

DSEX	6,216.62	▼	7.17	Gold (Ounce)	\$1,280.70	▲	Dollar	81.25 (Buy)	▲	82.25(Sell)	REPO Rate (16/10/2017)	3.44%
DSE30	2,261.87	▲	2.53	Oil (Barrel)	\$54.30	▲	Euro	93.52 (Buy)	▼	97.88(Sell)	REPO Rate (15/10/2017)	3.46%
Source: DSE				Source: Yahoo Finance				Source: One Bank Limited				Source: Bangladesh Bank (W AV)

National News

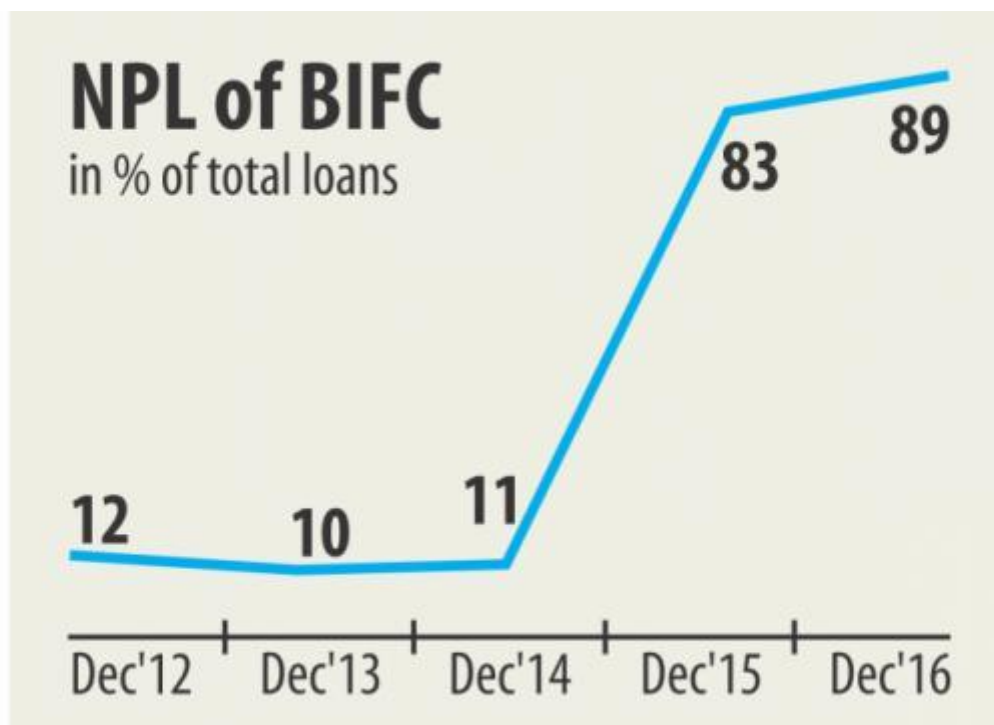
[BIFC on the verge of collapse](#)
[Walton gets nod for mobile assembly plant](#)
[2 new land port projects deferred](#)
[Uber launches bike sharing service in Dhaka today](#)
[BB move fails to cool down dollar](#)
[CIP: What is a Commercially Important Person in Bangladesh?](#)
[BTRC cuts spectrum conversion fee amid telcos' pressure](#)
[Economy progressing below true potential: MCCI](#)
[Stocks rise for 2nd week riding on banks, GP](#)

International News

[Trump lauds Asia trade wins and red carpets](#)
[Deadly quake kills over 400 in Iran, Iraq](#)
[Regional integration to boost South Asia's growth: ICCB](#)

National News

BIFC on the verge of collapse



The non-bank financial institution Bangladesh Industrial Finance Company is on the verge of collapse after it failed to pay loans worth Tk 200 crore with 14 banks.

This is the first time that a financial institution has become a defaulter.

Subsequently, the management of BIFC has sought a bailout package from the Bangladesh Bank for its survival. “If the central bank does not provide the fund immediately, we will have to go for liquidation,” said the NBFI in a letter to the BB earlier in July.

The NBFI has been barred from lending and taking deposits by the BB for several months now.

BIFC's troubles started when its former chairman Abdul Mannan took out loans worth Tk 703 crore through forgery, according to a central bank report.

The falsification in paperwork by Mannan and his family members including his wife Umme Kulsum Mannan, who altogether hold 62 percent stakes in BIFC, was unearthed in 2015 by a BB investigation.

In 2016, the central bank informed the Anti Corruption Commission, the Criminal Investigation Department and the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit about the anomalies in Mannan's paperwork but no action was taken, the report said.

As of March last year, Mannan, also the chairman of Sunman Group, owed Tk 860 crore to BIFC, according to data from the central bank.

In June 2015 an observer was appointed in BIFC but the NBFI's financial health continued to deteriorate. In July 2015, Kulsum through a letter to the central bank acknowledged all the irregularities that the BB investigation team found.

In another letter, Mannan took responsibility of the irregularities and agreed to pay back the sum.

But, he did not keep his word, taking the company into severe financial crisis. BIFC has managed to recover only Tk 120 crore from him so far.

Contacted, Kulsum said the dues are being paid off gradually. She, however, disputed the due amount of Tk 860 crore. “We do not owe that sum to BIFC,” she said without specifying the actual amount her family owes. BIFC has been making net loss of Tk 6.40 crore every month and could not maintain the required Statutory Liquidity Ratio and Cash Reserve Ratio, facing continuous penalty from the central bank, according to the report.

The firm saw its default loans spiral in the last five years: from 12.21 in December 2012 to 90 percent in December 2016.

The NBFI's total default loans stood at Tk 780 crore at the end of last year in contrast to Tk 84.28 crore in 2012.

At the end of last year, its total deposits stood at Tk 508.62 crore, down 13.25 percent from a year earlier.

Its loan portfolio shrunk to Tk 876 crore at the end of last year from Tk 1,063 crore the previous year.

BIFC has submitted a recovery plan containing three options to the central bank.

One option involves taking Tk 500 crore from the BB to pay off the bank loans such that BIFC's normal activities can be resumed.

Another option is to inject fresh equity by raising the paid-up capital.

The third option is to block the bank loans for 10 years and reschedule the payment with a year's grace period.

“The central bank is studying the proposal,” an official of BB said.

Listed on the Dhaka Stock Exchange in 2006, BIFC became a “Z” category stock eight years later. BIFC's shares traded between Tk 10 and Tk 12 in the last two years and closed yesterday at Tk 10.80.

Source: <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/bifc-the-verge-collapse-1490989>

Walton gets nod for mobile assembly plant

Tech giant Walton has received a provisional licence from the telecom watchdog to assemble mobile phones in Bangladesh, hence becoming the first company to bag the approval for making handsets locally. Last month, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) visited the factory of Walton in Gazipur and handed over the interim licence to the company recently, said a senior official of the commission. The conglomerate has already started assembling different kinds of handsets in its hi-tech park and plans to market the products within a short time. Local ICT service provider Aamra Holdings Ltd, which owns and markets WE branded handsets, is in the process of getting the provisional licence. The company's senior officials will give a presentation before the regulator on Thursday to outline its plan and preparation, said the official.

Some other companies have also contacted the regulator and expressed their willingness to set up assembly plants but they have not applied officially, according to the official. “This is a big shift in the mindset of handset vendors,” he said. The development comes after the telecom regulator published a guideline in August this year to encourage manufacturing and assembling of handsets in the country. To encourage local assembly, the government has slashed customs duty for mobile parts by 24 percentage points to 1 percent in the current budget. Walton has also received permission from the regulator to assemble 51,000 3G-enabled smartphones in three models and has imported equipment for the sets, said a senior executive of the company.

Uday Hakim, a director of Walton, said the group has a full-fledged industrial park in Gazipur so it will not need to make a huge investment. However, the company has set aside Tk 100 crore for handset assembling. Aamra Holdings plans to start test production of smartphones in its assembly plant in the capital's Mirpur in the first week of December. The company plans to start commercial assembling from mid-December and exports from the plant will begin in the middle of next year, said AM Ehsan-ul Haque, chief operating officer of the smart solutions division at Aamra Holdings Ltd. After the planned presentation on Thursday, the company expects to obtain a demand note from the BTRC. Then the ICT service provider will have to complete some formalities to get the licence, according to Haque. Market leader Symphony and some other players are also looking for opportunities to establish assembly plants, said Ashraful Haque, director for marketing of Edison Group, the parent company of Symphony. Last year, Bangladesh imported 3.1 crore units of handsets at Tk 8,000 crore, according to Bangladesh Mobile Phone Importers Association. Besides, about 50 lakh handsets enter the country illegally every year, according to the telecom watchdog. The government said the scope to set up manufacturing or assembly plants will provide local entrepreneurs the scope to invest in technology which will create jobs and open up export opportunities.

Source: <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/walton-gets-nod-mobile-assembly-plant-1490977>

2 new land port projects deferred

Unpleasant relation with Myanmar

A decision had been taken in January this year to establish three new land ports in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to ensure smooth and efficient trade with India and Myanmar

Bangladesh is unlikely to establish land ports at Gundhum in Cox's Bazar and Tegamukh in Rangamati due to the prevailing unpleasant relation with Myanmar and lack of financial viability. A decision had been taken in January this year to establish three new land ports in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to ensure smooth and efficient trade with India and Myanmar, sources in the Land Port Authority (LPA) said.

The government had decided to establish three new land ports at Ramgarh in Khagrachhari, Gundam in Bandarban, and Tegamukh in Rangamati, said sources at the shipping ministry.

The sources also said Bangladesh has deferred the plan to build the port at Gundam in Cox's Bazar due to the current unpleasant relation with Myanmar because of the Rohingya crisis.

The government will also not proceed with the Teghamukh land port because of financial constraints and also because the World Bank (WB) has not approved the feasibility report prepared by the local government engineering department (LGED) due to poor assessment of the route that would connect the Chittagong sea port to the proposed Teghamukh land port.

However, the sources said that the WB has provided Tk 693 crore for a feasibility study of the proposed land port in Ramgarh in Khagrachhari and other port-related activities.

The port in Ramgarh will establish trade links with India's Tripura state with which Bangladesh shares about 400 km of land border.

The sources said the improvement of the Ramgarh land port would boost trade with Tripura. This would increase the efficiency of the Chittagong port, they added.

A WB team visited several ports, Customs points and the India-Bangladesh multimodal corridors in 2014 and 2015. Following its visits, the three land ports were selected on the basis of the WB team's suggestions, an LPA official said.

The official also said a WB mission would visit the proposed Ramgarh land port site in December, after which the government would take the next step to establish the port infrastructure.

He further said official formalities are being completed for going ahead with the establishment of the Ramgarh port. He expected it to be operational within three years.

Under the project, the infrastructure, warehousing facilities, transshipment and inspection systems, customs control procedures, and institutional and regulatory framework would be developed to facilitate the smooth functioning of the ports.

The LPA sources said the Indian side is eager about an early establishment of the Ramgarh port as it would facilitate cross-border connectivity. It would also makes commercial sense, as each hour's delay entails an additional cost of USD 10–15 and a single day's delay at the border raises the tariff on goods by 1 per cent.

Source: <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/123437>

Uber launches bike sharing service in Dhaka today

Popular ride-hailing company Uber is set to roll out its bike sharing service UberMOTO in Dhaka today, presenting yet another transport option for the city-dwellers yearning for more convenient service in a city known for its notorious traffic congestion.

The San Francisco-based global transportation technology company made the announcement on its official Facebook page. According to the post, riders using the two-wheeler service can travel 4 kilometres at less than Tk 60 in the capital. The popular ride-sharing venture also declared some distance-based prices. The fare for an 8km drive will be less than Tk 120 and for 20km it will cost less than Tk 300.

The company however said nothing about base fare, waiting charges, or per kilometre fare.

A spokesperson of Uber said there would be no waiting charges and further information will be made available after the service hits the road.

According to the official, MOTO drivers will carry two helmets: one for themselves and one for riders. All riders and drivers must wear the helmet as per the law. To use the service, users will have to select MOTO app on their smartphones, enter pickup location and payment method, and request a ride. They will receive the drivers' details: name, photo and details of the motorbike.

Riders can pay by cash, credit or debit card and receive an electronic receipt via the app.

UberMOTO is the second venture in Dhaka that is rolling out the motorcycle taxi-hailing service.

Pathao, a local venture, has gained huge popularity after it inaugurated the service in July last year.

Analysts said in cities like Dhaka where traffic jams cost its inhabitants dearly in wasted time, fuel and energy, bikes have become very popular as they help weave through the congestion cutting travel times.

Now it has become the most preferred and cost-effective transportation mode in Dhaka, evident from the surge of almost 40 percent in motorcycle sales in the past one year, according to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority.

Last year Uber introduced its car-based ride-sharing service in Dhaka.

Uber launched UberMOTO service in India and completed two million trips in the first year of the operation. It also had similar success in several cities of Indonesia and Vietnam.

Source: <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/uber-launches-bike-sharing-service-dhaka-today-1490974>

BB move fails to cool down dollar



The US dollar continues to appreciate against Bangladeshi currency taka despite the injection of a vast quantity of greenbacks into the market by the Bangladesh Bank as it endeavours to keep the exchange rate stable.

Yesterday, the inter-bank exchange rate of the US dollar stood at Tk 81.10, up from Tk 81.05 on Sunday and Tk 78.50 a year earlier, according to the central bank.

The BB has sold \$126 million to banks in the first 13 days of November and in October it sold \$160 million -- the highest yet in 2017. The central bank has sold a total of \$440 million to banks from July 1 to November 13. In contrast, it sold \$175 million and purchased \$1.93 billion during the course of fiscal 2016-17.

“But it is not yielding the desired result as the demand for the US dollar continues to rise,” said a BB official.

The taka has been depreciating against the US dollar since the middle of October mainly due to a mismatch between the demand and supply of the greenback, according to bankers and an economist.

Remittance and exports, the two major sources of foreign currency for Bangladesh, are in the slow lane, while imports have ballooned, they said.

The upward trend of the dollar is bad news for importers, who have to pay Tk 10 lakh extra for a bill of \$1 million if the dollar rate goes up by even Tk 1.

Bangladesh's import bills have significantly increased in the first four months of the fiscal year and the existing trend indicates that the payments will balloon further in the months to come. In the first three months of the fiscal year, imports soared 28.38 percent year-on-year to \$12.19 billion.

The import of food grains, capital machinery and industrial raw materials continues to rise, the BB official added.

“The current account balance posted a huge deficit in the first quarter of the fiscal year. This reflects the existing foreign currency shortage,” said another BB official.

Between the months of July and September, the current account deficit stood at \$1.79 billion, in contrast to \$539 million in the surplus a year earlier, according to data from the central bank.

During the period, the trade deficit widened to \$3.65 billion from \$1.56 billion a year earlier.

Inflation will accelerate if the taka depreciation trend continues, said AB Mirza Azizul Islam, a former caretaker government adviser. The government should take initiatives to increase the export earnings and remittance with a view to halting the depreciating trend of the taka, he added.

Source: <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/bb-move-fails-cool-down-dollar-1490986>

CIP: What is a Commercially Important Person in Bangladesh?

A CIP in Bangladesh can avail a number of benefits and facilities for one year once he or she has been given the card.

On Sunday, November 10, 2017, 164 people were recognised as Commercially Important Persons (CIP) by the Commerce Ministry for their contribution to the economic growth of Bangladesh in 2014.

The awardees included: Managing Director of Picard Bangladesh Limited Mohammad Saiful Islam, Managing Director of Bagerhat Sea Food Industries Ltd SM Amzad Hossain, Vice-chairman of Newage Apparels Ltd Asif Ibrahim, Managing Director of Ananta Apparels Limited Sharif Zahir, and Managing Director of Envoy Group Abdus Salam Murshedy, among others.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed handed over the CIP cards at a gala ceremony on Sunday held at Hotel Sonargaon in Dhaka.

With 562 CIP cards having been granted by the Commerce Ministry over the past four years, it begs the question: What exactly is a CIP and what benefits do they get?

CIPs are awarded in various categories each denoting a particular industry, such as the leather product sector, frozen food sector and knitwear sector.

A CIP in Bangladesh can avail a number of benefits and facilities for one year once he or she has been given the card for their contribution to their respective sector.

These facilities include permission to enter the Bangladesh Secretariat, invitations to participate at various national programmes, priority booking for air, railway and waterway tickets for business purposes, as well as assistance from the Foreign Ministry in the issuance of visas through letters of introduction that they send to the embassies concerned. Furthermore, CIPs also get access to the VVIP lounges at airports, and their family members receive priority when booking cabins at government hospitals for treatment.

However, some of the CIPs told the Dhaka Tribune that there were occasionally difficulties in availing these benefits. Picard Bangladesh Limited Managing Director Mohammad Saiful Islam, who received the CIP card for the seventeenth consecutive year, said: “We have all been getting the CIP facilities provided by the government regularly. However, there are some problems with priority booking for air, railway and waterway tickets for business purposes, which need to be addressed.”

Meanwhile, Envoy Group MD Abdus Salam Murshedy said: “There are a number of difficulties in availing the benefits offered by government agencies to CIPs. First, the CIP list is not updated regularly enough, so those who are granting the benefits sometimes do not believe that the CIP cards are real. Further confusion in this regard is created because the cards for 2014 are only being given now. In addition, some service providers do not even know what CIPs are.”

Source: <http://www.dhakatribune.com/business/commerce/2017/11/13/cip-commercially-important-bangladesh/>

BTRC cuts spectrum conversion fee amid telcos' pressure

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission has revised downward the fee for getting technology neutrality facility for each megahertz of spectrum in 900 and 1800 megahertz bands amid pressure from mobile phone operators.

The telecom regulator on November 8 made the decision at a special meeting with its chairman Shahjahan Mahmood in the chair, a senior official of the commission told New Age on Monday.

Under the technology neutrality facility, the operators are allowed to provide any of the 2G, 3G and 4G or long-term evolution services in any bands.

The telecom regulator under its latest revision proposed the ministry that the conversion fee for each MHz of spectrum in the 900 and 1800 bands should be \$4 million if entire spectrums in possession are converted, while the rate should be \$7.5 million for partial conversion of spectrums in the two bands.

The BTRC earlier proposed that the conversion fee for each MHz of spectrum should be \$7.5 million and the conversion of entire holdings in the 900 and 1800 MHz bands at once should be made mandatory.

BTRC officials said that the total allocation of spectrums in the two bands to the mobile operators was 82 MHz.

Dissatisfied with the BTRC's earlier decision, country's mobile phone operators requested the government top brass to intervene in the issue.

The telecom regulator made the revision following an instruction from the posts and telecommunication ministry after a tripartite meeting at the secretariat among the ministry, BTRC and top officials of the mobile phone operators in presence of prime minister's ICT affairs adviser Sajeeb Wazed Joy.

The BTRC, based on the instruction from the ministry, on October 30 held a meeting with the top officials of telecom operators where operators proposed that the conversion fee in case of conversion of entire bandwidth at once should be \$3 million per MHz, while the fee should be \$5 million per MHz in case of conversion of spectrums partially.

BTRC officials said that the commission would make it final after getting approval from the telecom ministry. Apart from launching 4G services, the telecom regulator earlier prepared to hold fresh auction for 2100 megahertz (MHz), 1800 MHz and 900 MHz within this year. At present, mobile operators use 900 MHz and 1800 MHz for 2G services, while 2100 MHz for 3G services and they enjoy technology neutrality in the 2100 MHz by default.

Source: <http://www.newagebd.net/article/28305/btrc-cuts-spectrum-conversion-fee-amid-telcos-pressure>

Economy progressing below true potential: MCCI

The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry has said that the country's economy was progressing below its true potential.

'Bangladesh's economy is progressing well, but below its true potential as infrastructure bottlenecks and shortage of power and energy generally prevent its performance at full capacity,' the MCCI said in its first quarterly review on economic situation of the country.

The MCCI on Monday released the review for the period between July and September of the current fiscal year 2017-2018.

The major macroeconomic indicators like per capita income, foreign currency reserve, import and foreign direct investment, however, showed a strong positive trend during the period, it said.

The overall economic situation was positive despite the presence of some risk factors such as marginal growth in remittances, slower growth in the export receipts, and a higher rate of inflation.

Bangladesh will need to increase the rate of export growth, generate more investments, improve the overall infrastructure, in particular its roads, railways and port facilities, increase power and gas production, and remove all other infrastructure bottlenecks to achieve the target of economic growth at 7.40 per cent during the Seventh Five Year Plan period, the MCCI said.

According to the report, the country's agriculture, industry, construction and services sectors performed well in the period but frequency of power outages has been on the rise in recent weeks despite a substantial increase in overall electricity production.

Infrastructure deficits and gas and power supply problems are now undermining the performance of all productive sectors of the economy, it said.

The government should adopt adequate steps to overcome these problems and achieve and maintain political stability, which are essential for creating an investment-friendly climate, so crucial to achieve higher economic growth, it added.

Source: <http://www.newagebd.net/article/28310/economy-progressing-below-true-potential-mcci>

Stocks rise for 2nd week riding on banks, GP

stocks advanced last week, for the second week in a row, despite a fall in share prices of two-thirds of the traded scrips as banks and Grameenphone soared on better financial results.

DSEX, the key index of Dhaka Stock Exchange, advanced by 1.55 per cent, or 94.54 points, over the week to close at 6,193 points on Thursday after gaining 80 points in the previous week.

Although the equity market opened negative on Sunday, it rebounded in the next session that sustained till the end of the week as investors remained on buying binge for sector specific scrips, market operators said.

Despite a decline in share prices of most of the scrips, the core index advanced in the week due mainly to the surge in share prices of banks and some of the other large capitalised scrips including GP, Beximco Pharmaceuticals and British American Tobacco, they said.

Investors regained confidence over the market after most of the companies declared strong earnings and better dividends.

Banks have been the catalyst for the recent market surge with an increase in their average share price by 4.45 per cent last week following their better profit growth for the third quarter.

Out of the 30 traded banks scrips, share prices of all of them except three advanced over the week.

Besides banks, Grameenphone continued drawing attention of many investors as the company reported better earnings for the third quarter.

With the highest market capitalisation of the market, the share prices of the mobile operator surged by 4 per cent that

contributed most to the index's rise in last week.

The surge in share prices of Beximco Pharmaceuticals, BATBC and Square Pharmaceuticals helped the market gain for the second week.

On the other hand, the share prices of Oimex Electrode plunged by 12 per cent after shooting up by 1,047 per cent on its debut on November 6.

Investment Corporation of Bangladesh, Lafarge Surma and Olympic Industries faced corrections, declining by more than 2 per cent each.

Cement, energy and pharmaceuticals declined by 1.3 per cent, 1.0 per cent and 0.8 per cent respectively.

The daily average turnover on the bourse advanced by 18.61 per cent to Tk 718.22 crore last week compared with that of Tk 605.52 crore in the previous week.

'Some recent positive news like many European investors are keen to invest in Bangladesh expecting Bangladesh to be one of the fastest growing economies within next few years, acted as building block behind this confidence among investors,' said EBL Securities.

Of the 336 companies and mutual funds traded, 207 declined, 116 advanced and 13 remained unchanged.

DS30, the blue chip index of the DSE, however, soared by 1.94 per cent, or 42.64 points, to close at 2,244.10 points over the week.

The Shariah index of the bourse, DSES, gained 0.92 per cent, or 12.18 points, to close at 1,341.29 points.

City Bank led the turnover chart in the week with its shares worth Tk 184.25 crore changing hands.

IFAD Autos, BRAC Bank, LankaBangla Finance, Dhaka Bank, Bangladesh Export Import Company, BBS Cables, United Commercial Bank, Grameenphone and Shahjalal islami Bank were the others turnover leaders.

Reckitt Benckiser gained the most in the week with 19.25 per cent increase in its share price, while Stylecraft was the worst loser, shedding 33.22 per cent.

Source: <http://www.newagebd.net/article/28204/stocks-rise-for-2nd-week-riding-on-banks-gp>

International News

Trump lauds Asia trade wins and red carpets

Donald Trump yesterday lauded his trade achievements during a five-nation tour of Asia, promising he would reveal "far bigger" steps when he returned to Washington.

The US president has frequently bemoaned what he calls "unfair" international trade deals and a perceived lack of respect for America and its leaders.

But standing alongside the prime ministers of Japan and Australia in Manila yesterday, he said that was all changing.

"The way they've treated us, the respect that Japan and China and South Korea, in particular—because we went there—have treated us has been really a great respect for the people of our country, the people of the United States," he said.

"And we very much appreciate it, I will say that. It was red carpet like nobody, I think, has probably ever received.

"And that really is a sign of respect, perhaps, for me a little bit, but really for our country."

Trump was lavished with praise during his time in Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing, in what analysts said was a deliberate strategy of flattery. In Japan he golfed with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and world number four Hideki Matsuyama, and met the revered Emperor Akihito.

In South Korea he was treated to clamorous applause during a parliamentary address, on the first state visit by a US leader in a quarter of a century.

Source: <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/123573>

Deadly quake kills over 400 in Iran, Iraq

At least 7,200 injured in the world's deadliest earthquake this year; hunt for survivors on; death toll to rise, say officials

People including rescue personnel conduct search and rescue work following a 7.3-magnitude earthquake at Sarpol-e Zahab in Iran's Kermanshah province yesterday. The earthquake shook the mountainous Iran-Iraq border triggering landslides that were hindering rescue efforts. More on page 8. Photo: AFP

Afp, Tehran

Teams of Iranian rescuers dug through rubble in a hunt for survivors yesterday after a major earthquake struck the Iran-Iraq border, killing at least 415 people and injuring thousands.

The 7.3-magnitude quake rocked a border area 30 kilometres southwest of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan around 9:20 pm (1820 GMT) on Sunday, the US Geological Survey said.

Many people would have been at home when the quake hit in Iran's western province of Kermanshah, where authorities said it killed at least 407 people and injured 6,700.

Across the border in more sparsely populated areas of Iraq, the health ministry said eight people had died and several hundred were injured.

Iraq's Red Crescent reported nine dead and more than 400 injured.

As dusk approached yesterday, tens of thousands of Iranians were forced to sleep outside in the cold for a second night as authorities scrambled to provide them with aid.

Some had spent Sunday night outdoors after fleeing their homes in the mountainous cross-border region, huddling around fires at dawn as the authorities sent in help.

"People's immediate needs are firstly tents, water and food," said the head of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards, Maj Gen Mohammad Ali Jafari.

"Newly constructed buildings... held up well, but the old houses built with earth were totally destroyed," he told state television during a visit to the affected region.

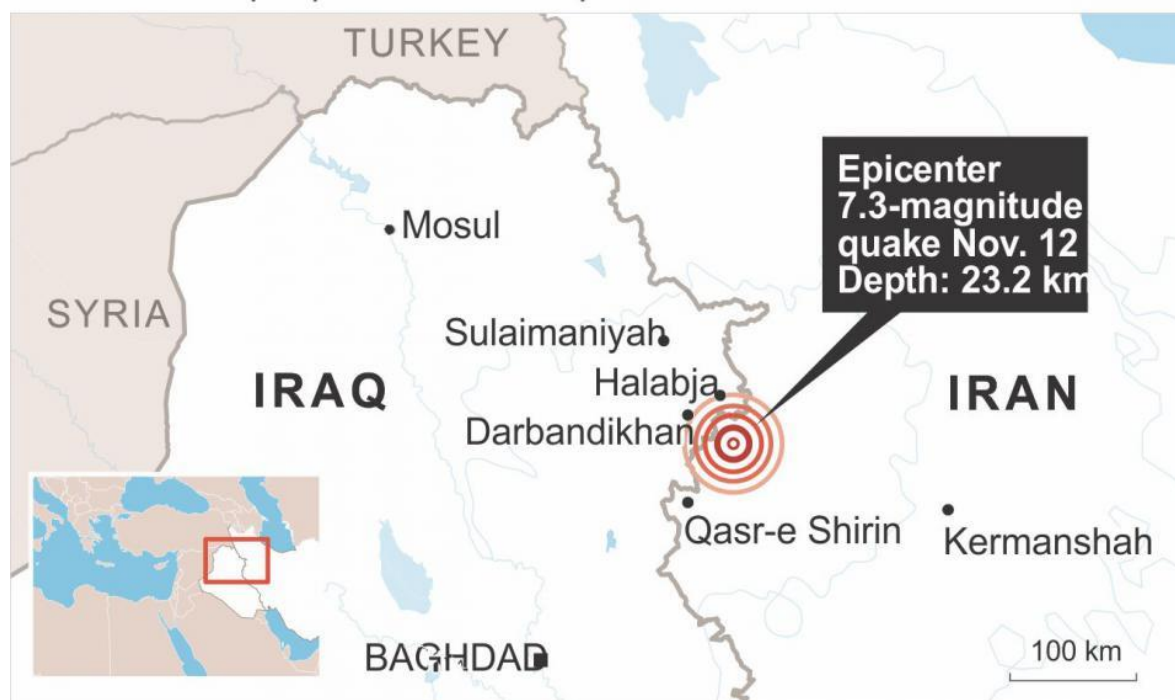
Hundreds of ambulances and dozens of army helicopters reportedly joined the rescue effort after Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered the government and armed forces to mobilise "all their means".

Like other foreign media organisations, AFP had not received authorisation to visit the scene of the disaster yesterday. Officials said they were setting up relief camps for the displaced.

Iran's emergency services chief Pir Hossein Koolivand said landslides had cut off roads to affected villages, impeding the access of rescue workers.

Iraq-Iran earthquake

Hundreds of people killed in the quake



Source : USGS.gov

© AFP

But by late afternoon, officials said all the roads in Kermanshah province had been re-opened, although the worst-affected town of Sar-e Pol-e Zahab remained without electricity, said state television.

The official IRNA news agency said 30 Red Crescent teams had been sent to the quake zone.

After initially pinning the quake's epicentre inside Iraq, the USGS then placed it across the border in Iran on Monday morning.

Iran's Sar-e Pol-e Zahab, home to some 85,000 people close to the border, was the worst hit with at least 236 dead.

At dawn, buildings in the town stood disfigured, their former facades now rubble on crumpled vehicles.

In an open space away from wrecked housing blocks, men and women, some wrapped in blankets, huddled around a campfire.

Iranian media reported that a woman and her baby were pulled alive from the rubble.

The towns of Eslamabad and Qasr-e Shirin were also affected, while the tremor shook several western Iranian cities including Tabriz.

Some 259,000 people live in the region, according to the most recent census.

State television showed tents, blankets and food being distributed in areas struck by the temblor.

In neighbouring Dalahoo County, several villages were totally destroyed, an official told Tasnim agency.

In Iraq, the health ministry said the quake had killed seven people in the northern province of Sulaimaniyah and one in Diyala province to its south.

More than 500 people were injured in both provinces and the nearby province of Kirkuk.

Footage posted on Twitter showed panicked people fleeing a building in Sulaimaniyah as windows shattered at the moment the quake struck. Images from the nearby town of Darbandikhan showed walls and concrete structures that had collapsed.

Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Syria offered their condolences, while Pope Francis called the quake a "tragedy" and expressed his "prayerful solidarity" with victims.

The quake struck along a 1,500-kilometre fault line between the Arabian and Eurasian tectonic plates, which extends through western Iran and northeastern Iraq.

The area sees frequent seismic activity.

In 1990, a 7.4-magnitude quake in northern Iran killed 40,000 people, injured 300,000 and left half a million homeless, reducing dozens of towns and nearly 2,000 villages to rubble in just seconds.

Thirteen years later, a catastrophic quake flattened swathes of the ancient southeastern Iranian city of Bam, killing at least 31,000.

Iran has experienced at least two major quake disasters since, one in 2005 that killed more than 600 and another in 2012 that left some 300 dead.

Source: <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/more-400-killed-earthquake-hits-iran-iraq-1490803>

Regional integration to boost South Asia's growth: ICCB

Regional integration among the South Asian nations is a must for increased trade and investment in order to achieve sustainable growth, said the International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh (ICCB).

"Regional integration impacts trade facilitation in several ways. It helps in inclusive growth and poverty reduction, reallocating capital and labour toward sectors holding a comparative advantage," said the local chapter of the Paris-based body in its July-September bulletin released last week.

"Trade facilitation and regional integration are two important factors for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals." According to the association, the beneficial link between trade and investment catalyses economic transformation, job creation and skill development.

It said strengthening regional integration for trade facilitation is particularly crucial for three reasons -- it can foster economic diversification and transformation, increase resilience to global economic shocks, and generate significant economies of scale through the widening of markets.

The ICCB said trade facilitation has a direct impact on trade costs and an indirect impact on the price of traded goods.

"It increases trade flows and ultimately leads to higher growth. Trade facilitation eases the cross-border movement of goods by cutting costs and simplifying trade procedures."

Quoting experts, the ICCB editorial said furthering the case for regional approaches, cooperation on many aspects of trade facilitation makes sense from an economic point of view.

Experience from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations suggests that moving forward on a regional basis might be a viable option, through pooling resources, opening markets to private multinational actors, and judicious use of mechanisms like mutual recognition.

The ICCB talked about the low level of trade among South Asian countries.

According to the World Bank, South Asia is one of the most dynamic regions in the world, with a population of 1.67 billion and economic growth of 7.1 percent over the last decade.

But South Asia is one of the least integrated regions. Intra-regional trade accounts for only 5 percent of South Asia's total trade, compared to 25 percent in the ASEAN.

The main reasons behind the lesser integration in South Asia, according to the WB, are high trade costs, investment restrictions and insufficient policy-relevant analytical work on gains of both trade and investment.

It is expected that with the gradual removal of these barriers, intra-regional trade in South Asia could increase from the current \$28 billion to \$100 billion, added the ICCB.

Source: <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/regional-integration-boost-south-asias-growth-iccb-1490971>