

'Reserve heist' report fake Says central bank

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank has dismissed a report published by an Indian digital news outlet on a "new reserve heist" at the central bank.

It was "absolutely fake" news, Bangladesh Bank spokesman Mezbauul Haque said yesterday.

"We have a three-tier confirmation policy with the Fed now and have regular reconciliation of transactions," he said.

The BB made the comments after Northeast News, a digital news platform of Northeast India, citing three unidentified officials, yesterday claimed that "unidentified suspected Indian hackers allegedly took to digital means and ferreted out a few billion dollars from" the BB.

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In February 2016, the BB lost \$101 million with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York to hackers. Of the money, at least \$81 million was transferred to the accounts in Manila-based Rizal Commercial Banking Corp (RCBC Bank), from where the money disappeared into the casinos of the Philippines.

So far, Bangladesh retrieved \$15 million from RCBC and recovered another \$20 million sent to a bank in Sri Lanka. In February 2022, the BB sued Rizal Bank in US court to recover \$66m of stolen funds.



Palestinians gather near the remains of a car at the site of an Israeli strike on a house in Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

450,000 displaced from Rafah since May 6

Says UN agency; 82 more Palestinians killed as Israeli tanks push into the Gaza city

AGENCIES

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) said yesterday that nearly 450,000 people have been displaced from Rafah since Israel began issuing evacuation orders for the south Gaza city eight days ago.

"People face constant exhaustion, hunger and fear. Nowhere is safe. An immediate ceasefire is the only hope," the agency said on X, as Israeli tanks forged deeper into eastern Rafah, reaching some residential districts.

"The tanks advanced this morning west of Salahuddin road into the Brzail and Jneina neighbourhoods. They are in the streets inside the built-up area and there are clashes," one resident told Reuters via a chat app yesterday.

Hamas's armed wing said it had destroyed an Israeli troop carrier with an

Al-Yassin 105 missile in the eastern Al-Salam neighbourhood, killing some crew members and wounding others.

Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, meanwhile, said Israel's operations in Rafah have set back efforts at trying to reach a ceasefire in talks that are being mediated by Qatar and Egypt, although it would continue to negotiate.

The UN's International Court of Justice (ICJ) will hold hearings tomorrow and Friday to discuss new emergency measures sought by South Africa over Israel's attacks on Rafah, the tribunal said.

Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip has killed at least 35,173 Palestinians and wounded 79,061 since October 7, the Palestinian enclave's health ministry said yesterday. There have been 82 Palestinians killed and 234 injured in the past 24 hours, the ministry statement added.

Palestinian people are moving to empty tracts of land, including Al-Mawasi, a sandy strip bordering the coast that Israel has designated as a humanitarian area. Aid agencies have warned the zone lacks sanitary and other facilities to host an influx of displaced people.

Fighting across the strip has intensified in recent days, including in the north, with the Israeli military heading back into areas where it had claimed to have dismantled Hamas months ago.

In the Zeitoun neighbourhood of Gaza City in the north, bulldozers demolished clusters of houses to make a new road for tanks to roll through into the eastern suburb.

In northern Gaza's Jabalia, a sprawling refugee camp built for displaced Palestinians 75 years ago, residents said Israeli forces were trying to reach as deep as the camp's local market under heavy tank shelling.

CONDEMNED CELLS Govt seeks stay on HC judgement on prisoners

STAFF CORRESPONDENTS

The government yesterday filed a petition with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, seeking a stay on the High Court judgement that ordered the authorities concerned to move the prisoners, who were sentenced to death, to ordinary jail cells from condemned cells.

The attorney general's office submitted the petition on behalf of the state, saying it will file a leave to appeal petition with the Appellate Division, challenging the HC judgement after receiving the full text of the verdict.

The hearing on the stay petition will be held today, Attorney General AM Amin Uddin told reporters at his office yesterday.

"We couldn't receive the full judgement of the High Court. However, I have learned that the High Court in the verdict has issued several directives and observations, including one for granting bail to the convicts sentenced to death and for formulating a new law. If the High Court verdict is not stayed at this stage, there may be problems."

Replying to a question, AG Amin Uddin said if the convicts, who have been sentenced to death, are granted bail, most of them will escape.

Mild heatwave sweeps over parts of country

BSS, Dhaka

A mild heatwave is sweeping the central, northern, northeastern and southeastern parts of the country and it may continue, the Met office said yesterday.

"Mild heat wave is sweeping over the districts of Tangail, Rajshahi, Pabna, Jashore, Nilphamari, Rangamati and Feni and it may continue," said the weather forecast valid for the next 24 hours from 9:00am yesterday.

The weather may remain mainly dry with a temporary partly cloudy sky over the country.

Day and night temperatures may rise slightly over the country.

The country's maximum temperature on Monday was recorded 37.0 degrees Celsius at Ishurdi and the minimum temperature yesterday was 23.8 degrees Celsius at Tetulia.

The country's maximum rainfall for the last 24 hours till 6:00am yesterday was recorded at 20 millimetres in Patuakhali.

The sun set in the capital yesterday at 6:33pm and rose at 5:16am today.

Bangladesh experienced a record-breaking 23 heatwave days in April, the highest in 76 years.

Crucial projects held back by land issues

FROM PAGE 1

But RHD in September 2018 took up the separate project, involving Tk 3,586.04 crore, to acquire land and move the utility services by December 2020, to make room for Dhaka-Sylhet-Tamabil road expansion.

The aim was to complete the legwork ahead as these issues often hold up road expansion work. The government wanted the road expanded as soon as the expansion projects were approved.

Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecenc) in September 2020 approved the Tk 3,586.04 crore project for turning 56.16km of the Sylhet-Tamabil Highway into four lanes, with service lanes of both sides. The project's deadline is June 2025.

In February 2021, Ecenc approved the Tk 16,918.59 crore Dhaka-Sylhet expansion project to turn the 209km road from Narayanganj's Kanchpur to Sylhet into four lanes, with service lanes on both sides. The project's deadline is December 2026.

While the expansion projects moved forward, the land acquisition project was revised twice, taking the cost to Tk 7,975.31 crore and the

deadline to December 2025.

Project sources said 66 land acquisition (LA) proposals were submitted to acquire 829.83 acres of land in seven districts for the Dhaka-Sylhet highway expansion.

But only the documents of around 60 acres of land under four LA proposals have so far been handed over to the project authorities, officials said.

The authorities could not take control of the land as the local administrations are yet to compensate the land owners, they said.

As this is an ADB-funded project, the project authorities would not be able to use the land unless owners receive full compensation, the sources said, adding that there were structures on the land as well.

AK Mohammad Fazlul Karim, project director of Dhaka-Sylhet highway expansion, said they have hired contractors for all 13 packages.

As per the conditions, they were supposed to handover the land to contractors within 270 days of signing of the contracts, he said.

Four of the contractors have already sought financial compensation for their unused equipment and

manpower; and asked for deadline extensions, he told The Daily Star over phone.

Another project official, seeking anonymity, said, "The delay is making it very difficult to complete the project within the deadline. A deadline extension will ultimately increase cost."

Replying to a question, the official said their contractors were now working on a limited scale on the land under the RHD's possession.

Meanwhile, 30 LA proposals were submitted to acquire 335.77 acres of land in Sylhet district for the Sylhet-Tamabil road expansion.

No land was handed over to the project authorities, officials said.

Contacted, Project Director Abu Sayeed Md Nazmul Huda said they would implement the project under four packages.

They have already hired a China-Bangladesh joint venture firm for one package and the proposals to hire contractors, for two other packages, will soon be sent to the cabinet committee on government purchase, he said.

He added that the joint venture firm already mobilised their

equipment and manpower, and will start work within a week on the land under the RHD's possession.

"The delay in land acquisition will ultimately cause a delay in implementation," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

An RHD official, not involved in these projects, said it might take a year or two for land acquisitions to finish. "But over two years is unacceptable. So, there's definitely lack of sincerity among some local administration officials."

He said there should have been a clear timeline for the completion on land acquisition for the local administration to comply with.

Contacted, land acquisition Project Director Fazle Rabbe, said land acquisition is a complicated process and sensitive matter.

"We have to follow all relevant laws and procedures so that no one is deprived," Fazle, also an additional chief engineer (Sylhet zone) of the RHD, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Replying to question, he said, "Nobody is causing delays intentionally. There is no negligence from any side We're all trying our best."

reluctance about it," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

In an email interview, Samaranyake said Dhaka is likely taking its time to study the specifics of the agreements and understand its options.

"The US agreements are bilateral and do not prevent Bangladesh from having partnerships with other countries such as China. Bangladesh's foreign policy approach is seen as open to multiple partnerships."

Besides, as a climate vulnerable country, Bangladesh needs huge funding from the developed countries. Bangladesh's annual funding requirement is of \$9 billion for climate change initiatives, but the government allocates only \$3 billion, resulting in a shortfall of \$6 billion.

"We need funding as well as technologies. We would seek greater US contribution towards this. Also, the US has been the largest donor for Rohingya, and we would seek their support for them," said a government official.

Bangladesh would also seek investments from the US, the single largest export market for Bangladesh.

Former ambassador M Humayun Kabir said Washington has great economic interests in Bangladesh, including in the oil and gas sectors.

US oil-gas company ExxonMobil has expressed interest in exploring oil and gas reserves in Bangladesh's offshore blocks.

"We need to decide everything from the view of our national interest," said Humayun.

From horror to a warm embrace

FROM PAGE 1

The ship was freed by the pirates a month ago but it took another month for it to come home since it needed to unload the export cargo at its destined port in the UAE.

The vessel then loaded import cargo from another UAE port and sailed for another 13 days to reach Kutubdia on Monday evening.

From there, a smaller lighter vessel -- MV Jahan Moni-3 -- brought the 23 sailors to the No-1 jetty of the New Mooring Container Terminal at the port.

Along with their families, senior officials of the ship's owning firm SR Shipping, its parent organisation KSRM group, and the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA), were eagerly waiting for their arrival.

As soon as MV Jahan Moni-3 came in sight, the atmosphere changed from eager to celebratory. The crowd, joined by the jetty workers, welcomed the sailors amid cheerful screams.

The ship berthed at the jetty around 4:00pm, but it took a good 20 minutes for the crew members to disembark due to the crowd below.

Standing on the deck, they looked for their families.

When Jannatul Ferdous spotted her husband Mohammad Noor Uddin, a general steward of MV Abdullah, standing on MV Jahan Moni-3's deck, she passed a cap to him to help him get shade from the scorching sun.

"Our life has been renewed. I thought we would never see him again but by the grace of God, he returned to me," she told The Daily Star.

Once the sailors were able to get off the ship, senior officials of KSRM and the CPA formally greeted them.

Chattogram City Corporation Mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury; CPA Chairman Mohammad Sohail; KSRM Deputy Managing Directors Sarwar Jahan and Shahriar Jahan; and SR Shipping CEO Meherul Karim received them with bouquets.

Until then, the crew members were calm and composed. But once they got to meet their families, after two long months of turmoil, the tears flowed freely.

Overcome by elation, they struggled to speak to the media people who gathered there.

General Steward Noor was seen rushing to his toddler son. Once he got him in his arms, he smothered him with kisses.

Josna Begum, mother of fourth engineer Tanveer Ahmad, would not let go of her son when this

correspondent approached, having gotten him back in her arms after so long.

"My long wait has at last come to an end. I feel so good to have my son back, I can't express it in words," she said, beaming.

Tanveer said, "I had thought we'd be held hostage longer because every time I got a glimmer of hope to be released, it was snatched away again. I have been waiting for this moment for so long."

MV Abdullah's Chief Officer Md Atiq Ullah Khan's two daughters and younger brother had been waiting for him.

Once Atiq spotted them, he rushed to them and held his daughters tight.

Speaking to The Daily Star, he said, "I can't express my joy in words. The whole country prayed for us and their prayers were our strength during those moments of crisis."

Atik's younger daughter Unaiya Mahbin, a first grader, said, "Baba said he will take us out now! I am so happy to see him!"

Mohammad Shamsuddin, an oiler of the ship, said, "I don't even want to recall those days in captivity. Thirty-three days felt like 33 years to me. The pirates were heavily armed and desperate, leaving us constantly anxious and fearful.... We used to pray in the ship at gunpoint."

CPA arranged a brief reception ceremony at the jetty for the MV Abdullah crew.

Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud in a virtual speech welcomed the crew members.

He said the coordinated efforts by the ship's owning firm, different government offices and international organisations helped the speedy release.

The ship was hijacked by Somali pirates on March 12, when it was carrying 55,000 tonnes of coal from Mozambique's Maputo port of Mozambique to the UAE's Al Hamriyah port.

The pirates released the ship in the early hours of April 14 after reportedly receiving the demanded ransom.

Once released, the ship went to the Al Hamriyah port on April 22 to unload the cargo and then to the Mina Saqr port to load 56,000 tonnes of limestone to be imported to Bangladesh.

The ship left the UAE in the early hours of April 30. It stopped at a nearby port to refuel before heading to Chattogram.

(Another Chattogram correspondent contributed to this report.)