

UN Council

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as possible to become a new member of the UN, China threatens to veto this move. The other members of the Council propose a compromise.

Pakistan President ZA Bhutto says that he believes Bangladesh will not be granted entry into the UN. "I can tell you emphatically that the door of the UN will be closed," he declares. He refers to China's veto power when asked to explain his position.

BANGABANDHU MAY EXTEND STAY IN CLINIC

Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is likely to stay at the London Clinic for a few more days before he proceeds to Switzerland for convalescence.

BM Abbas, adviser to the prime minister on flood control, power and irrigation, who arrived in London yesterday from Dhaka meets Bangabandhu today at the clinic and appraises him of the latest flood situation in Bangladesh.

\$19.2M AID GRANT FOR BANGLADESH

The United States Agency for International Development today announces a new grant of 1.2 million dollars to supply wheat, edible oil and other foodstuff to Bangladesh. This brings the economic and humanitarian assistance to Bangladesh since the beginning of the year to a total of 295.4 million dollars.

SOURCES: August 11, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Dainik Ittefaq.

India moves

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Benapole integrated check post (ICP), while 281 people want to enter through Phulbari-Banglabandha border, reported Indian news portal ThePrint.

Asked, an official at the Indian High Commission in Dhaka said the stranded ones had come to Bangladesh on tourist visas. He also said the borders might open soon and they would be sent back then.

The letter, sent by MEA Additional Secretary Vikram Doraiswami to West Bengal Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha, stated that the stranded people are "unskilled or semi-skilled" labourers, and have been living in "extreme distress" under the lockdown, with no financial support.

It said Delhi has offered to arrange trains and vehicles for them once the West Bengal government approves.

"They are all from weaker sections of our society. Many are living in extreme distress, including sheltering in schools verandahs or public parks, and are increasingly desperate to return home. It is not feasible for them to fly home, they can only hope to return if they are allowed to travel by rail or road," it said.

ThePrint tried to contact Chief Secretary Sinha, but didn't receive a response.

However, a top official in West Bengal told ThePrint that a call was yet to be taken on allowing the migrants to return.

In the early days of the lockdown, the Mamata Banerjee government was reluctant to bring back migrant labourers stuck in other states, fearing the spread of the novel coronavirus. The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs had, in fact, written a series of letters asking the state to allow them to return.

'Robotaxis'

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Similar efforts are under way in the US, and AutoX's chief executive Xiao Jianxiang told AFP the first fully-autonomous vehicles could be on the roads by the end of the year.

Robotaxis or delivery services are considered ideal for accumulating the driving time and huge data cache needed for cars to "learn" and become safe enough.

Chinese consumers -- known for eagerly embracing e-commerce, online payments and other digital solutions -- are lining up for a spin in DiDi Chuxing's self-developed autonomous taxis at a Shanghai pilot project launched in June.

Lebanese

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not enough ... the whole government should resign as it is unable to help the country recover," he said in his Sunday sermon.

Saturday's protests were the biggest since October when thousands of people took to the streets to demand an end to corruption, bad governance and mismanagement.

About 10,000 people gathered at Martyrs' Square, which was transformed into a battle zone in the evening between police and protesters who tried to break down a barrier along a road leading to parliament. Some demonstrators stormed government ministries and the Association of Lebanese Banks.

People defied dozens of teargas canisters fired at them and hurled stones and firecrackers at riot police, some of whom were carried away to ambulances. One policeman was killed and the Red Cross said more than 170 people were injured.

"The police fired at me. But that won't stop us from demonstrating until we change the government from top to bottom," Younis Flayti, 55, a retired army officer, said yesterday.



People walk past a burnt truck, set ablaze by protesters during clashes on Saturday night following a demonstration against a political leadership they blame for a monster explosion, in downtown Beirut, Lebanon yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Illegal lifting unstoppable

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She also submitted that the use of drills, dredging or mechanised machines -- a violation of lease agreements -- is damaging the environment as well as private and public properties including roads, bridges, agricultural land, and homesteads.

The petitioner also said it would be "whimsical" and an aberration of the law to allow silica sand extraction in the absence of an EIA.

She also pointed out that silica sand is essentially a mineral resource and thus falls under the "red" category of industries like other mineral resources and so, an EIA is required for a mandatory ECC.

For the past two years, however, the Bureau has failed to conduct an EIA and instead, it has been at loggerheads with the Department of Environment (DoE) over it.

It has sent a number of letters to the DoE to conduct the EIA, which the latter declined to comply with, terming it not their responsibility, according to various sources with knowledge of the matter.

The director general of BMD sent a letter to his DoE counterpart on January 7, 2019 requesting an EIA of the 51 silica sand quarries in Moulvibazar.

The DoE DG responded on January 30, 2019 saying the DoE does not assess the environmental impact for any department or organisation. The DoE could only provide an ECC, he said, after getting an EIA report from the BMD.

The BMD DG then sent another letter to the DoE DG on February 14 that year, requesting them again to undertake an EIA of the 51 quarries in the district.

Taking advantage of the long delay during which official work in the quarries remains stalled, traders engaged in indiscriminate illegal extraction of the silica sand -- posing a serious threat to the environment and ecology of the north-eastern district known for its unique beauty and natural appeal, said experts and locals.

The Daily Star had earlier reported -- including in May 2019 and February this year -- on such illegal sand lifting which locals said are controlled by influentials.

During a recent visit to Jetarchhara, Shashan, Islampara and Ichhamati villages in Sreemangal upazila, this correspondent saw traders illegally lifting silica sand using dredgers and long pipelines.

Kabir Mia, a resident of Islampur village, said sand traders, with the

help of local influentials, have been extracting sand from agricultural land by setting up excavator machines and dredgers.

Kabir said the traders were extracting silica sand from a depth of 30 to 40 feet, leaving nearby agricultural and hilly land and canals vulnerable.

Joly Paul, convener of Lawachhara Bon O Jibaboichitra Rokkha Andolon, told this correspondent the illegal sand trade, worth crores of taka, is going on unabated in Sreemangal.

As a result, natural reservoirs, small rivers, hilly streams, protected areas, tea gardens, croplands, roads, river terminals, bridges, and culverts, are all in jeopardy, she added.

Sreemangal Upazila Nirbahi Officer Nazrul Islam admitted that illegal sand lifting continued despite strict vigilance. He said his office fined illegal sand lifters Tk 78.5 lakh in 21 months till July -- the period he has been in office.

Badrul Huda, assistant director of DoE in Moulvibazar, confirmed to this correspondent recently that letters were exchanged between the DoE and the Bureau on the matter of the EIA.

"Recently, we issued a letter to the BMD for submitting the application for an ECC with EIA in accordance

with the Bangladesh Environment Conservation Rules, 1997. If they [BMD] submit applications, we will be able to proceed to comply with the High Court judgment," he said.

Contacted, Mamunur Rashid, deputy director of BMD, said, "We do not have funds to conduct an EIA. It is up to the environment department to assess the environmental impact. It's something they haven't done yet and that is why the process is being delayed."

Sharif Jamil, general secretary of the Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon's central committee, termed the whole episode a cruel irony.

"Whenever there is a step taken to protect our natural resources, a new way of misappropriation emerges to damage the environment more than before."

Jamil said government bodies were supposed to follow up on a good decision swiftly and in a transparent way.

"But they are delaying it only to promote rampant illegal sand lifting. And it is only profiting some corrupt government officials and influential politicians for the last couple of years," said Jamil, adding that the Anti-Corruption Commission should conduct an inquiry into the matter.

India Covid tally crosses 21 lakh

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"India is performing around 500 tests for detection of Covid-19 per minute and the per-day testing capacity has increased over five lakhs," scientist and ICMR media coordinator Lokesh Sharma was quoted by news agency PTI as saying.

Meanwhile, the United States set a record for coronavirus cases on Saturday, with more than 5 million people now infected, according to a Reuters tally.

The country has recorded more than 160,000 deaths, nearly a quarter of the world's total.

The grim milestone comes as President Donald Trump signed executive orders intended to provide economic relief to Americans hurt by the pandemic after the White House failed to reach a deal with Congress.

Trump said the orders would provide an extra \$400 per week in unemployment payments, less than the \$600 per week passed earlier in the crisis. Some of the measures were likely to face legal challenges, as the US Constitution gives Congress

authority over federal spending.

"This is the money they need, this is the money they want, this gives them an incentive to go back to work," the Republican president said of the lower payments. He said 25% of it would be paid by states, whose budgets have been hard hit by the crisis.

Republicans have argued that higher payments were a disincentive for unemployed Americans to try to return to work, though economists, including Federal Reserve officials, disputed that assertion.

Australia's second-most populous state, Victoria, reported its deadliest day of the Covid-19 outbreak yesterday, with 17 people dying, as police thwarted a planned anti-mask rally in the capital of Melbourne.

Victoria, at the centre of a second wave of infections in Australia, reported 394 cases in the past 24 hours, compared with a daily average of 400-500 over the past week. The new deaths bring the state's total to 210.

Brazil on Saturday surpassed

100,000 coronavirus deaths and three million cases of infection, crossing the grim milestone after President Jair Bolsonaro said he had a "clear conscience" on his response to the outbreak.

With 100,477 fatalities and 3,012,412 confirmed cases, the South American nation of 212 million people is the second hardest-hit country in the global pandemic, after the United States.

The health ministry reported 905 new deaths in the past 24 hours, as well as 49,970 fresh cases.

The coronavirus has killed at least 727,288 people globally since it emerged in China last December, with at least 19,674,290 cases meaning the 20 million mark is likely to be breached in the next few days.

According to an AFP tally, some 11,665,200 people are now considered to have recovered from the illness.

In France, growing infections in and around Paris have prompted officials to make face masks compulsory outdoors in crowded areas and tourist

hotspots in the city and surrounding areas from today.

The mask will be obligatory for all those aged 11 and over "in certain very crowded zones," said a police statement, including the banks of the Seine River and more than 100 streets in the French capital.

Several resort towns on the Belgian coast said they will bar day-trippers after fights broke out between police and youths told to leave a beach for refusing to respect coronavirus safety measures.

New Zealand marked 100 days yesterday with no recorded cases of the coronavirus in the community but health officials warned there was no room for complacency.

There are still 23 active cases but all were detected at the border when entering the country and are being held in managed isolation facilities.

"Achieving 100 days without community transmission is a significant milestone, however, as we all know, we can't afford to be complacent," director-general of health Ashley Bloomfield said.

Pull out troops from Depsang

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importance, Depsang Plains is more crucial than the Pangong Tso and Gogra areas, where the deadlock in troop disengagement has largely persisted despite five rounds of the highest military dialogue at the corps commander-level till now.

The "one-rung lower" talks on Saturday were held between 3 Infantry Division commander Major General Abhijit Bapat and his PLA counterpart on the Chinese side of the DBO-Tien Wien Dien (TWD) border personnel meeting point from 11:00 am to 7:30 pm.

"Below the corps commanders, who are focusing on the major face-off sites, talks are being regularly conducted at the level of colonels, brigadiers and major generals for discussing specific sectors," said a source.

There was no official word on the Saturday meeting. But sources said Gen Bapat insisted that the PLA troops camping near the "Bottleneck" or "Y-junction" area in Depsang Plains since May should not continue to block Indian soldiers from going to

their traditional Patrolling Points (PPs)-10, 11, 12 and 13.

The "Bottleneck" area is around 18-km inside what India perceives to be its territory, though the Chinese claim line lies another 5-km to the west of it. China, in fact, claims 972 square km of territory in the region.

The last major troop face-off in Depsang Plains, the table-top plateau located at an altitude of 16,000-feet and just about 35-km south of the critical Karakoram Pass, took place in April-May 2013.

The PLA troops had then intruded 19-km across the LAC to camp at the Raki Nalla area, with the confrontation finally being resolved after 21 days of hectic diplomatic negotiations.

A large and permanent PLA presence in Depsang can conceivably threaten India's two available access routes to the logistical hub and airstrip at DBO and the critical Karakoram Pass in the north.

"Depsang is an old problem due to the hugely overlapping claims. Rival soldiers from both sides used to go to their PPs in the past. But over the last

two-three years, there has been some blocking of each other's patrols. This has aggravated since May," said the source.

The PLA has also deployed over 12,000 troops, with tanks and artillery guns, from its 4th Motorised Infantry Division and 6th Mechanised Infantry Division along the LAC across the Depsang-DBO sector.

The Indian Army, too, has counter-deployed with a couple of infantry brigades and an armoured brigade in the region, as was reported by TOI earlier.

ARMS EMBARGO LIST

India yesterday announced a negative arms imports list, under which acquisition of 101 weapon systems and platforms from abroad will be progressively banned from December 2020 to December 2025, in a bid to bolster the fledgling domestic defence production sector.

The 101 items, with different embargo timelines, range from some types of ammunition, sonars, radars, artillery guns and assault rifles to missile destroyers, transport aircraft, light combat helicopters, wheeled armoured fighting vehicles,

conventional diesel-electric submarines and communication satellites.

Announcing the decision, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said it was "a big step towards self-reliance in defence production" in accordance with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiative.

Though outright procurements of the notified products from abroad will be banned, Indian public and private sector companies can continue to tie-up with foreign manufacturers to produce them in India. This is in tune with the government decision in May to hike the FDI limit to 74% from 49% in the defence production sector through the automatic clearance route.

The new negative list includes many products that are already being produced domestically or are in the research and development phase.

The list, for instance, includes the 123 Tejas light combat aircraft that IAF is expected to induct for over Rs 85,000 crore. "Such products have been included to ensure their indigenous content is increased progressively," said an official.

Latifur Rahman's

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ancestral home in Cumilla after a prolonged bout of lung-related illness. He was buried at Banani graveyard that day.

Latifur was an iconic figure in the business world and highly respected nationally and internationally for his ethical business practices for which he received many global and regional awards.

He was the founding director of Mediaworld, the owning company of The Daily Star, and the chairman of Mediastar, the owning company of Prothom Alo -- leading English and Bangla newspapers of the country. He was a driving spirit behind the establishment of The Daily Star.

Latifur was a member of the executive board of ICC-Paris, vice president of ICC-Bangladesh and member of Brac's governing body.

He was also a member of Bangladesh Better Business Forum and Advisory Committee on World Trade Organization.

Latifur had been president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka for seven terms.

He was also chairman of the Bangladesh government's Trade Body Reforms Committee and a member of Bangladesh Bank's executive board.

Latifur was an honouree of "Oslo Business for Peace Award 2012" and was awarded Business Executive of the Year 2001 by the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh.

He had also been honoured with the "SAARC Outstanding Leader" award and Lifetime Achievement Award presented by the UK Bangladesh Catalysts of Commerce and Industry.

Latifur started his career in 1966 in his family-owned jute mills in Chandpur. He worked as an executive in the mills till 1971.

He established Transcom Group in 1973 after W Rahman Jute Mills, the major earning source for the Rahman family, was nationalised in 1972.

In the 1980s, Latifur became the sole importer and distributor of Nestlé products in Bangladesh. In the 1990s, he bought Smith, Kline & French, and a US-based pharmaceutical, later known as Eskayef.

He was married to Shahnaz Rahman. They have three daughters Simeen Hossain, Shahzreh Huq, (late) Shazneen Rahman and a son, Arshad Waliur Rahman.

Flood ravaged

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Dimla upazila returned their homes after spending days on dams, dykes, and educational institutions where they took shelter from flood.

Many of them found their houses damaged partially or completely. They claim they did not get any assistance from the government.

There is no rehabilitation programme from the government for the flood-victims, said villagers in the upazila.

Mesbahur Rahman, project implementation officer of Dimla, said only the river erosion victims would get the government help to rebuild their houses, and there was no programme yet for the other victims to assist them in repairing their houses.

Abul Hosen, 65, of Bhendabari shool, said the government gave them rice, but there was no financial assistance to rebuild their houses.

SA Hayat, district relief and rehabilitation officer, said they provided Tk 2,000 and dry food to each erosion victim family and that they were planning to give them corrugated iron sheets soon.

In Gaibandha, over 2.52 lakh people have been affected by flood. Thousands lost their houses to river, but the district administration did not rehabilitate any flood victim yet.

Shoma Rani Shah, 30, of Goghat village in Sadar upazila, said, "I had a small shop and a house, but everything went into the Brahmaputra river last week. Now my family members are passing very hard times as we have no earnings. I did not get any help from the government."

Contacted, AKM Idris Ali, district relief and rehabilitation officer, said, "When floodwater recedes completely, we will enlist the affected people to rehabilitate them."

Locals say around 1,000 people have been displaced from the Char areas in Bogura after floodwater washed away their homes.

Mubarak Hossain, 45, of Aucharpara char under Sariakandi upazila, said during the flood, homes of 350 families and croplands were devoured by the Jamuna. But they did not get any help from the government. They were now living under the open sky, he said.

In Sunamganj, about 1,76,712 families have been affected by flood and 1,064 people were still living at shelter centres as their houses are not repaired yet or remain flooded.

But there is apparently no rehabilitation plan for the affected people.

Jahirul Alam, assistant commissioner (in-charge of relief and rehabilitation) of Sunamganj district administration, said, "Most families get relief multiple times, but we cannot start their rehabilitation yet due to shortages of corrugated iron sheets. We wrote to the disaster management and relief ministry seeking 1,000 bundles of tin and money."

[Our correspondents from Nilphamari, Bogura, and Sylhet contributed to this report]