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SAGAR-RUNI MURDER Probe to go on till capture of real culprits Says law minister

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

The investigation into the Sagar-Runi murder case will continue until the real criminals are held, Law Minister Anisul Huq said yesterday.

He made the comment while talking to reporters at the Akhaura Railway Junction in Brahmanbaria in the morning.

Responding to a query about his comment the day before that if the probe needs to continue for 50 years to identify the killers of the journalist couple, it will have to be given the time, he said, "I don't understand why you [journalists] get upset even when I say something good."

He also said, "You take it differently even if I say a good thing. The thing is, I said if it takes time to arrest the people who actually committed this crime ... even if it takes 50 years, no matter how long it takes to detain those who committed this, we will arrest them ... but you thought it

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



People offer Juma prayers on Tongi Station Road near the Biswa Ijtima ground on the Turag yesterday, the first day of the three-day congregation. Devotees from home and abroad are taking part in the Ijtima.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Ijtima begins

Six devotees die since Wednesday; ASI heading to congregation for duty killed in bike crash

STAR REPORT

A total of six participants died on the Biswa Ijtima ground in the last three days due to old age complications, cardiac arrest, and respiratory problems.

Three of them died yesterday morning, reports UNB. They are Matiur Rahman, 55, from Jamalpur; Ekhlas Mia, 70, from Netrokona; and Shah Alam, 60, from Bhola.

Another participant, Abdus Sattar, 70, from Netrokona, died on Thursday and two others—Yunus Miah, 60, from Brahmanbaria and Md Zaman, 40, from Chapainawabganj—died on Wednesday.

Gazipur Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Ibrahim Khan confirmed the deaths, UNB said.

Meanwhile, a policeman was killed and another one was injured in a road accident on their way to perform duties at Ijtima ground yesterday morning.

The deceased is Md Hasanuzzaman, 30, assistant sub-inspector of Manikganj District Court, who was posted at the Ijtima ground.

Police said Hasanuzzaman, along with another police sub-inspector, Amir Hamza, was going to the Ijtima ground on a motorbike.

When they reached the Tongi Milgate area on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway around 7:00am, a bus rear-ended the motorbike. The duo was thrown off the motorbike and suffered critical injuries.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

India releases pigeon wrongfully accused of spying

AFP, New Delhi

A pigeon that spent eight months in Indian police custody has been released after it was finally cleared of being a suspected Chinese spy.

The bird was caught at a port in the financial capital Mumbai with "messages written in a Chinese-like script" on its wings, the Times of India newspaper reported.

"Initially, the police had registered a case of spying against the bird, but after completing their inquiry, they dropped the charge," the report added.

The unnamed bird was held under lock and key at a city hospital while police carried out an investigation.

That probe took an "astonishing eight months", the India office of the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) said in a Thursday statement.

PETA India said police had granted "formal permission for the hospital to release the pigeon" on Wednesday.

Local media reports said the bird fluttered away in good health. The pigeon is the latest of several detained by Indian authorities on suspicion of espionage.

Border security officers took a pigeon into custody in 2016 after it was found carrying a threatening message to Prime Minister Narendra Modi close to India's border with arch-rival Pakistan.

Another pigeon was held under armed guard in 2010 after it was found in the same region with a ring around its foot and a Pakistani phone number and address stamped on its body in red ink.



US to keep working with govt despite polls concerns Says state dept spokesperson

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Even though the US expressed concerns about Bangladesh's elections and crackdowns on political activists, the country will not cease working with the Bangladesh government, said State Department Spokesperson Mathew Miller.

During Thursday's briefing at the state department, Miller was asked how it would be possible to work with the Bangladesh government in various security areas without welcoming the prime minister.

In response, Miller said, "So I would say that we have relationships of this sort all around the world. We expressed our concerns about the Bangladeshi election. We've expressed our concerns about crackdowns in Bangladesh, but that doesn't mean that we don't have the responsibility to work with the government -- both on areas where we have concern and also

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2

Palestinians fear assault on last refuge

Israel turns focus of offensive to Rafah; Qatar says Hamas gives 'initial' approval to truce plan

- Over half of Gaza's 2.3m residents now crammed into Rafah
- Wind and cold weather worsen misery of displaced families
- Death toll in enclave now 27,131



AGENCIES

Israeli forces shelled the outskirts of the last refuge on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip yesterday, where the displaced, penned against the border fence in their hundreds of thousands, said they feared a new assault with nowhere left to flee.

More than half of Gaza's 2.3 million residents are now homeless and crammed into Rafah. Tens of thousands more have arrived in recent days, carrying belongings in their arms and pulling children on carts, since Israeli forces launched one of the biggest assaults of the offensive last week to capture Khan Younis, the main southern city, just to the north of Rafah.

If the Israeli tanks keep coming, "we will be left with two choices: stay and die or climb the walls into Egypt", said Emad, 55, a businessman and father of six, reached on a mobile phone chat app.

"Most of Gaza's population are in Rafah. If the tanks storm in, it will be a massacre like never before during this war."

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said late on Thursday that troops would now turn to Rafah, which along with Deir al-Balah just north of Khan Younis is among the last remaining areas they have yet to storm in an almost four-month assault.

As the only part of Gaza with access to the limited food and medical aid trickling across the border, Rafah and adjacent parts of Khan Younis have become a teeming warren of makeshift tents clinging to the winter mud.

Wind and cold weather added to the misery, blowing tents down, flooding them and the ground between them, reports Reuters.

The United Nations humanitarian office yesterday voiced concern about the hostilities in Khan Younis that have forced more people to flee to Rafah, describing the border town as a "pressure cooker of despair".

TROOPS IN MALDIVES India to start withdrawing in March

AFP, Male

India will start withdrawing its troops deployed in the Maldives from next month, Male's foreign ministry said after talks yesterday.

New Delhi considers the strategically located Indian Ocean archipelago -- which straddles key global shipping lanes -- to be within its sphere of influence.

But the Maldives has shifted into the orbit of China -- its largest external creditor -- with September's election of new President Mohamed Muizzu, who demanded the Indian troops leave.

Male's foreign ministry said New Delhi had agreed at talks in the Indian capital to start pulling out its 89 personnel by March 10, and complete the process within two months.

The troops are deployed to operate three Indian-donated maritime reconnaissance aircraft, two helicopters and a fixed-wing plane which have also been used for medical evacuations from remote islets scattered for some 800 kilometres (500 miles) across the equator.

The two sides had "reviewed" their co-operation with a view to "enhancing" their partnership in defence, security and other fields, the Maldivian foreign ministry statement said.

But the Indian government's

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2

Hit by train, father, son die

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Three people, including a man and his son, were killed when a train ran them over in Tangail's Kalihati upazila yesterday.

The incident took place on the Dhaka-Tangail-Bangabandhu Bridge railway tracks in the upazila's Analiabari area around 8:45pm.

The deceased were identified as Sharif, 40, of Rajshahi city's Belpukur; Ratan, 32, of Natore's Baraigram upazila; and his child Sunny, 6.

Quoting witnesses, Mohammad Toyob, assistant sub-inspector (ASI) of Bangabandhu Bridge East Police Station, said a Dhaka-bound bus broke down and stopped near the Bangabandhu Bridge East link road in Analiabari area around 8:30pm.

The incident happened when some passengers of the bus were roaming around the rail tracks while the vehicle was being repaired.

At one point, the Chilahati Express train from Dhaka ran three people over and left them dead on the spot, said the ASI.

Being informed, a police team from Bangabandhu Bridge East Police Station went to the spot immediately.

The railway police were informed about the accident, the ASI added.



Defending champions Bangladesh got their SAFF U-19 Women's Championship campaign off to a winning start with a commanding 3-1 victory over Nepal at the Birshreshtho Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. Forward Shagorika scored a brace in either side of the break while midfielder Munki Akhter netted one.

PHOTO: BFF

SPORT

Once a promising Test venue, now a complete wreck

The Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium (SANS) in Khulna continues to rot away, remaining unused owing to a lack of renovations at a time when the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) says it is desperate for more venues. Despite witnessing some of the most historic moments in Bangladesh cricket, the life of the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna as an international venue has been a short one -- hosting only 12 men's international matches and one women's international match from 2006 to 2016 -- largely owing to the red-tapism and back-and-forth between the National Sports Council (NSC) and the BCB.

READ A SPECIAL STORY, FEATURING FACTS AND FIGURES, ON THIS ISSUE ON PAGE 10