SCHOOL POISONING

Dozens of Iran girls hospitalised

AFP, *Tehran*

Dozens of schoolgirls in Iran were hospitalised yesterday after a mysterious poisoning, an Iranian news agency reported, the latest in a spate of suspected attacks in the Islamic republic.

Hundreds of cases of respiratory distress have been reported in the past three months among Iranian schoolgirls mainly in the holy city of Qom, south of Tehran, with some needing hospitalisation.

A government official said on Sunday that the attacks were believed to be a deliberate attempt to force the closure of girls' schools.

"Today at noon, a number of students were poisoned at the Khayyam Girls' School in the city of Pardis, Tehran province," Tasnim news agency reported.

Thirty-five students had been transferred to hospital so far, Tasnim said, adding to the hundreds of cases of poisoning since November in at least two other cities.

The poisonings come more than five months into protests that spread across Iran after death in custody of Iranian Kurd Mahsa Amini.

RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE

Blinken promises US help to C Asia

AFP, *Astana*

Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday promised US help for Central Asia to reduce the region's reliance on Russia, vowing support for the sovereignty of former Soviet republics unnerved by the Ukraine war.

Days after the anniversary of the invasion, the top US diplomat met his counterparts from all five Central Asian nations where Moscow has long been the top power and a magnet for workers, and where neighbouring China also has a growing influence.

Blinken announced $25 million in new support, on top of a previous $25 million announced in September, to help Central Asian nations diversify trade routes and create jobs at home.

The initiatives include English-language education, development of electronic payment systems, and

training for returned migrant workers.

"I reaffirm the United States' unwavering support for Kazakhstan, like all nations, to freely determine its future, especially as we mark one year since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine," Blinken told a news conference.

In remarks with counterparts from all five nations -- Kazakhstan as well as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan -- Blinken said the United States backed their "sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity." Blinken later headed to the imposing palace in the capital to meet President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who voiced "appreciation" for US support for Kazakhstan's sovereignty.

Israeli soldiers check a car as Israeli forces block off streets leading to the city of Jericho yesterday, a day after a suspected Palestinian gunman killed a dual US-Israeli citizen motorist, in Jericho, West Bank. PHOTO: AFP

ANTI-TAX PROTESTS

Sri Lanka outlaws strikes

AFP, *Colombo*

Sri Lanka's government said yesterday it was banning strikes in several key sectors, a day ahead of a planned one-day national stoppage called by unions to protest against painfully high taxes and utility bills.

Anger towards President Ranil Wickremesinghe is growing as his government slashes spending and hikes taxes to secure an IMF bailout after more than a year of economic and political upheaval.

Wickremesinghe's office said he used his executive power to invoke an "essential services" order that effectively outlawed the planned trade union action.

He declared "public transports, delivery of food or drink, or coal, oil, fuel, the maintenance of facilities for transport by road, rail or air... airports, ports and railway lines, as essential services with immediate effect," a statement said.

Anyone defying the essential services order risks losing their job.

More than 40 trade unions, including bank employees and government hospital staff, had said they would not carry out work today as a token protest against the doubling of taxes since January.

The government has raised energy costs threefold in line with demands by the International Monetary Fund to reduce losses of state utilities in order to qualify for a $2.9-billion rescue.

Sri Lanka sought help from the IMF after defaulting on the country's $46 billion in external debts in April.

The IMF is yet to unlock the funds pending financial assurances from China, the largest single bilateral creditor of Sri Lanka, that it is willing to take a haircut on loans to the South Asian nation.

12-HR BATTLE IN JAMMU & KASHMIR

Indian security forces kill two militants

REUTERS, *Srinagar*

Indian security forces shot dead two militants in Jammu and Kashmir yesterday during a 12-hour battle in the disputed region in which a soldier was also killed, the chief of police said.

The battle occurred in a village south of Srinagar after security forces launched a manhunt for the suspected killers of a Hindu security guard who was shot dead on Sunday in another nearby village, Kashmir Police Chief Vijay Kumar said.

"One of the slain militants, Aquib Mushtaq, was responsible for killing (security guard) Sanjay Kumar Nath," he said.

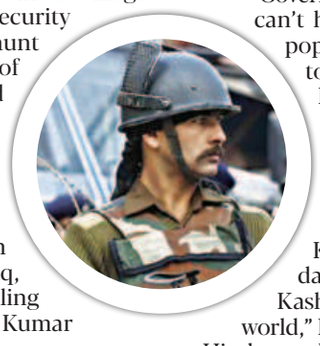
On Monday, members of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party held a protest in Kashmir against the killing, reports Reuters.

Former chief minister and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti accused the government of failing to protect minorities in the valley.

"The vicious cycle of killings doesn't seem to end. GOI has failed to protect minorities in J&K & reduced them to sitting ducks," Mufti said in a tweet. "Everyone here is paying a heavy price for this facade of normalcy."

However, the KPSS, an organisation of Kashmiri Pandits who stayed back in the Valley during the militancy, hit out at the government, reports The Indian Express.

"Government and BJP4Inia can't handle 75 lakh Kashmiri population and want to control PoK and Balochistan. Kashmiri Pandits are killed like dogs in Kashmir and HMOIndia and @OfficeofLGJandK censor the information. Kashmir is the most dangerous place for Kashmiri Pandits in this world," KPSS tweeted.



Hindus and Sikhs are minorities in the Muslim-majority Kashmir valley, and are often the target of militants fighting the Indian government. The region saw a surge in violence last year, which triggered a widespread security crackdown.

India and neighbouring Pakistan claim the Himalayan region - that also includes the Hindu-dominated Jammu - in full but only rule parts of it. India says Pakistan supports the insurgency in Kashmir, a charge Pakistan denies.

Taliban kill top IS commander in Afghanistan

AFP, *Kabul*

Taliban forces killed a top Islamic State commander who allegedly planned attacks against diplomatic missions in Afghanistan's capital, a government official said.

Violence in Afghanistan dramatically dipped after the Taliban seized power in August 2021.

But in the past year, security has worsened, with a spate of mass casualty attacks claimed by Islamic State's regional chapter.

Taliban forces killed Qari Fateh, the regional IS "intelligence and operations chief", during an operation on Sunday night, the Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement on Monday.

Fateh "directly masterminded recent operations in Kabul, including against diplomatic missions, mosques and other targets", Mujahid said.

One other IS member was killed in the operation against the cell, which was based in Kabul's Khair Khana area, according to the statement.

Residents in that neighbourhood had reported loud gunfire on Sunday night.

Taliban officials posted footage on Twitter of two bodies lying in debris.

A United Nations Security Council report in July 2022 described Fateh as a key IS leader, charged with military operations in an area spanning India, Iran and Central Asia.

IS has emerged as the biggest security challenge to Taliban rule, staging attacks on foreigners, religious minorities and government institutions.

The situation is getting more and more complicated. The enemy is constantly destroying everything that can be used to protect our positions.

Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelensky** on Russia's invasion of Ukraine

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১.	xenpne/east/ e-tender/22-23/76	795389	Works: At Chittagong CGMY Area: Construction of new flood light tower 02 Nos. and repairing & repainting of existing 02 Nos. flood light tower with other allied works as per approved drawing.	OTM (NCT)	21-Mar-2023 12:00pm
২.	xenpne/east/ e-tender/22-23/75	794265	Works: At CTG (PHT-1 Section): Construction of ballast protection wall at Km. 2/1 to 2/3 (Up line)=400 Rft, drain at Km. 1/2 to 1/4 = 702 Rft, providing rail fencing 900 rft, at Km. 1/8 to 2/1 (Link Line) including cleaning & disposing of earth and other allied works as per drawing.	OTM (NCT)	21-Mar-2023 12:00pm

বিঃ দ্রঃ
১. শুধুমাত্র ই-জিপি সিস্টেমে নিবন্ধিত eligibility শর্তাবলী পূরণকারী দরদাতাগণ সরাসরি অংশগ্রহণ করতে পারবেন।
২. দরপত্রে অংশগ্রহণের জন্য দরপত্র দলিল ও দরপত্র জামানত বাবদ অর্থ নির্ধারিত ব্যাংকে জমা করতে হবে।

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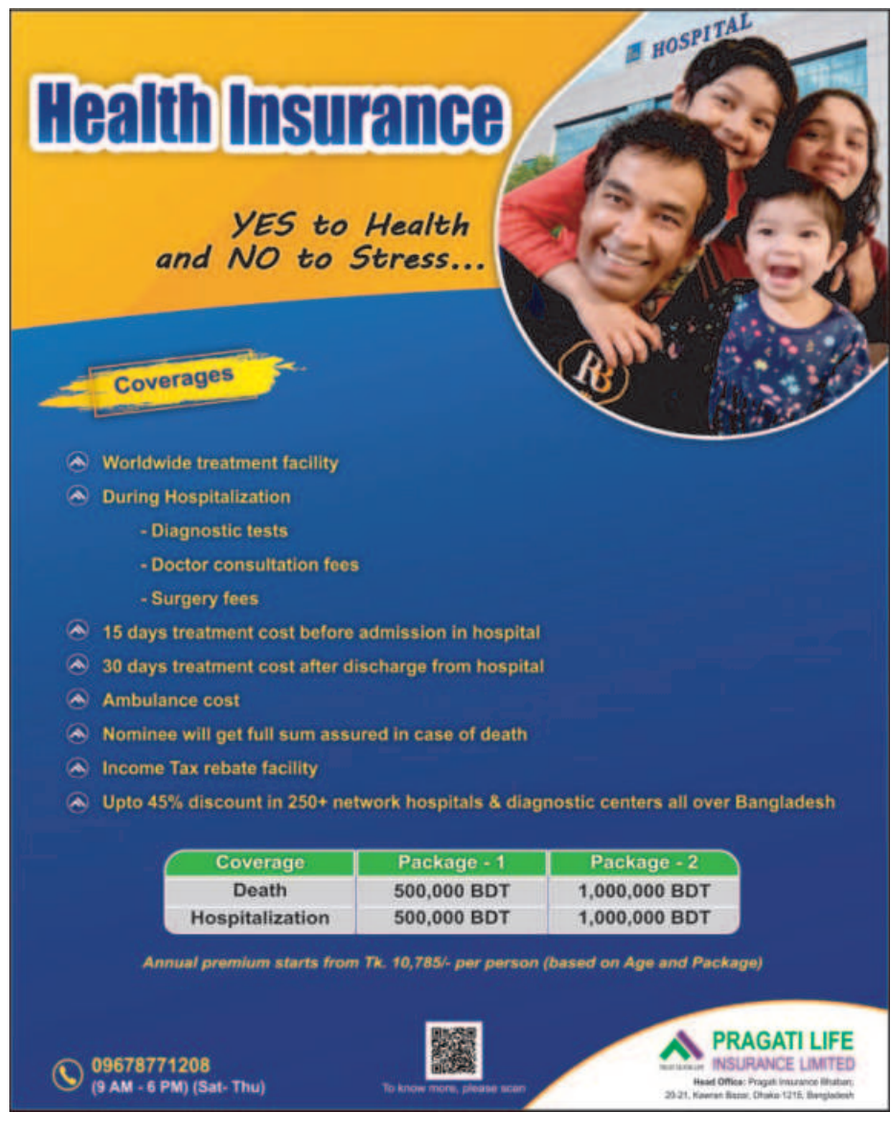
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