

## US visa policy insulting for Bangladesh: CPD

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The latest US visa policy for Bangladeshi individuals is “very insulting” for the nation, said the Centre for Policy Dialogue yesterday.

“The new US visa policy is unfortunate. We should ensure a credible election for our own interest,” said Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the CPD, at a press briefing yesterday.

The thinktank organised the event to disclose its third reading on “State of the Bangladesh Economy in FY2022-23” at its office in the capital.

Ensuring a free and fair election should seem a normal process in a democratic society, he said.

“It is very unfortunate that the threat of a visa restriction is a precondition to arranging a free and fair election. It should be a part of any functioning democracy,” he said.

“I hope that all pollical quarters will realise it.”

He cautioned that the new visa policy should be taken with due seriousness as the US is the single-largest market of Bangladesh exports.

“We are capable of competing in the US market even after facing duties when the country graduates from the LDC level, he said.

## Noakhali BNP leader allegedly defamed PM

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

An allegation has been raised against a BNP leader in Noakhali for making derogatory remarks about Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Abdur Rahman, BNP’s joint general secretary of Senbagh upazila unit and chairman of Chatarpaiyya union parishad, allegedly made the remark at a meeting with his party men at his office in Chatarpaiyya Bazar on Thursday evening.

He has been on the run since a video clip of the meeting went viral.

Police on Friday night arrested his son Nazmul Hasan Riday, 23, and his nephews Ismail Hossain Rakib, 22, and Zunayed Hossain, 24.

“Although the trio were not present at that meeting, they are accused of other criminal cases,” said Iqbal Hossain Patwary, officer-in-charge (OC) of Senbagh Police Station.

Police were trying to arrest Abdur Rahman, he added.

A fresh case will be filed against Abdur after his arrest for making derogatory remarks about the prime minister, the OC added.



An aerial view shows residential buildings destroyed by recent shelling in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict in Donetsk, Russian-controlled Ukraine, May 26, 2023.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Ukraine targets oil pipeline with drones inside Russia

Say media reports; Russian forces intercept British Storm Shadow missiles

REUTERS, Moscow

Ukraine struck oil pipeline installations deep inside Russia yesterday with a series of drone attacks including on a station serving the Druzhba pipeline, while shelling from Ukraine killed at least two, Russian officials and media said.

Ukrainian drone attacks inside Russia have been growing in intensity in recent weeks, and the New York Times reported that US intelligence believes Ukraine was behind a drone attack on the Kremlin earlier this month.

Ukraine has not publicly acknowledged launching attacks against targets inside Russia. The Ukrainian defence ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Saturday.

In the Tver region, which lies just northwest of Moscow, two drones attacked a station that serves the Druzhba (Friendship) pipeline, one of the world’s largest oil pipelines, the Kommersant newspaper said.

The Tver local council said that a drone had crashed near the village of Erokhino, around 500 km (310 miles) from the border with Ukraine.

The Telegram channel Baza, which has

good sources among Russia’s security services, said the drones attacked a station serving the Druzhba pipeline.

In Russia’s Belgorod region, Ukrainian shelling killed at least one person and injured three, including a 15-year-old girl and a 17-year-old boy, Vyacheslav Gladkov, the governor of the region said.

- Drones attack Druzhba pipeline infrastructure
- One killed in shelling near Ukraine border
- Russian forces intercept British Storm Shadow missiles

Gladkov, whose region borders Ukraine and was the target of pro-Ukrainian fighters this week, said a power line was also damaged. In Kursk region, a construction worker was killed in shelling near the border with Ukraine, the local governor said.

Druzhba, built by the Soviet Union, has capacity to pump more than 2 million barrels per day (bpd) but has been severely

under-utilised as Europe sought to reduce its dependency on Russian energy after President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine last year.

Russia’s oil pipeline operator Transneft TRNF p.MM said earlier this month that a filling point on Druzhba in a Russian region bordering Ukraine had been attacked.

At its daily briefing on the Ukraine war, Russia’s defence ministry said it had destroyed 12 Ukrainian drones in the past 24 hours and intercepted two long range Storm Shadow cruise missiles that were supplied to Ukraine by Britain.

Russia also said it had intercepted shorter-range US-built HIMARS-launched and HARM missiles. The ministry did not say where those interceptions took place but reported fighting at points along the front line.

Reuters could not immediately verify battlefield accounts from either side.

Ukraine’s Ministry of Defence did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Kyiv officials have previously said that Western-supplied weapons would be used exclusively against Russian forces inside Ukraine.

## Man dies as truck rams three-wheeler

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A truck rammed into a three-wheeler killing a man and injuring four others on Bogura-Nagarbari highway in Ullapara upazila of Sirajganj yesterday morning.

Mohammed Ali Sheikh, 42, of Raiganj upazila of the Sirajganj, who was on the three-wheeler, died at the scene of the crash, said Bodrul Kabir, officer-in-charge of Hatikumrul Highway Police Station.

Highway police recovered the body and sent the injured men to Sirajganj general hospital.

The truck driver managed to flee the scene, the OC added.

## Boy dies after falling off roof

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 17-year-old boy died after falling off the roof of a seven-storey building in the capital’s Uttar Badda yesterday.

Muhammad Tasin, son of Babul Mia of Tongibari, was watering plants on the roof in the morning when he slipped and fell, said Inspector Bachchhu Mia, in-charge at Dhaka Medical College Hospital police outpost.

Tasin was a delivery person for an online shop, the inspector said, adding that he lived on the 6th floor of the building.

## Body of newborn recovered from Buet campus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The body of a newborn was recovered from a dustbin on the Buet campus yesterday.

A man spotted the body wrapped in a strip of cloth inside the dustbin next to an ATM booth around 11:00am, said Dipak Bala, sub-inspector of Shahbagh Police Station.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue, he added.

## Two killed in clashes on Afghan-Iranian border

AFP, Kabul

Two people were killed yesterday when clashes broke out between Taliban and Iranian forces at the Afghan-Iranian border, Taliban authorities said, as the neighbours argue over water rights.

Iranian police confirmed the incident without giving details of casualties, while local news agency Mehr reported one Iranian border guard had been killed.

Both sides blamed the other for shooting first. “In the clash, one person was killed on each side and many were injured,” tweeted the Taliban’s interior ministry spokesman Abdul Nafy Takor about the incident in the southwestern province of Nimroz.

## Govt borrowing from banks Bangladesh economy

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Also, the IMF’s \$4.7 billion loan programme, approved earlier this year, has set a condition for reducing sales of savings certificates, said finance ministry officials.

That is why the government plans to borrow more money from banks, they said.

Zahid Hussain said the IMF condition is logical as the government expenditure on interest payment has grown out of proportion.

The government’s interest payment may exceed Tk 1 lakh crore in the next fiscal. It is Tk 80,375 crore in the current fiscal.

The impact of the government’s borrowing on the economy will largely depend on how it will borrow

from the banking system, said Hussain.

“If the government borrows more from the central bank than the commercial banks, it will have an adverse impact on inflation. Besides, it will also chip away at the Bangladesh Bank initiatives to tackle the dollar crisis,” he said.

He said that the inflationary pressure and strain on foreign reserves will decrease considerably if the government borrows more from the commercial banks.

“Withdrawing funding from low-priority projects in the next fiscal can be another way for the government to reduce government borrowing from banks,” said Hussain.

## BNP may go for 1-point demand

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Members of the standing committee held a meeting on Thursday night and discussed the outline of a joint declaration which the BNP and like-minded political parties will announce.

BNP leaders drafted the outline from the party’s 27-point state reform proposal. The declaration will be finalised at another standing committee meeting tomorrow.

Once it is finalised, the BNP and other like-minded parties will make the joint declaration public and launch the one-point movement, party insiders said.

The programmes which are part of the one-point movement will be announced after the death anniversary of BNP founder Ziaur Rahman on May 30.

The leadership is considering youth rallies in every division to mobilise the young generation.

The party’s top leadership has already held meetings with former lawmakers, former MP candidates, and key leaders from the districts and cities, said a senior leader, wishing not to be named.

The top leadership also held meetings with the organising secretaries and leaders of associate bodies and asked them to prepare for waging a one-point movement.

At multiple standing committee meetings in recent weeks, the leaders discussed how the authorities had started arresting BNP activists and filing false cases against them.

The US visa policy will weaken the ruling party leaders’ morality and the administration will be less aggressive, BNP leaders believe.

However, while some senior leaders want to launch the one-point movement as soon as possible, others fear that the momentum of the movement will be lost during the coming Eid holidays and want to launch it in the second week of July.

Meanwhile, two crude bombs went off in front of Natore district unit BNP office at Alaipur area in the town yesterday morning and in Gaibandha 26 BNP men were arrested at a hotel on charge of planning subversive activities.

Both the incidents took place ahead of their party’s programme for the 10-point demand.

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unrealistic manner – must not be repeated.”

Fahmida said the government didn’t set most of the economic targets, including for GDP growth, inflation, export, import, and remittance, in its budget for the current fiscal year due to the global economic turmoil and the Russia-Ukraine war.

“If the targets can’t be set considering the reality, there will be a possibility of drawing up wrong policies,” she said.

Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the CPD, said that the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics had projected that the country would achieve 6.03 percent GDP growth in the current fiscal year, the lowest in 11 years except for the FY2019-20.

The government initially set a GDP growth target of 7.5 percent for this fiscal, but it was later revised to 6.5 percent.

The country’s foreign exchange reserves have dropped to the lowest level in the last seven years, Mustafizur said.

The reserves stood at \$29.96 billion on May 24 this year, down by 29.14 percent year on year.

He said that the government set an inflation target of 5.4 percent for this fiscal year, but inflation was a little short of the decade high of 9.52 percent in August last year.

Fahmida said, “Continued borrowing from the central bank [by the government] will surely increase the money supply in the market, and subsequently would create inflationary pressure.”

The CPD said the government borrowed Tk 54,501 crore from the Bangladesh Bank until February this fiscal year.

According to media reports, borrowing from the central bank rose to Tk 74,393 crore until April, it said.

Borrowing from the BB may create gross new money of Tk 383,124 crore, but a comparison with global practice

reveals that Bangladesh has surpassed all the thresholds of creating gross new money by a considerable margin, Fahmida said.

She said that the central bank did not even use its monetary tools to contain inflationary pressure.

The BB should have relaxed the interest rate cap of 9 percent on loans to tackle the high inflation, observed the CPD executive director.

The think-tank said Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), the sole agency that imports and markets petroleum products, may make a profit of Tk 5 per litre from selling diesel and about Tk 13 per litre from octane at the current prices.

So, there may be an opportunity for the BPC to reduce petroleum prices between Tk 5 and Tk 10 each litre, it added.

The BPC’s total profit in the last seven years (from FY 2015-16 to FY 2021-22) was about Tk 43,804 crore.

After paying Tk 7,727 crore as income tax, the BPC’s net profit stood at Tk 36,074 crore during the same period.

Being a monopoly and state-owned enterprise, enjoying windfall gains by penalising the citizens of the country can’t be justified, it said.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the CPD, said, “Almost all economic indicators are in a bad shape. Policies adopted by the government to resolve the problems are not working. The government will get stuck if it continues adopting such policies in future.”

In such a situation, the pressure on macroeconomy will increase further, he added.

For instance, the initiatives taken by the government to boost remittances or resolve the ongoing crisis in forex reserves have become ineffective, Moazzem said.

He said it is very difficult to bring back stability to the economy if a reform programme is not taken in the true sense.

Towfiqul Islam Khan, a senior research fellow, of the CPD also addressed the event.

## It’ll help curb laundering of money

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diplomatic correspondent.

Meanwhile, at a different programme, on the same day, Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque said the US wants the next election to be free and fair, which is also the goal of the government.

“So, there is nothing to be worried about the new US policy,” he said while addressing the triennial conference of the Tangail district Jubo League at Shaheed Srity Poura Udayan in the town, reports our Tangail correspondent.

On May 24, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced the new visa policy under which the US will be able to restrict the issuance of visas for any Bangladeshi individual, believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh.

Momen said, “Who applies for US visa?...Only some government officials, businesses, politicians, and civil society leaders who send their children, built homes, and laundered money there. As a result, money laundering will come down inshallah.”

The government wants the US visa policy to stop violence and arson attacks as were the cases in the past, he said, mentioning that in 2014, at least 3,800 vehicles were burnt.

“If this policy helps stop violence, it would be a blessing. You know who resort to violence, they should be careful,” he said, while making an

oblique reference to the BNP-Jamaat.

On the other hand, Dr Abdur Razzaque said the US announced the new policy to prevent BNP’s bid to sabotage the election.

“The next election will be fair and acceptable. Still, if BNP wants to bring an unconstitutional government to power by conspiring to thwart the election, the administration will deal with it and the Awami League leaders and activists will cooperate with them,” said Razzaque, also presidium member of AL.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said BNP is in trouble because of the new US visa policy, reports our staff correspondent. “Elections will be held in a free and fair manner. So, neither Awami League nor Sheikh Hasina has any headache over any visa policy or sanctions,” he said while addressing a rally at Madhya Badda.

He said the “final game” would be played in the next general elections between “boat” and “sheaf of paddy”.

“The people don’t want sheaf of paddy,” said Quader, also the AL General Secretary.

He said the BNP lodged complaints to the US and spoke of sanctions.

“But where is the sanction? Now sanction is against BNP as they always want to create unrest through vandalism, arson, and terrorism. So, they are in fear over the new policy,” Quader said.

## Rab recovers 14kg of ivory in Ctg

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sack under a cabinet of his flat. Later, Rab took him into custody for interrogation,” he added.

“During interrogation, Malek said the tusks and buckskin were collected from the deep forests of Ali Kadam and Lama of Bandarban district. He had plans to send those to Sylhet border to smuggle those out of the country,” said Maj Mehedi.

Rab yesterday filed a case accusing Malek of wildlife smuggling with the Panchlaish police station. Later,

a court in the evening sent Malek to jail, said Officer-in-Charge (OC) Nazim Uddin of Panchlaish police station.

According to Rab, Malek owns 25 unlicensed elephants.

On Friday, a mobile court sentenced two people to six months’ jail after they had held with four endangered hornbill birds in Banshkali upazila. Police said they wanted to smuggle the birds to India after catching those from the deep forests in Ali Kadam of Bandarban.