

BANGLADESH UPDATE



428
New cases in 24hrs



5,44,544
Total cases



8,379
Deaths



4,93,798
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

2,502,906
Deaths



112,931,685
Total cases

MYANMAR MILITARY RULE

Call for global arms embargo

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Fortify Rights and 136 other organisations have written an open letter, calling for the UN Security Council to institute a coordinated, global arms embargo against the Myanmar military that has taken control of power through a coup on February 1.

In the letter to the body and UN member states, they said the Security Council should break its long history of inaction on Myanmar and immediately respond to this crisis, Fortify Rights said in a statement yesterday.

Signatories to the open letter hail from 31 countries and include Fortify Rights, Human Rights Watch, and dozens of Myanmar-based as well as Rohingya-led organisations, demonstrating a level of inter-ethnic unity in the wake of the coup d'état in Myanmar.

In response to coup and detention of civilian leaders, millions of people joined nationwide general strike and street protests but state security forces have used lethal force against unarmed protesters, killing some protesters. As of February 22, more than 630 people are either evading arbitrary arrest or are currently in detention since the junta seized power.

The letter said Myanmar military is also responsible for mass atrocities and protracted human rights violations committed with impunity against the Rohingya and the Arakanese (Rakhine), Kachin, Shan, Karen, and other ethnic-nationality people.

In its 2017 genocidal offensive

against the Rohingya, the military massacred untold civilians and forced nearly 800,000 to flee to Bangladesh. Myanmar authorities continue to confine more than 125,000 Rohingya and other Muslims to more than 20 internment camps, while several armed conflicts in the country are ongoing.

Fortify Rights said the UN Security Council already recognises humanitarian emergencies, atrocity crimes, military coups, and cross-border refugee crises as legitimate threats to international peace.

"There is no question that the Myanmar military poses a threat to international peace and security, even beyond this coup," said Matthew Smith. "The coup will only exacerbate existing crises in the country that threaten to spill over its borders."

Despite the Myanmar military's long-standing threats to peace and security, the UN Security Council has never used its authority under Chapter VII of the UN Charter with regard to Myanmar, the statement said.

On February 2, the Security Council convened an emergency meeting but failed to establish a common position on Myanmar. Later, the body issued a statement on the situation in Myanmar.

"Council members should use that newfound consensus to take swift and substantive action," the open letter said.

An arms embargo would be the centerpiece of a global effort to shield the people of Myanmar from a return to abusive and autocratic rule, it added.

A bold voice

FROM PAGE 1

run his fight against the vested quarter in a consistent manner?

There is nothing but his honesty, sincerity and knowledge to deal a fatal blow to the fraudsters.

The unexpected demise of Khaled this morning, at the age of 80, has silenced a voice against the lack of corporate governance in banks.

The prominent economist and former deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank breathed his last at 5:45am yesterday at the intensive care unit of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

Khaled was admitted to the hospital on February 11 with post-Covid-19 complications.

He had earlier tested positive for coronavirus infection and was admitted to Bangladesh Specialised Hospital last month.

The unexpected demise brought a sense of great loss for the nation with President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Parliament Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury and ministers expressing condolences over his death.

Khaled was born on July 4, 1941, in Gopalganj. He earned his graduation and post-graduation degrees from Dhaka University's science faculty and then completed his MBA from Institute of Business Administration in the same institution.

He commenced his banking career as a probationary officer of Habib Bank in 1963 and engaged with different banks, including the central bank, for more than four decades.

He was appointed as the managing director of Bangladesh Krishi Bank in 1994 and broke with tradition by starting to visit rural areas to observe the hardships of farmers.

This might be the first incident of visiting rural areas by an MD of a bank.

Khaled listened to the problems of farmers with utmost patience and arranged meetings at district level with the deputy commissioner concerned as part of his efforts to give loans to underprivileged farmers.

He also served at Sonali Bank as its MD for one year in 1997 and held the same post in Agrani Bank for a year in 1996.

Between 1998 and 2000, he was the deputy governor of the central bank and drew attention from different corners because of his outspokenness against delinquent borrowers.

During his tenure as deputy governor, he vehemently criticised the scammers in presence of the then finance minister at a programme held at a city hotel, saying that a mafia

group had control over the banking sector. Khaled's forthright speech also baffled the finance minister.

After completing his tenure in the central bank, he joined Pubali Bank as its MD, when the lender was struggling to survive because of its ailing financial health. The lender was identified as a problem bank after reeling from a wide range of financial scams.

But Khaled restored the corporate governance of the bank and turned it into a profit-making institution. Between 2000 and 2006, he established corporate governance in the bank and the trend continues till date.

The country's capital market faced a bubble-and-burst in 2010 that drove many investors away after which the government formed a four-member committee led by Khaled in January 2011 to look into the matter.

The committee submitted a report in April that year based mostly on interviews with stakeholders.

He publicly blamed the share market regulator for the failure to control the market where rampant illegal trading was also alleged.

Although Khaled's suggestions to strengthen the capital market had hardly been implemented, his strict stance against the unholy nexus is still an example of the fight against the vested quarters in the financial sector.

In addition, he has written articles for newspapers on a regular basis as part of his effort to bolster the financial sector so that it could sweep aside the irregularities.

He has departed life at a time when scammers are using innovative tricks to swindle money from the banking sector and at least 10 out of 36 non-bank financial institutions are now unable to pay back depositors' funds after reeling from wide-ranging scams.

A question has now surfaced: who will take a bold stance against the perpetrators in the financial sector after Khaled's departure?

Beyond a doubt, Khaled's absence has created a vacuum of voices against scammers in the days ahead.

Although he held the top posts of a number of banks, Khaled was not solvent in his old age.

He invested some of his pension fund in national savings certificates, which was his major financial source to live life after his retirement.

One of his close associates said Khaled's family had even faced financial trouble to pay the hospital's bills.

This is the man whose life is like an open book.



Vehicles are caught in long tailbacks on Mirpur Road in the capital's Shyamoli area around 10:00am yesterday. People suffered delays throughout the day as demonstrations by college students blocking roads led to severe traffic disruption in many parts of the city.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Commuters suffer for daylong demo

FROM PAGE 1

Students of the seven colleges staged demonstrations for the last two days demanding the authorities hold their ongoing and previously announced exams and reopen their educational institutions and dormitories.

An education ministry statement yesterday said the DU authorities would hold all ongoing and previously announced examinations of its seven affiliated colleges under certain conditions.

Education Minister Dipu Moni said the exams would be held maintaining Covid-19 health guidelines and the college dormitories would not be opened during the exams.

Dhaka College Principal IK Selim Ullah Khondaker, also the coordinator of the seven colleges, who was present at the meeting, said they would inform the students about the matter.

Earlier on Tuesday evening, the DU authorities in a meeting with the college principals had decided to postpone the exams. The decision came a day after the education minister announced that all universities would reopen on May 24 after the Eid-ul-Fitr.

No examinations will be held before reopening of the universities, but online classes will continue, Dipu Moni added.

Frustrated by the decision, a group of students blocked Nilkhet intersection and some other roads near the DU campus that evening, demanding continuation of their ongoing exams.

Yesterday, students once again gathered at the intersection around 9:00am and blocked roads, halting traffic in New Market area.

Around noon, another group of students blocked Science Laboratory intersection. They continued their protests till around 4:00pm. The protesters left the place after hearing about the latest announcement of the education ministry.

During demonstrations, students alleged that the session jam situation worsened following the affiliation of their colleges to the DU. They expressed concern that the situation would deteriorate further if the ongoing exams were deferred.

Mohammad Lincoln, a fourth-year honours student of Dhaka College,

said he needed to take only one more exam, and the DU authorities were considering postponing the exams.

"Halls are closed amid the pandemic and we were taking exams staying at messes. If the exams are postponed, we have to stay at messes for the next three months spending extra money," he said.

Mentioning that financial condition of all students are not the same, he demanded the authorities meet their demand.

Assistant Commissioner (Lalbagh zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Sanwar Hossain yesterday said they requested the agitating students to free the streets but in vain.

In 2017, the seven colleges -- Dhaka College, Eden Mohila College, Government Shaheed Suhrawardy College, Kabi Nazrul Government College, Begum Badrunnesa Government Mohila College, Mirpur Government Bangla College, and Government Titumir College -- were brought under DU from National University with the aim to increase the quality of education and reduce session jam.

Chinese firm raises fund crunch alarm

FROM PAGE 1

"Project execution is naturally slowing down, and project costs are increasing day by day," China Railway, also known as CREC, said in a press release circulated through its PR agency.

"The government of Bangladesh has set a target of opening both rail and road on the Padma Bridge on the same day. However, the fund crisis seems to have emerged as an impediment to completing the construction process," read the release.

It claimed that it was having to borrow hefty sums to keep the fast-track project moving.

Project Director (PD) Golam Fakhruddin Ahmed Chowdhury said he would not comment about the allegations. He said he had contacted the CREC which told him that they had not issued any such press release.

However, the PR agency appointed by the CREC told The Daily Star that they received the press release from their client and circulated it to different news outlets.

This paper could not contact the CREC directly.

PROJECT AND CONTRACTOR
A contractor issuing such a press release is rare but the CREC had issued another press release via the same PR agency on June 9 last year.

It had alleged that Roads and Highways Department (RHD) had closed a passage between the Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga Expressway and a service road, causing problems for the construction work.

The RHD had refuted the allegations and said the CREC and its sub-contractors were damaging the expressway and service roads with their heavily loaded trucks.

The rail project was approved in March 2016 to connect the capital with Jashore by 2022 with a 169km rail line over the under-construction Padma bridge at a cost of Tk 34,989 crore.

The cost rose to Tk 39,246 crore and the deadline was extended to 2024 after the first revision of the project.

Chinese Exim Bank was supposed to provide Tk 2036.69 crore in loans for the project.

Even though construction work started in July 2018, the project is still facing several challenges that could adversely impact its cost and duration, according to BR documents.

BR plans to open the Bhanga-Mawa section of the route when the Padma bridge opens, expected in June, 2022.

THE PRESS RELEASE
The CREC said it received mobilisation payment at the end of June 2018 but Bangladesh Railway did not pay them anything between that time and September 2020.

During this long period, the CREC had to borrow huge amounts to continue with the project execution, it added.

According to the CREC, the time consumed by BR for processing each interim payment was a lot longer than expected.

For example, the CREC submitted a bill (interim payment-7) for project expenses between June and September of 2020 on October 27, 2020. But it was not until February 9, 2021, that BR sent the bill to China Exim Bank asking it to release the part of the loan, the CREC said in the release.

The local portion of the payment is still pending.

"Since China Exim Bank shall not release the foreign portion before the local portion is paid, the CREC has not received any payment for IP7 [interim payment-7] up to now, 115 days after the submission of IP7," it added.

The CREC claimed that they have only received the payment for the work completed before June 2020, while the payment for the work completed between July 2020 and January, 2021 is still being processed by BR.

According to the CREC, it has repeatedly asked BR to give the go ahead for building 100 rail carriages that would be used on the lines. It had told BR that the carriages would take two years to build.

Even though the carriages were

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, bedrock of Beat Generation, dies at 101

AFP, San Francisco

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the last great poet of the Beat Generation who helped to establish the counter-culture movement of 1950s America through his City Lights bookshop and publishers, has died, the store announced Tuesday. He was 101.

"We love you, Lawrence," City Lights said on Twitter, adding that Ferlinghetti died on Monday.

Born in 1919, the New York native took part in the D-Day landings of World War II and saw the horror of atomic-bombed Nagasaki before ending up in San Francisco and co-founding City Lights in 1953.

Demise of an authentic voice

FROM PAGE 1

But it was the bigger picture of shrinking intellectual space that most concerned him. He dreamt of a democratic and free Bangladesh and any reversal of it pained him to the core and he couldn't desist from protesting. He was also seriously concerned at the rising religious extremist trends in society. He considered both these tendencies to be fundamentally antithetical to the core values of our freedom struggle.

A humble man, he never showed a trace of ego and desire for special treatment. Always ready to oblige and listen to people from every ethnic, social or religious group. He would react very badly and almost feel personally hurt when political figures would insult one another in objectionable terms. He would insist that even in condemning someone there should be an elegance of expression. According to him, under no circumstances should one lower the bar of linguistic refinement. This he also insisted in personal behaviour. His interactions with people from all walks of life and from every strata of society would be marked by a sensitivity and attention to personal courtesy that would make every encounter refreshing and pleasant.

His interest was wide and varied, from literary to political, from memoirs to history, to tourism, to journals of visits, to snippets from the lives of eminent persons. He wrote just as easily on Maulana Bhashani as on Sir Philip Joseph Hartog, the first vice chancellor of Dhaka University. He wrote on Syed Waliullah, on Buddhadeb Basu, on Tagore and on the dilemmas of Muslim Bengali intellectuals.

In the last two decades, he excelled as a columnist. When in 2004, while working as a senior staff of the state-owned news agency BSS, he wrote a stinging essay after the murder of writer and university professor Humayun Azad terming it the "rise of naked Fascism", he was asked by the BSS authority to desist from writing columns anymore. That triggered his resignation and emergence as one of the most popular columnists in the country. His voice was one of dissent, one of a fresh perspective, one of thinking out of the box.

His very last column on the proposal by some in the ruling party about withdrawing the gallantry award given to the one of the most prominent of our sector commanders of our Liberation War, former president Ziaur Rahman and the founder of BNP, was a contrarian one. The argument he made in his column was most powerful. He warned the present holders of power not to set any example that future powers holders may use as an excuse for their own political vendetta.

It was remarkable that while we all stood aghast at the US's invasion of Iraq on false pretence, Syed Abul Maksud took it upon himself to protest in the Gandhian style of non-cooperation by abandoning western style clothing and wearing only two pieces of unstitched white cloths as an attire. This he vowed to carry on, as his personal protest, till every US soldier would leave Iraq. He did so till the very last day of his life.

This taking personal responsibility to articulate a social concern was what made Syed Abul Maksud so special. For every cause he felt a personal responsibility and if nobody would protest, he would take it upon himself to do what he felt needed to be done. Over the years, he became a personification of civic protest. For every just cause he would be a definite presence in the protest rallies.

That was Syed Abul Maksud, the voice that would articulate views that others would not dare to. More the protesting voices were stymied the more he became loud and poignant.

With his passing we lose an authentic dissenting voice whose love for the people was based on a genuine love for them, on ethical values, on social concerns, and we lose a far sighted vision of the society that is increasingly becoming rare.

Death Anniversary



The 48th death anniversary of Freedom Fighter Abdur Rob (Boga Mia) Ex-member of the Constituent Assembly and President of the Pabna District Awami League, will be observed today.

He was the first to hoist the flag of independent Bangladesh in the District of Pabna.

Mr. Abdur Rob (Boga Mia) died in a tragic car accident on February 25, 1973. D-37

UP member killed at upazila office

FROM PAGE 1

Talking to The Daily Star, Baghaichhari Upazila Project Implementation Officer Nurnnabi Sarkar, who was present at the room when Samar was killed, said the incident happened when the UP member, sitting in a chair, was talking to him about a project.

Two people were peeking from behind the door. At one point, one of them came in, fired two shots at Samar and fled along with the other, he said.

Nurnnabi said both the assailants were wearing masks and he did not recognise them.

Officer-in-charge of Baghaichhari Police Station Mohammad Anwar Hossain Khan said they recovered the body and sent it to hospital for an autopsy.

Asked about the security in the building, he said no police personnel were deployed there when the incident happened. "Several Ansar members provide security to the upazila nirbahi officer in the building, but none of them saw the attackers."

He also said they were trying to arrest the killers.

