



PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Children wade through water to reach this half dry patch of land to play football in Sunamganj's Chhatak upazila. The whole pitch is surrounded by arable land that has gone under water in recent heavy rains.

24 pushed in through Feni, Khagrachhari

STAR REPORT

At least 24 people were pushed into Bangladesh allegedly by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) through borders in Feni and Khagrachhari yesterday.

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) members detained 11 of them after they entered Bangladesh via Jashpur border in Feni's Chhagalnaiya upazila around 2:00am yesterday.

The detainees include a man, seven women, and three children, said Lt Col Mohammad Mosharraf Hossain, commander of BGB-4 Battalion in Feni.

During primary interrogation, the detainees said they are from Jashore, Narail, and Satkhira. They had entered India illegally to work there.

The detainees were handed over to Chhagalnaiya Police Station, said the BGB official.

In Khagrachhari, 13 people were pushed into Bangladesh allegedly by BSF through the Tanakkapara area in Matiranga upazila, reports Prothom Alo.

BGB members detained them, said Matiranga Upazila Nirbahi Officer Monjur Alam.

During primary interrogation, the detainees said they are residents of Narail. The process of verifying their identities was underway, the UNO added.

[A correspondent from Feni contributed to this report.]

3 teens run over by train in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three teenagers were killed after being hit by a train on Dhaka-Chattogram railway lines in Mirsharai upazila of Chattogram last night.

The incident took place near Chinki Astana Railway Station around 8:00pm, said police.

The victims, aged around 18, were Arafat, Anis, and Riaz.

They were residents of Sonapahar under Jorarganj Police Station in Chattogram.

Quoting locals, Masuk Mia, additional superintendent of Chattogram Railway Police, said the three were standing near the railway lines and busy with their mobile phones when the Dhaka-bound Sonar Bangla Express was passing by. They were hit by the running train, leaving them critically injured.

Locals rushed the injured to the Mirsharai Upazila Health Complex, where on-duty doctors declared them dead, he added.

5 secretaries, a grade-1 official

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According to the notifications, all six officials have completed 25 years in service, and the government has deemed their retirement necessary in public interest.

They will receive retirement benefits as per the rules, the ministry said.

Under the act, the government retains the authority to retire any government employee without justification, as long as the individual has completed 25 years of service.

In such cases, the employees are entitled to full retirement benefits along with other applicable entitlements.

Funds linked to Bangladesh

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to Ireland, new safe havens are emerging where you can buy properties, open accounts, and move money more discreetly," said Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office.

"The secrecy that once defined Swiss banking is no longer what it used to be," he told The Daily Star.

"A deposit in a Swiss bank coming from the UK may be legal, but that doesn't mean the money wasn't laundered earlier through under-invoicing in trade. And we can't rule out that these funds passed through legal channels before landing in Swiss banks, especially given how sophisticated illicit flows have become," said Hussain, who was part of a government-formed panel that authored a white paper on the state of Bangladesh's economy.

A total of \$234 billion was siphoned off from Bangladesh between 2009 and 2023, according to the white paper

published in December last year. As per the report, the laundered money was sent to or routed primarily through the UAE, the UK, Canada, the US, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and India, as well as a number of tax havens.

Deposits linked to Bangladeshi nationals and entities in Swiss banks jumped 33-fold in 2024 from the previous year, when holdings had dropped to a record low of just 17.7 million francs. The deposits declined sharply also in 2022, following a post-pandemic peak of 871 million francs in 2021 amid growing global scrutiny of illicit financial flows.

The SNB data, released annually, tracks funds held in all currencies by Bangladeshi nationals, residents, or corporate entities in Swiss banks under the category "Banks in Switzerland". It does not disaggregate by type of depositor or specific purpose of the funds.

Swiss banks have historically been associated with financial secrecy,

leading to concerns about their role in facilitating illicit money flows. While recent reforms have increased transparency and cooperation with international authorities, Swiss banks continue to be scrutinised for their handling of funds potentially linked to money laundering.

From 2015 to 2020, Bangladeshi deposits in Swiss banks typically ranged between 480 million and 660 million francs. The latest spike is expected to draw renewed scrutiny, particularly as Bangladesh's interim government has made financial transparency and asset recovery a core part of its reform agenda.

"Based on global experience, the recovery rate for illicit outflows is just around 1 percent," Hussain said. "To get the money back, you have to win legal cases in both countries -- where it originated and where it ended up. It's not just about knowing the money left illegally -- you have to prove it in court, twice."

'Two weeks for diplomacy'

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Leavitt declined to say if Trump would seek congressional authorisation for any strikes on Iran.

The statement came as the week-old air war escalated with no sign yet of an off-ramp.

The statement from the White House came as Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said he is set to meet with top diplomats of Britain, France, Germany and the European Union today in Geneva.

He said the meeting had come at the request of the three European states.

On the ground, Israel yesterday bombed nuclear targets in Iran, and Iran fired missiles and drones at Israel. Israel said a strike on an Israeli hospital overnight injured at least 40 people.

Following the strike that damaged the Soroka medical centre in Israel's southern city of Beersheba, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Tehran's "tyrants" would pay the "full price".

Defence Minister Israel Katz said the military had been instructed to intensify strikes on strategic targets in Tehran in order to eliminate the threat to Israel and destabilise the "Ayatollah regime".

Katz also warned that Iran's supreme leader "can no longer be allowed to exist".

Iran said the attack was targeted at Israeli military and intelligence headquarters near the hospital. An Israeli military official denied there were military targets nearby.

The escalation and threats came as global powers urged the warring parties to find a diplomatic solution.

China's President Xi Jinping yesterday held a phone call with Russia's Vladimir Putin, and after that, urged a ceasefire between Iran and Israel.

"Parties to the conflict, especially Israel, should cease hostilities as soon as possible to prevent a cyclical escalation and resolutely avoid the spillover of the war," Xi said, according to Xinhua.

Earlier, Moscow reiterated its call for peace and warned the US not to take military action against Iran.

Moscow is one of Iran's most important allies, with the two deepening military cooperation and inking a strategic partnership agreement just months ago.

According to Israeli, Western and regional officials, Israel's sweeping campaign of airstrikes aims to do more than destroy Iran's nuclear centrifuges and missile capabilities.

It seeks to shatter the foundations of Khamenei's government and leave it near collapse.

Netanyahu wants Iran weakened enough to be forced into fundamental concessions on permanently abandoning its nuclear enrichment, its ballistic missile programme and its support for militant groups across the region, the sources said.

The diplomatic efforts continued as Israel said it struck Iran's Natanz and Isfahan nuclear sites yesterday. It initially said it had also hit Bushehr, site of Iran's only functioning nuclear power plant, but a spokesperson later said it was a mistake to have said this.

It also said it targeted the Khondab nuclear site near Iran's central city Arak overnight, including a partially-built heavy-water research reactor. Iran's atomic energy agency said the attack caused no casualties.

Israel's military also claimed that it has struck "hundreds" of surface-to-surface missile launchers and two-thirds of the country's missile silos.

Trump has veered from proposing a swift diplomatic end to the war to suggesting the United States might join it. On Wednesday, he said nobody knew what he would do. A day earlier, he mused on social media about killing Khamenei, then demanded Iran's unconditional surrender.

Khamenei has rejected Trump's demand for an "unconditional surrender".

Yesterday, the Iranian supreme leader said the Israeli regime was showing signs of weakness.

"The very fact that the Zionist regime's American friends have entered the scene and are saying such things is a sign of that regime's weakness and inability", Iran's supreme leader posted on X.

Earlier, Netanyahu said that the United States is "already helping a lot" in his country's conflict with Iran.

"They're participating in the protection of the skies over Israel and its cities," Netanyahu told CNN. "I think it's a remarkable cooperation."

The prime minister also said that he is being asked whether Israel is targeting the downfall of the Iranian regime. "That may be the result," he said. "But it's up to the Iranian people to rise for their freedom. Freedom is never cheap."

"We may create conditions that may help them do it," Netanyahu said.

Any US involvement would be expected to involve the bombing of a crucial underground Iranian nuclear facility in Fordo, using specially

developed bunker-busting bombs.

The Wall Street Journal reported that Trump had told aides on Tuesday he had approved attack plans but was holding off to see if Iran would give up its nuclear programme.

A week of Israeli air and missile strikes against its major rival has wiped out the top echelon of Iran's military command, damaged its nuclear capabilities and killed hundreds of people, while Iranian retaliatory strikes have killed at least two dozen civilians in Israel.

Iran has been weighing its options in responding to its biggest security challenge since the 1979 revolution. A member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security Committee Presidium, Behnam Saedi, told the semi-official Mehr news agency Iran could consider closing the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 percent of daily global oil consumption passes.

Amid the raging conflict, countries around the world are taking measures to evacuate their citizens from Israel and Iran. The airspace in the region remains closed.

Israel, which has the most advanced military in the Middle East, has been fighting on several fronts since October 7, 2023, when it its Gaza offensive. Since then it has severely weakened Iran's regional allies, Hamas in Gaza and Lebanon's Hezbollah, and bombed Yemen's Houthis.

The extent of the damage inside Iran from the week-old bombing campaign has become more difficult to assess in recent days, with the authorities apparently seeking to prevent panic by limiting information.

Iran has stopped giving updates on the death toll, and state media have ceased showing widespread images of destruction. The internet has been almost completely shut down, and the public has been banned from filming. Israel has issued evacuation orders for whole sections of Tehran, a city of 10 million. Thousands of residents have fled, said reports.

Inside Israel, the missile strikes over the past week are the first time a significant number of projectiles from Iran have pierced defences and killed Israelis in their homes.

According to Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth, thousands of people in Israel have become homeless as a result of Iran's retaliatory missile attacks.

The Israeli Ministry of Interior classified 5,110 people as homeless, including 907 from Tel Aviv, the report said.

EC drafts stricter code

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advisers, ministers and lawmakers are now in a category of "very important persons".

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) Abul Fazal Sanaullah yesterday said the draft was finalised at a meeting of the election commissioners.

"The draft will be uploaded to the Election Commission website, and people will be invited to give their opinions on it," he said.

The provision to cancel the candidacy is being included for the first time, he said.

According to article 91 (1) of the draft, if the Election Commission (EC) receives information that a candidate, their agent, or someone acting on their behalf has committed a serious offence or violated election rules -- either directly or with their consent -- the EC can launch an investigation. The candidate will get a fair chance to respond to the allegation.

If the investigation finds the candidate guilty, the EC can cancel that individual's candidacy.

Certain restrictions have also been imposed on the use of government facilities like circuit houses, bungalows, and rest houses during campaigns, he said.

As of now, the highest punishment for violation of the electoral code of conduct was six months in prison and a fine of Tk 50,000. For a political party, the highest fine used to be Tk 50,000.

The provision for imprisonment remains unchanged, Sanaullah said, but the fine will be raised to Tk 1.5

lakh.

"This was one of the recommendations from the electoral reform commission," he said.

NEW RULES

Sanaullah said parties and candidates would be able to use billboards. "The proposal to ban the use of posters also came from the reform commission, and we agreed with it."

There is an emphasis on the use of eco-friendly materials on campaign trails.

"A decision has been made to introduce voter slips. The restrictions on T-shirts and jackets will be relaxed."

Individuals serving or nominated as chairpersons or members of the governing bodies of educational institutions will be required to resign from those positions once their candidacy is finalised, because teachers from these institutions often serve as presiding and polling officers, he said, adding that it was also recommended by the reform commission.

Restrictions on the participation of government employees and the use of state institutions, and properties will be stricter. No foreigner will be allowed to fund social media campaigns for a candidate, Sanaullah said.

Yesterday's EC meeting included two agenda: finalising the code of conduct, and discussing the redrawing of the boundaries of constituencies.

"Due to time constraints and the unavailability of some data, we could not discuss the delimitation of parliamentary constituencies. We expect to do it by next week."

Parties split over

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elected representatives from local government bodies alongside parliament members.

The AB Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Khelafat Majlish, Nagorik Oikya, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Bangladesh expressed support for an electoral college system.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Nizam-e-Islam, and the Bangladesh Labour Party want a direct presidential election.

Ali Riaz, vice president of the consensus commission, said Sunday's discussions would go back to unresolved issues such as the election system for the president, the prime minister's tenure, the mechanism for electing 100 reserved seats for women in parliament, and the proposed bicameral legislature.

Speaking to reporters, Riaz noted that most parties were in favour of a bicameral system with a 100-seat upper house, but added, "Further discussions are needed on several related matters."

He also acknowledged that full consensus may not be realistic under current circumstances, but stressed that both the commission and the parties were committed to reaching agreements on key reforms.

BNP Standing Committee Member Salahuddin Ahmed told reporters his party supported amending article 70 of the constitution to allow parliament members to vote independently, except on finance bills and no-confidence motions. He added that the BNP advocates a secret ballot in presidential elections to ensure transparency and neutrality.

On the question of a bicameral legislature, he argued that a proportional representation system for the upper house would be "illogical".

Jamaat-e-Islami's Nayebe Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher said some progress had been made in the discussions regarding both the

presidential election and the PM's tenure. While most parties appeared to favour an electoral college involving lawmakers, he criticised the reform commission's proposal to expand it up to 70,000, including union council representatives.

"We believe some expansion is needed, but not on such a large scale. Covering district councils and municipalities should suffice," he said, adding that his party believes a prime minister should not serve more than two terms.

"Some parties, including the BNP, disagreed. They suggested a PM could return after a break following two consecutive terms. So, there is a slight difference of opinion. But most parties support a total two-term limit [whether consecutive or not]."

Bazlur Rashid Firoz, general secretary of the Socialist Party of Bangladesh, questioned why the PM's office should be exempt from a two-term limit if the presidency isn't.

AB Party Chairman Mojibur Rahman Monju and Gono Odhikar Parishad President Nurul Huq Nur echoed support for a two-term cap on the prime minister's tenure, citing democratic principles and national interest.

National Citizen Party Joint Convener Javed Rasin said his party supported involving local government in the presidential election process. "Presidential election shouldn't depend on the parliament alone. We agree with the concept of the local governments' involvement, which the [election reform] commission has proposed."

"We believe the president should be elected through votes from members at every union level ... so that the president is not subservient to any one party."

Around 30 political parties took part in the second phase of talks, which began on June 2, with the National Consensus Commission yesterday.