

Holidaymakers leaving Dhaka early to avoid hassles

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Holidaymakers have begun leaving the capital early to avoid the expected traffic congestion and other difficulties on the road to their homes ahead of Eid-ul-Azha, which will be celebrated on Thursday.

Although the official holidays does not start until Tuesday, thousands have been leaving for their villages since Friday.

Regardless, most homebound passengers are expected to begin their journey on Monday night, after government offices close for the holidays.

Police have warned that expansion works on highways, roadside cattle markets, and possible rains may cause delays and difficulties for northbound passengers.

As such, many people were sending their family members home a few days early so that they could avoid the crowds and chaos.

"On Saturday [yesterday], the first day of Bangladesh Railway's special arrangement for holidaymakers, all trains left Dhaka on schedule," said Shah Alam Kiron Shishir, commercial officer (Dhaka division) of BR.

"We have put a three-step checking system in place so that nobody can travel without a train ticket," he told this newspaper.

"A large crowd of passengers gathered at Kamalapur Railway Station in the morning and evening, and a total of 50 trains, including 38 intercity trains, departed from Dhaka for different destinations," he added.

He also said that three special trains to Panchagarh, Lalmonirhat, and Dewanganj will be added to the fleet today [Sunday] to accommodate Eid passengers.

Speaking to this newspaper, Abu Raihan, general secretary of the Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners' Association, said, "People started leaving the capital on Friday, and their journey has so far been smooth."

"More people will begin their Eid journey on Monday, and the volume of outbound passengers will reach its peak on Wednesday," he said yesterday.

Meanwhile, no pressure from additional passengers was noticed at the Sadarghat Launch Terminal, the largest in the country.

"We had a typical day today [Saturday]. We expect to see more passengers starting Monday evening," Alamgir Kabir, joint director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority, told this correspondent yesterday.



Away from the hustle and bustle of the city, people are enjoying an affordable ride on an open-top bus along the seafront in the port city's Patenga. Several tourist buses recently launched by Chattogram district administration roll from New Market to Patenga beach via the scenic Tiger Pass Road and DC Park.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

BIDEN-MODI MEETING

Pakistan hits out at US, India over terror swipe

REUTERS, Washington

Pakistan yesterday criticised the United States and India after President Joe Biden met Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the White House and both leaders called on Pakistan to ensure its territory was not used as a base for militant attacks.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said a joint US-Indian statement was "unwarranted, one-sided, and misleading". The reference to Islamabad in it was "contrary to diplomatic norms," it said.

The ministry added that it was surprised by the joint statement and said it had "close counterterrorism cooperation" with the United States.

Relations between India and Pakistan have been fraught for years. Since independence from Britain in 1947, India and Pakistan have fought three wars, two of them over the Muslim-majority Himalayan region of Kashmir, which they both claim in full but rule in part.

The joint US-Indian statement said: "They (Biden and Modi) strongly condemned cross-border terrorism, the use of terrorist proxies and called on Pakistan to take immediate action to ensure that no territory under its control is used for launching terrorist attacks."

Pakistan's foreign ministry said India

was using the allegations of extremism against Islamabad to deflect from the situation in Kashmir and the treatment of minorities in India.

New Delhi has for years accused Pakistan of launching militant attacks in India, including the one in 2008 in Mumbai that killed over 165 people.

Pakistan also expresses deep concern over the planned transfer of advanced military technologies to India

India also says Pakistan has helped Islamist militants who have battled Indian security forces in its part of Kashmir since the late 1980s. Pakistan denies the accusation and says it only provides diplomatic and moral support for Kashmiris seeking self-determination.

The special status given to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir was revoked in 2019 when New Delhi split it into two federally controlled territories. Pakistan calls the moves illegal and wants them rolled back.

Biden rolled out the red carpet for Modi on Thursday, with both leaders touting deals their countries reached on defense

and commerce aimed at countering China's global influence.

Pakistan also said it was "deeply concerned" over the planned transfer of advanced military technologies to India, saying such steps would not prove helpful in achieving peace in South Asia.

The backdrop to Modi's visit is the Biden administration's attempts to draw India, the world's most populous country at 1.4 billion and its fifth-largest economy, closer amid its growing geopolitical rivalry with Beijing.

Modi did not address China directly during the visit, and Biden only mentioned China in response to a reporter's question, but a joint statement included a pointed reference to the East and South China Seas, where China has territorial disputes with its neighbours.

Farwa Aamer, director for South Asia at the Asia Society Policy Institute, in an analysis note described that as "a clear signal of unity and determination to preserve stability and peace in the region."

Alongside agreements to sell weapons to India and share with it sensitive military technology, announcements this week included several investments from US-firms aimed at spurring semiconductor manufacturing in India and lowering its dependence on China for electronics.

Australia sanctions three involved in downing of MH17

AFP, Sydney

Australia yesterday announced financial sanctions and travel bans on two Russians and a Ukrainian involved in the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 in 2014.

Canberra officials said the sanctions target Russian national Sergey Dubinsky and Ukrainian Leonid Kharchenko, who were found guilty in absentia of murder and other charges by a Dutch court last year, after 298 passengers and crew died in the MH17 disaster.

Sergey Muchkaev, a colonel with the Russian Armed Forces, is also included in the sanctions by Australia. He commanded the anti-aircraft brigade that supplied the weapons system which downed flight MH17, Canberra said.

There were 38 Australians on board when the Boeing 777 en route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur went down over eastern Ukraine in July 2014.

"As either separatist leaders... at the time of the downing of Flight MH17, or a member of the Russian Armed Forces, the three people sanctioned today actively supported actions and policies that threatened the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine," said Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong.

at giving opportunities to some powerful individuals to whiten the money they had laundered, he told The Daily Star.

A finance ministry official said the government made the move to boost revenue and mobilise foreign currencies at a time when Bangladesh's foreign currency reserves were under pressure.

Since independence, Tk 45,522.83 crore have been whitened under the government's tax amnesty, generating Tk 4,641.34 crore in taxes.

What is Wagner group?

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The private army had always denied involvement in conflicts in Africa and the Middle East.

According to Wagner's chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, 62, the group has around 25,000 troops.

Prigozhin last year admitted he had founded the group, recruiting soldiers from Russian prisons in exchange for amnesty.

However, the UK Ministry of Defence said in January estimated that the group has at least 50,000 fighters in Ukraine.

It said the organisation started recruiting in large numbers in 2022 because Russia had trouble finding people for the regular army.

A BBC investigation into the Wagner Group highlighted the believed involvement of a former Russian army officer, Dmitri Utkin. A veteran of Russia's wars in Chechnya, he is thought to have been Wagner's first field commander and to have named the group after his former radio call sign.

Prigozhin, its current head, is a rich businessman nicknamed "Putin's chef" because he provided catering for the Kremlin.

Although mercenary forces are illegal in Russia, the Wagner Group registered as a company in 2022 and opened a new headquarters in St Petersburg.

"It is openly recruiting in Russian cities, on billboards, and is being named in Russian media as a patriotic organisation," says Dr Samuel Ramani, of the Royal United Services Institute think tank.

Western countries and UN experts have accused Wagner mercenaries of human rights abuses throughout Africa, including in Central African Republic, Libya, and Mali.

In eastern Ukraine, the mercenary unit has been spearheading Russia's costly battles. It had been at the forefront of the months-long assault for Bakhmut, capturing the site for Russia, but at huge losses.

The brutal fight also created a rift

One more dies from Covid, 82 new cases reported

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh reported one more death from Covid-19 and 82 fresh cases in 24 hours till last morning.

With the new numbers, the country's total fatalities rose to 29,459 and caseload to 2,042,131, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The daily case test positivity slightly declined to 7.17 percent from Friday's 7.18 percent as 1,144 samples were tested.

However, the death and recovery rate remained unchanged at 1.44 percent and 98.33 percent, respectively, DGHS said.

Bangladesh registered its highest daily caseload of 16,230 on July 28 in 2021 and its highest number of fatalities of 264 on August 10 the same year.

On May 8, the National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19 recommended relaxing Covid-19 guidelines such as social distance, wearing mask and others as the infection rate in Bangladesh was under control for days following the World Health Organization declaration that the Covid is no longer a global health emergency.

Man kills wife over family feud

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

A man allegedly killed his wife over a family dispute in Kalai upazila of Joypurhat yesterday.

Moslem Uddin, 76, went hiding after the killing of his wife Aysha Khatun, 60.

Kalai Police Station Officer-in-Charge Wasim Ali Bari said "Moslem went fishing in a local ditch in the morning. Around noon, his wife Aysha went there and the couple got into a fight. At one point, Moslem hit Aysha with the spade, killing her on the spot."

Informed, police recovered her body and sent it to Joypurhat Modern Hospital for autopsy.

A case was filed with the police station in this connection, said the OC.

Smuggler held with gold worth Tk 70 lakh

UNB, Chuadanga

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) yesterday detained a suspected smuggler with 11 gold bars worth Tk 70 lakh in his possession along the Sultanpur border with India in Darshana upazila, Chuadanga.

Tariqul Islam, 32, was apprehended when he tried to flee after the border security personnel challenged him at the border.

Lt Col Sayeed Md Jahidur Rahman, commander of the BGB-6, said they conducted a drive in Sultanpur after being informed that a consignment of gold would be smuggled to India through the border in the morning.

The market value of the seized gold is estimated to be Tk 70 lakh, he said, adding that it was deposited at the exchequer and a case was filed in this connection.

Mercenary group halts advance on Moscow

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Belarusian president knows Prigozhin for 20 years, he added.

Earlier, Prigozhin said that his "march for justice" was intended to remove corrupt and incompetent Russian commanders he blames for botching the war in Ukraine.

In a televised address from the Kremlin, Putin said Russia's very existence was under threat.

"We are fighting for the lives and security of our people, for our sovereignty and independence, for the right to remain Russia, a state with a thousand-year history," he said, vowing punishment for those who "who prepared an armed insurrection".

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said the Wagner revolt exposed complete chaos in Russia.

"Today the world can see that the masters of Russia control nothing. And that means nothing. Simply complete chaos. An absence of any predictability," Zelenskiy said in his nightly video address.

Video obtained by Reuters showed troop carriers and two flatbed trucks each carrying a tank driving 30 miles (50 km) beyond Voronezh, more than half way to Moscow. A helicopter fired on them near Voronezh.

More than 100 firefighters were in action at a fuel depot ablaze in Voronezh. Video footage obtained by Reuters showed it exploding in a fireball shortly after a helicopter flew by.

Further along the road, a video showed, vehicles apparently placed as barricades to slow Wagner's advance had been tossed to one side.

Prigozhin, whose private army fought the bloodiest battles in Ukraine even as he feuded for months with the military top brass, said he had captured the headquarters of Russia's Southern Military District in the city of Rostov without firing a shot.

In Rostov, which serves as the main rear logistical hub for Russia's entire invasion force in Ukraine, residents milled about calmly, filming on mobile phones as Wagner fighters in armoured vehicles and battle tanks took up positions.

"Will there be civil war?" a woman in Rostov asked the mercenaries who took over the city. "No, everything will be fine," a fighter answered.

The region surrounding Rostov is an important oil, gas and grains hub.

Prigozhin, a former convict and long-time ally of Putin, accused Russian generals of incompetence

and of withholding ammunition from his fighters. This month, he defied orders to sign a contract placing his troops under Defence Ministry command.

He launched the apparent mutiny on Friday after alleging that the military had killed many of his fighters in an air strike. The Defence Ministry denied it.

In a series of hectic messages overnight, Prigozhin had demanded that Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and the chief of the general staff Valery Gerasimov should come to see him in Rostov.

Western capitals said they were closely following the situation in nuclear-armed Russia. US President Joe Biden spoke with the leaders of France, Germany and Britain, while Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke to counterparts from G7 nations.

The top US military officer, Army General Mark Milley, cancelled a scheduled trip to the Middle East because of the situation in Russia.

The insurrection risked leaving Russia's invasion force in Ukraine in disarray, just as Kyiv is launching its strongest counteroffensive since the war began in February last year.

paying a seven percent tax remained.

Besides this, the National Board of Revenue was tasked with confiscating undisclosed assets abroad and take various other measures against money launderers.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute, said it was presumed that no one would take the amnesty offer. "Those who launder money are less likely to have an intention to bring the money back home."

The amnesty offer was aimed

ministry sources said.

When the finance bill is placed in parliament today, there is little chance the amnesty will be extended, they added.

In June 2022, the finance minister proposed legalising movable and immovable assets abroad, acquired with undeclared income in Bangladesh, in exchange for a certain amount in taxes.

As the proposal received widespread criticism, only the option to bring back cash through the banking channel by

Govt's tax amnesty offer draws blank

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utilised the opportunity, but this is the first time, no one had whitened black money, added the official, requesting anonymity.

Only about a couple of work days remain of this fiscal year, and it is highly unlikely that someone will suddenly appear now and try to bring back their laundered money, the official said.

If the tax break is not extended, the offer will automatically expire at the beginning of the new fiscal year,