

Hezbollah, Hamas chiefs meet to discuss Israel-Arab ties

AFP, Beirut

Leaders of Lebanon's Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas movement, both enemies of Israel, have met to discuss diplomatic normalisation between the Jewish state and Arab countries, a report said yesterday.

They stressed the "stability" of the "axis of resistance" against Israel, the Hezbollah-run Al-Manar TV channel reported, without saying where or when the meeting took place.

Hassan Nasrallah, head of the Iran-backed Shiite Hezbollah movement,

was pictured meeting Ismail Haniyeh, who heads the political bureau of Hamas, the Islamist movement that control the Gaza Strip.

They discussed "political and military developments in Palestine, Lebanon and the region" and "the dangers to the Palestinian cause" including "Arab plans for normalisation" with Israel, Al-Manar said.

The meeting comes after an August 13 announcement that the Jewish state and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to normalise ties.

She drew ire from land

FROM PAGE 1

were attacked by the gang several times.

This must have angered some people, he said.

Wahida and her father Sheikh Omar Ali were seriously injured in an attack at her official residence early Thursday.

Rab officials said later that day that a suspect admitted to breaking into the house to steal valuables.

Dinajpur Deputy Commissioner Mahmudul Alam yesterday said the attack on Wahida was aimed at killing her.

"What is burglary? Nothing has gone missing there," he said, adding, "The assailants had been at the house for almost three and a half hours. Why would they hit wahida and her father with a hammer?"

DEMAND FOR JUSTICE

Government employees in Ghoraghat formed a human chain in front of the upazila parishad office yesterday demanding exemplary punishment of the attackers. They also stressed that it was not an incident of burglary.

Meanwhile, a Senior Judicial Magistrate Court placed Asadul Haq, an accused in the case filed over the attack, on a seven-day remand yesterday afternoon.

The two other accused, Nabirul Islam and Santu Das, were placed on remand on Saturday. They are being interrogated at the detective branch office in Dinajpur.

Mutation rate faster

FROM PAGE 1

For the BCSIR study released yesterday, data on 263 cases of genome sequencing was collected from areas in eight divisions between May 7 and July 31 this year.

Analysing the data, researchers noticed the presence of variant G614 in all the cases, which is largely responsible for virus transmission in the country.

"The virus mutations analysed through the study are not like the ones seen in other countries. The virus here appears to be weaker," BCSIR Principal Scientific Officer Md Salim Khan, who led the study team, told this newspaper.

According to the World Health Organisation, six major types of the novel coronavirus are found across the globe. And of those, four have been found in Bangladesh, said the BCSIR researchers.

VIRUS MUTATION

To replicate, a virus uses a host cell where it leaves its genetic elements. This results in millions of copies of the virus in the human body cell.

However, errors can creep in during this process when the virus replicates and such types of incidents are called mutation of the virus.

As a mutation creates new subtypes of the virus, it makes the development

of an effective vaccine or drug against it very difficult.

These different variants also explain why a virus can trigger waves of infections of varying severity in different regions of the world, and why infections can also progress very differently in different people, say researchers.

"Mutation in the virus is usual. But knowing the clinical features of the virus -- severe or mild -- is very important. Because, it helps devise a plan to suppress the transmission," said noted virologist Prof Nazrul Islam, also member of the National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19.

He pointed out that there is no study that says what types of virus strain are prevalent in different regions of the country.

"We are just getting information on virus mutations. We need to carry out a thorough study to fight the virus," he added.

BCSIR officials said they sent their study report to 50 research organisations that are working on Covid-19 vaccine. Those include US biotech firm Moderna, Oxford University and Chinese firm Sinovac.

This will help the organisations develop vaccines fit for people in this region, they claimed.

Even final tests

FROM PAGE 1

without any exams as all schools are closed due to the pandemic.

On August 27, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, "As the final exams are approaching, we are looking for ways to do what we can. There will be no exams ... we are thinking about what more we can do. Maybe we can promote without an exam."

All educational institutions have been closed since March 17 due to the pandemic. These will remain closed at least until October 3.

Since all schools and other educational institutions have been closed, academic activities of about two crore students of primary, secondary, and tertiary levels are being hampered.

The government cancelled this year's Junior School Certificate (JSC) and its equivalent Junior Dakhil Certificate exams as well as Primary Education Completion (PEC) and its equivalent Ebtedayee Education Completion exams due to the pandemic and the closure of schools.

Instead of public exams, students will have to appear in final exams at their schools.

The PEC and its equivalent exams for the fifth graders and JSC and its equivalent exams for the eighth graders were slated for November. These are the two largest public exams.

Besides, first-and second-term exams at primary schools and half-yearly tests at secondary schools have

been postponed.

Holding of this year's Higher Secondary Certificate and its equivalent exams has been deferred for an indefinite period from April 1.

At yesterday's press conference, Secretary Akram said before reopening of schools, every institution would have to make a plan on how they would conduct their regular activities.

He said many kindergartens could be forced to close due to fund crisis. "So, we have already asked all concerned that students [of closed kindergartens] can be enrolled at government primary schools situated in the catchment area," he said.

State Minister for Primary and Mass Education Zakir Hossain told the conference that the country's literacy rate is now 74.7 percent.

Last year, the rate was 73.90 percent.

The literacy rate increased due to the government's persistent initiatives, said Zakir, adding that the rate was 53.50 percent in 2005 during the BNP-Jamaat-led four party alliance government.

The country will observe the International Literacy Day tomorrow. This year's International Literacy Day focuses on "Literacy teaching and learning in the Covid-19 crisis and beyond," he added.

The day is being celebrated across the world since 1967 with a view to raising awareness globally on the issues surrounding adult and child literacy.



A garment factory official near DEPZ in Baipail is taking down the details of job-seekers, many of whom are disregarding social distancing measures. This photo was taken around 8:00am yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Ensure proper plan for safety

FROM PAGE 1

might occur anytime," the PM said.

She was participating in a discussion on a condolence motion at the demise of two sitting ruling Awami League MPs -- Sahara Khatun and M Israfil Alam -- as well as former president of India Pranab Mukherjee.

In her speech, the PM said the government has already asked the authorities to unearth the causes behind Friday night's mosque explosion that claimed 25 lives so far and left several injured.

"I have directed the cabinet secretary and the other authorities concerned to find out what caused the blast."

She said experts have visited the place of occurrence and samples are being collected to this end.

The Leader of the House also directed all to find out whether the explosion took place due to irregularities in taking permission to build a mosque over a gas pipeline or whether the mosque was lacking proper power connections for the six air conditioners in such a small space.

She added, "Did Rajuk give permission [for the construction of a

mosque over a gas pipeline]?... It [such permissions] should not be given. Because, there is always a risk and now that will be under investigation."

Hasina asked the authorities concerned to look into whether air conditioners are being installed in an unplanned manner at mosques across the country and also whether mosques are being built on unauthorised grounds.

She said her government has taken all possible measures to provide proper treatment to the burn victims.

The PM also said she is getting frequent updates about those injured from Dr Samanta Lal Sen, chief coordinator of Sheikh Hasina National Burn and Plastic Surgery Institute.

BDR MUTINY

Recalling Sahara Khatun's role during the 2009 BDR mutiny, Hasina said the incident occurred just 52 days after the AL had formed the government, and those who could not come to power at that time were behind the tragedy.

Talking about BNP and some other quarters "spreading rumours on different occasions about the BDR mutiny", the AL chief said, "We'd just formed the government. Why would

we carry out such an incident?"

She also said that of the army officers killed in the mutiny, 33 were from AL-leaning families.

"The truth must come out someday," she hoped.

Hasina said Sahara, then minister for home affairs, had risked her life when she visited Pikhana to receive the arms surrendered by the mutineers as well as rescue the stranded army officers and their families.

"We saw her courage during the BDR mutiny," she added.

Several other MPs of the treasury and opposition benches, including Jatiya Party's GM Quader and Moshir Rahman Ranga, and BNP's Harunur Rashid also took part in the discussion on the condolence motion.

The motion was adopted unanimously.

Names of some other distinguished personalities who died since the prorogation of the 8th session of the current parliament on July 9 also came up in the discussion.

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury moved the motion immediately after the House went into its ninth sitting around 11:05am.

Ray in the darkness

FROM PAGE 1

children to study at the primary level free of cost. Currently, around 50 students are studying in braille from the first to fifth grade.

After the fifth grade, BERDO helps these students integrate into mainstream schools and provides them with necessary books and other learning materials.

Today, many of these students are studying at various public universities.

Md Anwar Hossain, currently a 3rd-semester student of Islamic studies at the University of Dhaka, was born visually impaired. His parents initially admitted him to the Hizf department of a local madrasah in Mirpur, where students memorise the Holy Quran through rote-learning, as they weren't aware of braille education.

When they heard about BERDO, Anwar was admitted there. "One thing I will say is that BERDO gifted me the light of education which I didn't have before and it has brought about the most significant changes in my life. Otherwise, I might not have gotten admitted to DU."

BERDO's library is equipped with around 500 braille books and 300 audio cassettes and CDs containing curriculum books, children's books, story books, poetry, and novels.

It also has a recording studio -- where university students voluntarily record books which are not in braille -- as well as a computer lab which helps its students develop their computer and ICT skills with the help of screen-reading software.

Considering how scarce braille books were for Saidul and his contemporaries, BERDO also set up a braille book production centre. After BERDO printed 67 sets of braille books for eighth graders under the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) last year, they received an order for NCTB braille books for 860 students in grades one through 10 this year.

The organisation is also helping to connect differently abled people with appropriate employment opportunities and income-generating activities.

"We have already managed jobs for around 250 people with disabilities in various banks, corporations, educational institutions, and other private companies," said Saidul.

For the past nine years, visually impaired 40-year-old Mst Monju Akter has worked as an information officer at Daffodil International University -- a position BERDO helped her find.

Physically disabled 53-year-old Md Abdul Hai, who lost a leg due to

illness, was trained and given Tk 1 lakh with which he bought an auto-rickshaw and earns a living by driving for fares and doing repair work at an auto-rickshaw garage.

Hai also trains other people with disabilities, who once begged on the streets, to earn a living by doing minor repair work and maintenance of auto-rickshaws.

The organisation itself employs 13 people with disabilities, most of who have been working there for decades.

Back in 1993, Saidul was made an Ashoka Fellow in recognition for his contribution for the people with disabilities. In June last year, BERDO received national recognition from the government for its outstanding contribution to the betterment of people with disabilities.

Saidul aspires to expand his work to all 64 districts of the country, have a braille press so that large numbers of braille books can be churned out, and set up a separate residential school for visually impaired girls.

"We also want to establish a technical training centre for people with disabilities, so that those who don't have education can work and earn money such as in bookbinding, notebook binding, and braille book production."

Tunisian officer stabbed to death, 3 'terrorists' killed in firefight

AFP, Sousse

Attackers with knives killed a Tunisian National Guard officer and wounded another yesterday before three assailants were shot dead in a firefight, the security force said, labelling it a "terrorist" act.

The attack took place in the tourist district of the coastal city of Sousse, the site of the worst of several jihadist attacks in recent years, where 38 people, most of them Britons, were killed in a 2015 beachside shooting rampage.

"A patrol of two National Guard officers was attacked with a knife in the centre of Sousse," 140 kilometres (80 miles) south of the capital Tunis, said National Guard spokesman Houcem Eddine Jebabli.

"One died as a martyr and the other was wounded and is hospitalised," he said, adding that "this was a terrorist attack".

The attackers had first rammed the officers of the national gendarmerie with a vehicle, said the interior ministry in a statement.

After the knife attack, security forces pursued the assailants, who had taken the officers' guns and vehicle, through the Akouda district of the city's tourist area of El-Kantaoui, said Jebabli.

"In a firefight three terrorists were killed," he said, adding that security forces "managed to recover" the car and two pistols the assailants had stolen.

British ambassador to Tunisia Louise de Sousa tweeted she was "appalled to hear of the attack on a National Guard patrol in #Sousse this morning."

"My sincere condolences to the family of the murdered officer & I wish a swift recovery to the injured. #UKSupportTunisia"

Tunisia, since its 2011 popular revolution, has been hit by a string of jihadist attacks that have killed dozens of security personnel, civilians and foreign tourists.

A suicide attack against security forces protecting the US Embassy in Tunis killed a Tunisian police officer and left several others wounded in March.

2015 was a particularly bloody year, with three major deadly attacks claimed by the Islamic State group.

An attack at the capital's Bardo museum in March killed 21 foreign tourists and a security guard.

Just three months later, the 38 tourists were killed in the shooting rampage at Sousse.

And that November, a bomb blast

on a bus in central Tunis killed 12 presidential guards.

While the situation has significantly improved since then, Tunisia has maintained a state of emergency.

Assaults on security forces have persisted, mainly in remote areas along the border with Algeria.

Tunisia has been praised as the Arab success story among the 2011 Arab Spring popular uprisings that swept the region and brought down many autocrats, among them Tunisia's long-time president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

But the small Mediterranean country of about 11 million people is mired in an economic crisis, with the official unemployment rate at 18 percent, and in need of new assistance from the International Monetary Fund.

Last week Tunisia's parliament approved a new technocratic government led by Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi which faces the task of tackling deep social and economic woes in the North African country.

The 46-year-old premier pledged to revitalise the economy, including the crucial tourism sector, which had rebounded after the jihadist attacks but has been hit hard this year by the coronavirus pandemic.

Turkey 'disappointed' by Kosovo's move to recognise Israel

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday voiced disappointment over majority-Muslim Kosovo's decision to recognise Israel and set up its mission in Jerusalem.

A vocal advocate of the Palestinian cause, Turkey became one of the first countries to recognise Kosovo, which declared its independence from Serbia in 2008.

"Even the thought by Kosovo officials of taking such a step -- which is a clear violation of international law -- is disappointing," the Turkish foreign ministry said in a statement.

The ministry called on the Kosovo leadership to avoid such steps that would harm the legal status of Jerusalem.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday Serbia will become the first European country to transfer its embassy to Jerusalem.

Kosovo will also set up its Israel mission in Jerusalem and in exchange earn Israel's recognition, as it seeks to further legitimise its statehood.

Those decisions came out of a US-brokered agreement between the two Balkan rivals.

In a separate statement late Saturday, the Turkish foreign ministry said it was also "deeply concerned" by Serbia's move.

Investigators

FROM PAGE 1

National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, said Dr Samanta Lal Sen, coordinator of the institute.

Twelve more victims are now undergoing treatment at the institute and they are not out of danger, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Of the victims, six are receiving treatment at the Intensive Care Unit.

Abdullah Al Arefin, assistant director of Narayanganj Fire Service and Civil Defence, told The Daily Star that they have already started investigating into the incident.

"We are also checking the electric connections of the mosque with the help of the experts," said Arefin, a member of the four-member probe body formed by the fire service.

The fire service officials examined all the six air conditioners installed at the mosques but did not find any evidence that suggests any of the ACs exploded.

"Only the upper portions of ACs melted due to the fire," he said.

Earlier, Al-Amin, religious affairs secretary of the mosque management committee, said three underground gas pipelines run around the mosque compound.

"One of them [pipeline] is partly underneath the mosque while two others are also pretty close," he said.

People in the neighbourhood said they first noticed signs of gas leakage nearly two months ago.

Mosharaf Hossain, assistant superintendent of police in Narayanganj, also a member of the five-member probe body formed by the district administration, said they have already started investigating into the case.

But they are facing difficulties in getting comments from the eyewitnesses as all of them have suffered burn injuries and are undergoing treatment at the hospital.

The ASP, however, said they have started collecting statements from nearby residents and were hopeful to complete the investigation within the timeframe.

The tragic explosion happened at Pashchim Talla Baitus Salam Mosque of Narayanganj around 8:45pm after Esha prayers on Friday.

State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Dr Md Enamur Rahman said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was taking regular updates of the victims.

Maximum efforts are being made to save lives of the burn victims but everyone's condition is alarming, he said after visiting the victims at the institute yesterday.

The minister said the doctors were trying their best to provide treatment of the fire victims admitted at the institute. But unfortunately, almost all the patients are suffering from inhalation burn, he said.

He further said a case was filed in Fatulla Police Station for negligence. Three investigation committees have been formed to investigate the incident and if anyone's negligence is found, action would be taken against them in accordance with the law, he warns.

Positivity rate

FROM PAGE 1

With this, the recovery rate now stands at slightly over 68 percent.

Seven of yesterday's deceased were females while 25 were males.

Three of them died in their residences and 29 in hospitals, according to the press release from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Two were aged between 31 and 40, four between 41 and 50, nine between 51 and 60 while the rest 17 were over 60 years.

A total of 3,850 patients were admitted to the hospitals' general section while 316 to ICUs in the Covid-19 dedicated hospitals across the country in the 24 hours, according to the DGHS press release.