

BSF seizes 'record' 41.49 kg gold near Benapole border

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Indian Border Security Force yesterday seized 41.49kg gold worth Rs 21.22 crore from five bags left behind by suspected smugglers near Benapole, reportedly the biggest gold haul by Indian security forces along the Indo-Bangladesh border.

"This is reportedly the biggest single seizure of gold by any Indian law enforcement agency along the India-Bangladesh border," BSF said.

Acting on specific information of cross-border movement of smugglers at the border outpost of Gunarmath village in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, the personnel of 158 battalion of the BSF laid an ambush along the Ichhamati river on Thursday.

According to BSF, around 6:30pm, the forces noticed a group of about seven-eight suspected smugglers crossing the international border by a boat with some bags.

Challenged, the smugglers jumped into the river and swam back to Bangladesh, leaving behind all the goods, the BSF said.

A thorough search of the area led to the recovery of five bags containing 321 gold biscuits, four gold bars, one gold coin and a wooden boat.

Besides, four mobile phones, packing materials and a few Bangladeshi newspapers were also seized.

Bangladeshis highest number of irregular migrants to Italy

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladeshis were found to be the highest number of irregular migrants reaching the shores of Italy in the first six months of this year.

Of the 28,405 irregular migrants, there were a total of 4,606, who were followed by Egyptians, Tunisians, and Afghans.

Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh Enrico Nunziata revealed this information at a view-exchange meeting organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The meeting was held on "Tackling Human Trafficking and Safe Migration" at Shariatpur municipality auditorium yesterday.

Shariatpur is one of the most trafficking-prone areas from where a lot of Bangladeshis take risky journeys to Italy through the Mediterranean.

Nunziata said those seeking to migrate to Europe face enormous suffering, violence, and extortion, and many of them die on the way.

Last year, 3,231 migrants died, he added.



People, mostly Rajshahi University admission seekers and their guardians, wait in long queues at Khulna Railway Station yesterday to buy tickets to Rajshahi. Many said they could not purchase tickets despite waiting for hours since Thursday night. Several thousand students from Khulna region are expected to take the university entrance exams, scheduled for July 25-27.

PHOTO: STAR

Lanka troops raid main protest camp

Clear out a section of it; new cabinet sworn in with Rajapaksa ally takes oath as new PM; Xi offers support amid crisis

AGENCIES

Sri Lankan security forces raided and partially cleared the main protest camp occupying government grounds in Colombo early yesterday, fuelling fears that President Ranil Wickremesinghe had launched a crackdown a day after being sworn in.

Media footage showed soldiers in riot gear and armed with assault rifles tearing down the camp, set up in April by protesters enraged by the country's economic collapse and acute shortages of fuel, food and medicine.

Wickremesinghe, a six-time prime minister, was sworn in as president on Thursday after winning a parliamentary vote to succeed Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who fled to Singapore last week in the wake of massive public protests triggered by the country's worst economic crisis in seven decades.

Chinese President Xi Jinping offered Wickremesinghe his support yesterday.

In his message, Xi said he believes Sri Lanka will be able to move towards economic and social recovery and he is "ready to provide support and assistance to the best of my ability to President Wickremesinghe and the people of Sri Lanka in their efforts", CCTV reported.

Protesters had feared a crackdown was



DINESH GUNAWARDENA

imminent as Wickremesinghe imposed a state of emergency in the country from Monday, when he was the acting head of state, and many regarded him as an ally of Rajapaksa.

Previous emergency regulations have been used to give powers to the military to arrest protesters, and curtail the right to protest.

A representative of the United Nations, and western envoys urged the government to exercise restraint, warning that the use of force could further destabilise the island nation, whose economy desperately needs an International Monetary Fund bailout, having virtually run out of dollars to pay for vital imports.

"Actions that stifle protests and the right to peaceful assembly can worsen economic and political instability in Sri Lanka," said

Hanaa Singer-Hamdy, the United Nations resident coordinator in Sri Lanka.

US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Julie Chung, said on Twitter: "We urge restraint by authorities and immediate access to medical attention for those injured."

The European Union said freedom of expression was essential for Sri Lanka to transition from its chaos, reports AFP.

Just hours after security forces moved against the protest camp, another Rajapaksa ally, senior lawmaker Dinesh Gunawardena, was sworn in as the new prime minister.

Seventeen other ministers completed the cabinet, with former finance minister Ali Sabry becoming foreign minister, while sources said Wickremesinghe would keep the finance portfolio.

As Wickremesinghe, lawmakers and officials listened to Gunawardena being sworn in at the prime minister's office, uniformed military officers sat on one side of the room, reports Reuters.

Earlier, police said nine people had been arrested following the raid on the protest camp.

Angered by the pre-dawn raids, hundreds of protesters marched from the city's main railway station towards the Galle Face protest site, where they were held back by military and riot police manning barricades.

2 Covid patients die; positivity rate 8.36

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two patients with Covid-19 died and at least 620 new Covid-19 cases were recorded by the health directorate in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

The total number of cases has now risen to rise to 20,00,899, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The total number of Covid deaths in the country is 29,258 and the death rate stands at 1.46 percent.

The positivity rate, against 7,419 samples tested, was 8.36 percent during the period, down from 9.81 percent the previous day. The overall positivity rate is 13.76 percent.

At least 1,765 patients have recovered from Covid-19 in the period, taking total recoveries to 19,33,259. The recovery rate is 96.62 percent.

The two deceased were male and aged between 81-90 years old.

25-yr-old tourist drowns in Nikli haor

UNB, Kishoreganj

A 25-year-old tourist drowned and two others were injured while bathing in the Nikli haor in Kishoreganj yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Akash, a resident of Dhaka.

Fire service sources said the three youths went missing while bathing in the haor around 9:00am.

On information, firefighters and locals recovered the body and rescued Tuhin, 25, and Hasib, 26 alive.

"The injured youths are undergoing treatment at Nikli upazila health complex," said Abujar Gifari, station officer of Kishoreganj Fire Service.

Schoolgirl raped in Manikganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Police in Manikganj are trying to arrest five men accused of raping a schoolgirl.

The victim's mother filed the case with Manikganj Sadar Police Station yesterday morning, accusing Siam Hossain, 18, Akash Hossain, 18, Md Raju, 19, Riyad, 18, and Yasin Hossain, 19.

The accused have been on the run since the case was filed, said Abdur Rauf Sarkar, officer-in-charge of the police station, adding that they were trying to arrest them.

According to the case statement, Siam forcibly took the schoolgirl to his house and raped her on July 16. The other four accused assisted him in committing the crime.

On information, the girl's family admitted her to hospital on Monday. The hospital authorities discharged her on Wednesday.

6 sent to jail for illegal sand extraction from Padma

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Pabna court yesterday sent six people to jail for illegally extracting sand from the Padma river in the district's Sujanagar upazila.

Officer-in-Charge of Sujanagar Police Station Abdul Hannan said on information, a team on Thursday night raided Najirganj ghat area where the illegal sand traders were extracting sand illegally.

The arrestees are Al Amin, 38, Panna Meer, 42, Saheb Ali, 22, Shafique Sardar, 37, Nayan Khan, 38, and Sohel Rana, 20.

During the drive, police also seized two dredgers and two bulk heads for carrying sand from the spot, the OC said.

Wasfia

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highest peak, in 2012.

On her Facebook page, the mountaineer on Sunday sought thoughts and prayers from her fans and well-wishers saying she was heading out to summit K2 that night with the strongest team.

"If all goes well, good news will come in a week," she wrote.

Wasfia is best known for being the only Bangladeshi to climb the Seven Summits -- the highest mountains of every continent.

Her expedition consisted of some of the strongest and most renowned climbers in the world -- Mingma Tenzi Sherpa, Mingma David Sherpa, and Nirmal Purja.

K2 is deemed notorious for its harsh conditions -- winds can blow at more than 200 kilometres per hour and temperatures can drop to negative 60 degrees Celsius. It has only been scaled by 425 people since 1954 -- including around 20 women.

According to the 2019 National Geographic article, "Of the 14 mountains that rise at least 8,000 metres (26,246 feet), K2 remains the only peak unclimbed during winter."

Located in the Karakorum Range in northern Pakistan near the country's border with China, K2 is thought to be the world's most dangerous mountain. Pakistan is home to five of the world's 14 mountains higher than 8,000 metres, and climbing them all is considered the ultimate achievement of any mountaineer.

CU admin identifies

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Haque Rubel claimed that he identified five people who were involved in the crime.

"One of the five is Azim Hossain, a follower of BCL sub-group 'CFC'. Azim knows about the rest of the culprits. I got five names from him," Rubel told this correspondent.

Asked about the findings, Assistant Proctor Shahidul Islam said, "He [Rubel] is not a part of the probe body. He cannot claim this."

Besides, a friend of the victim who went to the proctor's office to lodge complaint that night had a peek at the CCTV footage of the incident and confirmed Azim's involvement.

Need 1 week to assess situation

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for load shedding will be fixed next week and the situation is likely to improve as time progresses.

He said they would fix another load shedding schedule after having the first week's results.

"Customers are accepting the situation due to special circumstances. I think we can put things in order in 10 days and the situation will get better after that," Nasrul said.

Responding to a question, the state minister said he was expecting that alternative energy (energy sources other than fossil fuels) would be used in some power plants and that is why he was terming the current situation temporary.

He said the demand for power would fall gradually in the "coming

season" and they would be able to deal with the situation.

Nasrul, however, said the oil and gas crises would worsen if the Russia-Ukraine war continued, adding that there would not be any problem if people used electricity sensibly.

He also highlighted the differences between the demands for electricity in cities and rural areas. "It is found that three villages collectively use 10MW power every day, but one locality in Dhaka alone uses about 100MW. This is a problem."

He said the demand for gas in factories and industrial units is also increasing. "The majority of our gas supplies are being sent to industries."

The state minister said only 10 percent of the country's total diesel stock is used for power generation

and the rest is used by agriculture and transportation sectors.

Nasrul said the overall power supply deficit is now crossing the 1,500MW mark daily. "In the last two-three days, we observed that the load shedding was 1,500 MW every day. Sometimes the figure went up by 400-500MW when the usage of gas increased in industries."

He also said Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation has recently held meetings with the transport sector stakeholders.

"The meetings were held to analyse how much increase in transport fares would be needed if the fuel prices are hiked by the BPC," he said.

The BPC was yet to adjust fuel prices with the additional import prices, the state minister said.

Dhaka losing its greenery

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to decrease is the rapid growth of population and urban areas' expansion to accommodate housing, business and other amenities," said the study, adding that depletion of green spaces contributed to temperature rise.

With a population of about two crores, Dhaka has witnessed a rise in temperature of nearly 3 degrees Celsius in the last 20 years, found another study, styled "Surface urban heat island intensity (SUHI) in five major cities of Bangladesh: patterns, drivers and trends."

Published last year, this study found that the increase in annual daytime temperature in Dhaka over the last 20 years is 2.74 degrees Celsius.

"Human populations play a major role in shaping cities and influencing the thermal environment of urban areas, so increasing population both expand city size and are accountable for the rapid transformation of

natural land cover to impervious surfaces," the report found.

Urban green spaces are parks, open fields, trees, agricultural land, plants on the edge of roads and areas covered in any green infrastructure within the city that are essential components of the environment.

Also, they are essential to improve air quality and to mitigate the heat island effect. Urban heat islands occur when natural land cover is replaced by dense concentrations of pavement, buildings, and other surfaces that absorb and retain heat.

They contribute to higher daytime temperatures, reduced night-time cooling, and higher air-pollution levels, experts said.

Ashraf Dewan, a professor at School of Earth and Planetary Sciences, Curtin University, Australia, yesterday said that continuous encroachment of green spaces in cities of Bangladesh is not only causing local and regional temperatures to rise but also affecting supply and

demand of urban ecosystem services. "Consequently, both societal and human wellbeing are in jeopardy," he said.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

Ashraf said to combat climate change, land-oriented mitigation measures such as creation of urban forest and green spaces are the cheapest and sustainable solutions to slow the magnitude of climate warming at regional to local scales.

"Unfortunately, we do the opposite. It is therefore high time to focus on performance-based planning rather than prescribed urban planning systems," he said.

Mostafizur Rahman, also an associate professor of Environmental Sciences at Jahangirnagar University, said it is very difficult to do something in the already developed areas.

"So, we have to do proper planning in the areas under development. If we fail to do this, we have to face dire consequences in the coming days," he said.

A foreign trip okayed quizzically

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MoPA Senior Secretary KM Ali Azam that foreign trips for training should be discouraged and officials were "advised not to make any trip in this crisis".

On May 12, the finance ministry suspended exposure visits, study tours, travels for workshops or seminars, and trips under APA (annual performance agreement) and innovation.

Contacted, MoPA Joint Secretary Dr Mohammed Ziaul Haque said the trip was necessary for the officials to obtain the PPMC certificate. "That is why they are going to Australia."

However, when his attention was drawn to the 2020 annual report of MoPA, which shows 26 participants attended the 20th PPMC foreign exposure visit in 2020, Haque said, "It may have been mentioned mistakenly."

Contacted, MoPA Senior Secretary

KM Ali Azam said, "The officials are taking part in the training with approval of the prime minister."

He added, "All foreign visits, except the ones for training, are completely suspended."

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council urged all in the public and private sectors to maintain austerity in power consumption and other areas amid a rise in global inflation.

Being informed about the trip, Dr Iftekharuzzaman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) said, "The government is issuing embargoes on foreign trips while its officials are flouting it. Violation of an order is not uncommon. But when the order comes during a critical period, the officials should take it more seriously."

Rohingya genocide

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Gambia, which took up the cause after its then-attorney general visited a refugee camp in Bangladesh, argues that all countries have a duty to uphold the 1948 Genocide Convention. It is backed by the 57-nation Organisation for Islamic Cooperation in a suit aiming to hold Myanmar accountable and prevent further bloodshed.

A separate UN fact-finding mission concluded that a 2017 military campaign by Myanmar that drove 730,000 Rohingyas into neighbouring Bangladesh had included "genocidal acts".

While the court's decisions are binding and countries generally follow them, it has no way of enforcing them.

In a 2020 provisional decision

it ordered Myanmar to protect the Rohingya from genocide, a legal victory that established their right under international law as a protected minority.

However, Rohingya groups and rights activists say there has been no meaningful attempt to end their systemic persecution and what Amnesty International has called a system of apartheid.

Rohingyas are still denied citizenship and freedom of movement in Myanmar. Tens of thousands have now been confined to squalid displacement camps for a decade, reports Reuters.

The junta has imprisoned democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who defended Myanmar personally in 2019 hearings in The Hague.