

Fraud the main enemy for Afghan election officials

AFP, Kabul

In a dusty Kabul suburb, hundreds of workers check and recheck biometric fingerprint readers -- part of a massive effort to ensure Afghanistan's upcoming presidential election is not tainted by fraud allegations that have marred previous polls.

The young employees at the Independent Election Commission (IEC) are rushing through final technical preparations for the vote, set for September 28.

The stakes for the IEC are high, with the question of turnout in Afghanistan's fourth presidential election since the fall of the Taliban crucial to whether it is seen as fair and transparent.

The Taliban have openly threatened to disrupt the polls, and killed 26 people in a bomb blast at a campaign rally being held by President Ashraf Ghani earlier this week.

Maldives bans

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However, we have been requesting the Maldives authorities to regularise some 40,000 undocumented Bangladeshis. We haven't heard anything from their part until now," he said.

Moshfiqur added that a migrant could become undocumented in Maldives if he or she changed job and if their work permit was expired.

There are also cases of Bangladeshi migrant workers getting hired but not paid, he said, adding in those cases workers change their job and become undocumented.

The taskforce formed by President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih decided to impose the temporary ban. The rules may be reviewed if this decision impacts the economy negatively in next six months, he added.

Under pressure

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Indian stock markets have been on course for the biggest quarterly exodus since at least 1999, with foreign funds having dumped a net \$4.9 billion worth of stocks since June, Bloomberg News said.

Jeffrey Halley at OANDA said the cuts were "likely to re-energise investor interest in the sub-continent" after two and a half years "of slowing growth and disappointment in PM Modi's reform progress".

Authorities have in recent weeks rolled out a series of measures to boost the economy and battle grinding unemployment, which is at its highest since the 1970s.

Among its latest measures are lifting a ban on government departments buying new cars as it looks to support the auto sector, which saw sales dive 41 percent last month, the biggest drop on record.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) -- reportedly under government pressure -- has cut interest rates four times this year to a nine-year low, while New Delhi has also announced the merger of 10 state banks to try to crank up lending.

The government has also eased restrictions on foreign investment in four key sectors, including coal mining, in an effort to attract more overseas capital.

Rajiv Singh from Karvy Stock Broking added that after a number of "minor" changes, the government has finally announced "a bold and major measure to revive animal spirits".

Including surcharges, the effective tax rate will be 25.17 per cent, down by almost 10 percentage points from 34.94 percent before, according to PTTI.

Friday's move will make it more tempting for foreign companies operating in China that have been hit by the China-US trade war, which has seen both sides impose tariffs on goods worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

India and the US are also engaged in a trade spat, something which Modi will be hoping to soothe when he meets President Donald Trump at a "Howdy, Modi!" rally of Indian-Americans in Houston tomorrow.

Bangladeshi

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beaten to death by BSF men. Several injury marks were found on different parts of his body. Police were preparing an inquest report.

The body was sent to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Lt Col SNM Samiun Nabi Chowdhury, commanding officer of 50 BGB Battalion in Thakurgaon, said hearing the news, they asked BSF for a company commander-level flag meeting.

Responding to the call, BSF officials of Nargaon BSF camp took part in the meeting held on the zero line of the border.

Subedar Mohiuddin, company commander of Kathaldangi BGB camp, led the Bangladesh side, while Himmat Singh, assistant commandant of Nargaon BSF camp, led the Indian side.

Refuting the allegation of beating the Bangladeshi to death, the BSF official said they did not detain any Bangladeshi and were not aware of such incident.



A Palestinian protester raises his walking cane as he stands before Israeli border guards during a demonstration against Israeli settlers laying claims and pitching tents in an area of the village of al-Sawahre, near the village of Abu Dis in East Jerusalem, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Youths strike for planet

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Enough to prevent harmful climate change by curbing gas emissions.

On the eve of the strikes, she insisted solutions were being "ignored".

"Everything counts, what you do counts," she said in a video message to supporters.

Demonstrators young and old echoed her cry.

About 200 marched in Ghana's capital Accra, where some 44 percent of the country's population has not heard of climate change, according to a study by Afrobarometer.

"Developing countries like Ghana are the most affected. We don't have the resources to adapt to climate change," said 26-year-old protest organiser Ellen Lindsey Awuku.

Hundreds of others also took to the streets in Kenya and Uganda.

The demonstrations were due to culminate in New York, where 1.1 million students in around 1,800 public schools have been permitted to skip school.

Events began in the deluge-threatened Pacific Islands of Vanuatu, the Solomons and Kiribati, where children chanted: "We are not sinking, we are fighting."

The defiance message was heard across Asia.

"We are the future and we deserve better," 12-year-old Lilly Satidtanasarn -- known as "Thailand's Greta" for her campaigning against plastic bags in malls -- told AFP in Bangkok.

"This (problem) was created by the generation before us... so much is at risk because of one generation and it is up to the next generation to change all of that," said 16-year-old Reezan Ahmed at a protest in Pakistan's capital Islamabad, where some 1,000 people demonstrated.

In Australia, some local authorities, schools and business encouraged people to take part in the strikes.

Australia has been struck in recent years by droughts, more intense bushfires, devastating floods and the bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef -- phenomena blamed on a changing climate.

Numerous peer-reviewed scientific studies have shown a link between human-made gas emissions and climate change.

But the protests also laid bare resistance from those who question the threat.

Australian ruling coalition parliamentarian Craig Kelly on Thursday told children that "everything you're told is a lie".

"The facts are, there is no link between climate change and drought, polar bears are increasing in number."

An increasing number of businesses backed the protests.

Amazon chief Jeff Bezos on Thursday pledged to make the US technology and retail giant carbon neutral by 2040 and encourage other firms to do likewise.

Yesterday's mass action set the scene for a range of high-profile climate events in New York.

A Youth Climate Summit will take place at the United Nations today.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will then host an emergency summit on Monday in which he will urge world leaders to raise their commitments made in the 2015 Paris climate accord.

The agreement saw countries pledge to limit the long-term rise in the average temperature of the Earth to two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-industrial levels, and if possible, to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

A landmark UN report to be unveiled next week will warn that global warming and pollution are ravaging Earth's oceans and icy regions in ways that could unleash misery on a global scale.

The scientific report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will be put to a gathering of experts from 195 countries meeting in Morocco from yesterday.

China's new mega-airport ready to open

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nearly impossible for airlines to add flights at desirable times.

In 2018, more than 100 million travelers passed through its three terminals -- making it only the second airport in the world to cross that passenger traffic milestone, after Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta. China is projected to overtake the United States as the world's biggest air travel market by 2022.

The multibillion-dollar Daxing, designed by the late architect Zaha Hadid and her Chinese partners, is built for the future, boasting four runways and a terminal the size of 97 soccer pitches upon opening of the first phase -- as well as customer-service robots that will provide travelers with flight updates and airport information.

The "modest" initial operational target is to accommodate 72 million passengers and 2 million tons of cargo annually by 2025. The ambitious master plan calls for the building of a total of seven runways, and moving at least 100 million passengers and 4 million tons of cargo a year through the airport.

Construction for the \$11.5 billion project began in 2014, with more than 40,000 workers on site at its peak. The terminal bears all the hallmarks of Hadid's signature contour lines, with plenty of natural light shining through its more than 8,000 distinct rooftop windows.

Nicknamed "starfish" by Chinese media for its shape of five concourses connected to a main hall, Daxing aims to reduce walking for passengers, long a complaint about many new mega-hubs. The airport authority has promised a distance of no more than 600 meters (650 yards) -- about eight minutes of walking -- between security checkpoints and the remotest gates.

Another passenger concern is Daxing's location. It's in the far south of Beijing, a city notorious for traffic jams. The new airport is some 50 kilometers (30 miles) from Tiananmen Square in the city center -- and even farther away from the main business districts in the east and north.

Brushing aside such worries, officials say they have built more than just an airport -- but rather a truly integrated transportation hub that will eventually see high-speed rail, inter-city services and downtown-to-airport express trains all stopping right beneath the terminal. The airport express trains, traveling at a top speed of 160 kilometers an hour (100 mph), promise to whisk arriving passengers to the city in less than 20 minutes.

Everybody now disowns

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his business, securing contracts from the housing and public works ministry.

In 2001, when the BNP-led alliance came to power, he became assistant secretary of Jubo Dal. He established good relations with Mirza Khokon, younger brother of the then public works minister Mirza Abbas.

At that time, he got work orders from the Public Works Department and expanded his business further.

As the AL returned to power in 2009, he began contacting some Jubo League leaders, and eventually got very close to them.

Delwar Hossain, organising secretary of Sammandi union Jubo League in Narayanganj, said Shamim last visited his ancestral home at Dakkhinpara village in May.

A three-storey building is being constructed at his village home, he added.

Four held

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of the Padma.

Around 1:00am on Thursday, the goons chopped off Rubel's wrists and snatched Tk 1.5 lakh from him. On information, the victim's family rescued him and rushed him to Chapainawabganj Sadar Hospital. Rubel was later shifted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, the case statement added.

Foyezuddin and Rubel both were leaders of the ruling Awami League and they had previous enmity over establishing supremacy in Tartipur Cattle Market near the Padma, the case statement added.

Trump rolls out red carpet for Australia's Morrison

AFP, Washington

Don't expect any awkward silences when President Donald Trump and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison sit down to a rare state dinner at the White House yesterday.

They already agree on curbing asylum seekers, playing down climate change fears, pushing back against Iran, and excluding China's Huawei from their 5G phone markets.

This is "one of our strongest and most enduring relationships anywhere in the world," a senior Trump administration official said Thursday, asking not to be identified.

Australian flags are fluttering alongside the Stars and Stripes at the White House, where Morrison will get a red carpet, honor guard, joint press conference and then dinner in the beautiful Rose Garden.

Morrison may air Australia's nervousness about Trump's trade war with China. In June, he warned of smaller economies suffering collateral damage and of the global system coming "under real pressure."

But this is likely to be a relaxed meeting between political friends, albeit with a lot of pomp and ceremony.

Although the head of state in Australia is Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, not Morrison, the White House is giving this the most prestigious category of state dinner.

It's only the second time that has been granted in the Trump presidency and the first for an Australian premier here since John Howard in 2006.

On Sunday, Morrison and Trump will reunite for a visit at a new Australian-owned factory in Wapakoneta, Ohio, that the White House says will "demonstrate the strong trade and investment relationship."

Trump's relations with the previous Australian premier, Malcolm Turnbull, got off to a bad start.

But even though it's end of summer in Washington, there'll be plenty of diplomatic warmth on Friday.

Morrison will cement his place in a growing conservative club -- also including the likes of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson -- drawn into Trump's orbit.

Trump has defied controversy over his push to prevent illegal immigrants and asylum seekers from crossing the Mexican border. Similarly, Morrison, a former immigration minister, has worked to make Australia less attractive to would-be asylum seekers.

His Liberal-National coalition also has much in common with Trump's climate change skepticism, rejecting overwhelming scientific warnings to encourage lucrative fossil fuel industries. Australia is the world's largest coal exporter.

Australia has joined Trump's coalition to patrol the Strait of Hormuz, where Iranian forces threaten to interfere with the massive international flow of oil exports.

BCL men

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The incident took place in front of project engineers Shafi Mandal and Nazmul Haque, the contractor said.

Contacted, Shafi confirmed the incident occurred and said he had informed his higher authorities of the matter.

They also assaulted Nazmul on the spot and snatched keys of his car, Shafi said.

The keys were recovered on Thursday afternoon and handed over to Nazmul, said Johurul Islam, officer-in-charge of Tetulia Police Station, adding that no case was filed yet in this connection.

Sakib, however, denied the allegation of extortion and said they had only asked for a sub-contract for supplying sand and stone required for the project.

Where saving

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"Water is the most precious thing here. We have to do everything with the allotted amount," Major Intiaz Zaman told The Daily Star.

Peacekeepers cannot even dream of taking a proper shower in Kidal, he said.

"I keep my dirty laundry under my feet when I bathe. As the clothes get soaked and I can wash them with less water."

Some soldiers step into their bucket so that when they bathe, the water is collected in the bucket and can be used later.

The key to survival in the desert is to know how to save water, the peacekeepers said.

There are taps inside the washrooms and kitchens but not a single one works. There is no running water in Kidal.

With very poor ground water availability, water usage is never a mindless act here. "You make a conscious decision every time you use water," said soldier Khandaker Muhammad Zakir Hossain.

They also conserve rainwater during monsoon and treat waste water for reuse. Rainwater is used for human consumption and treated wastewater for gardening and other chores.

The water trucks are usually heavily guarded.

"It is difficult to do everything with this little water. But, when we think of the people of Mali, we feel that we are far better off," said soldier Atikur Rahman.

Sergeant Abdul Kaium said, "We have accepted this. We are here on a special mission. Whenever we think of the water crisis, we remind ourselves of the reason why we are here and motivate ourselves."

With the average temperature of around a scorching 50-degrees Celsius, the soldiers frequently suffer from dehydration and nosebleeds.

The desert sand is so dry that water drops disappear in the blink of an eye.

Impose arms

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practices, systematic violations basic rights, while there are tight military controls in place limiting access to aid agencies and media in Rakhine.

On April 29 this year, EU extended a ban on selling arms to Myanmar and prolonged sanctions against high-ranking officials over their role in the Rohingya crisis. The embargo on weapons and other equipment that could be used for repression would stay in place until at least April 30, 2020.

In yesterday's resolution, MEPs expressed grave concern about the ongoing and long-lasting conflict and called upon Myanmar government and the security forces to immediately stop the violations.

They also welcomed the ICC decision to open a preliminary investigation into crimes under the Court's jurisdiction committed against the Rohingya population since 2016. The European Parliament has also called on Myanmar to cooperate with the ICC and become a signatory of the Rome Statute of the ICC.

It reiterated its call for the EU and its Member States to take lead on the UN Security Council on the request to refer the situation in Myanmar to the ICC, and support efforts to open a case on Myanmar's possible violation of the UN Genocide Convention before the International Court of Justice.

MEPs reiterated call on the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Member States to seek accountability in multilateral fora for the perpetrators of crimes in Myanmar, while calling on Myanmar to cooperate with international efforts to ensure accountability.

They also called on Bangladesh authorities to guarantee full access to quality education for Rohingya children, to lift restrictions on access to the internet and to freedom of movement, and to ensure that the security forces operating in the camps uphold all standards to protect refugees' personal security.

The European Parliament observed financial responsibility for assisting the refugee population should not fall disproportionately on Bangladesh and called for further international support for those communities hosting the refugees.