

Ending pact with India on water survey Says Maldives

THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

Barely a month after asking India to withdraw its military personnel from the Maldives, the government of President Mohamed Muizzu, whose party rode to power on an 'India Out' poll campaign, has decided not to renew the previous government's agreement with India on a hydrographic survey of the island nation's waters.

The agreement, signed on June 8, 2019 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Maldives at the invitation of then president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, allowed India to conduct a hydrographic survey of the Maldivian territorial waters, study and chart reefs, lagoons, coastlines, ocean currents and tide levels.

This is the first bilateral pact that the newly-elected Maldives government, which took charge in November, is officially terminating.

TRIAL OF IMRAN KHAN Pak media ban raises transparency concerns

REUTERS, Islamabad

A Pakistan court has banned media from reporting on proceedings in a closed-door trial of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on charges of leaking state secrets, raising concerns about transparency ahead of national elections in February.

Banning coverage of the trial could taint the coming vote under a caretaker government, which the country's election commission says is favouring Khan's opponents.

The charges against Khan are related to a classified cable sent by Pakistan's ambassador in Washington last year. Khan is accused of making the cable public, which is punishable under the Official Secrets Act up to 10 years in prison.

The decision to hold a closed-door trial and the media ban on its proceedings came in the opening of the trial in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, according to a court order issued late on Thursday.

Bangladesh updates

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to a statement from the Bangladesh embassy in Washington DC.

The meeting comes weeks after the US rolled out a presidential memorandum on advancing labour rights in the US and abroad.

While announcing the memorandum on November 16, Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, cited Kalpona Akter, a Bangladeshi garment worker and activist, as an example of the type of people the policy intends to safeguard.

As per the memorandum, the US foreign mission would directly interact with or deal with labour issues and the policy may encourage interested US diplomats or missions to interfere in many internal or domestic issues.

Later, the Bangladesh embassy in Washington sent a letter to the commerce ministry in Dhaka saying that although the US presidential memorandum appears to be a global policy, there are reasons to believe that Bangladesh may be one of the targets.

The US is the major export destination for Bangladesh, with annual earnings of about \$10 billion from the American market.

At the meeting yesterday, Ambassador Imran and Julie Su agreed to remain engaged at different levels of the two governments on the labour standards of Bangladesh and further understand the concerns of the parties.

Imran also met with Deputy Under Secretary of the US Department of Labor Thea Lee at the same event.

Salim Reza, minister (commerce) of the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington DC, was also present.



A Palestinian boy recovers pigeons from the rubble of a building destroyed following Israeli bombardment on Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday, amid continuing battles between Israel and Hamas. PHOTO: AFP

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR IN GAZA UN warns of ‘breakdown of order’

AFP, Geneva

Hunger and desperation are driving people to seize humanitarian aid being delivered to the Gaza Strip, the United Nations said Thursday, warning of a "breakdown of civil order".

International aid organisations have struggled to get supplies to desperate Gazans under Israeli bombardment, with the Rafah crossing in Egypt the only point of entry.

Israel has reopened the Kerem Shalom crossing as an inspection checkpoint to increase the amount of aid reaching the Palestinian territory, but the UN warned this was not enough.

"Everywhere you go people are desperate, hungry and are terrified," said Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), at a press conference in Geneva.

"We are teetering on the edge of a possible implosion. We might reach our limit. Why? Because there is more and more a breakdown of civil order."

Lazzarini, who has just returned from Gaza, said he saw people stopping aid trucks to take food and immediately eat it – something he described as "completely new" in the Palestinian territory.

But he said he hadn't heard of any UN or UNRWA trucks being hijacked by Hamas.

"This has nothing to do with aid diversion. This has to do with a total despair," he said, adding that many people UNRWA had met hadn't eaten for one, two or three days.

"With this growing despair, our operating environment becomes more and more difficult," Lazzarini said, adding that the "little aid trickling into Gaza" did not match the "immensity of needs".

He called for a large-scale increase in aid deliveries as the only way, in the absence of a

ceasefire, to help alleviate the situation in Gaza.

Turkey strongly condemns "provocations" by Israeli forces during raids on a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin and the desecration of a mosque there, Turkey's foreign ministry said.

Israeli troops killed a youth at a hospital and read out Jewish prayers at a mosque in Jenin during the raids that Palestinian authorities said killed 12 and that Israel said helped capture dozens of Hamas fighters.

"We strongly condemn the provocations of Israeli soldiers who stormed the Jenin Refugee Camp, and disrespected sanctity of a place of worship by entering the mosque," Spokesman Oncu Keceli said.

In a joint statement published by the British government, more than a dozen countries have said: "This rise in extremist settler violence committed against Palestinians is unacceptable."

Prince Harry was victim of phone hacking UK judge rules

AFP, London

A UK judge ruled yesterday that Prince Harry was a victim of phone hacking by journalists working for Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN), and awarded the royal £140,600 (\$179,600) in damages.

The decision is one in a number of legal cases brought by Harry against British media, with which the Duke of Sussex has long had a turbulent relationship.

High Court Justice Timothy Fancourt ruled in favour of Harry in 15 of the 33 sample articles that the prince submitted as evidence in his lawsuit against MGN, which publishes the Mirror, Sunday Mirror and Sunday People.

Hungary PM Orban blocks aid for Ukraine

Says he can still halt EU accession

REUTERS, Brussels

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban vetoed a major European Union aid package for Ukraine yesterday and warned he could still halt Kyiv's accession to the bloc after membership talks won EU approval. At a summit in Brussels on Thursday, the European Union's 26 other national leaders took the historic step of agreeing to start accession negotiations with a country at war, bypassing Orban's grievances by getting him to leave the room. But, hours later, they could not overcome resistance from Orban, who maintains close ties to Russia, to a revamp of the bloc's budget to channel 50 billion euros (\$55 billion) to Ukraine and provide more cash for other EU priorities such as managing migration. The Kremlin praised Orban's stance, which spokesman Dmitry Peskov said impressed Moscow, while criticising the EU, saying the decision to open membership talks was a politicised one that could destabilise the bloc. Orban told state radio that he blocked the aid package to Ukraine – part of a broader multi-year budget plan – to make sure Hungary gets the funds it wants from the EU budget.

Navalny taken from prison near Moscow to unknown location

AFP, Moscow

Jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been removed from a prison near Moscow and taken to an undisclosed location, his spokeswoman said yesterday, citing a court representative. Supporters of Navalny, who was jailed in 2021 after surviving a poisoning assassination attempt, have sounded the alarm since early this month, when the Kremlin critic was last seen. Kira Yarmysh said she was told that Navalny, serving a 19-year sentence, was removed from the Vladimir region near Moscow on December 11, signalling a potential prison transfer. "It is not known where exactly" he was taken, Yarmysh added. "I want to remind you that lawyers have not seen Alexei since December 6. Why they were not allowed to meet with him, if Alexei was still in IK-6, we do not know," she said, referring to the penal colony where he was last seen. The Kremlin this week criticised what it called "interference" by the United States in the case after Washington said it was "deeply concerned" by Navalny's team saying they have had no access to him for almost a week.



A member of a local emergencies ministry inspects the ruins of a house destroyed by recent shelling in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict in the town of Yasynuvata in the Donetsk region, Russian-controlled Ukraine, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Anup Ghoshal

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at 1:40pm, reports PTI quoting his family.

Ghosal, who had successfully contested the 2011 assembly polls from Kolkata's Uttarpara seat on the Trinamool Congress ticket, left behind two daughters.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee condoled his death.

"With the passing of Anup Ghoshal, the world of music has incurred an irreparable loss. I extend heartfelt condolences to the family, relatives, and admirers of Anup Ghoshal," she wrote.

A prolific singer, Ghosal proved his versatility in the songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam, Rabindranath Tagore and modern Bengali songs. As

a playback singer, he had been associated with Ray's 'Goopy Gyn Bagha Byne' and 'Hirak Rajar Deshe'.

In the film "Sagina Mahato" directed by Tapan Sinha, his songs are still fondly remembered by the audience. The song "Tujhse Naraaz Nahin Zindagi" from the 1983 movie "Masoom" has left an unforgettable mark as well. Besides Bengali and Hindi songs, he has also lent his voice to songs in Bhojpuri and Assamese languages.

In 2011, the West Bengal government honoured Anup Ghoshal with the 'Nazrul Smriti Puraskar', and in 2013, he received the 'Sangeet Mahasamman' (Music Lifetime Achievement Award).

Hamas fights

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in Rafah and Israeli tanks were shelling targets just east of the city near the Egyptian border, medics and witnesses said.

The Israeli military yesterday said in an update that its forces had destroyed a Hamas command and control hub in Gaza City's heavily contested Sheijaia district and conducted a "targeted raid" on Hamas infrastructure in Khan Younis.

The heavy fighting, confirmed by many residents and Hamas sources reached by Reuters, raised questions about whether Israel's two-month-long aerial and ground blitz of Gaza had significantly weakened Hamas, which it has vowed to annihilate.

Unrelenting Israeli bombardment has laid much of Gaza to waste over the past two months, with nearly 19,000 people confirmed dead, according to Palestinian health officials, and thousands more feared buried under the rubble.

Tens of thousands of homeless Gazans who have crammed into Rafah at Gaza's southern end since December 3 are struggling in extremely overcrowded conditions, with the lack of latrines forcing many to defecate in the open, raising disease risks, the UN Humanitarian Office (OCHA) said in an update yesterday.

In many locations, solid waste was piling up without a safe means of disposal, and rats and insects were congregating in these areas, OCHA said.

Washington has been pressing Israel for weeks to do more to protect Gaza's civilians as a global outcry over a spreading humanitarian catastrophe, with medical care crippled and food, fuel and drinking water widely unavailable, has intensified.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan had talks with Israel yesterday about shifting its military strategy in Gaza. Sullivan said after "very constructive talks" with Netanyahu that the war would transition to a new phase focused on precise targeting of Hamas leaders and on intelligence-driven operations.

BNP to woo all

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regards to our demand. Our movement will continue until the victory is achieved," he told this correspondent yesterday.

Party sources said BNP may call hartal for December 18 that has been fixed by the Election Commission for allocation of electoral symbols for candidates. The BNP is also likely to enforce a 48-hour nationwide blockade from 6:00am on December 19.

The decision was made at a meeting of the BNP standing committee, the highest policymaking body of the party, on Thursday night.

After the October 28 rally in Nayapaltan, BNP and its like-minded parties have enforced several rounds of hartals and blockades.

Sources said BNP will go ahead with such tough programmes until

the polling day as the party could not find alternatives.

Meanwhile, BNP yesterday announced that it will take out a procession from in front of its Nayapaltan central office at 1:00pm today on the occasion of the Victory Day.

Rizvi made the announcement at a virtual press conference. He, however, did not clarify whether they secured police permission.

The procession, to be organised by BNP's Dhaka south and north city units, will end at Moghbazar.

Leaders and activists of BNP and its front and associated bodies have been instructed to join the procession, which will be taken out in a show of strength, sources said.

Party activists from the districts adjacent to Dhaka will also join the procession.

People's rights, equality not fully established yet

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marking the 11th death anniversary of eminent educationist and diplomat Khan Sarwar Murshid.

The Nurjahan-Sarwar Murshid Sangskritik Kendra Uttarsuri, in association with Bengal Foundation, organised the event titled "Relevance of academic activism to build a democratic society" at Dhanmondi's Bengal Shilpalay.

Stressing the importance of having students' unions at universities, Serajul said no elections to students' unions of universities were held in the last several decades.

"Students' unions play an important role in shaping the democratic practices and values in society. They also help establishing cultural movements in universities, which is equally important for a democratic society," he added.

Speaking at the event, eminent

writer and researcher Hasnat Abdul Hye said, "Academic activism is a way to practice democracy. The term 'academic activism' was introduced by Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid. He founded a newspaper named New Values in the 1960s, through which he added new values and dimensions to cultural movements."

He said academic activism was practiced in universities previously, but this is no longer practiced.

"Party politics takes place in the universities now in the name of politics," he added.

Sharmeen Soneya Murshid, daughter of Khan Sarwar Murshid, moderated the event, chaired by eminent economist Prof Wahid Uddin Mahmud.

Prof Firdous Azim of BRAC University and Mohammad Asaf-ud-Daula, a former secretary, spoke at the event, among others.