

PM reaches London from Washington DC

BSS, London

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina arrived in London from Washington DC yesterday morning.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to the UK Saïda Muna Tasneem received the premier at the airport.

Bangladesh Ambassador to the US Muhammad Imran saw the PM off at the Dulles International Airport, Washington DC.

On September 23, Hasina reached Washington DC after attending the 78th United Nations General Assembly and other high-level side and bilateral events in New York between September 17 and September 22.

Hasina is expected to leave London for home by a commercial flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines around 8:35pm (local time) on October 3.

She is scheduled to reach Dhaka on October 4.

ROUGH SEAS

150 tourists stranded at St Martin's

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 150 tourists were stranded at St Martin's Island in Teknaf of Cox's Bazar yesterday due to rough seas.

The local administration suspended the movement of all types of vessels on Teknaf-St Martin's Island route yesterday morning as the meteorological department asked the maritime ports in Cox's Bazar to hoist cautionary signal number 3.

Teknaf Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mohammad Adnan Chowdhury said some 150 tourists have been stranded at the island since Friday noon.

The local government officials and public representatives have been asked to assist the tourists, he said.

They will be brought back to Teknaf once the weather improves, the UNO said.

However, locals have put the number of stranded tourists at over 200.

St Martin's Union Parishad Chairman Mujibur Rahman said, "We asked the tourists to leave the island yesterday [Friday] as the sea was getting rough. But many turned down our request and decided to stay at the island. They are safe now."

If the weather improves tomorrow, they will be able to leave the island, he added.

The administration permitted a tourist ship – MV Baro Awlia – to start services on Teknaf-St Martin's Island route for one week from Wednesday on an experimental basis.

Meanwhile, a woman passenger of a speed boat died on Friday afternoon as the vessel capsized in the Bay near St Martin's Island after a crack developed in its hull, said the UP chairman.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Part of a large crowd at yesterday's Awami League rally at the south gate of Baitul Mukarram Mosque in the capital. Story on page 16.

Dengue vaccine on trial, will be used after WHO nod

Says health minister

STAR REPORT

Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said the recently developed dengue vaccine is still on trial and it will be used after approval from the World Health Organisation.

The dengue vaccine, developed by icddr,b and the Lerner College of Medicine at the University of Vermont, requires more trials and WHO's approval for clinical application against the mosquito-borne disease, he told journalists at his home in Manikganj, reports BSS.

A trial of the vaccine was conducted for the first time in Bangladesh.

The work, evaluating the single-dose tetravalent dengue vaccine candidate TV005, demonstrated safety and immune responsiveness in children and adults, said icddr,b sources, adding that the accompanying study was recently published in the Lancet Infectious Diseases journal.

Senior scientist at the icddr,b Rashidul Haque said, "The development of an effective and tetravalent dengue vaccine is a high priority for the large population

of Bangladesh, which is now having increasingly severe dengue outbreaks."

"We are proud to participate in the evaluation of the TV005 vaccine in the Bangladeshi population and hope that our work will accelerate the development of dengue vaccines for our country."

The TV005 vaccine is the only single-dose tetravalent dengue vaccine, which is an important feature of this vaccine," said another scientist, Beth Kirkpatrick, who led the University of Vermont team, adding that it also appears to prompt immune responses to all four of the dengue serotypes.

Meanwhile, 14 more people died from dengue in 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday.

Of them, eight were reported in the capital.

At least 2,425 dengue patients were hospitalised in the 24-hour period, according to data from the Directorate General of Health Services.

Dengue has so far claimed 989 lives this year and 2,03,406 were infected, making this the deadliest year since the first dengue outbreak in 2000.

Japan to give \$1.5b more for Matarbari plant

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Japan yesterday signed an agreement with Bangladesh to provide \$1.5 billion in loans for the Matarbari coal-fired power project in Cox's Bazar.

This is the second instalment of the loan package. In the first instalment, 30 billion yen was provided. Now, 217.556 billion yen will be given, equivalent to \$1.5 billion. About \$1.67 billion has been provided so far under the loan package.

The rate of interest for this loan will be 1.6 percent, with the part concerning payments to consultants carrying an interest rate of 0.1 percent, said a press release from the embassy of Japan. The repayment period will be 30 years, including a 10-year grace period.

This project is being implemented to meet the growing electricity demand and involves setting up two units of 600MW power plant.

The total cost of the project is Tk 51,854.88 crore, of which Japan is providing Tk 43,921.03 crore, the Bangladesh government Tk 6,406.16 crore and Coal Power Generation Company Bangladesh Tk 1,527.69 crore.

According to the project plan, the implementation period is between July 2014 to December 2026.

Man found dead in river in Manikganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A 21-year-old man died after going fishing in the Ichhamati river in Manikganj yesterday morning.

Suman Kumar Aditya, OC of Harirampur Police Station, said Naushad Hossain had gone out of his home around 7:00am to go fishing in the river. As he had not returned for long, his family went out to search for him and found his shoes at the riverside. His body was later found floating in the river.

"Naushad had epilepsy. Preliminary investigation showed that he died after he fell into the river and drowned. His family recovered his body and took it home."

Doctor poisons 7yr-old son, attempts suicide

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A doctor poisoned her seven-year-old son to death and then attempted suicide in Manikganj yesterday.

The dead is Rasu Mandal, son of Dr Mita Sarkar and her ex-husband Dr Ranjan Kumal Mandal.

According to Abdur Rauf Sarkar, OC of Manikganj Sadar Police Station, the incident took place at Mita's rented flat in Khan Majlish Tower in Gangdharpatti area of the town.

Dr Sahrin Geeta, of Manikganj General Hospital, said, "Rasu Mandal was brought dead this [yesterday] morning. As Dr Mita's condition is critical, she has been transferred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital."

According to family sources, Mita works in a private hospital's trauma center in Manikganj and had been living with her son since she and her husband got divorced recently.

"No complaints have been filed in this connection yet," the OC said.

AL leader hacked to death in Sirajganj; nephew held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A local AL leader was hacked to death and his brother injured in an attack by a family member over land dispute at Charkushabari village of Sirajganj's Tarash upazila yesterday morning.

The dead, Md Moslem Uddin, 70, was the religious affairs' secretary of Saguna Union Awami League.

Md Shahidul Islam, OC of Tarash Police Station, said Moslem along with his brother Shamsul Haque, 55, were going to the mosque for Fajr prayers when their nephew Jalal Uddin obstructed their path and started attacking them with a sharp weapon.

Moslem died on the spot while Shamsul was critically injured and taken to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

On information, police rushed to the spot and arrested Jalal Uddin on charges of murder.

Police are investigating the incident, the OC said.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Julfikar Ali Bhutto, chairman of Saguna Union Parishad, said, "Moslem is a veteran AL leader of the union ... His death was due to an internal family dispute, there was no political involvement."

He demanded the punishment of the attacker.

Some officials in admin, police ill at ease

FROM PAGE 1

policy won't affect their morale and that they are loyal to the Sheikh Hasina-led government.

According to sources in the police, the government will try not to assign any official who has family abroad to discharge duties directly involved in the election process.

Sources in the police said officers who had no significant role in the previous polls would be given important duties related to the polls.

They said field-level police officers from the 24th, 25th, and 27th BCS batches have been appointed superintendents of police, who are directly involved in the election process since law and order of a district is under the SP's jurisdiction.

During the previous two national polls, these officials had lower-level and non-decision-making posts. Police high-ups believe these officials are unlikely to come under the US visa curbs.

"We can't say that we are not concerned after the visa restrictions, but it is also not true that we are wrecked," an SP-ranked police official told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

Two SP-ranked officials said they have an impression that the polls will be free and fair and if there is a regime change, it will affect their families and careers.

Three mid-level civil servants said there is a discomfort within the bureaucracy over the visa policy but its loyalty towards the Hasina-led government is unwavering. They also said they have no alternative to being loyal.

The government has information that out of the 86 secretary-ranked officials, 29 have children studying abroad. The government is trying to find out the whereabouts of the children of field-level officials.

Some of the officials this paper spoke to said the children of most of the field-level officials, such as deputy commissioners and Upazila Nirbahi Officers, are not old enough to be abroad for higher studies.

While making the announcement that the visa curbs are being applied,

the US state department said the individuals will include current and former officials, members of opposition and ruling political parties, and members of law enforcement, the judiciary, and security services.

Some bureaucrats told this paper that there was a confusion among them about how back in time the US would go to scrutinise the officials' actions.

If the US took the last two national elections under consideration, a large number of bureaucrats could be affected. They said the DCs who acted as returning officers in 2014 national polls are now secretary-level officials. Many of them have gone into retirement. And the DCs who acted as Returning Officers in the 2018 national polls now hold joint secretary-level position, although some of them have become additional secretaries.

However, US Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu in an interview with a TV channel made it clear that the visa restrictions will not retrospectively affect individuals who have been alleged to have committed actions to undermine democratic elections in the past.

He stated, "This is a forward-looking policy, meaning that our hope is that this policy will help prevent violence and promote a free and fair election this coming year in Bangladesh."

But Lu's statement did not give Bangladeshi officials much relief as the latest state department announcement mentioned current and former officials.

The bureaucrats are also worried about the European Union following suit.

Half the training programmes for bureaucrats take place in European countries, and if the EU decides on actions similar to that of the US, the training could become uncertain.

Talking to this newspaper, a high official of the police said the top tier officials know that they would be in trouble if the incumbent government fails to assume power again.

"These officials have taken benefits from the government and they have no headache regarding the US sanctions," said the official requesting anonymity. "These officials have their own exit

plans and they would perform their duty."

Another police high official requesting anonymity said, "Some officials are working and keeping a low profile. They do not want to come into the spotlight and they will make their decisions depending on the situation."

Immediately after the visa curb announcement, DMP Spokesperson Faruk Hossain told reporters that police won't be affected by the visa restrictions.

"We don't know who they are [on the US list]. If the visa policy is implemented, a small fraction of the force may not be able to enter that country," the deputy commissioner (media) added.

The DC said police work within the scope of the law, and the visa policy won't cause any disruptions to the performance of the force.

About the US visa restrictions, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal on Wednesday said there was no reason to worry about it.

"I don't understand one thing, why will the visa restrictions of their country should affect us here? Whom they let in and whom they don't let in their business. We will run the country according to the constitution, and the next general election will be held in line with the constitution," he said.

Asked about the implications of the visa policy for bureaucracy, former cabinet secretary Ali Inam Majumder told The Daily Star that time is yet to come to say the final word as many things are yet to be clear.

So much depends on BNP's decision regarding the election and how the election will be held, he added.

"Elections are conducted by mid- and junior-level as well as field-level officials. Teachers and bankers are also involved in the voting process. Headmasters and principals act as presiding officers, and teachers act as polling officers. Generally, these groups of people are not so rich and do not usually visit the USA, so it might not be their headache," he said.

But, in some cases, DCs and SPs are their monitoring authorities and thus they might be affected by the US visa restrictions, Majumder said.

Stakes too high not to reach consensus

M Humayun Kabir

FROM PAGE 1

and inspire the partymen. The party cannot say anything that demotivates its activists."

The challenge, however, is that the election is attracting considerable global attention and that the international community has taken a strong stance on free, fair, peaceful and credible elections this time, he said, adding that implementation of the US visa policy is part of this strategy.

"Therefore, it will be difficult

Shantanu Majumder

FROM PAGE 1

confidence is bolstered because of the US visa policy and its sanction on RAB."

Majumder believes the political parties will come to an understanding on the polls-time administration and not due to any external pressure but because neither party can afford to reach a "point of no return".

"Against the backdrop of two previous controversial elections, AL

will not take the risk of another bad election simply as it cannot afford it. On the other hand, BNP cannot afford to shun the parliament because that will create an existential issue for the party."

Those who want to intimidate the elections this time will be the losers. If the government wants to hold a one-sided election, it will be the loser, he said.

About the issue of the polls-time

responsibility to ensure a free and fair election. At the same time, BNP should fulfil its democratic obligation by taking part in the poll, he said.

"At this stage, I believe political communication and dialogue are of utmost importance. The economy and the changing global geopolitics require national consensus despite political differences."

Khan thinks AL is opening up to constructive criticism and BNP is showing positive gestures by not encouraging or resorting to acts of street violence.

"I hope both parties will reach a middle ground before external forces exert their influence, or economic instability goes through the roof."

responsibility to ensure a free and fair election. At the same time, BNP should fulfil its democratic obligation by taking part in the poll, he said.

"At this stage, I believe political communication and dialogue are of utmost importance. The economy and the changing global geopolitics require national consensus despite political differences."

Khan thinks AL is opening up to constructive criticism and BNP is showing positive gestures by not encouraging or resorting to acts of street violence.

"I hope both parties will reach a middle ground before external forces exert their influence, or economic instability goes through the roof."

they did during the last two polls."

Countries that otherwise don't say much about Bangladesh's elections like India, China or Russia will not want any prolonged violence to protect their trade interests and investments, Kabir said.

Without the possibility of compromise between the political parties, foreign countries may not send election observers.

"That's why starting a process of compromise at the earliest is a must. Otherwise, it will be difficult for the government to make the election internationally acceptable."

administration, he said the caretaker system is not good for democracy as it consists of unelected people.

"There can be many democratic ways to ensure a free and fair election within the current constitutional framework. Those may include inviting many national and international election observers, random transfer of the DCs and SPs etc."

Huge fire erupts at oil pipeline in west Ukraine

AFP, Kyiv

A huge fire has erupted at an oil pipeline in the western Ukrainian region of Ivano-Frankivsk, injuring three people, emergency services said yesterday.

Unverified footage shared on social media showed billowing clouds of thick black smoke over what appeared to be a village.

"At 5 pm (1400 GMT), near the village of Strymba, Nadvorna district, an oil pipeline (150 millimetres in diameter) ruptured," Ukraine's State Emergency Service said.