



In this photograph taken on Monday, train carriages are seen toppled over following a landslide caused by a heavy rainfall at New Haflong railway station on the Lumding-Silchar route at Dima Hasao district, some 100 km from Silchar in Assam state, India.

PHOTO: AFP

## POST-BREXIT N IRELAND TRADE London unveils unilateral plans

AFP, London

The UK government yesterday announced its intention to drastically overhaul post-Brexit trade rules in Northern Ireland, arguing the plan was needed to end political paralysis in the territory but risking a trade war with the EU.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said she would introduce legislation reforming the so-called Northern Ireland Protocol "in the coming weeks" – unless Brussels caves on its insistence that the pact cannot be rewritten.

The protocol was agreed as part of Britain's 2019 Brexit divorce deal with the European Union, recognising Northern Ireland's status as a post-conflict territory that shared the UK's new land border with an EU member.

Its requirement for checks on goods arriving from England, Scotland and Wales has infuriated pro-UK unionists in Northern Ireland, who claim the protocol is undermining their place within the UK and are refusing to join a new power-sharing government in Belfast.

"Our preference remains a negotiated solution with the EU, and in parallel with the legislation being introduced, we remain open to further talks," Truss told parliament.

Truss denied Britain was breaching international law by effectively abrogating a key element of the Brexit deal, arguing that the government had tried to implement the protocol "in good faith" but had been stymied by EU inflexibility.

The largest pro-British party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), said it would not share power with pro-Irish rivals Sinn Féin until the protocol is reworked.

Its hard line came nearly two weeks after Sinn Féin won a historic victory in elections for the devolved Stormont assembly, which entitled the party to the role of first minister in a joint executive with the DUP.

Under the new plan, the UK intends unilaterally to create a "green channel" for British traders to send goods to Northern Ireland without making any customs declaration to the EU.

The EU would have access to more real-time UK data on the flow of goods, and only businesses intending to trade into the single market via Ireland would be required to make declarations. The EU would need to trust the UK to monitor the flow, and Truss vowed "robust penalties" for any companies seeking to abuse the new system.



## Floods paralysing Sylhet

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at Sarighat point in Jaintiapur upazila.

In Sylhet city, Upasahar, Sobhanighat, Kalighat, Chaarpar, Sheikhghat, Taltala, Kalapara, Majumdarpara and Machimpur areas were submerged.

Hundreds of houses were waterlogged and the road network was almost snuffed in the areas.

Debjyoti Das, of Sobhanighat area, said they knew the Surma was swelling but had no idea that their neighbourhood would be submerged overnight.

"We are now shifting to the upper floors considering that the situation may deteriorate further," said said.

According to Sylhet City Corporation (SCC), more than 1,000 people took shelter at 15 shelter centres in the city.

SCC Chief Engineer Nur Azizur Rahman said,

"We are facing a crucial waterlogging because the rainfall could not reduce because of the overflowing Surma."

"Now we are working to supply food aid to the people who took shelter at different shelter centres," he added.

Besides the city, vast areas in Kanaighat, Zakiganj, Gowainghat, Jaintiapur and Companiganj upazilas remained submerged.

Meanwhile, a volunteering organisation in Sylhet – Jainti Kendriya Parishad – yesterday urged Sylhet's deputy commissioner to declare Jaintiapur, Gowainghat, Companiganj and Kanaighat upazilas a "Distress Zone".

Sylhet District Relief and Rehabilitation Officer Shofique Uddin Ahmed, however, said that situation was not yet intense enough to be declared a "Distress Zone".

"We estimate a total of 12

to 13 lakh people directly and indirectly affected by the flood. We have prepared 199 shelter homes and allotted 129 tonnes of rice and 1,000 sacks of dry food for the victims," he said.

Meanwhile, the flood situation worsened further in Sunamganj's Sadar, Tahirkpur, Bishwambarpur, Chhatak and Doarabazar upazilas.

In the district, the Surma was flowing 35cm above the danger level at Sunamganj town point at 9:00am while the Jadukata was flowing 70cm below the danger level at Shaktiarkhola point in Tahirkpur upazila.

FFWC Executive Engineer Arifuzzaman Bhuyan said, "The situation will start to improve from tomorrow [Tuesday]."

He further said that the floodwater would reduce gradually but the situation would deteriorate in the north as the Teesta and other rivers were swelling.

## Dhaka to seek GSP

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The mission had discussed issues relating to human rights and labour rights, particularly on Bangladesh's implementation of the National Action Plan on the Labour Sector and the compliance with human rights obligations.

"The EU conveyed to the Bangladeshi authorities the need to address all remaining issues in a timely and effective manner," according to the statement EU had put out at the time.

The EU imports about \$19 billion (Tk 1.66 lakh crore approximately) worth of products from Bangladesh a year and also provides Bangladesh more than Tk 5,000 crore a year in development assistance.

"Trade is a very important area of cooperation with the EU. We will try to boost our trade relations with the EU," an ERD official told

The Daily Star yesterday.

The EU has some issues that they discussed in the previous meeting in 2019, which they will bring to the table this time too.

"We will have our positions and present the progress we have made," said the ERD official, who wished to remain unnamed.

In 2019, the Joint Commission discussed the role of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, including the importance of holding free and fair elections. The EU had raised concerns on the situation of human rights, in particular reports of "extrajudicial killings" and "forced disappearances".

The EU also raised concerns regarding certain provisions of the Digital Security Act and emphasised on improving labour rights in line with the International Labour Organisation Conventions.

## His return may take time

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foreign minister-level meeting to be held in Delhi on May 30.

He said they will give a response from their side once they are provided with due information, adding that they are working with the Bangladesh government and complying with the legal process.

Talking to the press

yesterday, the Indian high commissioner also said extradition of criminals is part of the regular cooperation between the two countries and there are various frameworks, including legal aid, to bring criminals to book.

Doraismami added the Bangladesh government provided information to the Indian agency concerned, which then arrested him after verification on May 13.

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen said

Halder's arrest was based on specific information provided by the Anti-Corruption Commission, and that his extradition will be done following a legal process.

"Doraismami has assured us of India's wholehearted cooperation towards this end."

He did not clarify whether Halder will return only after the completion of the legal procedures, but said the Indian diplomat has not given any such condition.

"The issue around extradition can be better understood with the advancement of the legal process."

"It is up to India to determine the crime he committed there. Once the investigation is done, then it could be decided how the legal process [for extradition] should proceed," Momen told

journalists after the meeting.

He, however, said that in the existence of a "good relationship", legal frameworks are not always required, and both countries have dealt and cooperated on such issues before.

"It is a financial crime case, not just any other criminal case. They [India] will first carry out legal processes and then consider our requests."

Asked if Dhaka has made a formal request to Delhi, he said, "We will make requests through the diplomatic channel and our home ministry will play an important role here. Our requests will include knowing the full extent of his financial illegality and if it helps our case."

"Halder needs to be brought back home and face the charges against him here."

## Hezbollah lose majority in Lebanon polls

AFP, Beirut

Shia group Hezbollah and its allies lost their majority in Lebanon's parliament, official results showed yesterday, while independents achieved a surprise breakthrough. Full results announced by the interior ministry two days after the election revealed that no bloc will control the 128-seat assembly, a deadlock observers fear could usher in a tense period of political jostling. The Iranian-backed Hezbollah and its main allies had the support of around 70 lawmakers in the outgoing parliament but will now fall just short of the 65 seats needed to retain a majority. At least 13 independents who backed the 2019 protest movement won seats. Twelve of them will sit in parliament for the first time.

## US eases Cuba visa, remittance policy

AFP, Washington

The United States said Monday it is easing restrictions imposed during former president Donald Trump's administration on travel to Cuba and on the sending of family remittances between the United States and the communist island. The loosening of the embargo on Cuba will see increased visa processing, including at the Havana consulate, but with most visas still handled at the US embassy in Guyana. To boost the flow of remittances, the US government will lift the current limit of \$1,000 per quarter for each sender, and also allow non-family remittances to "support independent Cuban entrepreneurs." It said it would increase the number of flights permitted between the US and the Caribbean island, and serving cities other than the capital Havana.

## Clashes rock Tripoli

REUTERS, Tripoli

Clashes erupted in Libya's capital yesterday as the parliament appointed prime minister, Fathi Bashagha, tried to take over government there but was forced back by a rival administration that refuses to cede power. Bashagha entered Tripoli overnight after two months of stalemate between Libya's rival administrations, but withdrew hours later as fighting rocked the capital, his office said. The crisis risks plunging Libya back into prolonged fighting after two years of comparative peace, or returning it to partition between the eastern-backed government of Bashagha and a Tripoli administration under Abdulhamid al-Dbeibah.

## Over 100,000 missing in Mexico

AFP, Mexico City

The number of people reported missing in violence-wracked Mexico has exceeded 100,000, according to official data, with rights groups calling for "immediate" action from the government to locate the disappeared. The country's National Registry of Missing Persons – which has been tracking disappearances since 1964 – said that as of Monday, the whereabouts of 100,012 people are unknown. About 75 percent are men. Last April, the UN Committee against Enforced Disappearances warned that Mexico was facing an "alarming upward trend" in missing people cases.

