

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



1,683
New cases in 24hrs



4,21,921
Total cases



6,092
Deaths



3,39,768
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,266,079
Deaths



51,041,400
Total cases

US-Bangladesh ties might strengthen with Biden in office

Experts say

PORIMOL PAIMA

The US-Bangladesh relations might get stronger with Joe Biden in the office, foreign affairs analysts have said.

The experts however said Dhaka needs to address its shortcomings in governance and human rights, the two issues that the new US administration will focus on globally.

They said Biden, a seasoned politician with vast knowledge on global affairs, intends to ease relations with countries with which the relations became strained under the Trump administration.

Biden has pledged to re-enter the Paris Agreement on climate change and reverse the withdrawal from the WHO -- both steps taken under the Trump administration.

Under Donald Trump, the US had also begun a tough trade war against China.

Analysts said when the world will be reasonably stable, Bangladesh, a growing economy striving to expand its global reach and seeking to address regional issues like the Rohingya crisis, can effectively work towards its objectives.

Crucial areas where Bangladesh can expect positive outcomes include the coronavirus pandemic, climate change, Rohingya crisis and easing the US's rules to facilitate the passage of a greater number of Bangladeshis immigrants to the US, they said.

ADDRESSING COVID-19 AND CLIMATE CHANGE

"Apart from handling it [the pandemic] better in the USA, he [Biden] is also likely to take a leadership role globally towards this end," said M Humayun Kabir, former Bangladesh ambassador to the US.

If the US returns to the WHO, questions over China's expanding role in the UN body will be addressed, he said.

Prof Imtiaz Ahmed of International Relations Department of Dhaka University said Bangladesh, as a WHO member, might benefit in terms of vaccine accessibility.

Prof Imtiaz said Biden's vision for a greener world is good news for Bangladesh, which is at the forefront of climate change.

The country, which faces threats of salinity intrusion, inundation of large coastal areas and displacement of millions of people, should get support from the US and other industrial countries for adaptation.

Besides, promotion of renewable energy in the US and elsewhere means a reduction in carbon emission and its fallout, said M Humayun Kabir, also chairman of the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute.

Nurture tolerance, show respect

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During yesterday's proceedings, Hamid pointed out in brief the successes of Sheikh Hasina's government in different areas, especially the government's tackling of the pandemic.

Reflecting on the life of Bangabandhu, he said there was no scope for looking at Bangabandhu and Bangladesh separately. One has to know about Bangabandhu in order to know about Bangladesh, the struggle of the Bangalees for freedom, and the Liberation War in 1971.

"Those who tried to look at these two phenomena separately have failed. Today's reality is the biggest proof of that," he said.

Saying that the Father of the Nation had a huge heart, Hamid said, "His confidence, love and faith in his countrymen were infinite. He repaid the love of the people of Bangla by sacrificing his own life. He has made the Bangalee nation indebted to him."

The president said Bangabandhu always got himself involved in helping others and ameliorating their sorrows. "Instead of bothering about his own happiness and sorrow, he used to worry about others. That was the beginning. He started protesting whenever he saw injustices, exploitations and repressions. He never became confined within his own self or the domain of his family.

"Even while standing on the gallows, he sang the victory-song of Bangla, the Bangalees and Bangladesh. He was unwavering and resolute even when he learnt that his grave was being dug beside the condemned cell."

Hamid also said Bangabandhu had participated in anti-British rallies and gatherings at the age of only 14. Personal and family bondages could never become a hindrance to the political pursuits of Bangabandhu.

Saying that Bangabandhu used to attach highest priority to the proceedings of the constituent assembly, Hamid said there were no opposition parties in the assembly, and the number of opposition members was less than 10 when all parties and independents were combined.

"But the opposition members were quite vocal and used to get sufficient time for placing their arguments. The parliamentary sessions were quite lively. The arguments, debates and presentations of views were very

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

Since the influx of some 750,000 Rohingya refugees following the brutal military campaign in Myanmar's Rakhine State, there has been little headway in the issue due to an absence of effective measures from the international community.

Humayun Kabir thought neither China nor the US put enough pressure on Myanmar, fearing perhaps the country would be driven closer to one of the two superpowers.

Trump had not attached much importance to it. However, the issue is likely to get sufficient attention from the Biden administration, which may try to handle the trade war against China in a manner other than building an alliance against the nation, he said.

"The Democrats have always been vocal against genocide and crimes against humanity. Biden is very likely to be strong in raising the Rohingya issue and seek a resolve," said Prof Imtiaz Ahmed.

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Analysts said US engagements with Bangladesh have increased recently. Holding of comprehensive economic partnership dialogues, signing of an open sky deal between and US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun's visit in October are all signs of that.

Bangladesh's political stability, continued growth, skilled workforce, rising middle class, improved infrastructure and connectivity, geostrategic location between South and Southeast Asia and handling of the coronavirus pandemic are all factors the US has noticed.

"Therefore, US companies are interested in investments in Bangladesh," said Prof Imtiaz Ahmed.

Both experts said Bangladesh really needs to work sincerely to improve the climate for investment by removing bottlenecks -- either bureaucratic red tape or taxation, or both.

"The blue economy especially is an area where US companies can come in and explore," Humayun Kabir said.

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Both experts said Biden, unlike Trump, will be vocal on democracy, human rights and labour rights, which is why it is important for Bangladesh to improve on those fronts.

"It is not that we will do it for America, but for ourselves. The US will then have less scope to speak on such issues and we can draw investments," said Prof Imtiaz.

He said the US will be strengthening its relations with India, but is also likely to raise voice on India's National Register of Citizenship and Citizenship Amendment Act -- an issue that generated some level of disquiet within Bangladesh.

attractive.

"Bangabandhu used to attach much importance to the opinions of opposition members in all the proceedings of parliament."

He added, "There was also another notable feature of that parliament. The Speaker was embarrassed when anyone spoke against Bangabandhu in parliament, but Bangabandhu did not show such an emotion. This could not be imagined if one was not liberal and democracy-minded.

"However divergent the political ideologies might have been, Bangabandhu never cast any aspersion on the opposition leaders. Rather, he spoke by showing due honour for them. Political courtesy was a notable feature of his life."

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is not merely a name, Bangabandhu is an institution, an entity, a history, Hamid said, adding that an invisible Bangabandhu is much more powerful than a living Bangabandhu.

After a break of about 15 minutes following the president's speech, the JS proceedings resumed when Prime Minister and Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina brought a resolution under section 147 of the rules of procedure of parliament paving the way for discussion on the political life, work and philosophy of Bangabandhu to pay tributes to him marking Mujib Borsho.

While placing the resolution, Hasina described various aspects of Bangabandhu's life and work and his sacrifice for the Bangalee nation throughout his life.

This was for the first time any prime minister brought any resolution in parliament for discussion, sources at the parliament secretariat told The Daily Star.

Following placing of the resolution, Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, who was presiding over the sitting, urged Awami League General Secretary and Roads, Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader to take part in the discussion. Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, ruling AL MP Asaduzzaman Noor, Gonoforum MP Sultan Muhammed Mansur Ahmed, among others, participated in the discussion.

Discussion on the resolution will be held for four days.



Following months of closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the area surrounding the capital's New Market have taken on the appearance of old. Hawkers have taken over the pavement and crowds of pedestrians on the road and the sidewalk leave little space for social distancing. This photo was taken yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

The mayoral mechanism

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The owners in 1986 filed partition suits with the Joint Session Judge's Court in Cox's Bazar, which a few years later appointed a receiver -- assistant commissioner (land) of the upazila concerned -- for the land until the suits are resolved.

Despite all this, mayor's wife Farhana Akhtar and his brother-in-law Mizanur Rahman were able to sell eight plots from the disputed land to the land acquisition office.

After the land acquisition began, the owners also moved the High Court on December 19, 2019.

"Those who claim they purchased the land could not show any papers proving that we had sold our land to them, when we went to the High Court protesting the irregularity," said the owner, taking to this newspaper.

An investigation by The Daily Star has uncovered massive irregularities in the land acquisition process that implicates the mayor himself, in addition to various officials from the land acquisition office.

BEGINNING OF THE SCAM

The municipality acquired a total of 2,1750 acres of land in Rubber Dam area of Jhilonggha at 11 times the cost of another site proposed for the project. The Daily Star has documents that confirm 1.171 acres of it was acquired from Farhana and Mizan.

In a letter sent by the then mayor Sarwar Kamal on April 19, 2015 to Md Abdul Halim Khan, project director at the Department of Public Health Engineering, two sites were proposed -- one at PM Khali and the second at Jhilonggha.

The letter stated that two acres of land at Jhilonggha would cost Tk 11 crore 23 lakh, while the same area of land at PM Khali would cost Tk 1 crore 23 lakh.

Despite the huge discrepancy in costs, Mujibor Rahman started to lobby for the site in Jhilonggha after he assumed office in August 2018.

As per the minutes of a meeting held at Cox's Bazar office of the Department of Public Health Engineering on May 14, 2019, he urged Abdul Halim Khan to speed up the process to acquire the land at Jhilonggha.

"As water table is receding fast in Cox's Bazar, I request to accelerate the steps to implement the project at Jhilonggha mouja," he said.

In a letter signed by the mayor and sent to the project director at the Department of Public Health Engineering on June 13, 2019, the price per decimal of land was shown to be Tk 5,57,236, several times higher than the market price.

As per the land acquisition rules, the owner gets three times the original rate when the land is acquired and that's how the price for 1.171 acres finally stood at Tk 36 crore.

RECOMMENDATION AFTER VISIT

Following a proposal for acquisition from Cox's Bazar Municipality on July 17, 2019, the district administration sent a team led by the upazila nirbahi officer of Cox's Bazar Sadar upazila, the land acquisition officer of the district and the assistant commissioner (land) of the upazila to visit the site and review all relevant documents on September 16, 2019.

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us directives to reduce time and prevent harassment [of people] during land registration and mutation."

He mentioned that delay in land registration and mutation occurs as the work is carried out by two different offices under two ministries. But now they will be linked through the interoperable software and be able to share the database.

The cabinet secretary said AC land offices across the country now have 4.3 crore digital records of rights or Khatiyon.

Khatiyon is a document prepared through survey for determining possession, ownership and assessment of land development tax.

In the past, anyone could get a plot of land registered in his or her name at the sub-registrar's office without confirmation from the AC land office. Now, the sub-registrar's office will register land after getting confirmation from the AC land office through the software.

If a person goes to the sub-registrar's

Later in the same month, Ashraful Afsar, the then additional deputy commissioner (revenue), also visited the spot, and recommended the land for acquisition, overlooking the legal issues.

They did not even explore the alternative site for the project.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the minutes of a district land allocation committee meeting held at the DC office on September 30 last year.

The meeting minutes show that additional deputy commissioner (revenue) wrote to Deputy Commissioner Kamal Hossein, recommending the land be acquired for the project.

"The ADC (revenue) forwarded his recommendation to facilitate the acquisition. The papers relating to the land were found correct. In the presence of all parties a unanimous decision to acquire 2.1750 acres of land at Jhilonggha mouja is taken," concludes the meeting minutes, which was signed by the DC.

MYSTERIOUS MUTATION

Mayor Mujibor Rahman proposed the site for acquisition in a letter sent to the Cox's Bazar DC on July 17, 2019.

Using his clout, he had the land mutation done on October 2, 2019, recording the names of Farhana and Mizan as the owners, according to land documents and land office sources.

As per the land acquisition order sheet, the office concerned issued a notice for the acquisition on October 28, 2019.

The land office of Cox's Bazar Sadar upazila mutated the land knowing all legal issues involved. The original owners lodged complaints with the ADC (revenue) against the mutation a few days after the mutation.

But the ADC (revenue) did not dispose of the complaints. Rather, he released a cheque for Farhana and Mizan.

The district land allocation committee headed by DC Kamal Hossein was aware of the disputes surrounding the land acquired, according to the order sheet, which contains all information from the land acquisition to settlement of acquisition.

The order sheet prepared by the district administration, in fact, mentions the reservations about the land acquisition procedure.

"Four reservations were found so far -- between October 27 and November 18 [a period in 2019 during which the district administration asked people to raise complaints, if any]. They [claimants] requested that the land not be acquired as there are multiple claims on the land," says the order sheet.

Shah Alam, a claimant of a disputed plot, told The Daily Star that his family filed a case for the land to be partitioned off among the claimants in 1986. Since then, the court had appointed the assistant commissioner (land) of their upazila as a custodian of the land.

"I received a notice in October last year that the government wants to acquire the land. But to my utter shock, I learnt that the ownership of the land had been transferred to another party. But being a disputed land, there is no scope for anybody to mutate or register

the land as per the acquisition law," he said.

"I lodged a complaint with the district administration against the mutation and filed a writ with the High Court, which ordered disposal of the issue within 30 days. Following the order, they included me in the registrar but are procrastinating over the payment for the last seven months."

Official sources said the land acquisition office has already released Tk 8 crore to Farhana and Mizan and the process to release another 28 crore got slowed down due to an Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) investigation.

Contacted on October 24, DC Kamal Hossein said he can't make any comment without going through the order sheet.

When told that the order sheet mentions reservations about the land acquisition, he said there were about 75 big and small projects in his area and "I can't say anything without seeing the papers".

"I am giving you the phone number of my official concerned; you better talk to him," he said and hung up the call.

This correspondent never got that number.

Muhammad Shahriar Muktar, assistant commissioner (land) of Cox's Bazar Sadar, told The Daily Star earlier that he was not aware of any legal prohibition in mutating that land.

When this correspondent reminded him of the cases over the acquired land, he cut short the conversation, saying, "Sorry, the case is under ACC investigation. I can't say anything further."

Shamim Hasan, land acquisition officer in charge of the acquisition, who had told the administration after visiting the site that there was no dispute over the land, said, "The law does not allow me to talk to the media without permission of my superior."

Asked how the Tk 8 crore was released despite a dispute over the land, former ADC (revenue) Ashraful Afsar, said, "As far as I know if there is any reservation or case over the land, the payment won't be released. I have to investigate the matter."

Recently, Afsar has been promoted to deputy secretary of science and technology ministry.

SOURCE OF MONEY?

Mizan, brother-in-law of Mayor Mujibor, hung up the phone call when this correspondent introduced himself as a journalist.

Mujibor, as a mayoral candidate, had submitted an affidavit on June 24, 2018 to the Election Commission, where his wife's profession was listed as that of homemaker.

In just two years, Farhana and her brother bought 63 decimals from the disputed land spending Tk 2,75,94,000, according to one sale deed obtained by this newspaper.

It raises the question how she and her brother, who is known to have no fixed job, managed to earn so much money.

Mujibor had shown Tk 3,00,809 as cash in his hand in his affidavit.

The Daily Star could not get his comment as both his phones were found switched off for the last 15 days. His wife also could not be reached for comments.

The secretary further said the AC land offices across the country failed to update records on ownership of 50-60 percent plots of land. Now the offices, which will be able to update records based on online database, have to prepare monthly reports in this regard.

Anwarul said the issue of land inheritance has also been incorporated in the software.

"The prime minister has given directives to protect the rights of transgender people in case of land inheritance."

When his attention was drawn to bribe allegations against a section of officials at sub-registrar's offices, he said, "Now there is no such scope [for corruption] ... The new system will right away reduce corruption by around 75 percent."

"According to our estimate, 75 percent of the lawsuits are filed over land dispute. Once this new system comes into effect, the number of cases will decrease by 50 percent," he added.

25 more die, 1,683 test positive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of deaths due to Covid-19 rose as the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) yesterday reported 25 single-day deaths in the past 24 hours till 8:00am.

Over the last one week, the daily death toll was below 20 except the 21 deaths on Wednesday, according to DGHS data.

Since October 13, this is the highest single-day casualties, except the second day of November when the number was the same, due to the highly transmissible virus.

Around 31 people died of Covid-19 on October 12.

With the latest figure, deaths due to Covid-19 rose to 6,092, which was 1.44 percent of all confirmed cases, according to the yesterday's press release from the DGHS.

In the same 24 hours, meanwhile, a total of 1,683 people tested positive for the viral infection surging the total number of case to 4,21,921.

Besides, the recovery count rose to 3,39,768 after another 1,623 patients were discharged from the hospitals during the same period.

Against a total of 14,042 tests in those 24 hours in 115 Covid-19 testing laboratories, the positivity rate was almost 12 percent (11.99 percent) -- which indicates further rise of infection.

The overall positivity rate was 17.17 percent.

Meanwhile, a total of 1,623 Covid-19 patients were added to the recovery list, raising the total number of recoveries to 339,768.

This is more than 80 percent of all confirmed cases, according to the press release.

Of the deceased yesterday, 17 were males and eight were females.

All of them died in hospitals.

One was aged between 11 and 20, one between 21 and 30, one between 31 and 40, two between 41 and 50, nine between 51 and 60, and the rest 11 were above 60 years.

SI Akbar held

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citizen in Kanaighat.

Contacted, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) officials also said Akbar was detained by locals in India.

When reporters at the press conference asked the SP about the videos, he said Akbar was detained under direct supervision of police and some trusted friends helped them catch him.

"We take help from the general public and such friends have helped us," he said without specifying much.

Akbar will soon be handed over to the PBI, which is investigating the case, the SP said.

Sylhet Range Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Mofiz Uddin Ahmed said, "Sub-inspector Akbar will face prosecution for the heinous crime he has committed and no one's above the law."

PBI Special Superintendent Muhammad Khaled-uz-Zaman told The Daily Star, "Akbar was in India and was detained by the Khasi people near the border area. They then handed him over to the police."

Contacted, BGB Battalion-19 Commanding Officer Lt Col Sayeed Hossain said, "We came to know that Akbar was in Shilchar of Assam for a while. Once he came to Meghalaya, he was detained by the Khasi community people."

"After detaining him, Khasi people contacted one Abdur Rahim, a resident of Kanaighat, who received Akbar from the Khasi people on the border. Rahim then contacted police and handed him over."

Rayhan, a 33-year-old resident of Akhalia Neharipara area in Sylhet city, was allegedly detained and tortured by police on October 11.

He died at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital at 7:50am. His wife filed a case with Kotwali Police Station accusing several unnamed people the next day.

On October 12, Sylhet Metropolitan Police suspended four personnel including sub-inspector Akbar, who was the in-charge of a police outpost.

On October 13, PBI was tasked with the investigation of the case. Until yesterday, an assistant sub-inspector and two constables were arrested in the case. 'SENIOR OFFICER ASKED ME TO FLEE' Akbar fled from his workplace the day he got suspended.

"I was suspended, I could be arrested, and a senior officer told me to run away. The officer told me to come back two months later when everything would settle down," Akbar was seen saying in one of the viral clips.

"Rayhan was arrested for mugging. I had not beat him up alone. Seven or eight other policemen also beat him up," he said, adding that he fled to India via Bhologanj area of Companiganj.

After Akbar's detention, Rayhan's mother Salma Begum said that the case should be handed over to Rab for better investigation.

Thanking the Khasi community, she said, "Police failed to detain him. All I want is justice. If I see Akbar being punished for what he did to my son, I will be able to sleep in peace."