

Bangladesh embassy in Sudan, ambassador’s home attacked

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh embassy in Sudan and the acting ambassador Tarek Ahmed’s residence in Khartoum came under attack on April 15, forcing Tarek to move to a safe place, sources at the foreign ministry said.

Bullets from machine guns hit the ambassador’s residence on April 15, the initial days of the conflicts that began between Sudan’s military and paramilitary forces.

A foreign ministry official said the Bangladesh embassy building on April 22 was hit by machine gun bullets. There were no casualties.

DEFAMATION CONVICTION Rahul Gandhi appeals after court denies stay

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday appealed to the High Court in the western state of Gujarat seeking a stay of conviction in a defamation case, challenging a lower court’s ruling against his plea, his lawyer said.

Gandhi was convicted last month in a case brought by a state lawmaker from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after comments he made that were deemed to be insulting to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other people surnamed Modi.

The 52-year old scion of India’s Congress party was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment. His petition seeking a stay of conviction was rejected last week.

“We have filed an appeal challenging the Surat district court’s order,” Gandhi’s lawyer, Pankaj Champaneri, told Reuters.

Gandhi also lost his parliamentary seat following the conviction since lawmakers sentenced to jail terms of two years or more are automatically disqualified and barred from running for election.

His sentence will remain suspended until he exhausts all legal challenges.

Two more defamation cases have also been filed against Gandhi elsewhere in India relating to the same comment.



Indubala Bhaater Hotel – a web series on the OTT platform Hoichoi – is the current craze. I will not discuss the storyline in detail but let’s just say that it leaves you with a nostalgic pull for lost worlds and makes you realise how a woman can evolve through troubled times.



The city’s vegetarian EATERIES

RBR

I would, however, discuss the vegetarian dishes that played a supporting role in the series. A taro root mash or “kochu bhorta” in coconut shavings – mixed with mustard oil – is the recipe that saves Indubala and popularises her hotel. How a small portion of this special kochu bhorta and piping hot rice fills both the hearts and stomachs of the castaways and the regular people is what captured my imagination.

I took it upon myself to find restaurants like Indubala Bhaater Hotel in Dhaka, serving simple no-fuss vegetarian dishes like aubergine burnt in a coal fire and mixed with “aam tel” or mango pickle oil. It’s hard to find an exact match of the drama setting but there are a few restaurants in equally dreamy locations.

One is Jatra Biroti on Kemal Ataturk Avenue in Banani. It is a multi-purpose event space/art lounge and vegetarian restaurant serving exotic dishes like eggplant korma, cauliflower rezala, and wood-apple drinks. Give their vegetables a try and eat mushroom tehari, niramish (veg), and begun bhaji – their specialties.

Faiza Ahmed, food visionary and vegan chef, owner of Shanchayita, a restaurant in Mohakhali DOHS, has the most amazing vegan spread in town. Her popular meals are vegan dam biriyani served with cabbage pakora, a comfort runny veggie khichuri platter served with sour eggplant and lentil



PHOTO: SHANCHAYITA

fritters, boukhudi or broken rice dish with three local mashes of lentil, dry red chilli, and yummy peanut.

The most popular snack is batata puri (batata means potato in Portuguese). This is one of those classic mashed potato, onion, chilli, and cilantro concoctions topped with a tamarind sauce. This is served on crispy wheat chips.

The desserts available are vegan peanut laddu with no oil and no dairy, semolina halwa with date jaggery, and narikel (coconut) puli.

Faiza’s pickles are to die for and add that much-needed oomph to the food – dry jujube pickle, mango rasya, and Kartik jaitun pickle. She has a private

dine-in facility, where you need to make reservations first and enjoy a cosy meal. Faiza also takes 8 to 15 takeout orders a day. A very niche clientele is attracted to this beautiful restaurant.

There are a few more options of vegetarian and vegan eateries in town, but ISKCON Dhaka at Swami Bagh and Vishnupriya Vojanalay – a vegetarian restaurant in Kowtali Road, old Dhaka also has their loyal vegetarian regulars.

So, during this scorching Dhaka summer time do yourself a favour and have organic vegetarian dishes for a change. Popularise greens in Dhaka especially after coming out of the Eid food coma.

BCL leader sent to jail for rape attempt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A Sherpur court sent a leader of the Bangladesh Chhatra League to jail for attempting to rape an indigenous girl belonging to the Garo community in Jhenaigati upazila.

Shahrier Khan Shawon, 31, was also expelled from his position as the general secretary of BCL’s Jhenaigati upazila unit on the same day.

Police arrested him after the 19-year-old girl lodged a complaint with the Jhenaigati Police Station on Monday night, said Officer-in-Charge Monirul Alam Bhuiyan.

According to the case statement, Shawon broke into the girl’s house on Saturday night and attempted to rape her.

Woman’s body recovered from RHD staff quarters

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lakshmpur

The dismembered body of a woman was found inside the staff quarters of the Roads and Highways Department in Lakshmpur Monday night.

The deceased was identified as Montaj Begum, wife of late Abdul Matin, a former employee of the department.

Montaj lived in the quarters with her two sons – Shariful Islam Bappi and Saiful Islam Rocky – since her husband died.

After returning home around 11:30pm, Bappi found his mother’s dismembered body and informed police who recovered it and sent to District Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy, said Mosleh Uddin, officer-in-charge of Lakshmpur Sadar Police Station.

4 held with drugs in Teknaf

UNB, Dhaka

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) detained four Myanmar nationals and seized 10,000 yaba pills, a little over 1kg of crystal meth, 35 bottles of foreign liquor, and 430 cans of beer from them at Jaliardwip in Teknaf upazila of Cox’s Bazar.

The detainees are Waz Karim, 22, Mahbubur Rahman, 19, Md Foysal, 20, and Jashim Uddin.

Foysal and Jashim are residents of Rohingya camps in the district.

Tipped off, a team of BGB-2 conducted a drive in the area on Monday night and challenged a boat while it was crossing the zero line of the bordering area around 10:20pm, said BGB-2 Commanding Officer Lt Col Mohiuddin Ahmed.

2 children drown in Kurigram

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Two children died after drowning in a canal in Rajarhat upazila of Kurigram yesterday.

The incident took place in Alsia Para village under the upazila’s Nazim Khan union.

Mahadi Hossain, 8, son of Sajidul Islam and Faradi Hossain, 9, son of Sohag Mia, are cousins.

The children drowned after they went to bathe in a canal near their house around noon. They did not know how to swim.

Family members found their bodies floating in the canal around an hour later.

Rajarhat Police Station Officer-in-Charge Abdullah Hail Zaman said the bodies of the two children were with their families.

There is no complaint from the family over this incident, he added.

WB to give

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“The recent energy crisis in Bangladesh underlines the vulnerability of the sector due to high dependency on fossil fuels,” it said.

Along with the new CPF, the WB board with authorise budget support of \$500 million and a new project of \$250 million.

During the PM’s visit, \$1.53 billion of loan agreements for three projects will also be signed.

A daylong programme will be held on May 1 at the WB headquarters in Washington DC where the lender would be showcasing the outcome of its collaboration with Bangladesh, which has enabled the country to achieve lower middle-income status only within four decades of its independence.

Hasina would also be speaking at the meeting of the WB board of directors and participating in a panel discussion.

She will also meet with Ajay Banga, the incoming president of the World Bank Group, and Kristalina Georgieva, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund.

Another power price hike likely by June

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and electricity. Who drives cars? Who consumes air conditioning? It is not the poor, it’s the rich people. Those people do not deserve the subsidy they are getting in the context of a country going through a fiscal problem,” said Krishna Srinivasan, director of the IMF’s Asia-Pacific department, in an interaction with Bangladeshi journalists in New Delhi earlier in February.

Blanket subsidies also limit how much the government can support social safety net programmes and infrastructure spending.

Subsequently, the lender insists on providing targeted subsidies and not blanket subsidies or blanket tax exemptions.

A record Tk 81,000 crore was earmarked for subsidy expenses in the original budget for this fiscal year. In the revised budget, another

Tk 21,000 crore had to be made available.

But for the common people grappling with a cost of living crisis, a fourth electricity price hike in six months might be a step too far.

In the first nine months of fiscal 2022-23, inflation averaged 8.81 percent, way above the budgetary target of 5.6 percent, according to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. In March, inflation stood at 9.33 percent, the highest in seven months.

The finance ministry officials have also informed the staff mission that it would be difficult to meet June’s target for net international reserves (NIR), one of the three mandatory conditions for the release of the next tranche of the loan.

The IMF stipulated a minimum NIR of \$24.46 billion on June 30.

On March 30, it was less than

\$22 billion – and missing the IMF’s floor of \$22.95 billion for March, The Daily Star has learnt from finance ministry officials involved with the proceedings.

Meanwhile, BB officials informed the staff mission that the central bank is on track to introduce a market-determined exchange rate for all official foreign exchange transactions and interest rate corridor by June, as sought by the Washington-based multilateral lender.

“We have almost arrived at a position to introduce a single exchange rate,” Md. Mezbaul Haque, BB spokesman, told reporters yesterday.

The monetary policy that would be announced in July would reflect many of the recommendations such as reporting on foreign exchange reserves as per the IMF’s BPM6 manual, he said.

The president spends

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contingent drawn from the Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force presented the state salute on the occasion as the bugles played the last post.

Shahabuddin, himself a valiant freedom fighter, stood in solemn silence for the memories of the heroes who made the supreme sacrifice for the motherland during the nine-month war in 1971. He also signed the visitors’ book there.

From Savar, the president went to Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi 32 and placed a wreath at the portrait of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, reports UNB.

He witnessed a holographic presentation on Bangabandhu’s historic March 7 speech and signed the visitors’ book.

Later, the president paid his respect to the martyrs of the Language Movement by placing wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar. He stood in solemn silence to honour the memories of the heroes who embraced death for the state recognition of the mother tongue in 1952.

Earlier in the morning, President Shahabuddin received the maiden ceremonial salute at the southwestern part of the Credential Ground of the Bangabhaban.

Family members and Bangabhaban officials witnessed the ceremony held at around 10:30am, reports BSS.

A contingent of the President Guard Regiment (PGR) extended him a guard of honour as part of the ceremony while a band comprising army, navy, and air force played the welcome tune.

President Shahabuddin’s family members, including wife Dr Rebecca Sultana and son Arshad Adnan Roni, arrived at the Bangabhaban around 8:50pm on Monday in a motorcade from his Gulshan residence.

On his arrival at the Bangabhaban, a contingent of the horse-mounted PGR welcomed the president at the main gate.

From there, they took them to the main building gate, where he was greeted with flowers by the officials and employees of the presidential palace.

Senior military and civil officials, including President’s Office Secretary Sampad Barua, Military Secretary Major General SM Salahuddin Islam, Press Secretary Md Joyal Abedin and Secretary (Attachment) Md Wahidul Islam Khan were present there.

Around 11:00am on Monday, he was sworn in as the head of state in an impressive ceremony as Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury administered his oath.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Chief Justice Hasan Foez Siddique, Bangabandhu’s younger daughter Sheikh Rehana, cabinet members, and several hundred distinguished guests attended the state programme.

After his swearing-in, the new president and outgoing president M Abdul Hamid officially changed their seats as part of the ceremony of changing the charge of the office.

President Shahabuddin is scheduled to visit Tungipara today to pay his respect at the Mausoleum of Bangabandhu.

HSC exams

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are boys and 10,50,966 are girls; 16,49,275 will sit for the SSC; 2,95,121 for Dakhil; and 1,27,767 for vocational tests.

The number of science students in the SSC has increased by 37,320, Dipu Moni added.

The exams will take place at 3,810 centres across the country for the students from 29,798 schools, madrasas, and technical institutes. Some 374 students will sit for the tests from abroad.

The exams will be held on all subjects with full marks on abridged syllabuses.

Students will have to be at the exam centres 30 minutes before the three-hour tests start and those with disabilities will be allowed an additional 20-30 minutes.

Smartphones with internet and camera will be prohibited at the centres, she said, adding that the exam centre secretaries will be allowed to carry feature phones.

Deputy Minister for Education Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury and officials of the ministry were present at the event.

Fix it all, avoid disaster

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sudden rise of gas pressure. “But this [Monday’s] incident proves they do not have this system.”

Over the past few years, there were a number of fire or blast incidents caused by accumulated gas in homes, industries, and markets.

Iqbal Habib, joint secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon, said Monday’s leaks could have caused serious accidents.

He warned that if the leaks are not fixed immediately, incidents like that in Narayanganj and Moghbazar may happen again.

Another energy expert, Md Maqbul E Elahi Chowdhury said mixing odorant was a good initiative that alerted people about the leaked gas on Monday.

By using an odorant, it is possible to identify 80 to 85 percent leaks, he added.

Odorant is chemical additive that is mixed into natural gas to create an artificial smell. It serves as a warning in the detection of natural gas in the air when there is a leak.

“But Titas is not using it regularly in its entire network,” said Maqbul.

“Titas should repair all the leaks of the distribution network immediately to avert accidents,” added Maqbul, a former director of Petrobangla.

Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company is the biggest distributor of pipeline gas in the country with 7,000km of lines in Dhaka alone and 28.57 lakh domestic connections across the country.

However, most of the pipes in the

city are around 40 years old and the distribution network has developed many leaks.

In a survey conducted on a 1,682km pipeline in Dhaka in fiscal 2021-22, Titas detected 985 leaks at 449 points. Titas officials claimed that they have repaired those.

But experts said had Titas conducted a survey on the rest of the network, they would have found a lot more leaks.

Asked about Monday’s leaks, Titas Managing Director Md Harunur Rashid Mollah said these were very minor.

The leaks are not repairable but not risky, he added.

“The smell has spread as we have used odorant. But these were very minor leaks which increased due to the pressure of gas and again it

reduced when we have reduced the gas pressure,” he said.

“We are regularly fixing the leaks which are repairable.”

Rashid further claimed no pipeline in Dhaka city is risky and there is no chance of explosion.

An official of Titas said illegal gas connections and damage of the gas pipelines by other utility service providers are mainly responsible for the leaks.

Titas has identified 60 areas in Dhaka and Narayanganj where old and narrow gas pipes need to be changed to solve the problem of leaks and low gas pressure.

“A DPP has already been sent to the ministry concerned in this regard. Once we get the approval, we will start our work,” said the MD of Titas.