

Russia stops oil supplies to Belarus after no deal signed

AFP, Minsk

Russia has stopped shipping oil to Belarus, the Belarusian state energy firm said yesterday, after the two countries failed to reach a deal on supplies by a January 1 deadline.

Moscow said oil flow through Belarus -- a key transit route for Russian oil and gas to Europe -- was continuing. But a dragged-out dispute could threaten supplies.

Belneftkhim said in a statement that loading to Belarus's two oil refineries had been reduced to a technical minimum after supplies from Russia were halted.

"Work is ongoing on concluding the January contracts," said the statement, quoted by state media.

The ex-Soviet neighbours have a long history of energy disputes and complicated bilateral ties, with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko running hot and cold on Moscow's push for a closer trade and political union.

A previous deal on oil prices, transit fees and volumes expired on December 31.

Lukashenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin held a series of calls ahead of the deadline but without apparent progress.

Croatia president tries to unite right against leftist ex-PM

AFP, Zagreb

Croatia's conservative president is trying to lure nationalists back to her camp as she faces a leftist ex-premier at the polls Sunday, in a race that has revealed growing support for the country's radical right.

The run-off election comes just four days after Croatia formally took over the EU's rotating presidency at a difficult juncture for both Brussels and Zagreb.

While Brussels is staring down the barrel of Brexit and divisions on everything from climate to immigration policy, Zagreb is struggling to tackle an emigration crisis, corruption and a lacklustre economy at home.

On Sunday 3.8 million eligible voters will be asked to choose between two rival visions of the Adriatic country: the "real Croatia" that centre-right incumbent Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic says she represents, and the "normal Croatia" that her Social Democrat rival Zoran Milanovic promises to deliver.

While the role is mostly ceremonial, the president represents the country on the world stage, coordinates foreign policy with the government and is in charge of the armed forces.

Analysts say Grabar-Kitarovic's re-election depends on whether she can win over right-wing voters who rallied around a nationalist folk singer in the election's first round in December.

3 cold spells

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Yesterday, the early morning rain made things difficult for poor people like day-labourers and rickshaw-pullers, reported UNB.

"It would have been better had I stayed indoor and taken rest rather than braving the chilly rain," said Hashem Ali, a rickshaw-puller sitting idle in his slow-moving three-wheeler at Mouchak intersection yesterday morning.

Besides, students were seen using umbrellas while going to their coaching centers on the weekend, added the UNB report.

The drizzle along with cold wave from disrupted normal life in six southern districts and hampered normal life of general people, reported our Barishal correspondent.

As a result, very few people were seen plying on the roads and water ways for reaching their workplaces. Shopkeepers in the town were seen passing idle time due to lack of customers.

The children and elderly people also suffered due to the cold wave with rain.

Dr Md Rahim, director of health in Barishal district, said over 1700 children admitted to 42 upazila health complexes in last seven days in his region with diseases related to cold.

On the other hand, various cold-related diseases affected 5,440 people across the country in the last 24 hours, the government said on Thursday, reported UNB.

Data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) control room showed that 767 of the patients received treatment for acute respiratory infection.

According to the data, 51 deaths were reported across the country between November 1 and January 2 due to cold-related diseases, the UNB report added.



Chief Minister of West Bengal state and leader of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) Mamata Banerjee (centre, dressed in white) along with party supporters walks in a mass rally to protest against the new citizenship law in Siliguri, India yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Won't budge an inch

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going back an inch on the CAA," he said at the meeting held in Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's assembly constituency.

The home minister said it is "shameful" that the Congress is criticising the sacrifice of great sons of the country, like Veer Savarkar, for the sake of its vote bank.

The remark comes amid a row over the distribution of a booklet against the Hindutva icon at a camp held by Congress-affiliated Seva Dal in Madhya Pradesh. But Shah did not directly refer to it.

Opposition parties have criticised the amendment that allows non-Muslims an easier path to citizenship if they came to India from three neighbouring countries before 2015 after facing religious persecution.

"The law is not against the minorities," Shah said.

"There is no provision in the Citizenship Amendment Act to take anyone's citizenship away but it is a law to grant citizenship," he added.

"We have not kept out any religion. We are giving citizenship to minorities of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan whether they are Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi or Christian," he said.

He challenged Congress leader Rahul to a discussion on the law.

"Rahul baba if you have read the law come anywhere for a discussion. If you haven't read it, I will get it

translated into Italian," he said, in a swipe at his Italian-origin mother Sonia Gandhi.

Shah said Congress leaders too had in the past talked about granting citizenship to those who faced religious persecution in neighbouring countries, but the party did not implement the suggestions due to the fear of losing its vote bank.

But Prime Minister Narendra Modi has protected the human rights and honour of millions of refugees who came to India, the BJP leader said.

"Mahatma Gandhi had made the promise. Was he communal? Former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru had also said in Parliament that citizenship will be granted to Hindus or Sikhs who have come. Were they communal?" he said.

"These refugee brothers were millionaires and today they have no place to live. There they had many bighas of land and here they have nothing to eat," Shah said.

He said that percentage of the minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh has declined while the minorities in India are living with honour.

The opposition is against granting citizenship to those refugees who have come to India after facing atrocities, and whose property and jobs were taken away, he said.

He referred to the pact between Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan's Liaquat Ali Khan on the protection of

minorities after partition.

"Now, we will execute the Nehru-Liaquat agreement. This is the rule of Narendra Modi, no one has to fear. PM Modi government is going to give citizenship to all of you and make you feel proud of being an Indian," he said in a remark apparently directed at the migrants.

"I want to say that the refugees who have come from those countries are from India only," he added.

He said the Congress, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Aam Aadmi Party and the Communists are opposing the law.

Shah said it is hard to understand why West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee is opposing citizenship to Bengali-speaking Hindus and Dalits living in West Bengal.

"There is no need to fear from Didi. I want to say that refugees living in Bengal will not have to face any atrocities. You will be granted citizenship with honour," he said.

Shah also hit out at Ashok Gehlot, saying the BJP has implemented the promise mentioned in the election manifesto of his Congress government in Rajasthan.

He said the chief minister should stop protesting against the CAA and be concerned about the deaths of infants at Kota's JK Lon Hospital, where 100 children died in December.

FLOODS IN INDONESIA

Search on for survivors after 43 killed

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian rescuers yesterday mounted a desperate search for those missing after torrential rains unleashed flash floods and landslides, killing at least 43 people across the Jakarta region as authorities raced to prevent disease outbreaks.

Around a dozen people were still unaccounted for after record rains that started on New Year's Eve pounded the

capital and left swathes of the megalopolis -- home to some 30 million -- under water and thousands homeless.

Around 192,000 residents have been evacuated to temporary shelters, according to authorities, with many unable to return to waterlogged homes in neighbourhoods that have been turned into wastelands.

"We're encouraging people whose houses are still inundated to go to a safer place," said National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesman Agus Wibowo.

The agency said 43 people had been confirmed dead in Greater Jakarta and neighbouring Lebak regency in the south of Java island.

Waters had receded in many areas and power was being restored after being cut off in many districts.

Only capable cops to get vital posts

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implementation," Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Shaiful Islam, a member of the Policy Group, told The Daily Star.

The draft said officers, who have their last five years' annual report clean and satisfactory disciplinary report throughout their career, would make it to the "fit list".

Lobbying would be considered a reason for disqualification, the draft said.

The PHQ would consider an officer's skill, competence, honesty, and reputation before making them range deputy inspectors general and metropolitan police commissioners.

A section of officers said the plans would not work until police are allowed to work without political interference.

The home ministry now authorises postings of officers from SP and above ranks following recommendation by the PHQ.

Once the guideline is finalised, the PHQ would propose names of officers from the "fit list", an officer involved in the making of the draft said.

"It's up to the ministry whether it would accept the officer recommended," he said, adding that usually the ministry accepts the PHQ recommendations.

Asked whether the guideline needs approval of the ministry concerned, DMP Commissioner Shaiful said,

"The home minister and secretary should be aware of the policy. They should know that the it does not support lobbying."

Former IGP Nur Mohammad said, "If posts are given following the guideline, no one will be disappointed. Presently some people at the top are getting posts in different districts depriving good officers who work silently."

The guideline will also pave the way for brilliant officers, now serving in remote areas, to get good posts, he said.

Nur Mohammad, now a ruling party lawmaker, also said, "In a country like ours, political intervention is a big issue. So, it's success will depend on the government's intention."

THE GUIDELINE

An officer will be recommended for posts as a range DIG and a metropolitan commissioner once. If an officer serves less than a year at a range or metropolitan city, they can be recommended again for the posts. But, if an officer is transferred for inefficiency, corruption, physical inability, and moral turpitude, they will not be recommended.

An eight-member committee led by the IGP will make a list of competent SP-level officers. The other members of the committee are additional IG (admin & ops), DG (Rab), commissioner (DMP), additional IGs of Special Branch and Criminal Investigation Department, DIG

(admin & discipline) and additional DIG (personnel management-1).

For the "fit list", the age limit for a BCS police cadre is 50 and for a departmental officer, it is 54.

An officer will serve as SP at two districts and for no more than five years.

Officers who completed training course at Staff College and Special Branch will get priority and those having higher training at home or abroad will be will also get priority.

Another eight-member committee led by additional IGP (admin and ops) will select OCs from the list officers who had worked as inspectors for at least three years.

Other members of the committee are: the DMP commissioner, additional IG of SB, DIG (admin and discipline), DIG (Dhaka range), additional DIG (organisation and management), AIG (recruitment and career planning) and AIG (personnel management-2) of the PHQ.

Any officer given a major punishment will not be included in the "fit list". An officer will not be allowed to serve as OC for more than eight years or at more than four police stations.

The guidelines also mentioned in details about how postings of additional SPs or additional deputy commissioners, assistant SPs or assistant commissioners, sub-inspectors, assistant sub-inspectors and constables will take place.

Saudi to issue

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authorities. Workers from other countries will also have opportunities to return to their homes, officials said.

Mohammad Ashaduzzaman, first secretary at Riyadh labour welfare wing, said they had been receiving applications since December 22.

"The process will continue until further notice," he told this correspondent over phone.

About 1,000 workers have already applied for the opportunity, said a top official at the expatriates' welfare ministry.

Throughout last year, Saudi Arabia deported thousands of undocumented Bangladeshi migrant workers after detaining them on various grounds.

Until mid-November, some 22,000 workers were deported by the Gulf country, according to Brac Migration Programme.

Many of them did not have the residency permission, locally known as iqama.

The notices were also posted on the Facebook page of Bangladesh mission in Riyadh.

A Facebook user named Khondokar Faisal commented that he had been in Saudi Arabia for five months but had not received his iqama yet.

"I live in Dammam Al Jubail and I don't know where my kafil [sponsor] is," he wrote.

Faisal also expressed his desire to return home.

Seeking anonymity, an official at the expatriates' welfare ministry said when a migrant worker fails to obtain iqama they become illegal and faces the risks of legal action.

It is the responsibility of Saudi employers to arrange iqama for foreign workers and renew it every year, he said.

The employer has to pay a certain amount of money in fees to the authorities for the iqama, he added.

However, in 5 to 10 percent of the cases, employers refuse to pay the money or renew their employees' iqama, he said, adding that in such circumstances it falls upon the Saudi authorities to hold the employer accountable.

US Senate returns amid standoff over impeachment trial

AFP, Washington

US lawmakers returned to Washington yesterday with President Donald Trump's upcoming impeachment trial looming over the first Senate session of 2020, but congressional leaders are locked in stalemate over how to proceed.

As Congress braces for a frenetic January, newly uncovered evidence could bolster Democrats' demands for testimony from key witnesses with firsthand knowledge of Trump's Ukraine pressure scheme at the heart of the impeachment scandal.

A series of emails published Thursday signal that the order to maintain a freeze on military aid to Ukraine came directly from Trump, and reveal that the Pentagon raised serious concerns about the legality of the directive.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has so far refused to transmit the two articles of impeachment against Trump -- abuse of power and obstruction of Congress -- to the Senate until the chamber agrees on trial parameters that she considers fair.

No progress was made over the holiday break as to the rules of the trial, after Trump last month became only the third US president ever impeached by the House of Representatives.

World's largest flower

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(3.6 foot) in diameter.

That's bigger than the previous record of 107 centimetres on a bloom also found in the jungles of West Sumatra several years ago.

"This is the largest Rafflesia tuan-mudae that has ever been documented," said Ade Putra at the Agam Conservation Agency in

Sumatra.

The flower's bloom will only last about one week before it will wither and rot, he added.

It was named Rafflesia after British colonialist Sir Stamford Raffles who spotted one in Indonesia in the early 19th Century.

The species grows in several Southeast Asian countries, including

the Philippines where a 100 centimetre specimen was recorded.

The parasitic bloom, sometimes referred to as corpse flower, mimics the stench of rotting meat to attract insects.

Sharing that noxious smell is Indonesia's Amorphophallus titanum, a phallus-shaped flower that can reach heights of up to three metres (10 feet).

PHOTO: AFP