

BANGLADESH UPDATE



2,525
New cases in 24hrs



4,64,932
Total cases



6,644
Deaths



380,711
Recoveries



1,467,928
Deaths



63,231,139
Total cases

Biden's victory offers hope for democracy, governance globally

Analysts tell int'l webinar

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Democrat candidate Joe Biden's victory in the US elections offers hope for democracy and governance globally as well as for healing the scars of structural racism and inequality in American society, global affairs analysts have said.

Speaking at an international webinar titled "Between Reds and Blues: Critical Reflections on US Elections 2020", they said Biden will try to restore the respect that was lost to some extent during Trump's four-year tenure which saw US relations with NATO, the European Union, China and Iran deteriorate.

Trump also moved away from the Paris Agreement on climate change, the World Health Organization and the nuclear deal with Iran.

Although the Trump administration performed relatively well on the economic front, his mishandling of the coronavirus pandemic has been widely criticised. As of Sunday, 13.7 million Americans were infected while more than 273,000 died of coronavirus.

At the webinar on Sunday night, experts said the Biden administration that takes charge in January will focus on fixing domestic issues, including managing the coronavirus pandemic, structural inequality and racism in American society.

Therefore, it would not go for confrontation, especially with China over trade and coronavirus issues, they said in the webinar organised by the Journal of International Relations Committee of the Dhaka University International Relations (DUIR).

M Humayun Kabir, former Bangladesh ambassador to the US, said much of Biden's focus may be devoted to addressing the pandemic, fixing trade and economy, racial and social inequalities and climate change issues that the young Americans are advocating for.

"Since 2002, US foreign policy has been highly militarised. Now it has to go for diplomacy," he said at the webinar moderated by DUIR Prof Dr Amena Mohsin.

Analysts said as US will need to rely on foreign countries for Covid-19 management, Biden is likely to

collaborate with China. This will definitely have an impact on South Asia where a new alignment -- either the China bloc or US bloc -- was in the offing in recent times under the Trump administration.

DUIR Prof ASM Ali Ashraf said Biden will hold a democracy summit in 2021 and it is clear that he is not going to "flirt" with autocrats. He will also speak of global governance and human rights to restore American values and respect.

Biden will not fully withdraw troops from countries, including Afghanistan, but the new administration will be careful to make sure that US troops are not engaged in any torture, he said.

By reviving the relations with NATO, EU and international organisations like the WHO, Biden will try to reinstate the US's global leadership position, Ali Ashraf said.

DUIR Prof Lailufar Yasmin, however, said the US has largely abandoned its hegemonic responsibility, which means that there would not be much difference in foreign policy during Biden's tenure.

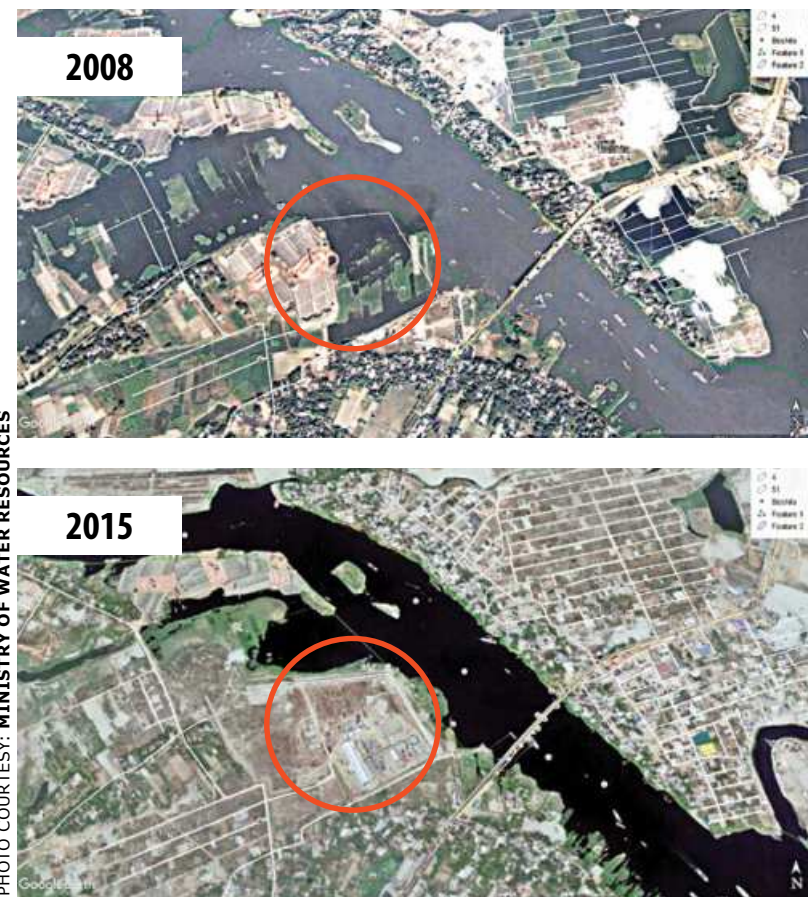
She negated the notion of a cold war between the US bloc and China bloc and suggested Biden will have more interest in South Asia to boost trade and investment.

The US dispute with China is more about technology than trade, Lailufar said, adding that the US will try to maintain its supremacy in technology by enforcing intellectual property regime.

The analysts said China may also make some adjustments to its policy globally because of criticism it faces regarding transparency and compliance in environmental aspects.

They also said while Biden will try to promote democracy and human rights, it is still not clear how far he would go to address the Rohingya crisis by creating pressure on Myanmar. The US, however, will remain the largest donor during the Rohingya crisis.

Dr Shelley Feldman, senior fellow at the Max Weber Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies in Germany, and Dr Mehnaaz Momen, associate professor of Public Administration at Texas A&M International University, also spoke at the event.



Satellite images show how structures were constructed after filling up parts of the Buriganga river and wetland over the years along the Basila bridge in the capital. A National River Conservation Commission probe found that Aslamul Haque, lawmaker of Dhaka-14, filled up more than 54 acres of river and wetland to construct a power plant and a private economic zone in Basila. The MP, however, claims he bought the land from original owners and it is not part of the river.

Part of river now MP's

FROM PAGE 1

Aslamul Haque filed a writ petition to the HC on September 2 this year after Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) on August 23 asked him to remove within seven days the structures built for his power plant and Arisha Private Economic Zone in the area.

The lawmaker also submitted an application to the BIWTA to conduct a survey to find out whether any of this land was part of the river.

Following his petition, the NRCC formed a probe committee involving all government offices concerned, including that of Dhaka deputy commissioner, joint director of BIWTA, director general of Land Record and Survey Directorate, director general of Bangladesh Water Development Board, chairman of Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority (BEZA), AC land (Keraniganj circle), AC land (Savar circle) and chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk).

After conducting manual survey and using remote sensing technology with the help of Space Research and Remote Sensing Organisation (SPARSO), the commission found the actual area of land being filled up in the area was 54.01 acres, two acres more than what the MP had mentioned in the petition.

The NRCC report also states Aslamul Haque in 2016 submitted a plan to BEZA authorities to set up the economic zone on 84 acres of land.

"We have recommended investigating how he would obtain the rest 30 acres," Dr Mujibur Rahman Howlader, chairman of the NRCC, told The Daily Star on Sunday.

He said they have also requested the Land Record and Survey Directorate to investigate how a portion of the river was recorded as private land during the RS survey.

The commission last week submitted the 20-page probe report to the authorities concerned, including the BIWTA, requesting them to remove all structures and earth from the filled-up land and restore it to its original state.

Earlier, The Daily Star obtained

NRCC PROBE FINDING

- ➔ 54 acres of river and wetland filled up
- ➔ 12.78 acres of it recorded as river land in Cadastral Survey, which ended in 1940.
- ➔ The Revisional Survey that ended in 1962 illegally recorded the river land as private property
- ➔ The rest of the 54 acres is wetland, marked as flood-flow zone in the detailed area plan (DAP)

satellite images taken in 2008 clearly showing the land along the Basila bridge being part of the Buriganga river.

Multiple satellite images taken in 2011 and 2015 show how the riverbed was filled up over the years during which Aslamul Haque constructed structures for the power plant and economic zone.

In 2008, when Aslamul Haque submitted his wealth statement to the Election Commission to contest for Dhaka-14, he declared a total of 615 decimals (around six acres) of land on the outskirts of the capital.

Ahead of the next general election in 2014, his wealth statement mentioned more than 14,178 decimals (more than 141 acres) of land, the location of which was not disclosed.

The question remains how he got the additional land.

In a press conference on Saturday, he rejected the probe report and said he started purchasing "private land" from different "original owners" in 2010 for Maisha Power Plant and Arisha Private Economic Zone in Oayeshpur and Chatarchar mouzas in Keraniganj and Hazratpur mouza in Savar.

Reading out a written statement, he termed the NRCC chairman a follower of Ziaur Rahman and Ershad and said he would fight a legal battle for his land.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, he said the river commission report

has not been prepared following due procedures. "If this land is part of the river, the authorities can take it back but there has to be a proper survey for this."

He again claimed that he had bought this land from original owners.

Asked about apparent discrepancy over the declared land in the two wealth statements, he said, "I cleared it all in 2014 by submitting necessary papers to the Anti-Corruption Commission."

Earlier on March 12 this year, asked about these allegations, Aslamul Haque denied any wrongdoing and claimed the land was not part of the river and it was recorded as "null" [non-arable] in the RS survey record conducted between 1956 and 1962.

He claimed the BIWTA authorities gave him clearance twice -- in 2011 and 2015 -- "but they are now raising their objections".

However, the then BIWTA joint director AKM Arif Uddin, who has been recently transferred, said they only gave him the permission to use a floating jetty.

A 2009 landmark High Court judgment detailed measures to recover ailing rivers from land grabbers and save them from pollution.

Yet influential people grabbed river foreshores as government officials did not perform their duty properly, said Sharif Jamil, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) and country representative of International Riverkeeper.

Though the HC announced these rivers to be living entities entitled to all the legal rights and directed the government to protect them, the authorities have so far failed to implement the court directives, he added.

"We demand proper demarcation of rivers."

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association, said the impact of the High Court judgement will only be felt when the NRCC coordinates and monitors the actions of other agencies involved.

COVID VACCINE

BNP demands army's role in its purchase, distribution

UNB, Dhaka

The BNP has demanded that the army and relevant organisations be given the responsibility to procure the Covid-19 vaccine and preserve and distribute it.

Members of the BNP standing committee, the highest policymaking body of the party, at a meeting on Sunday made the demand, said a press release yesterday.

"There is an apprehension that the activities regarding the vaccine procurement can be hampered due to the incompetence of the health ministry. The BNP standing committee thinks people won't be benefited if a pragmatic plan on the collection, preservation and distribution of the vaccine is not adopted. Instead, there is a huge scope for corruption in this process," the media release said.

The meeting said it is not possible for the corruption-riddled health ministry and the relevant offices to properly do the huge job relating to the vaccine. "The Armed Forces and other agencies concerned should be given this job as some developed countries have engaged army personnel in this regard."

The BNP standing committee members urged the government to immediately declare a plan with a detailed outline to ensure strict monitoring and accountability regarding the collection, preservation, and distribution of the vaccine.

They also demanded the government take steps to give the vaccine to people free of cost.

The government should take preparations in advance to preserve the vaccine at the right temperature as Bangladesh needs 32 crore doses of

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A grim tale of disease, distress

FROM PAGE 1

Asked what she does for treatment, Ruma said it is not possible for her to take the medicines required every day. "I can take medicines from the DIC. The staff there even wrote the names of the tablets and when to take them. But I cannot maintain my routine due to my drug habit," she added.

According to Save The Children, five of the 21 DICs for drug users and 26 of the 29 DICs for street sex workers, were temporarily closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, for which services such as HIV screening, Methadone and Antiretroviral (ARV) distribution, HIV prevention education, and treatment were heavily disrupted.

The ARV drugs are free and distributed at six major hospitals around the country, including Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) and Infectious Diseases Hospitals (IDH) in Dhaka.

Ruma said she was not able to get the medicine from BSMMU when Covid outbreak began as she did not wear a mask and gloves.

"A woman asked me to tell her what my problems were from afar. But I did not want others to hear me, so I left without the medicine."

She was suffering from fever, diarrhoea and fatigue at the time.

Shamima (not her real name), 35, who is in sex trade to fend for herself and her seven-year-old daughter, is also HIV positive. She said she too would receive the medicine from a DIC at Chankharpu but was unable to after the service was disrupted when the Covid-19 outbreak began.

She, however, sent a male relative to buy medicines on her behalf. "He used to take Tk 100 for four pills," she said, adding that she later learned he had been charging money even though she is supposed to get the medicines for free.

According to Md Akhtaruzzaman, senior manager, National AIDS/STD Control Programme (NASP) of the Directorate General of Health Services DGHS, there was a disruption to hospital services at the beginning of the pandemic.

"However, we have sent the medicines to our respective patients through couriers [SA Paribahan] and Uber Moto, based on their locations. Besides, the enlisted patients can also send their authorised person to collect the medicines as they cannot always come in person," he said.

In some cases, the medicines have been handed over to a patient's nominated person after a verbal permission from the patient taken by the peer counsellors at the centre over the phone.

"But since this is not just about the medicine and every patient needs to get a follow-up, they must visit in person at least every six months," he added.

According to NASP data, the total

number of HIV cases as of October 2019 is 7,374. Of them, 1,242 resulted in death. Of the patients who are fighting the disease, 70 percent are taking ARV treatment regularly, while the remaining 30 percent, including those living out of the country, prefer taking treatment abroad.

On the other hand, according to Save the Children, the number of HIV positive sex workers till September this year is 36. Of them, four have already died.

The organisation worked with 18,500 sex workers around the country until yesterday, and from today, they will be covering 30,000 sex workers.

Save the Children's Dr Shahrear Farid, deputy director, measurement and evaluation, HIV/AIDS Programme, told this correspondent that the DICs for street sex workers work on building awareness related to HIV and STDs, and they do so both on the field and inside the centres with the assistance of their peer educators. They also distribute lubricant and condoms and refer a medical assistant if symptoms of STDs or other health related issues are found.

During and after the lockdown (till September), the outreach workers rarely found sex workers at the hotspots due to a lack of clients.

The number of screenings, however, increased and the organisation is focused on that under the community leadership. Those who are found to be positive are connected to ART services.

Modi refuses

FROM PAGE 1

wholesale markets, where growers were assured of a minimum support price for staples like wheat and rice, leaving small farmers at the mercy of corporate agribusinesses.

Speaking at a public rally during a visit to his political constituency of Varanasi in northern India, Modi dismissed the fears as misplaced.

"The new agricultural laws have been brought in for benefit of the farmers. We will see and experience benefits of these new laws in the coming days," he said. He blamed the opposition for spreading rumours about the future of farmers.

The farm sector contributes nearly 15% of India's \$2.9 trillion economy and employs around half its 1.3 billion people.

The government says the deregulation of the sector will attract investment and fix the supply chains that lose a quarter of India's produce to wastage.

But Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the main opposition Congress party, said the new laws would benefit big business and accused Modi of crony capitalism.

"Our farmers are standing up against the black laws, they have reached Delhi leaving their farms and families behind. Do you want to stand with them or with Modi's capitalist friends?" he said in a tweet.

Country to join 3rd submarine cable

FROM PAGE 1

The country now has a bandwidth capacity of 2,600 Gbps from two submarine cables. The third undersea cable will add another 7,200 Gbps, said BSCL insiders.

At the beginning of 2018, the government had asked the state-run BSCL to take steps to get connected with the third undersea link.

BSCL officials said once the country is connected with the third cable, it will boost the company's revenue as the country is moving towards digitalisation.

With the roll-out of 3G and 4G services in the country, bandwidth consumption has increased significantly over the last few years and this trend will continue in the coming days.

The country now uses 1,600 Gbps bandwidth, which was 300 Gbps at the

end of 2016.

Of the bandwidth, Bangladesh gets 1,200 Gbps from the first and second submarine cables and another 400 Gbps comes from India.

Bangladesh imports bandwidth from India, as it needs network redundancy in case the submarine cables get disconnected.

Seeking anonymity, a BSCL official said a major reason to look for another submarine cable is that the 20-year lifespan of the first cable is nearing an end. "It is not possible to expand the capacity of the first undersea cable much and its maintenance cost is also increasing every year."

The BSCL's revenue rose to Tk 250 crore in fiscal 2019-20 from Tk 103 crore in fiscal 2016-17 on the back of a boost in bandwidth usage through undersea cables, according to its annual report for

USA may see 'surge upon surge' of virus

FROM PAGE 1

The trend is ominous, Fauci and other government scientists said, with the Christmas holidays sure to bring more travel and family gatherings.

Deborah Bix, White House coronavirus response coordinator, noted a surge in Covid-19 after a holiday weekend in May.

"Now we're entering this post-Thanksgiving surge with three, four and 10 times as much disease across the country," she told CBS's "Face the Nation."

"We are deeply worried."

The US surgeon general, Jerome Adams, was equally blunt. "I want to be straight with the American people," he told "Fox News Sunday."

"It's going to get worse over the next several weeks."

In the 24 hours to 0130 GMT yesterday, the country added 140,651 cases, taking its total to 13,373,673,

according to Johns Hopkins University. There had been 822 additional deaths.

DESPERATE WAIT FOR VACCINE

US firm Moderna said it would file requests for emergency authorization of its Covid-19 vaccine in the United States and Europe yesterday, after full results confirmed a high efficacy estimated at 94.1 percent.

"We believe that our vaccine will provide a new and powerful tool that may change the course of this pandemic and help prevent severe disease, hospitalizations and death," said the company's CEO Stephane Bancel.

If the US Food and Drug Administration agrees it is safe and effective, the first of the drug's two doses could be injected into the arms of millions of Americans by the middle of December.

Elsewhere, thousands of health workers marched in Madrid in support of Spain's public health system, in one

of the European countries hardest hit by the pandemic.

And guards opened fire to quell a prison riot in Sri Lanka, where four inmates were killed while protesting a surge in coronavirus infections.

Hong Kong introduced a hotline to denounce people who do not respect social distancing after ballroom dancing nights are blamed for helping spark a fourth wave of infections.

In France, the highest administrative court ordered the government to loosen rules allowing no more than 30 people at religious services, in the face of angry objections from church leaders.

Around 9,000 runners -- some wearing face masks -- took part in the Shanghai International Marathon, according to Chinese media, a mass-participation sports event rare during the pandemic.

Taxpayers

FROM PAGE 1

Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneen said at a media briefing at the NBR headquarters in the capital yesterday afternoon.

The NBR said it received requests, including from public representatives, businesses and tax lawyers, for the deadline extension as the number of Covid-19 cases kept increasing, disrupting preparations for filing the returns. The first phase of the outbreak devastated incomes of a large number of people after it affected businesses and other economic activities.

Muneen said only 15 lakh among the holders of 50 lakh Taxpayer Identification Numbers (TIN) had filed the income tax returns till Sunday afternoon. The number of such individual taxpayers was 14.65 lakh during the same period the previous year.

"We thought the deadline should be extended so that more taxpayers could comply with the tax rules," he said, adding that the decision was made following approval from their higher authorities.

A notification, signed by NBR Second Secretary (Tax Policy) Md Mohidul Islam Chowdhury, said the order was issued considering public interests.

For the current fiscal year, the NBR has made submission of income tax returns compulsory for all taxpayers, except for credit cardholders with no taxable income, people who got TIN for selling land and non-residents who do not have any fixed base in Bangladesh.

Last year, nearly 22 lakh taxpayers filed returns as the submission was not mandatory. This year, tax authorities expect to receive a higher number of returns because of changes in the law made while passing the national budget for fiscal 2020-21.

The official time for tax return filing starts on July 1 every year.

Taxpayers failing to file their returns by the end of the new deadline will have to submit their returns by seeking time from the field offices of taxes, said NBR sources.