Pakistan orders arrest of Afghans without visas

AFP, *Islamabad*

Pakistan's government has ordered law enforcement nationwide to arrest Afghan citizens without visas from July 10, according to a directive seen by AFP yesterday, part of an intensifying deportation drive.

The order is likely to exacerbate a years-long repatriation policy that has pushed back millions of Afghans -- some who had lived in Pakistan for decades and others who fled their home country following Taliban authorities' return to power in 2021.

The interior ministry directive -- confirmed by an official to AFP -- was addressed to all of Pakistan's provinces and territories, instructing them that "with effect from 10th July 2026, any Afghan national found residing in Pakistan without a valid visa shall be immediately arrested".

The directive appeared to formalise and escalate a policy of detaining Afghans as Pakistan vows to take action against growing militancy it says emanates from Afghanistan -- an accusation denied by authorities there.

Residents and Taliban members gather near a building destroyed by a Pakistan airstrike in Samkani district, Paktia province, Afghanistan, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

BGB, locals foil fresh BSF push-in bid in Meherpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Benapole*

Border Guard Bangladesh and locals again foiled an alleged attempt by India's Border Security Force to forcibly push 10 people into Bangladesh through the Mujibnagar border in Meherpur early yesterday.

According to local sources and BGB officials, the BSF tried to push the group through the Nazirakona border from Patharghata village in India's Nadia district.

Nayek Subedar Mozammel Haque, commander of the Nazirakona BGB camp, said, "After detecting the move, BGB members, along with locals, immediately took up positions and resisted the push-in attempt. Facing resistance, the BSF was forced to take the individuals back from the zero line into Indian territory."

Later in the afternoon, BSF members again tried to move the group into the no-man's land in an apparent bid to push them into Bangladesh, Lt Col Nazmul Hasan, commanding officer of BGB Battalion-6 in Chuadanga, told The Daily Star.

"We, along with the locals, also resisted the latest attempt, after which the group was seen stranded in the no-man's land. However, we could not see them later in the evening. They may have been taken back into Indian territory by the BSF."

Nayek Subedar Mozammel Haque said this was the sixth alleged push-in attempt by the BSF along the Meherpur border this month.

BB offers exit for loan defaulters

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It has asked banks to prioritise short-term agricultural credit and loans to the Cottage, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (CMSME) sector.

Following the BB move, analysts have given mixed opinions, saying the facility may help banks clear balance sheets but could also encourage more defaults.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, told The Daily Star that this process of cleaning up banks' balance sheets is not a bad approach. Instead of carrying the burden of bad loans indefinitely, he said, it is better if defaulting borrowers exit after settling liabilities through a one-time concession.

Mahbubur, also former chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh, cautioned that care must be taken to prevent misuse of the facility.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the facility was being offered under exceptional circumstances. Since the policy states that exits should be based on the bank-client relationship, he argued, the decision should ultimately rest with banks.

"In the past, many such decisions were made on political considerations. If similar undue pressure is exerted now, it will not lead to positive outcomes. But if a bank allows an exit based on its relationship with the borrower, it could help clean up balance sheets and provide relief."

He cautioned that the process must be handled carefully, noting that many borrowers have collateral. In such cases, banks should first recover principal and accrued interest by selling off the collateral.

"Through this policy, the central bank has essentially provided commercial banks a way out. Now it is up to the banks to use it prudently. At the same time, the central bank must maintain close oversight. Moreover, such facilities should not be extended to new loans in the future," he added.

Meanwhile, Toufic Ahmad Choudhury, former director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management, criticised the move, saying it was not a sound policy and would likely encourage more defaults.

"There was a general expectation that the new government would take a tougher stance against loan defaulters. Instead, the policies being introduced appear to favour the errant borrowers."

He warned that delegating authority to waive interest to banks could allow directors to write off dues in ways that serve their own interests. Decisions on rescheduling and waivers, he argued, should remain with the Bangladesh Bank.

He believes that given the already massive volume of NPLs, waiving accumulated interest would raise questions about how banks would pay depositors and cover operating costs.

"Ultimately, such concessions risk creating a new generation of irresponsible borrowers and encouraging future defaults," Toufic added.

Deen Islam, professor of economics at Dhaka University, agreed that the BB's special exit policy could provide relief to the banking sector.

In the short run, he noted, the policy may improve liquidity, support credit growth, and help viable businesses retain or create jobs, particularly in SMEs and agriculture.

"However, repeated reliance on such exit facilities could reduce borrowers' incentives to repay on time if they expect future concessions."

He said this weakens credit discipline and distorts resource allocation by rewarding default over prudent behaviour.

While the policy has clear short-term benefits, it must be accompanied by stronger governance, stricter risk management, and improved recovery mechanisms to ensure long-term stability and sustainable growth, Deen added.

Martinelli stunner fires Brazil into last 16

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ineffective in attack.

Ancelotti was forced into a change at the break, an emotional Lucas Paqueta limping off in distress with the attacking midfielder replaced by 19-year-old striker Endrick.

Japan, who thrashed Tunisia and held the Netherlands and Sweden to reach the last 32, had Brazil where they wanted them.

Brazil ramped up the pressure to start the second half and Japan defender Takehiro Tomiyasu twice kept the ball off the line, not that he knew much about it.

Brazil were soon level, Arsenal defender Gabriel sending in an inviting cross for midfielder Casemiro to head in unmarked at the back post.

The danger man Vinicius, well stifled up until then, turned the Japan defence inside out and stabbed the ball towards Suzuki, who directed it onto the post.

It was all Brazil as they pushed for a late winner, with Vinicius -- who scored four times in the group stage -- increasingly in the thick of it.

Then came Martinelli's late intervention.

No easy return for bank plunderers

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in Hong Kong, London and New York to mobilise foreign direct investment for Bangladesh.

Yesterday, the Finance Bill for the upcoming fiscal 2026-27, along with tax-related amendments, was passed in the parliament.

The major amendments included increasing the tax-free income limit for individual taxpayers by Tk 50,000 to Tk 4 lakh, withdrawing the opportunity to whiten undisclosed money (black money) and repealing the mandatory TIN (Taxpayer Identification Number) certificate requirement for opening bank accounts.

Khosru's speech followed the prime minister's concluding remarks, during which he addressed various budget amendments and criticisms raised since the proposed budget was placed on June 11.

The discussions on the budget across various levels, including the parliament and the media, primarily focused on inflation, revenue collection, budget deficit financing, banking sector reforms, employment, investment and overall economic recovery.

"These questions are natural and logical. The public wants to know how we will effectively tackle current challenges and place the economy on a strong and sustainable foundation," Khosru said.

REFORMING NBR

The government will separate the revenue policy wing of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) from the regulatory body's management wing to eliminate conflicts of interest and enhance revenue collection capacity.

While the interim government issued an ordinance to separate the NBR's functions following recommendations from development partners like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, it was not formalised into law, triggering doubts over its execution.

Yesterday, Khosru officially announced the separation of revenue policy and revenue management.

"We are taking initiatives to expand business and trade by ensuring transparency and accountability through the separation of revenue policy and revenue management, automation of the tax system, prevention of tax evasion and deregulation," he told the parliament.

Addressing the concerns over ambitious domestic revenue targets, Khosru said the government aims to expand the tax base rather than increase the tax rates.

Despite recent economic stagnation, Khosru highlighted that the NBR's revenue collection has crossed the historic Tk 4 lakh crore milestone for the first time owing to sweeping reforms introduced over the last four months.

He expressed confidence that despite being challenging, the upcoming fiscal year's revenue targets are achievable.

SPECIALISED FUNDS

To boost private sector growth and reduce entrepreneurs' over-dependence on traditional banking, the government is looking at alternative capital market instruments.

"We are expanding alternative financing opportunities for the private sector through asset securitisation, bond market development and equity financing."

As part of the strategy, specialised funds will be formed in major global financial hubs -- Hong Kong, London and New York -- specifically dedicated to investing in Bangladesh.

"Once operational, these private funds will inject foreign direct investment into both public and private projects without adding any extra pressure on our domestic financial system," he said, assuring that the government's domestic borrowing will not "crowd out" the private sector.

Criticising the previous regime, Khosru said that massive, reckless borrowing under the "fascist" government had severely compromised the country's debt sustainability, downgrading its risk rating from 'low' to 'medium'.

At the end of fiscal 2024-25, the government's total debt stood at Tk 21,44,034 crore, accounting for 38.61 percent of the country's GDP.

"Although we inherited this massive debt, we are bound to repay both the principal and interest on time, which is severely straining our revenue management."

LOWERING BANK BORROWING

It also outlined a strategy to bring the country's fiscal risk rating back to the "low" category by gradually shifting the economy from debt-driven to investment-led growth aiming to boost returns on investment, accelerate GDP growth and reduce reliance on deficit financing.

The government has proposed reducing bank borrowing by Tk 6,000 crore in the next fiscal year and plans to steadily reduce its reliance on financing from the BB and commercial banks over the medium term.

THE IMF PROGRAMME

Responding to critics who said the government returned empty-handed from talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Khosru said that Bangladesh voluntarily walked away from the previous arrangement.

"The government did not return empty-handed. Rather, certain conditions of the programme initiated during the fascist government's tenure were not acceptable to us in the interest of the country and its people. Therefore, we voluntarily opted out."

A completely new programme will be negotiated with the IMF keeping the best interests of the nation and its citizens at the centre of the dialogue.

The government is treating prevailing high inflation with the utmost importance, viewing the fight against soaring prices not merely as an economic programme but as a social responsibility to protect ordinary citizens, Khosru said.

Addressing scepticism from lawmakers, economists and civil society members regarding the upcoming fiscal year's targets of 7.5 percent inflation and 6.5 percent GDP growth, he defended the projections as challenging but achievable through synchronised policy interventions.

"We have taken initiatives to control the money supply in the market through effective coordination of monetary and fiscal policies."

To give relief to consumers, the government has reduced the tax at source for 60 essential commodities.

The state is actively working on deregulation and digitalisation to lower the cost of doing business, repair supply chain disruptions and foster market competition, he said.

"Strict measures remain in place against artificial crises and manipulation by dishonest market syndicates. We firmly believe these initiatives will gradually bring inflation under control and offer relief to public life."

Dismissing doubts surrounding the 6.5 percent GDP growth target, Khosru emphasised that growth is a reflection of economic vitality, investment and public confidence rather than just a dry statistic.

To hit the target, the government is prioritising a massive expansion in production capacity by boosting public and private investment across key sectors, including industry, agriculture and ICT services.

"We are also focusing on integrating the creative economy into the mainstream, accelerating human resource and physical infrastructure development and significantly strengthening the private sector."

CRACKDOWN ON MONEY LAUNDERING

In a major announcement regarding financial scams and capital flight, Khosru offered strong reassurances that the government is aggressively pursuing laundered wealth.

"Our stance on repatriating stolen assets is uncompromising. The government has taken strict measures against those who misappropriated public funds or smuggled them abroad."

As of May, assets worth approximately Tk 72,343 crore have been seized or frozen both at home and abroad under 11 priority cases.

To track down and retrieve the siphoned capital, Bangladesh has dispatched 23 Mutual Legal Assistance Requests to 13 countries. Furthermore, two formal Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties have been finalised with Malaysia and Hong Kong.

As part of the legal crackdown, the government is initiating civil proceedings in the first phase against six major defaulting borrower groups linked to the priority cases. Additionally, more than 15 affected commercial banks have signed over 60 non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) with international asset recovery agencies to trace and repatriate the stolen funds.

A budget for nation building

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is inclusive," he said while taking part at the discussion on the proposed budget at the Parliament yesterday.

He took part in the discussion as the Leader of the House.

Terming the budget as "life-friendly budget", realistic and practical Tarique said it is framed in a way so it can bring relief to people from all walks of life.

Highlighting the budget's consumer-friendly measures, the Prime Minister said taxes and duties on 61 essential commodities were withdrawn, Tarique said "we did not witness abnormal price hike this time. Through the withdrawal of taxes on essential goods, we believe we have been able to fulfil at least part of our responsibility to the people and provide them with some relief."

The prime minister also spoke at length about the economic situation inherited by his government when it assumed office on February 18.

He said the government had taken charge of a fragile economy marked by corruption, mismanagement, looting of public resources and policy failures.

"We inherited a broken economy. Corruption, looting, mismanagement and wrong policies had severely damaged the country's economic foundations," the Prime Minister said.

Tarique said large-scale capital flight, declining investment and soaring inflation had left ordinary people struggling in the years before his government took office.

"Thousands of crores of taka were siphoned out of the country. Production and investment had nearly stagnated. Inflation had reached a level that people could feel in their daily lives," he said.

Tarique also referred to difficulties in the capital market, saying many investors had lost their savings, while foreign exchange reserves had come under severe pressure due to capital flight and wasteful expenditure.

"The stock market, a vital sector of the economy, reached a point where people lost everything. Some even took their own lives after losing their savings," he said.

The prime minister also outlined his vision of a Bangladesh where development is rooted in justice, the economy is inclusive, the state is accountable, and citizens' lives are safe, dignified and full of opportunities.

He said the true strength of a state lies not in its wealth, but in good governance, justice, accountability and public trust, adding that sustainable development requires not only economic reforms but also good governance across all spheres of administration.

Tarique Rahman said people now demand a state founded on justice, transparency and accountability. "Fulfilling this aspiration is not only the responsibility of the present government, but of the entire parliament, working together from our respective positions," he said.

Highlighting democracy, the rule of law and human rights, the prime minister stressed the need for an independent judiciary and justice delivered to people's doorsteps.

He said the government had already expanded the Legal Aid Programme introduced by former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia. He also noted that this year's budget had increased allocations for the judiciary and requested the finance and planning minister to provide an additional Tk 100 crore to the Supreme Court and Tk 500 crore to the law ministry to address judges' housing, research needs and shortages of court buildings.

He further said there was no alternative to an efficient, honest and professional public administration in a democratic system.

"If we want to receive services, our administration must be made efficient. To deliver services to the people, we must ensure their full participation in nation-building by making the administration accountable, while also maintaining fair pay structures, training, and a work environment free from unnecessary political interference," he said.

The prime minister pledged to overcome deep-rooted corruption, malpractice and irregularities that have long crippled the economy. "We are committed to overcoming these challenges, and we pledge this to the people," he said.

Marsch praises Canada's 'heroes'

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give a s**t what people have to say," said Marsch.

"Like, all I care about is our own team and what we do together."

Canada came second in their group after losing to Switzerland. It was enough to progress to the knockout stages for the first time in the history of a country more known for ice hockey.

But failing to top the group deprived Canada of the chance to stay in Vancouver for the tournament's next phase.

"We were disappointed to have to leave Canada, given the fanfare and passion around everything for the World Cup and our team," admitted Marsch.

"But the guys quickly refocused and knew that this was a massive opportunity."

Marsch said his team was very familiar with playing in the United States, which has hosted recent editions of the CONCACAF Gold Cup and Copa America, as well as Canadian friendlies.

Large parts of Los Angeles' SoFi stadium were a sea of red. The team's next stop is Houston for the round of 16.

Canada's opponents will be the winners of a clash between Morocco, who reached the semi-finals of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, and three-time finalists the Netherlands.

Marsch, who sent out his team to attack against South Africa, said he would need to adjust his tactics given the higher quality of each of the next potential opponents.

But he said he was relishing the chance to face "one of the giants" of world football, dubbing Morocco a "modern giant" for their recent success, and the Netherlands "a traditional giant."

"I feel like it's a free hit, and we're going to go after it and do everything we can to see if we can find a way to get a win," he said.