

Mob beats up 4 for trying to shoot ex-UP member

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Four youths were beaten up and handed over to police by a mob in Chattogram's Satkania upazila for trying to shoot a former union parishad member yesterday afternoon.

The youths received primary treatment at a local hospital before being taken to Satkania Police Station. A light gun (LG) was seized from their possession, said Shibli Noman, additional superintendent of police (Satkania circle).

Citing locals, police said the four, riding on a motorbike, went to the Rastar Matha area under Satkania's Keochia union, where their men were cutting grass in a field. They had an altercation with Mannan, an ex-UP member, after the latter tried to resist them from collecting fodder.

At one stage, they pulled out firearms and tried to shoot Mannan. This angered the locals who chased down the four and tied them to an electricity pole after giving them a good beating, Shibli said.

On information, police rushed to the scene, seized a firearm and detained the four, he added.

The identities of the detainees could not be ascertained till filing of this report last night.

Keochia UP Chairman Osman Ali said the four carried four firearms, but the locals managed to seize only one.

Expressing concern, he said use of illegal firearms in Satkania has reached an alarming stage.

"Police should launch a drive to recover illegal arms," he told The Daily Star.

8 killed in eastern China factory explosion

AFP, Beijing

Eight people were killed in a factory explosion in eastern China's Jiangsu province yesterday, state media reported.

The blast occurred at 3:38 am local time (1938 GMT on Friday) in the workshop of a metal product factory in Changzhou city, 180 kilometres (111 miles) northwest of Shanghai, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

"A dust explosion occurred in the production workshop of Shenrong Metal Technology Limited, killing eight people and lightly injuring eight others," Xinhua said.

US authorities to return artworks stolen by Nazis

AFP, United Nations

US authorities announced Friday that two drawings worth \$2.5 million stolen by the Nazi regime and eventually displayed in American museums will be returned to relatives of Fritz Grunbaum, an Austrian Jewish cabaret performer killed in the Holocaust.

It follows the return last year of seven works of art stolen from Grunbaum in 1938 and sold by the Nazis to fund their war machine.

"Girl with Black Hair" had been held by the Allen Museum of Art at Oberlin College and is valued at approximately \$1.5 million, while "Portrait of a Man" was in the Carnegie Museum of Art collection and valued at approximately \$1 million.

DU student

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officer in charge of Ukhiya Police Station.

The dead was identified as Gura Mia, a resident of Block A-9 of Kutupalong Camp-1.

The OC said that Gura Mia first fell on the road after being hit by an easy bike while crossing the road, then autorickshaw coming from the same direction ran him over.

In Dhaka, printing press trader Rabiul Islam, 41, died on the spot after a lorry hit his motorbike in Jatrabari area around 11:00am yesterday.

Police seized the vehicle and arrested its driver, said Jatrabari Police Station's Sub-Inspector Iqbal Hossain.

In Rajshahi, two people, including a child, died and two others were injured after a bus hit a rickshaw van in Mohanpur upazila around 12:00pm, reports UNB.

The deceased are van driver Siraj, 50, and Abdullah, 12, a passenger of the van.

(Our correspondents in Bandarban, Pabna, Sylhet and Cox's Bazar contributed to the report.)



A picture taken from Rafah shows smoke billowing over Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip during Israeli bombardment yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel presses on in southern Gaza as death toll surges

Natanyahu says told Biden that he rejected enclave's sovereignty

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel is pressing its push southwards of the Gaza strip whose health ministry reported a surging death toll.

Gaza's health ministry reported at least 165 people killed over the previous 24 hours -- by far the largest such toll it has issued in days, and more than double the previous day's figure.

An AFP correspondent reported gunfire, air strikes and tank shelling into the morning, particularly in southern Gaza's Khan Yunis city.

Israel army in early January said the Hamas command structure in northern Gaza had been dismantled, leaving only isolated fighters.

The military said troops backed by air and naval support were striking Hamas infrastructure throughout the Gaza Strip, including the north yesterday.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said yesterday at least 24,927 people have been killed in the Palestinian territory since October 7.

A ministry statement said at least 165 people were killed over the past 24 hours, while another 62,388 have been wounded since the war began.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday he told US President Joe Biden that he rejected Palestinian sovereignty in the Gaza Strip, in a call the day before.

The two leaders spoke by phone on Friday for the first time in nearly a month, with Biden saying following the call that he believed it was still possible Netanyahu could agree to some form of Palestinian state.

24,927 killed, 62,388 wounded in Gaza since October 7

165 killed over 24 hours in the enclave

Gunfire, air strikes, tank shelling reported in Khan Yunis

"In his conversation with President Biden, Prime Minister Netanyahu reiterated his policy that after Hamas is destroyed Israel must retain security control over Gaza to ensure that Gaza will no longer pose a threat to Israel, a requirement that contradicts the demand for Palestinian sovereignty," Netanyahu's office said in a

statement issued on Saturday.

On Thursday, Netanyahu had rejected Palestinian sovereignty over the occupied West Bank, saying it was incompatible with Israel's need to have "security control over all the territory west of the (River) Jordan".

Biden had said after the call on Friday that it was possible Netanyahu could come round to some form of two-state solution, seen for decades by diplomats as the best way to bring peace to the Middle East.

"There are a number of types of two-state solutions. There's a number of countries that are members of the UN that... don't have their own militaries," Biden told reporters after an event at the White House.

A senior Hamas official yesterday dismissed Biden's comments about the possibility of Israel agreeing to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

"The illusion that Biden is preaching about a state of Palestine and its characteristics does not fool our people," Izzat al-Rishq, a member of the Islamist group's political bureau, said in a statement.

"Biden is a full partner in the genocidal war and our people do not expect any good from him."

C'wealth secy gen greets Hasina on re-election

UNB, Dhaka

Commonwealth Secretary General Patricia Scotland has congratulated Sheikh Hasina on her re-election as prime minister of Bangladesh.

In a congratulatory letter sent to the prime minister, Patricia said she is encouraged by the vision that Sheikh Hasina outlined after assuming office, which emphasised the principles of transparency and accountability, and she also recalled the exhortation of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, of "friendship to all, malice towards none".

"The Secretariat stands ready to support you [Hasina] as prime minister of Bangladesh, in continuing your important work on these values," she said.

"These values are mirrored in our Commonwealth Charter, which calls for tolerance, respect and understanding, and delivering the many facets of sustainable development," she said.

The Commonwealth secretary general mentioned that she was pleased to have deployed a Commonwealth Expert Team of independent observers for the recent elections, led by the former prime minister of Jamaica, Bruce Golding.

"I look forward to receiving the team's report with its findings and recommendations, and to an opportunity to discuss these with you," she added.

Patricia said that Bangladesh is a treasured member of the Commonwealth family.

"Our diverse nations are bound by the shared values that are reflected in our Charter, including those of peace, democracy, and sustainable development," she said.

In this connection, she mentioned that Bangladesh's active engagement and leadership in the Commonwealth is greatly appreciated by its members, including on issues of ocean stewardship and climate change, digital innovation, trade and investment, youth, gender equality, and mental health.

Poultry farm worker stabbed to death

UNB, Jashore

A poultry farm worker was stabbed to death by unidentified criminals in Jhikargachha upazila of Jashore

The incident happened at Katakhal area of the upazila around 8:00am yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Toufiq Hossain, 28, of Jhikargachha upazila.

"Toufiq worked in a poultry farm. He woke up around 7:30am and was on his way to work. On the way, when he reached the Katakhal intersection, unidentified criminals ambushed him, stabbed him and fled," said the deceased's mother Rehana Khatun.

Toufiq was taken to Jhikargachha Upazila Health Complex where doctors referred him to Jashore General Hospital as his condition deteriorated. He succumbed to his injuries en route.

Jhikargachha Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Kamal Hossain Bhuiyan said, "Police are investigating the matter closely. Operation is underway to nab those involved in the murder."

Dollar crisis, hoarding jack up prices

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They blamed the dollar shortage for the situation.

Bangladesh has been witnessing a gradually worsening shortage of the American greenback since the Russia-Ukraine war began in February 2022.

Besides, the taka has lost 28 percent of its value against the dollar since February 2023, making imports significantly costlier.

According to the National Board of Revenue, between October 16 last year and January 15 this year, the import of wheat, dates, soybean oil and lentils have decreased.

About 10.98 lakh tonnes of wheat and 1.27 lakh tonnes of soybean oil were imported over the last three months.

In the same period a year ago, the import was 11.26 lakh tonnes of wheat, 2.35 lakh tonnes of soybean oil.

Taslim Shahriar, senior assistant general manager at Meghna Group of Industries, said, "We are not being able to import as much as we need because overseas transactions have become difficult amid the dollar shortage. This has had an impact on the market."

On January 17, Bangladesh Bank told the commercial banks that Letters of Credit (LC), a requirement for importing goods, should take priority when they are opened for bringing in everyday essentials.

The central bank recently asked the commercial banks to make sure eight essential items can be imported until March.

About this, Taslim said such instructions were issued in the past, but not implemented.

Besides, even if an LC is opened right now, the goods will not arrive before Ramadan, he added.

State Minister for Commerce Ahsanul Islam Titu told reporters on Thursday that the authorities will launch a stringent crackdown on those who create an artificial crisis of goods through hoarding.

Biswajit Saha, director (corporate affairs) at the City Group, said the prices of certain essentials will not come down unless the value of taka rises against the dollar.

Besides, if major importers are able to bring in essential items as they can, the prices fall.

Ghulam Rahman, president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said, "The government must take effective steps to rein in inflation."

Representatives of the ministries of finance, commerce, food, and agriculture, and Bangladesh Bank will hold a meeting today to find a way to control the prices.

Infection rate

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necessary measures, including issuing instructions on mask-wearing, to prevent the spread of the virus.

The Directorate General of Health Services reported 13 new Covid-19 cases and no deaths in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

On Friday, 22 new cases were recorded.

The total number of confirmed cases rose to 20,46,724, and the number of deaths to 29,479, taking the overall fatality rate to 1.44 percent.

Meanwhile, 10 patients recovered during this period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 20,14,153, taking the overall recovery rate to 98.41 percent.

As Covid-19 infection rate has been on a sudden rise in the country over the past few days, the government has already decided to administer Covid-19 vaccination again.

Prof Tahmina Shirin, director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Research and Disease Control (IEDCR), said it is not yet certain whether the new subvariant is related to the recent increase in the infection rate.

It will be possible to tell whether JN.1 is responsible if more people are tested, she added.

"The number of daily tests is currently low... We are cautious about the variant and have taken necessary measures in this regard."

ABM Abdullah, emeritus professor at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said those who have already been vaccinated will be protected from this new strain, but advised maintaining hygiene rules.

"The symptoms seen in the bodies of those affected by the JN.1 variant are relatively similar to those of the common cold," he said.

Only one condition missed

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misses out on any quantitative target.

If the other reform measures remain on track, it might not be necessary to ask for a waiver for the reserve target, the official added.

For December last year, the goal for tax revenue, including NBR and non-NBR taxes, was set at Tk 143,640 crore. The government has already met the target, the finance ministry official said.

One of the loan conditions for the third instalment is that the country's budget deficit must not surpass Tk 90,520 crore in December last year.

As of September last year, the deficit was only Tk 12,402 crore, according to data from the finance ministry.

"The deficit is expected to remain within the IMF ceiling," the official said.

Bangladesh has met the other four quantitative targets: external payment arrears, reserve money, priority social spending and capital investment.

Apart from the quantitative and indicative targets, there are some structural conditions set by the IMF.

One of them is that the government will adopt a periodic formula-based price adjustment mechanism for petroleum products.

The first price adjustment will be done by March, according to the finance ministry official.

From then on, Bangladesh will adjust petroleum prices in line with the international market every three months.

Another structural condition is that the government will release quarterly GDP data from December last year.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics plans to release the first quarterly GDP report by January after falling behind in publishing the data due to the national election.

The Washington-based lender is likely to dispatch the third instalment in May.



A Ukrainian serviceman of 2 battalion 92nd brigade inside a dugout, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, at a position near Bakhmut in Donetsk region.

PHOTO: REUTERS