



Trucks wait in a long queue at border customs control to cross into the US. Redeployment of border officers to deal with a surge in migrants at the Otay border crossing in Tijuana caused the queue yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

## ADDRESS TO US CONGRESS Nato chief cites Russia threat

REUTERS, Washington

The head of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization yesterday warned the US Congress of the threat posed by "a more assertive Russia" to the alliance, including its violations of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

"Nato has no intention of deploying land-based nuclear missiles in Europe," Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said. "But Nato will always take the necessary steps to provide credible and effective deterrence."

Stoltenberg also used his speech to give a ringing defense of "the most successful alliance in history," which has often been derided by US President Donald Trump.

Members of Congress, who greeted Stoltenberg with repeated cheers and standing ovations, said they viewed his address to the joint meeting of the House of Representatives and Senate as a chance to reaffirm the American committee to the Nato alliance.

Stoltenberg was the first Norwegian ever accorded the rare honour of such an address.

"Nato has been good for Europe, but Nato has also been good for the United States," Stoltenberg said.

Stoltenberg met on Tuesday with Trump, who said his pressure on Nato nations to pay more for their defense is leading to tens of billions of dollars more in contributions, but the allies may need to boost their budgets even more.

Stoltenberg said Nato member countries are "adding billions" in defense spending.

## Banking sector's

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banks (PCBs) and the foreign commercial banks (FCBs), the report says.

The financial health of state-run banks is relatively weaker than that of the private ones, noted Chan Hong.

As of last year, defaulted loans at eight SCBs accounted for 57 percent of the total NPLs in the banking sector.

The state-run banks, which are saddled with huge bad debts, have become a burden on the government, the report said.

Injecting capital into the state-run banks on a regular basis is not the right way to strengthen the lenders' capital base, Chan Hong said.

Since 2009, the government has injected Tk 14,505 crore into the state-owned banks.

Despite this, six state-run banks faced capital shortfall at the end of December last year.

The ADB has recommended appointing competent professionals to the board of directors at the SCBs with a view to strengthening the financial health of the lenders.

"Political appointment to the board should be avoided," it said.

Moreover, the SCBs' management should be given full operational independence to conduct day-to-day operations, and both the board and the management be made answerable to the central bank.

The authorities should consider consolidation, merger or even privatisation of the SCBs. They should also ensure strict enforcement of existing bank rules and regulations.

## Suspect killed

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party member, said Lt Col Miftah Uddin Ahmed, commanding officer of Rab-7.

He stood accused in the murder case, the Rab official said.

On the other hand, MA Manzur, officer-in-charge of Rangamati's Baghaichhari Police Station, said a case was filed against 40-50 unnamed assailants. Shankor's name was not mentioned in the case. But police were keeping watch on him, the OC said.

Acting on a tip-off, a joint team of army and Rab raided remote Dochhari area in Naikhongchhari around 10:00am. Shankor was shot dead during the "gunfight" and nine to 10 others managed to flee, said the Rab official.

The team came to know about his identity from his national ID card, which was found in his pocket, he added.

In a press release, Rab said the joint forces recovered seven sub-machine guns, 437 bullets and Tk 4.36 lakh from the spot.

This correspondent could not contact the deceased's family for comments.

On March 18, seven people, including two polling officials and four Ansar personnel, were shot dead in Baghaichhari upazila. They, along with others, were returning to the upazila town with polling materials in two cars after discharging their duties at a polling centre in the second phase of upazila polls.

# Trudeau ousts 2 ex-ministers from Canada ruling party

AFF, Ottawa

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ousted from his Liberal Party on Tuesday two former ministers whose accusations of political meddling in a prosecution jeopardized his re-election bid.

The announcement came at the end of an emergency caucus meeting to consider expelling former attorney general Jody Wilson-Raybould after her release of a secret recording last week that reignited the simmering scandal.

Former budget minister Jane Philpott, who had quit in protest over Trudeau's handling of the controversy, was also removed.

"The trust that previously existed between these two individuals and our team has been broken," Trudeau said.

"Whether it's taping conversations without consent or repeatedly expressing a lack of confidence in our government and in me personally as leader, it's become clear that (both) can no longer remain part of our Liberal team."

Since February, Trudeau's government has been rocked by accusations that his inner circle sought to shield engineering giant SNC-Lavalin from a corruption trial.

The Montreal-based firm was charged in 2015 for allegedly paying bribes to secure contracts in Libya.

Wilson-Raybould refused to ask prosecutors to settle the case, and the trial is set to proceed.

After resigning, she testified to lawmakers that she'd experienced "consistent and sustained" political pressure to interfere in the case, including "veiled threats."

Trudeau has steadfastly denied the claims, which also led to the resignations of two other senior officials, and plunged his Liberals behind the opposition Tories in opinion polls just months before elections.

On Friday, the House of Commons justice committee looking into the allegations released messages and a secret recording by Wilson-Raybould of a call with Canada's top bureau-

crat, Chief of the Privy Council Michael Wernick, to back her claims.

"If a politician secretly records a conversation with anyone," Trudeau said, "it's wrong."

He labeled as "unconscionable" the one-time attorney general's secret recording of the clerk of the Privy Council.

The scandal, Trudeau added, has sidelined his government's progressive agenda and created divisions within the party.

"Civil wars within parties are incredibly damaging because they signal to Canadians that we care more about ourselves than we do about them," he said.

"Our political opponents win when the Liberals are divided."

Opposition Tory leader Andrew Scheer blasted Trudeau's actions, saying: "Elected officials are supposed to protect individuals who blow the whistle on government misconduct and corruption, not punish them."

In a statement, Philpott protested that neither she nor Wilson-Raybould "initiated the crisis now facing the party or the prime minister."

"Rather than acknowledge the obvious -- that a range of individuals had inappropriately attempted to pressure the former attorney general in relation to a prosecutorial decision -- and apologize for what occurred, a decision was made to attempt to deny the obvious -- to attack Jody Wilson-Raybould's credibility and attempt to blame her," Philpott said.

Earlier in the day, Wilson-Raybould had expressed her desire to remain in the party and run as a Liberal in the October election.

She later tweeted, "I can look myself in the mirror knowing I did what I was required to do and what needed to be done based on principles and values that must always transcend party."

"I have no regrets," she added. "I spoke the truth as I will continue to do."

## ETHIOPIAN JET CRASH

# Pilots followed guidelines before crash: WSJ

AFF, Washington

The pilots of the Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 MAX plane that crashed last month initially took the emergency steps outlined by the manufacturer but still could not regain control, The Wall Street Journal reported yesterday.

The airliner went down soon after taking off on March 10, killing 157 people in the second deadly crash of a 737 MAX aircraft in less than five months, forcing a worldwide grounding of the model.

The first -- a Lion Air crash in Indonesia that killed 189 people in October -- led to Boeing issuing a bulletin reminding operators of emergency guidelines to override a specially developed anti-stall system on MAX planes.

The pilots trying to regain control of the Ethiopian jet at first followed those procedures to switch off the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS) but failed to recover control, the WSJ said, citing people briefed on the crash investigation's preliminary findings.

They then switched the system back as they tried to find other ways to control the jet before it crashed, the newspaper added.

Its sources said "the latest details are based on data downloaded from the plane's black-box recorders".

The preliminary report on the accident will likely be issued this week, the Ethiopian government has said.

The MCAS is believed to have been a key factor in both 737 MAX crashes. It is designed to automatically lower the aircraft's nose if it detects a stall or loss of airspeed.

Before it crashed, the pilots of the Lion Air 737 MAX struggled to control it as the MCAS repeatedly pushed the plane's nose down, according to its flight data recorder.

Both the Lion Air and Ethiopian planes -- MAX 8 models -- reportedly experienced erratic steep climbs and descents, as well as fluctuating airspeeds, before crashing shortly after takeoff.

## Schoolgirl

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of Pirojpur Sadar Police Station, said locals rescued the victim and took her to the police station.

She was immediately sent to Pirojpur Sadar Hospital for medical tests, he added.

The girl's father filed a case under Women and Children Repression Prevention Act accusing the two men early yesterday, he further added.

## Prime accused

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after the incident.

The judge denied him bail and sent him to jail.

Later, the same court place two others accused -- Abul Bashar and Yusuf Majhi -- on three and two day remand respectively.

In another development in the case, Resident Medical Officer of Noakhali General Hospital Syed Mohiuddin Abdul Azim said the victim underwent all the required medical tests, where they found evidence of her being raped, UNB reports.

The report was sent to Noakhali police superintendent, Azim said.

The victim, a 48-year-old mother of six, was gang-raped in Subarnachar on Sunday evening over "campaigning for an upazila vice-chairman candidate".

Later, the victim's husband filed a case with Char Jabbar Police Station on Monday, accusing 12 people, including four unnamed.

With Kalam's surrender, six accused in the case are now behind bars.

The incident happened barely three months after a mother of four was gang-raped by 10-12 people in the same area allegedly for voting for "sheaf of paddy" in the December 30 national election.

## Two Biman

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2472 free tickets on London-Dhaka-London route for advertisement purpose, he, in real, sold those and kept the tickets' prices, sources added.

Mohibul Haque, secretary at the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, told The Daily Star that Shafiqul had no jurisdiction to offer free tickets to people.

"On receiving complaint, the ministry in its primary investigation found that he [Shafiqul] sold those tickets in exchange of money from passengers," Mohibul added.

"What he did is nothing but theft and embezzlement of money," he further said.

The secretary also said that the ministry sent its investigation report to the Biman's Board.

On the other hand, Ashrafal was allegedly involved in illegally giving benefits to particular travel agencies through blocking seats on different routes, said Biman sources.

The board of Biman on Tuesday discussed the issues in its meeting and asked the national airliner to make the two officials OSD.

Biman MD Masaddique has been given charge to take further action against the duo, Biman sources said.

The Daily Star, however, could not reach Shafiqul and Ashrafal for their comments after repeated attempts.

## Samples tampered

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In an instance of such tampering, Dhaka-based importer MS Sadia Center brought sewing machines from Singapore last December, and got clearance based on the sample report. But after officials seized the consignment on a tip-off, they found cosmetics in the containers.

Based on the initial sample report, officials estimated a duty of Tk 5 lakh but after physical examination, it was seen that the tax for the actual goods amounted to Tk 1.84 crore. The importer later admitted to the "mistake" and paid the higher tax to release the goods from the port.

According to CCH officials, Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directory (CIID), Audit, Investigation and Research (AIR) unit of the CCH and other agencies found sample forgery several times, but the authorities remain indifferent.

The Jetty, Un-stuffing and AIR sections filed cases in connection with 1,090 consignments for revenue forgery last year. As per case records, goods worth more than the declaration, import of prohibited goods, empty containers and non-declared goods were unearthed.

Most of these consignments were awaiting release after clearance from the labs and taxation sections. The importers later paid the higher tax amounts and had the goods released.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) and the CIID had issued several letters with brief reports to the authorities, drawing attention to the risk of the entry of prohibited goods due to irregularities in sample collection.

When contacted, Prakash Dewan, a member of the National Board of Revenue, said he was unaware of the shortage in manpower. He said assigning representatives of the importers or an outsider for such a task was completely illegal.

**LAB RESULTS BEING QUESTIONED**  
Customs officials said they get different results from different labs based on samples of the same shipment.

For instance, an importer brought industrial salt with a declaration of having 99 percent Sodium Sulphate in October, which has a tax rate of around 10 percent.

But the lab results showed that it was edible salt with 24 percent sodium chloride, which has a tax of around 86 percent.

As the importer appealed for a re-test, the sample was again sent to labs in Dhaka University and Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR). The lab said it was edible salt with 55 percent sodium chloride, while the BCSIR said it was industrial salt with 0.88 percent sodium chloride.

The importer later declared the goods to be edible salt and had the consignment released by paying the higher tax amount.

Sadhan Kumar Kundha, joint commissioner of CCH, said he was aware of discrepancies in reports from different labs for the same sample.

"We don't know the reason behind it. It can be because the samples were changed or the quality deteriorated when the goods were transported or for other reasons."

"Some employees were assigned to collect and transfer the samples from the jetty to laboratories and taxation sections. Sometime the representatives of importers do this task for getting quick service. But all samples have a plastic lock with serial numbers; therefore it's not possible to change the sample," added Kumar, also head of Jetty Customs and Sample section.

During a visit to the Customs laboratory, all samples were seen to be collected by representatives of importers. They were, however, using plastic shopping bags which were stitched at the bottom, making it easy to make a switch.

Md Moin, driver of lab in-charge there, was seen testing the sample in front of the importer's representative, although no outsider is allowed there.

"Results of the same sample can be dissimilar due to different causes," said H M Murshed, Scientific Officer of BCSIR Chattogram office.

He told The Daily Star that quality of machineries and supporting chemicals used in different labs were not same, making the men behind the machine the most important to get accurate result.

Depending on the item, samples are sent to different labs, including CCH Chemical Laboratory, Department of Fisheries, Dhaka University, BCSIR, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology and Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Sciences University.

Kazi Mostafizur Rahman, commissioner of CCH, said anomalies were taking place, as they often cannot follow rules due to a shortage of manpower and transportation facilities.

"There is no alternative to employing our own manpower to get accurate lab results."

The varying results also pose a problem for importers, often causing delays.

Mahadi Hasan, a chemical importer, said that importers were suffering due to dissimilar results from different labs and it increased their time and cost.

He added that sample transportation and examination costs were borne by the importer and the amount was between Tk 15,000 to Tk 40,000.

## Workers carry on strike

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recruit workers.

In Khulna, workers of nine jute mills in the Jashore and Khulna industrial region blocked the Dhaka-Khulna highway at different points in the city, including BDR Camp, Phulbari Gate, Daulatpur and Natun Rasta intersections.

They also blocked Dhaka-Khulna railway at the city's Nayabati, Natun Rasta, and Daulatpur points.

The workers demonstrated under the banner of Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA) and Non-CBA Oikya Parishad, reports our Khulna correspondent.

Sahanaj Sharmin, president of employees union at Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills, told The Daily Star that workers did not get their salaries regularly, but Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation officials were getting their salaries regularly.

"If our demands are not met, we will go for tougher movements," she warned.

Workers of nine jute mills yesterday observed the work abstention in Chattogram, adds our staff correspondent there.

During the work abstention, workers of Amin Jute Mills blocked Chattogram-Hathazari road and rail lines in the port city's Baizid area.

Kamal Uddin, CBA office secretary at the jute mills, said the district administration assured them of implementing the National Wage Scale-2015.

"We don't believe in assurances as the earlier promises were not fulfilled. We will continue our agitation until our demands are met," he said.



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