomed Bangladesh's comprehensive set of measures to deal with them -- including their focus on ensuring protection for the vulnerable during these difficult times," Sayeh said.

The repercussions made the government realise that it needed to push through on stalled reforms to strengthen the economy and hence the knock on the doors of the Washington-based multilateral lender for a framework to implement the agenda.

## 30 hurt in Ctg clash, peaceful elsewhere

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As BNP men in a procession from Askar Dighi area tried to cross the police barricade, the law enforcers intercepted them, triggering the clash around 3:30pm.

The protestors started hurling brick chunks at police. Chase and counter-chase took place between them. At one stage, police fired rubber bullets and lobbed teargas shells to drive away the demonstrators.

Senior BNP leaders ended the rally and left the area after the clash broke out.

The violence continued till around 4:00pm.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Chattogram City BNP Convener Shahadat Hossain alleged that police plotted the clash by setting up a barricade on the way to the venue.

"We took permission for the rally and procession beforehand, but police told us just before the start of the rally that no procession would be allowed."

He said police tried to foil the peaceful demonstrations seeing the huge crowd.

Mostafizur Rahman, deputy commissioner (south) of Chattogram Metropolitan Police, claimed that BNP men first attacked law enforcers from a procession without any provocation.

"Police later resisted the troublemakers firing teargas shells to save people's lives and properties. The attack on police was planned."

He said 20 cops were wounded and four of them were taken to Chattogram Medical College Hospital with bad injuries.

Police detained several BNP men in this connection, he added. Md Saidul Islam, Chattogram

"We don't want any bail-out. This programme of ours is not a bail-out but a pre-emptive measure," Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told Sayeh in her meeting yesterday, reports UNB.

The pace of Bangladesh's socio-economic progress has slowed due to the pandemic, the Ukraine war and the resulting sanctions and counter-sanctions, Hasina also said.

Bangladesh is also facing difficulties due to the price hike of commodities, she said, adding that the government has widened the social safety net and expanded food programmes to support the lower-

income people.

In response, Sayeh said the IMF will assist in Bangladesh's efforts to face the problems.

"Bangladesh aspires to become a developed, prosperous and higher-income country by 2041 -- the IMF will continue to support this aspiration," Sayeh was quoted as saying.

Kamal, PM's International Relations Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi, Principal Secretary M. Tofazzel Hossain Miah, Talukder, Senior Finance Secretary Fatima Yasmin and IMF Resident Representative in Dhaka Jayendu De were present at the meeting.

bureau chief of the Bangla daily Kalbela, said some BNP men vandalised his company car in front of Almas Cinema.

Meanwhile, BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain at the Nayapaltan rally said, "We have to keep in mind that wherever there is democracy, there is contribution of the BNP. Therefore, leaders of the BNP and its front and associate bodies must take the responsibility and unite the people from all walks of life to build strong unity to oust the government."

The BNP leader urged the party men to continue staging protests peacefully to dislodge the government.

"The Baksal regime was introduced on January 25, 1975 and democracy was destroyed. That's why BNP will hold rallies in all cities and districts on January 25 to press home its 10-point demand," he said.

Dhaka north and south city units of the BNP jointly organised the rally. The party later brought out a procession from the rally venue, which marched to the Kakrail intersection and then went to Fakirerpool area before ending in front of the BNP headquarters.

Mosharraf alleged that the government hiked the electricity price "to steal public money".

"Through the rental and quick rental power plants, the government is plundering money. The price of electricity was hiked again to steal money and siphon it out abroad," he added.

**JCD LEADER SHOT**

A Chhatra Dal leader was shot in his right leg allegedly by a Chhatra League man in Narsingdi yesterday.

Mostafizur Rahman, 32, convener

of Polash upazila Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), suffered bullet wounds in Dorihawlapara of Palash upazila around 3:00pm when he was on his way to take part in a BNP protest programme, reports our Narsingdi correspondent.

Locals rushed Mostafizur, a resident of Malita village in Palash, to Narsingdi 100-bed Zilla Hospital. Later, he was referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

JCD men Amanullah and Ariful Islam Arif were also beaten up by pro-ruling party men, sources said.

Rubel Mia, who allegedly shot Mostafizur, is a former vice president of the BCL's Ghorashal municipality unit.

Despite repeated attempts, this newspaper could not reach Rubel for comments.

Mohammad Elias Hossain, OC of Palash Police Station, said, "If we get a written complaint from the Chhatra Dal leader, we will take actions against those involved in the incident."

## Pakistan lawyer shot dead by colleague at high court

AFP, Peshawar

A top lawyer was murdered at a Pakistan high court yesterday by a colleague who shot him six times while dressed in full judicial robes, police and a witness said.

Abdul Latif Afridi -- former president of Pakistan's Supreme Court Bar Association -- was lounging with coworkers in a break room at Peshawar High Court when he was slain in an apparent grudge attack.