

Govt unblocks PUBG hours after blocking

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Posts and Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar said they had unblocked popular online game PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG) hours after a top police official said it was blocked.

Minister Jabbar told this correspondent over the phone at 10:10pm that the block was lifted after the matter was reviewed. He, however, did not go into details on why they changed their stance.

Around 3:00pm, Najmul Islam, additional deputy commissioner of DMP's cyber security division, said police had requested the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to block the game.

"We have observed the adverse effects on the children's psychosocial behaviour due to the game. It also eats up their study time. We have received several complaints from the citizens and based on these and we suggested the BTRC to block it," Najmul had told The Daily Star.

He, however, admitted that they had not done any research or consulted any expert before determining the game's "psychosocial impact". He also

could not say how many active PUBG players Bangladesh had.

The police official said they suggested the move after receiving many complaints from citizens, triggered by the "violent" and "addictive" nature of the game.

"There is no other intention of the government," Najmul said.

After the minister's announcement of the unblocking, Najmul then posted a status on his Facebook to confirm the development.

Meanwhile, PUBG player communities in Bangladesh have complained of facing problems in playing the game since the start of October. They claimed that the BTRC had already blocked the gaming servers, before the official announcement to do so.

PUBG is a hugely popular, online multiplayer shooting game that has been topping the charts in countries around the world, including Bangladesh.

In the survival-themed version of the game, up to one hundred players parachute onto an island and scavenge it for weapons and equipment to ensure their survival. Players have to kill others to survive or to avoid being

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Good news for tourists

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Currently, buses operate on five cross-border routes: Dhaka-Kolkata-Dhaka, Dhaka-Agartala-Dhaka, Dhaka-Sylhet-Shillong-Guwahati-Dhaka, Agartala-Dhaka-Kolkata-Agartala and Dhaka-Khulna-Kolkata-Dhaka.

Suvenker Ghosh Rakesh, managing director of Shyamoli NR Travels, which operates bus on all the five routes, said they had earlier placed proposals to the ministry following demands of holidaymakers.

A large number of holidaymakers seek for direct bus services to Gangtok and Darjeeling as those are popular tourist destinations, he said.

Besides, many Bangladeshi parents send their children to boarding schools in Darjeeling and they make frequent visits to the area, he added.

Distance between Dhaka and Darjeeling via Siliguri is around 450-kilometre whereas distance between Dhaka and Gangtok via Siliguri is around 500-kilometre.

"We are ready to operate buses on these routes if the government allows us to do so," Suvenker said on October 6.

Mahbub Hossain Sumon, managing director of Touch Creation Ltd, a travel agency, hailed the move, saying, "This definitely is a great initiative."

He said India lifted a ban in last November that restricted foreigners from entering Gangtok and now anyone can take permission from Indian High Commission in Dhaka or from India to visit there.

He, however, said heavy buses would not be operated from Siliguri to Darjeeling due to narrow and zigzag roads.

Light vehicles can go there, he added.

About possible costs, he said it would cost around Tk 15,000 per person to

visit the destinations for three to four days.

Asked whether the initiative can put adverse impact on domestic tourism in Bangladesh, Sumon replied in negative.

"Those who want to visit Darjeeling or Gangtok will go there at any cost. The direct bus service will just help them," he said.

PROBLEMS IN EXISTING ROUTES

Faruk Talukder Sohel, managing director of Sohag Paribahan, said although several private bus companies have their service on the existing routes, only one can directly go to the destinations.

Other operators need to change buses at the border. Indian private operators then take the passengers from the borders to their destinations, he added.

Currently, Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) has the licence to operate bus directly through border but the state-run agency does not operate bus. Rather, it chose Shyamoli NR Travels through competitive bidding to do so, Sohel said.

"It will be very good if private operators are allowed to operate buses directly," he said.

Sohel said passengers of these routes often face problems at immigration if there is any delay at the ferry terminals.

"We have requested the government to give special privilege to the international passengers at the ferry terminals, but to no avail," he alleged.

Suvenker Ghosh Rakesh also echoed him.

He demanded dedicated separate booths at borders, especially at Benapole, for passage of cross-border buses.

The facility will help passengers of the cross-border buses to complete their immigration process quickly.

Qatar reforms labour rules

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A ministerial decree was also signed, removing exit permit requirement for all workers except military personnel. Together, these steps mark the end of kafala in the country.

In addition, the council of ministers endorsed a new law to establish a non-discriminatory minimum wage, the first in the Middle-East. The legislation is expected to come into force by January 2020.

The ILO welcomes these reforms and recognises the commitment of the State of Qatar to transforming its labour market. These steps will greatly support the rights of migrant workers, while contributing to a more efficient and productive economy," said ILO Director General Guy Ryder.

The elimination of the NOC

requirement will allow workers to freely change employers following an initial probationary period. Should they wish to change employers during this period, the new employer would need to reimburse recruitment costs to the original employer, said the ILO.

The decision on exit permits means that domestic workers, workers in government and public institutions, workers employed at sea and in agriculture, as well as casual workers are free to leave the country either temporarily or permanently without having to obtain the permission of their employers.

The establishment of a non-discriminatory minimum wage that applies to all nationalities and all sectors will guarantee a minimum level of protection for all workers.

Four killed in shootouts

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Sensing danger, the criminals opened fire on the BGB men, forcing them to retaliate that eventually triggered a "gunfight", said the CO.

Later, BGB officials found two bullet-hit men on the spot and took them to a local hospital where doctors declared them dead.

The BGB official also claimed that three of their men were injured in the incident.

A total of 50,000 pieces of yaba pills and a local firearm were recovered from the spot, said BGB.

Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, said two cases were filed in this connection.

In Mymensingh, a suspected robber was killed in an alleged gunfight with Detective Branch (DB) of Police in Rasulpur area of Gafargaon upazila.

The dead is Abdul Motalab, 42.

Being tipped-off that a gang of robbers were preparing to rob a house in Rasulpur area, DB men conducted a drive to arrest them around 12.30am, said Shah Kamal Akanda, officer-in-charge of DB Police in Mymensingh

who led the team.

Sensing police presence, the criminals opened fire on police, forcing them to fire back, which eventually turned into a "shootout".

Later, police found bullet-hit body of Motalab and rushed him to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead around 1.30am, said the OC, adding that police recovered a pipe-gum with 10 bullets from the spot.

Motalab was a member of inter-district robbers' gang and he was accused in five robbery cases lodged with Gafargaon Police Station, the OC said.

However, victim's elder son Jewel Mia, 24, a garment worker by profession, said his father went missing since Wednesday afternoon and they had not been able to trace him.

Asked, DB OC Shah Kamal said they had no such information.

In Joypurhat, Aminul Islam Kaset, an accused of multiple crimes, including abduction, was killed in an alleged gunfight with police at Pachbibi upazila, reports our Dinajpur correspondent.

Henrik Petersen said that in the future, Handke would be considered



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina poses for a photo with the winners of a cultural competition at the capital's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre yesterday. Sheikh Russell Jatiya Shishu-Kishore Parishad organised the programme, marking the birthday of Sheikh Russell, youngest son of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

PHOTO: PID

Red tape holds back progress

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which is a long-drawn-out exercise.

"And the situation is even more dragged-out in China," said a finance ministry official upon condition of anonymity to speak candidly on the matter.

For instance, if the Chinese side do not agree to or fail to understand even a particular word in the project documents, they send the file back to Bangladesh for the process to start afresh.

Besides, China's Exim Bank has some limitations: only a few officials of the bank deal with foreign loans, so the funds are released very slowly.

The intense lobbying by Chinese firms in both the countries to win the contracts for the development projects cause further delays, the finance ministry official said.

"Having said that, whatever the amount China has released thus far is a big step up when viewed from an historical perspective. They always made negligible donations and their assistance was mostly in the form cheaper contracts."

Since 2016, \$1.8 billion was committed on average each year, which is in line with what the multilateral lenders do.

"Also, as per Chinese Exim bank officials, Beijing does not commit more than \$3 billion a year to any country as it deems any amount

higher than this might be beyond the repayment capacity of the country," he added.

Regardless, to probe the slow progress, a joint working group has been formed earlier this year during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to China. The group is likely to meet this month in Dhaka.

At present, five of the China-funded projects are in the implementation stage: the Padma bridge rail link, Karnaphuli river tunnel, phase III of the Info-Sarkar project, installation of a single-point mooring with double pipeline in Maheshkhali and modernisation of telecommunication network for digital connectivity.

The phase-III of the Info-Sarkar project is almost complete, while construction of the Karnaphuli river tunnel project is 48 percent done as of September, said an official of bridges division.

As of August, 17.15 percent of the work for the Padma bridge rail link was done, according to an official of the railways ministry.

During Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's tour of China in July this year, loan agreements were signed to expand and strengthen the power supply network under the Dhaka Power Distribution Company involving \$1.2 billion.

Another loan agreement involving

\$280.49 million was struck as part of a \$1.12 billion project to strengthen the power grid network under the Power Grid Company of Bangladesh (PGCB).

The remaining loan agreements for the PGCB projects and also for the construction of Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway involving \$1.15 billion will be signed this year, said finance ministry officials.

But it would take some more months to start the implementation work of the projects: a few more official procedures are needed after the signing of loan agreements, they added.

From financing deals, Beijing proposed a free trade area between the two countries with a view to boost bilateral trade. But the free trade agreement is still at the feasibility study stage.

Commerce ministry officials said two separate studies will be conducted by Bangladesh and China to reach a consensus for the free trade agreement.

In Bangladesh, the tariff commission has been tasked with conducting the preliminary feasibility study and the first draft of the study has been completed.

The aim is to ink a deal before 2024, before Bangladesh graduates from the least-developing country bracket.

FORESTS OF COX'S BAZAR

JS body for proper assessment of damage

BSS, Dhaka

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment, Forest and Climate Change yesterday recommended conducting an assessment by an expert team on the loss and damage of environment and biodiversity occurred for sheltering the Rohingya population in Cox's Bazar.

The parliamentary watchdog came up with the recommendation at its eight meeting held at Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner's conference room with its chairman Saber Hossain Chowdhury in the chair.

Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Md Shahab Uddin and Deputy Minister Habibun Nahar were present at the meeting.

During the meeting, they discussed their experience after visiting the Rohingya camps in Ukhia and Teknaf as well as the environmental loss caused by the Rohingya settlements.

They also suggested taking steps to supply safe water to Rohingya people.

The meeting was informed that about 8,000 acres of forest were affected by Rohingyas, causing an environmental loss of over Tk 2,420 crore.

UN to probe rights abuses in Ecuador after protests

AFP, Geneva

The UN said yesterday that it would send a team of investigators to Ecuador, following an invitation from the government, to investigate alleged violations committed during recent deadly protests.

The United Nations rights office said that three of its staff members would visit from October 20 through November 8 to look into allegations of abuses, including by state security forces.

The announcement came after President Lenin Moreno and indigenous leaders reached an agreement Sunday to end nearly two weeks of violent protests against austerity measures adopted to obtain a multi-billion-dollar loan from the IMF.

The demonstrations, which left eight people dead and some 1,300 injured, were sparked when Moreno scrapped fuel subsidies to obtain a \$4.2 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund, causing prices to double.

"Our Office has received allegations of human rights violations committed by state security forces, as well as reports of crimes committed by third parties," UN rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva.

62 killed

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Yamamoto, adding they demonstrate the importance of talks leading to a ceasefire and a permanent political settlement.

The figures - 1,174 deaths and 3,139 injured from July 1 until September 30 -- represent a 42 percent increase compared to the same period last year.

The UN laid most of the blame for the spike at the feet of "anti-government elements" such as the Taliban, who have been carrying out a bloody insurgency in Afghanistan for more than 18 years.

July alone saw more casualties than in any other month on record since the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) began documenting the violence in 2009.

The first six months of 2019 had seen casualties drop slightly compared to previous years.

But the violence has surged so far in the third quarter that it yanked the overall total for the year back on par with the bloodiest since Nato withdrew its combat forces at the end of 2014.

Nobel Committee member defends Handke pick

AFP, Stockholm

just as worthy as someone like acclaimed Irish novelist Samuel Beckett, who won in 1969.

"In 50 years... Peter Handke, just like Beckett, will be among the most obvious choices the Swedish Academy ever made, of that I am certain," Petersen wrote in an op-ed in the newspaper Svenska Dagbladet.

The awarding of the Nobel to

Handke came under fire in the Balkans and beyond because of his admiration for late Serbian strongman Slobodan Milošević.

In the 1990s, Handke emerged as a vocal defender of the Serbs during the bloody collapse of the former Yugoslavia, even comparing them to Jews under the Nazis, a remark he later retracted.