

Russia hit with new US sanctions over nerve agent attack

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday imposed new sanctions on Russia over the attempted assassination of a former spy in Britain using a lethal nerve agent.

The sanctions include halting foreign aid to Russia, blocking the sale of items or services related to defense and national security, and banning any

government credit support for any exports to Russia.

However, sales and services related to space launches, both commercial and government, will continue.

And the State Department has issued a non-specific "partial waiver" on the sanctions, a move which could dull their impact.

The sanctions, first announced

August 8, are a response to the March 4 failed attempt to kill former Russian intelligence agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia Skripal using Novichok, a military-grade nerve agent developed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The British government says the attack in Salisbury, England was undertaken by Russian operatives.

Govt relaxes experience requirement

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demanding improved road safety.

An eminent transport expert said the decision would make the roads riskier.

As per the Motor Vehicle Ordinance-1983, a person needs to get a learner's licence for three months before getting the licence to drive light vehicles like cars.

According to the ordinance, large microbus and pickup are medium-sized vehicles while bus and truck are heavy.

Apart from experience, existing procedures that has to be followed to get medium and heavy vehicles' driving licence will remain unchanged, the gazette said.

Moreover, a person having professional driving licence for light vehicles and one-year experience can now drive medium-sized vehicles. Similarly, a person having professional driving licence for medium-sized vehicles can operate heavy vehicles until December 31, it said.

"The government is issuing such

directives for the sake of people's interest as well as to keep the movement of passenger and goods-laden vehicles normal in the backdrop of inadequate number of people holding medium and heavy vehicles' driving licence, compared to the number of those vehicles in the country," reads the gazette notification.

Prof Moazzem Hossain, former director of Accident Research Institute (ARI) of Buet, said the government should have taken a programme to train the drivers before providing them with licences.

"If you give them a licence by relaxing the conditions, it means you are giving them a licence to kill," he told The Daily Star last night.

"It can't serve people's interest," he added.

Eminent road safety campaigner Ilias Kanchan said, "I won't oppose it. However, they [drivers] should be given short training and they should go through tests before getting licence for heavy vehicles."

Nepali probe panel trashes media report

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"The sole purpose of the Accident Investigation Commission is to find the probable cause and try to prevent further accident of similar nature in future."

The probe is ongoing and the report is not complete, said the commission formed by the Nepalese government after the US-Bangla plane crashed in Tribhuvan International Airport on March 12.

The Kathmandu Post, which claimed to have a copy of the report, yesterday said Captain Abid was going through tremendous personal mental stress and anxiety, and a series of erroneous decisions on his part led to the crash of flight BS211.

The paper said the pilot was smoking inside the cockpit during the one-hour flight to Kathmandu from Dhaka and he was disoriented.

It said, "The investigation of the US-Bangla Flight 211 concluded that the ATC's [Air Traffic Control] handling of the flight was not a significant contributing factor to the crash. However, the report stated that some air traffic management procedural lapses were noted on the part of the crew at the control tower."

Aviation experts in Bangladesh have raised questions about the motive behind the report, which blamed the pilot without touching on issues like the conversation between the ATC and the pilot.

The Kathmandu Post report was concocted, Chief of Aircraft Accident Investigation Group of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) Captain Salahuddin M Rahmatullah told reporters at his Dhanmondi home yesterday.

A six-member delegation, led by Salahuddin, represents Bangladesh in the probe commission.

The Kathmandu Post published the news at a time when the investigation is halfway through and the commission is yet to formally make public any information about the probe.

"I didn't find any truth after going through it [the Kathmandu Post report]," said Salahuddin, also a former principal operations inspector (POI) appointed by the CAAB for US-

Bangla Airlines.

"We have just started analysing the Cockpit Voice Recorder. We cannot come to any conclusion before completing the probe," he said, adding that it could take four to five months to complete the probe. "There's no possibility of publishing it before December."

He said he had called the chairman and member-secretary of the commission and requested them to issue a rejoinder and take measures against the newspaper.

US-Bangla Airlines termed the Kathmandu Post report baseless and irrelevant. There might be two reasons behind publishing of such a report before the official report. One is to defame the airlines concerned and its crew and the other is to hide the truth, the carrier said in a statement signed by Kamrul Islam, general manager (marketing support and public relations) of the airlines.

Apart from Bangladesh and Nepalese officials, the investigation commission includes representatives from Bombardier, the Canadian maker of the plane, the UK-based engine supplier, officials of Transport Safety Board of Canada, and two psychiatrists. It started the decoding process of the plane's black boxes on April 23.

The plane carrying 67 passengers and four crew members burst into flames after missing the runway and crashing into a football pitch during its second landing attempt. The crash killed 27 Bangladeshis, 23 Nepalese and 1 Chinese. At least 20 passengers survived.

WHAT THE POST SAID

The Kathmandu Post quoting "Nepali investigators' report" said throughout the flight Capt Abid was erratic that marked a departure from his usual character, which should have immediately raised red flags.

It said the pilot demonstrated complacency and gross negligence of procedural discipline.

Six minutes prior to landing, he had confirmed that the plane's landing gear was down and locked. "Gears down, three greens [cockpit light indicating gears down and locked]," the pilot said, according to the Post.

Slow-vehicle ban to be strictly enforced

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meeting was held nearly 10 months ago.

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan, also the executive president of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, State Minister for Rural Development and Cooperatives Mashiur Rahman Ranga, also the president of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners' Association, Dhaka South City Corporation Mayor Sayeed Khokon, Inspector General of Police Mohammad Javed Patwary, secretaries of several ministries, divisional commissioners, and top ministry and police officials, among others, joined yesterday's meeting.

"We have discussed for two hours and took some decisions unanimously," Quader said while briefing the media.

When journalist reminded him that many of yesterday's decisions had already been taken at the previous meeting, the minister claimed that 80 to 90 percent of three-wheelers and other slow vehicles no longer ply the highways.

"There is a lot of improvement in

sight. However, everything will not be changed overnight," he said.

After the previous meeting, Quader had said the government would make a decision on so-called "seating service" buses within a couple of weeks.

Asked why the decision has not been made yet, he said, "The matter is now with RTC [Regional Transport Committee] which will hold a meeting in this regard in the first week of next month. Please wait for a few more days."

OTHER DECISIONS

The Council yesterday directed the authority concerned to formulate regional transport committees in districts which have no such committees. It also asked for holding regular committee meetings.

Claiming that 90 percent illegal bumpers of buses, trucks and covered vans had already been removed, Quader said their drive against such parts of vehicles would continue.

He said a committee, headed by Abdul Malek, additional secretary of the road transport and bridges ministry, had been formed to formulate a policy

on the operation of easy bikes. It was asked to come up with its report by September 20.

Besides, he said they would write to the finance ministry to ensure all opportunities the transport sector deserved as an industry.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) would continue its special programmes and its office would remain open from 9:00am to 9:00pm every day except Friday until further notice, he said. The BRTA would also increase its drives against unfit vehicles and drivers who violate traffic rules.

"We won't allow any Leguna [human hauler] type vehicles on national highways," he said, adding they would ensure that no vehicles crossed the 80km speed limit on highways.

He also thanked the bus owners in Dhaka city for taking steps to stop contract-basis bus services and asked them to repair their vehicles next months.



Rezaul Karim

Pushed off

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No case was filed when this report was filed around 11:00pm.

Last month, the driver, his helper and the supervisor of Hanif Paribahan bus threw North South University student Saidur Rahman Payel into a roadside canal after he was injured while getting into the vehicle.

The supervisor, Mohammad Johnny, revealed this in his confessional statement to a magistrate.

Two brothers

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hospital. Talking to The Daily Star, he said his fellow party activist Ramjan along with his sibling and another man was riding a motorbike on his way home.

All of a sudden, a group of criminals swooped on the bikers in Choto Darogar Hat area of the highway and stabbed the duo indiscriminately, leaving them badly injured.

They were rushed to CMCH around 8:50pm where doctors declared Ramjan dead. About an hour later, Srijan died of his wounds, said the ASI.

Locals said the third biker escaped the attack unhurt. Police, however, could not confirm his identity.

Mobarak said Ramjan was blessed by Sitakunda upazila Chairman SM Al Mamun, also an AL leader, who has a longstanding rivalry with local AL lawmaker Didarul Alam.

The bodies were sent to Chittagong Medical College morgue for autopsies.

Malaysia bans

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The company said in a statement Country Garden's chairman met Mahathir earlier this month, and the Malaysian leader had "reiterated that he welcomes foreign investments which could create employment opportunities, promote technology transfer and innovations that could benefit Malaysia's economic growth and job creation".

Relations between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing were warm under the former government of scandal-plagued Najib Razak, and investment from Chinese companies surged into Malaysia. But critics said the deals were unfavourable to Malaysia. On a visit to Beijing last week, Mahathir announced he was shelving a series of Chinese-backed infrastructure projects worth \$22 billion in total.

While Forest City is a private development, some in Malaysia viewed it as a another unwelcome sign of growing Chinese influence.

Naughty dolphin

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woman bather with his snout," Lars told the local newspaper Ouest France.

The ban took effect on August 20.

Sami Hassani, a specialist in marine mammals at the Oceanopolis sea park, said the dolphin could accidentally cause "serious injuries" with its tail fin. But the ban has run into legal problems.

Lawyer Erwan Le Cornec told AFP he plans to file a petition to overturn the restrictions on the grounds of administrative over-reach.

"How many accidents involving a dolphin and a human have occurred in the region of Finistere since the two species have lived side-by-side?" he asked scornfully. "None."

"With this decree the mayor is trying to make out that the dolphin is almost like a ferocious beast, something that is completely unpredictable, able to drown people."

The mayor, he said, "will overturn the rightly positive approach that people have towards dolphins into a fear of these intelligent animals."

Facebook

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reached for comment.

Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg has addressed the violence in Myanmar on several occasions including at a congressional hearing earlier this year.

He told lawmakers Facebook planned to hire more native speakers to help monitor the situation and had partnered with civil society groups to identify perpetrators of hate speech.

"We're hiring dozens of more Burmese-language content reviewers, because hate speech is very language-specific," he said at the April hearing in the US Senate.

"It's hard to do it without people who speak the local language, and we need to ramp up our effort there dramatically."

'Robber' killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A suspected robber was killed in what police claimed was a shootout between the law enforcers and a gang of robbers in Baliakandi upazila of Rajbari Sadar upazila.

The deceased was identified as Badu Sheikh, 40, of Gobinadapur village of Rajbari Sadar upazila.

Hasina Begum, officer-in-charge of Baliakandi Police Station, said, "Acting on a tip-off, a police team went to Alankarpur village where a gang of robbers was holding a meeting. Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, the gang opened fire and the policemen retaliated,

triggering the gunfight."

Badu's body was recovered from the spot after his cohorts fled. He was rushed to Baliakandi Upazila Health Complex where an on-duty doctor declared him dead around 3:00am, she said. The law enforcers also claimed to have recovered two guns, cartridges, five bullets and a knife from the spot.

Badu was a leader of the gang and was an accused in seven cases, including four for robbery, filed with different police stations, she said, adding that three policemen also sustained minor injuries in the incident.

Give Shahidul division

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Shahidul, 63, was picked up by law enforcers on the night of August 5 from his Dhanmondi home.

The following day, he was placed on seven-day remand after police had produced him before a court seeking a 10-day remand. He told the court that he was tortured in custody, but the police denied the allegation.

He was sent to jail on August 13 on completion of his remand.

In response to a writ petition filed by his wife Rahnuma Ahmed on August 7, the High Court directed the authorities concerned to immediately send him to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, arrange his medical examination and submit a report by 10:30am on August 9.

The BSMMU authorities formed a four-member medical board to examine his health and mental condition. The board's report submitted to the HC mentioned that he was physically and mentally sound.

During hearing at the HC on August 9, the defence argued that there was no psychologist in the medical board to examine his mental condition.

The hearing of Shahidul's bail petition would be held on September 11 at the court of Metropolitan and Sessions Judge, Dhaka.

PHOTO EXHIBITION

To attract people's attention to the work of Shahidul Alam and to promote solidarity with him, a photographic exhibition was held in Peru yesterday.

Alta Tecnología Andina (ATA) and the Cultural Centre Ricardo Palma jointly organised the exhibition titled "Shahidul Alam: A voice from the shadows."

The exhibition was curated by José-Carlos Mariátegui and Jorge Villacorta, says a press release.

Thousands of voices have risen in the world in the last three weeks in protest against the arrest of Shahidul and "mistreatment he has been suffering in prison", it read.

The exhibition was inaugurated on August 24 at Raúl Porras Barrenechea Hall, Ricardo Palma Cultural Centre, Av. Larco 770, Miraflores, Lima, Perú. It will be available for viewing till September 9.

The exhibition summarises his career as a photojournalist, in Bangladesh and around the world.

In the last 30 years he has developed a broad work both in education and in the promotion of an ethical and committed attitude with regards to the problems that affect societies in invisible areas of the world.

Never late, absent

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"I did discuss it with her before our marriage," Satyajit recalls, "but at first she was annoyed. Still, it worked out alright because as per Hindu traditions our wedding was in the evening. I was able to take classes that day, before arriving at my in-law's home. From there I went to school again the next day, and returned to take my wife to our house."

Gradually his wife, Arati Rani Biswas, became accustomed to her husband's ways. "Later she understood that I was doing a good thing," Satyajit reflects. "Now she cooperates with me."

Yet some of his other relatives are less convinced. Some have suggested that only a madman wouldn't take leave on his wedding day.

Nor did Satyajit apply for leave when his father passed away. "My father died early in the morning," he recalls. "I was with the body until 8 a.m. Then I went to school for two classes before returning home for the cremation."

In the course of his career Satyajit has

progressed from his initial appointment as assistant teacher to his current role as assistant head teacher. By habit he reaches the school gate not less than half an hour before school starts.

"I want to establish our school as the best in the area," says the teacher whose devotion to education has made him especially popular with colleagues, students and the community at large. Indeed several local organisations have recognised Satyajit as an ideal teacher.

"He doesn't only teach," says the school's head teacher, Nazrul Islam. "Satyajit is also there for our students when they need advice on any topic, be it school or life-related."

"Satyajit has shown unprecedented professionalism," says Jessore's secondary education officer Aminul Islam Tuku. "Over such a long period he hasn't taken a single day in leave. He has attended school despite any personal difficulty. He is an ideal teacher whose example is worth emulating."

Row over 'tinkering of EVM'

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At an all-party meeting the EC convened here, the opposition parties questioned how in every case of EVM malfunction, the vote goes to only one party and demanded that the Commission hand over the name and address of the firms that repair the EVMs.

Representatives of BJP, opposition Congress, Trinamool Congress, Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party, CPI, CPI (M) and Nationalist Congress Party and 51 state parties were present in the meeting called by the EC to find political consensus on electoral reforms.

Since the BJP's sweeping victory in Uttar Pradesh state assembly elections in 2017, Mayawati, along with Aam Aadmi Party, had been alleging that the results were swung because of manipulation of the EVMs.

The Election Commission has dismissed the allegation and challenged anyone to hack into an EVM.

Emerging from yesterday's meeting, Congress leader Mukul Wasnik told the media that EVMs "do not reflect the will of the people".

"There have been a number of times when EVMs malfunction and it [the vote] goes to only one political party. We want to know who is repairing the EVMs and how many of the old ones are being used. We want the VVPAT [voter-verified paper audit trail] and the EVMs to be checked," he said.

Going a step further, Trinamool Congress leader Kalyan Banerjee demanded a return to ballot boxes. "We have no faith in EVMs," he said.

The Election Commission had used VVPAT in some recent polls apart from keeping a paper record of every vote cast. This was matched with the result given by EVMs in only some cases.

Former Chief Election Commissioner SY Quraishi, has however, said the EC only matches one per cent of the votes. To dispel doubts, the Commission should allow matching results of at least five per cent EVMs and paper trail slips, he said.

The opposition parties want at least 30 percent of them to be cross-checked.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission said it would provide "satisfactory solution" to the concerns raised by the political parties on the EVMs.

Chief Election Commissioner O P Rawat told reporters that "we will definitely look into all the suggestions given by them [political parties] and there will be a satisfactory solution to them."

Some parties also suggested that the number of constituencies where results of EVM and paper audit trail device are matched be increased to enhance the confidence of voters and parties in the reliability of the voting mode.

"Nothing final has been decided yet but one way to dispel fears is to increase the number of constituencies where EVM and paper trail machine results are matched," said a senior EC functionary.

EVMs were first used in election in India in May, 1982 in a Kerala by-polls. But since there was no law prescribing its use, the Supreme Court struck down the election.