

BANGLADESH
UPDATE1,007
New cases in 24hrs5,19,905
Total cases7,718
Deaths4,64,446
RecoveriesGLOBAL
UPDATE1,895,190
Deaths87,851,273
Total cases

UNRESOLVED ISSUES WITH PAKISTAN

Dhaka seeks to settle those

Asks for Islamabad's formal apology for 1971 genocide

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka seeks to resolve outstanding issues with Islamabad as the latter shows eagerness to improve bilateral relations with Bangladesh.

The unresolved issues include receiving an official apology from Pakistan for the genocide in 1971, repatriation of Pakistanis stranded in Bangladesh, and the division of assets.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam spoke about the issues when Pakistan High Commissioner to Bangladesh Imran Ahmed Siddiqui paid him a courtesy call at the foreign ministry yesterday.

The foreign ministry in a statement yesterday said State Minister Shahriar cordially welcomed the high commissioner and said enhancing relations with neighbouring countries was a policy of Bangladesh.

Shahriar then reiterated the importance of resolving the outstanding bilateral issues.

The Pakistan High Commission in another statement said High Commissioner Imran handed the state minister a signed copy of the Tripartite Agreement of 1974 which addresses the issues between the countries.

He said the agreement should serve as a foundation to further strengthen the fraternal relations and underlined that in order to establish productive commercial relations, there was a need to address all non-trade barriers and

efforts needed to be made to facilitate frequent interactions between the business sectors of the two countries.

The high commissioner also informed the state minister that Pakistan had removed all restrictions on Pakistani visa for Bangladeshis.

Imran joined the Pakistan High Commission early last year. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen had earlier talked to him about the gruesome killings of Bangladeshis by the Pakistani army in 1971 and said Pakistan should apologise for the genocide.

Experts also say improvement of relations with Pakistan should depend on whether it apologises for the past crimes. Trade and regional cooperation, however, can continue as usual.

The state minister yesterday also urged Pakistan to grant access to more Bangladeshi products by utilising the existing South Asia Free Trade Agreement provisions, and to remove the trade barriers as the current trade balance tilts towards Pakistan.

The high commissioner conveyed the very best wishes of the people and the government of Pakistan to Shahriar and said he would diligently work to advance bilateral relations in every possible area of cooperation.

Both sides agreed on the need to hold the long-pending Foreign Office Consultations, which was held the last time in 2010.

PM renews vow to fight

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she said, adding that at the same time, her government would do everything needed to ensure people's civic and democratic rights, upholding the rule of law.

The PM said her government prevented the rise of militancy with an iron hand and kept its cultural and spiritual heritage of being a nation of interfaith harmony.

"The followers of all religions faiths and castes have been living together maintaining mutual respect and they will do so in the future as well."

Hasina said the pandemic left a huge scar throughout the globe. Cyclone Amphan, repeated and prolonged flooding alongside the pandemic exposed Bangladesh economy to a deeper crisis, which "we managed to overcome with firmness".

"The world is yet to overcome the coronavirus crisis, [but] by the grace of Almighty Allah the death and infection rates caused by the pandemic continued to remain much low in Bangladesh," she said.

Hasina said her government put in its all efforts to contain the pandemic and ensure the import of its vaccine as quick as possible.

"Frontline warriors like physicians, health workers, and law enforcement agency members will have priority in getting the inoculation as soon as the vaccines are available in the country."

She reiterated her clarion call upon all to follow health guidelines.

Hasina said Bangladesh kept stabilised its economic performance, defying Covid-19 onslaught and "according to our estimates, this year our GDP growth rate will be 7.4 percent".

She said different international agencies predicted Bangladesh to be on the top of the countries with higher GDP growth in Asia, while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) report said Bangladesh was the third top scorer among the nations across the globe.

The PM pointed out that the GDP of Bangladesh last year grew by 5.24 percent, when the per capita income stood at \$2,064.

"March 26 will be the golden jubilee of our independence. We will celebrate it with all festivity InshaAllah if the coronavirus disappears. Simultaneously, the Father of the Nation's birth centenary functions will continue," the PM said.

Hasina outlined her government's policies and strategies to negate the pandemic impact on Bangladesh economy, particularly keeping in mind the issues of the poorer people.

"We have so far announced stimulus packages of Tk 1.21 lakh crore which is equivalent to 4.3 percent of the total GDP. We are still continuing the process considering the situation," she said.

The PM said during the crisis, the social safety net was widened to bring around 2.5 crore people under financial and other assistance programmes.

Hasina said the pandemic forced closure of educational institutions in Bangladesh as elsewhere in the globe, but students continued to attend classes virtually.

She said the schools and other educational institutions would be reopened as soon as the normalcy returned.

The PM said her government continued to make all efforts to

peacefully send all 1.1 million Rohingyas back home.

"I call upon the international community to take more effective measures to repatriate Rohingyas to their own country."

Hasina said her government built improved and well-designed infrastructures in Bhasan Char to accommodate one lakh Rohingyas.

But she said only those who voluntarily expressed their desire to be moved to the island were being relocated.

The PM noted that Bangladesh at this moment has secured the number one position in terms of peacekeeper members in the United Nations blue helmet missions.

Hasina said Bangladesh would be the 24th largest economy within 2030 as forecast by the World Economic Forum.

She also highlighted the implementation status of different mega projects such as the Padma bridge (82 percent) after the installation of the last span, first unit of 1,200MW Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (80 percent) and tunnel under the Karnaphuli river (62 percent).

Hasina said her governments have added 19,000MW power to the national grid from 2009 to 2020 and now the daily generation capacity is 24,421MW.

Mentioning that Bangladesh secured the third spot, climbing from the fourth place, in rice production, she said continuous policy support and stimulation to the agriculture sector have helped achieve this success.

About the road communications, Hasina said the government has developed 63,655km rural roads, while 453km highways were upgraded to four lanes from 2009 to 2020.

Besides, the PM said the government has set up 451km of new rail lines, while it restored 1,181km rail tracks and constructed 428 rail bridges from 2009 to 2020.

Hasina added that 12 brand new Boeing aircraft, including Dreamliners, have been inducted into the fleet of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, while a Dash-8-400 aircraft has been added to it last month and another two Dash-8-400 aircraft were on the way.

The PM said digital technology has emerged as a key medium of communications and trade-business during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The number of internet users has exceeded 11 crore during the period, she said, adding that internet connections were being provided via fiber-optic cable to 18,434 government organisations and 3,800 unions.

Hasina said the country's own satellite Bangabandhu-1 has been providing all local satellite TV channels' feeds and internet to remote islands as well as offering services to private banks and Bangladesh Army.

She mentioned that the government has provided a total of Tk 2,958 crore as stipend from primary to higher education levels in fiscal 2019-20 and Tk 111 crore to 2,10,049 honours or equivalent-level students under education assistance trust of the prime minister in 2020.

The PM said each primary school student will get Tk 1,000 as kit allowance in 2021 on the occasion of Mujib Borsho and the scheme will require Tk 1,400 crore.



A supporter of US President Donald Trump sits inside the office of US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi as he protest inside the US Capitol in Washington, DC, yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFP

US riot stuns world

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pleas for intervention, while the violence at the Capitol spurred several administration officials to quit.

After the chaos on Capitol Hill, Congress late on Wednesday resumed its work certifying Biden's Electoral College win: normally a formality but which included efforts by some Republican lawmakers to stall the process. As the tense debate stretched into the early hours of Thursday, the Senate and the House of Representatives rejected two objections to the tally and certified the final Electoral College count with Biden receiving 306 votes and Trump 232 votes.

McConnell, who had long remained silent while Trump sought to overturn the election results, chastised other Republicans who stalled certification. He called the invasion a "failed insurrection".

"They tried to disrupt our democracy," he said on the Senate floor. "They failed."

The outcome of the certification proceedings was never in doubt, but it was interrupted by rioters who forced their way past metal security barricades, broke windows and scaled walls to fight their way into the Capitol.

Security forces fired tear gas in a four-hour operation to clear the Capitol. Police said a woman, reportedly a Trump partisan from southern California, was shot and killed and three others died in the area in circumstances that were unclear.

Some besieged the House chamber while lawmakers were

inside, banging on its doors. Security officers piled furniture against the chamber's door and drew their pistols before helping lawmakers and others escape.

The assault on the Capitol was the culmination of months of divisive and escalating rhetoric around the Nov 3 election, with Trump repeatedly making false claims the vote was rigged and urging his supporters to help him overturn his loss.

Following Thursday's certification, he issued a statement via White House aide Dan Scavino, saying: "Even though I totally disagree with the outcome of the election, and the facts bear me out, nevertheless there will be an orderly transition on January 20th."

Biden said on Wednesday that the activity of the rioters "borders on sedition".

The violence came on the day that his Democratic party secured narrow control of the Senate with wins in two Georgia runoff.

Wednesday's chaos unfolded after Trump - who before the election refused to commit to a peaceful transfer of power if he lost - addressed thousands of supporters near the White House and told them to march on the Capitol to express their anger at lawmakers.

He told supporters to pressure their elected officials to reject the results, urging them "to fight".

Some prominent Republicans in Congress squarely blamed Trump for the violence.

"There is no question that the president formed the mob, the

president incited the mob, the president addressed the mob. He lit the flame," Representative Liz Cheney, the No-3 House Republican, wrote on Twitter.

Trump had tried to get Pence and other Republicans to block the certification of the election - the final step before Biden takes office - even though they lacked the constitutional authority to do so.

After Pence made clear he would not do this, Trump president ripped into his No-2 on Twitter even as the Senate, with the vice president presiding, was under siege.

The shock of the assault seemed to soften the resolve of some Republicans who had supported Trump's efforts.

Several Republican senators who had said they would mount objections to the electoral vote count changed their minds when they returned to the chamber.

Two objections - to the vote tallies in Arizona and Pennsylvania - were voted down resoundingly in both the House and the Senate.

"All I can say is count me out. Enough is enough," Senator Lindsey Graham, one of Trump's staunchest allies in Congress, said on the Senate floor.

Election officials of both parties and independent observers have said there was no significant fraud in the November contest, when Biden won 7 million more votes than Trump.

Historians said it was the first time that the Capitol had been taken over since 1814 when the British burned it during the War of 1812.

WH sees spate

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saw angry mob rampaging through the citadel of American democracy.

The discussions focused on the 25th amendment to the US Constitution, which allows for a president's removal by the vice president and cabinet if he is judged "unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office."

Invoking it would require Vice President Michael Pence to lead the cabinet in a vote on removing him.

CNN quoted unnamed Republican leaders saying the 25th amendment had been discussed, saying they had described Trump as "out of control."

CBS reporter Margaret Brennan said that "nothing formal" had been presented to Pence, and ABC reporter Katherine Faulders said "multiple" sources had told her that discussions took place on the unprecedented move.

Trump's encouragement of the protesters, his unfounded claims that he lost the November 3 presidential election due to massive fraud, and other bizarre behavior have raised questions about his ability to lead.

While only two weeks remain before President-elect Joe Biden takes office, after the attacks on Congress Wednesday Democratic lawmakers called for invoking the 25th Amendment as well.

Democrats of the House Judiciary Committee sent a letter to Pence urging him to act to remove Trump, saying he had stoked an act of insurrection and "sought to undermine our democracy."

Pointing to a rambling speech Trump gave Wednesday, it said he "revealed that he is not mentally sound and is still unable to process and accept the results of the 2020 election."

Former and current Republican leaders also vented their anger.

Former President George W Bush, who has kept a low profile, released a strongly-worded rebuke Wednesday evening calling the "insurrection" at the Capitol a "sickening and heartbreaking sight."

While not mentioning Trump by name, Bush said he was "appalled by the reckless behavior of some political leaders since the election and by the lack of respect shown today for our institutions, our traditions, and our law enforcement."

Mitt Romney, the Utah senator who was the only Republican to vote to convict the president on an article of impeachment last year, went further, calling the President a "selfish man" who "deliberately misinformed his supporters" about the election.

Wyoming Republican Rep Liz Cheney, a member of the House leadership, echoed Romney's anger and frustration at Trump. "There is no question that the President formed the mob. The President incited mob, the President addressed the mob," said Cheney on Fox News. "He lit the flame."

And Sen Tom Cotton of Arkansas, an otherwise staunch ally of Trump's, was unsparing. "It's past time for the president to accept the results of the election, quit misleading the American people, and repudiate mob violence," Cotton said.

Meanwhile, White House deputy national security adviser Matt Pottinger has resigned, joining a number of officials who are leaving the administration of Trump following the violent incidents.

Pottinger, a leading figure in the development of Trump's China policy, resigned on Wednesday. Bloomberg first reported the resignation. Pottinger's boss, national security adviser Robert O'Brien, has no plans to quit, the official said.

An administration official described Trump as "increasingly isolated" and said that "national security officials who are loyal to their oath to the constitution will be standing watch until Inauguration Day and will then turn over power to the duly elected new president."

Four people died during the chaos - one from gunshot wounds and three from medical emergencies - after hundreds of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol in a bid to overturn his election defeat to Democrat Biden.

Two top aides to first lady Melania Trump also resigned on Wednesday. Stephanie Grisham resigned as chief of staff to the first lady. Grisham, who spent a year as White House press secretary before becoming chief of staff to the first lady, did not say whether her resignation was in reaction to the violence, but a source familiar with her decision said it was the last straw.

The White House social secretary, Rickie Niceta, also resigned, as did a deputy White House press secretary Sarah Matthews, two sources told Reuters.

There was also talk inside the White House that deputy chief of staff Chris Liddell might resign, a source said.

No media can air, publish their comments: HC

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necessary directives against the authorities concerned of Ekattor TV for allowing PK Halder to participate in a live talk show and broadcasting his interview.

The full text of the 56-page order was released yesterday. The HC judges said in the order that Ekattor TV's action was a despicable act and contrary to the spirit of the law.

The HC bench said as per section 59 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), every person is bound to assist the court and the investigating agency to prevent the escape of someone accused of non-bailable and cognisable offences, and assist in the arrest if asked.

"Besides, any private person may also arrest any accused of non-bailable and cognisable offences and then hand him or her to a police officer and/or the nearest police station, as the case may be. But, in this case, the authorities of Ekattor TV, instead of upholding the mandate and spirit of the law, allowed an absconding accused [Halder] to participate in a live talk show, which is a despicable act on the part of the authorities of Ekattor TV and also contrary to the spirit of the law," the HC bench said in the full text.

"In addition, the freedom of thought, conscience and speech of an absconding accused are not allowed to be expressed freely in TV news and TV talk shows with regard to the sub-judice matter when the said matter is in the session of the court," the HC

said. "In conclusion, we want to make one thing clear -- that the purpose of giving aforesaid observations and outlines is not to throttle the voice of media, but the court expects that the media should follow the provisions of law and the constitution while reporting on any sensitive issues which are sub-judice, within the session of the court and under investigation," the HC bench said.

In the full text of the order, the HC also restrained by an order of injunction the authorities concerned of all media from participating, publishing, broadcasting any statement, comment, interview and conversation of anyone accused and convicted of non-bailable and cognisable offences in TV news and talk shows with regard to the cases pending before the court or investigating agency till further order.

The channel broadcast an interview of PK Halder at 10:00pm on December 28 and connected him to the talk show Ekattor Journal at 11:30pm the same day. PK Halder refuted the allegations of laundering a huge amount of money abroad.

On December 30, ACC's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan and Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik prayed to the HC bench to initiate contempt of court proceedings against the authorities concerned of Ekattor TV.

In a suo moto (voluntary) rule issued on November 18 last year, the HC bench led by Justice Md Nazrul

Islam Talukder ordered the authorities concerned of the government and the ACC to explain the steps taken to arrest PK Halder and bring him back to the country.

In the rule, the court also asked the authorities to show cause as to why their inaction and failure in arresting and bringing PK Halder back home should not be declared illegal.

On October 21 last year, another HC bench directed law enforcement authorities to arrest PK Halder immediately after his return home.

According to Canadian media reports, PK Halder is now staying in Toronto. He is director of P&L Hal Holding Inc, a Canadian corporation.

In an investigation, the central bank found that Tk 1,596 crore was transferred from International Leasing and Financial Services (ILFSL) in violation of the rules through 48 accounts of various organisations related to the directors and shareholders of the firm, according to BB officials.

PK Halder came into public view during the anti-casino drives in 2019 when the ACC had opened investigations into the involvement of 43 people, including PK Halder, in the illegal casino business.

The government issued a travel ban on him on October 3, 2019, but he managed to flee the country. On January 8 last year, the anti-graft body filed a case against PK Halder on charges of illegally amassing wealth worth Tk 275 crore.

Govt approves Covishield use

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Ltd, told The Daily Star, "I have heard about the emergency use approval, but did not see the papers yet."

He refused to make further comments.

There was uncertainty over getting the vaccine after Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonewalla told Indian media that the Indian government had banned export of the vaccine until its local needs were met.

The issue, however, was resolved after the Indian government and the SII assured Bangladesh that the ban would not be applicable for Bangladesh.

On November 5, the health ministry signed a tri-lateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Beximco and SII to purchase three crore doses of Covishield.

Based on the MoU, the government signed Covid-19 vaccine procurement

contract with the companies on December 13.

SII will supply 50 lakh shots of the vaccine every month for six months after it has been approved.

On Tuesday, the government also made an advanced payment of Tk 509.7 crore for the three crore doses.

On Monday, the DGDA provided No Objection Certificate (NOC) to Beximco for importing the vaccine. According to DGDA officials,

the NOC permitted the Beximco only to import of the vaccine while yesterday's approval allows it to supply the vaccines to public and private organisations.

The price of the vaccines will be fixed later, the officials said.

The government will also collect another 68 million doses of coronavirus vaccines under the COVAX arrangement led by the WHO, Gavi and the SEPI.