

Iran moves mock-up US carrier to mouth of Gulf

Show satellite images

REUTERS, Dubai

Iran has moved a mock-up US aircraft carrier to the strategic Strait of Hormuz, satellite images show, suggesting it will use the look-alike vessel for target practice in war games in a Gulf shipping channel vital to world oil exports.

The use of dummy American warships has become an occasional feature of training by Iran's Revolutionary Guards and its naval forces, including in 2015 when Iranian missiles hit a mock-up resembling a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier.

Tehran, which opposes the presence of US and Western navies in the Gulf, frequently holds naval war games in the strategic Strait, the conduit for some 30% of all crude and other oil liquids traded by sea.

One of the images taken on July 26 by US-based space technology firm Maxar Technologies showed an Iranian fast attack boat moving toward the model US carrier in the strategic waterway. Another image showed model planes lined up on the deck of the fake carrier.

Lab relying on volunteers

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and half-way through Sunday, informed Motiar Rahman, one of the technologists volunteering at the institute.

"There are 55 of us and we only get food and accommodation. The institute has six or seven salaried technologists, but they are not regularly involved with Covid-19 tests," claimed Rahman.

"All of us are graduates from the vocational and technical education board. We first joined the center as apprentices in February and this is a part of our curriculum," said Rahman. "Our apprenticeship was suspended when the pandemic started. Then towards the end of March, we were called back because the center began testing samples for coronavirus."

Four months on, the volunteers are wondering how much longer they would have to give their unremunerated labour.

"On June 29, 1,200 government posts for technologists, and 1,800 posts for technicians were created. So far, only 183 volunteers have been recruited and none of them was from the NILMRC," said Sabuj Madbar, a medical technologist and joint coordinator of Bangladesh Awami Medical Technologist Parishad.

"They stopped their strike when the

new director general of DGHS.... told them that they will be taken care of in the future," said Shamsuzzaman.

Of the 11 lakh coronavirus tests done in the country since the outbreak began, the NILMRC did 1.4 lakh. The 55 volunteers played a key role in the testing, officials said.

Recruitment of medical technologists remained stalled for 11 years over a legal tussle between the health ministry's medical education department and the technical education board.

In 2013, the ministry's Medical Education and Family Welfare department issued a circular stating that only its graduates could be recruited by the government as medical technologists. The Board of Technical Education then filed a writ petition, because the decision deprived its graduates of jobs.

The High Court in 2016 stated that graduates from all the institutes could apply and that the curriculum must be streamlined. But there was an appeal against the verdict.

Noted virologist Prof Nazrul Islam, who is also a member of the government's national technical advisory committee on Covid-19, told The Daily Star yesterday that it was surprising that the system had been dependent on voluntary labour.

Tackling outbreak first priority now

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"Our goal is to overcome this pandemic... We will work in the days to come to dispel all your doubts over coordination between the DGHS and other government agencies.

"I will try my best to ensure that the initiatives see progress. I will take steps in this regard," said Khurshid, former head of the surgery department at Dhaka Medical College.

About his recent comment that liability for corruption lies with every person in the country, he said, "Every individual is a measuring stick for corruption. If you are not an honest person, it will not be possible to eradicate corruption through laws or rules no matter what position you hold."

He sought cooperation from journalists in finding loopholes in the health sector.

About the VIPs who take treatment abroad, he said, "This is a matter of patriotism. The DGHS cannot change the mentality of the VIPs, VVIPs or any other person."

TRANSFER OF 28 SURGEONS

Prof Nasima Sultana, assistant director general at the DGHS, said, "Many staffs were sitting idle at the makeshift hospital at Bashundhara International Convention Center as the number of patients there was low.

Rayhan said nothing that breaks law

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had talks with the Malaysian authorities and will do what is the best," the envoy said.

Asked if the high commission would provide legal assistance to Rayhan, whose work permit has been revoked by the Malaysian authorities, Shahidul said, "The question of legal assistance comes only when the case goes to the court. We are trying to address the issue diplomatically. There is nothing to be concerned."

Meanwhile, lawyers for Rayhan yesterday failed to meet him.

The lawyers - Sumitha Shaanthinni Kishna (Chambers of Sumitha) and Selvaraja Chinniah (Messrs CR Selva) - went to the Malaysia's Department of Immigration at Putrajaya to meet Rayhan.

"But the head of immigration was at the parliament and was not able to give the necessary permission to meet our client," Kishna told this newspaper.

She said they had emailed the immigration department on 25 and 26 July, seeking permission to visit Rayhan.

"The immigration stated that they were only able to retrieve our emails today [yesterday] as they had some 100 emails to go through," Kishna said.

"We have requested that the immigration expedite their responses to our emails to enable us to meet our client as soon as possible," she said.

Rayhan, 25, who went to Malaysia in 2014 and had been working after completing his bachelor's degree, was the target of Malaysia's manhunt after his criticism against Putrajaya's detention of undocumented migrant workers in an Al Jazeera documentary titled "Locked Up in Malaysia's

Lockdown" was aired on July 3.

In the 26-minute video produced by Al Jazeera's 101 East team, he accused the authorities of racism against undocumented migrants, claiming that being an irregular immigrant in Malaysia is not a crime.

The documentary said the undocumented migrants were at risk during the pandemic when over 2,000 migrant workers were arrested during raids in areas of Kuala Lumpur that were placed under tight virus lockdowns.

Following the coronavirus outbreak, Malaysia enforced movement control order to curb the virus infections.

Meanwhile, a Malaysia-based rights group yesterday criticised the arrest of Rayhan as well as plans to deport him and blacklist him from re-entering the country, calling these "drastic measures".

In a statement, Lawyers for Liberty (LFL) said the actions against Rayhan were unwarranted as the immigration department had yet to explain his offence, reports Free Malaysia Today.

It also accused the authorities of retaliating against Rayhan's allegations of discrimination.

"We have scrutinised the statement made by Rayhan in the documentary and firmly restate that he has not said anything even remotely in breach of the country's laws," it said, adding that Rayhan was only venting his frustrations and concerns over the crackdown on migrants.

The LFL said this was against section 9(1)(c) of the Immigration Act 1959/63, which meant that his deportation on grounds of being undocumented could not stand.

It also urged the authorities to stop all actions against Rayhan.



A railway staffer sprays disinfectant on a train at the capital's Kamalapur Railway Station for the protection of passengers from novel coronavirus. The railways authorities said they were trying to ensure safe travel of Eid holidaymakers. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Number of tests keeps dropping

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testing facilities were expanded to different laboratories.

It has happened apparently as the daily test numbers have come down, said the experts.

Between June 15 and 30, the health directorate tested over 15,000 samples every day except on July 20 when 14,031 samples were tested. The highest 18,498 samples were tested on June 26 at 66 laboratories across the country, shows DGHS data.

In July, the authorities tested more than 15,000 samples only on four days. As many as 10,078 tests were carried out across the country on July 26 at 88 labs, which has been the lowest for the months of June and July.

The Covid-19 testing began in the country on January 21 and the first three cases were reported on March 8.

The experts said they have long been suggesting that the daily test number be raised to 20,000 as doing so would help know the real Covid-19 situation in the country.

It is difficult to get any idea on the virus transmission with the existing test numbers, they argue, adding that the average test number in Bangladesh was inadequate compared to the country's population and other coronavirus-hit neighbouring countries.

A country with a population of about 168 million, only 6,823 tests have been carried out against every one million people in Bangladesh, according to worldometer.info.

India has tested 12,171 samples per million people while it is 8,057 in

Pakistan.

Infectious diseases specialist Prof Ridwanur Rahman said the inadequate testing would only help community transmission of the virus.

"To check the transmission, you have to test all Covid-19 suspects and send them into isolation if they test positive. Otherwise, the community transmission will go up," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"People have lost confidence in the testing system and they consider it a trouble as it takes a long time to get the results," Prof Ridwanur said.

"Therefore, the authorities have to bring back people's confidence and encourage them to get tested," he added.

Echoing a similar view, medical scientist Dr Liaquat Ali said there was no alternative to testing people to fight Covid-19.

But long delays in getting the results and people's lack of confidence in the accuracy of the test results following some recent scams are the main reasons why many have become reluctant in getting tested, he said.

Dr Liaquat, also one of the eight members of Public Health Expert Divisional Advisors' Group, then suggested bringing variation in the tests.

Instead of depending only on the RT-PCR testing, he said, the government can introduce an antigen test to increase the number of Covid-19 tests.

"Once the authorities bring variation to the testing, people will get more options. Then they will feel encouraged to get tested as they will

get results within a short time," he added.

Asked about the reasons behind the decline in the daily test numbers, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) at the DGHS, said there was a lack of interest among people.

Speaking at yesterday's daily coronavirus briefing, she said the decrease in infection rate made people not to show up for the tests.

She claimed the IEDCR in its survey has found that the infection rate has gone down in the country.

DEATH TOLL NEARS 3,000

The DGHS confirmed 37 more deaths and 2,772 new Covid-19 cases after testing 12,423 samples in 24 hours till 8:30am yesterday.

With this, the death toll rose to 2,965 and the total number of infections 2,26,225, Prof Nasima said at the online briefing.

The death rate stood at 1.31 percent, she said.

Of the deceased, 26 were males and 11 were females. One was aged between 21 and 30, one between 31 and 40, seven were aged between 41 and 50, seven between 51 and 60, 12 between 61 and 70, eight between 71 and 80, and one was aged between 81 and 90, she said.

Of them, 24 were from Dhaka, five from Chattogram, three from Rangpur, two each from Khulna and Barisal, and one was from Mymensingh divisions.

Some 1,801 Covid-19 patients recovered in the 24 hours, taking the number of recovery cases to 1,25,683, Prof Nasima added.

Shahed bribed Chisty, got loan

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against the loan.

Without analysing any credit risk grading and checking Shahed's financial ability to repay the loan or his business performance, the corporate branch the next day sent a recommendation letter to the corporate division of the principal branch to sanction the Tk 2 crore loan.

The following day, the credit risk management division of the bank submitted a memo to the then executive committee chairman Chisty, detailing Shahed's financial state. Chisty approved the memo the same day.

On January 15, 2015, at the 21st meeting of the committee chaired by Chisty, the memo was produced and approved.

On January 18, the credit risk management division sent the loan approval letter to the Gulshan Corporate Branch.

On the same day, Shahed deposited

Tk 35 lakh in cash at the Bakshiganj Jute Spinners Ltd account with Farmers Bank at the Bakshiganj branch.

Chisty's son Rashedul withdrew the money over two days - January 18 and 20 - according to the ACC.

"In the enquiry it is found that there was no business relationship between Bakshiganj Spinners Ltd and Regent Hospital. Depositing Tk 35 lakh by the borrower before the issuance of loan makes it clear that Rashedul took the bribe and with the help of his father sanctioned the loan," reads the First Information Report (FIR).

On January 19, the loan was issued to Shahed upon the condition of keeping the MRI machine and Tk 1 crore FDR as collateral.

On the same day, the Gulshan corporate branch issued a Tk 2 crore pay order to MRI supplier Arby's Medical Equipment.

The loan was cleared through Shahjalal Islami Bank's Uttara branch on January 21, 2015.

ACC found that no documents regarding the purchase of the MRI were submitted to the bank, and neither had the bank kept the MRI as mortgage.

ACC's enquiry officer found that the loan was not used to purchase the MRI. "The money was laundered and the bank issued the loan without keeping collateral," said the FIR.

Shahed did not repay the loan. Later, the bank reconciled the loan with Tk 1 crore FDR. The total outstanding amount, including the loan and interest, stood at Tk 2.71 crore on July 15, 2020.

Last week, the ACC filed another case against Shahed and three others for misappropriating a Tk 1.51-crore loan from NRB bank.

He took the loan from the bank in November 2014.

Two 'robbers' killed in 'gunfight'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two alleged robbers were killed in a "shootout" with Rab members in Gazipur city early yesterday.

Their identities could not be known immediately.

The "gunfight" took place around 2:30am when a Rab team raided near the National Park area on Dhaka-Mymensingh road on information that some robbers gathered there, said Lt Commander Abdullah Al Mamun, company commander of Rab-1 in Gazipur.

Sensing the presence of Rab members, the criminals opened fire. Law enforcers retaliated, resulting in a "shootout", he claimed.

Two were hit by bullets while others fled. They were rushed to Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master General Hospital in Tongi where doctors declared them dead, the Rab official said.

Rab claimed to have recovered two firearms, four bullets, and two machetes from the spot.

A Rab member was also hurt in the incident, Rab claimed.

10-grader raped in Gaibandha

Six arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped by multiple assaulters in Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila early yesterday and six people, including an underaged boy, were arrested in connection with the incident.

AKM Mehedi Hasan, officer-in-charge of Gobindaganj Police Station, said the 10th grader had "eloped" with the boy on a motorcycle from her home in Naovanga village around 12:30am yesterday.

Five men of the same village intercepted them; took them to a house belonging to one of the five and raped the girl there, the OC said.

The two minors were set free around 2:00am after which they went to the police station around 3:00am to report the incident, the OC said. "We immediately conducted a raid at the village and arrested all the accused."

The arrestees are Anamul Haque, 30, Md Rezaul, 32, Md Dhalu, 27, Md Sumon Mia, 23, and Saddam alias Sujjan Kazi.

Police arrested the boy, also a minor, on suspicion that he knew the perpetrators and seemed to have knowingly wasted time while refuelling his vehicle, allowing the abductors to come to the scene.

Later, the victim filed a case against the accused, including the boy, said the OC.

The schoolgirl was sent to Gaibandha General Hospital for medical test and the accused were sent to Gaibandha to be produced before a court, he added.

Swechhasebak League leader dies after being stabbed by police informant

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A local Swechhasebak League leader died last night, over a week after he was stabbed allegedly by a police informant in Bogura.

Rokonuzzaman Roni, 33, publicity secretary of the organisation, died at Bogura Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital.

He and his nephew Rifatuzzaman were stabbed allegedly by police informant Sobahan in Malgram area on July 19.

Roni's elder sister Sharmin Akter Ruma filed an attempted murder case accusing Sobahan and five others.

Humayan Kabir, officer-in-charge of Bogura Sadar Police Station, said, "Muktar, Somrat, Munna, Rakib, Noman are accused of stabbing Roni and his nephew over a previous feud. We arrested Rakib two days after the attack and he admitted that Mukter stabbed Roni and his nephew."

Ruma told reporters that accused Sobahan is a police informant and had an enmity with her brother.

Zulfikar Rahman Shanto, secretary of Bogura Swechhasebak League, unit told the Daily Star that the attacker Sobahan is a notorious criminal and a police informant and he should be arrested immediately.

Sonaton Chakraborty, additional superintendent of police, however, said Sobahan was not a police informant.

Police teams are working to arrest him, he added.

A relief for female farmers

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"I don't need to face any hassles in this process. The Daraz team comes to our house, takes photos and videos of the cows, and after the sale, they take the cows on their own transport and hand over the money to us," said Madhu.

According to her, this way, she can save her time, money (for transporting the cattle to the local market) and other expenditures at the market (tips for each person accompanying the cows, etc.).

"Since we cannot sell all the cows in one market, the process repeats," she said.

Another cattle farmer, Sreemoti Milon Rani Ghosh, also sold two cows this time for Tk 1,45,000 (one for Tk 80,000 and the other for Tk 65,000), while in 2019, she had sold three. While many entrepreneurs are not able to sell their cows locally, Milon is happy about the price she got as, according to her, the amount is much better than what she gets from local brokers.

Along with the fair prices, women farmers also appreciate the fact that when they sell their cows online, they get the entire money at once, which they can use when necessary.

"When we sell to local brokers, they never pay the entire amount at once and sometimes try to pay less than the amount we agreed upon while selling, using the excuse of low profits," said 39-year-old Shila Begum of Sundarganj's

Chandipur. She has targeted selling two cows this time. Last year, she sold two for Tk 1,50,000.

Nahidul Islam, junior executive of Daraz Bangladesh, said that as of July 23, a total of 32 cows have been sold out of the 120 advertised on their platform since July 13.

However, despite the huge demand, people are not able to buy more cows due to limitations in the digital payment method.

E-commerce website "Amar Foods" has also been helping women farmers of Shorbojaya, a social business led by female farmers in Gaibandha's Sadullahpur, by selling their cattle through their site. Already, they have been able to sell 450 out of 500 cows of 75 female farmers, through this platform.

AGRO PRODUCTS GO DIGITAL

Apart from the bulls, at least 1,500 women from seven unions in Bogura's Gabtoli upazila have been selling their agro products on e-commerce sites under the MMWW project. They sell local hens, roosters and eggs, local ducks and eggs, chemical-free vegetable, puffed rice, Binni rice, lentils, milk, rice cakes and much more through e-commerce sites like Parmeeda, Market Bangla and Abaar.

Although the pandemic has impacted the businesses of rural farmers as they were forced to sell their products

at lower prices in the absence of wholesalers from outside districts, these female farmers have been selling goods four times a week on these platforms.

According to Narayan Chandra Roy, project coordinator of Association for Socio-Economic Advancement of Bangladesh (ASEAB), the implementing organisation of MMWW in Bogura, the products are sold on a pre-order basis and the buyers inform them of the required amount of each product at least three days before they want the delivery.

"There is a three-member committee in every union, and the members collect the goods from grassroots women farmers in exchange for cash and send those to the online buyers in Dhaka," said Narayan.

Shirine Begum, a 30-year-old entrepreneur in Gabtoli's Durgahata, said since the buyers have their own transport, the women do not have to go through that hassle.

"After selling the goods, they send our money directly to our bank accounts that we jointly opened for this purpose, and then, we distribute the money amongst ourselves," she said.

"This way, we are also getting fair prices compared to local markets and we don't need to bargain with men. We are being able to profit around Tk 5-10 on every kg of each item," she added.