

CPB protests ‘Akhand Bharat’ mural

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) yesterday protested the installation of a mural at the newly inaugurated Indian parliament building depicting the Indian subcontinental landmass.

The mural has been interpreted as a map of Akhand Bharat or undivided India, which has drawn angry responses from political leaders across party lines in Nepal and Pakistan.

In a press release, CPB said the mural is a disgrace towards Bangladesh's sovereignty and self-esteem.

The party said the mural may deteriorate India's relationship with its neighbouring countries and spread confusion, and even can instigate communal violence.

The party also demanded that the government formally lodge a protest against the installation of the mural.

Meanwhile, Rastro Songskar Andolon also protested the installation of the mural.

The organisation, in a press release, demanded that the Indian government uninstalls the mural.

It also urged people to raise their voice against this.

12 women return from KSA after being ‘tortured’

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Twelve women who went to Saudi Arabia to work as house helps about six months ago returned to Bangladesh penniless yesterday after “being subjected to torture”.

“Arrest them all. They tortured us inhumanly,” one of the women was making this call to law enforcers at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the evening upon her return.

The 12 were able to return following efforts by the Airport Armed Police Battalion (AAPBn).

MH Trade International, a recruiting agency, had sent them to Saudi Arabia.

“They [employers] beat us with whips and iron rods. They hardly gave us any food. We were given only some rice and cabbage after a day or two,” said the woman to AAPBn officials.

All the women complained that they were tortured in Saudi Arabia both mentally and physically, Ziaul Haque, additional superintendent of police at AAPBn, told The Daily Star.

He said they started working on bringing the 12 women back home after the husband of one of them

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Firefighters work at a house on fire following a shelling, which, according to the regional governor, was carried out by Ukrainian forces, in the village of Sobolevka, Belgorod region, Russia. The photo was captured on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

‘Ukraine ready to launch counteroffensive’

Says Zelenskiy as shelling kills 2 in Russia

AGENCIES

Ukraine is ready to launch its long-awaited counteroffensive to recapture Russian-occupied territory, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said in an interview published Friday.

“We strongly believe that we will succeed,” Zelenskiy told the Wall Street Journal, reports Reuters.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian shelling killed two people yesterday in Russia's Belgorod, a border region.

Belgorod border villages have been hit by unprecedented shelling, and the latest deaths bring the overall toll to seven this week.

“Since this morning, the district of Shebekino has been under shelling of the Ukrainian armed forces,” said Belgorod governor Vyacheslav Gladkov. Two other people were wounded in the shelling.

The Russian army on Thursday said it had used its air force and artillery to repel an attempt from the Ukrainian army to invade Belgorod.

Elsewhere, Ukraine's defence minister yesterday dismissed a plan proposed by his Indonesian counterpart to end the war between Kyiv and Moscow, calling it a

“strange” proposal, reports AFP.

Indonesian Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto pitched the idea at the Shangri-La Dialogue defence summit in Singapore where he was a speaker.

The plan included an “immediate cessation of hostilities”, a ceasefire “at present positions”, and demilitarised zones that would be guaranteed by observers and United Nations peacekeeping forces.

He also suggested an eventual “referendum in the disputed areas” organised by the UN.

But Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov, who was attending the two-day summit, flatly rejected the proposal.

“It sounds like a Russian plan, not Indonesian plan,” he said. “We don't need this mediator coming to us (with) this strange plan.”

Zelenskiy in on the counteroffensive said, “I don't know how long it will take. To be honest, it can go a variety of ways, completely different. But we are going to do it, and we are ready.”

Kyiv hopes a counteroffensive to reclaim territory will change the dynamics of the war that has raged since Russia invaded its smaller neighbour 15 months ago.

REGIONAL STABILITY Iran to form naval alliance with Gulf states, India, Pakistan

REUTERS

Iran's navy commander said his country and Saudi Arabia, as well as three other Gulf states, plan to form a naval alliance that will also include India and Pakistan, Iranian media reported yesterday.

“The countries of the region have today realized that only cooperation with each other brings security to the area,” Iran's navy commander Shahram Irani was quoted as saying.

He did not elaborate on the shape of the alliance that he said would be formed soon.

Iran has recently been trying to mend its strained ties with several Gulf Arab states.

In March, Saudi Arabia and Iran ended seven years of hostility under a China-mediated deal, stressing the need for regional stability and economic cooperation.

Naval commander Irani said the states that will take part in the alliance also include the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Qatar, Iraq, Pakistan, and India.

Three drown in lake, river

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday recovered two unidentified children's bodies from the lake at Martyred Intellectual Graveyard in the capital's Rayerbazar.

The bodies were sent to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College morgue, said police.

Azizul Haque, assistant commissioner (Mohammadpur zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said locals found the bodies around 5:15pm and informed police.

Meanwhile, a college student drowned in the Teesta in Jagatber area of Lalmonirhat yesterday.

The accident took place when the victim, Talha Islam, 18, was taking a bath in the river around noon. He didn't know how to swim, said Ershadul Alam, officer-in-charge of Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station.

Talha, an HSC student of Syedpur Government College, was a resident of Nilphamari's Syedpur upazila.

A local fisherman fished out the student and took him to Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital where the on-duty doctor declared him dead.

Talha went to Rajpur in Lalmonirhat on Friday with his parents to attend his cousin's wedding ceremony.

Two killed as train rams three-wheeler

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

Two people were killed as the Mohanagar Express, bound for Dhaka from Chattogram, rammed into a CNG-run auto-rickshaw on an unmanned rail crossing in Jaikhanabari area of Cumilla's Sadar Dakshin upazila yesterday.

The deceased were identified as auto-rickshaw driver Sohagh, 35, and his son Sohel, 12, of Cumilla Sadar upazila.

The accident occurred around 5:00pm when the three-wheeler was crossing the level crossing, said Jashim Uddin Khandaker, officer-in-charge of Laksham railway police station.

BCL leader found dead at home

DU CORRESPONDENT

The body of a Chhatra League leader was found at his home in the capital's Chankharpool area early yesterday.

Deceased Wasim Rana was the president of BCL's Kabi Nazrul Govt College unit, said police.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy, said Inspector Bachchu Miah, in-charge of the DMCH police outpost.

Wasim's friends broke the door of his room and found him hanging from a ceiling fan after his nephew informed them that he was not opening the door around Friday midnight.

They rushed Wasim to DMCH where doctors declared him dead.

One of Wasim's friends said he could have died by suicide as he was depressed after the demise of his father and elder brother.

BCL president and general secretary expressed deep shock over the death of Wasim yesterday in a press release.

They also prayed for the salvation of the departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to bereaved family members.

288 dead in India's worst train crash

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behind the train crash revealed the Coromandel Express entered the loop line and crashed into a stationary goods train already parked there instead of the main line just ahead of Bahanagar Bazar station, about 250km south of Kolkata, railway sources said.

A short while later, the Bengaluru-Howrah Express train ran into the derailed compartments of the Coromandel Express.

The two passenger trains running at high speed were carrying nearly 2,000 passengers when the accident took place. The high speed has been cited by experts as one of the main reasons for the casualty figure.

A total of 17 coaches of the two trains derailed and were severely damaged trapping hundreds of passengers inside mangled coaches.

Rescuers raced against time to retrieve survivors and bodies that were buried under the derailed coaches of the two trains.

According to officials, the toll is likely to go up as several coaches still lay scattered on the tracks.

More than 900 injured have been rushed to different hospitals in Balasore and nearby districts.

The rescue personnel are collecting their luggage, other belongings and documents hoping these could help in the identification of the bodies.

6 Congressmen write to Biden

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Referring to reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, and the UN, they also mentioned “increasingly repudiated democratic systems”, rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, persecution of minorities, shrinking space for freedom of speech and attacks on peaceful protesters.

They stressed the need for appropriate measures so people in Bangladesh can exercise their voting rights freely in the upcoming election.

The Congressmen are Scott Perry, Barry Moore, Warren Davidson, Bob Good, Tim Burchett and Keith Self.

On June 2, Bob Good issued a statement on his official website including the letter, dated May 25.

Earlier, two identical letters containing their call were doing the rounds on social media last week.

But as there were speculations about the authenticity of the letters, issued on two different dates – May 17 and May 25 – The Daily Star tried to find out more about the issue.

The newspaper sent emails,

attaching the letters, to the offices of all the six Congressmen on May 31, but did not yet get any reply.

It also called the office of Congressman Bob Good (VA-05) on May 31. Staffers there said a letter on Bangladesh had indeed been sent to the US president.

Bob Good's June 2 statement says that the letter was led by Rep. Scott Perry (PA-10) and signed by Rep. Bob Good (VA-05), Rep. Barry Moore (AL-02), Rep. Tim Burchett (TN-02), Rep. Warren Davidson (OH-08), and Rep. Keith Self (TX-03).

Hong Kong arrests 4 for ‘seditious’ acts on Tiananmen anniversary eve

AFP, Hong Kong

Police arrested four people in Hong Kong for “seditious” acts and “disorderly conduct” yesterday, on the eve of the 34th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown.

The bloody 1989 clampdown in Beijing is a highly sensitive topic for China's communist leadership, and commemoration of the hundreds killed – by some estimates, more than 1,000 – has long been forbidden in the mainland.

For decades, Hong Kong was the only Chinese city with large-scale public Tiananmen commemoration, but the annual vigil has been banned following the imposition of a national security law on the city in 2020.

Around the busy shopping district of Causeway Bay yesterday, AFP reporters witnessed police bundling several performance artists – some of whom appeared to be doing nothing – into police vans.

Late yesterday evening, the police said four people have been arrested “for disorderly conduct in a public place” and “doing acts with seditious intent”.

Four others were suspected of “breaching the peace” and were detained “to assist with the investigation,” the police said on its official Facebook page.

They did not name the people arrested and detained.

Earlier, artist Sanmu Chen had repeatedly chanted “Don't forget June 4! Hong Kong people, don't be afraid of them!” at a bustling Causeway Bay street.

An officer shouted at him to “stop doing seditious acts” before authorities bundled him into a police bus.

Another well-known performance artist Chan Mei-tung was also taken away, with police refusing to provide the reason for her detention.

Spending just 1.01pc

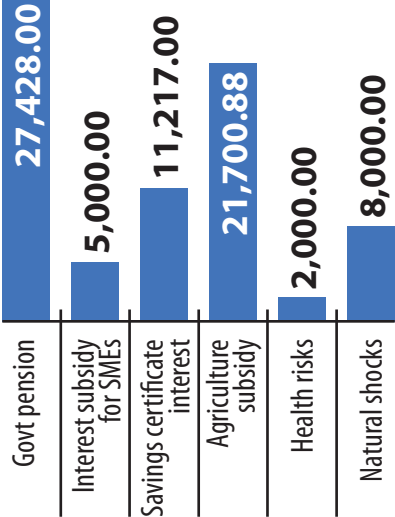
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being spent on the poor, not the 2.52 percent of the GDP as touted by the government.

“The total allocation for social protection programmes looks quite big, but this is an inflated figure,” said Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM), a think tank.

Social safety net programmes are meant for the poor and marginalised families. “And that's why the increase in the amount for these groups is more

SAFETY NET FUNDS GOING TO NON-POOR (in Tk cr)



important than the rise in the total allocation for safety net schemes,” he said.

Furthermore, the allocations for the non-poor seem bloated, too. Take the case of the fund for dealing with economic and natural shocks. Some Tk 8,000 crore has been allocated for this in the incoming fiscal year, up from Tk 5,000 crore in the budget for fiscal 2022-23.

Since the fund was hardly used this fiscal year, it was hacked down to Tk 2,000 crore in the revised budget. This begs the question: Why were more funds allocated when it was hardly used in the previous year?

Besides, the government in this proposed budget created a new fund to address the health risks, allocating Tk 2,000 crore, according to the detailed document of the social safety net programme.

However, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal did not mention anything about the fund in his budget speech on the health sector. Neither did he drop a hint about the fund while announcing the budget for the social safety net schemes.

“This allocation was kept in case of any unforeseen health-related shocks like Covid-19,” said a finance ministry official.

The government has set aside Tk 21,700 crore as agriculture subsidy, which is about 17 percent of the social safety net budget.

The allocation was made based on the agriculture ministry's estimation of fertiliser being used by the landless, marginal and small farmers in the country.

Agriculture subsidy and national saving certificates should be grouped under subsidy and kept out of social safety net schemes, said Raihan, also a professor of economics at the University of Dhaka.

“Such overlapping only makes the number inflated, which is confusing. Why would subsidies be included under the social safety net schemes?”

Such sectors are not included in the internationally accepted definition of social safety net, he said.

Over the years, loosely related or completely unrelated programmes that do not have anything to do with the protection of vulnerable groups have been included in the social safety net schemes, according to a review report of the Centre for Policy Dialogue titled “State of the Bangladesh Economy in FY2022-23”. Economists have been maintaining that delivering support to intended beneficiaries is the main challenge as there were previous examples of irregularities like the inclusion of ineligible beneficiaries with political connections, leaving many in need out.

“The second million-dollar question is whether the real beneficiaries are getting the government's benefits. We have to ensure that,” Raihan added.