

Prez's visit sparks protests in Janakpur

The situation has remained tense due to President Bidhya Devi Bhandari's visit to Janakpur since early Wednesday. President Bhandari's participation for the Ram-Janaki Bibaha Mahotsav has sparked protests all over Janakpur.

Supporters of Madhesi Morcha and Madhesi coalition are jointly demonstrating at Janakpur's main chowk. The security has been tightened and heavy deployment of security personnel can be seen in the area.

The agitating Samyukta Loktantrik Madhesi Morcha (SLMM) had announced on Tuesday that it would protest Bhandari's visit. Bhandari is scheduled to arrive at Janakpur at around 12 pm by a helicopter.

Meanwhile, the Ram Janaki temple is being evacuated for security purposes. The pilgrims from Nepal and India have complained that it is improper to evacuate the pilgrims from temple premises.

Tribute pours in for liberation war martyrs

People all around are celebrating Victory Day, that was reaped through the bloodshed of 3 million people and nine months of hardship, in due solemnities.

The day began with President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paying tributes to the Liberation War martyrs to begin the 45th Victory Day of Bangladesh.

The president placed a wreath at the altar of National Mausoleum at 6:34am, adds UNB. He stood there in solemn silence as a token of respect for the martyrs.

He also signed the visitors' book kept on the premises of the National Mausoleum.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina followed with a colourful wreath at the base of the mausoleum. She also stood in solemn silence to pay respect for the martyrs.

A smart contingent plucked from Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force presented a state salute on the occasion when bugles played the last post.

Flanked by senior leaders of the party, Sheikh Hasina, also the Awami League president, laid another wreath at the National Memorial as the party chief.

The Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad, the Chief Justice, ministers, the leader of the opposition, the chiefs of the three services, members of parliament, freedom fighters, diplomats and high civil and military officials were present.

Later in the day, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia accompanied her party men and placed her respect to the martyrs of Liberation War at National Mausoleum.

Pakistan protests reports on diplomat's terror link

Pakistan today protested reports in Bangladeshi media on alleged involvement of one of its diplomats in financing terrorism here.

A media release was issued from the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka termed the reports "utterly baseless" and "fabricated".

Diplomatic norms and courtesies were "thrown to the wind" by publishing such news, the release said.

READ MORE: Pakistani diplomat 'linked to terror financing' in Bangladesh

The news of a Pakistan diplomat's link to financing terrorism was quizzed out from a militant of banned Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, according to detectives.

The information came during a strain in diplomatic ties between the two countries over Pakistan's denial about committing genocide in Bangladesh during the 1971 War of Independence.

Majority quarters have raised demands to sever diplomatic ties with Pakistan.

While talking on the alleged link of the Pakistan diplomat with terror financing, the home minister yesterday said Pakistan was still conspiring against Bangladesh.

[News Source](#)

BCL man hurt in clash with Shibir at Ctg College

A Bangladesh Chhatra League man was injured during a clash with Islami Chhatra Shibir at Chittagong College in the port city this morning.

Injured Shaon was rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital with head injuries, reports our Chittagong correspondent.

The clash ensued around 11:00am as Shibir activists attacked BCL men when the latter were placing wreaths at the Shaheed Minar on the campus marking the country's 45th victory day, said Hasmat Ali Rasel, organising secretary of Chittagong city BCL unit.

Shibir activists wielding iron rods and stones attacked the BCL men, triggering the clash, the BCL leader said.

The clash was continuing till 1:00pm when the report was filed.

[News Source](#)

North Korea sentences Canadian pastor to life in prison

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North Korea's Supreme Court sentenced a Canadian pastor to life in prison with hard labor on Wednesday for what it called crimes against the state.

Hyeon Soo Lim, who pastors the Light Korean Presbyterian Church in Toronto, was given the sentence after a brief trial. He had been in detention since February.

Lim had earlier appeared at a news conference organized by North Korean authorities in Pyongyang in July and admitted to plotting to overthrow the North Korean state, but other foreigners detained in North Korea and then released have said they were coerced into making similar statements and confessing guilt during their detention.

Lim's relatives and colleagues have said he travelled on Jan. 31 as part of a regular humanitarian mission to North Korea where he supports a nursing home, a nursery and an orphanage. They said Lim, who is in his early 60s, has made more than 100 trips to North Korea since 1997 and that his trips were about helping people and were not political.

North Korea has very strict rules against any missionary or religious activities that it sees as threatening the supremacy of its ruling regime. Merely leaving a Bible in a public place can lead to arrest and possibly severe punishment.

Both the U.S. and Canadian governments warn against travel to North Korea.

Last year, the North released Kenneth Bae, a Korean-American missionary who was convicted of "anti-state" crimes and had been serving a 15-year sentence.

Bae, whose detention received worldwide attention, suffered medical issues in detention. He was freed along with one other American detainee after a secret mission to the reclusive communist country by James Clapper, the top U.S. intelligence official. He is reportedly planning a book about his 2-year-ordeal in detention.

An Australian missionary detained for spreading Christianity was deported last year after he apologized for anti-state religious acts and requested forgiveness.

[News Source](#)

Pentagon warns ISIS offshoot growing in Afghanistan, 'operationally active'

The Pentagon delivered a warning Tuesday about the growth of the Islamic State offshoot in Afghanistan, saying the branch has become "more operationally active" there by carving out territory and openly fighting the Taliban.

[The Defense Department report](#) also said violence in Afghanistan overall is on the rise and the security situation has worsened since June, with more effective attacks by insurgents and increased casualties among Afghan security forces. The DOD said advances by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) – Khorasan Province (IS-KP) in particular could stoke "increased violence" with other extremist groups in 2016.

IS-KP "has progressed from its initial exploratory phase to a point where they are openly fighting the Taliban for the establishment of a safe haven, and are becoming more operationally active," the report said.

The warning comes as President Obama tries to assure the public about the administration's strategy for fighting the Islamic State, a military operation that focuses on Iraq and Syria.

"We are squeezing its heart and making it harder for them to pump out its propaganda," Obama declared Monday at the Pentagon.

But the recent Paris and San Bernardino, Calif., attacks demonstrate the reach of ISIS' ideology and threat beyond the Iraq-Syria warzone. The offshoot's presence in Afghanistan represents another unstable area where the group is trying to establish a foothold.

The commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, General John Campbell, confirmed to The Associated Press on Tuesday that ISIS allies in Afghanistan indeed are trying to establish a regional base in the eastern city of Jalalabad

Campbell said that "foreign fighters" from Syria and Iraq had joined Afghans who had declared loyalty to the group in the eastern province of Nangarhar, bordering Pakistan.

He said there were also "indications" that the ISIS supporters in Nangarhar were trying to consolidate links with the group's leadership in Syria and Iraq.

This comports with the findings in the DOD report, which said IS-KP has "seized pockets of terrain from the Taliban in Nangarhar Province."

The report also said the Taliban-led insurgency has been emboldened by the U.S.-led coalition's transition this year from direct combat operations to a train-and-advise role. The U.S. now has about 9,800 troops in Afghanistan.

The report noted IS-KP claimed responsibility for an IED attack against a United Nations vehicle in September and conducted an attack later that month against as many as 10 checkpoints.

According to the DOD, the offshoot is growing by recruiting "disaffected Taliban" and others.

During the summer months, Taliban and ISIS loyalists fought fierce battles in the far eastern districts of Nangarhar, with residents reporting a range of atrocities, including arbitrary imprisonment, forced marriages for young women, and beheadings.

Campbell stressed that "they don't have the capability right now to attack Europe, or attack the homeland, the United States. But that's what they want to do, they've said that's what they want to do."

[News Source](#)

Maldives' main bank announces 1 bln Hulhumale home finance fund

Bank of Maldives (BML) on Monday announced its decision to establish a MVR1 billion home finance fund to help the growing population of the reclaimed suburb Hulhumale.

Speaking during a ceremony to mark the opening of a new 24-hour ATM centre in Hulhumale, BML CEO and Managing Director Andrew Healy said the new initiative is part of its plan to expand its presence in Hulhumale.

"We are proud of this fine ATM Centre and of our new look branch but this is just the start of

our investment in Hulhumale'. We recognize the city's growth trajectory and it is vital that Bank of Maldives is here on the ground to support this growth. Over the next year we will significantly step up our presence in Hulhumale'."

Healy also revealed plans to open a Business Center next year to support businesses that are setting up and expanding in Hulhumale.

"We are also establishing a MVR 1 billion Home Finance Fund to help the growing population in the city obtain the necessary finance to get on the property ladder," he added.

The CEO said the bank will add more ATMs in convenient locations in Hulhumale.

BML's new ATM Centre, located beside the refurbished branch in Huvandhuraa Higon, contains three ATMs which allow customers to deposit and withdraw cash, deposit cheques, make payments and transfer money.

The country's main bank recently unveiled a large investment in Ibrahim Nasir International Airport where it has opened a new ATM Centre, including a US Dollar ATM, as well as a refurbished branch and new foreign exchange units in the international arrivals and departures areas.

BML is also supporting the financing of the visionary new Treetop Hospital which is currently under construction in Hulhumale.

Maldives polls body fines opposition over UN logo use

Electoral body fined main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and its ally Adhaalath Party Monday over events it had flagged as unlawful during a recent anti-government protest.

In a statement, Elections Commission said each party is required to pay MVR75,000 within a week. The fine was given due to the use of the logo of the United Nations by protestors and allowing children to take part in the demonstration, it added.

According to the commission, police were consulted before taking its decision.

MDP hit back at the Elections Commission on Monday, accusing it of discrimination when penalising political parties.

Elections Commission warned MDP last week after the UN logo was used in some banners during the anti-government protest in capital Male on November 27.

The commission had also asked MDP to not allow children into protests.

In response, MDP insisted that that party had not encouraged the participation of children and noted that the party was being penalised over the actions of individual protestors.

If the commission penalises parties for actions of individual members, then the commission must take action against the ruling party over president Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom's decision to snub the UN panel ruling urging the government to release jailed former president Mohamed Nasheed, MDP said.

MDP began using the UN logo following the ruling in late September by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention that Nasheed's imprisonment was arbitrary.

Nasheed was sentenced to 13 years in prison in March after he was convicted of the arbitrary detention of Chief Criminal Judge Abdulla Mohamed while he was president.

The former president was transferred to house arrest in July due to health reasons but late August he was taken back to prison. The opposition accused the government of backtracking on its decision to commute the ex-president's sentence.

The government has faced mounting international pressure to release Nasheed whose incarceration has been ruled as illegal by a UN panel.

Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM) had also criticised opposition supporters who participated in the extended protest for bringing along children to the demonstration.

Maldives again hails climate pact as big victory for small nations

Maldives on Monday hailed the recently concluded global climate summit in France as a big victory for small island nations like the Maldives.

Environment minister Thoriq Ibrahim, back from the French capital where he had represented the Maldives at the COP21 summit, told reporters that small nations like the Maldives had worked tirelessly to make their voices heard. Three important demands by island nations – maintaining the average temperature at 1.5 degree Celsius, setting up a fund worth USD\$100 billion for climate change adaptation and mitigation, and giving special status for small nations – were included in the final agreement, he said.

“The biggest challenge was to align the stand of all the small nations in the same direction,” the minister said, during the press conference at the Ibrahim Nasir International Airport (INIA) Monday evening.

Thoriq, however, stressed that some big nations were against including the demands made by small nations.

According to the minister, his delegation held several events on the sidelines of the summit in order to raise public awareness about the effects of climate change. Maldivian officials also participated in an event held by the World Bank and briefed attendees about renewable energy projects being carried out in the archipelago, he added.

The environment minister’s comments follow similar remarks by him a day earlier when he had declared that as the chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Maldives’ endeavours have brought a victory and smiles to small nations.

Shedding light on the COP21 summit held in Paris from November 30 to last Friday, the minister noted that the climate deal reached in the conference was a great triumph for small states.

Cheering envoys from 195 nations on Saturday approved a historic accord in Paris to stop global warming, offering hope that humanity can avert catastrophic climate change and usher in an energy revolution.

The post-2020 Paris Agreement ends decades-long rows between rich and poor nations over how to carry out what will be a multi-trillion-dollar campaign to cap global warming and cope with the impact of a shifting climate.

With 2015 forecast to be the hottest year on record, world leaders and scientists had said the accord was vital for capping rising temperatures and averting the most calamitous effects of climate change.

Without urgent action, they warned, mankind faced increasingly severe droughts, floods and storms, and rising seas that would engulf islands and coastal areas populated by hundreds of millions of people.

Aasandha employs 11 with special needs

Aasandha, which offers the national healthcare insurance scheme of the Maldives, employed 11 special needs individuals and awarded them employment certificates on Monday.

The certificates were awarded by First Lady Fathmath Ibrahim, who was the Chief Guest in the ceremony held at the presidential residence of Muliaage Palace.



The new employees of Aasandha include visually and speech impaired staff. Aasandha's venture is in collaboration with the National Social Protection Agency (NSPA) and The Sadaqat Foundation. The latter was founded by the First Lady to provide aid for people with special needs and disabilities.

Speaking at the ceremony, First Lady Fathmath declared that the path is being paved to provide people with special needs with the same work opportunities as the rest of the community.

NSPA CEO Mujuthaba Jaleel also stated that the agency is working to establish such an environment. He said that Aasandha's offer of employment has brightened the futures of such youth, describing it as the most important step to empower special needs people withi



in the community. Mujuthaba added that the future will see more doors of employment being opened.

The new staff of Aasandha have been employed to work in the Data Process Department of the office.

Mujuthaba assured that their responsibilities and salaries will be no different from other employees.
