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STRIFE-TORN SUDAN Evacuation of Bangladeshis to start tomorrow

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Evacuation of some 700 Bangladeshis from the Sudanese capital Khartoum will begin tomorrow, said Shahriar Alam, the state minister for foreign affairs, yesterday.

They will be taken from Khartoum to Port Sudan, a distance of more than 800 kilometres, by buses, he told reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday.

From there, they will be transported by sea to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. From Jeddah, the Bangladeshis will be brought to Dhaka by Biman planes.

Saudi Arabia is providing Bangladesh with the ships required for the evacuation from Port Sudan to Jeddah, Alam said.

An estimated 1,500 Bangladeshis live in Sudan.

Given the serious security concerns, Alam urged the remaining Bangladeshis to immediately register for evacuation.

It has been reported that they are living in uncertainty amid a shortage of essential supplies and widespread looting.

Only around 35 Bangladeshis safely left Sudan with the help of their employers.

The Sudanese army yesterday said it was attacking the city from all directions, with air strikes and heavy artillery, to flush out its paramilitary rivals called the Rapid Support Forces.

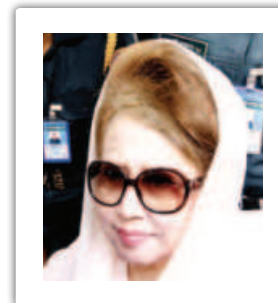
More than 500 people have been reported dead since fighting erupted on April 15.

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A candidate goes over his textbook for a last-minute revision, right before sitting for the Bangla (first paper) test as SSC exams began across the country yesterday. The photo was taken in front of the exam centre in Motijheel Government Boys High School.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



Khaleda's condition improves slightly

Says her physician

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has been kept under close observation by physicians at the city's Evercare Hospital for various ailments, said her personal physician, Prof Dr AZM Zahid Hossain.

"Madam [Khaleda] is under the close observation and supervision of doctors in a cabin. Her condition has improved a little as she has been given treatment as per the advice of her medical board," he told journalists yesterday.

Earlier on Saturday night, the BNP chief was admitted to Evercare

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DIGITAL SECURITY ACT 'Arbitrary misuse' of the law continues 8 arrested in 7 cases in April alone, says rights body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The harassment of journalists and activists continues unabated through the arbitrary misuse of the Digital Security Act, as eight people were arrested in seven cases filed under the act in April alone, said human rights body Manabdhikar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF).

In March, 10 cases were filed under the DSA, it said.

In a report issued yesterday and signed by its Founder Sultana Kamal, the rights body demanded the repeal of the act.

The report was based on news articles published by 10 media outlets, which were verified by human rights activists.

It said six of the cases filed under the DSA last month were for "tarnishing the images" of the country or high-ranking government officials through social media posts, shares and comments.

One case was filed against three journalists in Khulna in March, but there was no report on it until April 1.

The eight arrested in cases filed in April included a journalist, a teenager, and a BNP activist.

In the report, MSF said that though the DSA has been heavily criticised, it is still being misused to harass and prevent people from voicing their opinions.

METRO LINE-2, -4

Japan, S Korea, WB show interests

Claim metro authorities

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Japan, South Korea and the World Bank have expressed interests in financing the preparatory works for two more metro rail lines, said the authorities.

Mass Rapid Transit lines 2 and 4 will link Narayanganj with the capital.

Besides, the metro authorities said they have planned to start a pre-feasibility study to expand MRT Line-6 up to Tongi from Uttara, along with feasibility studies of the two lines.

"Japan, Korea and the World Bank have expressed interests in funding the studies for MRT Line-2 and -4. They also showed interests in investment projects. However, nothing has been finalised yet," MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd, told The Daily Star yesterday.

DMTCL, a state-run company, is the implementing and operating agencies of all metro rail projects.

In the first phase, the government plans to build around 140km metro rail network with six lines crisscrossing Dhaka and adjacent areas by 2030.

Country's first metro rail line - MRT Line-6 - partially came into operation between Uttara and Agargaon in December last year while physical works of MRT Line-1

Mass Rapid Transit lines 2 and 4 will link Narayanganj with the capital.

began in February this year.

Physical works of MRT Line-5 (northern route) are expected to start July this year while the preparatory works of MRT Line-5 (southern route) are going on with the funding of Asian Development Bank.

MRT Line-6, which will be 21.26km rail line from Uttara to Motijheel, is being implemented at

a cost of Tk 33,472 crore.

MRT Line-1, the 31.24km line with the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Kamalapur section underground and Notun Bazar to Purbachal section elevated, is being constructed at a cost of Tk 52,561.43 crore.

MRT Line-5 (northern route) will be a 20km line from Savar's Hemayetpur to Bhatara via Gabtoli, Mirpur, and Gulshan. The project cost is Tk 41,239 crore.

The three projects are being implemented with Japanese soft loan.

MRT Line-5 (southern route), which will be 17.3km long from Gabtoli to Dasherkandi via, Shyamoli, Panthapath, Karwan Bazar, Rampura and Aftabnagar, is expected to be done with the funding of ADB.

MRT LINE-2
MRT Line-2 was supposed to be constructed from Gabtoli to Chittagong Road on Dhaka-

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Signs of recent water found in Mars sand dunes

VOA NEWS ONLINE



Water may be more widespread and recent on Mars than previously thought, based on observations of Martian sand dunes by China's rover.

The finding highlights new, potentially fertile areas in the warmer regions of Mars where conditions might be suitable for life to exist, though more study is needed.

Friday's news came days after mission leaders acknowledged that the Zhurong rover had yet to wake up since going into hibernation for the Martian winter nearly a year ago.

Its solar panels are likely covered with dust, choking off its power source and possibly preventing the rover from operating again, said Zhang Rongqiao, the mission's chief designer.

Before Zhurong fell silent, it observed salt-rich dunes with cracks and crusts, which researchers said likely were mixed with melting morning frost or snow as recently as a few hundred thousand years ago.

Their estimated date range for when the cracks and other dune features formed in Mars' Utopia Planitia - a vast plain in the northern hemisphere - is sometime after 1.4 million to 400,000 years ago or even younger.

"Though the DSA has been heavily criticised, it is still being misused to harass and prevent people from voicing their opinions. Rather than relying on the Penal Code, the law is being exploited to silence and intimidate individuals...." - MSF

"Rather than relying on the Penal Code, the law is being exploited to silence and intimidate individuals - a practice that must be stopped."

The foundation added that at least 54 journalists were humiliated, harassed and tortured in April.

Of them, 19 were subjected to legal harassment, three were sued under the DSA, one was arrested in a case filed under the act, while a charge sheet in a DSA case against another journalist was submitted to a court.

Meanwhile, a woman journalist was barred from leaving the country in an ongoing case under the Official Secrets Act. Three other newsmen were sued under the ICT act and five in an extortion case, the report further said.

Last month, 22 journalists were attacked by vested quarters for covering news. Of them, seven were injured while gathering news, four were harassed and two were threatened with death.

Another reporter was killed after being run over by a truck in Nilphamari.

The MSF report said 338 political activists, including 259 BNP and 71 Jamaat members, were arrested in April.

In the report, the foundation also mentioned incidents of extra-judicial killings, custodial deaths, other rights violations by law enforcers, and the spate of fires that took place throughout the month.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Woodcutters toiling to cut through a large piece of timber in Mohammadpur's Beribandh yesterday afternoon. Each of these men will receive Tk 500 at the end of their day's work. Though May Day, otherwise known as labour day, is officially celebrated throughout the country every year, the working conditions, facilities and wages of day labourers are yet to improve.

MONEY LAUNDERING Casino 'kingpin' Salim Prodhan jailed for 8 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced casino "kingpin" Salim Prodhan to eight years' imprisonment in a case filed over amassing Tk 57.79 crore illegally and laundering about Tk 22 crore.

Judge Md Badrul Alam Bhuiyan of Dhaka's Special Judge's Court-8 handed down the verdict in the presence of the convict at the court.

The judge also fined him Tk 11 lakh, in default of which, he will have to serve seven months more in jail.

In the verdict, the judge said the prosecution was able to prove the charges brought against the accused beyond any doubt.

The judge also said Salim Prodhan amassed his wealth from online casino businesses and moved his illicit income to Thailand and the US.

Earlier, the prosecution and

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