

"No Hope...": Afghan Girls Want To Return To School Amid Taliban Rule



KABUL: Afghan teenager Amena saw dozens of classmates killed when her girls' school was targeted by an ISIS bomb attack in May, but she was determined to continue her education.

Now, like most secondary school girls in the country, she is banned from lessons altogether after the Taliban's hardline regime excluded them from returning to class one month ago.

"I wanted to study, see my friends and have a bright future, but now I am not allowed," 16-year-old Amena told AFP at her home in western Kabul.

"This situation makes me feel awful. Since the Taliban arrived, I am very sad and angry."

On September 18, Afghanistan's new Islamist rulers ordered male teachers and boys aged 13 and over back to secondary schools, picking up an academic

lessons across the country of about 39 million people, including in the capital Kabul.

Primary schools, meanwhile, have reopened for all children and women can go to private universities, though with tough restrictions on their clothes and movement.

"No hope"

Amena lives just a short walk from her Sayed Al-Shuhada High School, where 85 people -- mainly young girls -- perished in the May bomb attack.

"Innocent girls were killed," Amena said, her eyes welling up.

"I saw with my own eyes the dying and wounded girls. However, I still wanted to go to school again."

Amena would be in Grade 10 studying her favourite subjects such as biology, but instead is stuck inside with a handful of books doing "nothing special".

The teenager said she dreamt of becoming a journalist, but now has "no hope in Afghanistan".

Her siblings help her at home, and occasionally she gets lessons from a psychologist who comes to see her younger sister, still traumatised by the school attack.

"They say: 'Study if you cannot go to school -- study at home so that you may become someone in the future,'" said Amena.

"My brother brings home storybooks and I read them," Amena said. "And I always watch the news."

Reports have emerged of girls going back to a few high schools -- such as in Kunduz province where the Taliban promoted the return with a stage-managed rally.

A Taliban leader told the UN children's body that a framework to allow all girls to go to secondary school will be announced soon, a senior UNICEF executive said Friday.

But for now, the vast majority are barred from

Sri Lanka Seeks \$500 Million Loan From India For Fuel Purchase: Report

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka has sought a USD 500 million credit line from India to pay for its crude oil purchases amid a severe foreign exchange crisis in the island nation.

The move came few days after energy minister Udaya Gammanpila warned that the current availability of fuel in the country can be guaranteed only till next January.

The state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) owes nearly USD 3.3 billion to the two main government banks -- Bank of Ceylon and People's Bank. The state oil distributors imports crude from the Middle East and refined products from other areas, including Singapore.

"We are currently engaged with the Indian High Commission here to obtain the facility (USD 500 million credit line) under the India-Sri Lanka economic partnership arrangement," CPC Chairman Sumith Wijesinghe was quoted as saying by local news website newsfirst.lk.

He said the facility would be utilised for purchasing petrol and diesel requirements.

The energy secretaries

of both India and Lanka are expected to sign an agreement for the loan soon, the report quoted Finance Secretary SR Attygalle as saying.

The government has put on hold the expected retail price hike of fuel despite the last week's increase in cooking gas and other essentials.

The price hike in the global oil prices has forced Lanka to spend more on oil imports this year. The country's oil bill has jumped 41.5 per cent to USD 2 billion in the first seven months of this year, compared to last year.

Lanka is facing a severe foreign exchange crisis after the pandemic hit the nation's earnings from tourism and remittances, Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa had said last month.

The country's GDP contracted by a record 3.6 per cent in 2020 and its foreign exchange reserves plunged by over a half in one year through July to just USD 2.8 billion. This has led to a 9 per cent depreciation of the Sri Lankan rupee against the dollar over the past one year, making imports more expensive.

Bangladesh Communal Violence: Another Hindu Temple Vandalised Amid Calls For Hunger Strike



DHAKA: A Hindu temple has been vandalised in Bangladesh in a fresh case of communal unrest amidst days of violence unleashed by unidentified Muslim attackers who went after the minority Hindu community's places of worship during the Durga Puja celebrations over alleged blasphemy, prompting minority groups to announce a countrywide hunger strike, media reports said on Sunday.

Hindu-owned temples and shops in Feni, about 157 kms from the country's capital, have been vandalised and robbed during fresh clashes on Saturday which broke out after an attack on demonstrators who were protesting against the attacks on Durga Puja venues in several places in Bangladesh, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported.

The clashes left at least 40 people, including the Officer In-charge Nizamuddin of

Feni Model Police Station, injured in the clashes, it said.

On Saturday night, authorities deployed additional police forces and the paramilitary force -- Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), after several temples and businesses owned by Hindus were vandalised and robbed during clashes that lasted from 4:30 pm (local time) to midnight, the report said.

The report said that some people on Saturday vandalised six idols at the Daniapara Maha Shoshan Kali Mandir in Munshiganj.

It said that protests against attacks and vandalism on Hindu temples during the Durga Puja celebrations continued across the country on Saturday, as did the vandalism that led to public outcry. Meanwhile in the country's southeastern port city of Chittagong, the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council announced a sit-in and hunger strike from

October 23 in protest against the attacks during the Durga Puja celebrations.

The protest events will take place at Dhaka's Shahbagh and Chittagong's Andarkilla, the council's General Secretary Advocate Rana Dasgupta said at a press conference at the Chittagong Press Club.

Before making the announcement, the forum observed a six-hour strike in Chittagong on Saturday.

The Bangladesh Puja Ujjapan Parishad has demanded exemplary punishments for those involved in the rampant vandalism, violence and mayhem that took place during the Durga Puja celebrations.

Milan Kanti Dutta, president of the forum, said that they would launch a tougher movement if the government did not pay heed to their demand.

"From the home minister to ruling party General Secretary Obaidul Quader, everybody has assured us saying they are informed about everything. If you know everything, why are you not punishing the culprits?" he asked.

Charu Chandra Das Brahmachari, general secretary of ISKCON Bangladesh, warned that the community would not sit silent and watch the attacks happen.

Foreign Minister Lays Wreath At Cemetery For Indian Soldiers In Israel

Jerusalem: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Sunday began his five-day visit to Israel by laying wreaths at a cemetery for Indian soldiers who laid down their lives in the region during the World War I in Talpiot, Jerusalem. About 900 Indian soldiers are interred in cemeteries across Israel in Jerusalem, Ramle and Haifa.

Jaishankar, who arrived here earlier in the day on his first visit to the country as the External Affairs Minister, laid wreaths at the Talpiot Cemetery. "I am deeply honoured to pay homage to the valiant sons of India who fought with bravery and courage in this land during WWI, bringing glory to themselves, their comrades and their motherland."

Mr Jaishankar wrote in the visitors book. "The valour and supreme sacrifice of these bravehearts will forever remain etched in the heart of our nation. Your heroism and selfless service in an inspiration and beacon of light that will forever guide us in the service of our country. I wish to thank you & Commonwealth War Graves Commission for maintaining these memorials for Indian soldiers in Israel," he wrote.

The heroics of the Indian soldiers have prominently come to light here during the past two decades and the story of liberation of the northern coastal city of Haifa, in what most war historians consider "the last great cavalry campaign in history", has become a household tale with its inclusion in the city's local history textbooks.

The Indian Army commemorates September 23 every year as Haifa Day to pay its respects to the three brave Indian Cavalry Regiments - Mysore, Hyderabad and Jodhpur Lancers - that helped liberate Haifa following a dashing cavalry action by the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade.

Captain Aman Singh Bahadur and Dafadar Jor Singh were awarded the Indian Order of Merit (IOM) and Captain Anop Singh and Second Lieutenant Sagat Singh were awarded the Military Cross (MC) as recognition for their bravery in this battle. Major Dalpat Singh, widely known as the Hero of Haifa, was awarded a military cross for his bravery.

Indian cavalry regiments armed with spears and swords had displayed the highest tradition of valour and cleared the enemy from the rocky slopes of Mount Carmel.

In a symbolic gesture of friendship with Israel, India renamed the iconic Teen Murti Chowk, a war memorial, during the visit of then Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Delhi in January 2018 to Teen Murti Haifa Chowk.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Haifa cemetery during his visit to Israel in July 2017 and unveiled a plaque commemorating Major Dalpat Singh for his critical role in the liberation of the city. The 61st Cavalry, the name given to the unit created after the merger of cavalry units after independence, sent a contingent to Israel in 2018 to participate in the centenary celebrations.

UK To Increase Security Of MPs After Lawmaker Stabbed To Death

LEIGH-ON-SEA, UK: Britain's interior minister on Sunday said MPs' security would be increased, after a lawmaker was stabbed to death as he held a public meeting with constituents, in the second such attack in five years. Veteran Conservative MP David Amess, 69, was talking with voters at a church in the small town of Leigh-on-Sea, east of London, when he was killed on Friday.

The attack has spread fear among MPs, coming just over five years after the similar killing of Labour MP Jo Cox in the febrile run-up to the Brexit referendum.

This includes MPs sharing information on their whereabouts with police. Close protection at surgeries was also "in consideration right now", she added.

The Sunday Telegraph reported that uniformed police were guarding some surgeries following the attack, which prompted calls from some MPs for a pause in face-to-face meetings.

Police said late on Saturday that detectives had until Friday to question the suspected attacker after he was detained under the Terrorism Act, which allowed them to extend his detention.

He has not been charged.

British media, citing unnamed official sources, identified the suspect as Ali Harbi Ali. Reports said he



was a British national of Somali descent who had been referred to Prevent, the UK's official counter-terrorist scheme for those thought to be at risk of radicalisation.

Ali is believed not have spent long on the programme, which is voluntary, and was never formally a "subject of interest" to MI5, the domestic security agency, said the BBC. The Prevent programme is currently under independent review.

"We want to ensure it (the Prevent programme) is fit for purpose, robust, doing the right thing, but importantly, learning lessons," Ms Patel told Sky News.

Detectives said they have been carrying out searches at three addresses in the London area in a "fast-paced investigation".

China Tested New Space Capability With Hypersonic Missile: Report

BEIJING: China has tested a new space capability with a hypersonic missile, the Financial Times reported on Saturday.

The report, citing multiple sources familiar with the test, said Beijing in August launched a nuclear-capable missile that circled the Earth at low orbit before descending toward its target, which three sources said it missed by over 20 miles (32 kilometers).

FT sources said the hypersonic glide vehicle was carried by a Long March rocket, launches of which it usually announces, though the August test was kept under wraps.

The report added that China's progress on hypersonic weapons "caught US intelligence by surprise."

Along with China, the United States, Russia and at least five other countries are working on hypersonic technology.

Hypersonic missiles, like traditional ballistic missiles which can deliver nuclear weapons, can fly at more than five times the speed of sound.

But ballistic missiles fly high into space in an arc to

reach their target, while a hypersonic flies on a trajectory low in the atmosphere, potentially reaching a target more quickly.

Crucially, a hypersonic missile is maneuverable (like the much slower, often subsonic cruise missile), making it harder to track and defend against.

While countries like the United States have developed systems designed to defend against cruise and ballistic missiles, the ability to track and take down a hypersonic missile remains a question.

China has been aggressively developing the technology, seeing it as crucial to defend against US gains in hypersonic and other technologies, according to a recent report by the US Congressional Research Service (CRS).

The reported test comes as US-China tensions have mounted and Beijing has stepped up military activity near Taiwan, the self-ruling US-aligned democracy that Beijing considers a province awaiting reunification.

The Pentagon did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment on the FT report.

Russian Crew Lands On Earth After Filming First Movie In Space

MOSCOW: A Russian actress and a film director returned to Earth Sunday after spending 12 days on the International Space Station (ISS) shooting scenes for the first movie in orbit.

Yulia Peresild and Klim Shipenko landed as scheduled on Kazakhstan's steppe at 0436 GMT, according to footage broadcast live by the Russian space agency.

Touchdown after 191 days in space for @Novitskiy_ISS and 12 days in space for two Russian filmmakers! M o r e https://t.co/CRQ3O1BUjpic .twitter.com/kzXICTr0og

They were ferried back to terra firma by cosmonaut Oleg Novitskiy, who had been on the space station for the past six months.

"The descent vehicle of the crewed spacecraft Soyuz MS-18 is standing upright and is secure. The crew are feeling good!" Russian space agency Roscosmos tweeted.

The filmmakers had blasted off from the Russia-leased Baikonur Cosmodrome in ex-Soviet Kazakhstan earlier this month, travelling to the ISS with veteran cosmonaut Anton Shkaplerov to film scenes for "The Challenge".

If the project stays on track, the Russian crew will beat a Hollywood project announced last year by "Mission Impossible" star Tom Cruise together with NASA and Elon Musk's SpaceX.

The movie's plot, which has been mostly kept under wraps along with its budget, centres around a surgeon who is dispatched to the ISS to save a cosmonaut.

Shkaplerov, 49, along with the two Russian cos-

monauts who were already aboard the ISS are said to have cameo roles in the film.

The mission was not without small hitches.

As the film crew docked at the ISS earlier this month, Shkaplerov had to switch to manual control.

And when Russian flight controllers on Friday conducted a test on the Soyuz MS-18 spacecraft the ship's thruster fired unexpectedly and destabilised the ISS for 30 minutes, a NASA spokesman told the Russian news agency TASS.

But the spokesman confirmed their departure would go ahead as scheduled.

21st-century space race

Their landing, which was documented by a film crew, will also feature in the movie, Konstantin Ernst, the head of the Kremlin-friendly Channel One TV network and a co-producer of "The Challenge", told AFP.

The mission will add to a long list of firsts for Russia's space industry.

The Soviets launched the first satellite Sputnik, and sent into orbit the first animal, a dog named Laika, the first man, Yuri Gagarin and the first woman, Valentina Tereshkova.

Amid the growing threat from China, reports have emerged stating that Taiwan officials have urged Washington to speed up the delivery of US-made F-16 jets to Taipei. US President Joe Biden's "administration has discussed with Taiwanese officials the possibility of expediting the delivery of American-made F-16s to Taiwan," reported Taipei Times citing a CNN report.

The sale of the 22 fighter jets was approved in 2019, but Taiwan hopes to speed up the actual delivery time -- which normally can take up to 10 years -- particularly in light of the recent Chinese provocations," the report said. This came as the "Pentagon's Indo-Pacific Command has watched with increasing concern as China has rapidly modernized its military and improved its training with an eye to Taiwan," the report added.

Around 150 Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) military aircraft have made incursions in Taiwan's air defence identification zone from October 1-5,



But compared with the Soviet era, modern Russia has struggled to innovate and its space industry is fighting to secure state funding with the Kremlin prioritising military spending.

Its space agency is still reliant on Soviet-designed technology and has faced a number of setbacks, including corruption scandals and botched launches.

Russia is also falling behind in the global space race, facing tough competition from the United States and China, with Beijing showing growing ambitions in the industry.

Russia's Roscosmos was also dealt a blow after SpaceX last year successfully delivered astronauts to the ISS, ending Moscow's monopoly for journeys to the orbital station.

In a bid to spruce up its image and diversify its revenue, Russia's space programme revealed this year that it will be reviving its tourism plan to ferry fee-paying adventurers to the ISS. <After a decade-long pause, Russia will send two Japanese tourists -- including billionaire Yusaku Maezawa -- to the ISS in December, capping a year that has been a milestone for amateur space travel.

Amid looming China threat, Taiwan asks

US to speed up delivery of F-16 jets

Taipei Times reported citing the data from Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense.

Meanwhile, these are one of the biggest incursions from Beijing that Taiwan has surfaced in the last few days. The incursions happened as Beijing claims full sovereignty over Taiwan, a democracy of almost 24 million people located off the southeastern coast of mainland China, despite the fact that the two sides have been governed separately for more than seven decades.

Taipei, on the other hand, has countered the Chinese aggression by increasing strategic ties with democracies including the US, which has been repeatedly opposed by Beijing. China has also threatened that "Taiwan's independence" means war.

On June 1, Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged to complete reunification with self-ruled Taiwan and vowed to smash any attempts at formal independence for the island. Recently, Taipei has also expressed that it will not start a war with China but "it is prepared for it".

MIAMI: A fugitive businessman accused of acting as a money launderer for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's regime was extradited Saturday to the United States from Cape Verde, US justice officials said.

The Justice Department said in a statement that Alex Saab was due to appear in court in Florida on Monday and expressed "admiration" to authorities in Cape Verde for their help in the case.

Venezuela reacted furiously, suspending talks with the US-backed opposition on ending the country's political and economic crisis.

Saab, a Colombian national, and his business partner Alvaro Pulido are charged in the United States with running a network that exploited food aid destined for Venezuela, an oil rich nation mired in an acute economic crisis. They are alleged to have moved some \$350 million out of Venezuela into accounts they controlled in the United States and other countries. They risk up to 20 years in prison. Saab, who also has Venezuelan nationality and a Venezuelan diplomatic passport, was indicted in July 2019 in Miami for

Fugitive Businessman Close To Venezuela's Maduro Extradited To US

money laundering, and was arrested during a plane stopover in Cape Verde off the coast of West Africa in June 2020. Venezuela's opposition has described Saab a front man doing shady dealings for the populist socialist regime of Maduro.

Colombian President Ivan Duque praised Saab's extradition.

"The extradition of Alex Saab is a triumph in the fight against the drug trafficking, asset laundering and corruption that the dictatorship of Nicolas Maduro has fostered," Duque tweeted.

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido, who is recognized as the country's acting president by the United States and more than 50 other countries, also welcomed the move.

"We Venezuelans, who have seen justice kidnapped for years, respect and celebrate the system of justice in democratic countries like



Cape Verde," he tweeted.

Heavy security at airport

Cape Verde agreed last month to extradite Saab to the United States, despite protests from Venezuela.

Venezuela said Saab had been abducted by the United States. "Venezuela denounces the kidnapping of the Venezuelan diplomat Alex Saab by the government of the United States in complicity with the authorities in Cape Verde," the Caracas government said in a statement.

The speaker of Congress, Jorge Rodriguez, said the government would not attend the fourth round of talks with the opposition due to start Sunday in Mexico City "as a deep expression of our protest against the brutal aggression" against Saab.

Rodriguez leads the government delegation, which had hoped to make Saab one of its members, until his arrest.