Stronger co-op needed among S Asian countries

City

Says FM on climate change adaptation

on Google, Facebook

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has called for stronger collaboration between the South Asian countries for an effective implementation of adaptation activities.

He was addressing a virtual meeting, organised by the Global Centre on Adaptation (GCA) on Thursday, on setting strategic policies and finalising the work programme of GCA's regional office for South Asia.

The minister appreciated the support of the South Asian countries for the establishment of GCA's regional office in Dhaka.

underscored contribution towards driving international ambition on adaptation and strengthening the partnerships that are critical to the commitments made in the Paris Agreement on addressing climate change.

He said Bangladesh was determined to support both the GCA and Climate Vulnerable Forum from its hardearned experience on adaptation.

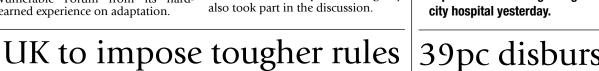
South Asia is one of the most adversely affected regions of the world due to climate change, he said, adding that all the countries of the region will incur huge per capita GDP losses without large scale and comprehensive adaptive measures.

The minister expressed hope that the South Asian countries could learn and work together, survive and even thrive under challenging circumstances through collaboration between themselves.

Momen called for keeping up the momentum of the creation of the "Global Hub on Locally Led Action".

Speaking at the event, Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Shahab Uddin emphasised on GCA's priorities for the South Asia region.

Participants from the South Asian countries and different development partners, including the World Bank, UNDP, UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Japan International Cooperation Agency, also took part in the discussion.



Britain announced yesterday it will set up a watchdog to regulate tech giants such as Facebook and Google and improve their transparency on using people's data and personalised advertising.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport said in a statement that the new regulator, the Digital Markets Unit, will "govern the behaviour of platforms that currently dominate the market, such as Google and Facebook".

The aim is "to ensure consumers and small businesses aren't disadvantaged",

The unit is being created after the UK Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) said in July that existing laws

were not effective and a new regulatory regime was needed to control internet giants that earn from digital advertising. The CMA has backed the new rules

while it has not taken direct action against Facebook and Google. pro-competition regime for digital markets will ensure

consumers have choice, and mean smaller firms aren't pushed out," said Business Secretary Alok Sharma. Britain acknowledged the online platforms bring "huge benefits for

businesses and society" but said the "concentration of power amongst a small number of tech companies" was curbing growth and innovation in the industry, which could have "negative impacts" for the public.

A life devoted to beauty

Save the personal, his life was consumed by two love affairs -- one with Bangladesh and the other with the theatre, and through his work he blended both. He was proudest of his involvement in our struggle for freedom and he was most passionate about his work as an actor. Through every action of his life he tried to bring his pride and his passion together. It is this coming together of the two most powerful forces within him that made Aly Zaker the exceptional patriot and the critically acclaimed actor, director, writer that he was.

His patriotism was of the most enlightened kind. It was far more than loyalty to a political entity. It was the people -- simple, tolerant, openminded, friendly, hospitable and engaging -- that he loved most. His childhood memories of what we call "Gram Bangla" (far more than the term "rural Bengal" signifies), etched deeply in his subconscious from long travels on country boats, horseback and train with his father produced his lifelong love for Bangladesh's natural features to which, he says, he owes the origins of his creativity.

He was most pained to see his "Gram Bangla" exploited both economically -- that we mostly talk about -- and culturally. He strongly believed in the syncretic cultural heritage of Bangladesh and strongly resisted, through his plays, attempts to divide it. In all his television appearances, interviews and writings he tried to warn us against this trend and foresaw the damage that it would do to the future advancement of Bangladesh. Like every freethinker he abhorred prejudice and extremism of all kinds and, as a columnist, relentlessly wrote against them.

His creative work began, as he says, with his involvement with Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendro in Kolkata in 1971, with the invitation of filmmaker Alamgir Kabir to do an hourly English language programme on our Muktijuddho. (I recall with pride my participation in several such programmes). Immediately after Bangladesh's liberation, he plunged himself into the world of theatre. Starting with Munier Chowdhury's play "Kobor", he joined Aranyak in 1972 and then there was no stopping

Equally important to his acting was his work in adaptation and translation. He chose the greatest of playwrights --Sophocles, Shakespeare, Brecht, Ibsen, to name a few -- to translate and adapt, which itself became a greater source of intellectual exchanges. Nagorik and a few other theatre groups became minicentres of discussion to understand what these great plays meant and how they could stimulate our own intellectual renaissance in post-

liberation Bangladesh. Aly Zaker's acting, intellectual stature, directing and his relentless effort to take Bangladeshi theatre to greater heights inspired thousands of young people to take up this art form as writers, directors, musicians,

scriptwriters, stage managers, light and audio technicians, etc. In other words, he triggered a process that helped to

make theatre production in Bangladesh

a far more professional endeavour than

it was ever before. Most talented people are not so good at "guru shishya parampara" but his warm, inclusive, engaging and modest personality broke the barriers and inspired generations of youngsters to take to theatre or at least become knowledgeable about this art form. He played a leadership role in triggering what later became a movement that created hundreds of theatre groups, thousands of actors and millions of theatre fans in the newly liberated country. In fact, theatre movement became a beacon of hope for the establishment of the ideals of our independence struggle -- a democratic,

prosperous and secular Bangladesh. A tribute to Aly Zaker would be incomplete without mentioning the magic he would bring to stage the moment he would enter it. The first thing that would strike the audience from the word go was his presence. The moment he would step onto the stage, there was no question that he was the centre of gravity. As he would move around the stage so would our eyes, trying to extract all the meanings that were being conveyed with his facial expressions, gestures of his hands, various postures and looks -- oh those penetrating eyes, that would pierce the audience signalling the drama of what was to come. Then came the dialogue with his thundering voice modulated to perfection so that we would not miss a word or a whisper. For the duration of the play he would make a plaything of us, lingering on his every word, every movement and every dramatic entry or departure from the stage.

His love for the theatre was never more dramatically exemplified than by his reappearance on stage after his bout with cancer that was first detected in 2016. He acted as "Galileo" for the last time in 2018 for a full hour and a half, never showing fatigue or lack of stamina for a moment. Those of us in the audience knew well that we are never going to see our most favourite and perhaps the greatest of our stage personalities, ever again on stage.

During his last years, when he was bedridden, he would enjoy receiving friends. When Shaheen (my wife) and last saw him, he was ever buoyant and talkative. Not for a moment did he refer to his cancer and the challenges he was facing. He talked about the founding days of The Daily Star (he was one of the few trusted friends I consulted before starting the paper; he was most supportive), the wonderful time we passed together, our meeting in various cities of the world, how much our friendship meant to him, and left us speechless with his enthusiastic prognosis of the future. He was acting his biggest role in life shunning pessimism and teaching us

to win everything with optimism. It is that ever optimistic Chotlu Bhai, as all of us lovingly called Aly Zaker, that we will remember him as.



A police team stages a guard of honour before the coffin of thespian Aly Zaker at Muktijuddho Jadughor in the capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. The valiant freedom fighter, also an Ekushey Padak recipient, passed away at a

39pc disbursed in six months

"The marginalised people in the country did not face any shortage of food because of the cash and food aid provided under the stimulus scheme. The possibility that these people would slide below the poverty line once again has also been reduced," said the progress report prepared by the finance division under the ministry.

The disbursement of the funds also had a positive impact on the business sector's ongoing recovery process and helped retain employment of tens of thousands of people working under different sectors, it said.

The support has been provided in the form of low-cost loans to micro, small, medium, large industries, service-providers and as food security, social protection and special allowances after the pandemic-induced shutdown paralysed the economy, drying up millions of jobs and creating the new poor.

The implementation of the scheme, however, has not been the same in all

For example, fund disbursement rate for the export-oriented and large industries has been quick, but the progress has been slow for small and medium enterprises and farm sectors.

The finance ministry divided the 21 packages in three broad categories -- job retention, restoration of demand and maintenance of supply chain; employment creation and revitalising rural economy; and enhancing social security and food supply.

In the first category, there are seven packages involving Tk 86,750 crore, which are being financed from the banking system.

Of the amount, around Tk 41,153 crore has been disbursed till October 31. As many as 73,28,251 firms and businesses got the loan assistances, the progress report shows. The lion's share of the beneficiaries,

or 72.80 lakh, are the borrowers who benefitted from the Bangladesh Bank's measure to suspend the payment of loan interests for two months -- April The total amount of interests for

the two months stood at Tk 16,549 crore. The central bank will give Tk 2,000 crore in subsidy in this regard. The government has already started the process to release a fund of Tk 1,390 crore, the report said.

The export-oriented sector, mainly readymade garments, received support from one of the seven packages in the first category. This sector is ahead of all others in terms of fund disbursement.

An interest-free loan of Tk 10,500 crore was given in two phases with a service charge of two percent for providing salaries to workers and employees of 1.992 export-oriented industrial units for four months. The full amount was disbursed by June and an estimated 50 lakh workers got the benefit, says the progress report.

The support in the form of salaries helped save jobs of 50 lakh workers. As a result, the families of those workers have been able to overcome the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, the report said.

A significant progress was made in dispensing the Tk 34,500 crore fund to the pandemic-hit large industries at an interest rate of nine percent, which is to be repaid equally by the borrowers and the government as subsidy.

As of last month, Tk 22,934 crore was disbursed and 2,594 firms got the assistance.

However, the scenario over the pandemic-hit micro and small businesses has not been satisfactory as they were yet to get enough benefit from the packages. The government announced Tk

20,000 crore as the working capital

support for such businesses at an interest rate of nine percent -- four percent to be paid by the borrower and five percent by the government as subsidy. Till last month, Tk 6,345 crore was

disbursed for the sector and 41,069 firms and entrepreneurs got the loan support, said the report. "As the disbursement rate is slower

than expected, the government is augmenting refinancing scheme and credit risk sharing facility to boost the disbursement," the report said.

The pre-shipment credit refinance scheme amounting to Tk 5,000 crore for nine export-oriented industries has also not made any progress. As of last month, only Tk 48.58 crore was disbursed.

SECOND CATEGORY

There are four packages in this category that involve Tk 12,458 crore. Of the amount, Tk 4,225 crore was disbursed till October 31.

As many as 37.22 lakh people, firms and beneficiaries got assistance under this category, according to the progress Of the beneficiaries, a large chunk or

35 lakh families received cash incentives -- Tk 2,500 a month -- under a stimulus package named cash transfer to the targeted poor. Of the allocated Tk 1,258 crore, around Tk 880 crore was spent.

However, the government had initially planned to give the cash incentives to each of 50 lakh families under this package. But it had to stop midway following allegations of anomalies over the lists of beneficiaries.

On the other hand, some 2.22 lakh firms and beneficiaries got the assistance under the three other packages -- credit expansion for employment creation, agriculture refinance scheme, and refinance scheme for farmers and small traders. THIRD CATEGORY

There are 10 packages in this category and the government allocated Tk 22,125 crore. So far, around Tk 2,237 crore has been disbursed under different packages that benefited around 3.28 crore people.

Free food was distributed under one of the packages. The government distributed five lakh tonnes of rice and one lakh tonnes of wheat among 2.54 crore people in 496 municipalities and

Around 50 lakh families across the country were allowed to buy rice at Tk 10 a kg under the OMS of rice package. The government also helped nearly 18 lakh families in the urban areas to buy rice at Tk 10 per kg.

"As a result, these people did not have to spend days starving," said the

But the progress has been slow in implementing some packages in this

The special honorarium allowance for healthcare professionals is a case in

The government has failed to provide frontline health professionals with the incentives after its announcement over four months ago. A Tk 100-crore fund was earmarked

to this end, but it could not be released as the health ministry has not yet sent the list of the recipients.

Similar is the case for handing compensation to the healthcare The government professionals. allocated Tk 750 crore for this purpose, but it could spend Tk 16.25 crore till October 31.

Speaking at Thursday's programme, Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem), suggested that the government should come up with an independent evaluation of the packages

that have been executed so far. Finance Secretary Abdur Rouf Talukder said they have a plan to carry out an independent assessment of the packages so that they can make adjustment to those packages whose

implementation lags behind. Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Ahmad Kaikaus said no initiative can ever be hundred percent successful. He, however, claimed that

they have done an assessment of the food and cash supports and found that they have been able to reach nearly 21 percent of the population.

BRTC revival plan stumbles benefits like that of a government

Winter is the peak season for BRTC, when it rents buses to different organisations for picnic trips. But this may not happen this time due to the pandemic, another BRTC official said. ECONOMIC RUNDOWN Established in 1961, BRTC provides

bus and truck services through its 23 depots across the country. It often made headlines for poor management and The government added 600 buses and 500 trucks to the BRTC fleet last

year to bail it out from losses. The vehicles were bought through Indian lines of credit. BRTC now has 1,450 out of its 1,835 buses and 570 out of its 588 trucks in

It started to become a losing concern from FY2016-17 when it incurred a loss of Tk 4.73 crore. The loss was 2.92 crore and around Tk 1 crore respectively in

the next two fiscal years. With losses growing, anger and frustration also grew among the workers at different depots of BRTC over unpaid salaries. The unpaid dues soared up to 16 months in some depots till January last year.

Some 3,300 BRTC employees, including drivers, get salaries and other

employee. But under the current system, the salaries and benefits of a depot employee has to be paid from the earnings of that particular depot.

BRTC staffers staged demonstrations on several occasions last year, even confining the then corporation chairman to his office, to get their arrears. Amid such a restive situation, the government appointed a new chairman in August that year.

At that time, officials of the BRTC said the depots had been struggling to pay the employees after the government implemented a new pay scale in 2016, but workers claimed that the corruption of some BRTC officials, including those running the depots, was to blame for their sufferings

SOME POSITIVE CHANGES Chairman Ehsan-E-Elahi said apart from new vehicles, strict measures, intense monitoring and financial discipline of the depots are also responsible for the boost in

BRTC earned Tk 349.28 crore in the last fiscal year compared to Tk 258.88 crore in 2018-19 despite the government suspending the operation of public transport for two months from March 26 due to the pandemic,

show documents.

It earned only Tk 14.80 crore in April and May against the expenditure of TK 27.41 crore. In these two months, BRTC buses remained off the roads; only its trucks were operational.

At that time, BRTC had to take a Tk 10 crore loan from the government to pay salaries and Eid bonuses, the chairman told this newspaper.

The state-owned company paid Tk 88.65 crore as salary and other allowances in one year, which is Tk 23.27 crore more than the corresponding period of the immediate past year, according to a special bulletin BRTĆ published in August this year.

Ehsan-E-Elahi said they have taken some strict measures to control some irregularities in depots and have taken actions against more than two dozen

"We are planning for full automation of the depots and training centres to prevent malpractice fully," he said, adding that they were going for central procurement of tires and batteries soon for the same reason.

He said that BRTC has been making profit for the last three months, adding that if that trend continues, they will be able to pay all the dues sooner rather

'Galileo' makes

FROM PAGE 1
In a condolence message, President
Abdul Hamid said, "Thespian Aly Zaker was a shining star in country's cultural arena ... The country lost an eminent actor and cultural figure with his death. His death is an irreparable loss to the

cultural arena of the country. He prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family members.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her condolence message recalled with profound respect. Also Zakor's

the country's art and culture arena. "Zaker's contribution to the Great Liberation War and the country's art and culture arena will be remembered for

with profound respect Aly Zaker's contribution to the Liberation War and

long," the PM said.
She then prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed profound sympathy to the bereaved family.

People from all walks of life, including members of the cabinet, different cultural, social, political organisations, and civil society, also expressed shock and sorrow at Aly Zaker's death. He was battling cancer for the last four

years and tested positive for Covid-19 two days ago. On November 17, he was admitted to Bangladesh Specialised Hospital due to cardiac issues.

We are grateful to everyone who kept him in their prayers," his son Iresh Zaker wrote on Facebook.

After his namaz-e-janaza, Aly Zaker was laid to eternal rest at Banani graveyard after Asr prayers.

Earlier, his body was taken to the premises of the Liberation War Museum in the capital's Agargaon around 11:00am, reports BSS.

Maintaining health guidelines cultural personalities, friends and admirers paid their tributes to Aly Zaker, who was a trustee of the Liberation War Museum.

Family sources said the celebrated actor tested positive for coronavirus two days before his death, which is why his body was not taken to the Central Shaheed Minar, said the BSS report.

Ramendu Majumder, Nasiruddin

Yousuff, Ferdousi Majumder and Mamunur Rashid, Liberation War Museum Trustees Dr Sarwar Ali and Mofidul Hogue placed wreaths on his coffin. On behalf of Awami League, the party's Cultural Affairs Secretary Asim Kumar Ukil and Office Secretary Barrister

Biplab Barua paid homage to Aly Zaker by placing wreaths on the coffin. Aly Zaker was born on November 5, 1944 in Chattogram to Muhammad

Taher and Rezia Taher. He was the third among four siblings and spent his early childhood in Kushtia and Madaripur. His father was a highranking government official who was

transferred every few years.

He studied at Notre Dame College and graduated from Dhaka University. During the Liberation War, Aly Zaker was trained at Sector-8 under Maj Gen

Manzoor. Eminent filmmaker Alamgir Kabir sked him to join Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. During the Liberation War, he travelled to the frontier many times to do interviews and Aly Zaker was an integral part of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra's English broadcasts.

Aly Zaker not only inspired freedom fighters on the frontier during the Liberation War as a Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra artiste and vocalist of Mukti Shangrami Shilpi Shangstha, he also played an important role in creating global opinion in support of the Liberation War, Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee said in a condolence message.

Besides, Aly Zaker was an important witness" of the Shaheed Janani Jahanara Imam-led civic movement Gana Adalat (people's court) launched on March 26, 1992 for the trial of war criminals and the then Jamaat-e-Islami chief Ghulam Azam, the committee said.

In 1972, Aly Zaker joined Aranyak Natya Dal. His first stage appearance was in the troupe's rendition of the Munier Chowdhury play "Kabor".

Later, he joined Nagorik Natya Sampradaya, where he did some of his best work, including "Dewan Gazir Kissa", 'Nuruldin-er Shara Jibon", "Macbeth" and "Galileo".

He directed plays like "Baki Itihash", Bidogdho Romonikul", "Toilo Sankat", Ei Nishiddho Polli Te" and "Achalayatan". On television, he is known for iconic oles in classics such as "Bohubrihi" and

Aaj Robibar". Aly Zaker married eminent theatre oersonality Sara Zaker in 1975. Together, they have a son Iresh Zaker and daughter Sriya Sharbojoya.

Aly Zaker was also the chairman of Asiatic 3Sixty.

Besides the Ekushey Padak (1999), Aly Zaker also received the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy Award, Bangabandhu Award, Munier Chowdhury Award, Naren Biswas Award, among other accolades.

Transport and Bridges Minister and Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader expressed shock at the death of the veteran cultural personality. "Celebrated actor Aly Zaker was

In a condolence message, Road

a shining star in the cultural arena, Quader said. BNP said he was a glittering star in the

cultural arena of Bangladesh. "People will always remember him for his glorious achievements and contributions to the country's cultural arena," said BNP Secretary General Mirza

Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, reports UNB.

Besides, Law Minister Anisul Huq, Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad, Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar, Information Minister Hasan Mahmud, Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Prof Akhtaruzzaman, Jahangirnagar University VC Prof Farzana Islam, Workers Party of Bangladesh, Gono Forum, Bangladesh National Awami Party, former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, Sammilita Sangskritik Jote, Sammilita Samajik 1971: Genocide-Torture Andolon, Archive and Museum Trust, Bangladesh Peace Council, Bangladesh Medical Association, and Bangladesh Mahila Parishad in separate messages condoled the death of the thespian.