

Foreign envoys will get addl security if they pay for it Says home minister

UNB, Dhaka

The additional security for some countries, including the US and the UK, will be restored if they want it but they must pay for the facility, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said yesterday.

"There was a reign of terror here when we saw the rise of militants... At that time, we used to give protection to only four embassies. They didn't write to us and no requests were made either. We gave them [additional security] so that they face no trouble," the minister said.

"We think that situation doesn't exist any more. That's why we have withdrawn this protection. However, if an ambassador thinks it will be needed, the new Ansar Guard Regiment will give protection..."

"I reiterate that we have police protection in every embassy. Gunmen are also there for the four ambassadors I spoke about. There are all kinds of protection. The protection we used to give only on the road has been withdrawn. I think I've made it clear."

Asaduzzaman Khan
Home Minister

They have to pay the cost and we will arrange it for them accordingly. That's how it has been decided."

The minister made the statement in response to a question after a meeting of a taskforce, formed to implement recommendations on ensuring discipline in the road transport sector and curbing accidents. The meeting was held at the conference room of the home ministry.

"I reiterate that we have police protection in every embassy. Gunmen are also there for the four ambassadors I spoke about. There are all kinds of protection. The protection we used to give only on the road has been withdrawn. I think I've made it clear," he said.

Asked if any attack on the envoys could create concern about their security in Bangladesh, Asaduzzaman said, "I have clarified that if they think they need protection on roads, we have everything ready. They'll get it if they want."

"We will also deploy Ansar Guard Regiment to ensure security of the ministers and VIPs in phases," he said.



People take part in a rally to show solidarity with Pakistan's army in Peshawar yesterday, after military installations were allegedly damaged by supporters of former Pakistan's prime minister Imran Khan following his arrest last week.

PHOTO: AFP

Next five years set to be hottest period ever: UN

AFP, Geneva

It is near-certain that 2023-2027 will be the warmest five-year period ever recorded, the United Nations warned as greenhouse gases and El Nino combine to send temperatures soaring.

Global temperatures are soon set to exceed the more ambitious target set out in the Paris climate accords, with a two-thirds chance that one of the next five years will do so, the UN's World Meteorological Organization said Tuesday.

The hottest eight years ever recorded were all between 2015 and 2022 -- but temperatures are forecast to increase further as climate change accelerates.

"There is a 98 percent likelihood that at least one of the next five years, and the five-year period as a whole, will be the warmest on record," the WMO said.

The 2015 Paris Agreement saw countries agree to cap global warming at "well below" two degrees Celsius above average levels measured between 1850 and 1900 -- and 1.5C if possible.

The global mean temperature in 2022 was 1.15C above the 1850-1900 average.

The WMO said there was a 66 percent chance that annual global surface temperatures will exceed 1.5C above pre-industrial levels for at least one of the years 2023-2027, with a range of 1.1C

to 1.8C forecasted for each of those five years.

While this does not mean that the world will permanently exceed the Paris benchmark, "WMO is sounding the alarm that we will breach the 1.5C level on a temporary basis with increasing frequency," said the agency's chief Petteri Taalas.

"A warming El Nino is expected to develop in the coming months and this will combine with human-induced climate change to push global temperatures into uncharted territory."

"This will have far-reaching repercussions for health, food security, water management and the environment. We need to be prepared."

El Nino is the large-scale warming of surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean. The weather phenomenon normally occurs every two to seven years.

Conditions oscillate between El Nino and its opposite La Nina, with neutral conditions in between.

The WMO said earlier this month that the chances of El Nino developing were 60 percent by the end of July and 80 percent by the end of September.

Typically, El Nino increases global temperatures in the year after it develops -- which in this cycle would be 2024.

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ACC summons Zahangir over graft allegations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission summoned Zahangir Alam, the suspended mayor of Gazipur City Corporation, for interrogation over corruption allegations on Tuesday, a day after his expulsion from the ruling Awami League.

Zahangir was expelled on May 15. The next day, the ACC issued a notice upon him. Zahangir is facing various graft allegations allegedly committed during his tenure as the GCC mayor.

He has been asked to be present at the ACC's Segunbagicha headquarters at 10:00am on May 21 and 22, said ACC Secretary Mahbub Hossain at a press briefing yesterday.

He said two enquiries are going on against Zahangir.

"After examining documents and recording statements of several people, the investigation officers find it necessary to record his [Zahangir] statement on the allegations," he said.

The ACC traced a suspicious account of the GCC with Konabari Branch of Premier Bank. It collected information about the account that was opened when Zahangir was the GCC mayor, read an ACC press release yesterday.



Two army men

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information about a hideout of armed criminals in Jarulchharipara.

As the team reached near Jarulchharipara around 1:55pm, the KNA criminals detonated the IED and started firing indiscriminately, leaving two officers and two soldiers injured, it added.

The injured were flown to Combined Military Hospital, Chittagong, where the two soldiers died of their injuries, said the ISPR release, adding that the injured officers are receiving treatment at the hospital.

In recent times, the KNA has been trying to create a chaotic environment through criminal activities in the deep forests of Ruma, Rowangchhari and Thanchi upazilas of Bandarban, it added.

Army Chief General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed offered his deepest condolences to the family members of the slain army personnel.

Home ministry

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been clearly instructed to appeal to the governments of the countries concerned to try the perpetrators of anti-state activities under their existing laws.

Bangladesh ambassadors and high commissioners in those countries have also been instructed to regularly monitor the activities of the listed persons or organisations and inform the authorities of any social media posts, content, news or information that are harmful and defamatory to the government or against the Bangladesh's interests.

Steps are already being taken to ensure that informative and objective news are regularly published in the international media to counter misinformation and promote a positive image for Bangladesh, the report said.

The ministry also placed a report regarding The Daily Star's news report titled "Sold as cyber slaves" in January.

The foreign ministry's senior secretary in the report said the expatriate welfare ministry had already been requesting necessary measures against Bangladeshi human trafficking rings.

Thai parties meet for coalition talks to form govt

AFP, Bangkok

Thai opposition groups met for coalition talks yesterday after hammering government rivals at the ballot box, but some junta-appointed senators warned they would try to stop the victorious party's leader from becoming prime minister.

The progressive Move Forward

Party (MFP) emerged from Sunday's election as the biggest party after voters emphatically rejected nearly a decade of military-backed rule.

MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat met senior officials from five other opposition parties at a Bangkok restaurant, posing for photos before ushering them inside for closed-door talks.

Old buses, trucks to be sent

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DRAFT GUIDELINE

The preamble to the draft guideline mentions that the move is required to improve road safety, bring discipline to the transport sector and reduce pollution.

The guideline will also be applicable to written off vehicles of the government and non-government organisations, vehicles damaged by fire, explosion or natural calamities, illegal and banned vehicles, and vehicles ordered for scrapping by courts or other authorities concerned.

As per the guideline, the owner has to submit the necessary papers for the outdated vehicle to the BRTA which

would hand over the vehicle to the firm scrapping.

The government would give special benefits to owners who would have the document certifying that they have scrapped their old vehicles, it read.

The BRTA would issue gazettes cancelling the registrations of scrapped vehicles.

A seven-member committee led by the director (engineering) of the BRTA will decide which parts of the vehicles could be recycled and fix the price of scrap metal, plastic and other products, it added.

Violation of the guideline would be tantamount to violation of the Road Transport Act-2018, it read.

Taqsem has turned Wasa

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against Mostafa for "tarnishing the image of Wasa" on a TV talk show.

In yesterday's letter, the board chairman said as per the Wasa Act-1996, there is an obligation to convene a board meeting every two months. But the managing director often ignores this obligation.

After Mostafa's talk show appearance, Taqsem, who was abroad at that time, tried to force the employees to form human chains against Mostafa. After he failed to do so, Taqsem had employee associations file a complaint against him with the LGRD ministry, read the letter.

Mostafa's letter read, "The list of his [Taqsem's] irregularities and

misrule is so long that it is not possible to write them here."

Taqsem runs Wasa as he wishes and the internal situation in Dhaka Wasa is very bad, read the letter.

"He terminated those who raised voices against him. Hundreds of such incidents happened in the past. Therefore, no one dares to speak against him for fear of getting fired. A government agency cannot run this way."

"Dhaka Wasa is being run bypassing the board and the board's decision," it added.

When this correspondent called Taqsem, he rejected the call. In his reply to a text message, he wrote, "Sorry, I can't talk right now."

Trees felled for facelift, a new median strip

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Although they could not confirm exactly when the trees were planted, Dhanmondi residents said they had been planted at least 15 years ago.

Talking about the issue, officials also referred to an integrated Tk 1,719 crore project called "Different Infrastructure Development Project" (DIDP), under which the DSCC is carrying out a number of infrastructural and beautification projects.

The DIDP includes beautification of footpaths and median strips and construction of public urinals. It covers infrastructural development and beautification on four different roads -- Saat Masjid Road, the stretch from Golapshah Mazar in Gulistan to Bangabazar in Fulbaria, the stretch from Palashi to Nilkhet and the stretch from Gulistan underpass to Golapshah Mazar. It also aims to widen the two-kilometre median on the Saat Masjid Road from 36 inches to 42 inches.

However, environmentalists and urban experts have raised questions about the rationale for cutting the trees which are vital for fresh air in an increasingly polluted city. They believe the project could be carried out without cutting the trees.

According to environmentalists, the DSCC has cut down nearly 600 trees from the median without having secured any permission from the forest department, which is illegal.

"The DSCC is doing it on the pretext of beautification and facilitating vehicular movement. However, it serves no such purpose," said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela).

Terming the move poorly planned, Adil Mohammad Khan, former general secretary of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said that the development work on Saat Masjid Road could have been done by protecting the trees because the condition of the median was fit for

the purpose.

The DSCC did not discuss it with professionals, nor did they care about public opinion though professional engagement and public participation are the two necessary factors before deciding on such issues, said Adil.

"Beautification by getting rid of trees is unacceptable," he added.

DSCC Chief Engineer Saleh Ahmed said they had to cut the trees to relocate the median at the centre of the road.

"Under new route plans, buses running from Ghatarchar to Kanchpur via Basila will ply Saat Masjid Road. But the problem is that the width of the road was not equal on both sides. So, we're making the width of both sides equal by relocating the median," Saleh Ahmed told The Daily Star.

"Besides, there were 10 to 12 intersections on this road. We will close them all except for four to five so that pedestrians and vehicles can cross safely," he added.

DSCC Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh on Tuesday told reporters that trees were cut only when there was no other alternative.

"Trees are being cut down on Saat Masjid Road to introduce an automatic traffic system. Residents of the area have already started to get the benefits of the ongoing development work," he said.

Responding to a question, the mayor said, "The information about the felling of 563 trees is false. We have cut only a few trees and the rest have fallen."

"We are sorry for the trees but we will plant three times the number that has been cut. Also, no more big trees will be planted on the median."

About not securing permission from the department of forest, a DSCC high-up, preferring not to be named, said, "It is necessary to take permission to cut the trees which are valued for timber but the trees which

we have cut had no such value."

Terming this claim unfounded, Adil stressed that cutting trees on such a long stretch of road without the permission of the forest officials is illegal.

Echoing Adil, Iqbal Habib, joint secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Adolon, said indiscriminate cutting of trees for implementing any project is illegal.

"The DSCC should have done a proper study considering the trees as living beings, but they didn't," Habib added.

Communications expert Prof Md Shamsul Hoque of Buet said he did not notice any anomaly with the median on Saat Masjid Road.

He also said that the decision to close so many intersections on the road might have a negative impact on curbing congestion.

51pc of Dhaka's poor are new

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But the BIDS study found that poverty increased in the first few months of the pandemic and then started to decline, he added.

He said digital technology like mobile banking services played a positive role in creating self-employment.

"However, the number of new poor rose, and the government should work on it."

Planning Minister MA Mannan said disparity was rising as the economy was growing.

The government is trying to reduce disparity through social safety net programmes that directly benefit the poor, he added.

Thanks to government initiatives, extreme poverty has fallen, he added while addressing the event as the chief guest.

Satyajit Karmaker, secretary at the planning ministry, also spoke at the event.

25 pro-BNP lawyers sued over violence at SCBA office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-five pro-BNP lawyers have been sued over Tuesday's violence on the Supreme Court Bar Association office premises.

Md Rafiqullah, assistant superintendent of the SCBA, filed the case with Shahbagh Police Station on Tuesday night and also accused 150 unnamed others, Nur Mohammad, officer-in-charge of the police station, told The Daily Star.

According to the case statement, the accused are pro-BNP Jamaat lawyers. The plaintiff filed the case, bringing allegations of attempting to murder an AL-leaning lawyer, harassment of a female lawyer, theft, and vandalism.

The accused include BNP Joint Secretary General Mahbub Uddin Khokon, former secretary of SCBA Md Ruhul Kuddus Kazal, and BNP Law Affairs Secretary Kayser Kamal.

On Tuesday, Pro-BNP and AL-leaning lawyers scuffled while holding separate programmes on the SCBA office premises over its recent annual polls. The incident left around two dozen lawyers injured.

Madrasa student dies from electrocution

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

A madrasa student died after a live electric wire fell on him in Jhalakathi's Nalchity upazila yesterday. Dead Tahsin Khalifa, 9, was a grade-II student of local Sarmahal Karimia Madrasa, said police.

He was returning home from the institution after attending an exam. On his way, he was electrocuted to death in Moulabhi Bari area, said locals.

He was rushed to Nalchity Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

Manoranjan, inspector of Nalchity Police Station, said he would take action after contacting the dead's family members.

Farmer shot dead near Indo-Bangla border

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A farmer was shot dead near Bangladesh-India border in Dinajpur's Chirirbandar upazila early yesterday.

The victim's family members and neighbours alleged that Indian Border Security Force (BSF) shot him. However, officials of Border Guard Bangladesh did not confirm.

Victim Monjurul Islam, 22, of Sahapur village in Chirirbandar, went out of home around 10:00pm on Tuesday night.

After hearing gunshots around midnight, locals informed police. The law enforcers recovered the body around 12:30am yesterday, said Bazlur Rashid, officer-in-charge of Chirirbandar Police Station.

The body had four bullet injuries, he further said, adding that the body was sent to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Lt Col Alamgir Hossain, commanding officer of 29th BGB Battalion in Phulbari, said BGB urged BSF to hold a flag meeting in this connection.