

Virus scare could affect Mujib Borsho celebrations

Says foreign minister

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said the coronavirus outbreak might affect foreign guests' presence at the celebrations of "Mujib Borsho".

"Coronavirus has caused panic globally and it may affect foreign guests' presence at the Mujib Borsho celebrations," he told reporters at Osmani International Airport after arriving in Sylhet to attend several programmes.

The minister said no foreign guest cancelled their trips yet over coronavirus. However, a guest cancelled the tour for another reason, he added.

"We are very much aware of it. We have been staying very alert. We hope that everyone will join the celebrations," said Momen, also a lawmaker from Sylhet-1.

"Mujib Borsho" will be observed from March 17, 2020, to March 26, 2021, through various programmes, marking the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The government said world leaders and eminent personalities would visit Bangladesh to take part in the programmes.

Among the foreign guests are Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, former Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohamad, Canadian PM Justin Trudeau, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Indian Congress leader Sonia Gandhi and former UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon.

Besides, all Bangladesh missions abroad will organise various programmes. The Unesco will also be celebrating the "Mujib Borsho" along with Bangladesh.

GK Shamim

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And this the reason why Shamim did not disclose the information to the media, he added.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star that the deputy attorney general concerned did not inform him about the HC order that granted bail to Shamim.

"We must move an appeal before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, challenging the HC order that granted bail to Shamim," he said.

Replying to a question, he said he would talk to the government authorities to decide on actions against the deputy attorney general concerned for not informing him about the HC order in this connection.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on September 20 last year arrested Shamim, known to be an influential contractor of the Public Works Department and a Jubo League leader, on charges of extortion and tender manipulation. His bodyguards were also arrested.

On that day, Rab members raided his house and office in the city's Niketan area and seized eight firearms, a huge amount of ammunition, FDR worth Tk 165 crore, around Tk 1.8 crore in cash, a large stash of US and Singaporean dollars and some foreign alcohol.

Later, Rab lodged three cases under the Narcotics Control Act and Arms Act against Shamim with Gulshan Police Station. Anti-Corruption Commission also filed a case against Shamim and his mother for amassing wealth worth Tk 297.08 crore beyond known source of income.

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A leader

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Tamim Iqbal, who carried Mashrafe on his shoulder after the win against Zimbabwe, was a regular fixture during addas in 'Bhai's' room. Whether it was a win or a loss, all players could be sure of one thing - at the end of the day, they would find normalcy in Mashrafe's room. They could also be sure of one other thing - Mashrafe would shield them from all outside pressures.

Mashrafe the bowler will of course be missed. By rights, he should have retired in 2015. But the last five years has been a study in how a bowler, who for much of his career was an out-and-out fast bowler, adapted into being a smart seam bowler who picked up numerous tricks to keep himself above the water in the face of numerous injuries.

But the man, whose chest thump from the dressing room during the Asia Cup final in 2018 calmed Liton Das's nerves and urged him to play sensibly on way to a maiden century, looms much larger than the player. And it is the man who will be acutely missed as he leaves the team in a state of chaos that was not his making, but one that he has had to deal with all his career.

Most parties nowhere near

Political party	Central Committee members	Number of Women	Percentage of women
Awami League	74	19	25.68%
BNP	73 (advisory body)	8	10.96%
Jatiya Party (Manju)	101	16	15.84%
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Jasad)	135	15	11.11%
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rob)	221	15	6.79%
Bangladesh Communist Party	53	8	15.09%
Gonotontri Party	5	0	0.00%
Gonoforum	101	10-15	9.9-14.8%
Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BASAD)	3	0	0.00%
Liberal Democratic Party	148	33	22.30%
Bangladesh National Awami Party	49	8	16.33%
Bangladesh Muslim League	101	12	11.88%
Pragatishil Ganatantrik Dal	251	33	13.15%
Bangladesh Biplabi Worker Party	unknown	unknown	20-25% (self-reported)
Bangladesh Islami Front	61	3	4.92%
Gonofront	51	17	33.33%
Bangladesh Kalyan Party	45	6	13.33%
Khelafat Majlis	93	31	33.33%
Zaker Party	unknown	unknown	33 percent (self-reported)
National People's Party	171	unknown	21 percent (self-reported)
Bangladesh Workers' Party	90	10	11.11%
Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal	26	0	0.00%
Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal	3	0	0.00%
Bangladesh National Awami Party (Bangladesh NAP)	71	27	38.03%
Jatiya Gonatantrik Party	82	30	36.59%

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percent of the committee. Seven posts are empty right now.

The BNP seems to have made little efforts to meet the requirement. Its advisory body which is comprised of 73 members includes eight women, meaning women make up only 11 percent of it.

Despite repeated attempts by this correspondent, leaders of Jatiya Party, the main opposition in parliament, could not confirm such numbers till last night.

Jatiya Party (Manju) has 16 women in its core committee of 101 members, said its Secretary General Sheikh Shahidul Islam, meaning women constitute 15.8 percent of the committee.

Bangladesh Worker's Party did not give any positive statistics either. Its Chairperson Rashed Khan Menon said, "There is one woman out of 15 members in the politburo, and 10 women among 90 members in the central committee."

Liberal Democratic Party's 148-member central committee includes 33 women, according to its chief Oli Ahmad. This makes for 22 percent of the committee.

Bangladesh National Awami Party's Secretary General Anamul Haque stated that there are 8 women in their central committee, which has 49 posts.

Bangladesh Muslim League's Secretary General Alhaj Kazi Abul Khaer said they have only 12 women in their 101-strong central committee.

There are 33 women in the 251-member central body of Pragatishil Ganatantrik Dal, according to its Secretary-General MA Hossain.

Bangladesh Islami Front's Secretary General MA Matin said they have 3 women among their 61-member central committee.

Talking to The Daily Star, only 5 parties claimed women constituted 33 percent of each of their central

committees. For example, Md Zakir Hossain, chairperson of Gono Front, said the party's 51-member central body includes 17 women.

Zaker Party's acting secretary general Ezazur Rasul also claimed that 33 percent of the party's central committee is comprised of women, but the exact figure was not available.

Ahmed Abdul Kader, secretary general of Khelafat Majlis, an Islamist political party, said, "We have 62 men and 31 women in the central committee."

But it must be noted that women are rarely seen in any of the party's activities. For example, the party posted photos of its general assembly held on December 25, 2019 on its website. One would easily notice that the committee members on the programme stage, and those watching from below were all men, with no women.

Jatiya Ganatantrik Party (JAGPA)'s acting chairperson Barrister Tasmia Pradhan says 36.6 percent of its core committee members are women. Out of 82 members, 30 are women, she said.

It is to be noted that other than the Awami League and the BNP, only two other parties have women as their head. JAGPA is one of them, while the other is Bangladesh Muslim League, which is headed by Begum Zobaidda Qader Chowdhury.

REACTIONS FROM LEADERS
Asked about the low participation of women in the committees, some blamed the existing patriarchy in the society, some pointed finger at the existing political practices, while some doubted the necessity of having women in the party to begin with.

LDP's Oli Ahmad said, "Because of the prevailing political situation and the problems they [women] face in day-to-day lives, women are not interested in joining politics."

"Many of them have developed a hatred for politics. They feel they have nothing to say."

Avoid public transport

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The novel coronavirus, termed COVID-19, has spread to nearly 100 countries.

"The first measure to stop coronavirus is to prevent transmission. We need everyone to help," Flora said yesterday.

The only facility where coronavirus can be tested in the country is the IEDCR laboratory in the capital.

The institute has so far examined 111 people and all of them tested negative for the virus, she said.

In separate hospitals, three people kept in isolation are being tested for the virus.

In the 24 hours until 8:00am yesterday, health officials tested

the temperature of 15,697 people entering the country.

Two Bangladeshis infected with the virus in Singapore are at a hospital there. One of them is in critical condition.

One Bangladeshi national in Italy and another in the United Arab Emirates have been admitted to hospitals with coronavirus infection.

Meanwhile, 23 Bangladeshis who were flown to India on Feb 27 from Wuhan in China are at a quarantine facility 40 miles away from Delhi, according to IEDCR.

India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and Afghanistan have reported coronavirus cases.

Coronavirus cases continue to rise

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revealed that the northern Lombardy region around Milan that has seen well over half of all infections had started "experiencing difficulties with the (number of) beds available in hospitals".

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Dilip Barua, chief of Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal, which has no women at its core committee, said, "Educated, intellectually active women do not want to come to politics."

Bangladesh Islami Front and Pragatishil Ganatantrik Dal totally dismissed the idea of having women in their central leadership.

"If we bring so many women in the committee, the party will simply not run," MA Hossain, secretary general of Pragatishil Ganatantrik Dal, told this correspondent.

Bangladesh Islami Front's Secretary-General MA Matin said, "Women themselves do not want this. They want to stay among themselves, the same way men want to stay among themselves. We have proposed that the Election Commission reconsiders this requirement."

Experts in the field working to increase women's participation in politics, however, beg to differ.

"Most men think that women want a separate unit for themselves. The women do not say that. The women's branch is about women's issues at the local level e.g. violence against women. They need to be given the chance to impact the party's decision-making powers," said Meghna Guhathakurta, executive director of Research Initiatives, Bangladesh.

Mujahidul Islam Selim, president of Bangladesh Communist Party, said, "We are being unable to bring more women into the party's fold as primary members. There are plenty of politically active women among garments workers and farm labourers, but we are not being able to bring middle-class women out of their shells, to make them join the mainstream politics."

About Workers Party Bangladesh, Rashed Khan Menon said, "Women have to cross several steps to reach the central leadership."

Guhathakurta said, "Political parties allow women only to rise up to a certain level, but not more than that. Women want to be a part of politics. For example, many women at the union parishad level are very ambitious. They want to be [promoted to] someone at the upazila branch. These are good ambitions."

A few parties are of the opinion that they do not have enough women in their parties due to the domestic duties performed by women.

Gonoforum's Azad Hossain said, "Married women dedicate their time to the welfare of their husbands and in-laws."

In June 2107, the Election Commission sent letters to all the registered political parties, asking them to inform it about their progress in achieving the target -- 33 percent women's representation by 2020.

In its reply, the AL said it would be able to fulfil the criteria by 2020.

The BNP said it hoped that the target would be achieved within the stipulated time.

Contacted, EC Deputy Secretary Abdul Halim Khan said the commission did not have any specific information about how many women leaders are there in the central and other committees of the political parties.

"We will send letters to all the registered political parties soon seeking information on the progress."

Currently, the EC has no plans to extend the deadline, said sources in it.

Asked what it would do if any political party failed to meet the deadline, Halim said, "Almost a year is still in their hand, let's see what happens."

The girls with clenched fist

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started taking Karate and Wushu lesson only a couple of weeks before, started kicking and punching the harassers until they ran away from the scene.

Like Shamima, a total of 145 girls aged 11-16 from remote villages of five districts --Rajshahi, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Barishal and Sunamganj -- were given a six-month self-defence training from May to October under the Shahosh (courage) initiative by World Vision Bangladesh.

Shahosh aims to teach girls for free to defend themselves from any forms of gender-based violence including rape and sexual abuse, forced prostitution, child marriage, dowry-related violence, sex trafficking and

The villagers respect us when we go to the karate class wearing our uniform," she said.

But the transformation was not so easy. A number of girls shared that, initially, their parents were reluctant to send them to the classes as they had to practise with boys.

"Many people of my area found it unacceptable that boys will mingle with us, which will be perceived negatively during our marriage," said Urmi Akter, a ninth-grader of Pranpur Girls High School, Tanore, Rajshahi.

"Many of them directly came to our house and forbade us from going to the karate class. They would say 'you are a girl, what is the use of learning such a thing since you will be married off soon'," she recounted.

However, after the first phase



A girl student of a six-month self-defence training practising karate at a primary school field in Rajshahi recently.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

forced labour.

"I had not learned all the moves by then, but, when they realised that I knew karate, they ran away immediately. This actually proves how effective self-defence is," said Shamima.

"Since that incident, everyone started calling me 'Karate-man' and stopped harassing me and my friends, for good," she added.

Shamima and the 59 other girls from Rajshahi are now preparing themselves for their first karate belt test. A number of girls from Rangpur have already earned the yellow, orange and green belt. The general order of karate belts is white, yellow, green, blue, brown and black.

"An overwhelming majority of them have the quality to play in the national team and earn a medal. If they can be trained for a few more months, they can easily earn a black belt," said Ruma Akter, the key female coach of Rajshahi's Shaolin Wushu Tai Chi Kung Fu Academy of Shahmukhdum.

Akter and her assistants have been conducting the training at the academy in Paba, at Sonadighi High School in Godagari and Pranpur Girls High School in Tanore upazila of Rajshahi.

Md Zahidul Kabir, national coordinator of the Social Inclusion and Policy Analysis Programme of World Vision Bangladesh, opines that girls should be taught martial arts to establish the fact that women are not a weak gender.

"It is not like that the girls will defeat the boys every time through beating. Rather, it is more about changing society's outlook towards girls that they are not weak and they know how to protest," said Zahidul.

"Besides, karate is not all about self-defence. Rather, it boosts the confidence of girls and helps them grow stronger, both mentally and physically," he added.

Eighth-grader Shapla Biswas of Baya High School and College, said the training has made her feel more empowered and helped her develop high self-esteem.

"Now, my parents don't feel insecure when I am out of the house.

of karate lesson, more and more mothers are sending their daughters to learn martial arts, defying social obstacles.

When sixth-grader Tonwee Minj received a minor wound on her nose during practice in the first week, nose from her village tried to convince her mother that such injuries leaving permanent mark would apparently create problems during Tonwee's marriage.

"But I never told my daughter to stop practising, because I knew, at the end of the course, it will bring more positivity to her life," said Tonwee's mother Laxmi Minj, a homemaker.

Apart from teaching the techniques for combating gender-based violence, the Shahosh initiative has also been engaging boys from the localities with trainings on positive masculinity. The Shahosh Boys Group are learning the concept of gender, recognising violence and understanding their role in preventing it.

Currently, World Vision Bangladesh is aspiring to extend the initiative in Dhaka, Nilphamari and Sherpur, and train a total of 280 girls in eight districts.

"We believe that not only girls, every adolescent should learn the techniques of self-defence and like many other countries, martial arts should be included in the physical education syllabus in our national curriculum in the secondary schools," said Zahidul.

He said self-defence will help adolescents have greater self-discipline and grow up to be responsible citizens.

According to Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK)'s data, a total of 1,413 women were either gang-raped or subjected to rape last year and of them 76 were killed after rape and 10 others died by suicide. But experts believe that this represents only the tip of the iceberg since most incidents of sexual violence go unreported out of fear of further harassment.

In such a dark and dire time, don't we need more and more girls like Shamima or Shapla? Perhaps a clenched fist is the best weapon to defend oneself in every violent situation.

Bangabandhu's speech

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people of the world for ages.

"It is the only speech which has been maintaining its appeal in the entire world for the last 49 years."

She said many people gave suggestions on the content of Bangabandhu's March 7 speech and some student leaders insisted on declaring independence at that moment arguing that the people would be frustrated if it was otherwise. But the Father of the Nation had known better what step he needed to take, the PM added.

Hasina said her mother played an important role in the decision-making by the Father of the Nation on his historic speech. "My mother could give a right decision at the right time during any crisis."

She said the Father of the Nation had given guidelines through his speech and the biggest word of it was that all would have to prepare for a war. "He clearly gave directives on what will have to be done for a guerrilla war and who will do what."

The PM said March 7 speech, which was once banned in the country, has won the recognition

of the world. It has been selected as the greatest speech in 2,500 years and also been placed in the world documentary heritage of the Unesco, she added.

She said the government expected that nobody would remain homeless in this Mujib Borsho, which would be celebrated from March 2020 to March 2021.

"It can't happen that one will remain homeless in this Mujib Borsho. We want to fulfill his [Bangabandhu's] desire."

The PM said her government had taken up various projects for the homeless people and it continued the efforts by following the footsteps of the Father of the Nation.

Hasina said she would provide money anyhow to arrange houses for the homeless families if any AL leader or activist could not spend money after finding such people.

The premier asked her audience to spread her call to every AL men across the country.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, delivered the introductory speech at the discussion, chaired by the PM.