

DURGA PUJA

Five idols
desecrated in
Jhenaidah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenaidah

Miscreants desecrated five idols being constructed for the upcoming Durga Puja at a temple in Jehnaidah Sadar upazila early yesterday.

The incident took place in Baroipara Sarbajanin Durga Mandir of Porahati village around 12:00-1:00am, said locals.

Additional Superintendent of Police (Sadar Circle) Mir Abidur Rahman said, “The superintendent of police and members of PBI, Rab, and other intelligence agencies visited the spot.”

Police are investigating the incident, he added.

Milon Kumar Kundu, general secretary of the temple committee, said the idols were being made for the upcoming Durga Puja scheduled for later this month.

The volunteers of the temple committee stand guard at night. The incident occurred when they went out to eat, he added.

“Miscreants sneaked inside the temple and broke the hands, feet, and heads of five of the under-construction idols and ran away. However, the Durga statue was not damaged,” he added.

“We want immediate punishment of the culprits,” Porahati Union Chairman Shahidul Islam Hiran said.

Maldives president
-elect to eject
Indian troops

AFP, Male

The president-elect of the Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu, has marked his victory with a pledge to end the foreign military presence in his small but strategically placed atoll nation.

Muizzu, 45, addressing his first public rally after winning Saturday's runoff election stopped short of naming India, the only foreign power with a military deployment in the archipelago.

He won an “India-out” campaign after New Delhi placed a small unit of security personnel to operate four reconnaissance aircraft gifted to the Maldives to patrol its vast maritime territory.

“We will be sending back military forces based in the Maldives according to law, and for sure we will do that accordingly,” Muizzu said at the rally in the capital Male on Monday night.

“The people who brought... military forces don't want to send them back, but the people of the Maldives decided,” he said.

No need to worry
about sanctions

FROM PAGE 1

On Monday, Hasina at an event in London said that there is no need to worry about sanctions, and if more sanctions come, Bangladesh too may impose sanctions.

“Those with whom we eradicated militancy have been slapped with sanctions. What is this? Should we have terrorists and militants in Bangladesh instead?”

The US Department of State on September 22 said it was taking steps to impose visa restrictions on Bangladeshi individuals responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh.

Referring to BNP's demand for permission to take Khaleda Zia abroad for treatment, Hasina asked, “Which country allows a convict to travel abroad for treatment? I said if they have to send [Khaleda] abroad, then a court's permission is needed. I do not have the executive authority to send her abroad by going against the court order.”

IMF mission begins
review today

FROM PAGE 1

second tranche of the \$4.7 billion would have been released by November, The Daily Star has learnt from finance ministry officials informed with the proceedings.

Now the matter will go to the IMF board, which will consider whether the explanations given by the government for failure to meet the two conditions are rational or not.

If the board is satisfied, the second instalment of about \$448 million will be approved.

And it would not be before January that the issue would make it to the IMF board's agenda, they said.



Vehicles carrying BNP leaders and activists passing Talmar Mor area in Faridpur's Nagarkanda upazila during the party's road march yesterday. The programme is part of the BNP's movement demanding that the government resign and general election be held under a non-party interim government.

PHOTO: STAR

4 earthquakes strike Nepal

One hurt, houses damaged, major highway blocked; tremors felt in Delhi

AGENCIES

Four earthquakes jolted western Nepal yesterday afternoon, injuring one person, damaging homes and triggering a landslide that blocked a major highway, authorities said, sending tremors as far away as the Indian capital.

The earthquakes occurred within a span of less than an hour. An official of India's National Centre for Seismology (NCS) said the first quake of magnitude 4.6 struck west Nepal at a depth of 10 kilometre at 2:25 pm, followed by the 6.2 magnitude jolt at 2:51 pm.

Two more quakes (magnitude 3.6 and 3.1) hit the same region at a depth of 15 km and 10 km at 3:06 pm and 3:19 pm, respectively. The tremors lasted nearly one minute, reports TNN.

The epicentre of the most powerful earthquake was located 206 km southeast of the pilgrimage town of Joshimath in Uttarakhand and 284 km north of the Uttar Pradesh capital, Lucknow.

The quakes in the Himalayan nation's district of Bajhang set off a landslide that blocked a major highway to the southern plains, interior ministry official Rama Acharya told Reuters.

One person was injured by a falling object, said Narayan Pandey, the top district

official, while some homes in Chainpur, a town in the district, collapsed.

In neighbouring India, people rushed out of houses and office blocks in parts of New Delhi as tremors shook some northern regions, but there were no immediate reports of damage.

The Delhi Police issued a plea for them to remain calm and not panic. “We hope you all are safe. Please come out of your buildings to a safe spot, but do not panic. DO NOT USE ELEVATORS! For any emergency help, dial 112,” it said in a post on X.

Tremors were also reported in Chandigarh, Jaipur, and various other parts of northern India. The police control room in Jaipur mentioned that there was no available information regarding any losses at that time.

Nepal is situated in one of the world's most active tectonic zones, categorised as seismic zone IV and V. This geographical positioning renders the country highly susceptible to earthquakes.

According to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) in the United States, Nepal experienced a devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake on April 25, 2015, resulting in the tragic loss of more than 8,000 lives and causing injuries to over 21,000 individuals.

ILLEGAL FUNDING PROBE

India police raid
media office,
journos' homes

Press Club of India
expresses deep concern

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian police yesterday raided the New Delhi office of a news portal and the homes of journalists and writers linked to it as part of an investigation into suspected illegal foreign funding of the media company, two government officials said.

Laptops and mobile phones were taken away as part of the investigation into online news channel NewsClick, the officials and some of the journalists said.

“A special investigations team launched a search operation to identify all those individuals who were possibly getting funds from overseas to run a media group with the main agenda of spreading foreign propaganda,” said an official in the interior ministry overseeing the raids by the Delhi Police.

The raids were part of an investigation by the Enforcement Directorate, India's financial crime agency, into suspected money laundering by NewsClick, the official said.

11-year-old
raped; 1 held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

A man was arrested in a case filed over the rape of an 11-year-old girl in Munshiganj.

Nayan Madbar, 20, is from Dewankandi Asharyan Project in Shilai union of Sadar upazila.

Around noon yesterday, the girl was sent to Munshiganj General Hospital for medical attention, said Munshiganj Sadar Police OC Aminul Islam.

Sources said Nayan abducted the girl and raped her at an isolated place Monday evening. Later, the girl's grandmother filed a written complaint with the Munshiganj Sadar Police Station, accusing Nayan.

OC Aminul said, “The accused has been sent to jail via a court order.”

Economy to remain
under stress

FROM PAGE 1

of interest rate caps, easing of foreign exchange shortage through exchange rate flexibility and the consequent normalisation of imports are likely to help ease inflationary pressure gradually in the medium term, the WB said.

Until inflation recedes to the target, monetary policy needs to be contractionary.

Monetary policy transmission would be improved by greater interest rate flexibility and reduced use of non-market national savings certificate instruments for government borrowing, it said.

The WB report touched on another major pressure point of the Bangladesh economy: depleting foreign currency reserves, due to the diversion of remittance to informal channels thanks to a wide exchange rate premium.

The official exchange rate is capped at Tk 110 for buying dollars and Tk 110.5 for selling dollars. In the kerb market, the exchange rate is Tk 118-120.

“Forcing the market to trade at an exchange rate significantly different

PM arrives home today

BSS, London

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina left London for home last night after wrapping up her 16-day official visit to the US and UK. A commercial flight (BG-208) of Biman Bangladesh Airlines departed Heathrow Airport around 8:35pm (London time).

The flight will reach Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport today around 12:30pm (Bangladesh time).

The prime minister reached London on September 30 from Washington DC. There, she paid courtesy calls to several dignitaries on October 2.

During her stay in New York and Washington DC from September 17-29, the premier attended the 78th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) session and other high level side and bilateral events and attended a reception accorded to her by Bangladeshi expatriates in the US, and visited the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington DC.

BANGLADESH POLLS

US doesn't want to
influence outcome

Says state dept spokesperson

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US does not want to influence the outcome of the election in Bangladesh, said State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller.

“The United States does not support any particular party and does not want to influence the outcome of the election, only to ensure that the people of Bangladesh may freely choose their leaders,” he said at a regular press briefing in Washington on Monday.

He also said the government, political parties, civil society, and the media in Bangladesh have all expressed their desire that the upcoming national election be free and fair and conducted in a peaceful manner – “as we want”.

29 Bangladeshis
return from Myanmar
after serving jail terms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-nine Bangladeshi men returned home yesterday after serving jail terms in different prisons in Myanmar.

Among the returnees, 23 are from Cox's Bazar, four from Bandarban and two from Rangamati.

BGP detained them on charges of illegally crossing the border into Myanmar at different times.

They came back to Bangladesh through the Teknaf border following a battalion commander-level flag meeting between Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Myanmar's Border Guard Police (BGP), according to the Bangladesh embassy in Myanmar.

The Bangladesh embassy in Yangon and its Sittve consulate worked together for the repatriation, the first in 18 months. Forty-one Bangladeshi nationals were repatriated from Myanmar on March 23, 2022.

Lt Col Mohiuddin, the battalion commander of BGB's Teknaf battalion led the 10-member Bangladesh team, which included, Zakir Ahmed, consul of the Bangladesh consulate in Sittve, during the handing over process.

Understanding reached
behind the scenes

FROM PAGE 1

with two selfies. One selfie in Delhi and another in New York. Selfie with Sheikh Hasina, Putul [prime minister's daughter] and Joe Biden. Checkmate in Delhi and then checkmate in New York.

“A free and fair election will be held. There will be no further sanctions. Fakhrul's [BNP secretary general] voice has grown faint.”

He said the game started in October and the semi-final will be in November and the final in January.

“Get ready for the final match ... A team like the BNP with broken knees and back won't be able to play the final match,” he said.

BNP leaders are now lost, said Quader, adding, “The BNP has lost its steam ... their 48-hour ultimatum has

fallen into the Buriganga.”

He said, “If the BNP comes to power, they will gobble up democracy ... electricity ... Bangladesh's Liberation War. If they come to power, they will again be world champions in corruption.”

AL leaders and activists from seven upazilas including Dhamrai, Savar, Dohar, Nawabganj, and Keraniganj joined the rally organised by the Dhaka district AL.

Benajir Ahmed, president of Dhaka district AL and MP of Dhaka-20, presided over the programme while Paniruzzaman Tarun, general secretary of Dhaka AL, moderated it.

Awami League presidium member Kamrul Islam and its Joint General Secretary Jahangir Kabir Nanak were present as special guests.

Govt likely to reintroduce it by this month

FROM PAGE 1

hoping that the project will get approval soon and we will be able to introduce the mid-day meals this month.

“We will cover all the government primary schools across the country in phases.”

The World Food Programme ran a project to feed schoolchildren from 2001 to 2009. The last government school-feeding programme was introduced in 2010.

Nearly 30 lakh children in over 15,300 primary schools at 104-poverty prone upazilas were provided with fortified biscuits, and students in three upazilas received hot meals.

The project ran till June 2022.

Before it ended, the concerned ministry in August 2020 prepared a project worth Tk 17,290 crore to feed all students of the 65,566 government primary schools for five years.

It, however, drew criticism from many quarters, especially since it

required officials to go on foreign trips to observe mid-meals, including “khichudi (a rice and lentil dish)” abroad. The project was turned down by the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecnec) in June 2021.

“The project was not approved as the prime minister was concerned about its structure [modus operandi]. She said cooking khichudi in schools might hamper academic activities,” Planning Minister MA Mannan had said at the time.

A 2018 study by the World Food Programme showed that the mid-day meal programmes resulted in a 4.2 percent increase in school enrolment and a 7.5 percent reduction in dropouts.

According to the Directorate of Primary Education, dropout rates at the primary level was 39.8 percent in 2010 and it came down to 13.95 percent in 2022.

KM Enamul Hoque, advocacy adviser of Adult Education and

Lifelong Learning in the Asia South Pacific, said mid-day meals help increase attendance and nutrition levels of students.

“Many students of the country end up attending classes with an empty stomach. It makes it hard for them to focus in class.”

Farid Ahmed said that 75 percent of project funds will come from the public exchequer while the rest will come from development partners.

The government in August 2019 prepared the National School Meal Policy aiming to provide midday meals to students at all government primary schools by 2023, to ensure children get at least 30 percent of their required daily calorie-intake at school.

There are 65,565 primary schools with around 1.20 crore students.

The government took the steps to relaunch the mid-day meal project, about three months away from next general polls – slated for January next.