

DIGITAL SECURITY ACT It has been misused to some extent

Admits law minister but opposes its scrapping

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq has admitted that the Digital Security Act has been misused and abused to some extent. "But I won't support repealing the Digital Security Act. It was found earlier that a journalist was arrested immediately after the filing of a case under the Digital Security Act. In this situation, I have ensured that nobody is arrested immediately after the lodging of a case under this law. The courts concerned will take necessary steps if anyone commits any punishable offence," he said.

The minister was speaking at a views-exchange meeting with government pleaders and public prosecutors at the capital's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre yesterday. The meeting

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JP doubtful about free, fair election under this govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader has said holding a free, fair and credible election under the authoritarian government is uncertain as the administration or constitutional institutions become helpless in front of it.

Speaking at a programme in the capital yesterday, he said the head of government has already announced that the next national election will be held using electronic voting machines (EVMs).

"Even if EVMs are not used in all electoral constituencies, the machines may be used in those where the ruling party candidates will not be able to dominate," he added.

Quader, also the deputy leader of the opposition in parliament, said his party does not want to see a farcical election.

The event was organised marking the joining of a group of women entrepreneurs to the JP. The group, led by Nazmin Sultana Tuli, founding president of voluntary organisation Alokito Manush Foundation, joined the opposition party giving flowers to Quader at the party chairman's Banani office.

The JP chief said there is no democracy in the country. Administrators have been appointed to all sectors and the politicians have no authority. That's why no one is accountable to the people of the country, he added.

Quader said although there are

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Police use tear gas to disperse Higher National Diploma (HND) students during a demonstration demanding the resignation of Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa over the country's crippling economic crisis, in Colombo, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

UNMANNED LEVEL CROSSING

Three killed as train rams pickup

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Three people were killed after a train hit a pick-up on an unmanned rail crossing in Nalchhata area of Gazipur's Kaliganj upazila yesterday morning.

Another accident happened at this very level crossing last year, which claimed the life of a retired professor of Dhaka University.

The three deceased were identified as Zakir, 22, driver of the pick-up, his assistant Mriddul, 15, and Mohsin, 50.

Witnesses said the Dhaka-bound Egarosindhur Prabhathi Express hit the Narayanganj-bound vehicle while it was crossing the rail line around 10:00am yesterday. The pick-up fell into a ditch on the impact, leaving the trio dead on the spot.

Police later recovered the bodies and sent those to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital for autopsies, said Iqbal Hosen, assistant sub-inspector of Narsingdi Railway Police Camp.

There is no barrier at the level crossing either. The authorities have only put up a signboard there



cautioning people to cross it "at their own risk", said police.

Unmanned level crossings remain a major cause of increased rail-related fatalities in the country.

Around 70 percent authorised level crossings do not have dedicated manpower. Besides, there are 1,149 unauthorised level crossings which have no gateman.

Out of 1,412 authorised level crossings, 964 are unmanned, according to statistics of Bangladesh

Railway (BR).

At least nine government bodies were involved in constructing unauthorised level crossings.

Between 2008 and 2018, 263 people were killed in 297 rail-related accidents, shows BR data. But the actual number would be much higher.

At least 158 people were killed and 39 others injured in 142 train-related accidents in 2020, according to the Accident Research Institute of Buet.

Erdogan puts conditions on support for Nordic nations' Nato bids

AFP, Istanbul

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday said Turkey would not look "positively" on Sweden and Finland's Nato bids unless its terror-related concerns were addressed, despite broad support from other allies including the United States.

Turkey has long accused Nordic countries, in particular Sweden which has a strong Turkish immigrant community, of harbouring extremist Kurdish groups as well as supporters of Fethullah Gulen, the US-based preacher wanted over the failed 2016 coup.

Erdogan's threat throws a major potential obstacle in the way of the likely membership bids from the hitherto militarily non-aligned Nordic nations since a consensus is required in Nato decisions.

Bank borrowing

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"But that would mean private savings would be diverted from banks. Given the cap on the bank interest rate, the law of demand and supply cannot take the course here," Hussain added.

And the interest rate spread, which is the difference between the interest rate a bank pays to depositors and the interest rate it receives from loans to consumers, is not favourable for the banks either to be able to compete with the government for deposits.

In simple terms, net interest rate spreads are like profit margins. The greater the spread, the more profitable the financial institution is likely to be. In March, the interest rate spread stood at 3.02 percent.

On the other hand, there is ample room to scale up foreign borrowing.

Of the budget deficit, foreign borrowing would cover Tk 120,046 crore (about \$13.95 billion), which

is an increase of 3.8 percent from this fiscal year's original budget.

There is \$48 billion in the pipeline and that could be used, Hussain said.

"Why don't the government accelerate the implementation of foreign-aid projects?"

In that way, the much-needed projects would get momentum and the pressure on the foreign currency would ease.

Besides, the International Monetary Fund has offered \$3 billion in budget support to Bangladesh provided the country undergoes some reforms in tax administration and tax policy.

"The reforms would have been good for us," Hussain said.

Instead, the government has chosen a method that would hamper recovery to some extent to finance the budget deficit, which has been brought down to 5.5 percent in the upcoming fiscal year.

Rohingyas sneaking in from India now

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a UNHCR card along with 200-300 other Rohingya families, law enforcers said, citing Selim.

Selim claimed that recently the situation in the Jammu area became volatile. He then communicated with his sister-in-law Tomida Khatun, who lives in Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar.

"My sister-in-law told me that the Rohingya camp situation in Bangladesh is good and that the Bangladesh government is very kind and helpful. Then I decided to move," he said.

Selim later communicated with an Indian broker and made a deal to cross the border.

As per the deal, Selim along with his wife and two children went to Delhi from Jammu by bus on May 8. From Delhi, they came to Agartala by train, which took them 72 hours.

Around 2:00pm on May 13, they entered Feni district of Bangladesh

through an opening of the wire fence of Agartala border.

An unknown broker received them and then they went to Ramu in Cox's Bazar and reached near the camp.

"After arriving here, I phoned my sister-in-law and then she came and took us inside the camp through an opening of the barbed-wire fence," he told law enforcers.

But based on a tip-off, the Armed Police Battalion took them from the camp and sent them to the office of the Camp in-Charge (CiC) in the Rohingya camp.

Naimul Haque, commanding officer of Armed Police Battalion (APBn)-14 said it is difficult to say exactly how many Rohingyas entered Bangladesh from India.

"But in my camp, we have arrested some 25 Rohingyas and they were sent to the CiC office," he said.

He also said that some of the Rohingyas who

came from India said they crossed the border as they have relatives here. Others cited the poor law and order situation in India and better living conditions in Bangladesh camps.

They said Rohingyas with the help of brokers first come to Kolkata by train. Then another group of brokers take the Rohingyas and then they were taken to Bangladesh borders in Sylhet, Cumilla and Moulvibazar by train.

There, another group of brokers near the border divide them into groups of 5-6 and help them enter Bangladesh through the barbed wire at the border.

Rohingyas who have already entered Bangladesh told the law enforcing agencies that some 2,000-3,000 Rohingyas are waiting in bordering areas to trespass into Bangladesh.

Intelligence sources said many of the Rohingyas have already spread in many parts of the country.

Md Mamunur Rashid,

Deputy Commissioner of Cox's Bazar, said, "It is a concern as Rohingyas are coming from India. They are now in the transit camps and the decisions about them will be taken soon after reviewing the overall situation."

According to Human Rights Watch, an estimated 40,000 Rohingyas are in India, at least 20,000 of whom are registered with the UNHCR.

Since 2016, ultranationalist Hindu groups have targeted Rohingya refugees in Jammu as part of growing attacks on Muslims in India and called for their expulsion from the country.

After October 2018, the Indian government deported 12 Rohingyas to Myanmar, claiming that they left voluntarily. However, the government denied repeated requests by the UNHCR to gain access to them to independently assess whether the decision was voluntary.

Covid death reported after a month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities recorded one coronavirus death and 16 fresh cases in the preceding 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

The last coronavirus death was recorded on April 20 in the country.

The total number of Covid-19 cases reached 1,953,204 and the death toll at 29,128, reported the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

More than 97 percent of all confirmed cases have recovered, including 172 in those 24 hours yesterday.

The daily test positivity rate slightly decreased to 0.41 percent from Friday's 0.79 percent as 3,927 samples were tested.

On Thursday, 50 cases were reported with no death.

The mortality rate remained unchanged at 1.49 percent. The recovery rate remained unchanged at 97.31 percent as 172 patients recovered during this period.

Cop killed in road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A police officer was killed and eight others were injured after a pickup van overturned in Moulvibazar's Rajnagar upazila early yesterday.

The dead is Somiron Chandra Das, a sub-inspector (SI) of Rajnagar Police Station.

Police said a pickup van, carrying policemen, turned turtle on the Sylhet-Moulvibazar regional highway in Moinar Dokan area around 5:00am while returning to the police station after nabbing three warranted accused.

Nine people were injured in the accident.

Police and fire service personnel rescued the injured and took them to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital where the on-duty doctor declared Somiron dead.

2 missing as trawler capsizes in Padma

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Two men went missing after a paddy-laden trawler capsized in the Padma in Louhajong upazila of Munshiganj yesterday.

The trawler capsized in the middle of the river near Padma Bridge at 6:00am. The two missing workers were not found till the time this report was filed.

The two missing men are Helal Uddin, 35, and Jobir Hossain, 28, both of Madaripur.

Abu Taher, officer-in-charge of Mawa Naval Police Station, said some 15 workers were traveling in a trawler carrying 350 sacks of paddy from Shimulia Feri Ghat to Banglabazar Ghat.

A six-member diving unit was conducting rescue operations to find the missing men but strong currents in the river kept hampering their work, he added.

Raising power

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gas was not properly considered before the recommendations were made, he said.

A technical committee of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) at a public hearing on Wednesday recommended increasing the bulk electricity price by 58 percent.

"This is not the right time to raise power and gas prices... This will have a serious impact on the livelihood of the people. It will be suicidal for the economy," Jashim said, adding that the Russia-Ukraine war and the Covid pandemic had already hurt the economy.

The vice chairman of Bengal Group of Industries then urged the government to shun the quick rental power plants and make use of the more efficient ones to generate electricity at lower costs.

"The industries cannot bear the brunt of the government's wrong planning,"

Rather than increasing the price of electricity and gas, the government should

bring radical reforms in the energy and power sectors, he said, urging steps to snap illegal connections and reduce unnecessary consumption.

Mohammad Hatem, executive president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the export-oriented businesses were still trying to turn around and the impact of raised utility prices will damage the economy.

Shahidullah Azim, vice-president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said a dip in export would cause depletion of the foreign currency reserves.

Mirza Nurul Ghani, president of the National Association of Small and Cottage Industries of Bangladesh; Mohammad Ali Khokon, president of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association; Anwar Ul Alam Chowdhury, president of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries; and Manwar Hossain, president of Bangladesh Steel Manufacturers Association, also spoke at the event.

UK looks to climate action with Australia's new prime minister

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday congratulated Anthony Albanese on his election as Australia's new leader, vowing to work together on trade, military ties and climate change.

"Our countries have a long history and a bright future together," Johnson said in a message to the Labor party leader, according to Downing Street.