

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



223
New cases in 24hrs



15,72,501
Total cases



27,922
Deaths



15,36,515
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



5,114,418
Deaths



253,948,038
Total cases

Dhaka for free, open, secure Indo-Pacific region

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh does not want dominance of any single country or group in Indo-Pacific. It wants a free, open and secure region for promotion of sustainable blue economy, said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen.

"There is widespread interest in Indo-Pacific, but our position is that we don't want dominance of any single country or group," he told reporters on the eve of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) meeting in Dhaka today.

At a press briefing at the foreign ministry yesterday, he said Bangladesh expects the IORA to chalk out its own vision of Indo-Pacific region, a vision for a free, open, peaceful, secure and inclusive Indo-Pacific based on international laws and shared prosperity for all.

There are a number of initiatives in Indo-Pacific, including Quad, a dialogue between the US, Australia, India and Japan.

Recently, Australia, UK and US also signed a defence deal, which experts say is aimed at countering China.

Bangladesh will host the 21st IORA Council of Ministers' meeting on November 17 as it takes up chairmanship of IORA. It will be preceded by the 23rd Council of Senior Officials meeting on November 15 and 16.

More than 80 representatives, including 12 ministers, of 23 countries and nine dialogue partners will attend the event. UK Minister Lord Tariq Ahmad and US Deputy Assistant Secretary Kelly Keiderling will be there. The IORA ministers will also meet

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Momen said the Indian Ocean region is warming up at a higher rate, which will contribute to more frequent and severe coastal flooding and erosion.

Considering these issues, Bangladesh will propose a platform for climate change within the framework of IORA, he said.

During Bangladesh's IORA chairmanship, Dhaka will try to align IORA initiatives and projects with the outcomes of COP.

Bangladesh will focus on the issues of maritime safety and security, trade and investment facilitation, fisheries management, disaster risk management, tourism and cultural exchanges, academic, science and technology cooperation, blue economy, women's economic empowerment.

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen said Bangladesh will also demonstrate that it has been able to bring Covid situation under control.

Rear Admiral (ret'd) Md Khurshed Alam, secretary of Maritime Affairs Unit said Bangladesh will propose "IORA-Dhaka Development Initiative" to enhance capacity building through offering practical training, on-the-job learning and physical demonstration.

In response to a question, Momen said border killings are sad for Bangladesh and shameful for India.

He said Bangladesh and India have at several stages agreed that there will be no killings at the India-Bangladesh border but still it continues.

Indian side maintains that BSF shoots only for saving lives as a last resort.

STATUS OF SHIPBREAKING INDUSTRY

BELA serves legal notice seeking cancellation of change

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association yesterday served legal notice on the authorities concerned seeking cancellation of the status change of Chattogram's harmful shipbreaking industry from red to orange.

When an industry is categorised as red, it has the highest obligation to comply with environmental guidelines.

Industries categorised as orange -- which include factories that make sports equipment, agro-equipment, combs, bread and biscuit -- do not require any environmental impact assessment (EIA), a process of evaluating the likely environmental impacts of a proposed project or development.

The copies of the notice were sent to the environment, forest and climate change ministry, director general of Department of Environment, industries ministry, its labour and employment wing and Bangladesh Shipbreakers Association.

The DoE last month changed the category of Chattogram's shipbreaking industry, bringing it to orange (kha)

category from red.

Being a highly polluting industry, the shipbreaking industry had been categorised as red, meaning it had to follow the environmental compliance strictly.

"Developed countries abandoned shipbreaking as it is highly dangerous for environment and human health. India and Pakistan made it mandatory to conduct EIA for the industry so that pollution scenario could be projected. But the change in status in Bangladesh will exempt the [shipyard] owners from this obligation," the notice said.

The notice demanded the rationality of the decision be made public.

It also said the asbestos, a toxic substance, is categorised as a red material under the Environment Conservation Act-1997, but the asbestos-laced ships have been downgraded to Orange (kha), a contradiction that must be explained.

"The High Court in several orders asked the authorities concerned to take steps to free the ships of toxic substances, to make sure the workers are safe. The authorities are yet to achieve the capacity to comply with the court orders," the notice added.

House erupts over elected

FROM PAGE 1

But at the same time, the BNP MP said he would walk out in protest of the Speaker asking him to withdraw his comment.

Harun and the other BNP MPs then walked out of parliament, but returned later.

Pointing to many incidents of violence in the UP polls, Harun said the places where Union Parishad polls are taking place are turning into places of panic.

Quoting Article 11 of the constitution, he said elected representatives must ensure effective participation of the people at all levels of the administration.

"But we already have not-elected MPs in this parliament," Harun said.

Ruling party MPs then began an uproar, demanding that the Speaker expunge Harun's remark from the parliament proceedings.

The Speaker then urged Harun to withdraw his statement.

Harun replied, "Let me raise the issue first. I want an explanation from you [on unopposed election of MPs and chairman and members in the UP polls]. I will withdraw my statement if your reply satisfies me."

Several ruling party MPs then stood up and asked Harun to withdraw his statement first.

Amidst the uproar, Harun withdrew his statement.

He later said over 300 chairmen and members of different UPs were elected unopposed in the two phases of the polls.

"Can we call them elected public representatives? By whom were they elected?" he asked.

Criticising Home Minister

Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal for his recent remarks that petty incidents were taking place in the UP polls, Harun said more than 40 people lost their lives in the violence.

"Can we still call it a petty quarrel?" he questioned.

Later, MP Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandary, chairman of Tarikat Federation which is a component of the AL-led alliance, said Harun walked out of parliament because of his fear of criticism.

JP MPS SLAM DIESEL PRICE HIKE Jatiya Party MPs Mujibul Haque Chunnun and Rustum Ali Faraji said the increased price of diesel and kerosene will be a heavy burden on the people.

They demanded that the price is reduced for the sake of easing public sufferings.

"The country's common people, particularly the poor, are now suffering due to the diesel price-hike. I would like tell the leader of the House and prime minister either to kindly reduce the price, or make an alternative arrangement," said Mujibul Haque from Kishoreganj-3.

Mujibul Haque, also secretary general of the Jatiya Party, said the government took the decision at a time when the people were going through a very tough time amid the rising prices of daily essentials.

"The diesel price-hike causes further increase in shipping costs and the cost of essentials. It increases public misery," he added.

"Rustum Ali Faraji from Pirojpur-3 said the government should either reduce diesel price or subsidise the fuel. The government will have to give the subsidy for public interest," he said.



A rickshaw van puller wears a plastic sheet like a cape while the man on the flatbed is hiding under another plastic sheet to stay dry during yesterday's rain near Science Lab intersection. The last couple of days have been wet in the capital.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

NBR server breached, again

FROM PAGE 1

messages. An official of a fourth firm declined to comment while five other importers could not be reached.

The breach has raised questions about the security of the server system. Once into the system, cybercriminals can issue duty-free release orders for any number of consignments.

This is the second known incident that scammers have accessed the NBR server -- known as Automated System for Customs Data World -- with unauthorised credentials.

Earlier in 2019, customs intelligence uncovered a series of breaches in the server between 2016 and 2018.

At the time, the cybercriminals had broken into the system using credentials of two other customs officials and released 3,337 consignments worth Tk 850 crore, according to an investigation by Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CIID).

Investigators had found that the Internet Protocol (IP) addresses used to access the system did not belong to the customs office. They were rather located in different areas in Dhaka and Chattogram where offices of seven C&F agents and two importers were located.

Two cases -- one by the Anti-Corruption Commission and other by the police -- are under trial in connection with that incident. The ACC case deals with the customs officials' alleged involvement while the police sued seven C&F agents and two importers for the forgery. Police had arrested four people in this connection. All four are now on bail.

After the 2019 breach, the customs authorities put in place a tougher credentials check and fixed some glitches. The authorities also issued an order to deactivate the IDs of officials immediately after their transfer.

But the latest breach shows that the IDs of the two officials were still active. It is not yet clear who used them or from where.

All the nine consignments were officially 'locked' by customs officials on information of irregularities. Consignments that are marked 'locked' must go through physical inspections before their final release from the port depot.

Kazi Muhammad Ziaul Haque, senior system analyst (IT) of NBR, said no one could use IDs and passwords without the involvement of the ID holders.

"Even the IT department of NBR is not able to know this password. However, anyone can access the NBR server from any part of the country if he can get an ID and its password," he said.

NBR and customs officials said they were still gathering information as to what exactly happened and how.

"We are trying to find it out. We cannot comment until we have more details," said Mizanur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Chattogram Customs House.

Documents obtained by The Daily Star show the nine consignments were released by submitting fake Import Permission (IP) papers from Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) in order to get duty-free facility.

Import items of cent percent export-oriented companies are duty-free. To claim the benefit, importers must submit the IP issued by BEPZA.

With their own IDs and passwords provided by the customs authorities, importers and C&F agents can only upload import documents on the NBR server from any location in Bangladesh. They cannot change anything after the upload is complete, nor do they have access to any other files.

According to customs sources, the authorities had originally flagged 11 consignments of nine importers. Of the 11, nine were fraudulently released, and customs authorities managed to seize the two others at the last moment.

"As per the declaration, the nine consignments carried yarn, woven fabric and polyester fabric. Now, we cannot really tell what was there as we could not examine them. But I do not think anyone would use fake Import Permissions if their declaration was proper," said a customs official on condition of anonymity.

One official with direct knowledge of the investigation said they cannot even find some hard documents related to the nine consignments.

The consignments arrived from

China, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirate between June and October this year.

Eight of them were released by using the ID of Revenue Officer Amir Hossain, and the other by using Revenue Officer Zainab Begum's ID.

Contacted, Amir Hossain said, "Under the rule, the authorities were supposed to deactivate the user ID of the officials after transfer. I don't know why they didn't do it. I have nothing to do with this fraud."

Zainab said she was not aware of the misuse of her ID. "I have no idea about the forgery, and I don't know how my user ID was used."

Her ID was used on August 23, the day her suspension took effect, sources said.

Six of the nine importers are based in Dhaka EPZ and three in Ishwardi EPZ, according to their declaration papers.

The Daily Star called and sent messages to Abdullah Hil Rakib, managing director of Grameen Knitwear Ltd, Khandaker Moniruddin, managing director of Shanta Denims Ltd, and Mohammed Abdul Matin, chairman of Helicon Ltd. None of the three importers, based in Dhaka EPZ, responded yet.

An official of Tigerco Ltd, also a DEPZ-based importer, declined to comment.

The Daily Star could not reach the five other importers for comments.

All the nine importers hired C&F agent Prottoy International for unloading their shipments.

Its proprietor Md Hafizur Rahman said his business was based in Dhaka and that he worked through his local agents Mohammad Masud and Emon, who use his licence on a rental basis. "They could be involved with the unloading," he said.

Customs law does not allow use of licence on a rental basis.

Contacted, Masud and Emon tried to distance themselves from each other and said they were not involved in the unloading.

Customs Commissioner Fakhrul Alam said he ordered an investigation and vowed to take action against the culprits.

Petition seeks cancellation of two sections of Evidence Act

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three rights organisations yesterday filed a writ petition with the High Court challenging the legality of two sections of the Evidence Act that allow questioning the "character" of rape victims.

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) and Naripokkho submitted the petition as a public interest litigation -- seeking cancellation of sections 155(4) and 146(3) of the Evidence Act, 1872.

In the petition, they said the sections, which permit the questioning of women and girls regarding their character, are discriminatory, arbitrary, a violation of fundamental rights to equality, freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sex and detrimental to their reputation.

Section 155(4) of the act says, "When a man is prosecuted for rape or an attempt to ravish, it may be shown that the prosecutrix was of generally immoral character."

"Explanation -- A witness declaring another witness to be unworthy of credit may not, upon his examination-in-chief, give reasons for his belief, but he may be asked his reasons in cross-examination, and the answers which he gives cannot be contradicted, though, if they are false, he may afterwards be charged with giving false evidence."

According to section 146(3), "When a witness is cross-examined, he [she] may, in addition to the questions hereinbefore referred to, be asked any questions which tend -- to shake his [her] credit, by injuring his [her] character, although the answer to such questions might tend directly or indirectly to criminate him [her] or might expose or tend directly or indirectly to expose him [her] to a penalty or forfeiture."

Petitioners' lawyer Sara Hossain told reporters that the two sections allow questioning and cross-examination of the rape victims' character and history, which are contradictory to their fundamental rights.

While movements are continuing for scrapping of the sections, no step has been taken yet and therefore, the writ petition was filed with the HC for necessary directives, she added.

The court is yet to schedule a date for a hearing.

Marsh, Warner

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batted despite losing skipper Aaron Finch early on, even a target of 200 might not have been enough, thanks to the 92-run second-wicket stand between Marsh and Warner.

Finch's early departure for five off the bowling of Trent Boult gave the Kiwis the early momentum but since then Marsh and man-of-the-series Warner took charge and there was no looking back for the Aussies.

Australia kept the basics right and added 43 for one in the Powerplay and were always in control with boundaries being scored in almost every over of the chase.

Marsh and Warner complemented each other, with the latter reaching his fifty off 34 balls with a gorgeous six over deep midwicket against Jimmy Neesham.

When Bout bowled Warner for 53 off 38 balls, Australia still needed 66 off 44 balls with eight wickets in hand.

But Marsh remained compact and reached his fifty off just 31 balls -- the fastest fifty in a World T20 final -- with a six against Ish Sodhi.

Glenn Maxwell also played his part and scored an unbeaten 18-ball 28 to complete the successful chase.

Earlier, Finch showed no hesitation in opting to field first as teams here have on most occasions successfully chased down targets in the World Cup.

New Zealand made a slow start scoring 32 for one in the Powerplay, losing hero of the semifinal, Daryl Mitchell, early on against Josh Hazlewood. Between the fourth and eighth overs, the Kiwis could not hit a boundary.

However, Williamson took charge and stepped on the gas although he was dropped on 21 by Hazlewood off the bowling of Mitchell Starc.

The Kiwi skipper took a liking to Starc, hitting eight boundaries as Starc finished with figures of 60 for none in four overs.

Williamson reached his 14th T20I fifty off 32 balls as New Zealand reached 114 for two in 15 overs. The Kiwi skipper then smashed Starc for 22 runs in the 16th over and set his side for a challenging total.

In the next four overs, New Zealand added 36 to the total losing two wickets in the 18th over bowled by Hazlewood. Glenn Phillips was dismissed for 18 as the third-wicket stand with Williamson ended on 68 off 37 deliveries.

And then Williamson departed for 85, becoming Hazlewood's third victim as the Aussies clawed back towards the end of the innings.