

INTERNET SHUTDOWN IN J&K

Indefinite curb illegal: India SC

The court rebukes govt for communications lockdown

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court said yesterday that an indefinite shutdown of the internet in Kashmir was illegal, rebuking the government for the communications lockdown imposed after it withdrew the Muslim majority region's autonomy in August.

Indefinite suspension of the internet violated India's telecoms rules, the court said, ordering authorities to review all curbs in Kashmir in a week.

"Freedom of Internet access is a fundamental right," Supreme Court justice N. V. Ramana said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's

Hindu-nationalist government has frequently used internet shutdowns as a tool to quell dissent in troubled parts of the country.

Last month, authorities imposed an internet clampdown in parts of the capital and in areas of the eastern state of Assam and Uttar Pradesh in the north as protests raged against a new citizenship law that Muslims see as discriminatory.

The shutdown in Kashmir, which has been on for more than 150 days, is the longest such outage in any democracy, according to digital rights

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Mujib Borsho

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She urged all to remain alert so that the dark era could never cast its shadow over the people again. "On this day, I hope people will build Golden Bangladesh of the Father of the Nation and place it in a dignified position in the world."

Hasina said the Pakistani occupation forces could not kill Bangabandhu with their repeated attempts, but it was very much regretful that Bangabandhu gave his life within three and a half years after the country's independence when he was taking the war-ravaged country towards development.

"The spirit and history of the Liberation War were erased, the slogan Joy Bangla, and the March 7 speech of the Father of the Nation were banned. That speech has got recognition from the UNESCO as a world document."

The PM said Bangladesh could not have been an independent country without the Father of the Nation and the Bangalee nation could not have got its dignity and self-identity as an independent nation.

"It's true that we achieved our victory on December 16, but at that time everybody thought that the independence remained unfulfilled and it was not complete. The people eagerly awaited the homecoming of their leader."

She mentioned that thousands of people had gathered at the airport (now the National Parade Square) to welcome Bangabandhu on January 10, 1972. People tried to forget their pain of loss of their dear ones by greeting their most loved leader, the PM added.

Bangabandhu's younger daughter Sheikh Rehana and grandson Sajeb Wazed Joy were present at the National Parade Square with the PM.

Marking the 10th January, a symbolic aircraft of the historic Homecoming of the Father of the Nation landed at Tejgaon Old Airport at 04:35pm yesterday.

Vehicle registration

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On the other hand, motorcycles are becoming increasingly popular in cities mostly because they can sieve through traffic.

Last year, 5.04 lakh vehicles were registered across the country, including 1.58 lakh in Dhaka. In 2018, the figures were 4.97 lakh and 1.71 lakh, respectively.

Abdul Haque, president of the Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicles Importers and Dealers Association (BARVIDA), termed the duty structure for reconditioned cars discriminatory, claiming that it pushed the used cars' prices upwards.

The government has brought down the maximum depreciation of imported reconditioned vehicles to 35 percent in 2018-19 from 45 percent in 2015-16, increasing the import duty and the prices of cars, according to the BARVIDA.

Thanks to ride-hailing services, many people are refraining from buying cars, Abdul said.

Contacted, an Uber official said the company was aiming to put more people in fewer cars.

App-based ride-hailing services were launched in Dhaka in May 2015. Inclusion of motorcycles popularised the services.

Currently, there are 12 registered ride-hailing companies with over 1 lakh vehicles, mainly cars and motorcycles.

Sajol Rahman, a private employee, said he was planning to buy a car in 2017. "But we dropped the plan because using ride-sharing services proved to be convenient."

Prof Shamsul said the purchase of 600 buses by the BRTC and the introduction of some new bus routes in Dhaka and its adjacent areas led to the increase in buses and minibuses.

"This is a very good sign, especially for reducing traffic congestion in Dhaka," Prof Shamsul, also a former director of the Accident Research Institute at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, said.

BRTA Director (operations) Sitangshu Shekhar Biswas said they had

A 21-gun salute was sounded just after opening the door of the plane after its arrival at the tarmac of the airport.

About 150 people, including students of educational institutions, welcomed the plane, while the nearby place of its exit door was illuminated with laser light.

Laser light slowly went down to the edge of the red carpet, reflecting the Homecoming of Bangabandhu as the lighting guide of the nation.

A smartly-turned out contingent drawn from Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force presented a state salute on the occasion.

COUNTDOWN BEGINS ACROSS COUNTRY

Meanwhile, devices are being set up at different public places in the capital, divisional cities, districts, city corporations, and upazilas across the country for the countdown for the birth centenary celebration.

Many ministries, divisions, departments, socio-cultural organisations and public and private universities are also installing devices at their own initiatives.

There will be an inauguration programme on March 17 this year, which will be attended by eminent personalities from home and abroad.

In the morning yesterday, the prime minister paid rich tributes to the Father of the Nation on the occasion of the historic Homecoming Day.

Hasina paid the homage by placing wreaths at the portrait of the Father of the Nation in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital's Dhanmondi.

After laying the wreaths, she stood there in solemn silence for some time as a mark of profound respect to the memory of Bangabandhu.

The Father of the Nation had returned to independent Bangladesh via London and New Delhi on January 10 in 1972 after long captivity in Pakistani jail.

not changed any policies or fees that could affect the number of vehicles. Import duties of cars or other tax issues may have played a role, he added.

The number of cars obtaining registration in Dhaka gradually declined from 19,573 in 2017 to 15,016 last year. Outside Dhaka, the number fell from 21,959 to 16,783 during the same period.

Last year, fewer trucks and microbuses were registered in the country but the registration of new buses and minibuses increased.

The numbers of buses and minibuses registered across the country were 3,606 and 837 last year. In 2018, it was 2,755 and 436, respectively. The BRTC's import of 600 buses last year was a major reason behind the rise.

From the independence to 2019, 43.01 lakh vehicles were registered with the BRTA. Some 15.28 lakh of those were registered in Dhaka. But the transport authorities do not have any record on how many of these vehicles are on the road now. Besides, there are unregistered vehicles plying the roads.

Pompeo to meet Japan, S Korea on N Korea tensions

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will meet top officials from Japan and South Korea, officials said Thursday, weeks after North Korea defiantly threatened a new weapon.

The State Department said that Pompeo would meet senior counterparts from the two US allies during a January 12-15 trip to the San Francisco area.

The State Department did not provide further detail but said Pompeo would make public remarks, including at Stanford University.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in a New Year's address declared an end to his regime's moratorium on nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests. He also threatened to demonstrate a "new strategic weapon."



Fire sweeps through a garment factory of Islam Knit Composite Ltd in Gazipur city's Konabari area yesterday. Eight fire engines fought the blaze for about four hours before it was brought under control around 6:00pm. No casualties were reported in the incident.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Preteen, teen gang-raped in the city

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ABM Moshir Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kamrangirchar Police Station, said all the accused are locals and were known to the victim.

At that night, the victim's family members rescued and took her to the police station. Police admitted her to the one-stop crisis centre of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), the OC said, adding that her condition was stable.

In another incident, an 11-year-old girl was allegedly gang-raped in Bhatra area early yesterday, said Muktaruzzaman, OC of Bhatra Police Station.

Quoting the victim, her elder sister

said four people raped and left her in Bhatra.

In the morning, locals found her and took her home.

She was admitted to the DMCH at night as her condition worsened.

These incidents happened less than a week after a Dhaka University student was raped and tortured in the capital's Kurmitola area when she was walking from Kurmitola bus stop to a friend's home nearby.

The rape of DU student sparked huge protests and condemnation. On Wednesday, the Rapid Action Battalion arrested alleged rapist Majnu in the capital's Shewra.

On January 2, another 13-year-old

girl was raped allegedly by a police source and two others in the capital's Sabujbagh.

Police arrested the three after the victim's mother lodged a case against them.

She was undergoing treatment at the DMCH.

Rights body Ain o Salish Kendra in its annual report released recently said rape victims doubled last year compared to that of 2018.

According to the report, 1,413 females were subjected to rape last year. Of them, 76 were killed after rape, and 10 others died by suicide. The number of the rape victims was 732 in 2018, it said.

May deal blow to Bangladesh

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At a briefing later, US President Donald Trump, however, said his country did not necessarily have to use its military power against Iran, but it "will immediately impose additional punishing economic sanctions on the Iranian regime".

Although many see the reaction as an US attempt to defuse the crisis, Ayham Kamel, an analyst of New York-based Eurasia Group, said, "The assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani will trigger a long cycle of regional escalation with significant risks to US assets and Middle East energy infrastructure

"The risk of limited conflict is real. It would include substantial Iranian attacks on Gulf energy targets and direct naval clashes between the US and Iran," Al Jazeera reported him as saying.

Immediately after news of the missile strikes on Wednesday, international benchmark Brent crude climbed more than 4 percent, reaching a session high of \$71.75 per barrel -- its highest value since September, reported CNBC, an US television channel the same day.

In Bangladesh, the price of liquefied petroleum gas has increased by 20 percent at retail stores after the rise in oil prices in the international market.

Talking about the issue, economist Mustafizur Rahman said Bangladesh's total imports hit \$65 billion a year and most of the imported items are commodities. "Any rise in gas and oil prices will affect the prices and supplies of the commodities."

He also said the US demand for readymade garments from Bangladesh might go down as it would have to invest money for the war. The US imports RMG products worth more than \$6 billion from Bangladesh.

Out of over \$40 billion export earnings of Bangladesh, \$34 billion comes from the RMG export.

MajGen (ret'd) ANMMuniruzzaman, president of Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), said if there was a war, ships would change their routes in the face of attacks in the Gulf region.

"Therefore, the insurance cost of the ships will increase. This will ultimately raise shipping costs," he said.

CPD Executive Director Fahmida Khatun said Bangladesh might have to purchase oil at a higher price, which would create pressure on the country's foreign exchange reserve.

"Our earnings from export to the middle eastern countries will also decrease," she said.

OVERSEAS JOBS AND REMITTANCE

The Middle East is the largest overseas job market for Bangladeshis, employing around six million who had sent home some 60 percent of the \$18 billion the country received in remittance last year.

Most of the Middle Eastern countries, especially Saudi Arabia, are implementing policies that discourage manpower import and encourage local workers.

Thousands of Bangladeshis were deported by Saudi Arabia last year either because their businesses were closed or they were found to be undocumented.

The United Arab Emirates currently does not recruit general workers, except in the domestic category.

The number of recruits by Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman has also decreased in recent months, show Bangladesh government data.

A war in the region could mean more job cuts or less scope for new jobs, Maj Gen (ret'd) Muniruzzaman said, adding that many of the existing workers would have to be evacuated in case of a war.

"Decline in demand for migrants and evacuation of those already employed there mean negative impact on migrant remittance," he said.

"Safety and security of our migrant workers in the Middle East would be a matter of serious concern," he added.

Fahmida Khatun said if migrants returned home from the Gulf en masse, they could find it very difficult to get suitable jobs in Bangladesh.

"Then the government may have to be forced to compensate and rehabilitate them," she said, adding that all these would create pressure on the country's economy.

WHAT TO DO?

Experts say that from Bangladesh's perspective, the first victims of the war would be the migrant workers.

They also suggested that the government took up some measures.

Mustafizur Rahman said exporters might want the government to appreciate taka against the dollar, but that has to be done very carefully and keeping in mind that it would not going to help the importers.

Also, Bangladesh should have long-term purchase contracts with oil suppliers so that the country does not suffer in the case of such crises, he added.

Prof CR Abrar, who teaches international relations at the Dhaka University and is an expert on labour migration, said Bangladesh has not much to do at the moment other than ensuring migrants' safety in case there is a war. But, for the long run, it needs to diversify the labour market.

"The ways out include increasing workers' skills and finding out jobs in other countries, especially in the developed ones. Our people need to be trained for the sectors, including hospitality, healthcare and caregiving," he added.

Maj Gen (ret'd) Muniruzzaman suggested that the government sits with experts and businesses concerned and devise a plan of action required to tackle the fallouts of a US-Iran war, if there was one.

Iran denies plane 'downed by missile'

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shot down an Iran Air plane by mistake, killing all 290 people on board.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Thursday that multiple intelligence sources indicated that an Iranian missile downed Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752 after it took off from Tehran.

But Abedzadeh rejected the allegation, saying that "any remarks made before the data is extracted (from the plane's black box flight recorders) ... is not an expert opinion."

Trudeau's comments came as video footage emerged that appeared to show the moment the airliner was hit.

The footage, which The New York Times said it had verified, shows a fast-moving object rising at an angle into the sky before a bright flash is seen, which dims and then continues moving forward. Several seconds later an explosion is heard.

Citing information from allies as well as Canada's own intelligence, Trudeau said the plane appeared to have been hit by an Iranian surface-to-air missile.

"We know this may have been unintentional. Canadians have questions, and they deserve answers," Trudeau told reporters.

He was backed by other Western leaders, including British Prime

Minister Boris Johnson who said mounting evidence supported a missile strike, which "may well have been unintentional".

US President Donald Trump indicated that Washington officials believed the Kiev-bound Boeing 737 was struck by one or more Iranian missiles before it ditched and exploded outside Tehran.

US officials have given Kiev "important data" about the crash of a Ukrainian airliner in Iran, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Vadym Prystaiko said yesterday.

NO RADIO MESSAGE

The US National Transportation Safety Board said late Thursday it had received formal notification of the crash from Iran and would send a representative to join the investigation, reports AFP.

Iran's foreign ministry earlier invited US plane maker Boeing to "participate" in the probe.

The flight went down in the dark just minutes after takeoff, with no radio message from the pilot to indicate distress, according to the Iranian Civil Aviation Organization.

It was carrying 82 Iranians, 63 Canadians, 11 Ukrainians, 10 Swedes, four Afghans, three Germans and three Britons.

With tensions high between the

United States and Iran, the disaster unfolded just hours after Tehran launched ballistic missiles towards bases in Iraq housing US troops.

Iran retaliated for the January 3 US drone strike in Baghdad that killed a top Iranian general.

The Iranian government said the missile strike scenario made "no sense," however, arguing that several internal and international flights had been sharing approximately the same airspace.

Tehran later asked Ottawa to share its information with Iranian investigators.

CANADIANS WANT ANSWERS

Trudeau said Canada was working with allies to ensure a credible probe. "The families of the victims want answers, Canadians want answers, I want answers," he said.

"This government will not rest until we get that."

Canada's transportation safety board on Thursday said it had accepted an invitation from Iran's civil aviation authority to join the inquiry.

Britain's Johnson called Thursday for a full, transparent investigation.

Trump would not directly confirm what US intelligence was saying privately. "I have my suspicions," Trump said, adding that "somebody could have made a mistake."

India enforces controversial CAA

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which gives citizenship to non-Muslims who came to India from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan until 2014, went into force yesterday, the Indian home ministry said.

"In exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (2) of the section 1 of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (47 of 2019), the central government hereby appoints the 10th day of January, 2020, as the date on which the provisions of the said Act shall come into force," said a ministry gazette notification.

The CAA, which has sparked countrywide street protests, was passed by parliament on December 11.

According to the CAA, members of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian communities who have come from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan until December 31, 2014, facing religious persecution there will not be treated as illegal immigrants and given Indian citizenship.

The critics of the law say it is for the first time that India will grant citizenship on the basis of religion which violates the basic tenets of the country's constitution.

But the government and ruling Bharatiya Janata Party have been defending the CAA, saying the minority groups from the three countries have no other option but to come India when they face religious persecution there.

The home ministry is yet to frame the rules for the Act.

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Khulna roar

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for 27 while Mohammad Amir and Aminul Islam took two each.

Cumilla opener Sabbir Rahman, who was dismissed by Amir after a verbal spat in their last match on Wednesday, was castled first ball by a superb Amir in-swinging yesterday.

Earlier, things did not look bright for Khulna after they were asked to bat first.

Opener Nazmul Hossain departed in the first over and Khulna were in a spot of bother after a dangerous looking Rilee Rossouw fell to Mujeeb Ur Rahman in the fourth over, leaving Khulna at 33 for two.

Since then, Khulna's resurgence was scripted by Mehedi Hasan Miraz and skipper Mushfiqur.

The duo strung together an unbeaten 168-run third-wicket stand -- the second-highest partnership for the wicket and the fifth highest overall in the BPL.

Khulna were firmly in charge throughout with both the players scoring quick runs and finding boundaries with ease.

However, the partnership was forced to end when Mehedi, while on 74 off 45 balls featuring five fours and three maximums, pulled his hamstring in the penultimate over and had to leave the field.

Mushfiqur continued but the stalwart could however consider himself unlucky as he could not get to his maiden T20 century. The right-hander's 12 fours and three maximums could only get him as far as an unbeaten 98 off 57.

Girl killed

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Meanwhile, police seized the bus and detained its driver. No case was filed in connection with the accident as of 1:00am today.

According to road safety campaigner Nirapad Sarak Chai, the number of road crashes and deaths rose alarmingly last year.

Buses, trucks and covered vans were responsible for 39 percent road accidents and motorcycle for 19 percent, it said.