

Sanctioned IGP Benazir gets US visa

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inspector General of Police Benazir Ahmed has received US visa to join the third United Nations Chiefs of Police Summit at the UN.



A top official at the Police Headquarters confirmed yesterday that the police chief got the visa, but could not say for how long it was valid or if there were any conditions attached to it.

Benazir is expected to be in New York for the two-day programme starting on August 31.

Benazir's US visa came to the fore after the government earlier this month decided to send him to the programme even though he had been sanctioned by the US for his alleged human rights violations when he was in Rab.

On December 10, the US slapped sanctions on Benazir and six other former and current Rab officials.

The police chief is supposed to travel to the US on the invitation from the UN headquarters.

Under the US law, there is no restriction on a sanctioned person's visit to the UN headquarters if they are invited by the UN, said officials at the PHQ.

As per a 1947 agreement between United Nations and the US, the latter will allow a sanctioned person to go to and return from the UN headquarters.

Apart from the free passage, the US is obliged to provide "any necessary protection" to UN visitors while they are in transit to UN premises, the deal adds.

On August 4, the government order (GO) regarding the IGP's visit to US was issued.

The GO, signed by Md Harun Or Rashid, deputy secretary of the home ministry, read that Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan would lead a six-member delegation to the summit.

Taiwan announces plans for record defence budget

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan yesterday announced plans for a record increase to its defence budget after huge military drills by China earlier this month sent tensions between the two to their highest in decades.

Taipei has proposed a defence budget of Tw\$415.1 billion (\$13.7 billion) for next year, up 13 percent year-on-year, pending parliamentary approval.



People stand next to a residential house destroyed by a Russian military strike in Chaplyne of Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region on Wednesday. PHOTO: REUTERS

ATTACK ON UKRAINE RAIL STATION

25 killed in I-Day strike

Says Kyiv as Moscow claims killing some 200 Ukrainian forces; rockets hit across Ukraine

AGENCIES

Russia's Defence Ministry yesterday said its forces had struck a railway station in eastern Ukraine, confirming an attack which Kyiv says also hit a residential area and killed 25 civilians as the nation marked its Independence Day.

In its daily briefing, the ministry said an Iskander missile had hit a military train on Wednesday at the station of Chaplyne that had been set to deliver arms to Ukrainian forces on the frontline in the eastern Donbas region.

Ukrainian presidential aide Kyrylo Tymoshenko said 21 people were killed when the strike hit the railway station and set five train carriages ablaze, while a boy died when a missile hit his home in the vicinity. The death toll rose to 25 on Thursday after three more bodies were retrieved from the rubble, he said.

The Russian ministry said some 200 Ukrainian military personnel had died in the attack.

Reuters was unable to independently verify the reports.

The Chaplyne attack and artillery shelling of frontline towns, including

Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Nikopol and Dnipro, followed President Volodymyr Zelensky's warnings of Russian provocations ahead of Wednesday's 31st anniversary of Ukraine's declaration of independence from Moscow-dominated Soviet rule.

Aug. 24 also marked six months since Russian forces invaded Ukraine, starting Europe's most devastating conflict since World War Two.

Fighting in the area near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, Europe's biggest, in eastern Ukraine has emerged as a major source of concern over the past weeks, with Moscow and Kyiv trading accusations of risking a disaster by shelling the plant.

The United Nations has called for the area to be demilitarised and its nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), is seeking to gain access.

Yesterday, IAEA chief Rafael Grossi told a French broadcaster the agency was "very, very close" to being able to travel to the plant, captured by Russian forces in March but still run by Ukrainian technicians.

However, Ukraine's state nuclear company yesterday said the nuclear plant

was disconnected from the national power supply.

"The actions of the invaders caused a complete disconnection of the (Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant) from the power grid -- the first in the history of the plant," Energoatom said on Telegram.

As rescue operations wrapped up in Chaplyne, residents of the small town, located some 145 km (90 miles) west of Russian-occupied Donetsk, grieved for their loved ones amid the rubble of their wrecked homes.

Local resident Sergiy lost his 11-year-old son in the strike. "We looked for him there in the ruins, and he was lying here. Nobody knew that he was here. Nobody knew," he said as he crouched next to his covered body.

Russia denies targeting civilians. It has also said that rail infrastructure is a legitimate target since it serves to supply Ukraine with Western weapons.

After Zelenskiy told the U.N. Security Council about the attack in a video message, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Twitter: "Russia's missile strike on a train station full of civilians in Ukraine fits a pattern of atrocities."

Confined for stealing battery, man found dead in UP building

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Police recovered the hanging body of a man yesterday from the Panchagarh Sadar Union Parishad building hours after he was locked in a room there for his alleged involvement in stealing a solar panel battery from a mosque.

The victim was Md Sujan, 30, son of Kasim Uddin of Goalpara in Sadar upazila.

Quoting locals, Abdul Latif Mia, OC of Panchagarh police, told The Daily Star that Sujan was accosted around 1:30am.

Locals said Sujan confessed to stealing the battery, adding that one Jahedul Haque of Jagdal village was also involved. Jahedul was also caught by the locals.

After a discussion with UP Chairman Al Imran Hossain, they locked the duo in separate rooms.

In the morning, Moksed Ali, a member of Gram Police, informed the chairman that Sujan had died by suicide.

After recovering the body, police sent it to Panchagarh Sadar Hospital for autopsy, the OC said, adding that an unnatural death case was filed in this regard.

7 Rohingyas detained in Barlekha while trying to enter India

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Seven Rohingyas, detained in Moulvibazar's Barlekha upazila while trying to illegally enter India, were sent back to the Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar's Ukhia yesterday.

Locals confined them on Wednesday around 6:30am while they were trying to cross the border at Kumarshail area of the upazila's North Shahbazpur union, said Rafiq Uddin Ahmad, chairman of the union.

They were handed over to BGB and later to police, said Jahangir Hossain Sardar, OC of Barlekha police.

The detained Rohingyas are between 15 and 19 years old.

According to locals, brokers brought the Rohingyas to cross the border.

More than 180 killed in a month by Afghan floods

AFP, Kabul

More than 180 people have been killed and 3,000 homes destroyed by floods in Afghanistan over the past month, a government spokesman said yesterday.

Zabihullah Mujahid said the scale of the damage had been worse because of the mismanagement of infrastructure by the previous government.

However, the headline Taliban regime that returned to power a year ago is also struggling to cope.

"If the floods and the losses increase, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan does not have that many resources to respond to all of it," Mujahid told a press conference in Kabul.

Heavy rains have lashed several provinces, with the worst of the flooding in the east of the country.

End culture of impunity

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Minister for Asia Amanda Milling said in the statement.

In September 2020, Canada and the Netherlands joined the Gambia to support the case filed in 2019. The ICJ on July 22 this year delivered a verdict that the court has jurisdiction to pursue the case.

The statements came on the fifth anniversary of the Rohingya influx into Bangladesh. Around 7,50,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military crackdown in 2017.

The 14 missions said they noted with concern the reports of escalating violence and serious human rights violations by the military across Myanmar since the coup in February last year.

The missions of Australia, UK, Canada, Denmark, European Union, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the US are signatories to the joint statement.

The missions said they have imposed sanctions on some individuals responsible for serious human rights violations against Rohingyas and would continue to push for a solution.

They also committed to continue to work together with Bangladesh, UN, and international and national partners, to ensure that Rohingyas receive humanitarian assistance, protection and education.

The statement also underlined the importance of supporting efforts to prepare Rohingyas for return to Myanmar, and continuing to support the host communities in Cox's Bazar.

Blinken, who in March this year said the violence against Rohingyas amounted to genocide, said the Myanmar military regime's recent executions of pro-democracy and opposition leaders is only the latest example of its abject disregard for the lives of the country's people.

"Its [Myanmar military's] escalation of violence has exacerbated the worsening humanitarian situation, particularly for ethnic and religious minority communities, including Rohingyas, who continue to remain among the most vulnerable and marginalised populations in the country."

The US has provided more than \$1.7 billion to assist those affected by the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar,

Bangladesh and elsewhere in the region.

'CANT LET THIS BECOME A FORGOTTEN CRISIS'

Noeleen Heyzer, UN's special envoy on Myanmar, yesterday called for the international community to increase support for a comprehensive solution to the Rohingya crisis.

"We cannot let this become a forgotten crisis," she said while addressing a seminar on Rohingya crisis organised by the Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS) of Dhaka University at the Foreign Service Academy.

On the fourth day of her visit, she also assured of advocating for greater leadership by countries in the region to support Bangladesh and leverage their influence with Myanmar to create conducive conditions for Rohingya repatriation.

It was ultimately Myanmar's responsibility to establish conducive conditions for the Rohingyas' return, she said.

Heyzer highlighted the importance of education and vocational training for the Rohingyas to prepare them for their return.

At the seminar, Foreign Minister

AK Abdul Momen said Bangladesh is bearing the burden of sheltering the Rohingyas, and a lack of strong action from the international community is prolonging the problem.

"If the crisis is not resolved quickly, it may create a security problem for the region and beyond," he said.

Despite Bangladesh's efforts, no Rohingyas returned to Rakhine due to the non-committal attitude of Myanmar. Starting their repatriation to Myanmar at the earliest should be a priority through dialogue and discussion, he said.

"The Rohingya crisis is not a bilateral issue. Its origin and solution lie in Myanmar," he said.

Momen said the presence of ASEAN and international actors in Rakhine state can help build confidence of Rohingyas for smooth repatriation.

CGS Director Prof Intiaz Ahmed made the keynote presentation while Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen, Netherlands Ambassador Anne van Leeuwen and US Embassy in Dhaka's Regional Refugee Coordinator Mackenzie Rowe also spoke.

Consultants come 4 months before deadlines expire

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A 126.25km broad gauge track with a 14.40km of loop line, shows project documents.

The project authorities, in mid-2018, issued an expression of interest in appointing a consultant.

However, they cancelled it in August that year, as only one organisation was shortlisted, according to project documents.

The second attempt was also cancelled as Indian EXIM Bank did not approve it.

Yesterday, the BR, in its third attempt, signed a contract with joint-venture firm STUP Consultants Pvt

Ltd-AARVEE Associates Architects Engineers and Consultants from India and Development Design Consultants Ltd of Bangladesh.

As per the contract, the company will get Tk 87.37 crore for their 59 months of consultation.

The government, in February 2018, approved the other project to turn about 67km of meter-gauge lines from Parbatipur to Kaunia into dual-gauge at a cost of Tk 1,683 crore.

The purpose of the project was to improve the inter-country rail network with India, Nepal, and Bhutan and increase trade. India is

supposed to finance 81 percent of the costs.

For this project, the authorities took three and a half years to select consultants.

Yesterday, the BR hired the same three companies at a cost of Tk 75.84 crore.

However, AARVEE will lead the joint venture in this project.

At the signing ceremony, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan said the country's rail network is divided into two gauges with metre gauge dominating the east zone and broad gauge dominating the west.

But the railways authorities are

converting all metre gauge lines into broad gauge gradually, he said, adding that India has already done so.

About the Parbatipur-Kaunia project, the minister said once the project is completed, it would improve connectivity not only with India but also with Bhutan and Nepal, further enhancing transportation of passengers and goods.

Humayun Kabir, secretary of the railways ministry, representatives from Indian High Commission in Dhaka and Indian Exim Bank, among others, were present at the programme.