



Fishermen roll up their nets and head home after drying the nets in the sun at Fishery Ghat in Chattogram yesterday. A 22-day ban on hilsa fishing begins today. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Era of Swiss bank

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cannot automatically see what citizens have in their domestic bank accounts, for example -- but gone are the days when well-paid European professionals could stash wealth across the border and beyond the prying eyes of their tax man.

The initial exchange was supposed to be with European Union countries plus nine other jurisdictions: Australia, Canada, Guernsey, Iceland, Isle of Man, Japan, Jersey, Norway and South Korea. "Cyprus and Romania are currently excluded as they do not yet meet the international requirements on confidentiality and data security," the FTA said.

Transmission of data to Australia and France was delayed "as these states could not yet deliver data to the FTA due to technical reasons", it said, adding that it also had not yet received data from Croatia, Estonia and Poland.

About 7,000 banks, trusts, insurers and other financial institutions registered with the FTA collect data on millions of accounts and send them on the Swiss tax agency. The FTA in turn sent information on around two million accounts to partner states. It put no value on the accounts in question.

The information includes the owner's name, address, country of residence and tax identification number as well as the reporting institution, account balance and capital income. This lets authorities check whether taxpayers have correctly declared their foreign financial accounts.

The annual data swap will expand next year to about 80 partner states, provided they meet requirements on confidentiality and data security. The OECD Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes reviews states' implementation of the accord.

Under international pressure, Swiss banking secrecy has weakened for years, meaning rich people from around the world can no longer easily use the Alpine republic to hide wealth.

The changes have put Switzerland in fierce competition with faster-growing centres like Hong Kong and Singapore.

Trucks won't carry goods

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said Mukbul Ahmad, convener of the association, at a rally in the city's Tejgaon Truck Stand.

He said although they organised the rally only for Dhaka division, all truck owners and workers associations from across the country expressed their solidarity with them.

According to Ahmad, at least 32,000 trucks transport goods, including food and export and import products, across the country every day.

Parliament on September 19 passed the much-anticipated Road Transport Act-2018 amid criticism over lenient punishments for deaths caused by reckless driving.

According to the new law, if anybody causes an accident by reckless and negligent driving, and kills or injures someone seriously, he would face a maximum five years' imprisonment or a fine of Tk 5 lakh or both.

However, if it is found that a driver has deliberately killed anyone or not averted a killing in a road accident, the incident will fall under either section 302 (murder) or 304 (culpable homicide) of the Penal Code, the law minister earlier said explaining the act.

The maximum punishment under section 302 of the Penal Code is the death penalty while it is life imprisonment under section 304.

Speaking at the rally, the association president said they would not accept the death penalty as drivers don't drive trucks to kill people.

"We are directly contributing significantly to accelerate the country's economy by providing services to the manufacturing sector. So why will we be considered as murderers?"

Tajul Islam, member secretary of the association, urged the truck owners and workers not to transport any goods until their demands were met.

He said if they did not drive vehicles, the export of readymade garments would be hampered; the government would subsequently be under pressure and be compelled to meet their demands. "Nobody will drive trucks without our permission."

Their other demands include unconditional release of driver Hasmat Ali, member of Tangail Truck Owners Association, and all staffers arrested in connection with road accident cases; issuing heavy vehicle driving licence to all drivers of heavy vehicles and allowing them to drive trucks with light vehicle driving licence until they are given heavy vehicle driving licence; stopping police harassment; setting up truck terminals and stands at suitable spots with sufficient facilities; returning driving licences to drivers without imposing a fine; and stopping overloading of trucks.

Hundreds of truck owners and workers joined the rally, also addressed by leaders from different districts.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sk

People suffer

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Corporation (BIWTC) officials said.

Tailbacks in Manikganj's Paturia and Rajbari's Daulatdia ferry terminals reached miles yesterday.

The two routes across the Padma are considered the gateway to 21 southern districts.

Traders are afraid of incurring losses as shipping duration and costs are rising.

Strong currents near Daulatdia are causing frequent disruptions to ferry services. Moreover, some old ferries frequently meet tugging while going upstream, officials said.

The authorities are struggling to cope with the added number of vehicles while ferries are taking longer to cross the river, reports our Manikganj correspondent.

Usually about 1,500 trucks and 3,500 other vehicles cross the river there. The numbers have halved due to disruptions, said Shafiqul Islam, manager (commerce) of BIWTC Daulatdia Station.

Near Daulatdia ferry terminal, our correspondent saw about 600 vehicles, including trucks, in a tailback reaching about two kilometres.

The situation was similar near Paturia terminal.

On Shimulia-Kathalbari route, several hundred trucks were stranded on both sides of the river, reports our Munshiganj correspondent.

People are crossing rivers on small launches and speedboats in daytime.

The route had been suffering navigability crisis for the last one and a half month.

"So far 17 lakh cubic metre of silt has been removed. We will have to remove 32 lakh cubic metre by next December to maintain navigability," Saidur Rahman, additional executive engineer of BIWTA, said.

22-day hilsa ban

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The ban would end on October 29, he said.

"In the past, such bans resulted in increased production. Hopefully, we will be successful this year as well," he told this newspaper over phone.

The decision to impose the ban was made to ensure safe spawning of hilsa during its peak breeding season, according to officials at District Fisheries Office in Barishal.

Mother hilsas start swimming upstream from the sea towards the rivers weeks before the Full Moon in October. They return to the sea after spawning, they said.

If anyone violates the ban the person will be fined and imprisoned, said Bimal Chandra Das, district fisheries officer in Barishal.

He said they have formed a committee to monitor the situation and that they will run mobile courts from today.

Meanwhile, yesterday, a day before the beginning of the ban, everyone at the Road hilsa wholesale market in Barishal passed busy time. Many traders were seen storing hilsas in ice boxes

and freezers.

Nirob Hossain Tutul, secretary of Matshob Aratdar Shamiti at the market, said enough hilsas have been caught in the Kirtankhola, the Tetulia, the Arial Kha and the Meghna rivers in the last two weeks.

Traders said at least 500 maunds hilsa reached the market yesterday afternoon.

A kilogram of the fish was being sold for between Tk 700 and Tk 800.

Meanwhile, district fisheries office said hilsa production in Patuakhali has increased in the last five years.

Patuakhali District Fisheries Officer Md Iqbal said they had set up a production target of 40,000 tonnes of hilsa for the fiscal 2017-18.

In 2016-17, at least 36,000 tonnes of hilsa was produced in the district, he said.

The amount was 32,750 tonnes in 2015-16, 28,277 tonnes in 2014-15 and 25,000 tonnes in 2013-14, sources at the office said.

[Our Barishal and Patuakhali correspondents contributed to this report]

Two killed

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Rab custody, was found and they would be released.

A faction of the JMB plotted to carry out subversive activities at the court building of Chattogram, Rab claimed after busting the "militant den" in Uttar Sonapahar area of Mirsarai upazila.

Rab personnel recovered an AK-22 rifle, three foreign-made pistols, five improvised explosive devices, and a large amount of grenade-making materials and documents.

BNP, other parties

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On September 22, several top BNP leaders shared the stage with Dr Kamal and Badruddoza at a citizens' rally and extended full support to Jatiya Oikya Prokriya's three-point demand including formation of a polls-time neutral government.

The other two demands are effective steps for reconstituting the Election Commission and dissolution of parliament before the announcement of the election schedule.

Senior BNP leaders called for "greater unity" also from a rally on September 30 and pressed for demands similar to that of the Oikya Prokriya.

The party wants to complete the process as soon as possible as it wants to observe some programmes together with the other political parties, insiders say.

The party high-ups could not finalise those programmes as the unity process is yet to get any formal shape, they added.

However, some party leaders said they will stage public meetings once the schedule for the upcoming parliamentary polls is announced.

"We will observe our programmes but want to discuss with other political parties so that we can move forward together to achieve our goals," said a senior leader wishing anonymity.

BNP leaders also said they are ready to share parliamentary seats with the other political parties in the upcoming election if all come under a single platform.

Mahmudur Rahman Manna said seat-sharing will not be a big issue and Jamaat-e-Islami will also not be a barrier.

BNP's longstanding ties with Jamaat has emerged as an obstacle to the "greater national unity" as Bikalpadhara already made it clear that BNP must cut its ties with the Islamist party.

On negotiations with the BNP, Manna added, "They said they will bring checks and balances when they assume office. Our point is we have to fix the modality of how checks and balances would be brought and how good governance will be ensured in every tier of the state."

Never said polls

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EC Secretary Helaluddin Ahmed said the schedule for the 11th parliamentary election could be announced on any date after October 30.

Talking to reporters yesterday, the CEC said, "We have not fixed the election-schedule declaring date ... We did not say that the election will be in this December. Those who said this ... might be their own calculation ... not ours."

The EC is showing Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) at the stall to get voters familiar with EVMs.

On EVMs in the next election, Huda urged those who oppose EVMs to see how they work. "If they do so, they will not oppose it", he said.

The CEC said, "The EVMs will not be used in all 64 districts but it will be used in a limited scale in the next general election and that is why we are displaying EVMs in the EC's stalls at the Unnayan Mela."

Repackaging

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provisions," they said in a statement.

They said they are concerned that the act will not only affect the press but also academic work, exchanges in social media involving policy critiquing and historical scrutiny regarding the politics of Bangladesh, with far-reaching impact on researchers inside and outside Bangladesh.

They urged the government to immediately postpone the implementation of the act until "a full independent review is done by human rights groups and nonpartisan organisations".

Ali Riaz, professor of Illinois State University; Professor Emeritus Zillur Rahman Khan of University of Wisconsin; Habib Zafarullah, adjunct professor of University of New England, Australia; Md Khalequzzaman, professor of Lock Haven University, Pennsylvania; Rumi Ahmed, associate professor of University of Central Florida; Mohammed Mia, Investment Bank Vice President, Houston; and Shafquat Rabbee, columnist and adjunct faculty, University of Dallas, are among the signatories to the statement.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Forum Bangladesh, a platform of 20 rights and development organisations, yesterday urged the president not to put his signature on the law until the "controversial sections" were amended, says a press release.

It said the bill was passed without addressing the concerns of journalists and rights activists.

Despite assurance from several top ministers, the proposed law still has some sections that go against the freedom of expression and freedom of press.

Besides, Convener of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal Khalequzzaman in a rally in the capital urged the president not to sign the law, according to a press release.

The act was passed in parliament on September 19 with harsh provision allowing police officials to search or arrest anyone without any warrant.

The bill got through by voice vote amid opposition from a number of Jatiya Party lawmakers, ignoring concern of journalists, owners of media houses and rights activists over some of its sections.

Latvia votes as Russians, populists eye power

AFP, Riga
Polling stations in Latvia opened yesterday for a general election that could propel a populist, pro-Kremlin coalition to power as the Baltic state celebrates the centenary of its birth as an independent state.

Though lauded for righting the economy, the governing centre-right coalition has lost ground, opinion polls suggest.

But with a quarter of voters still undecided according to pollsters, the election is still wide open.

After casting his ballot, President Raimonds Vejonis from the Green Party called on fellow Latvians to come to the polls, pointing to the Brexit vote as an example of what might happen if they didn't.

"It shows us that we should not stay at home and that we should express our opinions," he said.

Latvia is a member of both the eurozone and NATO, having joined the military alliance in 2004.

Latvia's ethnic Russian minority makes up about a quarter of the country's 1.9 million population and Harmony, which was formerly allied with Putin's United Russia party, is popular with them.

The party has won the largest number of votes in the last three elections, and did not enter government only because it failed to attract coalition partners.

But this time could be different.

Along with fellow Baltic states Estonia and Lithuania, Latvia declared independence in 1918 after the Tsarist Russian empire collapsed.

But it was occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II, and then by the Soviet Union for nearly

half a century until 1991.

After the last election in 2014, the centre-right Greens and Farmers Union, the right-wing National Alliance and the centre-right Unity formed a three-party coalition to run the country.

On their watch the economy, hit hard by the 2008 financial crisis, has resumed growth.

But polls suggest that voters are abandoning the ruling coalition.

"Voters are tired of hard work, which was necessary to pull Latvia out of the economic crisis," political scientist Filipis Rajevskis told AFP.

"Now... voters want new faces: the current ministers cannot offer anything entertaining. That's where the populism kicks in," he said.

The established parties tried to bring in fresh blood, but that tactic did not appear to have worked, said Rajevskis.

"Therefore there's the possibility of a Russia-oriented coalition after the election."

Polls suggest the Greens and Farmers Union, which currently holds the posts of both president and prime minister, will win no more than 15 seats in the 100-seat parliament.

The National Alliance is expected to win 13.

Unity, now rebranded as New Unity, might not even meet the five-percent threshold required to have any presence in the assembly.

Harmony meanwhile has signed on some high-profile ethnic Latvians as their frontrunners, and is on track to come out ahead with at least 28 seats.

And this time, after a decade of trying, the party may finally manage to form a government by joining forces with newcomer populists.

Prove they're Bangladeshis

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proves that the illegal immigrants are Bangladeshi nationals.

He was speaking at a session titled "Friends and neighbours: Sharing more than just a border" at the India Today Conclave East 2018 in Kolkata on Friday.

His comments come at a time when the issue of illegal immigrants in Assam is on focus in India.

The final draft of the National Register of Citizens excluded more than 40 lakh people. Calling illegal immigrants "termites", the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) President Amit Shah recently said they needed to be "weeded out" from India.

Asked about Dhaka's view on these developments, Rizvi said most people in Bangladesh see the issue of illegal immigrants in Assam as India's internal issue. "Even the media has not taken it up prominently."

Rizvi said in the past 10 years, during which he has been the PM's adviser, the Indian government has never taken up the issue of illegal immigrants with Bangladesh.

"The process of identifying illegal immigrants has just started. It is a long process and there may come a time in the distant future when the two countries will talk about it. We are mature countries and have friendly relations; we will work it out when time comes."

ROHINGYA ISSUE

About the challenges posed by the Rohingya crisis, Rizvi said although Bangladesh was sheltering more than 1 million Rohingyas, the international community needs to come together to find a solution to the humanitarian crisis.

He said what distinguishes the

4,100 cases filed

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also said it will file a writ petition with the High Court challenging the legality of filing such "politically motivated" cases.

Addressing a press conference at the party's Nayapalton central office, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir also claimed around 90,340 cases have been filed against over 2.5 million party men since 2009.

He also alleged around 1,512 BNP members have been victims of killing since that year.

"It proves that the government is engaged in hatching all sorts of conspiracy so that we cannot participate in the next general election," Fakhrul also said.

The BNP leaders noted that around 75,925 leaders and activists of the party are now behind bars since 2009.

BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed told the press about the party's decision to file the petition.

"We are thinking of filing a writ petition with the High Court against filing of fictitious cases against BNP leader and activists," he said.

"Through the writ petition, we will seek the apex court's directives for action against the police officers involved in filing such cases."

Referring to the case filed with Hatirjheel Police Station hours after the party staged a Suhrawardy Udyan rally on September 30 and asked its activists to prepare for both movement and elections, Moudud said they will move to the High Court with a writ petition taking the case as an instance.

Top BNP leaders, including Fakhrul, Mirza Abbas, Moudud, Nazrul Islam Khan, Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Amir

4,100 cases filed

Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and Moyeen Khan were sued for "instigating" subversive activities.

The case statement reads that the leaders delivered "provocative and anti-government speeches" at the rally. Interestingly, Amir Khasru was in the US while Rizvi was not even present at the rally.

Moudud alleged that the government is destroying the rule of law through filing such "fictitious" cases and its main intention is keeping BNP men in jail to hold a "one-sided" election.

Fakhrul said such cases will only invite danger for the government.

Turning to cases against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and acting chairperson Tarique Rahman, Fakhrul said the party chief is behind bars and Tarique in exile being falsely implicated.

Now, the government is plotting to finish the trial proceedings of the cases lodged against the party's senior leaders in a bid to keep them away from the election process, he alleged.

Claiming that the country's present political atmosphere is not election-friendly, Fakhrul said, "We want a fair election and the government will have to create a congenial atmosphere by releasing Khaleda Zia from jail."

The government will also have to withdraw the cases lodged against other BNP leaders and activists, he added.

Referring to the busting of a "militant den" in Mirsarai on Friday, Fakhrul said an old drama has been staged again. "This is not only dangerous for the opposition parties, rather for the entire nation," he added.