

Dhaka assures Kathmandu of railway transit

The assurance comes from Bangladesh PM after Nepal premier calls her

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday assured her Nepalese counterpart KP Sharma Oli of providing rail transit to his country.

The Nepalese premier expressed gratitude to Hasina in this regard.

"Nepalese Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli phoned Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina around 5:00pm and asked for 50,000 tonnes of fertiliser from Bangladesh," PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said.

The Bangladesh PM agreed to provide the fertiliser to Nepal, he added.

During the 20-minute telephonic conversation, the two leaders put emphasis on further boosting bilateral



relations and cooperation in different sectors, the press secretary said.

They hoped that the preferential trade agreement (PTA) between the two countries would be signed to boost trade and commerce.

Hasina congratulated Sharma Oli for successfully combating the novel coronavirus in his country, Ihsanul said.

Adieu, Pranab

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An army contingent gave a guard of honour and a gun salute to the former president, who was the supreme commander of the armed forces for five years from July 2012.

Two separate wreaths on behalf of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen were laid before Mukherjee's portrait at his residence at 10, Rajaji Marg in central Delhi.

The wreaths were placed by Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Md Imran, who also handed over a message of condolence and rich tributes from Hasina to Mukherjee's daughter Sharmistha.

The Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi will hold a special condolence meeting this afternoon for Mukherjee, who played a stellar role for the cause of an independent Bangladesh and its international recognition.

In a break from the tradition of use of open gun carriage of the army because of Covid-19 protocols, Mukherjee's body was carried in a hearse from his residence to the Lodhi Road crematorium.

The former president died on Monday, weeks after his brain surgery for removal of a clot on August 10. Mukherjee had suffered a fall in the bathroom at his house.

The Indian government and many states have announced a seven-day official mourning. The West Bengal government declared closure of its offices yesterday as a mark of respect for Mukherjee, who was twice elected a lawmaker of the Lok Sabha from Jangipur constituency in Murshidabad district in the state.

Before cremation, Mukherjee's mortal remains were brought to his residence, 10, Rajaji Marg, from the army hospital where he breathed his last.

Indian President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were

among the top dignitaries who visited Mukherjee's residence and paid their last respects yesterday morning.

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat, Army Chief Gen M M Naravane, Air Chief Marshal R K S Bhaduria and Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh were among others who paid homage to him.

A seven-time parliamentarian and recipient of Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, Mukherjee was one of the most admired and respected political figures.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, BJP President JP Nadda, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, India's Finance and Health Ministers Nirmala Sitharaman and Harsh Vardhan respectively, Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and CPI's D Raja also paid their respects.

INDIA OBSERVES ONE-DAY NATIONAL MOURNING

Bangladesh will observe a one-day national mourning today in honour of the memory of the former Indian president.

The Cabinet Division issued a notification in this regard yesterday.

Marking the day, the national flag will be hoisted half-mast at all government, semi-government and autonomous offices, educational institutions and all government and non-government buildings and at all missions abroad.

Special prayers will be offered at places of worship across the country.

Many organisations, including India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IBCCI), mourned Pranab Mukherjee's death.

Abdul Matlub Ahmad, president of IBCCI, all board members and general members have expressed deep grief over the death of Pranab Mukherjee, a true friend of Bangladesh.

EC backtracks on RPO reform

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It also proposed renaming city corporation mayor to 'mahanagar sabha adhikari' or 'mahanagarpati', councillor to 'sadasya', among others.

While answering queries of reporters, Alamgir also said they would not bring changes to any fundamental issue of RPO 1972.

"We will not cut the power of the EC in any way," he said.

Earlier, the EC sent a proposal to the law ministry to change the name of Representation of the People Order 1972 into 'Representation of the People Act 2020'.

Law ministry sent back the draft law with some observations and the EC is working to fix the issues, according to Alamgir.

Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam said there was no scope to cut EC's power.

"There is a misunderstanding. Election Commission secretariat thought that some issues should be kept in rule instead of the law," he said.

"But I think all these provisions should be incorporated in the law," he said.

According to Rafiqul, EC would not change the title of RPO 1972 as the government has decided not to formulate new laws scrapping the old ones either enacted or promulgated

during the tenure of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Many were criticising EC's move to bring change in RPO and local government names.

In a "note of dissent", Election Commissioner Mahub Talukdar on August 24 differed with the EC's move to revise the RPO 1972, and the election-related laws of local government bodies.

Mahub said if the order was revised without incorporating a provision that empowers the EC to cancel the candidature of candidates, the commission would turn into a "cat", let alone a "toothless tiger".

"The name of the law [RPO, 1972] is a historically important document, and unique memorabilia of the country's independence."

"EC does not have any jurisdiction to change the names of local government bodies and the positions within them," he said.

Transparency International Bangladesh in a statement on August 27 criticised the EC for making the move to amend RPO without the provision that empowers the EC to cancel the candidature of candidates. It terms the move as "suicidal".

It also said changing names of the local government bodies was beyond EC's jurisdiction.

Pre-Covid fare

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In many cases, conductors were forced by passengers to carry more than the bus's capacity. "I have seen two such incidents today [yesterday]. When we tried to stop them, they [passengers] asked how will they commute amidst the scarcity of public transport..." he added.

In Chattogram, many bus operators were seen boarding more passengers than their capacity, risking passengers' healths, reported our correspondent from the port city.

Many passengers were seen standing on different public vehicles in Chawkbazar, Muradpur, Bahaddarhat, Sholoshahar Gate No 2, Oxygen and Karnaphuli Shaha Amanat Bridge areas. Almost two-third of the passengers were seen without facemasks.

Contacted, Khandaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said the situation was good today.

About the violation of guidelines, he said, "Most of the vehicles reinstated the previous fare. Those that did not, will do so in a day or two."

He said they had already sent letters to the operators to follow the guidelines set by the government and said they were monitoring the situation alongside the BRTA.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Bridges Ministers Obaidul Quader yesterday again urged transport operators to follow the guidelines for public interest.

He asked law enforcers and district administrations to remain vigilant and take action against violators.

He also asked the BRTA and the owners' association to take steps so that all bus operators show their fare charts.

The minister said this while talking to the officials of Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority through video conference.

Public transport services, including that of buses and minibuses, resumed on June 1 after more than two months of suspension.

Following demands made by transport leaders, the government hiked bus fares by 60 percent from June 1 on some conditions, including carrying 50 percent passengers against their capacity.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

A broken traffic light post lies on the footpath at the capital's Palashi intersection yesterday, obstructing movement of pedestrians in the area. This also hampers control of traffic at the busy intersection by police.

Jail straightaway, not rehabilitation

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They said they had moved from Vung Tau and Ho Chi Minh cities to Hanoi on their own to escape exploitation at their accommodations managed by labour brokers.

VICTIM OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

According to the migrants, Bangladeshi and Vietnamese manpower brokers, in connivance with Bangladeshi recruiting and travel agents, arranged fake job documents and sent them to Vietnam towards the end of last year and early this year.

The workers were promised regular jobs with monthly salaries of \$500-\$600 plus other benefits. They were charged Tk 4-5 lakh each.

The migrants claimed they were also forced into laundering money.

"Before leaving the [Dhaka] airport, we were given \$1,000 to \$5,000 each and asked to hand them to Bangladeshi brokers in Vietnam," said one of the 26, who were freed yesterday.

Once they landed, brokers took away their passports and sent them to different factories, instead of arranging their work permits.

The migrant workers then found themselves unemployed most of the time. They were also beaten up by Bangladeshi and Vietnamese brokers when they refused to stay and asked to return home.

Many of them complained to the police in Vietnam, but to no avail, said the returnees.

Since early July, they began traveling to the Bangladesh embassy in Hanoi seeking to return home. Some of them also staged sit-in near the embassy. Eventually, the embassy in cooperation with Vietnam police sheltered them in hotels before their repatriation.

About a dozen migrants this correspondent spoke to said they all had immigration clearance from the

Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) for jobs in Vietnam.

BMET Director General Shamsul Alam did not respond to queries on how the bureau verified the job contracts, presented by the recruiting agents, before issuing the clearances.

Talking to this daily, Bangladesh Ambassador to Vietnam Samina Naz said she wrote several times to the home and expatriates' welfare ministries on such human trafficking in the last two years.

The BMET never communicated with the embassy for verification of any companies in Vietnam before issuing immigration clearances, she said, adding that most Bangladeshi migrants were sent to that country with tourist and entrepreneur visas though they were lured with promises of permanent jobs.

Meanwhile, on July 9, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested three directors of recruiting agencies and identified six agencies involved in human trafficking to Vietnam. Those are Mash Career Service, JK Overseas Limited, Advent Overseas Limited, Sandhani Overseas Limited, and Al Noman Human Resource Limited, said Rab sources.

Rab also got names of eight Bangladeshi brokers in Vietnam -- Abdul Jabbar, Mostafa, Golam Azam Sumon, Kalpana, Azmeer, Milon, Shovon and Atik, said the sources.

Ambassador Samina Naz could not be reached yesterday to learn whether there was any move to catch the alleged human traffickers operating in Vietnam.

Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad late last week said the ministry formed a committee to probe how the BMET issued the immigration clearances without verifying jobs.

According to the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013,

the recruiting agent will bear the cost of repatriation and compensation to the affected migrant worker. However, the cost for repatriating the 107 migrants from Vietnam was borne by the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund.

Asked, Imran Ahmad said the recruiting agents must pay it, but now their condition was not well due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Asked about their punishment, he said, "We are not being so harsh at this moment but eventually, the agents responsible will surely face punishment."

Experts say these developments suggest the authorities were out to punish the victims, not the culprits.

Prof CR Abrar of Dhaka University's International Relations Department said if the Bangladeshis had violated any laws in Vietnam, actions could have been taken there. "But it appears there is no proof in this regard."

"The complaint that the migrants tarnished the country's image is vague. In fact, by arresting the returnee migrants, the government itself is tarnishing the country's image," he told this correspondent.

Given that the BMET is also at fault in the recruitment of these migrant workers in Vietnam, there should be a judicial investigation into the matter, the migration expert said.

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac's Migration Programme, said instead of rehabilitating the migrants, they were jailed, which is strange.

"Why are BMET officials responsible for issuing immigration clearances above the law?" he asked.

Shariful also said such arrest was nothing but an attempt to scare the migrants so that they don't speak up for their rights and to protect officials and agents responsible for their miseries.

Online editions of newspapers to get priority

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minister to take immediate measures to register the online versions of newspapers and pay the dues to newspapers.

They also raised different other related issues and requested the minister to solve those.

Regarding the meeting, the information minister said first of all, meetings are held with the Sampadak Parishad regularly. Such kind of a meeting was held yesterday.

"Today [yesterday] we have discussed especially so that online versions of newspapers can get registered soon. They [information ministry] also think that there is no need for much scrutiny to give registration to online versions of newspapers, especially the major ones," he said.

"Because the newspapers are being published following due process and scrutiny. Therefore, online versions of newspapers will be registered on a priority basis."

About the arrears for publishing government advertisements and supplements, the information minister said many newspaper bills are stuck at various ministries. In total, it will be several hundred crore of Taka.

"Discussions are going on about this so that the bills are cleared soon. The information ministry will issue letters in this regard. It's because the cabinet division had earlier urged all the ministries and departments to clear the arrears," Hasan Mahmud said.

Following this, the information ministry had cleared some arrears. But the amount was very negligible compared to the outstanding bills. That's why another letter will be issued, said the minister.

The minister said the bills should be paid soon. As the bills have to be paid, it will be more helpful for newspapers if they get the arrears now as they are in

crisis.

Naem Nizam, general secretary of Sampadak Parishad and also editor of Bangladesh Parishad, said they discussed how to resolve the crisis the media is facing and how soon online versions of the mainstream newspapers can get registered following the new national online media policy.

"The information minister also assured us of a speedy solution. Secondly, mass media around the world is now facing the crisis. Bangladesh is not exceptional. The minister said he will try and help solve this crisis. He said there is no alternative to state cooperation for the advancement of the media."

In his introductory speech at the beginning of the meeting, the information minister said the mainstream media has played a very responsible role during the epidemic. They are also going through crisis. Newspapers are being published and distributed all over the country despite the crisis. He thanked the Sampadak Parishad for this.

"The biggest thing is that the government and the media are working together during the pandemic. That's why efforts to spread propaganda didn't work."

In response to a question, he said the BNP itself is an obstacle to democracy.

Matiur Rahman, editor and publisher of Prothom Alo, Imdadul Haq Milon, editor of Kaler Kantho, Khandaker Muniruzzaman, acting editor of Sangbad, Enamul Hoque Chowdhury, editor of Daily Sun, Dewan Hanif Mahmud, editor and publisher of Bonik Barta, Mustafiz Shafi, acting editor of Samakal, and Shyamal Dutta, editor of Bhorer Kagoj, took part in the meeting apart from Naem Nizam.

Information Secretary Kamrun Nahar was also present at the meeting.

TIB STATEMENT

Venezuela's Maduro pardons opposition lawmakers

AFP, Caracas

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on Monday pardoned more than 100 lawmakers and associates of opposition leader Juan Guaido "in the interests of promoting national

reconciliation," the government said.

Guaido's assistant Roberto Marrero and lawmakers Gilber Caro and Renzo Prieto were among the names read out by Communications Minister Jorge Rodriguez live on state

television.

The three were released in Caracas on Monday night just hours after the announcement, according to opposition leaders and confirmed by AFP. Other detainees were also freed.

SINHA MURDER

3 accused placed on remand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A Cox's Bazar court placed three accused on a three-day remand each in one of the cases filed over the murder of Major (ret'd) Sinha Md Rashid Khan.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) prayed four-day remand for each of the accused but Judge Tamanna Farah of Senior Judicial Magistrate Court-4 in Cox's Bazar granted three-day remand for each.

The three accused -- Nurul Amin, Nizam Uddin and Ayas Uddin -- were also mentioned as witnesses in two other cases filed by police in connection with the killing incident.

Rab members produced the three before the court around 12:15pm for taking them into custody for the third time, said Rab's Senior Assistant Superintendent of Police Khairul Islam.

Before taking them to court, the three were taken to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital from jail for health check-up around 11:00am.

On August 9, a Rab team arrested the three from Marishbumia village for their alleged involvement in Sinha's killing.

Meanwhile, OC Pradeep was sent to Cox's Bazar District Jail after one day remand.

The investigation officer placed him before the court yesterday evening.

With his last remand, Rab had taken OC Pradeep a total 15 days remand in four phrases for quizzing.

'MURDERED' GIRL FOUND ALIVE

Two cops give explanation to N'ganj court

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Officer-in-Charge of Narayanganj Sadar Police Station Asaduzzaman and suspended sub-inspector Shamim Ala Mamun yesterday gave explanation to a court in connection to three accused confessing to raping and killing a class-V student, who was later found alive.

The two police officers appeared before the court of Narayanganj Judicial Magistrate Nurunnahar Yeasmin in the noon and submitted their written statement, said Asaduzzaman, inspector of the court police.

Accepting the statement, the court fixed September 27 for passing its next order, said the inspector.

Inspector Asaduzzaman could not say what exactly the two policemen explained in the statement.

On August 27, the court asked OC Asaduzzaman and SI Shamim, who was also the investigation officer of the case, to appear before it and explain the incident by yesterday.

The schoolgirl went missing on July 4. Her father filed a case with the police station on August 6 over abduction of his daughter.

Later, police arrested three accused -- Md Abdullah, 22, Md Rakib, 19, and Khalilur Rahman, 36.

On August 9, the accused testified under section 164 in courts of Narayanganj Senior Judicial Magistrate and Judicial Magistrate. In their confessional statements, the accused said they had killed the girl after raping her and dumped her body into the Shitalakkhya river, said police.

Later, the accused were sent to jail.

On August 24, a police team, however, found the girl alive in Kushiara area of Narayanganj's Bandar upazila, 49 days after she had gone missing.

On Monday, the SI was suspended over the incident.

Submit charts

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are charging higher than the fixed rate under the Medical Practice and Private Clinics and Laboratories (Regulation) Ordinance-1982.

Following the same writ petition, the HC on July 24, 2018, had directed that the private healthcare facilities must display the chart of their fees in public view.

Health secretary, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services and Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council had been asked to execute the directives.

The HC asked them to form a committee of experts to formulate guidelines to monitor clinics, hospitals and diagnostic centres under the Medical Practice and Private Clinics and Laboratories (Regulation) Ordinance-1982 within 60 days after getting the HC order.

The court also issued a rule asking respondents to explain why they should not be ordered to take steps for setting up ICU/CCU units in all general hospitals at the district headquarters.

It also asked respondents to explain why they should not be ordered to take measures so that licences are collected from the authorities concerned for establishing diagnostic centres and clinical laboratories.

Health secretary, DGHS director general, Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council, inspector general of police and director general of Rab had been made respondents.

Lawyer Bashir Ahmed appeared for the petitioner, while Deputy Attorney General Noor Us Sadik represented the government.