

ZYRS OF UKRAINE WAR European leaders pledge to back Kyiv

REUTERS, Kyiv
European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen vowed that Europe would back Ukraine until it was "finally free" as she and three other Western leaders arrived in Kyiv to show solidarity on the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion.

The visit by von der Leyen and the prime ministers of Italy, Canada and Belgium - Giorgia Meloni, Justin Trudeau and Alexander De Croo - was a show of support as Ukraine suffers shortages of military supplies that are hurting it on the battlefield as Moscow grinds out territorial gains.

"More than ever, we stand firmly by Ukraine. Financially, economically, militarily, morally. Until the country is finally free," Von der Leyen, who came with the others on an overnight train from neighbouring Poland, wrote on the social media platform X.

The leaders visited Hostomel airport, site of a ferocious battle at the start of the invasion as Russia tried to fly in paratroopers to seize the capital Kyiv a few kilometres away.

"We are here today to say thanks to these men and women who on February 24 two years ago did not run away and instead fought," Meloni said. "This place is a symbol of Moscow's failures, a symbol of Ukrainian pride."

Navalny's body handed over to his mother

AFP, Poland
The body of late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been handed to his mother, more than a week after he died in an Arctic prison colony, his spokesperson said yesterday.



Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most vocal critic, died on February 16 in one of Russia's toughest prisons in northern Siberia, where he was serving a 19-year sentence on charges widely seen as political retribution for his opposition.

"Alexei's body was handed over to his mother. Many thanks to all those who demanded this with us," Navalny spokesperson Kira Yarmysh said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

For the past week, Russian authorities had refused to give Lyudmila Navalnaya custody of her son's body, after she travelled to the town of Salekhard in the Yamalo-Nenets region, the nearest settlement to the prison colony where Navalny died.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sitting alongside the Chief Justice of India Dhananjaya Yeshwant Chandrachud, Chief Justice of Bangladesh Obaidul Hassan, Law Minister Anisul Huq and others at a photo session after the International Conference on South Asian Constitutional Courts in the Twenty-First Century: Lessons from Bangladesh and India, held at the Bangabandhu International Conference Center yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

CARNAGE AT PILKHANA BDR HQ

15 years on, justice yet to be meted out

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Fifteen years have passed since the BDR mutiny that killed 74 people, including 57 army officials, but the victim families are yet to get final justice and the accused their due punishment, as both the cases filed over the incident have not yet been disposed of due to lengthy legal processes and courts being overburdened with cases.

The mutiny at the Pilkhana headquarters of the erstwhile Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) on February 25-26, 2009, left the nation shocked, as people stood aghast at the extent of the barbarity perpetrated at the headquarters of the paramilitary force, later renamed Border Guard Bangladesh.

On November 5, 2013, a Dhaka court handed down death sentences to 150 BDR members and two civilians, and life imprisonment to 160 others for their role and involvement in the carnage. A total of 256 people, mostly BDR soldiers, were handed jail sentences.

The court acquitted 278 others, but the prosecution later appealed against the acquittal of 69.

In January 2015, the HC started hearing the appeals of the convicts and pronounced its verdict on November 27, 2017, confirming the death penalty of 139.

It commuted the death penalty of eight convicts to life imprisonment and acquitted five others, who were sentenced to death by the trial court.

The HC upheld life imprisonment of 146 and acquitted 14 of the 160 accused, who were sentenced to life by the lower court.

A total of 248 accused out of the 278

got acquittals from the HC.

The execution of the death row convicts now depends on the hearing of appeals by the Appellate Division and its verdict.

Contacted, Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star on February 14 that the appeals, which have been filed against the HC verdict in the BDR carnage case, will be heard and disposed of by the Appellate Division when they serially come up in the hearing list.

A total of 256 convicts in the BDR carnage case are behind bars beyond their jail terms as the trial of the second case filed under the Explosive Substances Act is yet to be completed.

Those, who have filed the appeals, may take the initiative for early hearings before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, he said, adding, "The state has nothing to do in this regard."

About the case filed under the Explosive Substances Act in connection with the same incident, the minister said the trial proceedings are going on at the lower court and will be finished when the relevant procedures are done.

Meanwhile, Aminul Islam, one of the defence lawyers in the BDR carnage case, told this newspaper that it depends on the chief justice when the Appellate Division

will start hearing the appeals.

He added that the deposition of the witnesses under the Explosive Substances Act has been going on before the magistrate court concerned.

A total of 68 appeals and leave-to-appeal petitions have been filed on behalf of the convicted accused.

Of them, 35 appeals were filed by 63 condemned convicts. The rest were filed on behalf of 162 convicts who were sentenced to life, he said, adding that the state also filed 20 appeals against the acquittals of 83 by the HC.

Aminul further said that around 500 accused, who have already served jail sentences and got acquitted by the trial court and HC, could not walk out of jail as they are also accused in the Explosives Substances Act case.

Over a year will be needed to finish the trial of the case filed under the Explosive Substances Act, he said, adding that family members of the arrested have been suffering and leading very miserable lives.

A total of 256 convicts in the carnage case are behind bars beyond their jail terms as the trial of the second case filed under the Explosive Substances Act is yet to be completed.

Public Prosecutor Mosharrar Hossain Kajol said the trial court has so far recorded depositions of 271 of a total of 644 witnesses in the second case, the trial of which was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The PP hoped it would be completed this year.

Road crashes claim 3 lives in 2 districts

STAR REPORT

At least three people died in separate road accidents in Narsingdi and Dinajpur yesterday.

In Narsingdi, two people were killed and four others injured in a collision between a bus and a lorry in Palash upazila early in the morning.

According to locals, a Dhaka-bound bus of Ena Paribahan collided head-on with a lorry around 4:00am, killing drivers of both vehicles on the spot.

Police said one of the deceased is Shahid Mia, 41, the bus driver. The identity of the lorry driver couldn't be known immediately, reports our local correspondent.

"On information, we rescued the injured and sent them to local hospitals," Papon Chandra Dey, sub-inspector of Palash Police Station.

In Dinajpur, an employee of BRAC NGO was killed as a bus crashed into his motorbike in Birampur upazila in the evening.

Mizanur Rahman, 32, was a resident of Shyamnagar area in Rangpur Sadar upazila, reports UNB.

Birampur Police Station Sub-Inspector Abdur Rashid said the bus knocked down the bike coming from the opposite direction on the Dinajpur-Govindrapur regional road in Chandipur area around 6:30pm, leaving him dead on the spot.

Woman's throat-slit body found

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Police yesterday recovered the body of a woman from near the boundary wall of Agriculture Institute at Datora village under Satoria upazila of Manikganj.

The deceased was identified as Sharmin Akter, 30, daughter of Abdul Mannan, said Safiqul Islam Molla, officer-in-charge of Satoria Police Station.

The woman was married but had been living with her father, he added.

"Police recovered her body from the spot around 12:30pm after the locals informed them," the OC said, adding that the body was sent to Manikganj 250-bed General Hospital's morgue for autopsy.

"We saw injury marks on her neck inflicted by a sharp weapon. Initially, we believe that the murder took place over a domestic dispute."

Legal proceedings are underway in this regard, the OC said.

Man hacked to death by unknown criminals

UNB, Cumilla

A 38-year-old man was hacked to death by unidentified criminals at the Neura area in Cumilla city early yesterday.

Local people spotted the body of Shah Alam, of Chartha Thira in the area and informed police.

The body bore several injury marks on the head and neck, said Alamgir Bhuiya, officer-in-charge of Sadar Dakkhin Model Police Station.

It was sent to Cumilla Medical College and Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The police said the motive behind the killing could not be known immediately.

US team lauds labour leaders

FROM PAGE 1
Afreen Akhter, US Department of State deputy assistant secretary for South and Central Asia; USAID Assistant Administrator for Asia, Michael Schiffer and other US officials met the labour leaders at the office of Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) in the capital.

The delegation will hold meetings with the top officials of the ministries of foreign affairs, labour, home and law today.

"The US stands with the people of Bangladesh in their work to improve the rights to organise and collectively bargain," the embassy wrote.

Kalpona Akter, executive director of the BCWS, said the US delegation wanted to know about the state of labour law reforms, trade union registration, and investigation into the murder of labour leader Shahidul Islam last year.

The US, which in November last year rolled out a presidential memorandum on advancing labour rights in the US and abroad, cited Kalpona as an example of the type of people the policy intends to safeguard.

The Bangladesh Labour (amendment) Bill, 2023 was passed in November last year. After the US and other development partners raised objections, the government said it would bring necessary changes.

According to some labour leaders, there are anomalies in the registration of trade unions and that there are many "yellow trade unions" operating.

They also pointed out that the US brands have more scope to support labour rights in Bangladesh.

The US withdrew the GSP facility for Bangladesh following the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013. Earlier, US officials said funding from the US International Development Finance Corporation is conditioned on the improvement of labour conditions.



People march during a protest in Milan in support of Palestinians and to demand an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza strip. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Record job vacancies hurt govt services

FROM PAGE 1
Class 1 and 2 officers are recruited in a fair process by the Public Service Commission (PSC), officials say. But recruitment in the lower grades, which is handled by ministries and government bodies, often gets delayed.

For example, on June 16, 2020, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief issued a job circular for 108 vacant posts in the Cyclone Preparedness Programme.

The result of the subsequent recruitment test was published on September 13, 2021. But an investigation later found that the recruitment process was fraught with irregularities such as individuals getting hired without tests.

The ministry cancelled the recruitment process in January 2023 and had not done anything to fill the vacancies since. No steps were taken against officials responsible for the fiasco.

The food directorate on July 11, 2018, issued a circular for 1,666 jobs. The recruitment process ended in the last quarter of last year.

Allegations of corruption and nepotism in government recruitment have become so common that top officials of many organisations are reluctant to initiate recruitments, officials say.

MINISTRIES WITH MOST VACANCIES	
Health	74,574
Primary Education	44,790
Home	20,389
Telecommunication	9,132
Railway	15,113

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Preferring anonymity, a top public administration official said, "Directorates and similar organisations under different ministries are mostly led by additional secretaries. Since people in that level aspire to be secretaries, they tend to refrain from initiating recruitment processes, which they fear would bring trouble [for their promotion prospects]."

Contacted, former additional secretary Firoz Miah said forming a separate commission for recruitment in class 3 jobs would lower irregularities as the PSC is already struggling with the recruitment procedure of class 1 and 2 officers.

"If recruitment is free of corruption, there will be fewer irregularities in public

service. If someone pays Tk 10-15 lakh to get a government job, they will indulge in bribery," he said.

Former secretary Badiur Rahman said service seekers faced additional challenges and delays in government offices because of the staff shortage.

In 2019, the government took an initiative for centralising the recruitment of class 3 and 4 employees, and the MOPA sought the PSC's opinion in this regard.

Muhammad Sadik, the then PSC chairman, opined that the PSC could do that if the government provided adequate support.

On February 16, 2020, weeks before the coronavirus pandemic, the government formed a committee to assess a proposed centralised recruitment process.

After the first wave of the pandemic, the idea was revived on February 28, 2021. The then president Abdul Hamid told the PSC to organise a central recruitment process for the class 3 and 4 jobs.

But no considerable progress has been made since then.

Contacted, Farhad Hossain, minister for public administration, said the government would take steps to expedite the recruitment process.

"I cannot give you a specific date. But you will soon see some progress," he said.

Loan default

FROM PAGE 1
Sobhan went on to blame the default culture on the policies undertaken by Ziaur Rahman, who served as the president of Bangladesh from 1977 to 1981.

"The whole default crisis which is going on now for the last 40 years was initiated by Ziaur Rahman's policy of channelling state financial institutions to build the capitalist class."

The country is witnessing complete deinstitutionalisation, according to Sobhan.

"The essence of deinstitutionalisation is that there is no such thing as one law for all. Whether it is the Election Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the National Board of Revenue or any functioning institution, they selectively apply the rule of law."

Subsequently, people remain confused about what the actual law is.

"If you want to get your tax rebated, if you want to get your loan rebated, everything will depend on who you are and what are your political connections."

This cannot continue once Bangladesh becomes a developed country.

"You have to have functioning institutions when you move into the developed country status. If everything becomes discretionary and politically patronised, then you are progressively moving into a Hobbesian state," Sobhan said at the event held at the capital's Brac Centre Inn.

According to the 17th-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, the state of nature was like an existence where each man lives for himself. It is characterised by extreme competition and no one looks out for another. He believed that when people have unlimited freedom, it leads to chaos and a war-like scenario.

Hobbes argues that the only way to

escape the state of nature is to create a social contract. People create a contract by coming together in peace, agreeing to a set of laws, and creating a "sovereign". All individuals in that society cede some right to the sovereign authority for the sake of protection.

"This is a very dangerous situation for the aspirations we have of becoming a more developed society. Politics has become a very important instrument for participating in business and this is now gone all the way down to the union parishad level," Sobhan said.

Tenders for public works and government projects are not decided based on competency.

"If you are not depending on competitive forces for tenders, you then have to have the necessary political access."

People with political proximity and political access see the fastest rise in fortune. "That is the nature of the system," Sobhan added.

Bangladesh is transitioning towards the classical dominant party-state model, a trajectory it has followed since its inception, said Mirza M Hassan, senior research fellow at the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development.

Sobhan, however, differed on this. "It is not a dominant party state through the dominance of a party as a political force. The objective reality here is that you do not have a dominant party system - you have a dominant state and the dominant state itself is built around a person," Sobhan said.

Individual freedom is essential for democracy but collective action is also necessary, especially for the poor, said Rounaq Jahan, distinguished fellow of CPD.

MM Akash, a professor at the University of Dhaka's economics department, and Ashikur Rahman, senior economist at the Policy Research Institute, also spoke in the session.

"The whole default crisis which is going on now for the last 40 years was initiated by Ziaur Rahman's policy of channelling state financial institutions to build the capitalist class."

REHMAN SOBHAN
CPD chairman