

IMRAN KHAN'S VISIT TO US Pakistan hopes to 'refresh' ties

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday expressed hopes that Prime Minister Imran Khan's maiden trip to the White House later this month would help repair its acrimonious relationship with Washington as the US seeks its help in ending the war in Afghanistan.

Observers believe that the nearly 18-year conflict will be the major focus of talks between Khan and President Donald Trump when they meet on July 22, as Washington presses for Pakistani assistance in securing a peace deal.

"Pakistan has been facilitating the US-Taliban talks in good faith, underscoring that it remains a shared responsibility," Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said during a seminar in Islamabad.

"It will therefore be appropriate to work for broader engagement from Afghanistan to bilateral issues, economic and trade cooperation, to peace and stability in South Asia," he added.

HC orders two Rajuk

FROM PAGE 1

extra floors based on the design, which, according to the building construction rules, should not have been approved, it said.

The three are also accused of negligence and misusing power, said ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan, citing the case statement.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice KM Hafizul Alam passed yesterday's order after rejecting two separate petitions from Aurangzeb and Nazrul seeking anticipatory bail in the case.

The court, however, granted a six-week anticipatory bail to the former Rajuk chairman Harun.

The HC bench asked Harun to surrender after six weeks before the Dhaka's Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court, which is hearing the case, said the ACC lawyer.

Earlier in the day, the three accused appeared before the HC bench with three separate bail petitions.

Barrister Shafique Ahmed and

advocate AM Aminuddin appeared for the petitioners while advocate Khurshid argued for the ACC.

Aminuddin said the court granted bail to Harun as it did not find any "specific allegation" against his client.

On June 25, the anti-graft watchdog filed two more cases, against 23 people, for their alleged involvement in illegally extending FR Tower.

The ACC sued 20 and five people in the cases over the illegal extension of the building from 16th to 18th and 19th to 23rd floors respectively.

The accused included the former Rajuk chairman; chairman of Rupayan Housing Estate Ltd; and several government officials.

Earlier, an ACC enquiry found that FR Tower had no fire alarm and its exit points and staircases were narrow. Also, the building authorities originally had permission for building only 15 storeys.

These led to the rise in the number of casualties in the fire, according to ACC officials.



The overflowing Jamuna almost submerges two houses in Sonatala upazila of Bogura yesterday. Three upazilas of the district were hit by flood four days ago.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Food, drinking water scarce

FROM PAGE 1

the situation may improve in Lalmonirhat, Netrokona, Sunamganj, Sylhet, Habiganj and Moulvibazar.

Medium to heavy rainfall may occur in the northern and north-eastern parts of the country, according to FFWC bulletin.

FFWC officials yesterday monitored the conditions of rivers in their 93 stations across the country. Of these, 23 had water flowing above danger levels.

In Chattogram, most of tube-wells in Patiya upazila's Shovandandi union have been submerged creating an acute crisis of drinking water for villagers.

Visiting the area yesterday, our correspondent saw many villagers collecting rain water, while many others had to walk miles through waist or chest-deep water to collect drinking water.

"We are confined by water. But we don't have a drop to drink," said Md Lokman, a resident of Adamalla Para area of the union.

"There is only one tube-well left that has not been submerged. It is around two kilometres away from our residence. All the people of our village have to walk through waist-deep water to collect drinking water from there," said Md Idris, a resident of Yakub Nagar area.

Many flood-affected people are suffering from food crisis.

"All the women and children of my family have taken shelter in our relative's house in another upazila. I am alone here to look after my house. I have been eating biscuits and some dry foods for the past two days," he said.

Crisis of food and drinking water

prevails in other flood-affected areas in the district as well, while some 4.5 lakhs people of nine upazilas are in waterlogged areas.

Contacted, Chattogram's deputy commissioner Mohammad Elias Hossain said the district administration had already directed all upazila administrations to take necessary measures for ensuring sufficient relief, drinking water and other essentials for the affected people.

In Rangamati, flood-hit people in Baghaichari upazila are in severe need of drinking water as their houses and tube-wells have all been submerged.

"All the members of five families jointly use one tube-well near our residence. But it has been submerged. So, we have to collect drinking water from a tube-well far away," said Hajera Khatun, a resident of Muslim Block area in the upazila.

However, some are using water purifying tablets to make floodwater drinkable.

"We have got tablets from local medical teams. We are using it to purify floodwater so that it is drinkable," said Rahima Begum, 45, a resident of Kuddus Para village in the same upazila.

Around 10,000 people of the upazila are affected by the flood, according to locals and the authorities concerned.

Speaking to The Daily Star, local upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) Muhammad Ahsan Habib Jitu said they had already distributed dry food, rice, oil, salt and pure drinking water among the affected families.

In Nilphamari, around 40,000 people in the Teesta basin area, who are marooned by flood, are facing a

crisis of food and pure drinking water.

Officials concerned said they were distributing relief, but the affected-people claim those were insufficient.

Our Bandarban correspondent recently visited 10 shelters in the district's town where flood victims claimed that they were facing a serious shortage of food and drinking water and were barely getting help from government.

"We are so worried about our children. They are becoming weak as we cannot provide them with sufficient food," said Monwara Begum, who took shelter in Bandarban Govt Girls' High School.

In Gaibandha, the flood situation has worsened as fresh areas of four upazilas were inundated yesterday following the collapse of a dyke near the district town.

Meanwhile, the flood yesterday started improving in Lalmonirhat, while the situations remain unchanged in Mymensingh and Netrokona.

In Kaptai, the authorities of Kaptai Hydroelectric Power Plant (KHPP), the country's lone hydroelectric project yesterday opened its 16 gates of the dam, as water level on the lake rose above 20-feet higher than the dam can hold, posing a threat of flash floods in adjoining upazilas.

The authorities opened the gates yesterday evening, with the aim to control the water level, said KHPP Manager ATM Abduzzaher.

Boats and steamers were also warned by the authorities to take precautions as their movement may be difficult due to strong currents.

(Our correspondents from different districts contributed to this report.)

Mexico rejects new US asylum restrictions

AFP, Mexico City

Mexico on Monday rejected new asylum restrictions sought by US President Donald Trump to stem the flow of undocumented migrants trying to cross the neighbours' shared border.

Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard said Mexico would not become a dumping ground for asylum seekers rejected by the US, adding that his country would at the same time respect its obligation not to return refugees to danger zones.

The move announced by the Trump administration on Monday declares ineligible for asylum almost all migrants entering the United States from its southern border who didn't ask for asylum protection in any of the countries they crossed to get there.

Police arrest

FROM PAGE 1

Sharif, father of Rifat Sharif and the plaintiff of the case, demanded immediate arrest of his daughter-in-law three days ago, alleging her involvement in the murder.

Meanwhile, a Barguna court recorded the confessional statement of Simon, one of the accused in the case, on Monday when police placed him before the court after his fourth remand.

Humayun Kabir, investigation officer of Rifat murder case, said Senior Judicial Magistrate Sirajul Islam Gazi recorded Simon's statement at his court and sent him to jail.

With Simon, a total of 10 accused in the case gave their confessional statements before the court, the IO added.

Besides, the same court placed Rifat Farazi, another accused in the case, on a fresh seven-day remand after police produced him before the court with a 10-day remand plea on Monday. This was his 3rd remand.

Rifat Sharif, 25, an internet service provider, was hacked to death in broad daylight in front of his wife Aysha Siddika Minni near Barguna Government College on June 26.

A footage of the murder went viral on social media triggering public outrage.

The victim's father filed a murder case with Barguna Sadar Police Station against 12 people on the same day.

The prime accused in the case, Nayon Bond, was killed in a "gunfight" with police on July 2.

Two 'drug dealers'

FROM PAGE 1

Some 79 bottles of Phensedyl, a firearm, and two bullets were recovered from the spot, said the OC.

One drug trader got killed during a raid led by the Detective Branch (DB) of police in Chandmari of Narayanganj around 3:00am, said Kamrul Hassan, a sub-inspector of Narayanganj DB.

"DB personnel led the anti-drug raid on a tip-off. Sensing their presence, the miscreants opened fire. The gunfight ensued as police retaliated," said the SI.

He identified the deceased as Md Biplob of Fatullapur village of Chandmari. The 31-year-old was known as the "godfather of drugs" in his area and was facing at least 14 narcotics cases, according to the SI.

"Biplob was found lying on the ground with gunshot wounds after his accomplices managed to flee. He was taken to the Narayanganj General Hospital where doctors declared him dead," SI Kamrul said.

A firearm was recovered from the spot, he said adding that two sub-inspectors - Osman and Sohel - and two constables - Borhan and Nadim - suffered injuries during the gunfight.

(Staff correspondent from Rajsahi and our correspondent from Narayanganj contributed to the report.)

Unmanned level

FROM PAGE 1

people were killed and 296 others wounded in 103 rail-related incidents as of July 15 this year.

Some 244 people lost their lives and 228 others were injured in 235 rail-related fatalities in 2018, while 229 died and 156 were hurt in 211 such incidents the previous year, says ARI.

Most of the incidents happened when trains ran over people or rrammed vehicles at unprotected level crossings and nearby rail lines, said Imran Uddin, lecturer at Buet's ARI.

According to Bangladesh Railway's latest data prepared in August last year, only 466 gates among 1,412 level crossings have gatekeepers.

Of the 434 gates in Railway's east zone, 245 have gatemen and only 221 out of 978 gates in west zone are manned.

Of the 1,085 unauthorised level crossings, 811 are in east zone while 274 are in west zone, the data shows.

At least nine government bodies were involved in constructing illegal level crossings, with the Local Government Engineering Department having built the highest 452.

The acts are blatant violations of the law, which so far remains only on paper, BR officials said.

BR Director General Md Shamsuddin told this correspondent yesterday that different government bodies set up level crossings without their approval.

He said those organisations did not take the permission because they have to pay a large fee to get approval.

After getting applications, the authorities will evaluate the necessity of level crossings. Once approved, the organisations which need the crossings would have to pay for constructing the crossings and salaries of gatemen for 10 years in advance.

"So, they do it without taking our permission," he said, adding, "We can file cases [against them], but we don't do that as we both are government organisations."

In February 2013, BR sent letters to different organisations for holding a meeting about the authorised level crossings, railway sources said.

But as the BR did not get expected response, the authorities decided to lodge cases against the responsible persons, they said.

"We will talk to them again," Shamsuddin said.

He said they usually put signboards near unmanned rail gates asking people to be careful while crossing those. "People should be more careful."

The BR chief added that they were planning to introduce automated gates at all level crossings and implementing two projects related to level crossings to improve the situation.

Transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque said different government bodies were constructing unauthorised level crossings, ignoring the railway authorities.

"The government has to stop setting up of such level crossings ... The railway authorities have to take steps in this regard," he said.

Prof Shamsul, also former director of ARI, said accident would increase when more double lines and speedy

trains start operating.

"But security issues are ignored [in railways plan]. The authorities are more interested in big infrastructure projects ... But safety-related projects should get more priority," he added.

He said the government should construct overpass or underpass on major rail crossings, remove unauthorised rail crossings or bring those under regulation and assign necessary manpower to all crossings.

TWO PROJECTS

The BR undertook two projects in June 2015 for rehabilitation, construction and upgradation of important level crossings in its both zones. Under the project, the authorities wanted to recruit 1,038 people for manning 328 (182 authorised and 146 unauthorised) level crossings in east zone, railway sources said.

But it could recruit 817 on a temporary basis. The tenure of the project ended in June this year.

The project authorities have already written to the higher authorities for extending the project tenure by two more years and regularising jobs of the temporary workers. There has been no response to this end yet, sources added.

The fate of the project for west zone is also similar.

Some 629 people against the demand of 851 gatemen are now working on a temporary basis at 326 (273 authorised and 53 unauthorised) level crossings, sources said.

Tenure of the project expired last month, but the authorities are yet to respond to project officials' appeal for extending the tenure by two more years, they said.

| LEVEL CROSSING INFO | |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| CATEGORY | NUMBER |
| Total legal level crossings | 1412 |
| Total manned level crossings | 466 |
| Total unmanned level crossings | 946 |
| Total illegal level crossings | 1085 |

SOURCE: BANGLADESH RAILWAY

| ILLEGAL LEVEL CROSSING | |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| NAME | NUMBER |
| LGED | 452 |
| Union councils | 363 |
| Municipalities | 79 |
| City Corporations | 34 |
| District councils | 13 |
| RHD | 11 |
| Chattogram Port Authority | 3 |
| Benapole Land Port Authority | 1 |
| Joypurhat Sugar Mill Authority | 1 |
| Private | 3 |
| Others | 92 |
| Unnamed constructors | 33 |
| Total | 1085 |

SOURCE: BANGLADESH RAILWAY

| NUMBER OF RAIL FATALITIES | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------|-------|--------|
| YEAR | INCIDENTS | DEATH | INJURY |
| 2019 (Till July 15) | 103 | 122 | 296 |
| 2018 | 235 | 244 | 228 |
| 2017 | 211 | 229 | 156 |
| 2016 (Mar to Dec) | 56 | 69 | 46 |

SOURCE: ACCIDENT RESEARCH INSTITUTE, BUET

Procure directly from farmers

FROM PAGE 1

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He also said the government will build separate silos for storing paddy.

HUNT FOR MIDDLEMEN

Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Imran Ahmed said he sought assistance from the DCs to bring to book middlemen, who are alluring overseas jobseekers and putting them in danger abroad.

"These middlemen loot overseas jobseekers. They take Tk 7 lakh from each jobseeker while the cost of sending one abroad is Tk 1.50 lakh. Those who go abroad with middlemen's help become undocumented," he told reporters.

When his attention was drawn to the DCs' proposal for providing smart cards to overseas jobseekers at the district level, he said, "The government has already taken steps on this matter. We have a plan to provide these cards from the digital centres in the unions across the country."

The cards contain all information furnished in jobseekers' passports, their fingerprints, and the names and licence numbers of the recruiting agencies, allowing the authorities to identify all the parties involved in the migration process.

ONION PRICES TO FALL

Prices of essentials like onion and garlic will come down within 15 days, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi said after a session with the DCs.

Rain and fall in onion import from India have resulted in a hike in its

prices, he pointed out.

He claimed that the government has been successful in keeping the prices of essentials in control.

The minister asked the DCs to remain alert against food adulteration.

SECURITY TIGHTENED AT COURTS

Emerging from the session, Law Minister Anisul Huq said a proposal on salaries of public prosecutors (PPs) and additional PPs was sent to the finance ministry.

At present, the PPs and APPs don't draw any monthly salary. They are paid on the basis of their attendance at court hearings.

"We have already instructed the superintendent of police in Cumilla to scale up security at court... Security at all courts across the country will be tightened," Anisul said replying to a query on security at courts following the murder of a man in front of a judge and policemen at a packed courtroom in Cumilla on Monday.

About a deputy commissioner's proposal for giving DCs the authority to empower executive magistrates to deal with sections 98, 108, 110, 144, 145 and 147 of the CrPC, Anisul said it is not possible to consider the proposal right now.

"We will hold discussions to decide whether it is needed or not. The relevant law has to be amended for implementing such a proposal."

The minister also said the government will set up a cell to expedite the process of disposing of cases pending with courts across the country.

The cell comprising five or six deputy attorney generals will help maintain liaison between the Attorney General's Office and the DCs, he added.

JUTE WORKERS 'INSTIGATED'

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"Real workers don't want to wage a movement... but an anti-government quarter is instigating them."

The minister said state-owned jute mills are struggling to compete with those in the private sector following the raise in wages of public jute mill workers in line with the recommendations of the National Wages and Productivity Commission 2015.

The government has a plan to operate the state-run jute mills under Public-Private Partnership projects. "We are also considering a Chinese proposal for financial assistance."

The minister said he had asked the DCs to enforce the Mandatory Jute Packaging Act 2010 to protect the interests of the jute growers and mills.

Meanwhile, Justice Muhammad Imman Ali, who is currently performing the functions of the chief justice in his absence, sought cooperation from the DC's to ensure justice for people.

In a courtesy visit with the senior judge, the DCs called for digitisation of case documents and quick disposal of the cases related to lease of government properties.

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"We have already instructed the superintendent of police in Cumilla to scale up security at court... Security at all courts across the country will be tightened," Anisul said replying to a query on security at courts following the murder of a man in front of a judge and policemen at a packed courtroom in Cumilla on Monday.

About a deputy commissioner's proposal for giving DCs the authority to empower executive magistrates to deal with sections 98, 108, 110, 144, 145 and 147 of the CrPC, Anisul said it is not possible to consider the proposal right now.

"We will hold discussions to decide whether it is needed or not. The relevant law has to be amended for implementing such a proposal."

The minister also said the government will set up a cell to expedite the process of disposing of cases pending with courts across the country.

The cell comprising five or six deputy attorney generals will help maintain liaison between the Attorney General's Office and the DCs, he added.

JUTE WORKERS 'INSTIGATED'

Textiles and Jute Minister Golam Dastagir Gazi claimed that an anti-government quarter is provoking the workers of state-run jute mills into waging a movement to create instability in the sector.

"Real workers don't want to wage a movement... but an anti-government quarter is instigating them."

The minister said state-owned jute mills are struggling to compete with those in the private sector following the raise in wages of public jute mill workers in line with the recommendations of the National Wages and Productivity Commission 2015.

The government has a plan to operate the state-run jute mills under Public-Private Partnership projects. "We are also considering a Chinese proposal for financial assistance."

The minister said he had asked the DCs to enforce the Mandatory Jute Packaging Act 2010 to protect the interests of the jute growers and mills.

Meanwhile, Justice Muhammad Imman Ali, who is currently performing the functions of the chief justice in his absence, sought cooperation from the DC's to ensure justice for people.

In a courtesy visit with the senior judge, the DCs called for digitisation of case documents and quick disposal of the cases related to lease of government properties.