2 more push-in attempts foiled

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Kushtia*

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) has foiled alleged attempts by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) to push six people into Bangladesh through the Gangni border in Meherpur and four others through the Kushtia border.

In a press release, the BGB 47 Kushtia Battalion said an attempt was made to push six unidentified people, including two men and four women, into Bangladesh early yesterday through the border area under the Rangmahal Border Outpost.

The BSF's Dighalkandi camp under its 11th Battalion took the six people back inside India's barbed-wire fence around 8:00am.

Lt Col Rashed Kamal Roni, commander of the BGB 47 Kushtia Battalion, said regular patrols had been intensified in the relevant border areas.

Meanwhile, BGB foiled another attempt to push four Indian nationals into Bangladesh along the Kushtia border yesterday.

The incident took place near border pillar 153/9 in the area under the Uday Kishan camp of the BSF, adjacent to the Thotapara BOP under the 47 BGB Battalion.



Protesters react as security personnel detain them during a Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) demonstration demanding the resignation of India's CEC Gyanesh Kumar, near the protest site in New Delhi yesterday. Story on page 12. PHOTO: REUTERS

Rooppur unit-1 begins nuclear fission reaction

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Pabna*

Unit-1 of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant initiated its first nuclear fission reaction yesterday, marking a major milestone for Bangladesh's first nuclear power project.

The reaction, which begins a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction, started at around 3:34pm after the plant received regulatory approval, Md Anwar Hossain, secretary of the Ministry of Science and Technology, told The Daily Star.

"For the first time, the commissioning team began the fission reaction at unit-1 today. We successfully started the process while every parameter performed according to design," he said.

The development marks the reactor's first criticality -- the point at which it reaches a stable critical state at minimum thermal power and sustains a nuclear chain reaction for the first time.

Project officials said engineers are closely monitoring reactor parameters, safety systems and control equipment throughout the process. The physical start-up phase, including first criticality, is expected to take about 30 to 40 days, after which power generation will be increased gradually based on test results.

Dr Md Zahedul Hassan, managing director of Nuclear Power Plant Company Bangladesh Ltd, explained that heat produced through nuclear fission would convert water into high-pressure steam, which would drive turbines connected to generators to produce electricity.

BWSA protests cancellation of women's football match

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Women's Sports Association (BWSA) has protested the cancellation of a women's football match in Derai upazila of Sunamganj following alleged threats and intimidation by a small but vocal radical fundamentalist group.

The association also called on the local administration and other stakeholders to ensure that the match is held immediately, with adequate security and dignity.

BWSA president Barrister Sarwat Siraj Shukla made the remarks at a press conference at the association's office in Dhanmondi. General secretary and former South Asian Games gold medallist Sharmin Akter Ratna, Derai sports organiser Rakib Bhuiyan and Swapnachura Club captain Sabana Akhter were also present.

"It is a matter of regret, frustration, alarm and deep concern that this game is being stopped. How is it being stopped? In that region, a small but extremely vocal, loud and reactionary group, afflicted with radical fundamentalism, is campaigning against this game. They exert influence over the local administration, apply pressure, and also threaten and intimidate those who come to play," Shukla said in her opening remarks.

A friendly match between Swapnachura Club and Zara Sporting Club was scheduled for October 5 in Derai. However, the organisers were forced to cancel it a few hours before kick-off following threats from the group, which reportedly described the women footballers as indecent. The local administration also failed to provide the support needed to hold the match.

Shukla warned that such obstruction would not be allowed to continue in what she described as a new democratic journey towards a discrimination-free Bangladesh. She said the incident was particularly concerning at a time when the government was encouraging girls to take up sports through nationwide initiatives such as Notun Kuri Sports, the DC Cup and the Prime Minister's Gold Cup. She also noted that Prime Minister's daughter Zaima Rahman was a former athlete who remained enthusiastic about sports.

Drawing parallels with incidents during the interim period, Shukla cited mob attacks that had halted women's sporting events in Thakurgaon and Faridpur. Describing women's football as a "bright star" of Bangladesh sports, she noted that recent achievements, including the country's lone medal at the Asian Games, had come through girls from remote areas.

"We will not leave any obstruction to any game unchallenged. Wherever girls' sports are obstructed in Bangladesh, the Women's Sports Association will protest, will stand by the girls. Nothing will go unchallenged," Shukla said, adding that the association would submit a memorandum to the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, the deputy commissioner of Sunamganj and the upazila nirbahi officer of Derai.

Ratna demanded that those responsible for the match's cancellation be identified and brought to justice. She also called for legislation to protect women's sports and ensure punishment for those who attempt to obstruct them.



BWSA holds a press conference in Dhaka yesterday to protest against postponement of the match. PHOTO: STAR

Riyadh airport hit

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In a televised speech yesterday, Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree claimed responsibility for Saturday's attack and also said the group had attacked the airport in Dammam in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province and two facilities of Saudi oil giant Saudi Aramco.

There was no immediate Saudi confirmation. The Houthis earlier yesterday had renewed their warning to airlines, airport workers, and travellers against using Saudi airports, reports Reuters.

"We urge everyone to take our warnings seriously, and Saudi Arabia bears responsibility for any failed interceptions," the group said.

Saudi Arabia has stepped up its military involvement in Yemen in recent weeks, launching strikes against the Houthis and backing a Yemeni government counteroffensive after the group seized strategic territory along the Red Sea coast last month.

The Houthis said yesterday that Saudi Arabia carried out 124 air strikes in Yemen in the past 24 hours, including the capital Sanaa and the group's stronghold Saada.

Yemen's Houthi-run foreign ministry said that further Saudi military action in Yemen would trigger a stronger response, adding that its actions would be guided by the principle of reciprocity.

"Unless the Saudi enemy stops its aggression and interference in Yemen, worse is yet to come, God willing," the ministry said in statements carried by Houthi-run Al Masirah television.

US President Donald Trump said on Saturday the United States was considering joining Saudi strikes on the Houthis in the conflict, a spillover from the wider war on Iran that the US and Israel launched in February.

The US, Canadian, German and Spanish embassies in Saudi Arabia warned their citizens to avoid the airport. A senior Western diplomat told AFP that several embassies were banning their staff from using the airport "over the next week".

Schools in Riyadh switched to remote learning for the second time in a month, according to emails seen by AFP that were received by parents.

The Riyadh attack prompted health officials to activate a rare mass call-up of doctors, a medical source said.

Visa clock ticks

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travel, leaving passengers stranded and raising fears over employment, visas and livelihoods.

He planned to wait until 8:00pm or 9:00pm, as his company had assured him of arranging an alternative flight by last night.

"I don't know what will happen if the promised arrangement falls through. I am the sole breadwinner of a four-member family," he said.

The disruptions followed Saturday's attack on Riyadh airport, which killed 12 people, including two Bangladeshis, and injured more than 300. Four injured Bangladeshis are in intensive care at a Riyadh hospital, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam said yesterday.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), eight flights were cancelled after King Khalid International Airport closed, affecting 2,951 passengers. The cancelled flights were two Biman Bangladesh Airlines flights, one US-Bangla Airlines, three Saudia and two Riyadh Air.

Cancellations of connecting IndiGo and Himalaya Airlines services to Dammam were not in CAAB's tally.

Biman said its Dhaka-Riyadh-Dhaka flights BG339 and BG340, scheduled for October 11 and 12, would remain suspended as the airport closure was extended until 3:00am Bangladesh time today.

It advised passengers not to go to the airport and said rescheduling details would come through official channels. Its Dhaka-Dammam flight BG349, however, departed at 7:50pm, about 30 minutes late, according to Flightradar24.

Many workers learned of the cancellations only at the airport, where they were told to contact their recruiting agencies or employers.

Mohammad Rezaul Karim, from Shyamnagar in Satkhira, had returned to Bangladesh three months ago and was due to resume work in Dammam. He reached the airport around 1:00pm for a connecting IndiGo flight, only to learn at the boarding counter that it was cancelled.

"I waited under the sun without lunch or water," he said.

Around 7:30pm, his agency told him to spend the night in Dhaka and promised a flight today. Two other Dammam-bound workers, Mohammad Arif and Mohammad Tamim Islam, were also affected.

Saimon, who had returned on September 7 on leave, reached the airport around 1:30pm for a Himalaya Airlines flight to Dammam via Kathmandu. Counter staff told him it was cancelled, and his employer asked him to contact his travel agency.

Mohammad Jahidul Islam, from Daulatpur in Kushtia, arrived for a Riyadh flight with a ticket from his employer. With two children and elderly parents to support, he said, "I am considering returning to my village till further information is provided."

For some, a deadline adds to the pressure.

Mohammad Shahin, also bound for Dammam via Kathmandu, must return to Saudi Arabia by October 15 or secure a leave extension and permission to travel. Advised to go home to Kushtia and wait for his agency, he was on a ferry to his village around 7:30pm.

Shankar Kumar Das, who had spent four months in Bangladesh, was heading back to Narail to await news. Like Hasan, both Shahin and Shankar are sole breadwinners. Moreover, the two have loans to repay.

Asked why he wanted to return despite the conflict in the region, Shankar said, "I have a family to feed and loans to repay. Conflict or not, I have to go back to work to earn a living."

Workers from distant districts face wasted journeys to Dhaka, extra travel and living expenses, and no clear idea how long they must wait.

Recruiting agencies are trying to find alternatives.

Mohammad Belayat Hossain of MRJ Global said his agency was working to arrange flights for workers whose IndiGo journeys were disrupted.

But it remains unclear how quickly replacements can be secured, whether workers will bear extra costs, how many of those affected are migrant workers, and whether employers will extend leave for those facing deadlines.

The disruption comes as Bangladesh's overseas employment market is already under pressure.

According to Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) data, 5,69,979 Bangladeshis received clearance for overseas jobs in January-September, down about 32 percent from 8,38,892 a year earlier.

Saudi Arabia remained the largest destination, with 32,915 clearances in September alone.

It is also the largest source of remittances.

According to Bangladesh Bank, Saudi Arabia contributed $5.85 billion of Bangladesh's $35.59 billion in 2025-26 fiscal year, and $1.65 billion, or 19.2 percent, of the $8.59 billion received in July-September.

No remittance loss has been recorded so far, but prolonged disruption could cut earnings if workers cannot start jobs or return to existing ones.

The stakes are high for first-time migrants, while returning workers face extra travel costs and days or weeks without income.

For Hasan, the consequences could begin with a missed flight and an expiring visa but go much further.

Having spent heavily on his first overseas job, he risks losing time, money and the chance to earn for his family before his work life in Saudi Arabia has even begun.

When he spoke to The Daily Star yesterday, his visa deadline was just hours away, and he was still dependent on his company's assurance that a flight would be arranged.

CAB questions

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His comments came a day after the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources raised questions over fuel price hikes without public hearings and capacity payments to power plants.

A member questioned why public hearing regulations had not been framed in the 23 years since the relevant law was enacted.

Another called for a forensic audit to verify power plants' actual generation capacity and assess capacity payments.

Citing the 2021 example, Shamsul said that 28 companies were involved at the time, and around 10 to 12 submitted freight invoices showing costs of about $120 per tonne.

CAB submitted a document showing a freight cost of $69 per tonne for a shipment through Mongla port, but BERC did not accept it.

Shamsul questioned whether the commission had adequately examined the differences in the proposed costs, arguing that each charge should be supported by evidence before being included in the price calculation.

He also questioned BERC's response to complaints from LPG distributors.

In a letter dated September 21, the Bangladesh LPG Distributors Association reportedly told BERC and other authorities that suppliers were charging distributors Tk 1,550–1,720 per cylinder against the prescribed rate of Tk 1,475.

The complaint should have prompted a formal investigation to establish whether suppliers were violating the regulated pricing structure, Shamsul said, while calling for an inquiry into BERC's conduct.

CAB had sought action under Section 11 of the BERC law, including an inquiry through a judicial council, he added.

Contacted, BERC Chairman Jalal Ahmed said the commission had held public hearings twice in 2021, in April and October, before adopting a monthly LPG pricing mechanism based on changes in the Saudi contract price, freight charges, the dollar exchange rate and fuel costs.

Monthly hearings were unnecessary because these factors were largely beyond the commission's control and had been covered by the decisions taken at the 2021 hearings.

Jalal, who joined BERC in August 2024, said the commission had followed the same process since before his appointment.

He denied that BERC had defied the High Court directive, saying the commission had held hearings as ordered and established the monthly pricing mechanism through this process.

However, Jalal said BERC planned to review dealer and retailer commissions, which were fixed in 2021.

"If we move to revise these, we will certainly hold a public hearing," he said.

At the seminar, Mohammed Amirul Haque, president of the LPG Operators Association of Bangladesh (LOAB), said BERC sets prices monthly based on international market movements, the Saudi contract price, and other cost components.

"Our price for LPG is not dictated by us," he said, arguing that BERC determines the regulated rates, including those charged to dealers.

However, Haque acknowledged that consumers are paying 30-40 percent above the official price in the current market.

LOAB had warned operators, distributors and retailers against overcharging and market manipulation.

In a press release issued on September 30, the association called for legal action against anyone found hoarding LPG or selling it above the regulated price.

"My stand is very clear: if any of my operators does anything wrong, take legal steps against that operator, distributor or retailer."

He urged law enforcement agencies, district administrations and consumer rights authorities to monitor retail markets and take action against violators.

Matheendra De Zoysa, chief operating officer of Omera LPG, said the company sells cylinders at BERC-set prices but has limited control over what retailers charge consumers.

While the company can exercise some oversight over distributors, its influence diminishes further down the supply chain.

He cited Sri Lanka as an example of a country where consumer protection authorities conduct field inspections, operate hotlines and impose substantial fines on businesses selling goods above regulated prices.

Abu Sayed Raza, chief marketing officer of Fresh LPG, also defended BERC's pricing, saying the rates reflect international market movements, including changes in the Saudi contract price, along with premiums and other costs.

The Saudi contract price rose by 44 percent in April, prompting BERC to set the price at Tk 1,940 for a 12kg cylinder.

For October, the regulator set the price at Tk 1,837, despite a roughly 10 percent increase in the Saudi contract price from the previous month.

The Saudi contract price had risen from around $383 per tonne in July 2023 to $712.50 per tonne in October, Raza said, arguing that the regulated price is not excessive given the increase in international costs.

2 Bangladeshis

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Of them, 11 were on work visas, while the rest travelled to Saudi Arabia on Umrah visas, the ministry said.

Around 500 Bangladeshi passengers were stranded in Riyadh following the incident, the ministry added.

In another development, the foreign ministry strongly condemned the attack on the airport that left 12 dead.

"Bangladesh reiterates its firm solidarity with Saudi Arabia. It calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a peaceful resolution of the ongoing crisis through dialogue and diplomacy," the ministry said in a press release.

The two killed on Saturday are migrant worker Shahed Ahmed of Bogura and pilgrim Hafiz Mufti Mohammad Nasrullah of Cumilla.

After being away from home for two straight years, Shahed had returned to his village in Bogura to spend a month with his wife and two sons.

Shahed had been working as a plumber in Jeddah since 2013, reports our Bogura correspondent.

On Friday, the 36-year-old Bangladeshi left for Saudi Arabia to resume his work.

Shortly after landing at King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, he called his wife around 5:30pm (BST) to let her know he had reached safely.

It was the last time she would hear his voice.

Shahed is survived by his wife Kohinoor Akhter Kakoli, 26, and their two sons, Abdullah, 6, and Kawsar, 11, said his cousin, Masum Rana.

His relatives urged the government to take immediate steps to bring his body home and provide his family with financial assistance.

Another deceased, Nasrullah, of Cumilla's Nangalkot upazila, was travelling to Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah and was waiting at the Riyadh airport for a connecting flight when the attack took place, said his brother-in-law, Mohammad Nasir Uddin.

The 35-year-old was the assistant deputy director, or assistant muhtamim, of Jamia Arabia Darul Uloom Madrasa in Kamrangirchar, Dhaka.

He left behind his wife and three children, reports our Cumilla correspondent.

SITUATION ON THE GROUND

Around 3.5 million Bangladeshis live in Saudi Arabia, one of the major destinations for Bangladeshi migrant workers. Many Bangladeshis also travel to the country regularly to perform Umrah and Hajj.

Amid "restrictions on media coverage", Bangladeshis living in and around Riyadh face difficulty in keeping track of what is going on.

After the Saturday's strike, schools have stopped in-person classes, while government, semi-government, and private offices have allowed employees to work from home.

"It was only then that we realised something had happened. Apart from that, there is no panic among the Bangladeshi community," a Bangladeshi expatriate living in Riyadh told The Daily Star over the phone.

Bangladeshis living in the city said traffic has also decreased, partly because educational institutions have moved classes online.

Uncertainty is growing, especially among those planning to return home, as several flights have reportedly been cancelled, they said.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam yesterday said the government was working to identify all the Bangladeshi victims and collect information about their families.

Bangladesh's diplomatic missions across the region are maintaining contact with expatriates and providing guidance to help ensure their safety, she said.

At least 14 Bangladeshis have been killed amid the ongoing war in the Middle East, Shama said while responding to a query at her ministry.