



Some of the 120 arches built in Lama of Bandarban to welcome Mostafa Kamal, the newly selected member of Bandarban Hill District Council. Mostafa is also the joint secretary of the Awami League's upazila unit.

PHOTO:
SANJAY KUMAR BARUA

Bangladesh FM to visit India March 1-2

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Bangladesh Foreign Minister AH Mahmud Ali will visit India this week, High Commissioner Syed Muazzem Ali said yesterday.

The minister will arrive in New Delhi on a two-day visit on March 1. He is expected to hold a meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on the sidelines of Raisina Dialogue, to be organised by a leading think-tank on March 2, added the envoy.

Muazzem said the present India-Bangladesh relations are at their "best" since 1974. He stressed the need to expedite the process of economic integration of the two countries.

"Today, inter-state relationship is pretty much based on economic cooperation, technical cooperation and investment, among other factors.

"There are other problems, but I am sure that we will be able to resolve those with goodwill and sincerity. We should not spend all our time resolving the past issues, we should also look into the future," said the diplomat.

According to him, a strong neighbourhood was in the "common interest" of Bangladesh and India.

"Security has always been a problem in our part of the world. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has dealt with the issue with an iron hand," he mentioned.

SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW

Asean nations worried about rising tensions

REUTERS, Vientiane

Southeast Asian nations expressed serious concern on Saturday about growing international tension over disputed waters in the South China Sea.

China claims most of the sea but Southeast Asian countries Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei and Vietnam have rival claims. Friction has increased over China's recent deployment of missiles and fighter jets to the disputed Paracel island chain.

"Ministers remained seriously concerned over recent and ongoing developments," the 10-members Association of Southeast Asian Countries (Asean) said in a statement after a regular meeting of the group's foreign ministers in Laos.

Land reclamation and escalating activity has increased tensions and could undermine peace, security and stability in the region, Asean said in the statement.

The United States has criticized China's building of artificial islands and facilities in the sea and has sailed warships close to disputed territory to assert the right to freedom of navigation.

On Friday, the United States urged China's President Xi Jinping to prevent the militarisation of the region.

Vietnam, which accused China of violating its sovereignty with the missile deployment, echoed the U.S. call on Saturday.

"We call for non-militarisation in the South China Sea," Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh told reporters after meeting his Asean colleagues.

"We have serious concerns about that," he said, when asked about China's increasing military activity in the region.

The group agreed to seek a meeting between China and Asean's foreign ministers to discuss the South China Sea and other issues, Cambodian Minister Hor Namhong said.

China's maritime claims are Asean's most contentious issue, as its members struggle to balance mutual support with their growing economic relations with Beijing. China is the biggest trade partner for many Asean nations.

Neighbours Vietnam and China compete for influence over landlocked Laos, which has no maritime claims but finds itself in the difficult position of dealing with neighbours at odds over the South China Sea. Laos is tasked with finding common ground on the issue as the Asean chair in 2016.

RSF condemns cases against Star editor

FROM PAGE 1

The information was provided to the newspaper and to Bangladesh's other media outlets by the Task Force Interrogation Cell (TFIC) during the last caretaker government regime.

In a February 22 address, Hasina called on Anam to resign, blamed his editorial error for her imprisonment at the time, insinuated that his newspaper had colluded with the military and accused him of trying to sabotage the constitution during the 2007-2008 military-backed rule, said a RSF statement issued on Friday.

No fewer than 79 lawsuits have been filed against Anam since February

9 in 53 districts. Seventeen seek to bring sedition charges, and 62 accuse him of defamation. Total Tk 132,811.55 crore in damages are being demanded by the plaintiffs, who do not include Hasina herself.

"The law is being flouted on the pretext of seeking justice in what is just a matter of journalistic ethics. Mahfuz Anam can in no way be accused of sedition because he did not violate the constitution. And he cannot be prosecuted 72 times for the same mistake," said Benjamin Ismail, the head of RSF's Asia-Pacific desk.

"It is time the Awami League understood that political opposition is nec-

essary in a democracy and that suppressing critical media is a direct violation of fundamental freedoms and human rights."

Anam owned up to his error during a political discussion programme on the ATN News TV station on February 3, acknowledging that he should not have run stories based solely on information provided by TFIC.

In the television talk show, Anam conceded that he had not been able to verify the authenticity of the confessions he was reporting.

The English-language Daily Star and its sister newspaper Prothom Alo provide critical coverage of all the

various branches of government in Bangladesh, said the RSF statement.

The country's biggest companies, including mobile phone operations such as Grameenphone, have been forbidden to advertise in either of these two independent newspapers for the past six months, said the RSF statement.

No Bangladeshi media outlets have reported the existence of this illegal and discriminatory order, which is designed to throttle the two newspapers economically, added the RSF statement.

Bangladesh is ranked 146th out of 180 countries in RSF's 2015 World Press Freedom Index.

Fire at Brac Centre

Flames doused, none hurt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fire broke out at Brac Centre in the capital's Mohakhali yesterday evening, but was doused after efforts of one and a half hours.

No one was hurt in the flame, only some documents of the NGO were burnt, said Mozammel Haq, deputy director of fire service's Dhaka division.

The fire might have been caused by a short circuit in a room on the fourth floor of the 22-storey building around 7:00pm, said sources at Fire Service and Civil Defence.

The floor housed the human resource department of the non-government organisation, said Mozammel Haq.

Thirteen fire engines were dispatched to control the blaze.

The loss incurred in the blaze has yet to be known.

Now father dies

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The family had just moved into the flat. They were supposed to be at the flat from March 1 but since the flat was new and with no tenants, they moved in on February 20, police said quoting the building owner Delwar Hossain.

Ali Hossain Khan, officer-in-charge of Uttara Pashchim Police Station, said they questioned Delwar at his home.

Quoting Shahnawaz's neighbours, the OC said the neighbours smelt gas and had alerted Shahnawaz about leaking gas. Shahnawaz hired gas technicians but they could not find the leak.

The OC claimed that a team from Titas Gas yesterday visited the scene and found nothing wrong with the gas lines.

Police were probing whether the gas burners were left on, he said.

An unnatural death case was filed with Uttara Pashchim Police Station over the incident, he added.

Shahnawaz's wife Sumaiya was yet to know that her two sons had died, said Shahnawaz's brother Quamrul Ahasan. He said she asked about her children several times but family members told her

that they were safe at a relative's house.

The bodies of the children were sent to their ancestral home in Barisal for burial, he added.

Ahasan further said although Jarif was out of danger, the child was suffering from the trauma.

Shahnawaz's nephew Nazmus Shakib alleged that they had to wait for several hours at the DMCH burn unit to receive the bodies of two children on Friday.

Even though they had died in the afternoon, the family could receive the bodies around midnight after "enduring" several "legal processes", he said.

Shakib said the victims' family was preparing to settle in the US before the tragedy struck.

US Ambassador Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat visited the injured at DMCH yesterday afternoon, hospital sources said.

Samanta Lal Sen, national coordinator at National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, said the US ambassador expressed her shock over the incident and also asked about the condition of the injured.



A relative of Mohammad Shahnawaz in tears as another relative tries to console him at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Shahnawaz, who was burnt in a fire at his Uttara home on Friday, died yesterday. His two sons were killed in the incident and his wife is in a critical condition.

PHOTO:
STAR

Medicare scare

FROM PAGE 1

Bushra added, "There are 100,000 registered pharmacies in the country, but many pharmacies are run not by pharmacists but by salespersons who have incentive to over-prescribe that drives up the cost."

Aggressive marketing policies of pharmaceutical companies also lead to unnecessary prescriptions by doctors, she said, adding that doctors often prescribe brand drugs instead of the generic ones, which also add to the cost.

Dr Syed Abdul Hamid, associate professor at the Institute of Health Economics of Dhaka University, alleged that pharmaceutical companies often present doctors with apartments in posh areas such as Dhanmondi and Banani in return for prescribing their drugs for a certain number of years.

Emphasising the need for government control on drug prices, Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury, founder of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, said the government should form a drug committee with economists, consumers and health practitioners to control the prices of drug.

He suggested the health and family planning ministry run a prescription audit in the capital to check the tendency of doctors to overprescribe.

With regard to quality of drugs and identifying counterfeit ones, Bushra

said the drug testing laboratory at the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) with its modern equipment needs to be manned with efficient people.

Dr Md Khairul Islam, country representative of WaterAid Bangladesh, expressed concern about air and water pollution caused by unplanned urbanisation, which add to the health risk of the urban population.

Citing a study, Khairul said a correlation between stunting, lower IQ and unsafe water existed among children of the country.

He said inadequate waste management in cities and absence of faecal sludge management in municipalities and rural areas are contaminating surface water and thus posing health risk.

Hossain Zillur said the country has an elaborate health facility infrastructure from community hospitals to tertiary level hospitals such as Dhaka and Chittagong Medical College Hospitals.

However, instead of working as referral hospitals, these tertiary health facilities are burdened with outdoor patients, he said emphasising the need for ensuring better health services at districts and sub-districts level facilities.

Former health secretary AMM Nasiruddin said behavioural change is important to prevent the growing incidence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, high blood

pressure, heart and kidney diseases and cancer.

"There is a gap in awareness in rural areas about these," he said adding that imams of mosque can be used to encourage people to live healthy lifestyles.

National Professor Brig (retd) Abdul Malik, president of National Heart Foundation, emphasised the need for creating healthcare assistants to look after people disabled from chronic diseases.

Health Minister Mohammed Nasim said people are destroying their health in the name of modernisation by indulging in unhealthy lifestyles such as eating fast food and avoiding walk.

From this year onward, he said, a health service week would be observed every year from March 17, on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to raise awareness among people and decide on policy issues.

He added that to stop mushrooming of pharmacies, the government would now give pharmacy licence in a neighbourhood based on the population of that area.

A book titled "Realising Universal Coverage: Bangladesh: Challenges and Opportunities" edited by Hossain Zillur Rahman and published by PPRC was also launched at the programme.

Mosquitoes go out of control

FROM PAGE 1

The DSCC, however, started a 10-day crash programme in all its wards from Wednesday to combat the menace. Mayor Sayeed Khokon launched the programme after purchasing 30,000 litres of adulticide a few days ago.

Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) too started a crash programme from Wednesday and the programme would continue until Tuesday.

The DNCC authorities, however, were yet to start cleaning the water bodies under its jurisdiction.

Officials of both the city corporations said if the authorities had taken initiatives to buy the pesticides right after budget, the menace could have been controlled.

Residents of Pallabi, Mirpur, Kazipara, Shyamoli, Banani, Gulshan, Mohakhali, Mohammadpur, Niketon, Uttara, Gendaria, Panthapath, Jatrabari, Dhanmondi, Jigatola, Hazaribagh and Kamrangirchar are among the worst sufferers.

They said a sudden rain a few days ago would intensify the menace, as the number of breeding grounds had

increased due to the rain.

The urged the authorities concerned to take steps immediately.

Bijoy Krishno Debnath, chief zonal executive officer of zone-5 of DSCC, told The Daily Star on Monday that they could not conduct regular anti-mosquito drives over the last 10 days due to a shortage of adulticide and larvicide.

There are 15 wards under the zone and there is a shortage of pesticides in all the wards, he said.

Gullal Singh, zonal executive officer of zone-4 of DNCC, said, "We will start cleaning Ibrahimpur Khal and a water body behind Mirpur Bangla College within a few days. Those water bodies should have been cleaned earlier."

Unclean water bodies with stagnant water were the main reasons behind the rise of the menace, he said.

Gullal said they had submitted their requirement to the DNCC authorities for cleaning water bodies around three months ago, but they got the approval only recently.

A DNCC official, wishing anonymity, said they issued letters to

land owners and other government organisations, requesting them to clean water bodies in their areas. However, they did not get any positive response from them.

Finally, they started cleaning the water bodies on their own with the permission from ministries concerned, he said.

A DSCC official, wishing not to be named, said they failed to get the pesticides in time because there were not enough bidders for the first tender floated to purchase the chemicals. That is why they had to go for a re-tender.

They had already started a crash programme after receiving 30,000 litres of adulticide and 4,400 litres of larvicide a few days ago, the official said.

He claimed that they could not conduct regular mosquito control drives as they had only 1,000 litres of adulticide and 100 litres of larvicide.

Regarding cleaning of the water bodies, the official said although they had submitted their requirements to the DSCC authorities in this regard around a month ago, they were yet to get any response.