

BANGLADESH UPDATE

845
New cases in 24hrs

5,51,175
Total cases

8,476
Deaths

5,04,120
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

2,608,965
Deaths

117,648,316
Total cases

Get qualified, realise rights

PM to women

Bss, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon the country's women to become more qualified through education and training to realise their own rights.

"Rights have to be realised and qualification is needed to realise it. This qualification would come through education and training," she said.

The premier was addressing a programme, organised by the women and children affairs ministry at Bangladesh Shishu Academy Auditorium, to mark the International Women's Day-2021. She joined the event virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

The theme of this year's International Women's Day is "Women in leadership, achieving an equal future in a Covid-19 world".

Referring to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's move to make primary education free and compulsory for women, Hasina said her government was now providing scholarships to students up to higher education and over 70 percent of the beneficiaries were females.

She said both males and females should be educated to build the society.

The PM said men and women have to work together to take the society forward.

On the occasion of the International Women's Day-2021, five successful women were presented with Joyeeta awards. The awardees are: Hasina Begum Nila, Miftahul Jannat, Mosammat Helennesa Begum, Robijan and Anjana Bala Bishwas.

On behalf of the PM, State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Fazilatun Nessa Indira handed the awards to the recipients.

Hasina said after assuming office



in 1996, her then government saw that there were no women justices in the higher court, no women secretaries in the administration and no facilities for women at many places of the country.

But the Awami League government took initiatives to appoint women to those positions as Bangabandhu had paved the way by changing the law immediately after the country's independence. During the Pakistan period, women were barred from taking judicial service exams to get jobs, she added.

The PM said women in Bangladesh now have the opportunity to serve the High Court, Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, army, navy, air force, Border Guard Bangladesh, Rab, local government and everywhere.

Hasina said when the local government law was framed, the government kept a provision in it so that women could take up one-third of leadership positions in local government bodies and play a role in developing the society.

She urged the women to engage themselves in income generating activities instead of sitting idle at home.

Mentioning that a woman could become an ideal housewife, an ideal mother and an ideal woman, Hasina expressed optimism that the winners of Joyeeta award would show the path to others.

UN Resident Coordinator to Bangladesh Mia Seppo also spoke at the programme, with State Minister Fazilatun Nessa Indira in the chair.

At the outset of the ceremony, an inauguration song and a documentary on the Liberation War, Mujib Borsho and women development were screened.

Major parties not there yet

FROM PAGE 1

"We do not know what the Election Commission is doing. This provision in the law was incorporated in response to a long movement," said Bangladesh Mahila Parishad General Secretary Maleka Banu.

"They [EC] are trying to shift the responsibilities to the political parties. But it was the EC's responsibilities to monitor whether the target was being fulfilled by the political parties."

"The EC cannot avoid its responsibilities," she said.

Farida Akter said she does not have any hope that the current EC will do much to ensure the fulfilment of the target. This commission has failed to ensure voter rights, which was their main task, she added.

"In the lack of a proper democratic process, some institutions are losing their autonomy," she said.

Contacted, Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam said that political parties often say that they are trying to meet the deadline.

"We have to sit and discuss the matter of next steps as they failed to meet the deadline," he said.

He also said that the section that talks about that reservation of 33 percent of committee positions for women was an advisory section. "It says political parties should make an effort to fulfil the criteria."

"Many political parties are seeking more time. The decision of time extension is a political decision and the government will take the decision. There is an effort towards amendment of the law," he added.

However, as per the Representation of the People Order, 1972, if any political party wants to be registered, it shall fulfil one of the conditions, which include "to fix the goal of reserving at least 33% of all committee positions for women including the central committee and successively achieving this goal by the year 2020".

AL, BNP FAIL TO REACH 33PC

"If the present ruling party had fulfilled the target, the Election Commission could have created some pressure on other parties to follow suit," said women rights activist Farida.

"As the Awami League has failed to meet the criteria, the commission is silent."

According to party insiders, 19 out of the ruling Awami League's 74-member central committee are women (26 percent); seven posts are also empty as of now.

In June 2017, the Election Commission had sent letters to all the registered political parties, asking them about their progress in achieving the target of 33 percent women's political representation by 2020.

In its reply, AL had said it would be able to fulfil the criteria by 2020.

Contacted yesterday, Awami League Presidium Member Piyush Kanti Bhattacharya said the party is a women-centric party and already has many women leaders and activists.

"We should fulfill the requirement, we will take more initiatives to ensure this 33 percent," he said.

In the case of BNP, women constitute 11 percent of the party's 73-member advisory body, with only eight women. The party at the time expressed hope that the target would be achieved within the stipulated time.

"Other political parties also made almost similar comments like AL and BNP," said an EC official requesting anonymity.

Three months into the new year, the official said the commission does not yet have any specific information about

how many women leaders there are in the central and other committees of the political parties.

"We have a plan to send letters to all the registered political parties soon seeking information on the deadline. We have prepared a draft of the letter and are waiting for the commission's decision," he told The Daily Star recently.

BNP Standing Committee Member Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain said they are well aware of the requirement and are also concerned.

"We have discussed the issue in the party's standing committee meeting. We have decided to ensure 33 percent of women in all the committees and we are working on it."

He added the party's committees are reorganising and are hopeful the requirement will be fulfilled soon.

Party leaders claim it is difficult for females to join politics, with resistance from both women and men, and a lack of qualified candidates.

General Secretary Shah Alam of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), which has around 15 percent of women in their central committee, said that many men still resist woman joining politics.

"It is a problem of attitudes," he said. "Then again, women from urban areas usually join politics but women from rural areas do not have interest in joining politics," he claimed.

Among other parties, Jatiya Party (Manju) has 16 women in its core committee of 101 members (15.8 percent) and around 11 percent of the Workers Party of Bangladesh's central committee constitute women.

Farida Akter said that the two major parties AL and BNP could have set an example by fulfilling the criteria.

"They are not doing so. It isn't true that they are not getting qualified women leadership. There are a lot of qualified women leaders here," she said.

"Political parties talk much about gender sensitivity, promoting women leadership, following democratic practices and others but in reality, they do not do that much," added Maleka.

"Political parties argue women do not come forward to join politics but this is not true. During elections, we can see that many women are seeking tickets. Are these women not capable enough to become leaders of a political party?"

Shishir shatters

FROM PAGE 1

Passionate about dancing and acting from a young age, Shishir completed her master's in sociology from National University.

Shishir is a dedicated social worker and activist, having worked at Oribashi Karmi Unnayan Program, National Human Rights Commission Bangladesh, and Bandhu Social Welfare Society.

She began her acting career in 2007 with the theatre troupe Natua and has been a part of troupe Boffola for more than two years. She has appeared in a number of theatre productions with many groups. Shishir is also a freelance voice artist and a professional model.

She began acting on screen in 2012. Shishir is also the founder of Shree, a non-profit organisation that supports marginalised communities.

Shishir, along with Ho Chi Minh Islam, another transgender woman from Bangladesh, recently received a scholarship to pursue higher studies at BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health. She has already started her classes online.



Holding only a piece of rope and equipped no other safety gear, a man works to set up a billboard in the capital's Moghbazar area. He could fall, badly injured himself or even die. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

UK part of Bangladesh's economic success

FROM PAGE 1

that high-profile in the first half of the year due to Covid-19. However, we will have a series of high-profile commemorations in the second half of the year. I am very keen and optimistic to have some high-profile visits later this year. There is ambition in the UK to mark this significant relationship with increasingly prosperous Bangladesh.

TDS: How would you describe the evolution of the relationship between the two countries?

Dickson: Our development partnership is still significant, but it has become much more than that. Bangladesh is a successful economy having more than six percent of growth in the last decade.

Two things have played a major contribution. First, a lot of development fundamentals [were] got right. Bangladesh has been an incredible success story in family planning, maternal health, and infant health.

Then, Bangladesh's garments industry has been globally competitive. Now, Bangladesh exports about \$3 billion a year -- mainly garments and textiles to the UK -- while from the UK we export goods worth about \$500 million to Bangladesh. I am very keen to develop Bangladeshi trade relations with the UK, which is globally competitive in areas like finance, education, healthcare, and green tech.

For example, a number of UK universities are keen to set up campuses and offer courses in technical and managerial areas -- skills that are required in the growing industries here. Instead of going abroad, young Bangladeshis can have global standard education at a cheaper cost.

TDS: What are the areas that Bangladesh needs to focus on as it graduates from its LDC [least developed country] status by 2024 and aspires to become a developed country by 2041?

Dickson: A couple of things. There is a need to have an economic transition -- Bangladesh needs to become a more mature economic model in a wider range of sectors and have wider sources of capital. The key for Bangladesh is to branch out from the success in garments and build other successes. Some companies are now exporting electronics, bicycles, and pharmaceuticals. The country needs to be globally competitive in these sectors. Bangladesh has an advantage in human capital but investment is needed for its development.

Second, issues around the ease of doing business and corruption need to be addressed. There are a lot of examples of that. If you talk to international investors, the issues that put them off coming here are around ease of doing business. In the recent report on corruption, Bangladesh is unfortunately labelled as the 12th most corrupt country in the world. I think that's bad for everyone. It would be very good thing if that can be dealt with.

Third, I think political competition is

important. A democratic society needs political competition. It needs to have a strong opposition party to do its job, that you see in other countries. It would be a good thing if you had a strong opposition party, a loyal opposition, to occupy the democratic space. Democracy would also benefit from freer and fairer elections. Those will be good to see here in Bangladesh.

Besides, Bangladesh is 150th in the Reporters Without Borders world index. Our strong view is that the media has a crucial role to play in a democratic society. It is very important to make active citizens, to ensure they have access to information. Anything that makes that difficult is a bad thing. That applies everywhere in the world, not only in Bangladesh. One needs to have a free press that is able to report without fear or favour and play a role in holding the government accountable. Certainly, that's what the press does in the UK. Problems can brew without that. Ensuring press freedom, therefore, is of paramount importance in Bangladesh.

TDS: There are some 600,000 Bangladeshi-origin British citizens in the UK. How can the two countries boost collaboration through them?

Dickson: This is a huge people-to-people contact happening. Many Bangladeshis have been educated in the UK and became prosperous. They came back to Bangladesh and invested here. We see many examples of that. There is a very vibrant Bangladeshi community in London and there are also charitable investments coming back to Bangladesh. This connectivity can surely be stronger.

TDS: The UK is an important partner in Bangladesh's fight against climate change. How do you foresee future relations in terms of climate change?

Dickson: Climate is a crucial part of our relationship. It is particularly important this year because we are president of COP26 to be held in Glasgow in November. The political starting point looks much more promising now because the new American administration is committed to climate change. It can make a huge difference.

I think both Bangladesh and the UK need to work very closely together in climate negotiation. We hope we can reach an agreement in November so we can keep the global temperatures down to 1.5 degrees Celsius. This should be our immediate task.

There's a lot of work going on with Bangladesh on energy transition, trying to increase the amount of renewable energy and reduce Bangladesh's dependence on coal and bring forth the phasing out of fossil fuels. We are making sure that Bangladesh has the right access to green finance. The City of London is very important now as a green financial centre. I think we can do more on finance generally between Bangladesh and the UK as Bangladesh's financial system becomes more mature. Green finance is particularly an important area.

Besides finance, nature-based solutions are very important. For example, the Sundarbans -- which is South Asia's last remaining mangrove forest -- keep Bangladesh's southwest region intact during cyclones. That's just one example of how nature can play a vital role. Preserving nature is one of the best things that you can do in terms of tackling climate change impacts rather than building back after nature is destroyed. We are working on a programme with Bangladeshi partners to take all these things forward in the lead up to the COP26 and beyond.

TDS: The UK has been a major player in the Rohingya crisis. Where is the crisis going after the military coup in Myanmar?

Dickson: We are trying to secure safe and dignified return of the Rohingyas to their homes in Rakhine. This is our first priority. It has of course been complicated by what has happened in Myanmar. There has been strong criticism of the coup from the international community. We are strong supporters of accountability for the crimes committed against the Rohingyas. We are supporting the legal process at the ICJ [International Court of Justice] and ICC [International Criminal Court] and want to make sure the evidence is gathered from the Rohingyas currently in Cox's Bazar.

In the meantime, it is very important that we work with the Bangladesh government for the Rohingyas now living in Cox's Bazar. We have provided nearly £300 million since 2017. The refugee camps are better now. While the Rohingyas are here, it is important that the children get education so their youth is not wasted and the adults have the opportunity to earn their living. We are very keen that education and livelihood are provided to the Rohingyas -- not to keep them here, but to prepare them for life when they eventually return to Rakhine.

DS: What is your stance on the relocation of Rohingyas to Bhasan Char?

Dickson: It looks very impressive. I have seen it from the plane and I've been given lots of information about Bhasan Char, but two things are needed. We need the UN, on behalf of the international community, to go to Bhasan Char and conduct a technical assessment, to see if the infrastructure built there is big and solid enough to secure the island from typhoons and whether the international community could help the government support up to 100,000 people.

The other thing that the UN needs to do there is to talk to the group of Rohingyas who were rescued from the Bay of Bengal in May last year, to know how they found living there and arrange a protection visit there. Then, we would be very happy to have a conversation with the government and say how to support the refugee population there. It could be more costly having people on the island than it is in the camp, but it should be possible to find a solution.

'Quader Mirza's men' assault freedom fighter

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Companiganj upazila AL president was assaulted allegedly by people led by ruling Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader's younger brother Abdul Quader Mirza yesterday.

Victim Khizir Hayat Khan, who is a freedom fighter, 75, was undergoing treatment at the local upazila health complex.

Khizir claimed that Quader Mirza became angry as he had been opposing his recent activities that "go against the party".

Recently, Quader Mirza, also mayor of Basurhat municipality, took away furniture of the upazila unit AL office and locked the office.

"That is why I have rented a room to use it as our party office at Rupali Chhatar. I along with some party men was sitting in the new office around 5:00pm," said Khizir.

"At that time, Quader Mirza and around 100 of his followers entered the new office, assaulted me physically and tore my dresses," he alleged.

After the incident, tension was prevailing in the area as supporters of Khizir exploded crude bombs and fired blank shots in the air.

Additional law enforcers were deployed in the area to avoid further untoward incident, said Alamgir Hossain, superintendent of Noakhali police.

Quader Mirza came to the limelight as he started delivering speeches against corruption and misdeeds of some party leaders. It made political situation in Companiganj volatile.

On February 19, a deadly clash took place between two factions of ruling AL over establishing supremacy in the upazila.

One group was led by Quader Mirza, while the other group was led by Mizanur Rahman Badal, organising secretary of upazila unit AL.

The clash left a local journalist, Borhan Uddin Muzakkir, 30, dead and around fifty others injured.

The Daily Star could not reach Quader Mirza for comments.

4 EC officials sued for forging NID cards in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Four election officials in Kushtia have been sued for their alleged involvement in National Identity Card forgery.

Using the fake NID cards, a gang attempted to grab a house on 2.5 bighas of land, a property estimated to be worth around Tk 100 crore, in Kushtia city.

Senior District Election Officer Anisur Rahman filed two cases with Kushtia model and Kumarkhali police stations on Thursday over the incident. In both cases, a few sections of the Digital Security Act (DSA) have been used, Anisur told The Daily Star yesterday.

According to the case statements, the property in Kushtia city is owned by MMA Wadud, a resident of 110 NS (Nabab Seraj-Ud-Daula) Road, and five members of his family. A gang forged five NID cards under their names and other details and tried to grab the property.

After the incident came to light, the Election Commission launched an investigation and found evidence that four officials and an employee of the Kushtia District Election Office were involved in the forgery.

The case with Kushtia Model Police Station was filed under Section 20 of Bangladesh Voter List Act, 2019, Section 17 of National Identity Registration Act, 2010, sections 420, 468 and 109 of Penal Code, 1860, and sections 24, 33 and 35 of Digital Security Act, 2018.

The accused in the case are: Deputy Secretary of Dhaka Election Commission Secretariat (former senior district election officer) Nawabul Islam, Additional Regional Election Officer of Faridpur (former Kushtia Sadar upazila election officer) Ziaur Rahman, Upazila Election Officer of Magura Sadar (former Kushtia Sadar upazila election officer) Amit Kumar Das, and Kushtia Sadar Upazila Election Office Assistant cum Computer Typist GM Sadiq.

Kushtia Sadar Upazila Election Officer (former Kumarkhali upazila election officer) Samiul Alam was sued in the other case, which was filed under Section 18 of Voter List Act, 2019, Section 17 of the National Identity Registration Act, 2010 and sections 420, 468 and 109 of the Penal Code, and sections 24 and 35 of Digital Security Act, 2018.

Modi to open Maitri Setu today

UNB, DHAKA

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate "Maitri Setu" (Friendship Bridge) between Bangladesh and India today through videoconferencing.

Modi will also inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple infrastructure projects in Tripura during the event, Indian external affairs ministry said.

"Maitri Setu" has been built over the Feni river which flows between the international boundary of India's Tripura state and Bangladesh.

The 1.9km-long bridge connects Sabroom of India with Ramgarh of Bangladesh. It is poised to herald a new chapter for trade and people to people movement between India and Bangladesh.

Pandemic exposed inherent weaknesses

FROM PAGE 1

At the beginning of the pandemic, there were shortages of medical equipment and people to run the system, but prompt decisions made by the government helped contain the spread of the outbreak, he added.

"Initially, there were crises of beds, testing facilities, and PPE. There were other issues too. But it is not only Bangladesh that had these problems. In fact, the whole world faced these crises. But we failed to properly convey those messages to the people," Zahid said.

"We need to boost our efficiency and capability in tackling pandemic-like situations. The hospitals' capacities should be increased. In a pandemic-like situation, time is important and every minute matters."

Going through the pandemic, the health care providers have learnt how to tackle demanding situations, promptly ensure treatment, and mobilise resources.

"A pandemic has many dimensions. So the preparation should be

multidimensional as well. On one hand, we have to keep hospital beds ready and ensure treatment. On the other hand, we have to make people aware of the pandemic. We have to do these things simultaneously and on time."

Teamwork is the key to successful tackling of a pandemic, he said.

"The approach should be coordinated. Tackling a pandemic is not the task of the health ministry alone. It requires assistance from different ministries. There is no alternative to teamwork."

Research in the field should be vigorous and knowledge about the pandemic should be constantly updated, he added.

"Expert opinions from different sectors inside and outside the country need to be accommodated. There are no set rules of tackling such situations. Strategies should be adjusted from time to time depending on the situation."

Maleque said the biggest failure of the ministry was that it failed to send

the messages of Covid-19 treatment convincingly to the people and media.

Rather than pointing fingers, he said he welcomed criticism, because the criticisms helped them take actions promptly.

"People have to understand that Bangladesh is not the USA or Europe. You cannot expect facilities like the USA and Europe in Bangladesh. Our socio-economic condition is not like those countries."

The minister said the biggest challenge now is to bring in the vaccines on time and inoculate people. The Bangladesh government thinks in advance and that's why it got hold of the vaccine on time while many other countries were struggling to secure the vaccine shots, he said.

"Since we are not the manufacturers, we have to rely on others. The government alone cannot do everything, so the private entities should be engaged. People have to come forward and help the government wipe out Covid-19 from the country."