

ICT DEV INDEX

Bangladesh slips two notches

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh has slipped two notches down to 145th in the global ICT Development Index among 175 countries, according to a report published by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) on Tuesday.

In the Measuring the Information Society Report 2016, the Republic of Korea stood first with 8.84 points, followed by Denmark with 8.83 points while Bangladesh achieved only 2.35 points.

Bangladesh ranked 143th with 2.25 points in 2015, 145th with 1.97 points in 2014 and 146th in 2013.

The index is a composite measurement that ranks countries according to their level of ICT access, use and skills. The ITU started publishing the report in 2009.

State Minister for Telecom Tarana Halim refused to comment on the issue, while State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak could not be reached after several attempts.

The development index points for Bangladesh increases every year, but the growth could not keep pace with that of other countries, said industry experts.

Bangladesh has done very well in the use of mobile phones in the recent years, said Abu Saeed Khan, senior policy fellow at LIRNEasia.

But the country's achievement in internet use is poor, which is why Bangladesh ranked so low in the index, he said.

Among the neighbouring countries, SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Air, land ports alerted for Nasirnagar attackers

UNB, Dhaka

Police have alerted all the airports and land ports so that those involved in the attacks on the Hindus in Brahmanbaria cannot leave the country.

"Letters have been sent to different ports asking them to remain alert so that the culprits can't flee the country," Assistant Inspector General (Confidential) of the Police Headquarters Moniruzzaman said yesterday.

The alert was issued following a request from the Brahmanbaria district police.

M Mizanur Rahman, superintendent of police in Brahmanbaria, also wrote to the commanding officer of the Border Guard Bangladesh battalion-12 stationed in the district, requesting him to take steps so that the culprits could not cross the border, said Additional Superintendent of Police Iqbal Hossain.

On October 30, a group of religious zealots carried out attacks on the Hindus in Nasirnagar, vandalising around 100 homes and temples and looting cash and other valuables.

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Rohingya refugee Nur Sahara in the arms of a Rohingya man at Lambabil in Teknaf of Cox's Bazar yesterday. They had crossed the border into Bangladesh the night before. Sahara was crying in fear as she had seen a photojournalist wearing boots. She had witnessed men in boots torture people in her village across the border. The house, top right, where several Rohingya people had taken shelter the night before. Border Guard Bangladesh personnel patrolling the bank of the Naf river so that refugees cannot enter the country.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Refugees slipping in, getting help

FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh on Tuesday night by crossing the Naf river.

She and all her family members were together. But they had to split into small groups to enter Bangladesh illegally without being spotted by the border guards.

Like her, several thousand Rohingyas have entered Bangladesh over the last one week with the help of locals to escape persecution in Myanmar's Rakhine State, said locals in Teknaf.

Deeply concerned over the situation, Bangladesh foreign ministry yesterday summoned the Myanmar envoy in Dhaka, and asked him to tell his government to take urgent measures so that Muslim minorities in Rakhine State are not forced to seek shelter across the border.

Meanwhile, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has expressed grave concern over reports of serious human rights violations against Rohingya civilians in the ongoing security operation in Rakhine State.

Talking to these correspondents, Rashida, who is from a village in Zambunia of Maungdaw, said she entered Bangladesh along with her eight-year-old brother Nur Alam and her relative's six-year-old daughter Nur Sahara.

After crossing the border, Rashida had luckily chanced upon her aunt Mubina Khatun, who was accompanying the three, near Lambabil earlier in the morning.

Rashida and her family members reached the border four days ago. Later, they crossed the river by small boats and arrived at Hausher Dweep, which marks the Bangladesh border with Myanmar, on Tuesday morning.

But Border Guard Bangladesh personnel caught them along with 300 other Rohingyas.

"We spent the whole day at Hausher Dweep yesterday [Tuesday]. The BGB

members gave us rice, banana and buns. Later, they pushed our boats into Myanmar territory in the evening. But after a while, we came back with the help of Bangladeshi fishermen," said Rashida.

She said they crossed the river around 11:00pm on Tuesday, and spent the night at the house of an unknown person in Lambabil, a village on the river bank.

Asked, her aunt Mubina, who was taking the three to the slum near Kutupalong camp, said she along with her husband and two children came to Bangladesh from Myanmar six years ago by crossing the Naf river.

Later, she gave birth to two children in Bangladesh.

Now they live in the slum near Kutupalong camp. Her husband Nur Basar works as a day labourer. Mubina also showed the ID card she got during the last Rohingya census.

About the turbulent situation in Rakhine State, Rashida claimed it all began last month when "party men attacked Myanmar military personnel". But she couldn't say more about these "party men" whom the locals referred to as members of Myanmar's separatist outfit Rohingya Solidarity Organisation.

"Later, military personnel came to our village by helicopters and set fire to our houses," she said, adding that the army men had been detaining and torturing Rohingyas since the incident last month.

Locals said though the BGB is catching Rohingya trespassers and sending them back every day, many of them are coming back with the help of local fishermen and brokers.

These correspondents found 10 Rohingyas at the house of Shah Alam, an auto-rickshaw driver, on a hilltop at Lambabil village. They arrived there on Tuesday night.

Md Salim, one of the 10, said they entered Bangladesh with the help of

fishermen around midnight after BGB men pushed them back from Hausher Dweep.

Eight more Rohingyas took shelter at Mina Bazar, which is close to Lambabil.

Md Harun, a local journalist from Lambabil, said, "On Sunday and Monday, at least 1,500 to 2,000 Rohingyas entered Bangladesh. But the number was comparatively low yesterday [Tuesday]."

It would not have been possible for them to enter the country without the locals' help, Harun said.

He mentioned that some brokers are active in the bordering areas and are taking money from Rohingyas to help them cross the border and take shelter at different villages.

Locals said Rohingyas are taking shelter not only at Lambabil and Mina bazaar, but also at other villages or slums.

Asked about the Rohingya trespassers, Md Ibrahim, BGB commander at Whykong Border Outpost, declined to comment.

Yesterday, BGB caught around 200 Rohingyas while they were trying to enter Bangladesh illegally. The BGB members held them till evening and then sent them back to Myanmar.

BGB held a meeting with Myanmar's Border Guard Police (BGP) in Cox's Bazar. The Bangladesh side was led by Brig Gen Khondoker Farid Hossain, commander of Chittagong Eastern Zone, while the Myanmar team was headed by Tu San Lin.

Briefing journalists after the meeting, Farid said the Myanmar representatives told them that some Rohingyas were trying to trespass on Bangladesh territory. "But they [BGP] are discouraging them [Rohingyas]."

MYANMAR ENVOY SUMMONED
Kamrul Ahsan, secretary (bilateral and consular) at the foreign ministry, summoned Myanmar Ambassador Myo Myint Than, and conveyed to the

envoy the government's deep concern over the current situation.

At the meeting held at foreign ministry in the afternoon, Ahsan told the ambassador that desperate people from Rakhine State are entering Bangladesh, seeking safety and shelter across the border, said a ministry press release.

"Despite our Border Guards' sincere effort to prevent the influx, thousands of distressed Myanmar citizens, including women, children and elderly people, continue to cross the border into Bangladesh. Thousands more have been reported to be gathering at the border crossing," he said.

Ahsan urged Myanmar to help Bangladesh ensure integrity of its border and take measures to bring back normalcy in Rakhine State so that those who have already crossed border or are waiting to cross it can go back to their villages without fear.

He also called upon the Myanmar government to give due consideration to the demand from the international community to conduct impartial probe into the allegations of indiscriminate use of force and human rights violations in the ongoing military operation in Rakhine State.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh government has asked all its envoys around the world to brief the officials in their countries of stay about its position on the Rohingya issue and remove misunderstanding, if any, on why it doesn't want to host any more Myanmar citizens.

They have been advised to highlight that Bangladesh now hosts nearly half a million documented and undocumented Rohingya refugees since 1991 and has not deported any Rohingyas.

OIC WORRIED

The OIC has expressed grave concern at the deteriorating situation in Rakhine State and reports of serious human rights violations, including torture, rape and summary executions,

against Rohingya civilians in the ongoing security operation.

It pointed out that destruction of homes and mosques has forced tens of thousands to flee their villages, and subsequent blockade in the region has created an acute shortage of food, water and essentials, according to a press statement on the OIC website.

OIC Secretary General Yousef A Al-Othaimeen called for an immediate cessation of violence and urged the Myanmar authorities to ensure that the security services act in full compliance with the rule of law.

He also urged the Myanmar government to abide by its obligations under international law and human rights covenants, and take concrete steps to prevent further deterioration of the crisis.

KSA wants

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Prof Abul Kalam Azad, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, said it is true that the public sector in Bangladesh has a shortage of consultants and specialised doctors but there are many doctors in the private sector who can take the opportunity.

So, it is surely a good news for them, he said.

Recruitment of Bangladeshis by the Kingdom had been shrunk between 2008 and 2014.

Saudi Arabia, which is home to some 15 lakh Bangladeshis, resumed recruiting Bangladeshi female domestic workers early last year and male workers since the middle of this year.

However, Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) recently complained to the expatriates welfare ministry that the Saudi embassy in Dhaka is refusing to issue visas to male workers as the recruiting agencies are not sending at least 25 percent female workers simultaneously as decided earlier.

Cargo handling in a shambles

FROM PAGE 1

machines were not installed before the export of vegetable picked up in winter.

Exporters said the airport also needs pallets and containers.

Mahbubul Anam, president of Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association, said the cargo handling situation remained almost unchanged due to shortage of ground handling staff in the cargo village and lack of required equipment and machinery.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines, solely responsible for ground handling, was supposed to recruit 300 staff, including cargo loaders, but so far it appointed only 40, Mahbubul said.

"Although construction of the separate shed for garment items by the BGMEA mitigates the problem to some extent ..., " said Nasir Hossain, vice-president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Nasir said the 8,000sqft shed reduced delivery time for imported samples of garment items significantly but just one shed was not enough for storing all goods as tonnes of garment products are exported and imported through the airport.

"Previously, it required 10 days and in some cases even more for delivery of such goods," he said, adding that this was due to a section of officials at the cargo village taking a long time in the name of inspecting those.

"Now it takes only three-four days. The ideal time for delivery is within

one or two days of landing," Nasir said.

He also said the guarding of the sheds also reduced theft incidents significantly.

Still, there are incidents of small thefts as sometimes goods go missing from the package of garment samples.

Foyez Ahmed, proprietor of Tahura International, a C&F agent at the airport, said incidents of theft could not be removed completely but it has halved.

"Last month, one of my clients sent 5,332 pieces of shirts worth \$10,664 to Riyadh, but 2,000 pieces were missing when the consignment reached the buyer's store," Foyez said, adding that he did not lodge any complaint as he would have had to do it before the shipment.

The trouble in export and import through the airport began this time around when Australia imposed a ban on direct cargo from Dhaka to Australia on security ground in December last year.

The UK and Germany came up with similar kinds of bans in March and June this year.

The UK slapped the ban on March 8 after experts from the UK and the US inspected the Dhaka airport twice in November and December last year and found "serious security lapses and risks".

They found lapses in screening with x-ray and Explosive Trace Detector (ETD) machines; London-bound air cargo left unprotected and unguarded on the airside; visible

lapses in supervision; non-implementation of Corrective Action Plan (CAP), and manpower and equipment crises.

Sources said the security has improved significantly as British firm Redline Aviation Security Ltd has already trained more than half of the 552 screeners and security personnel of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh.

In a bid to boost security and dispel the fears of foreign governments, Bangladesh has approved a Tk 89 crore project to buy new equipment for the Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet airports. The project is scheduled to be implemented by the end of 2016.

Under the project, two sets of explosive detection system, six sets of liquid explosive detection system, eight sets of dual view x-ray scanning machines, 14 sets of dual view x-ray scanning machine for cabin bags, nine sets of under-vehicle scanning machines, 14 sets of explosive trace detectors, five barrier gates, and four sets of flap barriers would be bought.

Sources in the Caab said some of the equipment and machines would be in place by January next year while procurement and installation of the rest would be complete by June.

The ban on direct cargo from Bangladesh to the UK, Germany and Australia is still in place. As a result, cargo heading for the UK, Australia and Germany are re-screened in a third country.

This has increased the cost of exports and is hurting export of

perishable goods as the re-screening is time-consuming.

The foreign teams who visited the airport last year were concerned with cargo screening and management at the airport handled by Biman.

The British experts talked about improving the security at the airport, especially at the cargo village. The German team too was not satisfied with the security system.

But situation on the ground has improved little, even though the government hired Redline eight months ago.

The country's overall exports were valued at \$34.24 billion in the last fiscal year against imports of nearly \$45 billion.

Germany is our second largest export destination after the US. Bangladesh exported goods worth \$4.99 billion to Germany in 2015-16.

The UK is the third largest export destination. In the fiscal 2015-16, Bangladesh exported goods worth \$3.80 billion there.

Australia is one of the important emerging markets for Bangladesh. In the fiscal 2015-16, Bangladesh exported goods worth \$705.64 million to Australia.

Of the total export to Germany and the UK, 95 percent and 80 percent were garment items.

The UK is also a major destination for perishable items such as vegetables, and shrimps, owing largely to the high number of Bangladeshis living there.

If the situation doesn't improve,

other countries in the EU are likely to impose bans on direct air cargo from Bangladesh.

The EU accounts for nearly 60 percent of Bangladesh's exports, which means any ban from the EU will leave a disastrous impact on the garment sector.

Officials of Biman claimed that the situation has improved "remarkably" as they have cleared several scrap aircraft parked in the cargo village area, disposed of 89.6 tonnes of goods lying around in the village for last several years, semi-automated the cargo warehouse, rented things like cartons, pallets, narrow isle stacker, and outsourced a good number of trained workforce.

"With such steps, remarkable improvement has been made in the cargo village," said Biman's General Manager (public relations) Shakil Meraz.

Biman in an email response to The Daily Star's queries on Tuesday said due to concerns regarding proper scanning of goods and security at the warehouse and the apron, which are controlled by the Caab, the direct cargo to UK was banned.

Shakil also said Caab appointed Redline, security company of the UK, and was closely working with it to overcome the shortcomings.

On the shortage of manpower and equipment, he said Biman Board was working on a new organogram and procuring adequate number of equipment for cargo operations. "Hopefully it would be completed by this

year."

He mentioned that against the requirement of eight scanning machines, currently four were working in the cargo village.

On the incidents of theft, he said the situation would improve once Biman installs CCTV cameras to cover the entire cargo village by November 30.

About recruitment of around 300 ground handling staff, he said hopefully they would be recruited by this month as they were waiting for their viva test to be done.

Shakil said they had not received any allegations of artificial crisis of equipment and staff taking bribes. "If we receive any authentic report against anyone, stern action will be taken against the person concerned," he added.

Director of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport group captain MK Zakir Hassan said the security in the cargo village area was absolutely fine.

When a bulk of goods is taken out of the secure area for loading, a security personnel follows it until loading into aircraft, he added.

With complaints from different quarters from home and abroad, the government formed a seven-member committee headed by Abul Kalam Azad, principal secretary to the prime minister, to improve the services at the airport.

(Refayet Ullah Mirdha contributed to the report)