

SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA Moscow to stand by Dhaka

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Russia wants to continue its cooperation with Bangladesh, particularly in trade, economy, and implementation of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant despite sanctions imposed against Russia by the US and the "collective West".

Russian Ambassador to Bangladesh, Alexander Mantyskiy, said this in a meeting with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury yesterday.

Disruptions in supply chains and financial transactions caused by the sanctions imposed amid the Russia-Ukraine war have affected the progress of the Rooppur project.

Bangladesh banned 69 US-sanctioned Russian ships from entering its territory. And a sanctioned ship that brought equipment for the power plant in recent months was not allowed to anchor in Bangladesh.

In yesterday's meeting, Speaker Shirin and Mantyskiy spoke of mutual commitment to strengthen friendly relations between parliaments of Russia and Bangladesh, said a statement from the Russian embassy.

Biden scraps Trump's paint scheme for Air Force One

AFP, Washington

The US Air Force on Friday unveiled a new color scheme for Air Force One, discarding the palette chosen by Donald Trump for the presidential aircraft.

President Joe Biden is sticking with a classic blue-and-white color scheme for the jets, which are under construction, retaining a design that dates to John F. Kennedy's administration six decades ago.

Former president Trump, who left office in January 2021, wanted a bolder red, white and blue design, and kept a scale model bearing those colors on a coffee table in the Oval Office.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, inset, addressing a mammoth rally on Mymensingh Circuit House ground yesterday. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: BSS

Ahmadiyyas still homeless in Panchagarh

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

Several hundred people of the Ahmadiyya community, who came under attacks by fundamentalists in Panchagarh, are still homeless nine days after the violence.

Many of them are passing days amid untold sufferings at a local education institution, Jameya Ahmadiyya Bangladesh, and local mosques.

Some others have taken shelters to their relatives' houses in neighbouring districts. Most of the victims said they were not solvent enough to rebuild their houses within a very short span of time.

Those, who have financial abilities, are not repairing their houses fearing further attacks.

Visiting the spot yesterday, this correspondent found arson-ravaged

houses to be lying vacant.

"The attackers have damaged our home so badly that it is not possible to repair. We will have to rebuild it. But we don't have enough money," said Tajmahal Begum, 65, of Phultola village.

She and her freedom fighter husband Mohammad Hanif were now staying at Jameya Ahmadiyya Bangladesh in Ahmadnagar village with other family members.

"We live from hand to mouth. How can we repair our house?" question Md. Osman, of Ahmadnagar Dangapara village, whose house was burnt to ashes.

Osman and his family members were staying at their relative's house in Dinajpur.

Nasrin Begum, 25, of Shalsheri village, said her family members pass daytime

by roaming around the village and go to Jameya Ahmadiyya Bangladesh premises after evening to stay at night.

"We neither have money nor any assistance from the government to repair our house. We don't know how long we will have to endure such untold sufferings," she said.

Tanveer Ahmad Tarun, 34, of Phultola village, is one of the solvent persons in the Ahmadiyya community.

"I can repair my house. But who will guarantee us that no such attack will be carried out again? Now, we don't have the courage to rebuild our house," he said.

Contacted, Jahurul Islam, deputy commissioner of Panchagarh, said, "As per our assessment, a total of 195 houses were affected during the violence. We have

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Beggar's body recovered from home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police recovered the body of a female street beggar from her residence in Bikakhali village of Patuakhali's Mirzaganj upazila yesterday.

Khokran Bibi, 52, was found lying on the floor in her tin-roofed house around 9:00am. Her door was locked from the inside.

When Khokran's husband died a few years ago, she used to earn her living by begging and working at other people's houses. She lived alone in her house.

Mirzaganj Police Station OC Anwar Hossain said the woman had a bloody wound on the left side of her eye.

Her body was sent to Patuakhali Medical College Hospital morgue for postmortem.

1.2 million metres of illegal fishing nets seized, destroyed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Around 1.2 million metres of illegal fishing nets were seized from various areas of Patuakhali's Karapara upazila yesterday by the Bangladesh Coast Guard.

"Later, they were destroyed by fire," confirmed Coast Guard's Nizampur Contingent Commander M Arif Mahmood.

He also said a five-member team led by him from Nizampur CG Station Contingent under Bangladesh Coast Guard South Zone conducted a special drive from 6:00am to 12:00 noon to seize the fishing nets from Khajura, Kuakata, Gangamati, and Char Vijay areas of Kalapara upazila.

Later, the seized illegal nets were burnt and destroyed.

Man run over, killed by train

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenaidah

A man died after a train ran him over near the Sundarpur Railway Station in Jhenaidah's Kaliganj upazila yesterday.

Manik Mia, 45, from Jagdari village in Bogura Sadar upazila, was visiting his in-laws in Jhenaidah. Witnesses said the incident occurred when Manik was sitting on the rail tracks near Ekartapur bazaar with his headphones on.

A Dhaka-bound Chitra Express ran him over around 11:00am, confirmed Kaliganj Police Station SI Prakash Kumar.

'Bangladesh always ready to welcome you'

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countries have been rattled," BSS reports quoting Hasina as saying.

Despite the challenges, Bangladesh is marching towards prosperity and development, she said.

"We're advancing towards prosperity overcoming all the hurdles, and we have to make the current efforts more vibrant to continue the journey of progress.

"Once upon a time, Bangladesh was considered as the country of natural calamity and poverty. But the situation has changed now. Bangladesh has now become the world's 35th largest economy and a 'role model' for development."

FBCCI President Md Jashim Uddin invited global business leaders to join Bangladesh's mega initiatives and to take advantage of South Asia's fastest growing economy with a regional manufacturing hub.

The FBCCI is organising the mega business event on a global scale to focus on the vast opportunities the global leaders have in Bangladesh to expand their business and relocate their industries, he added.

Ministers from seven countries including the UK, Saudi Arabia, China, Bhutan, the UAE, CEOs of 12 multinational companies, over 200 foreign investors, and business leaders from 17 countries are participating in

the summit.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen; Saudi Arabia Commerce Minister Dr Majid bin Abdullah Alkassabi; Bhutan Commerce Minister Karma Dorji; Deputy Director General of the World Trade Organisation Xiangchen Zhang; Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi; and Sheikh Hasina's Private Industries and Investment Adviser Salman Fazlur Rahman spoke at the event.

Three memorandums of understanding (MoU) were signed between Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh to expand trade and commerce. The FBCCI signed a MoU with China Council for the Promotion of International Trade.

Transmitting Adani's power to get costlier

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Natore, according to project officials.

Another 41 kilometres of transmission line will be set up in Bhola's Charfassion, said Project Director Alamgir Hossain.

"The project has no connection to consuming the Adani power plant's generated capacity. We have done 104km 400 kV transmission line from Chapainawabganj border to Bogura district, which is enough for transmit the whole capacity of Adani Power as per demand," he told The Daily Star.

Transmission lines under this project can be used for power evacuation in southern regions including Payra power plant, according to the proposal.

"In addition, if the project is implemented, the capacity of the power transmission system in the southern and western regions of the country will increase and it will be possible to provide reliable and quality electricity to meet the increasing electricity demand of these areas," it added.

If the revised proposal gets approved today, the project will cost Tk 4,322.3 crore and be complete in December 2024.

Similarly, the planning commission is sitting on the revision

proposal for another project to make the best use of the power from the Adani plant. That project's cost was already increased by 22 percent last year.

The project, named Barapukuria-Bogura Kaliakoir 400 kV Transmission Line Project, is aimed at setting up high voltage transmission infrastructure for importing power from India, Nepal and Bhutan.

It was taken up in January 2019 at a cost of Tk 3,322 crore for completion by June 2022. Later, the cost was revised upwards by 22 percent and the deadline was extended to June 2024.

PGCB is now soliciting a second revision: a 153 percent hike in cost, which would take the project outlay to upwards of Tk 10,000 crore. The revision is yet to be approved by the planning commission.

Meanwhile, of the 12 proposals that would be placed in today's meeting, six would be for revisions.

Two of the projects are seeking their fifth revision. One of them is the project to construct the third unit of the state-owned Essential Drugs Company's manufacturing facility in Gopalganj.

Taken up in January 2011 at a cost of Tk 315 crore, the third unit was supposed to be completed by September 2013.

The project has gone through four revisions, with its cost increased to Tk 597.3 crore and the deadline extended to December 2022.

Now, it is seeking an extension in both cost and time.

If it gets the nod today, the project's cost would swell to Tk 798.8 crore and the new deadline is December 2023.

In a similar vein, the project to construct the rail line to link the Mongla Sea Port with the country's railway network is eyeing its fifth revision.

The project was taken up in December 2010 at a cost of Tk 1,721.4 crore for completion by December 2013. Over the decade, its cost was revised upwards to Tk 3,801.6 crore and the deadline was extended to December 2022.

Bangladesh Railway is now seeking until July 2024 to complete the project and another Tk 459.3 crore.

However, the planning division's urban resilience project is seeking to get its cost revised downwards.

Taken up in July 2015 to improve the infrastructure of Dhaka's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar at a cost of Tk 80 crore, the project failed to make much headway. Subsequently, its allocation was hacked down.

Now, it is aiming for completion by October this year at a cost of Tk 32.9 crore.

RU students, locals clash; over 220 hurt

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correspondents of two online portals, were among the injured.

RU Proctor Prof Ashabul Haque said, "We have been trying to control the situation. Law enforcers are also working."

Rajshahi Mayor AHM Khairuzzaman Liton went to the scene and tried to talk to the students and locals, but he had to leave as the

students threw chunks of brick at him.

Police also tried to calm the situation by talking to the warring groups, but failed to convince them. Around 10:30pm, police fired teargas shells and fired rubber bullets.

But more students soon gathered and started hurling brick chunks and stones at the law enforcers, forcing the latter to retreat.

The students then torched around 20 shops in the area, said Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner Anisur Rahman.

As the law enforcers regrouped and used firearms to chase the students away, around 20 students got shot, RMCH officials said.

The Dhaka-Rajshahi highway remained closed to traffic from 6:00pm.

Iran says deal reached to buy Russian fighter jets

AFP, Tehran

Iran has finalised a deal to buy Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets from Russia, state media reported, as defence cooperation between the two countries deepens.

The air force of sanctions-hit Iran has an ageing fleet of aircraft and has struggled to acquire spare parts to keep its warplanes in the air.

In a statement to the United Nations, Tehran said it began approaching "countries to buy fighter jets" to replenish its fleet in the wake of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

"Russia announced it was ready to sell them" after the expiry in October 2020 of restrictions on Iran purchasing conventional weapons under UN Resolution 2231, said the statement carried late Friday by the official IRNA news agency.

"The Sukhoi 35 fighter jets were technically acceptable for Iran," it added.

Tehran has forged strong ties with Moscow in various sectors including the military in the past year.

Kyiv has accused Tehran of supplying Moscow with Shahed-136 "kamikaze" drones used in attacks on civilian targets since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February last year -- an allegation the Islamic republic denies.

The United States has expressed alarm over the growing military cooperation between Iran and Russia, with Pentagon spokesman John Kirby warning in December that Russia looked likely to sell Iran its fighter jets.

Kirby maintained that Iranian pilots had reportedly been learning to fly the Sukhoi warplanes in Russia, and that Tehran may receive the

aircraft within the next year, which would "significantly strengthen Iran's air force relative to its regional neighbours".

Iran currently has mostly Russian MiG and Sukhoi fighter jets that date back to the Soviet era, as well as some Chinese aircraft, including the F-7.

Some American F-4 and F-5 fighter jets dating back to before the 1979 Islamic Revolution are also part of its fleet.

The United States began reimposing sanctions on Iran in 2019, a year after its unilateral withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal under then-president Donald Trump.

The 2015 deal formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, gave Iran relief from international sanctions in return for curbs on its suspect nuclear programme.

KSA agrees to joint venture fertiliser plant

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at the Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC) in the city.

The development comes when Bangladesh is seeking ensured supplies of fertiliser, energy, and food commodities, taking lessons from the supply chain disruptions caused by the Russia-Ukraine war and previously the Covid-19 pandemic.

On February 15 last year, Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation and Hanwha Saudi Contracting Company signed a memorandum for a feasibility study on setting up a diammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser plant in Saudi Arabia.

This is the first Bangladeshi government initiative to set up an industrial plant on foreign soil.

The plant, to be co-owned by the two countries, will help meet fertiliser demand in Bangladesh,

which needs 1.6 million tonnes of DAP a year.

Bangladesh is also in talks with Saudi Arabia on setting up a urea fertiliser factory as the kingdom has a huge supply of raw materials and funds to invest.

The issue was discussed when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Private Industry and Investment Adviser Salman F Rahman held a meeting with Saudi Commerce Minister Dr Majid bin Abdullah Alkassabi and Saudi Basic Industries Corporation CEO Yousef Abdullah Al-Benyani in early March this year.

Talking to journalists yesterday, Momen said Bangladesh has now stability and is focusing on foreign investments and creating jobs for the people.

The government has created institutions like Bangladesh Investment Development Authority and Bangladesh Economic Zone

Authority, he added.

"We are also asking the foreign investors to invest in Bangladesh. This is a 170 million people's market. The production cost is low here as we have an affordable, hardworking and skilled workforce."

Momen further said foreigners are also showing interest in Bangladesh.

During his visit to Bangladesh last month, South Korean Special Presidential Envoy for "Future Strategy" Jang Sung Min said they wanted to invest \$100 billion in Bangladesh.

Some projects by Saudi authorities are already underway including one in Patenga, Chattogram, as Bangladesh provided land to them.

"We wanted them to invest in a major project. We offered a special economic zone in Chattogram. They will start working soon," Momen said.

Saudi Arabia wants to invest in energy, ports and airports, he said.