

US support to continue

Defence Secretary Esper calls Hasina, discusses Rohingya crisis, extradition of Bangabandhu's killer Rashed Chy

UNB, Dhaka

The USA has assured Bangladesh that it will continue its support to bringing about a peaceful resolution to the protracted Rohingya crisis.

The assurance came during a phone call by US Defence Secretary Mark Esper to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday.

"The US defence secretary phoned Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina this [yesterday] evening and assured her of continuing US support in bringing a peaceful solution to the Rohingya problem," PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said.

He said the PM also sought the US defence secretary's support in repatriating Rashed Chowdhury, fugitive convicted killer of Bangabandhu, who is now residing in

the USA.

Esper assured the premier of extending cooperation in this regard, the press secretary said.

The defence secretary said his government stands ready to offer any help to Bangladesh in handling flood or any other natural disaster that the country might face.

He talked with the premier about the range of defense cooperation existing between Bangladesh and the USA.

Esper thanked Hasina for extending cooperation during the coronavirus pandemic that hit the USA hard.

The premier expressed condolences for the loss of lives in the USA and praised the support provided by the USA to Bangladesh in handling the Covid-19 pandemic.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

The Milon Smriti Stamba in TSC area of Dhaka University is in a bad shape due to a lack of maintenance. The memorial was built to commemorate Dr Shamsul Alam Khan Milon, who was killed by thugs at the height of the anti-autocracy movement in 1990. The physician's supreme sacrifice had transformed the movement into a mass upsurge that prompted the fall of the then autocratic regime of HM Ershad. The photo was taken yesterday.

Trump denies lying to US about virus after bombshell book

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump on Thursday denied lying to Americans about the severity of the coronavirus after a bombshell new book by journalist Bob Woodward revealed that he deliberately downplayed the crisis.

Trump's taped admission to Woodward that he minimized the pandemic in public, while being aware from the start about the unique danger presented by Covid-19, has set off alarm bells less than eight weeks before election day.

Asked at a hastily organized White House press conference "Why did you lie to the American people?" Trump responded: "I didn't lie."

The Republican, who is down in the polls against Democrat Joe Biden and faces overwhelming disapproval

from Americans on his handling of the coronavirus crisis, insisted that he'd softened the dangers in public so as to preserve calm.

"I don't want to jump up and down and start screaming 'Death! Death!'" he argued.

But Trump has been thrown onto the defense after multiple excerpts and recordings from Woodward's book "Rage" were released on Wednesday.

Following two Fox News interviews, dozens of tweets, and the press conference, Trump continued his bid to get his election message back on track by holding a rally with supporters in Freeland, Michigan.

He told the excited crowd that his approach to Covid-19 matched that of the British government in World War II with its famous "Keep calm and carry on" morale-boosting posters.

Just vanished!

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of the forces deployed to maintain law and order detain them and bring them back, he said.

"I do not have any such information that listed Rohingyas have disappeared from the camps."

THE NUMBERS
Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), the platform that coordinates among national and international NGOs and UN agencies working in the camps in Cox's Bazar, brings out monthly reports on its work.

Its situation report for July 2020 shows the total number of Rohingya refugees across all camps was 8,60,494. One of their initial reports published on September 26, 2017 following the atrocities in Rakhine State of Myanmar and influx of refugees in late August 2017, noted 4.80 lakh Rohingyas had arrived in one month and that there were 2.12 lakh already living in the Cox's Bazar area before this latest inflow.

According to the ISCG's funding report for the following year titled "2019 Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis", published in December 2018, 7.45 lakh Rohingyas had arrived in Cox's Bazar since August 25, 2017.

So, the total number of Rohingyas in the country can be estimated to have risen to around 9.57 lakh by the end of 2018.

In the 2019 Joint Response Plan and in a multi-sector needs assessment published in April 2019, the total number of Rohingyas was given as 9.09 lakh.

"With the newborn children in the camps, the number of refugees should be above one million," said an official of a prominent NGO working with the refugees.

On September 28, 2018 at the 73rd United Nations General Assembly, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina mentioned there were 1.1 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

ISCG reports show the biggest Rohingya camp, located in Kutupalong ward under Rajapalong union of Ukhiya upazila, currently hosts 5.98 lakh refugees.

However, in December 2018, 6.28 lakh Rohingyas lived there. In Leda camp, there were 33,540 refugees in December 2018; this figure decreased to 25,966 in July this year.

Nearby, Nayapara registered camp also saw a significant decline, from 26,930 to 22,335.

The number of refugees also declined in Alikhali, Unchuprang, Bagghona and Potibunia, and Shamlapur camps.

Even if some of this decline in numbers is due to resettlement of refugees across different camps, this still leaves a difference of over 40,000 refugees -- not taking into account the 76,000 births in the camps in the last three years, as per data from the NGO Save the Children until May 2020.

COMPARISON OF ROHINGYA POPULATION IN 2018 AND 2020

NAME OF THE SITE	DEC 31, 2018	JUL 31, 2020
Kutupalong-Balukhali	6,28,500	5,98,665
Ukhiya-Hakimpura	31,920	31,933
Jamtoli	49,440	49,635
Bagghona/Potibunia	21,790	20,852
Chakmarkul	12,250	16,452
Shamlapur	10,960	10,497
Unchuprang	22,210	21,211
Alikhali	9,500	7,576
Nayapara	41,040	40,434
Leda	33,540	25,966
Nayapara RC	26,930	22,335
Jadimura	14,270	14,938
Total	9,02,350	8,60,494

SOURCES: JOINT RESPONSE PLAN 2019, ISCG SITUATION REPORT JULY 2020

'CAMPS NOT PROTECTED'

Contacted, an official working with ISCG, choosing to remain anonymous, said during the first census which took place following the 2017 Rohingya influx, many of the refugees registered their names more than once as they thought it would help them get more relief.

But later, when biometric registration took place, the numbers decreased.

However, he said, many Rohingyas have left the camp. Those who are well off, rented houses in Cox's Bazar and live there and those who were able to, went abroad.

But these would only add up to a few thousand, he added.

Local representatives and NGO officials working for the refugees say otherwise.

They said Rohingyas frequently go out of the camp for one or two months at a stretch. Some Rohingyas have also married locals and live in Chattogram, other parts of Cox's Bazar, and Bandarban.

A good number of them work outside the camps as labourers in fishing trawlers and at construction sites, they said.

Abu Morshed Chowdhury Khoka, co-chairman of Cox's Bazar Civil Society and NGO Platform (CCNF), said it is an open secret that Rohingyas go out of the camps for work.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, executive director of COAST Trust, which has been working with the Rohingyas since the 2017 influx, said Rohingyas are desperate to leave the camps and integrate into Bangladesh society as the repatriation process continues to be delayed.

While there are some check posts on the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf road, he pointed out that there is no vigilance in the hills around the camps.

"There is nobody to stop them if they want to leave the camps crossing over those hills."

The administration has to take care of this issue before it is too late, he added.

Zahangir Kabir Chowdhury, chairman of Rajapalong union, said the Rohingya refugee camps are not protected as there is no boundary wall around it.

So, it is impossible for a handful of police forces to keep an eye on tens of thousands of Rohingyas, he said.

While some return after spending a few days outside the camps, some do not, he added.

For example, local sources told The Daily Star's local correspondent that around 3,000 Rohingya families have settled in Bandarban.

"Around 500 families are already settled in Alikadom upazila for the last seven to eight years while there is even a village named Burmaiya [Burmese] Para in Alikadom," said Kafil Uddin, vice chairman of the upazila.

"Before 2007-08, there were no Rohingya families but now there are more than 200 Rohingya families living in Sualok union," said U Kaynuie Marma, chairman of the union which is under Bandarban Sadar upazila.

"Among them, around 50 Rohingya families are registered in the voter list," the chairman added.

Palongkhali is another union near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, where a large number of Rohingyas live.

Chairman of Palongkhali Union M Gafur Uddin Chowdhury, said the Rohingyas move freely from one place to another and that many have had Bangladeshi passports made and gone abroad.

On September 3, a 25-year-old Rohingya man was detained from Chattogram Panchlaish Passport Office while trying to get a passport. He presented a verified Bangladeshi NID.

Last year, Chattogram police and passport officials said several Rohingya refugees were making Bangladeshi passports using forged NID cards with the help of some locals and Rohingya brokers.

A section of unscrupulous EC staffers was involved in syndicates providing forged NID cards to Rohingyas in exchange for money, they added.

CCNF's Abu Morshed said women and children in the camp also often try to go to Malaysia by sea with the help of traffickers.

In February this year, at least 14 Rohingyas, reportedly all women and children, drowned when the boat carrying them capsized near Saint Martin's island.

In May, boats carrying Rohingyas turned around from Malaysia returned to Bangladesh, in one of several such ships stranded at sea for weeks before being brought in by the navy earlier this year.

(Our Bandarban correspondent also contributed to this report.)

Man stabbed to death in broad daylight

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A man was killed allegedly by a group of miscreants in broad daylight in Bogura's Kahaloo upazila yesterday.

The dead, Abdul Alim, 24, was from Jamgram village in the upazila. He was a trader of second-hand motorcycles.

Police detained one Md Nowfel, 24, in connection with the murder, said Zia Latiful Islam, officer-in-charge of Kahaloo Police Station.

During the primary investigation, Nowfel said at least three more people were involved with the attack.

He also told police that the attackers, including him, had a dispute with Alim over a business deal.

Police said the miscreants carried out the attack when Alim was crossing Panai bridge area on his way home from Durgapur Bazar around 1:00pm.

They stabbed him in the chest and neck, leaving him dead on the spot, said OC Zia.

Police went to the spot immediately after the incident and detained Nowfel from the spot, the OC said, adding that they were trying to arrest the other perpetrators.

The body was sent to Bogura Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital for an autopsy, he said.

India, China

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distance and ease tensions," they said in the statement.

Jaishankar told Wang that the immediate task would be for troops to step back from the "areas of friction" so that things do not get worse, an Indian source said. Troops are barely a few hundred metres apart at some points.

China and India accused each other of firing into the air during the confrontation, a violation of long-held protocol not to use firearms on the sensitive frontier.

Wang told Jaishankar the "imperative is to immediately stop provocations such as firing and other dangerous actions that violate the commitments made by the two sides," China's foreign ministry said in a statement yesterday.

Wang also told Jaishankar all personnel and equipment that have trespassed at the border must be moved to de-escalate the situation.

In June, tensions erupted into a frontier clash in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed and China suffered an unspecified number of casualties.

India and China have made a useful decision on de-escalating tensions on their disputed Himalayan border, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday, speaking alongside his Chinese counterpart.

CHINESE BUILDUP

The ministers' meeting lasted for two hours and was the latest diplomatic effort to head off a broader conflict between the world's two most populous countries, which went to war in 1962.

Jaishankar told Wang that India was deeply concerned about the buildup of Chinese forces on the Line of Actual Control on the poorly defined border.

"The Chinese side has not provided a credible explanation for this deployment," an Indian government source quoted Jaishankar as saying at the meeting.

"The provocative behavior of Chinese frontline troops at numerous incidents of friction along the LAC also showed disregard for bilateral agreements and protocols," Jaishankar said, adding any unilateral attempt to change status quo would be resisted.

Ghoraghat OC

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it by the Detective Branch of Dinajpur police on completion of their seven-day remand each.

Ghoraghat Upazila Nirbahi Officer Wahida and her father Omar Ali Sheikh, a freedom fighter, were injured in the September 3 attack.

Wahida is now undergoing treatment at a Dhaka hospital and her father at Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

Sheikh Farid Uddin, brother of the injured UNO, filed the case with Ghoraghat Police Station on September 3 in connection with the attack, accusing some unidentified people.

Amirul was the OC of Nawabganj Police Station in Dinajpur in 2014 when then Nawabganj UNO Syed Forhat Hossain came under attack at his office allegedly from some Awami League leaders and activists on October 1 that year.

Yesterday afternoon, DB of Dinajpur police produced accused Nabirul Islam and Santu Das before Senior Judicial Magistrate Ismail Hossain on completion of their seven-day remand each.

Israil Hossain, court inspector of Dinajpur, said there was no prayer for fresh remand of the duo and recording their confessional statements.

Police has so far arrested three people in connection with the case. The other arrestee is expelled Jubo League leader Asadul Haq. His seven-day remand period will end today.

According to sources, members of different law enforcement agencies have so far picked up at least 20 people from different districts for interrogation in connection with the case.

In Dinajpur, in distress

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Contacted, the UNO declined to talk to the media but sources in the district administration said he used to conduct mobile court drives against illegal sand lifting and that's why some people wanted him out of the upazila.

About the 2014 attack, sources said the then UNO of Nawabganj Syed Forhat Hossain had a dispute with local AL leaders over appointment of night guards in 39 primary schools.

He strictly wanted to ensure fair recruitment, which made the ruling party men unhappy.

Finally, on October 1, 2014, a group of AL and BCL activists brought out a procession against him and marched to the UNO office.

The UNO tried to hide in the washroom but the party activists dragged him out and beat him mercilessly.

A case, filed against 29 named and 60 to 70 unnamed accused, is still under trial. Most of the accused are local leaders and activists of AL and BCL.

By the end of 2015, police submitted the charge sheet against 35 persons. Almost all of them were released on bail a few days after arrest, said local sources.

Then came the September 3 attack. Ghoraghat UNO Wahida Khanam and her father suffered severe injuries in a hammer attack by unidentified

criminals at her official residence in the Upazila Parishad complex.

Law enforcers later arrested now suspended Jubo League leader Asadul Haq, and painting workers Nabirul Islam and Santu Das. They were placed on seven days' remand each.

Besides, 20 others were detained for interrogation.

Contacted, Devdas Bhattacharya, deputy inspector general for Rangpur Range Police, said they are working hard to find out the attackers.

Both the upazilas -- Nawabganj and Ghoraghat -- are in Dinajpur-6, and Shibli Sadik from AL is the lawmaker of this constituency. He could not be reached for comments despite repeated attempts.

Azizul Isman Chowdhury, general secretary of Dinajpur district AL, said he has nothing to say about the attack on Ghoraghat UNO since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself talked about it in parliament.

If there is any involvement of AL leaders and activists in this attack, they must be caught, interrogated, and punished. "It's a matter of image of the party," he said.

Evading a reply to the question about conflicts between the party leaders and UNOs over various issues, the general secretary said if any party member is charge-sheeted, he or she will be expelled from the organisation.

He said more than 15 people have been expelled from the party recently.

Malaysia eases entry ban

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to come in as their technical skills are needed by the economy.

Ismail Sabri Yaakob said on Thursday that a special cabinet committee has decided to slightly relax the regulation that was enforced from Monday.

Malaysia even imposed the temporary ban on those who are permanent residents, Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) pass-holders, and employment pass holders, said a notice of the High Commission of Malaysia in Bangladesh.

The ban was also imposed on residence pass holders, spouses or children to Malaysian citizens with long term visit pass, students, and visit-pass holders, according to the September 4 notice.

Malaysia is home to about 800,000 Bangladeshis, many of whom work in construction and plantation sectors as low-paid workers.

Many of these migrant workers came home before the coronavirus pandemic on vacation and later got stranded due to the air communications suspension between the two countries.

Now, they are waiting to return to their workplaces.

Shahadat Hossain, owner of Dynasty Travels Ltd, said many Bangladeshi wage earners who came

home on vacation were waiting to fly back to Malaysia.

Besides, there are demands for visiting Malaysia, he told The Daily Star.

Wage earner Anwar Hossain of Gazipur said he came home on January 16 on vacation and intended to fly back on March 20. But he is still waiting to return.

His employer promised that they would rehire him and help in the immigration process.

According to The Straits Times report, Ismail Sabri said the Malaysia government has also decided to allow permanent residents and foreign spouses of Malaysian citizens to enter the country.

But this group can make only a one-way journey into Malaysia and have to remain there.

Student pass-holders from the affected countries will also be allowed to enter.

"All categories mentioned must get approval from Immigration beforehand," he said.

The 23 countries mentioned in the last week's order are the US, Brazil, India, Russia, Peru, Columbia, South Africa, Mexico, Spain, Argentina, Chile, Iran, Bangladesh, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, France, Turkey, Italy, Germany, Iraq, the Philippines and Indonesia.

Global solidarity to tackle Covid still lacking

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WHO's chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan said AstraZeneca's pause of an experimental vaccine for the coronavirus after the illness of a participant is a "wake-up call" but should not discourage researchers.

"This is a wake-up call to recognise that there are ups and downs in clinical development and that we have to be prepared," Swaminathan told a virtual briefing from Geneva.

"We do not have to be discouraged. These things happen."

Governments are desperate for a vaccine to help end the pandemic, and the WHO had flagged AstraZeneca's vaccine, being developed with Oxford University, as the most promising.

However, the drugmaker suspended late-stage trials this week after a participant in Britain suffered from neurological symptoms.

"It's a race against this virus, and it's a race to save lives. It's not a race between companies, and it's not a race between countries," added WHO's head of emergencies Mike Ryan.

WHO epidemiologist Maria Van Kerkhove said a combination of factors is helping reduce death rates in Europe, including finding cases earlier and better clinical care.

"We are in a better position to prevent the virus from infecting vulnerable populations," she said, cautioning, however, that the disease's long-term effects were still not known.

The virus has killed more than 909,000 people and infected at least 28.2 million since the outbreak emerged in China last December.

India reported another record daily jump of 96,551 coronavirus cases yesterday, taking its case load to 4.5 million, data from the federal health ministry showed.

Infections are growing faster in India than anywhere else in the world and the United States is the only nation worse affected, reports Reuters. Deaths have remained relatively low in the country, but are seeing an upward trend, with more than one thousand deaths being reported every day for the last ten days.

Yesterday, 1,209 people died from Covid-19, the ministry said, taking total mortalities to 76,271.

South Korea posted a slight rise in daily cases yesterday, as infections eased from a church and political rally that sparked a second wave of outbreaks and new cases emerged in religious and sporting groups and a university hospital.

The Korea Center for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) reported 176 new cases as of midnight Thursday, which brought the total infections to 21,919, with 350 deaths.

A fresh wave of infections erupted at a church whose members attended a large protest in downtown Seoul last month have driven the daily tally to its peak in months at 441.

North Korean authorities have issued shoot-to-kill orders to prevent the coronavirus entering the country from China, according to the commander of US forces in the South.

The impoverished North -- whose crumbling health system would struggle to cope with a major virus outbreak -- has not confirmed a single case of the disease that has swept the world since first emerging in China, the North's key ally.

In Europe, 90 people have tested positive and eight have died in two care homes in central Switzerland in two of the largest outbreaks seen in retirement facilities, reports AFP.

Ukraine registered a record daily high of 3,144 new cases of the coronavirus yesterday, the national security council said, topping a previous record of 2,836 on September 5.