

## India completes troop exit from Maldives

REUTERS, New Delhi

India has replaced some 80 soldiers on the Maldives with civilians after a demand by President Mohamed Muizzu who has pivoted the archipelago's ties towards China, New Delhi officials said yesterday.

The Indian troops supported two helicopters and an aircraft that were given by New Delhi and mainly used for marine surveillance, search-and-rescue and medical evacuation operations on the islands of about half a million people.

"Both sides have been working together to ensure continued operation of Indian aviation platforms," India's foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"Accordingly, deputation of competent Indian technical personnel has taken place."

The announcement coincided with a visit by Maldivian Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer to India, the first visit by a senior official since Muizzu took office in November last year.

Maldivian leaders traditionally made New Delhi their first port of call after coming to office but Muizzu has courted China instead and deepened defence ties as global powers jostle for influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

At a meeting with Zameer, India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar said that it was in both nations' common interest to understand how best to take ties forward.

Zameer said afterwards on X that talks centred on cooperation in fields from infrastructure to capacity building.

Apart from the troops issue, the Maldives' permission to a Chinese research vessel to dock at its port, in India's backyard, has also caused concern in New Delhi.

India opened a new naval base near the Maldives in March to enhance surveillance in the Indian Ocean. But despite the strains, its development projects in the Maldives have in fact gained pace.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a meeting with Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra at the premier's Gono Bhaban residence yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

## Biden threatens to withhold arms supply to Israel

Again warns against launching offensive on Rafah

REUTERS, Cairo

Israeli tanks and warplanes bombarded areas of Rafah yesterday, Palestinian residents said, after US President Joe Biden vowed to withhold weapons from Israel if its forces launch a major invasion of the southern Gaza city.

As ceasefire talks continued in Cairo, Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad said their fighters fired anti-tank rockets and mortars at Israeli tanks massed on the eastern outskirts of the city.

Residents and medics in Rafah, the biggest urban area in Gaza not yet overrun by Israeli ground forces, said an Israeli attack by a mosque killed at least three people and wounded others in the eastern Brazil neighbourhood.

On the city's eastern edge, residents said a helicopter opened fire, while drones hovered above houses in several areas, some close to rooftops.

Israel says Hamas members are hiding in Rafah, where the population has been swelled by hundreds of thousands of Gazans seeking refuge from bombardments elsewhere in the coastal enclave, and it needs to eliminate them for its own security.

One of the displaced, Mohammad Abder-Rahman, said he feared the Israeli bombardments presaged an invasion of the city.

"It reminds me of what happened before Israeli tanks stormed our residential areas in Gaza City, heavy bombardment usually allows tanks to roll towards places they intend to invade," the

42-year-old told Reuters via a messaging app.

Ceasefire talks in Egypt's capital made some headway but no deal was reached, according to two Egyptian security sources. "Over the past few hours, we've been adjusting and adding and deleting points based on consultations with both sides," one of the sources said.

The Hamas delegation left for Doha for consultations, blaming Israel for the lack of agreement so far.

Biden, who says Israel has not produced a convincing plan to safeguard civilians in Rafah, issued his starkest warning yet against a full ground invasion.

"I made it clear that if they go into Rafah, ... I'm not supplying the weapons," Biden told CNN in an interview on Wednesday.

## Aziz Mohammad Bhai

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During the delivery of the verdict, Ashish Rai and Emon were present in the courtroom.

Upon hearing about his acquittal, Emon, a top-listed criminal, expressed his satisfaction.

Speaking to The Daily Star inside the courtroom, he said, "Thanks God, I got justice in the case. I am very glad."

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Abu Abdullah told reporters they would appeal against the verdict.

Sohel Chowdhury's daughter Lamia Chowdhury said, "No matter what happens now, my father will not come back. They [the criminals] will have to answer for what they have done. Their imprisonment, whether they live up to it or not, would not make the pain that we have been through go away."

"My father's death has had a deep impact on my life and it will not change in any way. I have to live with this reality. We haven't seen any change in our lives due to their trial."

Security on the court premises was beefed up yesterday centring the verdict in the sensational murder case. Additional police forces were deployed in front of the tribunal, said a court inspector.

During the trial, 10 prosecution witnesses testified before the court.

After the filing of the case, the Detective Branch of police on July 30, 1998, pressed charges against nine accused.

On October 30, 2001, the Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court 3 of Dhaka framed the charges.

Two years later, the case was transferred to the Speedy Trial Tribunal-2 for its quick disposal.

Following a petition of an accused in the case, the High Court in 2003 stayed the trial proceedings.

## GM Quader blasts

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whether they will get their money back. They are going door to door," he said.

Talking about power cuts, GM Quader said it was increasing.

He said there was no shortfall in electricity supply in the capital but load shedding was increasing in rural areas.

He mentioned that rural people suffered the most load-shedding during the last week of April when the country was enduring an intense heatwave.

The opposition leader said the government could not reduce load shedding during the times of need and ensure uninterrupted power supply.

## Cybergangs now selling 'genuine' NIDs

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The gang, via encrypted messaging apps, gets orders for personal information of people or other "services" from clients. The demand is then sent to the unscrupulous staffers at the EC, who provide the details or deliver the "services".

It pays EC staffers involved, said Md Asaduzzaman, the chief of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit, during a press conference in the city yesterday.

The press conference was arranged following the arrest of suspects Md Jamal Uddin, data entry operator of IDEA 2 project of the election office in Kurigram Sadar, and Liton Mollah.

The CTTC arrested Liton from Bagerhat and Jamal from Pabna on Tuesday. They are now being quizzed on demand to find out who else is involved.

Asaduzzaman said Liton opened a WhatsApp group for getting orders from his clients while Jamal provided Liton with his credentials for the NID server.

Jamal would forward the one-time password (OTP) to Liton every time Liton logged on to the server.

Jamal received Tk 3,000 a day from Liton.

Liton, who studied up to HSC, made over Tk 1 crore in one year and paid Jamal around Tk 10 lakh, the CTTC chief said.

Officials said changing personal data on the NID server requires the credentials of at least the top EC official at an upazila or top EC officials at district or divisional level.

"So, there must be corrupt EC officials who aided him. We are trying to find out who else is involved," said an official of the CTTC.

## India willing to finance Teesta project here

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Because of surface water shortage, farmers in Bangladesh's northern region depend heavily on underground water for irrigation, which is not sufficient at times.

Meanwhile, in 2020, Bangladesh's Water Resources Ministry wrote to the Economic Relations Division seeking a \$983.27 million loan from China to implement the Teesta project that includes river dredging, creating reservoirs, and building townships along the river.

On October 13, 2022, then Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming at a seminar in Dhaka said China was serious about implementing the project, but also had a sense of reluctance due to sensitive issues surrounding it.

The visit of Kwatra, who arrived in Dhaka on Wednesday evening and left yesterday afternoon, was viewed mostly as the preparation for the possible visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India.

Diplomatic sources said Dhaka and Delhi were discussing two sets of dates – one is in late June and the other early July. The prime minister is also likely to

visit China after her India tour.

Asked about it, the foreign minister said the premier will definitely visit India. The elections are underway in India and the new government will be formed after the polls and then the date will be finalised.

In reply to a query whether the PM will go to India or China first, he smiled and said, "Delhi is close to Bangladesh in terms of geographical distance."

The last bilateral engagement between Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi took place during the G-20 summit held in India in September last year.

India is expected to invite South Asian and BIMSTEC country leaders to the swearing in ceremony of its newly elected prime minister.

Regarding border killings, Hasan said there is no deficit of willingness at the government and political levels to end the killings. "We have discussed the issue in details. We have laid emphasis on the use of non-lethal weapons."

He said Indian Border Security Force has been instructed and it is using non-lethal weapons following the instructions.

offered fake NID cards, birth certificates, Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training certificates, and health certificates for potential migrant workers.

To avail the "services", clients are required to pay via mobile financial services.

Earlier in February, the CTTC busted a cybergang who obtained the NID information from a government website. They also cloned websites of some government agencies, according to investigators.

Imranul Islam, assistant commissioner of the CTTC's cybercrime investigation department, told The Daily Star that they had arrested seven people, including three "super admins" of a website.

"We found that the gang was involved in selling original NID information and statements of mobile financial accounts," Imranul said.

In April, detectives arrested Pallab Das, data entry operator of IDEA 2 project of the EC office in Rangpur, for issuing NID cards to fraudsters who embezzled crores of taka from banks and financial institutions by taking out loans.

Joyal Abedin alias Idrish, a former salesman at a jewellery shop in Dhaka's Mirpur, obtained six NID cards with the help of Pallab, investigators said.

An official at the NID wing of the EC said about 176 organisations have access to the NID server.

On June 7, 2023, TechCrunch, a San Francisco-based online publisher of start-up and technology industry news, reported that personal information of about 5 million Bangladeshi nationals have been leaked from a government website.

## Will BB steps build up reserves?

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by Tk 7 to Tk 117, the steepest fall in a day against the dollar. Moreover, the central bank loosened its age-old grip on the taka as it will now follow the crawling peg, a flexible exchange rate system.

The BB also made lending rates fully market-based and raised the overnight repurchase agreement rate, a form of short-term borrowing cost for banks, by 50 basis points to 8.5 percent.

Seeking anonymity, a central bank official said the new system will allow authorised dealers to trade with clients and between themselves at freely negotiated rates.

People will be able to buy and sell foreign currency at a price which reflects the current market supply and demand.

The new crawling peg regime will help rebuild reserves, added the official.

Ahsan H Mansur said the new system's success will depend on how efficiently and successfully the government and the central bank execute it.

"New systems are introduced in this country at different times, but those are not implemented properly," he said.

The latest system has brought about a unified exchange rate, removing the previous distortions. This will slightly incentivise export and remittance which will produce a positive result, he added.

However, it will take time to have a

positive impact on the huge deficit in the financial account of the balance of payment because exporters and foreign investors will want to see how efficiently the new system is implemented, he noted.

If the new system stabilises the exchange rate, money will start flowing into the country in the next six to nine months, he further said.

"This means it will take some time for the new policy to produce results."

Finance division and central bank officials said the budget support will increase because of the bold actions.

Officials said these reforms, backed by the development partners, will help Bangladesh reach its full potential under the IMF programme.

On Wednesday, the IMF agreed to provide Bangladesh with \$1.15 billion in the third tranche under the \$4.7 billion loan programme.

Of the amount, about \$932 million will be under the Extended Credit Facility (ECF)/Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and about \$220 million under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF).

Earlier, Bangladesh got \$462 billion in the second tranche under the ECF/EFF.

BB officials said the total loan amount will remain the same – \$4.7 billion.

The IMF, however, has agreed to pay an instalment in advance with the third tranche to support the package reform programme.

## Pilot dies as BAF training jet

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10:25am when it was returning to the base post-training.

The two pilots – Wing Commander Sohan Hasan Khan and Asim Jawad – ejected from the plane and landed in the river with emergency parachutes. They were later rescued by members of air force, navy, and local fishermen, added the release.

The pilots were able to take the aircraft from the densely populated area near the airport to the sparsely populated area with great courage and skill to avoid major damage after it caught fire, said the ISPR.

Rescue operation was underway to recover the crashed aircraft.

The BAF has formed a high-level committee to investigate the cause of the accident.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Shaikh Abdul Hannan expressed deep condolences over the death of the pilot and conveyed their sympathies to his bereaved family members.

Assistant Chief of Air Staff (plans) Air Vice Marshal Muhammad Kamrul Islam reached the scene from Dhaka

## Man gets death sentence for raping sixth-grader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A Rangpur court yesterday sentenced a man to death for raping a sixth-grader in Mithapukur upazila in 2021.

The convict is Lablu Mia, 23, of Jaforpur village of the upazila, said Public Prosecutor Rafiq Hasnain.

Md Mostafa Kamal, the judge of Women and Children Oppression Prevention Tribunal-1 of Rangpur, delivered the judgement in the presence of the convict.

According to the case statement, Lablu raped the sixth grader of a local madrasa while she was returning home on September 1, 2021.

Her father then filed a case against Lablu. As Lablu and his family members were intimidating the girl and her family for filing the case, the girl died by suicide on September 25. Her mother lodged another case against Lablu and his family members in this connection. The case is under trial, said the public prosecutor.

## ASI killed, another injured in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

An assistant sub-inspector was killed and another injured as their motorcycle collided with a truck in Dinajpur Sadar upazila yesterday.

The deceased, Md Momotaz Ali, 42, of Thakurgaon, was working at the Pulhat police outpost in Dinajpur town as an ASI. Injured A Jalil, 38, from Panchagarh, is an ASI of the police outpost.

Farid Hossain, officer-in-charge of Dinajpur Kotwali Police Station, said Momotaz and Jalil were going to Doshmole of Kaharol upazila on a motorcycle from Pulhat police outpost. When they arrived in Nashipur village on Dinajpur-Rangpur highway around 5:20pm, the bike collided with the truck, leaving Momotaz dead on the spot.

Injured Jalil was taken to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital in Dinajpur. His condition was stated to be critical.

## 10,638 candidates pass 46th BCS preliminary test

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 10,638 candidates passed the preliminary test of 46th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examinations.

Bangladesh Public Service Commission published the results yesterday. The results are available on BPSC's website.

The test was held in Dhaka, Chattogram, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, Rangpur, and Mymensingh on April 26.

A total of 2,54,561 candidates took part in the test.