

Tension after border firing

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 the others were wearing shorts and Genji (T-shirt). They were armed, he said.

A BGB patrol team from Charghat stopped the BSF members and said the fisherman would be handed over to the BSF authorities through a flag meeting, he said.

The BSF men then tried to take away the fisherman forcibly. At this, the BGB men told the BSF members that they too intruded into Bangladesh territory and that they would also be handed over through a flag meeting.

Panicked, the BSF members started rushing back to the Indian side along with the fisherman. As the BGB personnel tried to obstruct them, they opened fire, forcing the BGB team to fire back in self-defence.

Later at a flag meeting between the two sides, the BGB came to know that one BSF jawan was killed and another was injured, the BGB official said.

He said the flag meeting was peaceful and that another meeting would be held in this regard.

Earlier in the day, Lt Col Ferdous said BSF men intruded into Bangladesh territory and attempted to snatch away an Indian fisherman whom the BGB members caught from Bangladesh territory for catching egg-carrying hilsa.

Fisheries department officials, assisted by police, BGB and river police have been conducting drives on a regular basis in the Padma since Bangladesh imposed a 22-day ban on catching egg-carrying hilsa on October 9.

As part of their regular drive, a team of three officials of the fisheries department assisted by BGB members from Charghat BOP began patrolling the Padma along the border in Charghat yesterday morning, said Ariful Islam, the Charghat upazila fisheries officer.

During the patrol around 9:00am, the team found several fishermen were catching hilsa in the Bangladesh portion of the river, said the BGB director.

The patrol team challenged the fishermen and caught one of them who

was found to be an Indian national while the others managed to flee into India.

Two hours later, BSF members went to the scene in speedboats and challenged BGB members asking them to return the Indian national, said the BGB director.

"They tried to snatch the Indian fisherman," he said.

He claimed that BGB fired at least three bullets in the air while the BSF men fired at least 15 bullets while leaving the scene.

In the last one week, Bangladeshi fishermen held meetings and have been complaining to the local authorities that Indian fishermen frequently intruded into Bangladesh territory and catch hilsa even during the ban that will end on October 30.

WHAT BSF SAYS
 In a statement, the BSF said three Indian fishermen were caught by Bangladesh officers and two of them were released later.

"This morning, three Indian fishermen went fishing in the Padma river in the border area. Two fishermen returned and approached the Kakmarichar BSF post, saying that the Border Guard Bangladesh had apprehended them and later released two of them," said the statement.

"Around 1030 hrs, the post commander and five troopers approached the BGB patrol in a BSF boat. During a flag meeting, the BGB patrol not only refused to release the Indian fisherman, but also tried to cordon the BSF troops. Sensing that the situation is worsening, the BSF party immediately returned. BGB troops opened fire on the returning BSF party," it added.

Both BSF soldiers were evacuated to the nearest medical facility, where head constable Vijay Bhan Singh was declared dead on arrival. The injured soldier is being treated in a hospital, the statement said.

Vijay, 50, was a resident of Uttar Pradesh's Firozabad, the statement added.



A shelter home in Bangla Bazar area of Gaibandha's Haripur union is in a sorry state in the absence of renovation. Built under a project named Ashrayan Prakalpa, the structure was hit hard by flood and erosion in 2015. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: K M REZAUL HOQUE

HC stays BTRC bid

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 The government is ready to appoint the administrators as per the rules of the telecom act, he said.

The minister claimed that his ministry had sent the approval to the BTRC for appointing the administrators.

The Daily Star could not verify if the order reached the regulator as of 5:00pm yesterday.

Earlier, Sharif Bhuiyan, a lawyer for Grameenphone, said the BTRC on April 2 sent a letter demanding Tk 12,579.95 crore from the carrier as "tax, revenue share, and late fees". He said 27 items in the letter were illogical.

Grameenphone then filed a case with a Dhaka court seeking remedy. It asked the court to direct the BTRC not to realise the money and harass the carrier until the issue was resolved.

The court rejected Grameenphone's plea.

Grameenphone then moved to the HC seeking a stay on the BTRC realising the money and the court yesterday issued the order in favour of the carrier.

Meanwhile, Robi, the second largest carrier in the country, has also filed a petition with the HC regarding the BTRC trying to realise Tk 867.24 crore from it.

The hearing on its petition might be held next week.

BTRC Chairman Md Jahirul Haque yesterday afternoon said he had no idea about the court order and that they would continue with their work to appoint the administrators until they

received the court order.

He said the commission has started the process to appoint a four-member team in each operator where one would act as the chief executive officer. The three others would be legal, engineering, and finance and marketing experts, the BTRC chairman said.

"We will not publish any advertisement ... We will try to find eight people who are capable, honest, and intelligent," he said.

The BTRC had sought the ministry's approval for appointing administrators on Tuesday.

After two separate audits between 2015 and 2016, the telecom regulator claimed that Grameenphone and Robi owed the government Tk 13,447 crore.

The carriers with over 12 crore active users and 75 percent market share refused to pay claiming the amount was subject to dispute.

Later, the BTRC issued two notices on Grameenphone and Robi asking why their 2G and 3G licences should not be revoked for their failure to pay the "dues".

The BTRC, terming the operators' response "unsatisfactory", moved to appoint administrators.

Hossain Sadat, head of regulatory affairs and acting head of communications at Grameenphone, said, "We would like to reaffirm our commitment to reaching a transparent and amicable resolution to the disputed BTRC audit claim through a constructive dialogue."

Proved innocent

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 Babu, for their involvement in a clash at Gangoli village.

Police, however, arrested Bablu instead of Sree Babu.

According to the case filed on April 18, 2001, Bablu was behind bars for six days before getting bail.

On June 23, 2016, he was again produced as Sree Babu in a lower court that convicted him and the five other accused. They were awarded two years' imprisonment and fined Tk 5,000 each.

Bablu had to serve around two months in jail as Sree Babu before getting bail on August 16, 2016, after an appeal against the verdict.

"I have lost 17 years of my life. The cost of fighting the case was much too high for me to bear as I am a day labourer. I wasn't able to give any attention to my family," said Bablu after his release was ordered.

"I am very happy that I am finally

relieved of the sufferings. I don't want anyone to suffer like I had to."

While ordering the release of Bablu Sheikh yesterday, Judge Saifur Rahman Siddiki made a four-point observation. The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the observations.

The two investigation officers -- Mominul Islam and Helena Parvin -- submitted their reports without investigating properly, he observed.

He also asked the authorities concerned to take legal action against the two IOs.

The lower court judge failed to follow the code of criminal procedure and handed the judgement all of a sudden, Judge Siddiki said.

"By doing so, it has made an error in judgement."

He added that the lawyer concerned failed to do his duty as he was supposed to notice that the wrong man was serving jail term.

Malaysia looks to strengthen navy as sea tensions grow

AFP, Kuala Lumpur
 Malaysia must strengthen its navy to better defend the country's waters, a minister said yesterday, as tensions mount over Beijing's growing assertiveness in the contested South China Sea.

China has laid claim to nearly all of the sea and has built numerous military outposts on small islands and atolls, angering other countries with competing claims to the waters,

including Malaysia.

Tensions have also flared between China and the US, which has sent warships through the South China Sea to assert international rights to freedom of navigation.

In a speech to parliament, Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah said the government wanted to "control the presence" of warships in the sea, in part by boosting the strength of its navy.

ACC to probe alleged graft in purchase 3 policemen suspended for carrying hilsa

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 Uddin has been made the chief of the committee.

According to ACC rules, an enquiry should be completed within 45 working days of its beginning.

On May 21, ACC Chairman Iqbal Mahmood said the commission had been closely monitoring the graft issue.

He said they would take necessary actions based on the findings of the two investigations by the housing and public works ministry.

According to media reports, the purchase prices of various items to furnish 966 flats of the project's Russian engineers and other officials were abnormally higher than the market prices.

The reports claimed that each pillow was bought for Tk 5,957, and the cost of carrying it to a flat was Tk 760. An electric stove was bought at Tk 7,747 and the cost for carrying it from the ground floor to the top floor was Tk 6,650. Each building of the project has 16 to 20 floors.

The reports also said the price of an electric iron was Tk 4,154 and the carrying cost was Tk 2,945.

When the matter came to light, the housing and public works ministry formed two probe committees. They found anomalies involving Tk 36.4 crore in purchasing furniture and other household items for the project in Pabna.

The probe bodies recommended departmental and legal actions against 50 project officials, including Engr Masudul Alam, former project director of Green City Housing Project under the power plant, over the irregularities.

On May 22, Masudul was made a reserve officer at the Public Works Department.

TWO CASES FILED
 Meanwhile, the ACC yesterday filed a case against eight people, including former chairman of erstwhile Farmers Bank Mahbulul Haque Chisty, his brother Majedul Haque Chisty and ex-additional managing director AKMM Shamim for allegedly misappropriating about Tk 114.34 crore from the bank.

The five other accused are Abdul Wadud, proprietor of Shababa Apparels, Rashed Ali, owner of ADM Dyeing and Washing, Mefthah Ferdous, proprietor of Tanuj Corporation, Golam Sarwar, owner of Mohammad Ali Transport and Ismail Hawladar, proprietor of Kanam Products.

Farmers Bank has been renamed as Padma Bank. The bank, which was established in 2013, became a hotbed for financial irregularities in less than three years of operation. More than Tk 3,500 crore was siphoned out from the bank, according to Bangladesh Bank.

On April 10 last year, the ACC arrested Chisty, his son Rashedul Haque Chisty and two officials of the bank in connection with a Tk 160 crore laundering case.

Also yesterday, the ACC filed another case against controversial business tycoon Moosa Bin Shamsher, his brother Faruk-uz-Zaman Chowdhury, owner of Auto Define Wahidur Rahman, Assistant Engineer Ayub Ansari of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority and one Fareed Nabir for using fake documents to dodge an import tax of about Tk 2.15 crore on a luxury car.

Two years ago, the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate asked the ACC to sue Moosa on charges of dodging the tax.

According to the case statement, a seized Range Rover used by Moosa was registered with the Bhola office of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, with a bill of entry showing Tk 17 lakh was paid in taxes.

But an investigation found that no such bill of entry was submitted to Chattogram Customs House.

3 policemen suspended for carrying hilsa

STAR REPORT
 Three policemen were suspended for carrying brood hilsa in Shariatpur yesterday, while 161 fishermen were jailed or fined for catching hilsa across the country defying a government ban.

The government has imposed a 22-day ban from October 9 on catching, selling, and transporting hilsa to ensure safe spawning during its peak breeding period.

The suspended policemen are Montu Hossain, assistant town sub-inspector, Sonjib Samaddar and Md Hridoy, constables of Shariatpur Police Lines.

The three were carrying around 200 brood hilsa on two motorbikes on Wednesday night. Locals caught them red-handed in front of Shariatpur Water Development office around 10:30pm, said Biswajit Boiragi, district fisheries officer in Shariatpur.

On information, superintendent of Shariatpur police Abdul Momen and other administrative officials rushed there. Later, the SP suspended the policemen, said Sirajul Islam, reserve inspector of Shariatpur Police Lines, adding that departmental action would be taken against them after probe.

Meanwhile, mobile courts assisted by river police jailed or fined 161 fishermen for catching hilsa in rivers across the country.

Of them, 131 fishermen were given different jail terms, while 30 others were fined Tk 1.38 lakh, BM Harun-Ar-Rashid, superintendent (crime and operations) of river police, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Around 22.68 lakh metres of illegal fishing nets, 45 boats, seven trawlers, and 1,389kg of hilsa were seized during the drives.

The nets were burnt and the fish were distributed among the poor, the police officer said.

The fisheries and livestock ministry, river police, and local administrations are conducting drives across the country.

In Munshiganj, mobile courts gave jail terms to 57 fishermen for catching brood hilsa in Lauhojong and Sreenagar upazilas, while 11 others, including seven women, were fined Tk 24,000 for possessing hilsa in Sirajdikhan upazila.

In Tangail, two mobile courts in separate incidents jailed 12 fishermen for 15 days and fined nine others Tk 31,500 for netting hilsa in the Jamuna river in Sadar and Bhupur upazilas.

Our Faridpur, Munshiganj, and Tangail correspondents contributed to this report.

New Brexit deal reached

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 The deal is a personal victory for Johnson, a leader of the 2016 Brexit referendum who was told repeatedly by EU leaders that they would not give him a new deal.

But it could quickly turn to defeat if the House of Commons -- which rejected a previous divorce text three times -- again refuses to play ball.

The immediate reaction was hostile. Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which props up Johnson's Conservatives, said it "will be unable to support these proposals".

The main opposition Labour, Scottish National and Liberal Democrat parties also spoke out against it.

Their response sent the pound sinking again after it had earlier risen to five-month peaks on news of the deal.

The draft agreement was forged just weeks before Britain was due to leave the bloc, ending more than four decades of close economic and political ties with its nearest neighbours.

Weeks of tense negotiations focused on changing the arrangements to

keep open the border between British Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland.

All sides agree they do not want infrastructure on the frontier, to avoid exacerbating tensions over Britain's control of Northern Ireland that caused decades of deadly violence up until the 1990s.

The new plan would see Northern Ireland remain British legal territory but trade under EU regulations.

"There will be no border on the island of Ireland and the (EU's) single market will be protected," Juncker said.

But it would involve some customs and tax checks with the rest of the UK, and the DUP warned the plans "undermine the integrity of the union".

Northern Ireland's regional assembly would be given a vote every four years on whether to maintain the arrangements.

But the DUP warned that did not go far enough, as there would be no vote before the plans came into effect.

Johnson met repeatedly with DUP leaders this week in a bid to keep them

onside -- and has also assured his European counterparts that he can get the deal through.

French President Emmanuel Macron said he was "reasonably confident" the deal could be ratified.

But Johnson has no majority among MPs, and his threat to leave the EU with or without a deal this month has exacerbated existing divisions in parliament.

Opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said the only way out was for a second referendum, amid speculation such a motion could be put to MPs at Saturday's sitting.

"The best way to get Brexit sorted is to give the people the final say in a public vote," he said.

However, it is not clear there is enough support in the House of Commons for a new referendum, and Johnson's government is strongly opposed.

Opinion polls show Britons remain deeply divided over Brexit, although the balance has shifted slightly in favour of staying in the EU.

8,000 acres of forests razed

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 since the Rohingya influx started in August 2017.

According to the report, a total of 6,164.02 acres of reserved forest have been razed to make way for the settlements in the upazilas. Trees have been chopped down for firewood in an additional 1,837 acres of forest.

Of the 6,164.02 acres lost to settlements, 4,136.52 acres were natural forest and 2,027.50 acres planted forest. The land belongs to the Cox's Bazar South Forest Department.

Rohingya refugees have been living in 34 camps, of which 26 are in Ukhiya and eight in Teknaf.

In forests, planted trees worth around Tk 198 crore and naturally growing trees worth around Tk 456 crore have disappeared, the report said.

MASSIVE DAMAGE TO BIODIVERSITY
 In the 6164.02 acres of reserved forest, the damage to the biodiversity is equivalent to an estimated loss of about Tk 1,409 crore, the report said.

It said a large number of shanties built after razing the trees caused extensive damage to the biodiversity. Therefore, it may take a long time for an expert team to properly assess the damage.

In September 2016, an expert team of the government assessed how the construction work of Single Point Mooring in Moheshkhali upazila of

the district impacted the biodiversity of a nearby reserved forest.

The estimation regarding the damage to biodiversity by Rohingya settlements were made in light of the findings of the 2016 assessment.

Following a recent proposal of the forest department, the ministry formed an outline of a 10-member expert team to thoroughly assess of the damages to biodiversity.

Besides, other forest resources worth around Tk 456 crore were damaged.

CONSTRUCTION WORK CONTINUES
 Following a meeting at the Prime Minister's Office last month, the Cox's Bazar administration issued a notice restricting all sorts of construction on properties belonging to the forest department.

However, different organisations are still building permanent structures in the Rohingya camp areas cutting hills and razing forests, the report said.

UPROOTING TREES
 No fuel has been distributed among the Rohingyas to cook with. As a result, the refugees have chopped down and, in most cases, uprooted trees on 1,837 acres of reserved forest (580 acres planted and 1,257 acres natural). These forests were outside the camps.

The damage is equivalent to a loss of over Tk 135 crore, it said.

MOVEMENT OF WILD ELEPHANTS STOPPED
 Saying that the forests in Cox's Bazar were the natural habitat of the critically endangered Asian elephant, the report mentioned that a 2017 report of the International Union for Conservation of Nature found only 63 Asian elephants living in the forests of Ukhiya, Teknaf, and Ramu upazilas.

The report said those elephants used to travel to Bandarban or Myanmar through Panerchora-Rajarkul and Balukhali-Ghumdhum corridors.

But the Panerchora-Rajarkul corridor was closed following the construction of a cantonment in Ramu. After the Rohingya influx and subsequent construction of their shanties, the Balukhali-Ghumdhum corridor got closed too, said the report.

As a result, incidents of elephant-human conflict increased, resulting in the deaths of at least 12 Rohingyas.

Such instances may increase in the future, the report warns.

"What Rohingya people have done in Ukhiya and Teknaf is not mere damage to the environment or biodiversity, it's simply devastation," Saber Hossain Chowdhury told The Daily Star after visiting the area yesterday.

"The committee will come up with some comprehensive suggestions on how to stop further deterioration of the situation and how to make up for the loss," he added.

3 of a family

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 The injured are currently receiving treatment at CMCH, OC Dulal added.

Shahabuddin said a big blast went off when the ambulance was crossing Chatori Chowmuhani area around 2:45pm, just an hour after the family hired the ambulance to their village home in Banshkhali upazila from CMCH.

Mafiz was released from the hospital yesterday morning, six days after he was admitted to the Neurosurgery unit with a head injury, Shahabuddin said.

"I don't know what happened... I just heard a big sound and then discovered myself outside the ambulance," he said in a quavering voice while talking to this correspondent at CMCH yesterday afternoon.

Police said an explosion of the CNG cylinder was the reason behind the accident.

Advocate Miraj Uddin, a cousin of Bubul who rushed to CMCH after the incident, told this correspondent that gas cylinders of vehicles were not being monitored properly, which was resulting in frequent accidents.

He urged the government to strictly monitor the gas cylinders so that such incidents can be avoided in future.