

Australia pledges to stop exporting its trash

AFP, Sydney

Australia yesterday pledged to stop exporting recyclable waste amid global concerns about plastic polluting the oceans and increasing pushback from Asian nations against accepting trash.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison agreed with Australian state and territory leaders to prepare a timeline to phase out the exports of recyclables like plastics, paper and glass.

"It's our waste and it's our responsibility," he told reporters yesterday.

"We're laying it out very clearly that there will be no export of plastics and paper and glass to other countries where it runs the risk of ending up floating around in our oceans -- whether off the Great Barrier Reef, which we know there's strong evidence of that, or anywhere else," he said.

"We will do everything that is in our remit to achieve that goal," he added.

No deadline has been set but local leaders have been tasked with reducing landfill and boosting the recycling sector in Australia, where just 12 percent of plastics are currently recycled.

Government figures show the country shipped over four million tonnes, or 12 percent, of its recyclable waste overseas last financial year, largely to Asian countries.

China began restricting imports on foreign plastics in 2017, leaving developed nations seeking new

destinations to dump their rubbish.

They started shipping huge amounts of trash to other Asian nations like Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

But they too have been pushing back.

Indonesia last month said it would return more than 210 tonnes of garbage to Australia after authorities said they uncovered hazardous material and household trash like diapers in containers meant to hold only waste paper.

In May, neighbouring Malaysia announced it was shipping 450 tonnes of imported plastic waste back to its sources, including Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.

Earlier this year, G20 nations agreed on a voluntary plan to reduce the plastic waste choking the seas.

A particular environmental concern are microplastics -- tiny pieces of degraded waste that absorb harmful chemicals and accumulate inside fish, birds and other animals.

Morrison's call comes before an annual meeting of Pacific nations next week, where ocean pollution and climate change are expected to dominate discussions.

Australia's conservative government has come under fire from Pacific leaders for not doing enough to tackle climate change, with many low-lying nations threatened by rising seas.



Two men pull a girl onto the roof of a train as its coaches are crammed with Eid holidaymakers. With the Eid-ul-Azha only two days away, thousands of people have been leaving the capital to celebrate the festival with their near and dear ones. The photo was taken at the Airport Railway Station in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

UN urges rival Libya forces to agree truce

AFP, Tripoli

The United Nations has called on forces loyal to Libya's internationally recognised government and a rival administration to commit to a humanitarian truce by midnight yesterday.

The UN mission in Libya "calls on all parties to accept a humanitarian truce for Eid Al-Adha", it said in a statement on Twitter late Thursday, referring to the Muslim festival of sacrifice that begins on Saturday.

"The mission hopes to receive written agreement from the parties no later than midnight (2200 GMT) on Friday", the statement said.

Strongman Khalifa Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army launched an offensive against Tripoli -- seat of the Government of National Accord -- in early April.

Over the past four months, 1,093 people have been killed in fighting, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), with forces loyal to the GNA keeping Haftar's troops at bay on the southern outskirts of the city.

UN envoy Ghassan Salame has already called several times for humanitarian truces, without success.

India to fence entire border

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Indian counterpart Amit Shah in New Delhi. It was the 7th India-Bangladesh home-ministerial level talks, and held at Indian home ministry on Wednesday evening.

During the one-hour meeting, Shah requested Bangladesh to take action regarding "illegal entry" of Bangladeshis to India, the minister said.

"I told him that no Bangladeshi goes to India illegally. Our economy is very good and people from different countries come here for employment. So why will Bangladeshis cross the border illegally?"

According to an Indian home ministry statement, "Both sides also reviewed the pending issues related to security and infrastructure at the borders, and agreed to take steps towards the expedited resolution of these matters."

"Home Minister Shri Amit Shah also raised India's concern regarding

the illicit movement of undocumented persons across the border, with a view to find solutions to this problem especially in North East India."

The Indian northeast has eight states including Assam, Tripura, and Meghalaya.

The meeting came ahead of the publication of the final list of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam on August 31. Four million names were excluded in the draft NRC published last year, triggering a major political controversy.

The Indian authorities also requested Bangladesh to keep watch on the border during the election in West Bengal, which is due in 2011.

Asaduzzaman said, "I told them that West Bengal is completely their internal political affair and that we have full control over the border."

The home minister will brief media today after meeting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Hajj today

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pilgrimage for the first time.

"It's a golden opportunity and moment," said his female companion.

Built in a desert valley, Makkah is home to the Kaaba, a cube structure that is the focal point of Islam and draped in a gold-embroidered black cloth.

Muslims around the world pray towards the Kaaba, which is located in the Grand Mosque, and pilgrims walk around it seven times.

"The whole world is here... being here in Makkah is the best feeling," said Mohamed Barry, a pilgrim from Britain.

During the pilgrimage, separate streams of men and women, grouped by nationality, will travel to Mina on foot or in buses provided by the authorities.

A district of Makkah, Mina sits in a narrow valley surrounded by rocky mountains and is transformed each year into a vast encampment for pilgrims.

A total of "350,000 air-conditioned tents have been pitched," a Saudi official said.

Worshippers will climb Mount Arafat, also known as the "Mount of Mercy", for hours of prayers and Koran recitals.

After descending, they will gather pebbles and perform the symbolic "stoning of the devil".

That marks the beginning of Eid al-Adha, the festival of sacrifice, marked tomorrow.

Pilgrims then return to the Grand Mosque to perform a final "tawaf" or

walk around the Kaaba.

POLITICISING THE HAJJ

This year's hajj takes place to a backdrop of Gulf tensions following a series of attacks on tankers, the downing of drones and the seizure of ships.

Riyadh blames regional foe Tehran for the attacks on commercial shipping, accusations Iran vehemently denies.

Despite the absence of diplomatic ties between the two countries, some 88,550 Iranian pilgrims are due to take part in the hajj this year according to Iran's Tasnim news agency.

As in previous years, Saudi authorities have been at pains to stress that the hajj is a religious event and have sought to prevent its politicisation.

Riyadh insisted its two-year embargo on Doha -- which includes restrictions on Qataris travelling to the kingdom -- would not affect the pilgrimage.

But hajj official Hassan Qadi acknowledged "very few Qataris have come to Makkah for the pilgrimage".

Saudi Arabia's hajj ministry accused Qatar of "politicising the hajj and creating obstacles for Qatari pilgrims," the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

The scale of the pilgrimage presents vast security and logistical challenges, with tens of thousands of safety officers deployed.

Riyadh faced strong criticism in 2015 when some 2,300 worshippers were killed in the worst stampede in the gathering's history.

Nightmare Eid journey

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the festival back home.

Many of them took leave for August 14, the only working day next week, and made the Eid vacation longer.

Earlier in the morning yesterday, tens of thousands of people thronged the bus, launch terminals and train stations in the capital. Their sufferings begin just there.

KAMALAPUR

Khaledun Nabi, an NGO worker, went to the Kamalapur Railway Station around 7:00am to catch a special train being operated for Eid.

The train was supposed to leave the station for Lalmonirhat at 9:15, but it did not even arrive there at 2:15pm, said the man while feeding his three-year-old boy. "It's painful. It even more painful for the kids."

"I work in Cumilla and usually take a bus from there to go to Lalmonirhat. But this time I did not get a ticket, so I had to come to Dhaka to catch the train," he said.

The train did not arrive till 3:15pm.

Asma Akhter, a housewife, and her family members had been waiting at the station since 7:00am. They would board Rangpur Express to go to Syedpur in Nilphamari.

The train also did not reach the station till 3:15.

"We planned to go by train to avoid possible tailback on highway. But he faced this problem here," she told The Daily Star.

Many passengers at the station, however, said they were anticipating such delays after they heard about the derailment of a train on the Bangabandhu Bridge.

A coach of Khulna-bound Sundarban Express derailed near the East corner of the bridge around 1:20pm, Mizanur Rahman, divisional railway manager (Pakshey) of Bangladesh Railway.

On information, a rescue team salvaged the coach and railway communication on the route resumed around 4:30pm, he said.

According to the Train Tracking Monitoring System, Chilahati-bound Nilsagar Express, Panchagarh-bound Ekata Express, Rajshahi-bound Dhumketu Express, Rajshahi-bound Banalata Express and Khulna-bound Sundarban Express left the Kamalapur station one-and-a-half to five hours behind the schedule.

Besides, Rajshahi-bound trains Silk City Express and Padma Express and Khulna-bound Chitra Express were all running late by one to three and half hours, railways sources said.

While visiting the railway station, 24, were powerful enough to kill people and destroy properties in the surrounding areas, said investigators.

Masrik graduated from Jashore MM College while Al Amin and Rifat passed HSC examinations recently.

They were produced before the Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, which placed them on a five-day remand.

The CITC unit officials said they recovered 10 detonators and four gas bottles from the arrestees.

"We have recovered some explosives that are similar to the IEDs planted in Paltan and Khamar Bari areas last month. We have collected some pieces of evidence regarding their involvement in it," Monirul said.

The explosives, recovered from Paltan and Khamar Bari on July

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujjan had to answer to question from passengers over the delay.

In reply, he said 32 trains heading towards the western regions have to cross Bangabandhu Bridge and they took a long time to cross it, leading to disruption in train schedule.

He hoped the problem would be solved once another bridge on the Jamuna River would be built by 2023.

About risky journey on train roof, the minister said on many occasions, they could not prevent passengers from travelling this way.

A total of 57 trains, including three Eid special trains, were scheduled to leave Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday, said sources said.

Operation of train in east zone was almost normal.

TRAFFIC CONGESTIONS ON HIGHWAYS

Holidaymakers faced immense sufferings due to traffic congestion on Dhaka-Tangail highway in Tangail and on the highway stretching from the western end of Bangabandhu Bridge to Hatikumrul in Sirajganj.

Vehicles remained stuck in a 70km-tailback from Chandra intersection in Gazipur to Bangabandhu Bridge since 3:00am, due to huge pressure of vehicles and bad shape of the road in some places.

Hundreds of vehicles also got stuck in between the west end of the Bangabandhu Bridge and Hatikumrul in Sirajganj and the bridge authorities were forced to suspend toll collection twice, police and transport workers said.

Sohel Rana, a private service holder, said their bus of Nabil Paribahan started from the capital's Gabtoli area for Dinajpur at 12:30am yesterday, around two hours after schedule.

"We faced huge traffic congestion on both sides of Bangabandhu Bridge. It took 12 hours to reach Bogura, which at best takes five hours during other time of the year," he told this newspaper over phone.

He reached Dinajpur around 5:45pm yesterday, meaning the journey took around 18 hours.

Ahaduzzaman Miah, additional superintendent of Tangail Police, said potholes and mud appeared on roads following rain. Incomplete underpasses, several accidents and vehicles breaking down hitting potholes worsened the situation, he said.

The 25-kilometer section from

Bangabandhu bridge to Hatikumrul point witnessed huge traffic jam due to pressure of the vehicles and sorry state of Nolkha bridge.

Faruk Hossain, a driver of Dhaka coach said the distance between Dhaka and Pabna was merely five hours, but yesterday it took between 12 and 15 hours because of huge traffic jam at Nolka and Hatikumrul points.

Many Eid holidaymakers alleged they paid extra for tickets amid huge demand.

WOES AT FERRY TERMINALS

Rajib Rudra and his family members started from their Mohammadpur home around 5:30am to go to Magura. But they could not reach to Paturia ferry terminal in 11 hours.

Usually, it takes to two to three hours to reach the terminal.

"We are still half kilometres away from the ferry terminal. We have to cross at least a four-kilometre tailback," Rajib told this correspondent over phone at 4:35pm.

They finally cross the Padma river at 6:00pm.

He blamed mismanagement at the ghat for the delay.

Huge pressure of vehicles created a 20-km long queue on Dhaka-Aricha Highway ahead of Paturia-Daulatdia ferry terminal.

The situation was so bad that many local buses changed their destination midway, said Superintendent of Police in Manikganj Rifat Rahman Shahim.

Zillur Rahman, assistant general manager of BIWTC at Aricha Ghat, said they were trying to handle the situation with 20 ferries, but strong currents of the Padma were creating trouble.

The situation at Shimulia and Kathalbari ferry terminals were comparatively better.

Meanwhile, huge number of passengers thronged the Sadarghat Launch Terminal from the morning and the number increased in the evening.

By 9:00pm, more than 100 launches left the terminal, said Badiuzzaman Badal, senior vice-chairman of Bangladesh Inland Waterways (passenger carriers') Association.

He said the number of the launches was sufficient for passengers heading home.

[Our correspondents from Tangail, Pabna, Manikganj, and Munshiganj contributed to this report]

UN rights chief condemns latest US Venezuela sanctions

AFP, Geneva

The UN rights chief on Thursday intensified criticism of US sanctions targeting Venezuela, condemning the latest measures as "extremely broad" with the potential to exacerbate suffering among an already vulnerable population.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, has raised concern about previous sanctions imposed by Washington against the government of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

In the new measures, President Donald Trump's administration ordered a freeze on all Venezuelan government assets in the United States and barred transactions with its authorities.

"I am deeply worried about the potentially severe impact on the human rights of the people of Venezuela of the new set of unilateral sanctions imposed by the US this week," Bachelet said in a statement.

"The sanctions are extremely broad and fail to contain sufficient measures to mitigate their impact on the most vulnerable sectors of the population," she added.

Bachelet, a former president of Chile, noted that the latest sanctions included exceptions for transactions related to certain food, clothing and medicine.

"However, they are still likely to significantly exacerbate the crisis for millions of ordinary Venezuelans," she said.

Venezuela -- wracked by a devastating economic crisis despite vast oil wealth -- has been mired in a political impasse since January when Juan Guaido, speaker of the National Assembly, proclaimed himself acting president.

He is now recognised as Venezuela's leader by more than 50 countries, including the US.

Bachelet has criticised Maduro's government, notably over its violent crackdown on protests, but stressed that previous US sanctions imposed in 2017 and in January of this year had made the "dire crisis" in Venezuela even worse.

Little time

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"We have cancelled leaves of all doctors and nurses. We are trying to ensure treatment to all the patients with our limited resources," the director said.

Liakat Hossain assistant registrar of unit-6 (medicine) at the DMCH said they were really struggling to handle the huge pressure.

Usually, around 150 patients are admitted at unit-6. But now there handling around 225 patients.