



HUMAN RIGHTS Dhaka to clear its stance to the six US congressmen

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

To clear Bangladesh's position on human rights and elections, Dhaka will communicate with six US congressmen, who recently wrote to President Joe Biden, said State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam.

Speaking to reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday, he said there were "exaggerations, inconsistencies and information gap" in the issues mentioned in the letter.

Congressmen Scott Perry, Barry Moore, Warren Davidson, Bob Good, Tim Burchett and Keith Self wrote to the US president on May 25 requesting urgent actions to stop the "human rights abuses" by the government in Bangladesh and give its people the "best possible chance for free and fair parliamentary elections".

The letter said, "The well-documented abuses by the Hasina government are not confined to her

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A re-excavated canal, known as Mora Posur, gets a new lease of life. Seven such canals, including this one, were re-excavated in Betaga union of Bagerhat's Fakirhat. Now farmers are getting irrigation water from them. The photo was taken in Betaga village recently.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

EC's power to scrap polling to be curtailed RPO amendment bill placed in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission will have less powers if the Representation of the People Order (Amendment) Bill, 2023, placed in parliament yesterday is passed as is.

If passed, the EC won't be able to postpone or cancel polls to an entire constituency if there were irregularities in one or some polling centres. And it will only be able to cancel or postpone voting on election day during the polling.

Law Minister Anisul Haq placed the bill in Jatiya Sangsad and it was sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the law ministry for scrutiny.

The committee was asked to submit its report within 15 days.

According to section 91 of the Representation of the People Order, 1972, the EC may stop the polls at any polling centre or the entire constituency at any stage of the election if it is convinced that it will not be able to ensure the conduct of the election justly, fairly and in accordance with the law due to malpractices, including coercion, intimidation and pressures.

According to the amendment, the EC will be able to cancel the election in a polling centre or centres, not the entire constituency, several EC officials have said.

The bill proposes changing the word "elections" with "polls" in section 91 of the RPO. The change of the word limits when the EC can cancel or postpone elections.

"Polls" mean the process of voting in an election, in other words, election day. "Elections" mean the period between the announcement of the schedule and the declaration of the unofficial results.

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujon) Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said the new move of amending the RPO would reduce the EC's powers.

"It seems that the commission can take action just on the polling day instead of the total election process..." he added. Jatiya Party MP Fakhru Imam objected to the amendment and said the powers of the EC are being curtailed through the amendment.

He said, "The constitution gives the Election Commission freedom. If this freedom is cancelled by the law, we are enacting then how will the Election Commission be free?"

"We saw the Election Commission cancel the bad polls in Gaibandha. I don't know why the law minister is now tabling that the Election Commission cannot cancel an entire election."

This contradicts the constitution, he said. In response, the law minister claimed that the amendment to the RPO does not go against the constitution or democracy.

He said if the EC could cancel polls in all stations because of irregularities in two or three, then it would be anti democratic since people have exercised their rights in the other polling stations.

The law minister said that as per the amendment, if there is a disturbance in any of the polling stations, the voting can be stopped there.

He said power is not being given to stop the polls in other stations where fair polls have been conducted. It is not against democracy, he added.

The amendment also proposed punishment of those who obstruct media personnel covering the polls and election observers.

It also has a provision that allows candidates to reschedule their default loans or utility bills a day prior to collecting nomination papers.

Now, potential candidates can reschedule those seven days before collecting their nomination papers.

Deprived of funds, airlines cut flights

IATA says Bangladesh withholding \$214m of foreign carriers, warns of operators leaving; fares for foreign destinations spike

RASHIDUL HASAN

Turkish Airlines used to fly to Dhaka twice a day but it has been operating one flight a day for a year since it cannot repatriate to Istanbul \$24 million it earned here from ticket sales and by moving freight.

Officials of the carrier said they have reduced selling tickets in Dhaka and are urging flyers to buy tickets online and outside Bangladesh.

Following suit, other foreign carriers, including Singapore Airlines, Malindo Air, Kuwait Airways, and Cathay Pacific, have cut flight frequencies to Dhaka as they too cannot take their money back to their countries, said leaders of Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB).

With fewer seats available, ticket prices have gone up.

Fund repatriation by foreign airlines operating in Bangladesh has been suspended since March 2022.

On Sunday, the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the trade association of some 300 airlines or 83 percent of total air traffic, said Bangladesh is the second worst in the world in terms of blocking funds of carriers after Nigeria.

Bangladesh is withholding \$214 million of airlines' funds, it said, warning that this could result in carriers not serving Bangladesh.

"Airlines cannot continue to offer services in markets where they are unable to repatriate the revenues arising from their commercial activities in those markets," said Willie Walsh, IATA director general.

The IATA said the global aviation industry's blocked funds have increased by 47 percent to \$2.27 billion in April 2023 from \$1.55 billion in April 2022. The top five countries account for 68.0 percent of the blocked funds: Nigeria (\$812.2

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Willie Walsh
IATA director general

Two siblings die after pest control cleans home

STAR REPORT

Two siblings died allegedly from pesticide poisoning after a cleaning service provider used pest control chemicals in their house in Dhaka's Bashundhara Residential Area.

Shayan Mobarat Zahin, 15, an eighth grader, and Shahir Mobarat Zayan, 9, a third-grader, died on Sunday.

Asaduzzaman, officer-in-charge of Bhatara Police Station, yesterday said they suspected that the two boys might have died due to pesticide poisoning.

Quoting the family members, Inspector (Investigation) Shariful Islam said Mobarat Hossain, the father of the two children, hired DCS Organisation Ltd to get rid of pests in their house at Block-1.

"The employees of the company applied pesticides there on Friday from 3:00pm to 6:00pm. I was there supervising the work wearing a mask, while my wife and 3 children were out attending an event," Mobarat told The Daily Star yesterday.

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PAYRA PLANT'S TEMPORARY CLOSURE Govt counting on power plants under trial run

ASIFUR RAHMAN

With the country's biggest power producer, Payra Power Plant, temporarily closing yesterday, the government is now looking at plants that are doing dry runs to ease load shedding.

At 12:15pm yesterday, the Payra 1,320MW Thermal Power Plant was turned off due to coal shortage.

Officials said the next shipment of coal would reach the plant after June 25.

The first unit of the plant, with 660MW capacity, has been out of operation since May 25, and the countrywide power cuts have been frequent since then.

Power Division officials said they will increase power production from gas and furnace oil until June 13 to fill the gap left behind by the Payra Power Plant's second unit.

"We are trying so that the current situation does not worsen, and it will improve after June 13," said Mohammad Hossain, director general of Power Cell.

He said from next week, Chattogram's SS Power, a subsidiary of Salam Group, will start supplying electricity to the national grid on a trial basis.

Besides, Adani Power of India will increase its power supply, he added.

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Trove of 750 looted artifacts returned to Italy



CNN ONLINE

Some 750 looted archaeological treasures have been seized from the notorious British antiquities trader Robin Symes and returned to Italy after a decades-long fight for their return, the Carabinieri art police said.

The artifacts, which according to the Italian cultural ministry are worth more than €12 million (\$12.9 million), will go on display in Rome's Castel Sant'Angelo museum as part of a collection of stolen art that has found its way home.

The objects "offer a cross-section of the many productions of ancient Italy and the islands," including "numerous and diversified archaeological contexts (funerary, cultural, residential and public) ... concentrated in particular in Etruria and Magna Graecia," according to a statement from the Ministry of Culture on Wednesday.

Among the recovered items from the Roman and Imperial eras is a bronze tripod table from an aristocratic Etruscan family, two parade headgear for horses, two funerary paintings, male busts in marble, various portions of statues and bronzes, and a wall painting with the depiction of a small temple, likely from a Vesuvian residence, according

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7,001 cases filed under DSA till Jan 31 Law minister tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 7,001 cases were filed across the country as of January 31, this year under the Digital Security Act, Law Minister Anisul Haq told parliament yesterday.

The minister said this in reply to a query from Gonoforum MP Mukabbir Khan from Sylhet-2.

The much-debated Digital Security Bill 2018 was passed in parliament in September 2018, ignoring the concerns of journalists, owners of media houses and rights activists over some of its sections.

Journalists and rights activists said the act goes against the main spirit of the constitution and will restrict free thinking, freedom of speech and freedom of expression. It will also impede independent journalism.

In his question, Mukabbir Khan wanted to know the number of cases and people arrested so far under the Digital Security Act.

In response, the law minister said, as the concerned authority, this part of the question has been sent to

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A rickshaw-puller, sweating profusely, takes a passenger to his destination in the scorching summer heat. The low-income people are the worst sufferers due to the ongoing heatwave, as they have to toil under the sweltering sun to make ends meet. The photo was taken in the High Court area in the capital.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN