

Dhaka to focus on energy during Lavrov visit

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh will explore the possibility of cooperation in the energy sector with Russia during its Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's official visit here later this month.

Bangladesh will also discuss food grains supply and quick implementation of the projects that are in the pipeline, including the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant.

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen hinted that these areas are likely to be discussed during the bilateral meeting with Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen.

"We have invited him and there is a possibility that he will be here. We will welcome him, and the visit will give us an opportunity to highlight our challenges and priority issues with Russia," he told reporters yesterday.

2 arrested in 2 dists for raping toddlers

STAR REPORT

A 70-year-old man was sent to jail yesterday on charges of raping a toddler in Kishoreganj.

In another incident, a teenage boy was arrested on Saturday night for raping a five-year-old girl in Cox's Bazar.

Besides, a woman in Lalmonirhat filed a case on Saturday accusing a man of raping her and two others of filming the crime.

The accused in Kishoreganj is Azim Uddin, a resident of Tarail.

Quoting the four-year-old girl's family members, police said Azim took the victim to his house offering her candies and raped her on Friday morning.

After the girl told her parents what happened, her mother filed a case with Tarail Police Station.

Police arrested Azim early yesterday.

In Cox's Bazar, police on Saturday night arrested an eighth grader of a madrasa on charges of raping a five-year-old, said police.

Officers said the suspect somehow managed to take the victim to his house and raped her on Saturday afternoon.

As the girl started screaming, locals rushed in and caught the boy and handed him over to police.

Yesterday morning, the victim's father filed a case with Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station, said Sub-Inspector Nurul Abchar.

Meanwhile in Lalmonirhat, a woman accused a man named Asad Mia, 50, of Chandanpat Kali Chara village in Aditmari upazila of raping her and Milon Mia, 40, and Kulu Mia, 45, of filming the crime.



A group of elderly people waiting for a mobile shop of the government's Open Market Sales programme on Sher-e-Bangla Road in Khulna. Rice and flour are sold at prices lower than the market under the programme. The photo was taken around 7:00am yesterday and the truck was supposed to arrive at 9:00am.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Six dead in Istanbul blast, Erdogan says it 'smells like terrorism'

REUTERS, Istanbul

Six people were killed and 81 others wounded yesterday when an explosion rocked a busy pedestrian street in central Istanbul in what Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan called a bomb attack that "smells like terrorism".

Ambulances raced to the scene on the packed Istiklal Avenue, which police had quickly cordoned off. The area, in the Beyoglu district of Turkey's largest city, had been crowded as usual at the weekend with shoppers, tourists and families.

Video footage obtained by Reuters showed the moment the blast occurred at 4:13 pm (1313 GMT), sending debris into the air and leaving several people lying on the ground, while others fled.

Some four hours after the blast, Vice President Fuat Oktay and Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu visited the site of the explosion.

Oktay said the number of injured was 81 and re-iterated six people died in the explosion.

"We will resolve this matter very soon,"

Oktay told reporters.

Erdogan told a news conference in Istanbul that the "efforts to defeat Turkey and the Turkish people through terrorism will fail today just as they did yesterday and as they will tomorrow." "Our people can rest assured that the culprits behind the attack will be punished as they deserve," he said, adding that initial information suggested "a woman played a part" in it.

"It would be wrong to say this is undoubtedly a terrorist attack but the initial developments and initial intelligence from my governor is that it smells like terrorism," he added.

Nobody has claimed responsibility for the blast. Istanbul and other Turkish cities have been targeted in the past by Kurdish separatists, Islamist militants and other groups, including in a series of attacks in 2015 and 2016.

Reuters footage showed people attending to victims after the blast, and later investigators in white outfits collecting material from the scene, where pieces of a concrete planter were scattered on the avenue.

A case of two missing doctors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two doctors have mysteriously gone missing in Kishoreganj and Faridpur, with one of them having allegedly been picked up by unknown persons.

Both men have been traceless for several days.

On Saturday evening, Mirza Kawsar, 28, was allegedly picked up by unknown persons from Medix Coaching Centre in Kishoreganj town's Khorompatti area around 7:00pm.

He is the director of the centre and also a lecturer of the pharmacology department at President Abdul Hamid Medical College and Hospital in Kishoreganj.

Md Alamin Hossain, additional police superintendent (Sadar Circle), said staffers of the coaching centre and eyewitnesses informed police that five people had come to the centre in a black microbus. They went to the second floor of the building and asked Mirza to come downstairs with them.

As Mirza followed, he was forced to board the microbus, which immediately left the scene, the ASP said, quoting eyewitnesses.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Police recover hanging body in Lalmonirhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Police recovered the hanging body of a man in an office of British American Tobacco in Lalmonirhat's Patgram municipality yesterday.

Rabiul Islam, 39, was the supervisor of BAT's Gold Leaf cigarette section, said Omar Farooq, officer-in-charge of Patgram Police Station.

He used to live in a room inside his office, he added.

Yesterday morning, as his colleagues entered the office, they found his hanging body. On information, police recovered the body.

"The law enforcers are yet to confirm if this was a murder of a suicide," the police official added.

The reason behind the death would be known after the autopsy, he further said.

Jhumon Das gets bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday granted Jhumon Das an ad-interim bail for six months, after him being in jail for two and a half months in a case filed under the controversial Digital Security Act.

This is Jhumon's second stint in jail in a DSA case filed over social media content.

The court granted the bail to Jhumon on the condition that he cannot make any statement on social media, which can "spread religious prejudice and incitement".

5 BNP men arrested in Moulvibazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Police arrested five people, including Rubel Ahmed, president of Maulvibazar district unit Chhatra Dal, in Chaumuhana area of Moulvibazar yesterday afternoon.

Other arrestees are municipal Sechhasebak Dal Joint Convener Zakir Hossain, 39, Chhatra Dal Joint General Secretary Tajul Chowdhury, 25, Chhatra Dal activists Sabbir Ahmed, 23, and Shakil Mia, 18.

Police arrested them while they were distributing leaflets for their party's Sylhet divisional rally, said Mizanur Rahman, general secretary of the district BNP.

Donetsk battles are 'hell'

AGENCIES

Russian forces destroyed key infrastructure in Ukraine's southern city of Kherson before fleeing, President Volodymyr Zelensky said, as his counterparts in Russia and Iran vowed to deepen economic, political and trade ties.

Zelensky described as hellish battles in the eastern region of Donetsk, where pro-Moscow forces were putting up a much stiffer fight after Russia abandoned on Friday the only regional capital it had captured since the war began in February.

Jubilant residents of Kherson welcomed arriving troops while Zelensky said authorities, in their efforts to stabilise the region, had dealt with nearly 2,000 mines, trip-wires and unexploded shells left by the departing Russians.

Press should

FROM PAGE 1

On July 31, 2018, the HC bench, led by Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder, delivered the verdict after hearing a rule issued by another bench over granting bail to Justice Md Joydul Abedin, a former judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, in connection with an ACC notice.

That day, the bench also scrapped an order that granted anticipatory bail to Joydul in 2010.

The ACC in July 2010 sent the notice to Joydul seeking his bank statements.

On July 10, 2017, another HC bench granted the anticipatory bail to Joydul and also issued a rule asking the government and the anti-graft watchdog to explain why he should not be granted permanent bail.

In the petition, Justice Joydul Abedin annexed two reports published in the Daily Janakantha on June 5 and 7 in 2017, under headlines "Sabek Bicharpatir Durneeti Tandante Supreme Court Proshasoner Badha" and "Sabek Ek Bicharpatir Tandante Theme Nei Dudak". He had expressed fear that the ACC might arrest him following the news reports.

Justice Joydul had led the one-man judicial enquiry into the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally in Dhaka. His probe found "foreign enemy links" to the attack.

In the full text, the HC judges observed, "We have gone through the contents of the news reports [of the Daily Janakantha] ... We have not found any reference of any officer of the Anti-Corruption Commission or the police, who have divulged anything about any steps to arrest or harass or humiliate the petitioner during pendency of the enquiry."

"The journalists of the Daily Janakantha [who worked on the reports] as part of their duty and responsibility, published the reports with a view to bringing this matter to the notice of the people and the authorities. It cannot be said that it has created an apprehension of arrest by the ACC under Section 21 of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2004."

Soured loans soar to new highs

FROM PAGE 1

increase in default loans has given an indication that no effective measure has been taken yet to address the issues," Hussain said.

Third-quarter's bad loan figure marked a rise of 33 percent from a year earlier and 7.3 percent from the preceding three months.

Hussain dismissed the bankers' excuse of an unfavourable business environment for the spike in bad loans. "There is forbearance for borrowers to repay loans," he said.

For instance, borrowers in large industries would be able to avoid falling into the defaulted loan category by repaying half of the loans payable for the April-June period in line with the central bank's instruction.

The borrowers must clear 60 percent of their unpaid loans in the July-September quarter and 80 percent in the fourth quarter of 2022 if they don't want to be classified as defaulters.

For cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises, borrowers must pay 25 percent of the payable loans in the April-June quarter, 30 percent in the second quarter and 40 percent in the last quarter of the year to avoid the defaulter status.

Borrowers have been enjoying relaxed repayment support since 2020 soon after the coronavirus hit the country.

In many cases, banks were

compelled to disburse loans to influential borrowers, Hussain said.

"Some banks are not following the rules while giving out loans," said Salehuddin Ahmed, a former BB governor.

Besides, the central bank has frequently relaxed the rules and regulations for loan classification and rescheduling policies, sending the wrong signal to borrowers.

"Businesses have forgotten how to pay back loans on time because of this."

Besides, some delinquent borrowers usually take loans in the name of doing business, but they later divert their funds to other sectors.

"Political will is imperative to bring down defaulted loans. Or else, it will only balloon in the days ahead."

Against the backdrop, the common people's confidence in the banking sector may weaken, Ahmed added.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, pinned the increase in default loans on the economic slowdown.

Habitual defaulters have also not repaid their loans using the excuse of the ongoing stress on the economy, he said.

Rahman went on to advise banks to gear up their recovery process of default loans by strengthening the legal process.

In addition, monitoring of borrowers should be enhanced such

Govt seeks more cheap loans from WB

FROM PAGE 1

meant an additional \$820 million had to be spent on imports, the ERD officials told the WB delegation.

Subsequently, the government sought an additional \$1 billion in budget support earlier in June.

This fiscal year, Bangladesh is expected to receive \$500 million from the WB in budget support, said a press release from the finance ministry. The same amount is expected next fiscal year.

In exchange for the funds, the Washington-based multilateral lender has put forward 12 reform actions pertaining to the economy and mitigating the effects of climate change.

The government is yet to fulfil any

of the conditions, which encompass reforms in fiscal policy and the financial sector and setting guardrails to future shocks.

In response to Kamal's request, the WB delegation said more funds would be made available as soon as Bangladesh starts implementing the reforms stipulated.

Prior actions are needed to get these funds released as they are not tied to any infrastructure project.

Kamal told Raiser that the reforms are at various stages of implementation.

Between 2019 and April this year, the WB has provided \$1 billion in budget support, according to the finance ministry press release.

Also at yesterday's meeting, Kamal

that they repay loans as per their commitment, he added.

Many businesses imported products last year at a lower exchange rate of the dollar, said Mosleh Uddin Ahmed, managing director of Shahjalal Islami Bank.

They also managed a deferral facility from the central bank to settle their letters of credit (LCs) at their convenient time within a span of one year. They sold their products aligning the exchange rate that they quoted while opening the LCs, he said.

Meanwhile, the taka depreciated dramatically against the dollar, creating substantial exchange rate losses, he said.

The exchange rate of the taka stood at Tk 105.40 for each dollar yesterday in contrast to Tk 85.79 a year earlier.

Under such a situation, many businesses have become defaulters, he said.

On top of that, Bangladesh's export destinations are in recession, meaning that ordinary people have lost their purchasing power.

This means exporters may face the same consequence that importers have already faced, Ahmed added.

At the end of September, defaulted loans in the nine state banks stood at Tk 64,729 crore, up 36 percent year-on-year. Private banks' defaulted loans grew 31 percent to Tk 66,695 crore while that of nine foreign banks 10.4 percent to Tk 2,971 crore.

asked the WB to sync its Country Partnership Framework for fiscals 2022-23 to 2026-27 with the 8th Five Year Plan, Vision Plan and Delta Plan and the other government master plans, sectoral plans and policies such that Bangladesh can reach its goal of becoming a developed country by 2041.

Kamal also thanked the WB for providing technical assistance to a project named "Beautification of Dhaka" involving the restoration of rivers around Dhaka city and improving their navigability of rivers around Dhaka city and enhancing the beauty of Dhaka.

Besides, he also discussed the progress of various projects under implementation with WB loans.