

Plan

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JAKARTA-DHAKA FOR PEACEFUL SOLUTION OF DISPUTES

Bangladesh and Indonesia today say all disputes in the subcontinent should be resolved peacefully without any outside interference and on the basis of national dignity, non-interference in internal affairs, and mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

A joint communiqué issued in Dhaka today at the end of a four-day visit to Bangladesh by Indonesian Foreign Minister Malik, agrees that a trade delegation from Bangladesh would shortly pay a visit to Indonesia to explore possibilities of expansion of trade between the two countries.

RULES FOR USING NATIONAL FLAG
The Bangladesh government today lays down procedures for using the national flag and hopes that the public will maintain it, says a press note. It adds that the national flag could be flown on private houses on specific days. The flag should be made in the correct size and proper colour. People will have to show respect to the flag by standing quietly when the national flag is screened in cinema houses or in similar situations.
SOURCES: September 9, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Dainik Ittefaq.

China embassy

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Mujibur Rahman and most of his family members in his Dhanmondi home in 1975.

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia celebrates the day as her birthday, but it has been a matter of political controversy.

The Awami League says it is her fake birthday but is celebrated in a sign of disrespect to the Mourning Day.

Following media reports that Chinese embassy sent gifts to Khaleda, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, in response to media query, said it was "unfortunate" and that he was sad about it.

However, the foreign ministry has not sought any explanation from the Chinese embassy in this regard.

The source said the Chinese embassy on its own wrote to the foreign ministry, saying sorry. The embassy also said that sending the gift to Khaleda was a mistake and not based on proper research, the source said.

India now second

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days to extend travel restrictions or impose new ones to try and contain fresh surges.

India, home to some of the world's most densely populated cities, has been reporting the highest single-day rises in the world and yesterday it confirmed a new record of nearly 91,000 new cases.

Infections have now risen above 4.2 million, surpassing Brazil's total and making India's tally the second-highest behind the United States' 6.25 million.

However, with India's economy imploding following months of travel restrictions, authorities pressed on with risky re-ignition plans.

The metro in the capital New Delhi reopened yesterday after a five-month shutdown and 12 other cities restarted subway services.

"For our lives to move on, we have to get out of our homes... so this is a good move by the government," passenger Deepak Kumar, who took the Delhi subway to work, told AFP.

Authorities imposed strict rules on the trains, with masks, social distancing and temperature checks mandatory.

During peak hour in New Delhi yesterday morning, carriages were sparsely filled as people followed guidelines dictating that only alternate seats could be occupied.

NEW EUROPEAN SPIKES
For total deaths worldwide, the United States has the most with more than 188,000, followed by Brazil with 126,000. India is next with about 71,000 fatalities.

Britain, one of the worst-hit countries at the start of the pandemic, is also battling another spike.

The number of daily cases hit nearly 3,000 on Sunday, a level not seen since late May, according to health ministry figures.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said the latest sufferers were predominantly young people.

"It's important that people don't allow this illness to infect their grandparents and to lead to the sort of problems that we saw earlier in the year," he said.

The British government said it would tighten local restrictions in areas showing sharp rises in cases, rather than impose a second national lockdown, for fear of its impacts on the economy.

In France authorities placed seven more regions covering several major cities on "red alert".

The curbs came after France reported a record of nearly 9,000 daily cases on Friday. In Paris masks are now mandatory in all public spaces.

Lockdowns have also been imposed or extended in Israel and Australia in recent days.

Israel decided to begin "a nightly closure" of 40 cities and towns with the highest infection rates.



Security guards frisk commuters at a Delhi metro train station, on the first day of the restart of their operations, amidst the spread of coronavirus disease, in New Delhi, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Essentials' prices hurting the already hurt

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21.05 percent and broiler 4.35 percent in the last week compared to the previous week.

Coarse rice was sold at Tk 46 per kg, lentil Tk 90, potato Tk 36, garlic Tk 90, imported ginger Tk 200 and broiler chicken Tk 110.

Of the other vegetables, brinjal was sold at Tk 75-80 per kg, green chilli at Tk 200-250, tomato at Tk 110-120, ladies finger at Tk 55-60, pointed gourd at Tk 65 and bitter gourd at Tk 75-80.

"How will we survive, if the prices keep rising?" asked Obaidul Islam, a former school teacher.

"It seems I'm trapped in a quicksand of debt. The more I'm trying to get over, the more I'm drowning," said Islam, who used to be a teacher of a kindergarten school, but is now running an online boutique shop after

losing his job due to the pandemic. Abdul Hai, manager of a clothing store in Bongabazar, engaged in a heated argument with a vegetable trader in Karwanbazar yesterday.

"We're not getting our salaries regularly whereas they [vegetable traders] continue to increase the prices," he told this correspondent. Wahab Mia, the vegetable trader, said he had to buy at an increased rate from the wholesale market.

"I won't make a loss by selling vegetables," he added. Production of agriculture, especially vegetables, has been hit hard due to the prolonged flood this year.

Prices of imported onion began to rise in the wholesale markets from August 20.

Data shows that the prices of per kg imported onion rose to Tk 25 on August 31 from Tk 20 on August 20.

During this period, the prices of onion in the retail market stood at Tk 40 from Tk 30.

Different varieties of local onion which remained almost stable in the first three weeks of August began to soar after the price hike of imported onion.

On Friday, prices of per kg local onion jumped to Tk 70 and imported onion to Tk 55 at retail markets in the capital. The wholesale prices of local and imported onion were Tk 64 and 44 respectively.

Narayan Saha, proprietor of Nobin Traders at Shyambazar Wholesale Market, said Indian onion meets most of the country's onion demand. "As the prices of onion shot up in India, the market has become unstable."

He, however, said that the onion prices won't be skyrocketed like the last year as "there is enough onion in

the stock." Mohammad Yousuf, director general of Department of Agriculture Marketing, said they held a meeting with the wholesalers.

"Due to heavy rainfall, onion prices have shot up to Rs 25 per kg in the Indian market.

"After import, when it reaches the wholesale shop, the cost stands at Tk 40," Yousuf said, quoting the traders. "Today local onion is being sold at Tk 60-65 and imported one at Tk 48-50 at retail markets," said Yousuf.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday warned of taking stern action if anyone attempts to increase individual onion prices by hoarding it illegally "as there is no logical reason of price hike and supply crunch of onion." The warning was issued by commerce ministry yesterday.

Experts link up with UK initiative

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effective model for vaccinating a large number of people for Covid-19, the chemical engineering professor said, adding that the project started in August this year and will continue until February 2022.

A cold chain is a temperature-controlled supply chain to store, manage and transport life-saving vaccines.

The team will design novel methods and instruments to assess Bangladesh's current cold-chain capacity. They would also try to incorporate renewable energy and energy-efficient solutions while developing the design.

Prof Ijaz said Brac University will collect field-level data and Buet will

develop a model based on that data. He said once we get the vaccines, the main challenge would be efficiently delivering the vaccines to the health centres across the country.

Around 50 million vaccines will have to be injected within six months, but the present capacity of Bangladesh is much lower than that, the Buet professor said.

"... If we fail to deliver the vaccines maintaining proper temperature, then the vaccines will be rendered useless," he explained.

Ijaz also said the modelling would also help decide who would be vaccinated first, how they would get it and what would be the cost.

"This modelling will help the government to make the vaccine

available in an efficient manner to people who need it the most," he added.

The University of Birmingham in a press statement on September 5 said researchers would assess different intervention scenarios for mass Covid-19 vaccination in Bangladesh.

After the assessment, researchers would be able to provide the Bangladeshi policy-makers with critical information and proposals to shape the country's immunisation strategies and priorities, the statement said.

They will also make their findings available to other countries to help public health planners evaluate their best options for creating sustainable temperature-controlled supply-chains for health and medical supplies in

epidemics and natural disasters.

When contacted, co-investigator of the study Prof Farzana Munshi of Brac University told The Daily Star, "It is crucial to assess the capacity and preparedness of Covid-19 vaccination cold-chains."

She also said they would assess the cold-chain capacity in Bangladesh by interviewing various stakeholders, including different ministries, GAVI, Unicef, WHO, NGOs, upazila health complexes and district hospitals.

This project will assist policy-makers in designing policies on the most sustainable interventions on medical supply chain at regional, national scale for Covid-19 but also other potential future natural disasters and epidemics.

Govt reducing Covid-19

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Covid-19 patients now. It is a waste of resources. Besides, we have to spend a good amount of money for maintaining a Covid-19 hospital," he said.

Farid Hossain Miah, director (hospitals and clinics) of the DGHS, said they found the number of hospital admissions of Covid-19 patients was decreasing gradually.

He also said they would also gradually close down Covid-19 units in those hospitals treating both Covid and non-Covid patients.

The DGHS also recommended suspending Covid-19 treatment at Dhaka Mahanagar Hospital, Lalkuthi MA O Shishu Kalyan Kendro,

Bashundhara Covid Hospital, Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID), Chattogram, Chattogram Railway Hospital, Field Hospital, Chattogram, corona isolation centres and others, says the letter.

The government introduced dedicated Covid-19 hospitals and also instructed the authorities of public and private hospitals to open Covid-19 units in their facilities to deal with the growing number of patients in mid-March.

There was an acute shortage of hospital beds. It was also reported that patients died while they were being taken from one hospital to another

due to lack of bed.

On February 6, the government first dedicated Kuwait Maitree Hospital for treating Covid-19 patients. Initially, suspected patients were admitted there. Later, other hospitals were dedicated for Covid-19 patients.

On May 24, all the private and public hospitals were instructed to treat coronavirus patients.

The number of patients went down in hospitals in the last one month. The daily health bulletin on September 5 said around 73.4 percent general hospital beds remained vacant across the country.

According to the bulletin, the number was 74.75 percent on

September 1, 71.56 percent on August 20, 73.09 percent on August 10 and 74.67 percent on August 1.

Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) of the DGHS, however, said the number of patients in hospitals was coming down as they were unwilling to get admitted there.

"People have now overcome the fear of the disease, and patients having mild symptoms take treatment at home," he added.

"It is also true that the capacity of the hospitals has also increased with time. That's why we don't hear that people are not getting treatment," Prof Be-Nazir said.

Georgia hosts major drills with Nato forces

AFP, Vaziani

Georgia yesterday launched large-scale joint military exercises with Nato forces as part of its longstanding bid to join the alliance, which has angered Tbilisi's Soviet-era master Russia.

Some 2,800 troops from the United States, France, Britain, and Poland will take part in the Noble Partner 2020 exercises held at the Vaziani and Camp Norio training centres near Tbilisi.

Georgia's Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia said the drills are "the most important component of efforts to make Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration achievable".

The drills "are a guarantee of peace in our country" and "are not directed against anyone," he said, addressing troops during the opening ceremony.

The exercises will last until September 18.

Georgia's bid to join Nato has angered Moscow and the confrontation culminated in a brief war over the Kremlin-backed separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in August 2008.

After the war, which saw Georgia's small military routed in just five days, Moscow recognised both provinces as independent states and moved in thousands of troops.

At a 2008 summit in Bucharest, Nato leaders made a formal pledge that Georgia "will become a Nato member" but -- wary of alienating an increasingly assertive Russia -- have so far refused to put the country on a formal membership path.

Saudi scraps

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ruling on the killing which had sparked an international outcry.

The verdict came after Khashoggi's sons said in May they had "pardoned" the killers, a move condemned as a "parody of justice" by a UN expert.

The family's pardon spared the lives of five unnamed people sentenced to death over the 2018 murder in a December court ruling, which was lambasted by human rights groups after two top aides to the crown prince were exonerated.

Khashoggi -- a royal family insider turned critic -- was killed and dismembered at the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul in October 2018, in a case that tarnished the reputation of de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Khashoggi, a 59-year-old critic of the crown prince, was strangled and his body cut into pieces by a 15-man Saudi squad inside the consulate, according to Turkish officials. His remains have not been found.

Riyadh has described the murder as a "rogue" operation, but both the CIA and a United Nations special envoy have directly linked Prince Mohammed to the killing, a charge the kingdom vehemently denies.

JCC meeting

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India and China since 20 Indian soldiers were killed in mid-June over border issues at Galwan Valley.

The fifth JCC was held in Delhi in February last year.

"We had a good discussion ... talked about holding the Joint Consultative Commission meeting at a convenient time for both of us. We hope to hold the meeting virtually sometime this month," the foreign minister said.

Asked on the issues to be discussed in the meeting, he said the officials concerned would work out and finalise the agenda before the meeting.

"We will raise our major issues and they will do theirs," Momen said.

After the telephone conversation, Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar tweeted, "Warm conversation with FM Dr AK Abdul Momen of Bangladesh. Agreed to hold our Joint Consultative Commission [meeting] very soon."

"We will continue to work closely to reach the ambitious goals set by our leaders."

An official at the Bangladesh High Commission in India said Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen was supposed to visit New Delhi preparatory to the JCC meeting, but that is unlikely.

"Indian High Commissioner [to Bangladesh] Riva Ganguly Das had wanted the secretary-level meeting before the JCC, but time would be a factor as she will also leave Dhaka soon," he said.

New Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Vikram Doraiswami is likely to arrive in Dhaka soon, although the date is not yet known.

According to foreign ministry officials, the JCC will discuss the whole range of issues concerning the Bangladesh-India relations. These would include Indian Line of Credit, power and energy, connectivity and trade.

The issues of vaccine, air travel bubble (which allows flights only between Bangladesh and India) during the pandemic and the Covid-19 recovery plan may also come up as important aspects in the meeting, an official said.

The rising trend of border killings by Indian Border Security Force, trade gaps, and the Teesta water sharing deal are some of the burning issues for Bangladesh, he said.

Bangladesh also wants an active role of India in the repatriation of Rohingya refugees, the official added.

Literacy project falls thru'

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the project this time too. Experts did not accept BNFE's claims and pointed instead to a lack of efficiency and proper planning as major reasons for missing one deadline after another.

"Blaming the Covid-19 crisis for missing the deadline yet again is a lame excuse," said Manzoor Ahmed, professor emeritus at Brac University. Against this backdrop, the country today observes International Literacy Day with the theme "Literacy teaching and learning in the Covid-19 crisis and beyond".

Literacy is attained in two ways -- formal education and adult literacy programmes -- and the country's focus has always been on formal education, with adult literacy programmes getting less priority. Moreover, the projects undertaken by successive governments on eradicating illiteracy were marred by allegations of irregularities, corruption and poor planning.

Before coming to power in 2008,

the ruling Awami League in its election manifesto pledged to achieve 100 percent literacy in the country by 2014. The literacy rate was then 48.8 percent among those aged 15 and above, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Literacy Assessment Survey.

The National Education Policy 2010, framed by the AL-led government in 2009, also set a similar target in the same timeframe.

Twelve years later, the literacy rate for the age group stands at 74.7 percent, according to the Sample Vital Registration System 2019 launched on June 30 by BBS.

BASIC LITERACY PROJECT
The project's courses were supposed to be integrated with life skills that are necessary or desirable for full participation in everyday life.

According to Unicef, life skills are the psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

The Tk 453-crore project suffered setbacks for fund crisis, and so deviated from the original plan and had to drop the life skills component.

"To provide life skills knowledge to the beneficiaries, we required around Tk 2,000 crore," said a BNFE official wishing not to be named.

However, the government plans to impart life skills to the beneficiaries in future, he said.

Under the project, the target was to set up 75,000 learning centres with 1,50,000 teachers and distribute over 96.36 lakh books among the 45 lakh beneficiaries in 250 upazilas. One NGO for each upazila, selected by the government, would run the learning centres.

According to officials, till 2019, they provided basic literacy to 23.6 lakh beneficiaries in 136 upazilas. They planned to make the remaining 21.4 lakh beneficiaries of 114 upazilas literate by June 2020.

The BNFE DG said they planned to hold the inauguration of the second phase on March 28 and begin the

learning at all centres from April.

He even cast a shadow on the project's completion by the extended June 2021 deadline as the Covid-19 situation still shows no sign of abating any time soon.

"A beneficiary gets six months of learning. If we cannot start classes by December this year it will be hard for us to complete the course by June next year," Tapan said.

Speaking on the design of the project, Prof Manzoor, also a former senior adviser at BRAC University's Institute of Educational Development, said six months of classes will not be enough to impart sustainable literacy. "One size doesn't fit all. Someone will need six months and someone else 12 months to attain sustainable literacy skills. We will need experience implementing NGOs, follow-ups and strong independent evaluation to get the desired results," he said.

The BNFE DG, however, disagreed. "I don't think there is any problem with the project design," he said.