

India eases

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US President Donald Trump urged the nuclear-armed rivals to come back to the negotiating table, speaking to Khan by phone on the importance of "reducing tensions through bilateral dialogue".

India yesterday meanwhile gradually restored phone lines following an almost two-week communications blackout in its part of Kashmir, imposed hours before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise August 5 gamble.

Seventeen out of around 100 telephone exchanges were restored Saturday in the restive Kashmir Valley, the local police chief told AFP.

But mobiles and the internet remained dead in the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley, the main hotbed of resistance to Indian rule in Jammu and Kashmir state in a 30-year-old conflict that has killed tens of thousands. In the Jammu area, which is mainly Hindu, mobile services have been restored in some districts.

Fearing an angry and potentially violent response, India also sent 10,000 extra troops to the area, severely restricted movement and arrested some 500 local politicians, activists, academics and others.

The state's Chief Secretary BVR Subrahmanyam had said Friday there would be a "gradual" restoration of phone lines over the weekend, with schools to resume classes in some areas next week.

The transformation of Srinagar into an eerie maze of barricades, soldiers and concertinas of barbed wire has failed to stop public anger boiling to the surface.

"We want peace and nothing else, but they have kept us under this lockdown like sheep while taking decisions about us," resident Tariq Madri told AFP.

"Even my nine-year old son asked me why they had locked us inside," he added.

Several hundred protesters clashed with police in the city on Friday, who responded with tear gas and pellet-firing shotguns.

People hurled stones and used shop hoardings and tin sheets as improvised shields, as police shot dozens of rounds into the crowd. No injuries were reported.

The clashes broke out after more than 3,000 people rallied in the city's Soura neighbourhood, which has witnessed regular demonstrations this month.

A week earlier around 8,000 people staged a protest which also ended in a violent confrontation with police, residents said.

"I want the government to know that this aggression and aggressive policies don't work on the ground," said 24-year-old Adnan Rashid, an engineering student.

Domingo

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and Zimbabwe next month.

Domingo will arrive in Dhaka on 21 August.

While making the announcement, BCB President Nazmul Hassan said Domingo's vision for Bangladesh made him the ideal candidate for the role.

"He has a wealth of experience and we were very impressed with his passion and coaching philosophy. He has a clear idea of what is required to take the team forward," said Nazmul.

For Domingo, who plans to develop some bright prospects, the ICC T20 World Cup, which is scheduled to begin on October 18 in 2020 in Australia, will be the biggest challenge for him in his two-year period as it is a format where the Tigers are yet to vastly improve.

"It is a massive honour to be appointed as head coach of the Bangladesh national cricket team. I have followed Bangladesh's progress with keen interest and I am extremely excited to assist the team in reaching the goals they are capable of," Domingo said as quoted in a press release from the BCB yesterday.

Domingo gave an interview to the BCB earlier this month and the board officials were satisfied with his plan and vision during the presentation.



Iranian oil tanker Grace 1 is seen as it sits anchored after the Supreme Court of the British territory lifted its detention order, in the Strait of Gibraltar, southern Spain, on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Hassles on return journey too

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working day was on August 8. A two-day weekend began on August 9 and the official three-day Eid holidays on 11 August 14 was the only working day before the National Mourning Day and another weekend, which ended yesterday.

Some office goers opted to take leave on August 14 (Wednesday) and make a nine-day holiday.

Our correspondents at different districts reported that people were rushing towards Dhaka yesterday.

At Shimulia Ferry Terminal in Munshiganj, thousands from the southern districts were seen crossing the Padma on ferries, launches, and speedboats.

Most of the launches on Shimulia-Kawrakandi route were seen overloaded and the operators were charging passengers more than usual.

"The government-set launch fare is Tk 33. But they are charging Tk 50," said Habibur Rahman, who came from Faridpur.

After crossing the river, people had to wait a long time to get buses

to Dhaka and the bus operators were also charging more than usual, alleged passengers.

"I had to wait for around one hour to get on the bus. They are charging each passenger over Tk 100 when the actual regular fare is Tk 70," said Solaiman Miah, who was traveling to Dhaka from Sathkhira yesterday.

Munshiganj's Mawa Zonal Traffic Inspector Helal Uddin claimed that they kept watch to prevent overcharging.

Soumitra Ghosh, who was traveling to Dhaka from Rajbari via the Paturia Ferry Terminal in Manikganj, said, "Bus staffers demanded Tk 300 for a trip to Dhaka from Paturia Ferry Terminal. The usual fare is Tk 120. When I refused to pay the extra money, they forced me off the bus."

Even, state-run Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) buses were also overcharging, alleged passengers.

"I got on a BRTC bus from Paturia and was heading towards Savar. The normal fare is Tk 80. But they charged me Tk 200," said Akhtar Hossain, who

also came from Rajbari.

Manikganj Deputy Commissioner SM Ferdous also claimed that they kept watch to prevent overcharging.

At Tangail New Bus Terminal, over 150 passengers were seen waiting in front of a bus counter around 11:00am.

"I have been waiting for around three hours but no bus is available. I just got a ticket," Nizamuddin told The Daily Star correspondent around 11:00am.

Tangail's Traffic Inspector Raifqul Islam said there were no tailbacks on the Dhaka-Tangail highway but traffic was very heavy and slow.

At Barishal Launch Terminal yesterday evening, every vessel was packed as a huge number of passengers poured into the terminal to board launches for Dhaka.

Azmal Huda Mithu, deputy director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) of Barishal River Port, claimed that over one lakh people left for Dhaka on launches yesterday.

"I have been trying to get a ticket for two hours. If I fail to get one, I will

have to come back to the terminal tomorrow," Bashudeve Mazumder, a resident of Barishal city, told The Daily Star correspondent around 7:00pm yesterday evening.

The Patuakhali Launch Terminal was crowded yesterday. Eight launches left the terminal from Dhaka yesterday; all overcrowded.

A gang was active in the terminal. They occupied space on the decks with bed sheets and then sold the space to passengers.

"After reaching the terminal, I found the launch was filled with passengers. Seeing me upset, a few people came to me and offered me space for money. I paid them Tk 200 and got a small space which they had kept occupied," said Abul Hossain, a resident of Nilganj under Kalapara upazila in Patuakhali.

At Kamalapur Railway Station, all incoming trains were filled with passengers.

"Despite the crowd, I prefer trains because there is no traffic jam to worry about," said Zahir Hossain who arrived from Sirajganj yesterday.

Blaze spread fast for faulty gas pipes

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Besides, many used gas cylinders which were bursting during the fire, he added.

According to fire officials, several deadly fire incidents earlier took place at the slum because of the defective gas supply lines. The illegal and risky gas connections remain a serious threat to people and households as the quality of distribution lines and the way they were installed fall far below standard.

Galvanised Iron (GI), plastic pipes and even rubber pipes were being used for gas connection. Some were precariously hanging overhead.

There have been allegations that syndicates, with the help of some unscrupulous Titas Gas employees, steal gas from the main transmission and distribution lines of the company.

The Daily Star contacted Titas Gas Managing Director Mir Mashirul Rahman several times over phone. But he didn't respond.

Asked, Director (operations) of Titas Gas M Kamruzzaman Khan said that he does not know about the illegal gas lines and that local Titas Gas workers in the area would know about it.

Firefighters were conducting a search operation at the slum since yesterday morning, during which they found that there were combustible substances in the shanties.

Meanwhile, a three-member probe committee was formed yesterday to investigate the slum fire. The committee has been asked to submit a report to the fire service headquarters in this regard within 15 working days.

The committee comprises deputy director (ambulance) Abul Hossain as its head, assistant director (operation) Abul Hossain as member secretary and deputy assistant director (Mirpur Zone) Newaz Ahmed as member.

LIVING ON THE STREETS

Most of the slum dwellers spent the night on the streets and in the open space of nearby Public Works Department (PWD) office premises.

Around 100 people suffered minor injuries while escaping the fire and took primary treatment from local pharmacies.

The DNCC has set up a temporary primary-treatment booth yesterday morning where 41 people took treatment, mostly for cuts sustained while trying to escape the fire in a rush, till 2:00pm.

Soheli Begum, who lives in the slum, said the fire originated from the northern side of the slum and took some time to reach the other end, where she resided.

"I thought the fire would not come here. But it engulfed everything in a few minutes. I couldn't save anything," she said in despair.

She added they did not have an exit and so they had to escape after breaking a wall.

Many residents of the shanties were seen coming to the site in the morning to find anything sellable out of the ruins, in order to buy daily necessities.

The DNCC and some volunteers provided food for the victims at Bangabandhu Biddyaniketon School located nearby, where some of the

victims have been taking shelter for the time being.

DO A FAIR PROBE'

Multiple versions surfaced about the cause of the fire. Some suspect short-circuits while some others suspect an act of sabotage. Officials, however, are still in the dark about it.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir demanded a fair and neutral investigation into the fire as such incidents are on the rise.

He visited the spot around 12:00pm.

Talking to reporters after the visit, Fakhrul also urged the government to rehabilitate the victims and provide them with compensation.

"Fire incidents at city slums have seen a rise these days, hitting the destitute hard. So, a neutral probe body needs to be formed to look into the matter," he said.

The BNP leader also said stern punitive actions must be taken if anybody's involvement in the fire incident is found.

Visiting the fire-ravaged area, Gonoforum President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday urged the government and social organisations to come forward in aid of the victims.

"Following the fire, thousands of people are living under the open sky without food, shelter and clothes in a dengue-hit city. I call upon the government and the social organisations to immediately stand by them," he said.

He voiced deep concern over the repeated fire incidents at different slums.

The fire broke out in the 35-year-old Chalantika slum around 7:22pm on Friday. After a six-hour long effort, 24 firefighting units doused the fire around 1:30am.

The firefighters rescued four injured people and took them to hospital.

The blaze rendered thousands of slum dwellers homeless, destroying their valuables and assets. The victims are mostly low-wage earners, including garment workers, rickshaw-pullers, hawkers, house maids and day labourers.

Many of the families went to their hometowns to celebrate Eid and were yet to return. The blaze destroyed everything as most of the shanties were locked from the outside.

Students

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in the morning and evening hours, when Aedes mosquitos, carrier of dengue fever, are known to bite, said Kankar Ghosh, an epidemiologist at Dhaka Shishu Hospital.

These mosquitos usually bite people two hours after sunrise and two hours before sunset, and people of these two groups remain outside home at these hours, he said.

Children are particularly vulnerable because their immune system is weaker than that of adults.

Kankar said that analysing information of 856 dengue patients admitted to Dhaka Shishu Hospital between May to August 16, they found 49 percent were aged 6 to 11 plus.

FURTHER SPREAD FEARED

Health experts have warned of a further spread of the viral disease as Aedes mosquitos may have used the empty homes, schools and offices to breed in large numbers during the Eid vacation.

Worried that things could get worse during Eid holidays when many homes in the capital remain unattended for days, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) on August 7 had instructed citizens to cover traditional and western commodities before they left the town.

It also asked them to remove water from the trays at the bottom of refrigerators, from air conditioning drain pipes, buckets, plant pots, and barrels.

On the other hand, the education ministry had asked school authorities to form special committees comprising teachers, staffers, scouts and students to monitor the institutions during the holidays so that Aedes mosquitos cannot breed easily.

These correspondents visited seven schools in the capital yesterday and found the school authorities took various preventive measures.

Five people were found cleaning the premises of Holy Cross Girls' High School yesterday noon. They also kept unused flower tubs upside down and cleaned those that have plants in them.

Mirpur Girls' Ideal Laboratory Institute acting principal Afrina Parvin were monitoring the cleaning activities herself. She said their two teams regularly cleaned or destroyed possible breeding grounds during the vacation.

Matiur Rahman, headmaster of Gendaria High School, said their team applied mosquito repellent every day during the vacation.

He said they were also spraying aerosol supplied by the Dhaka South City Corporation.

"It is very important to destroy mosquito even at offices. But there is a huge negligence here as in many offices people do not want to take responsibility for this," said Prof Mahbubur Rahman, principal of Norail Govt Mohila College, who did his doctoral research on Aedes mosquito.

On August 7, the Cabinet Division issued a circular asking all ministries and divisions, departments, and other agencies under ministries to take necessary steps so that Aedes mosquitos cannot breed in offices and their surrounding areas during the holidays.

Contacted yesterday, Cabinet Division Deputy Secretary Sazzad Ul Hasan said they did not have any monitoring teams.

"But we believe that all offices acted accordingly," said Sazzad, who had signed the circular.

Many private offices are also taking various measures to prevent mosquito breeding.

Nadim Haider Rauf, managing director of Market Fit, Dhaka, said they had dedicated staff for cleaning so that no Aedes mosquito can breed in their office.

Ravaged by fire

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at Tk 1,200 to a scrap collector.

"I still feel blessed that we are alive and could come out of the devastating blaze," Mamun said.

Friday's blaze left thousands of slum dwellers homeless. Most of them are low-wage earners, including garment workers, rickshaw-pullers, hawkers, house maids and day labourers.

Most of the families went to their hometowns to celebrate Eid. Many returned to find only ashes where their homes once were.

Kazakhstan court frees anti-Beijing activist

AFP, Almaty

A rights activist in Kazakhstan who faced seven years imprisonment over his outspoken opposition to neighbouring China was unexpectedly freed Friday as public and international pressure over his case mounted.

Serikjan Bilash, whose activism in defence of Muslim and Turkic minorities in Xinjiang earned him global media attention, told AFP he struck a plea bargain with the court that allowed him freedom but will end his activism.

"I had to end my activism against China. It was that or seven years in jail. I had no choice