

Shringla calls on PM

UNB, Dhaka

Visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

Briefing the media, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said the upcoming Bangladesh visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, sub-regional connectivity and various bilateral issues were discussed at the meeting.

Modi is scheduled to reach Dhaka on March 17 to join the birth centenary celebration of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Hasina briefly described various programmes that have been taken to celebrate "Mujib Borsho".

The press secretary said both sides also discussed coronavirus. The PM said Bangladesh already dedicated a hospital to coronavirus patients. Anyone found to be infected would be sent to that hospital.

Shringla praised Bangladesh's economic development and RMG industry.

PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Muhammad Imran and Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Riva Ganguly Das were also present.

Later, a seven-member delegation from Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS), led by its President Prof Quazi Deen Mohammad, called on the PM.

The BCPS team invited Hasina to their upcoming convocation.

Press Secretary Ihsanul said the delegation raised various problems regarding their profession and medical education before the PM.

Senior Vice-President of BCPS Prof TIM Abdullah Al Faruque, Vice President Maj Gen Abdul Ali Mia and PM's personal physician Prof Dr ABM Abdullah were also present.



Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

EU raises risk level

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arrivals from virus-hit nations, locking down towns, urging citizens to stay home and suspending major events such as football matches and trade fairs.

Health officials monitoring the virus at the ECDC announced that it had increased its risk assessment to "moderate to high".

The Louvre -- the world's most visited museum -- closed on Sunday and yesterday after staff refused to work because of fears about the virus.

China reported 42 more deaths yesterday-- all in central Hubei province. The pathogen is believed to have originated in a market that sold wild animals in Hubei's capital, Wuhan.

The death toll in China alone rose to 2,912, but it is also surging abroad.

The WHO says the virus appears to particularly hit those over the age of 60 and people already weakened by other illness. It has a mortality rate of between two and five percent.

Infections are now rising faster abroad than in China, as the country's drastic measures, including quarantining some 56 million people in Hubei since late January, appear to be paying off.

Iran reported 12 more deaths yesterday, raising the country's toll to 66, the second biggest after China.

South Korea, the biggest nest of infections outside China, reported nearly 500 new cases, raising its total past 4,000.

Half of South Korea's cases are linked to a sect whose leader apologised yesterday for the spread of the disease.

Seoul's city government have asked prosecutors to press murder charges

against him for failing to cooperate in efforts to contain the virus.

A second person died in the northwestern US state of Washington as President Donald Trump, who has downplayed the risk of a major outbreak, faced criticism over his administration's preparedness.

EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides said: "As of this morning, we have 2,100 confirmed cases in 18 EU member states and we have 38 citizens who have lost their lives."

After an increase on Sunday, China's National Health Commission reported 202 new infections on Monday, the lowest daily rise since late January, bringing the nationwide total over 80,000.

In a symbol of the improving situation, authorities in Wuhan closed on Sunday one of 16 makeshift hospitals built or repurposed from public buildings to treat the city's huge number of patients.

By contrast, Iran reported more than 500 new cases, raising its total number of infections to 1,501.

Four more people died in South Korea, taking its toll to 22.

South Korea's cases are expected to rise further as authorities test more than 260,000 people associated with the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, the religious group often condemned as a cult that is linked to more than half the infections.

In Italy, Europe's hardest-hit country, infections nearly doubled to around 1,700 cases over the weekend.

In the United States, a man in his 70s with underlying conditions died on Saturday, health officials said, as New York reported its first case in a woman who had visited Iran.

Condemned cell for animals

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after completion of the project, all problems will be solved."

Talking to The Daily Star, animal rights activists blamed the lack of experienced manpower and appropriate environment for the animals led to so many deaths in such a short time.

Visiting the conservation centre, this correspondent found out no veterinary surgeon was officially appointed there. A hospital that was set up for the animals did not even have a surgical bed.

Talking to this newspaper, Ahmed Rafi, president of Pradhikar, an animal rights organisation of Sylhet Agriculture University, said the conservation centre had the "worst management team".

"The animals are kept in cages that are not liveable at all. Plus, vehicles' access to the centre are troubling these animals."

Ashrafal Kabir, coordinator of Bhoomishontan Bangladesh, an environment and animal rights-based organisation, termed the conservation centre a "condemned cell for animals".

"The Forest Department showed the highest level of negligence by bringing in animals at the centre without appointing any expert veterinary surgeon or animal keeper."

Besides, leasing out the conservation centre to a corporate group is outrageous, he added.

In October 2018, the conservation centre was leased out to Tanha Enterprise for Tk 5,05,000. The same company took lease of the centre for Tk 757,000 in October 2019.

Contacted, Anwar Hossain, proprietor of Tanha, said their responsibility was selling entry and parking tickets, managing animal keepers and maintaining security only as per the lease agreement.

"There is no problem in taking care of the animals as we brought in two animal keepers from Bangabandhu Safari Park."

He alleged that the conservation centre was constructed in an unplanned way and that is causing trouble.

"We have a veterinarian from Sylhet Agriculture University who comes routinely to check the health of the animals; but it is not enough."

"Now we are hopeful as the Forest Department is already planning a project to develop it and

after completion of the project, all problems will be solved."

According to the Forest Department sources, the lessee was given all the responsibilities to manage the centre, even to bear the cost of keepers and the vet surgeon.

The department has proposed a project of Tk 100 crore for the development of the centre, which is awaiting ministry's approval.

Contacted, SM Sajjad Hossain, deputy conservator of forests and divisional forest officer in Sylhet, said, "The project seeks reconstruction of existing cages and building new, allotting human resources and many other aspects that will help the conservation centre to become a true conservation centre for wildlife."

Admitting there are acute manpower shortage and the lessee does not have the resources to operate the centre properly, he said, "In the project, we have asked for allotting 27 persons including a surgeon and nine keepers."

"Many things were overlooked when the centre was inaugurated and now we want to avert the problems it is facing. We are hopeful to make the centre as a true conservation centre for the wildlife."

With 62 animals, mostly from Bangabandhu Safari Park, the conservation centre was opened on November 2, 2018. Around 40 more animals were brought in later at different times and some were brought in after being rescued by different animal rights organisations.

A total of 45.34 hectares of forest was declared as Tilagarh Eco Park in 2006. After years of leaving it uncared for, the Forest Department in 2012 took the initiative to establish a wildlife conservation centre there.

According to the Forest Department, the initial budget of the project was 9.79 crore and the work of establishing the centre started in 2013. It was supposed to end by June 2016.

After revising the deadline, the Forest Department completed the construction work by the mid 2018 in a hurry. As they did not have proper human resources to open it, the department leased it out.

Of all the issues, two spotted deer gave birth to two calves at the conservation centre on January 18 and February 13 this year.

CAA misunderstood in many senses

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groundwork for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit on March 17-18. Modi is coming to Bangladesh to attend an event observing Bangabandhu's birth centennial.

Shringla also held meetings with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen and Roads and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader.

Shringla's visit comes against the backdrop of violence in Delhi that claimed over 40 lives and injured some 200 others since February 23 over protests in Delhi against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

The act created a pathway to get Indian citizenship for migrants belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. It excludes the Muslims.

Critics say the CAA violates India's secular constitution.

Responding to a question, Shringla said there were hundreds of thousands of homeless and stateless people in India. They will be allowed to apply for citizenship on fast track basis. This means, instead of waiting 10 years, they will get it in five years, he added.

"That does not mean in any way that other people are not benefited by the act. India has a normal process of application for citizenship."

For example, he said, about 5,000 nationals from Pakistan were granted citizenship in the last 10 years.

CAA is not targeted against any religion. Under the current government in Bangladesh, the minorities are taken care of really well, Shringla said, adding that Bangladesh had a secular constitution and laws were enacted accordingly.

Religious persecution took place in the post-1975 period when there was no spirit of secularism in the constitution of Bangladesh, he added.

Shringla repeated that the National Register of Citizenship (NRC) was an internal matter of India and would not affect Bangladesh.

It is being done under the guidance of Indian Supreme Court, and those who are not registered will have opportunities to appeal to the court, he said.

The final list of NRC published in August last year left out over 19 lakh people in Assam. They are allowed to appeal legally. But what happens to those who fail in the legal battle is not clear.

While addressing the seminar as chief guest, Prime Minister's International Affairs Adviser Dr Gowher Rizvi said Dhaka accepted the assurances of India on NRC, and had good reasons to believe that it had nothing to worry over the issue.

"Our commitment to secularism is absolutely central and we do not want to have any situation where our secularism will be threatened in any way," he said.

Bangladesh attaches high priority to protecting minorities and ensuring their welfare, he said, adding that the country would continue to work with India so "our secular society grows from strength to strength".

Rizvi said there was no way Bangladesh would look away if minorities were affected in any way.

DEAL ON SEVEN COMMON RIVERS

At the seminar attended by many politicians, academics, diplomats, civil society members, and journalists, Shringla said water sharing agreement of seven common rivers, including the Muhuri, Monu, Dharla, Khowai, Gumti and Dudhkumar, might be signed by this year.

India and Bangladesh have exchanged information on waterflow of the seven transboundary rivers, Shringla said.

"We need to expedite harmonisation of this data so that water sharing agreements can be finalised as early as possible, possibly within this year itself."

Water sharing agreements of the Teesta and the Feni were finalised in 2011. During Hasina's visit to Delhi in October last year, Bangladesh and India signed a deal, allowing India to withdraw 1.82 cubic feet of water from the Feni per second.

Teesta deal, which was supposed to be signed in 2011, was not finalised following objections from then West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee.

"Given our federal system, an agreement can only be finalised on the basis of consensus among stakeholders. We certainly want to show you that we are working on concluding the deal as soon as possible," Shringla said yesterday.

BORDER KILLINGS

During the question-answer session Shringla said India wanted to bring border killing to zero, but the criminal activity along the borders and attacks on security forces of both the countries lead to the killings.

"There have been attacks on border

guarding forces on both sides. Deaths on the border are not necessarily confined to the citizens of Bangladesh. There are equal number of Indian citizens."

Shringla said in 2019 alone, 12 Indian citizens were killed, four injured and 83 members of Border Security Forces of India were injured and one was killed.

The Daily Star could not verify the claim.

Shringla said modern fencing on the remaining 165 kilometres of Indo-Bangla borders would allow both countries to improve security and enhance cross-border trade.

INDIAN LINES OF CREDIT

Gowher Rizvi expressed frustration over the slow disbursement of Indian LoC.

"Despite all these lines of credit available to us, almost ten years down the road we have just about completed the first line of credit.... This truly needs serious attention," he said, referring to the about \$7.5 billion Indian LoC.

Bangladesh managed to use \$523 million of the \$862 million of the first LoC and \$14 million of the \$2 billion of the second LoC.

"We need to find a way to remove these things quickly. Otherwise, the opportunity being lost is too costly," Rizvi said.

INDIA TO ADDRESS ROHINGYA CRISIS

India is committed to offering the fullest support for any mutually-acceptable solution that will enable the earliest possible return of Rohingyas to Rakhine state in a safe, secure and sustainable manner, Shringla said.

Apart from providing assistance to the Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar, India is also investing in housing and other socio-economic aspects of Rakhine. This will make sure there is an incentive for their return, he added.

"In other words, there is no difference between India and Bangladesh on the way forward in addressing this major humanitarian problem."

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Riva Ganguly Das, BISS Chairman M Fazul Karim and BISS Acting Director General Col Sheikh Masud Ahmed also spoke at the seminar.

Dhaka has asked about the recent Delhi violence during the meeting between Shringla and Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen.

Shringla said they were probing if the violence was instigated by any third party, a foreign ministry official told The Daily Star.

Seven killed in a single 'gunfight'

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Block-D at Camp 27; Nur Hossain Nuraiyya, 35, a resident of Block-E at Camp 27, Md. Imran, 22, a resident of Shalbagan Camp, and Ali Hossain, 27, a resident of Camp-27.

Identities of the three others could not be confirmed till late last night.

Pradiip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge (OC) of Teknaf Police Station, said the bodies were sent to Cox's Bazar General Hospital for autopsy. Rab has filed a case with the police station in this connection.

The law enforcers said they were raiding different areas to arrest the gang leader, Zokir.

After the "gunfight", policemen visited the refugee camps and sought cooperation from the Rohingyas to

arrest robbers.

Meanwhile, panic gripped the camp areas since the incident.

'GUNFIGHT WITH BGB'

A man was killed in another gunfight with Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) in Damdamia area of Teknaf around 11:00pm on Sunday night.

The identity of the deceased could not be known, reports Bangla Daily Prothom Alo.

BGB claimed to have recovered 1.5 lakh yaba pills, a fire arms and two cartridges from the spot, said Lt Col Md Payscale Hasan Khan, commander of BGB's Teknaf-2 unit.

RIGHTS ACTIVISTS EXPRESS CONCERN

At least 412 people were killed in 2018 after the government launched

an anti-narcotics drive on May 4 that year. Last year, the figure was 356.

Noted human rights activist Nur Khan said the sharp rise in extrajudicial killings was extremely worrisome.

"Seven people killed in a single operation is definitely the biggest one. We can't accept it. The area where it happened is notorious for various types of criminal gangs, including those of robbers. The law enforcers, however, should be more careful in bringing criminals to book."

Such killings raise fears in the society and also lead to a culture of impunity, he said.

Nur observed that extrajudicial killings were taking place as law enforcers themselves lack faith in the country's judicial system.

End border killings

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Amendment Act (CAA) passed in December last year triggered violent protests in India.

Recent violence in Delhi over the CAA left 42 people dead and over 200 injured. India maintains these are its internal issues and won't have any impact on Bangladesh.

Eminent citizens in Bangladesh expressed concern over the Delhi violence, while some Islamic and left political parties have demonstrated against such violence.

"I said we want you not to do anything that creates problems for us. He [Shringla] said the issues are temporary and won't create problems for us," Momen said.

Momen said Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be visiting Bangladesh on March 17-18 to attend the birth centenary celebration

of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

India is the biggest contributor to the independence of Bangladesh. The two countries share common democratic values, tradition and history, and Bangladesh will pay the highest respect to the Indian PM during his visit, he said.

"We will also expect our guests to be aware of the expectations and concerns of our people."

Meanwhile, Dhaka has asked about the Delhi violence during Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen's meeting with Harsh Vardhan Shringla, a foreign ministry official told The Daily Star.

Shringla said they were investigating if the violence was instigated by any third party, he said without elaborating.

Tigers looking

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the 10-team ICC World Cup in England last year, which was followed by a 3-0 whitewash at the hands of Sri Lanka. It will be important for the Tigers to have the right frame of mind and to have the right processes in place, keeping the future in mind.

A win in the second game today can make the occasion special as it will be the 100th victory for veteran batsman Mushfiqur Rahim, who has been playing ODIs for Bangladesh since August 2006.

In the first ODI, Bangladesh were boosted by opener Liton Das's dominant century and a collective approach from the others and posted their highest ever ODI total against Zimbabwe of 321 for six.

The Bangladesh bowlers then followed it up with a clinical bowling performance, with young seam-bowling all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin picking up three wickets after a 15-ball 28 cameo, during which he displayed his big-hitting abilities.

Skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who had all the focus on him ahead of the series as he had been going through a lean patch that saw him take just one wicket in eight World Cup games last year, made a good comeback, which would be a great relief for everyone involved with Bangladesh cricket.

The 36-year-old picked up two wickets, and with the second he became only the fifth bowler to bag 100 ODI wickets as a captain after Shaun Pollock, Wasim Akram, Jason Holder and Imran Khan.

Off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz also bagged two scalps as Zimbabwe were bundled out for a mere 152 runs.

For Zimbabwe it will be a daunting task yet again and skipper Chamu Chibhabha will have to correct course to break a 14-match losing streak against Bangladesh.

With experienced campaigners in Sean Williams and Craig Ervine set to come back into the playing eleven, the side will surely gain some strength today.

Zimbabwe, in the first ODI, were depleted as Ervine was ruled out with flu while Williams could not report to the team early enough to be ready for the game.

Regular Zimbabwe captain Williams had opted sit out the one-off Test and was supposed to join the team in Sylhet ahead of the ODI series.

Zimbabwe's bowling lacked the bite in the first game, while it was equally frustrating that none of the batsmen were able to show any resistance apart from 19-year-old Wesley Madhevere on his debut.

The low turnout in Sylhet in the first game also remained a topic of discussion as the north-eastern city is hosting their first full-fledged international series.

Clarification

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics has sent a clarification to a report run by The Daily Star on February 25 under the headline "9 in 10 children suffer violent disciplining".

The BBS said this was one of the key findings of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, conducted by the BBS and Unicef. The survey found that 88.8 percent children aged between one and 14 years experienced physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by their parents and caregivers. The figure was 82.3 percent in 2012-2013.

In the clarification sent last week, the BBS gave an explanation on the nature of violence children endure in households as they collected data based on some questions asked to parents and caregivers.

According to the survey, 28.6 percent children in Bangladesh are hit or slapped on their face, head or ears by their parents or caregivers while 38 percent on their hands, arms and legs.

Besides, 38 percent children are spanked, hit or slapped on their back with bare hand while about 15.6 percent parents and caregivers used different objects, such as belt, hairbrush, stick or other hard objects to hit them on their back or elsewhere on the body. Around 32 percent of the respondents also said they shook their children.

Five percent parents and caregivers said they beat up their children repeatedly as hard as they could.

On the other hand, an overwhelming majority of children faced verbal abuse as almost 87 percent parents and caregivers said they shouted, yelled or screamed at them. About 27.5 percent of the respondents said they belittled and demeaned their children with name-calling like dumb or lazy.

The MICS is a global survey, conducted as part of the Global MICS Programme, developed by Unicef in 1990s. It measures key indicators that allow countries to generate data for use in policies, programmes, and national development plans, and to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The survey is done in every 3-4 years with the same methodology for every country.

According to the BBS, the percentage of violence against children was 82 percent in Nepal (MICS 2014), 82 percent in Bangladesh (MICS 2012-2013), 81 percent in Pakistan (MICS 2017) and 74 percent in Afghanistan (MICS 2010-2011).