

BENAPOLE LANDPORT

# 24-hr operation starts on Aug 1

SUBRATA ACHARYA, Kolkata

Import and export of goods through the Benapole-Petrapole land ports will be round the clock from August 1.

As of now goods-laden trucks can cross the border from 7:00am to 7:00pm six days a week except on Friday.

Once the new system is introduced, border trade would continue 24/7. It would cut the time lag on the border and help reduce the prices of goods imported and exported through the land ports.

Rahul Mahato, deputy commissioner of the Indian Department of Customs (Petrapole), has confirmed this.

He said Bangladesh has also started preparations to introduce trade operations 24/7 from August 1 onwards.

Sources said Deputy Commissioner of Bangladesh Department of Customs at Benapole Shakila Parvin informed Rahul Mahato that they had already completed their preparations on July 24.

The governments of the two countries had earlier finalised the issue of introducing round-the-clock trade at the border. However, infrastructural problems along the border were big obstacles that needed to be settled on an emergency basis.

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The higher authorities of the governments kept putting pressure on their respective customs departments to quickly improve the infrastructural obstacles since the first week of July. As a result, the customs departments along the Benapole-Petrapole border decided to start trade 24/7 within a month.

Everyone involved in import, export and international trade has so far been happy with the new arrangements and the progress made to that end.

Usually, hundreds of trucks get stranded on both sides of the border and create a serious hassle for international trade. The situation is likely to improve significantly with the introduction of the new system, according to the people concerned.

Leader of the Clearing and Forwarding Agents' Association in Petrapole Kartik Chakraborty told The Daily Star that it was a historic decision in expanding commercial relations between the two countries.

He said every day a huge amount of money was being wasted due to delay at the ports. On average, 350 trucks enter Bangladesh and 150-200 trucks enter India every day. Besides, 2,000 to



The photo taken yesterday shows the high-voltage power cables cleared of the vegetation by authorities in Bashabo near Khilgaon Flyover. The Daily Star published a picture of the cables, inset, weighed down by creepers on Thursday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## CJ says he'll keep talking for the sake of judiciary

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha yesterday said if anyone thinks that he makes "political statements", he will continue to do so for the sake of the judiciary.

"If anyone thinks that my statements are political then I'll do that more for the sake of the judiciary," he told a programme at the Supreme Court Auditorium.

The programme was arranged in honour of the country's first female judge, Nazmun Ara Sultana, who has gone into retirement.

"Honourable [Law] Minister, I'm telling you the main building of the Supreme Court is in very bad shape...rainwater drops on the chair I sit on, while the main record room of the High Court and the Appellate Division is also situated in this building," the chief justice said.

Law Minister Anisul Huq was also present on the occasion.

"The proposal for building a new annex building is still pending with Eneec. The present building won't sustain for more than five to six years. One day we'll have to deliver justice sitting in an open space if the [proposed] 20-storey annex building is not constructed soon. Honourable Minister, how will the judiciary continue?" he questioned.

Addressing the programme, Anisul Huq said, "Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana is part of history of the country and its judiciary. Following in her footsteps, many women have taken up this profession. Now there are 24 percent female judges in the country."

## Third time is not a charm

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to Pakistan and he returned home and went back to politics.

He was also blessed by the constitutional amendment in 2010 that removed the limit on former prime ministers to hold office for only two terms, allowing Nawaz to run for office a third time.

He was elected as prime minister for third term in 2013 following his party PML-N's win in the election.

Nawaz became the first prime minister in the 70-year history of Pakistan to be elected thrice. But he could not complete even a single term. None of his predecessors was able to do so in the last seven decades.

He was first elected premier in November 1990. His government collapsed after the then president dissolved the parliament in April 1993. After he returned to power next month following the SC's verdict, Nawaz called a fresh election in August 1993 in which he faced defeat to Benazir Bhutto.

He became prime minister for the second term in 1997. But he continued to be at loggerheads with the judiciary, the president and also the chief of army. He forced President Farooq Leghari to resign and Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah was ousted.

But his conflict with the then army chief general Pervez Musharraf caused his downfall in October 1999. Musharraf grabbed power ousting Nawaz who was then exiled to Saudi Arabia.

In the past, he was able to make a comeback. But the way his third term as prime minister came to an end on Friday has put his future in Pakistani politics in uncertainty. A murky fate now awaits Nawaz and his two sons and a daughter.

In the unprecedented verdict, the SC found him guilty of concealing information about his assets abroad in

his nomination paper submitted to the Election Commission seeking candidacy in the 2013 general election.

Soon after he was declared disqualified from holding the office of the premier and the membership in parliament, Nawaz resigned from the office.

### INVESTIGATION TO CONTINUE

But this did not bring an end to the story as the judicial proceeding against Nawaz and his family members will continue.

The SC also ordered the anti graft body to file cases against Nawaz, his two sons and one daughter and to investigate the allegation of illegally amassing of the wealth which was revealed by reports leaked from the Panama-based law firm of Mossack Fonseca.

In Friday's verdict which is a continuation of the apex court's April verdict, the court ordered the anti-graft body, National Accountability Bureau to submit its report before the Accountability Court within six months from the date of the judgement.

In preparing and filing the cases, the anti graft body shall consider the material already collected during the course of investigation conducted earlier by the joint investigation team following the April verdict of the SC, the court said.

It said the Accountability Court shall take appropriate action against them if it finds any deed, document or affidavit filed by or on behalf of Nawaz, his family members or others to be fake, false, forged or fabricated.

The apex court also requested the chief justice of Pakistan to nominate a SC justice to supervise and monitor implementation of Friday's verdict in letter and spirit and oversee the proceedings conducted by the anti-graft body and the Accountability Court.

In view of Pakistan's journalist Zahid Hussain, the verdict is a serious blow to dynastic politics in Pakistan

that has been the biggest impediment to the development of democratic institutions and values in the country.

"But such extreme action against the entire family and a consensus ruling came as a shock not only to the government but also to those outside," he said in a write up published in Dawn yesterday.

"There doesn't seem much chance of his return to power, but one is not sure if the family rule is over," he wrote.

The debate now is whether Nawaz's disqualification is permanent or temporary.

He however is trying to retain his influence in Pakistan's politics. He is still the chief of the PML-N, the party holding the majority seats in the parliament.

His younger brother, Shahbaz Sharif, is set to become the new prime minister. His party's dominance in other provinces in Pakistan was not disturbed by the apex court's verdict.

Nawaz Sharif was picked by Gen Ziaul Haq in August 1988, the Pakistan Muslim League split into two factions, with Sharif taking charge of PML, which later came to be known as PML-N.

Over the years, he has consolidated his position in Pakistan politics. He and his family members have been accused of illegally amassing massive wealth in the name of family business. Finally, the Panama Papers where name of his family was mentioned caused his downfall.

## ACC yet

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The court also ordered a criminal probe into the Sharif family over allegations stemming from the Panama Papers' leaks regarding international offshore companies.

On April 7, 2016, ACC formed a committee to find whether there were mentions of any Bangladeshi citizen with offshore accounts in the leaked Panama Papers.

The three-member committee led by ACC Deputy Director SM Akhtar Hamid Bhuiyan was tasked with gathering detailed information about the accounts opened there by any Bangladeshi citizens named in the documents.

On May 10, 2016, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) published the second list of the offshore entities and highlighted three new companies, 14 new addresses and a host of names with links to Bangladesh.

The data, collated by the ICIJ, comes from the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca and includes information about companies, trusts, foundations and funds incorporated in 21 tax havens. The leak caused a concentrated global scrutiny into offshore banking and tax evasions.

When contacted, Akhtar Hamid declined to make any comment.

Asked about the delay, ACC Chairman, Iqbal Mahmud, said, "We are waiting to get complete information [from other countries] about them through two channels."

He said the ACC has sent a Mutual Legal Assistance Request to different countries seeking information about the 11 persons and got information about some of them from the UK and USA.

"We also sought information through the Foreign Ministry but we did not get an adequate response yet," he said adding, "The information we

received so far is not enough to proceed further."

Asked how much time it would take to collect the full information, he said, "It is difficult to tell as getting information depends on the response from other countries."

Queried about the next steps, he said, "Four agencies are working in the anti-money laundering issue. After receiving information, we will scrutinise those and determine which agency will work on it," he said.

Contacted, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director, Transparency International Bangladesh, said, "Although one has to wait to see... the end result, including the political fallout of the Nawaz Sharif's case, countries including Bangladesh, bedeviled by illicit accumulation and transfer of corrupt money, have much to take home."

To say the least, it reemphasized the importance of the political demand and commitment on the one hand and institutional strength and effectiveness on the other, to ensure accountability irrespective of status and identify of the corrupt."

"Among many reasons for lack of progress in ACC's efforts to bring to justice Bangladeshi nationals involved in illicit financial transfers including those who figured in Panama Papers is the highly sophisticated nature of the crime and complex processes involved in collecting evidence that ACC may not yet be fully prepared," he said.

"More importantly, there has hardly been any collaborative effort on the part of other relevant institutions, especially Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit of Bangladesh Bank, Attorney General's Office, National Bureau of Revenue and the ACC to take full advantage of Mutual Legal Assistance under UN Convention against Corruption," he added.

## 'All US' within missile range

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Weapons experts said the altitude and flight time of Friday's missile suggested it was significantly more powerful than the July 4 test, with a theoretical range of around 10,000 kilometres (6,200 miles) meaning it might be able to reach east coast US cities like New York, depending on the payload size.

"North Korea seems to have made a logical step forward, as it tries to perfect the technologies to build and field an operationally-viable ICBM that can threaten the mainland United States," said Michael Elleman, missile defence specialist at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Kim Dong-Yub, a defence analyst at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies at Kyungnam University, said the North may have succeeded in miniaturising warheads down to 750 kilograms (1,650 pounds).

"If the missile carries a 750 kg payload, its range could be 10,000 kilometres. Taking into account the Earth's rotation, it means it could reach not only the western cities but New York and Washington as well," he told AFP.

Tillerson said Pyongyang's main ally Beijing, together with Moscow, bore responsibility for the growing threat from Pyongyang.

"As the principal economic enablers of North Korea's nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development programme, China and Russia bear unique and special responsibility

for this growing threat to regional and global stability," he said.

Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said he held telephone talks with Tillerson and agreed on the need to put "the heaviest possible pressure" on North Korea.

"We confirmed that we will closely cooperate in adopting a fresh UNSC (UN Security Council) resolution, including severe measures, and working on China and Russia," Kishida told reporters.

In a standard response to the test, Beijing urged restraint by all sides, after the US and South Korea conducted a live-fire exercise using surface-to-surface missiles.

The heads of the US and South Korean militaries also discussed "military response options" after North Korea's launch, the Pentagon said.

South Korea said the test had prompted it to speed up deployment of a US missile defence system, despite consistent protests from China that the programme would destabilise the region.

The THAAD (missile defence) system deployment cannot solve South Korea's security concerns, nor can it solve the problems facing the Korean peninsula," China's ministry of foreign affairs said in a statement yesterday.

North Korea's unrelenting pursuit of its missile and nuclear programmes poses a thorny policy challenge for Trump, who is at loggerheads with Beijing over how to handle Kim's

regime.

Trump has repeatedly urged China to rein in its recalcitrant neighbour, but Beijing insists dialogue is the only practical way forward.

## Kingpins remain unpunished

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Some 3,500 cases have been filed across the country after the formulation of Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012. However, only 30 criminals have been convicted so far.

According to the "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2016" prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Bangladesh reported just 10 to 15 convictions a year in human trafficking cases. It was way below the conviction rate (50 to 80) in its neighbour Nepal, the report said.

Such a slow pace of trial keeps frustrating the victims as the Bay of Bengal continues to be a hotspot of human trafficking over the years.

About 1.5 lakh people were trafficked out through this route alone in the last four years. Around 1,500 of them died before they could reach their destinations.

In May 2015, bodies of over 200 trafficking victims were dug out from mass graves in the deep jungles of Malaysia and Thailand. Many of them were Bangladeshis, according to a report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

European Union agency Frontex says Bangladesh is now among the top countries of origin for illegal immigrants in Europe with their number hitting 7,899 in the first six months of this year.

An EU delegation during their

Dhaka visit in April claimed that around 80,000 illegal Bangladeshi migrants were staying in Europe.

Meanwhile, speaking at a consultation meeting at the city's Brac Centre Inn yesterday, National Human Rights Commission Bangladesh Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque suggested that the government short-list the top 25 trafficking "godfathers" in the country for their immediate arrests.

Human trafficking is a heinous crime and "extreme form of human rights violation". But the government is not doing much to curb it, he said.

It has to overlook powerful and political links and make a list of the top criminals immediately, he added.

Brac organised the event, titled "Situation Analysis of Human Trafficking and Irregular Migration", to mark today's 'World Day against Trafficking in Persons'. It was chaired by the organisation's Senior Director Asif Saleh.

Addressing the government, migration expert Prof CR Abrar said, "You don't have to try 1,200 or 200 people. Just find out five big fish and punish them."

He said awarding adequate punishment to those big fish would set an example and help control human trafficking in the country.

Officials working to fight the global menace often cite an example of Thailand where a court sentenced an army general for his active role in the

crime. They feel the need for a firm commitment on the part of Bangladesh government to punish the culprits.

After remaining stagnant at "Tier 2" in the US Trafficking in Persons reports for the last five years, Bangladesh has recently slid to "Tier 2 Watch List", due to poor investigation and prosecution in the country.

Attending the event at the Brac Centre Inn, experts also said the government should handle the issue with a stronger hand for unmasking the trafficking kingpins, who remain out of the reach of the law.

Referring to police statistics, Brac Migration Programme head Shariful Hasan said about 3,500 cases have been filed over human trafficking since 2012.

Jabed Ahmed, additional secretary of Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment, claimed that the government has taken many initiatives to tackle the crime. He, however, stressed the need for more coordination between different ministries in this regard.</