

Businesses hit hard

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business hub in Companiganj, where there are around 6,000 wholesale and retail shops.

Atul Chandra Bhowmick, who runs his family business -- Moumita Pharmacy -- one of the oldest pharmacies in Basurhat area, said it was established around 109 years ago.

"In the recent past, we have seen so much violence and use of firearms in Basurhat. Customers now fear to come here. Today, I am getting the time to talk to you [journalists] because of this. In other days, you wouldn't get a chance.

"Earlier, if we could sell Tk 70,000-80,000 a day. Now it is down to Tk 3,000 only," he said.

He said there are around 200 pharmacies, including 30-40 wholesalers. All are incurring a heavy loss following the volatile political situation in Basurhat.

Wholesale grocery shop owner Shayon Chakrabarty, proprietor of Jaykali Bhandar, said they used to sell Tk 1,00,000 a day earlier. Now it is Tk 20,000-30,000.

Pintu Mazumdar, manager of New Apon Jewellers in Basurhat's New Market, said they have been incurring losses since the coronavirus hit the country. But the recent political clashes have worsened the situation.

"Women are our main customers. They fear to go out. Earlier, we could sell Tk 5-6 lakh a day. Now we can't even sell Tk 50,000," he added.

Another jewellery shop manager Md Sohel of Aradhona Jewellers said they failed to sell a single ornament in the last three days.

Visiting the area yesterday, these correspondents saw a lot of law enforcers in different parts of Basurhat municipality area. But there were fewer people in the markets.

Traders said Sunday and Thursday are the "haat" days in Basurhat Bazar. This 200-year-old market used to be filled with hundreds of customers and wholesale traders from different places -- Kabirhat, Dagonbhuiyan, Dudhmukha, Chowdhuryhat, Rongmala, Sonagazi, Chaprashihat, and Char Elahi.

The market is now almost empty, they said, adding that people now instead go to markets of adjacent upazilas.

Talking to The Daily Star, Nazim Uddin Nizam, general secretary of Basurhat Baboshayi Samabay Samity, said, "In every haat day, there would be a transaction of Tk 100-150 crore here. Now it's 4-5 crore. It's hard to differentiate when it is a haat day or a normal day here."

He said the political situation in Basurhat became unstable since the mayor election.

"Earlier, rallies and counter rallies were held on the streets of the bazaar. But for the last few days, these turned into clashes. We don't know how it will impact local politicians. But traders

are the worst victim. Please save us," Nizam said.

"On March 8, traders of Basurhat saw people wearing helmets using firearms on streets. You know what happened the next day. Such a heavy gunfight for around 45 minutes targeting the Basurhat municipality office ... we have never experienced such a situation here. Earlier, the shops remained open till 11:00pm to 12:00am. Now the dreadful atmosphere compelled us to close the businesses by the evening," Nizam added.

After the clash on March 9, almost all the shops in Basurhat Bazar have remained closed for the last three days, he added.

"Now, a huge number of law enforcers -- Rab, detectives, intelligence -- are present. They may be here for our security. But it's a threat to our business too. Customers from other places now avoid Basurhat.

"Also, some trade leaders are in fear of arrest in political cases. You see, in every case there are 150-200 unnamed accused. Some traders here may be followers of the two political groups in Basurhat," he said, adding that five traders of the market were picked up on Friday night who were followers of Quader Mirza.

The shop owners want immediate intervention of local MP Obaidul Quader to make the situation normal. "PLOT TO KILL ME"

At a press conference at Basurhat municipality office yesterday, Quader Mirza alleged that a conspiracy was going on to kill him.

"On Friday night, a meeting was held at Ekramul Karim Chowdhury's Kabirhat house to plan to kill me. Police and the local administration are working against me. Everything is going on one-sided.

"I am not thinking about my security, but about my activists. Our 25 activists suffered bullet injuries in the last attack. But police picked up eight of our activists," he alleged.

Talking to reporters, MP Ekramul, whose follower is Quader Mirza's rival Badal, said Mirza's allegation came from his imagination.

"Quader Mirza's allegation is baseless," he added.

Badal was arrested on Thursday.

Mir Jahidul Haque Roney, officer-in-charge of Companiganj Police Station, told The Daily Star that the overall situation is under their control. The situation is now better, he added.

About arresting people in the name of unnamed accused, he said, "No arrest has been made without specific charges. Raids against illegal firearms are going on."

In another development, pointing fingers at Obaidul Quader's wife, Mirza in a Facebook post in the evening hinted her role for worsening the relationship between brothers.

Quader Mirza also posted two photos with his brother.



A student nurse administers a shot at a Covid-19 mass vaccination site at Martinsville speedway in Ridgeway, Virginia, Friday. Health workers in the United States have administered more than 100 million Covid-19 vaccine doses, an official tracker showed.

PHOTO: AFP

Bhutto suggests power share

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wings, said Bhutto.

Bhutto further said that his party had not adopted an uncompromising attitude on the Six-Point demand. His party was trying its best to narrow down the differences on each and every point. The only debatable point was foreign trade and foreign aid.

He added that in the event of acceptance of Six-Point demand, Punjab and Sindh would have to meet about 80 percent revenues of the country. Besides, the Awami League maintained that the West Wing owed Rs 3,100 crore to the East Wing and about Rs 3,871 crore out of 4,000 crore rupees of foreign aid should go to the East Pakistan, said Bhutto.

He dismissed outright the Awami League's allegation that the date of National Assembly's Session was set by President General Yahya Khan after consulting him. He swore by 'Kalima' and his children, that President Yahya Khan did not consult him about the convening of the National Assembly Session.

On the same day Bhutto met Yahya in Karachi. Commenting on the incident, Bhutto wrote in his book 'The Great Tragedy' he told Yahya that Mujib's demands for a transfer of power and the lifting of martial law

were acceptable to his party but the modalities of these had to be worked out on the basis of an agreement.

Did Bhutto actually want the repeal of martial law? In hindsight, it is clear that he didn't as that would weaken his main ally, the Pakistan military. [Srinath Raghavan, 1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh, Permanent Black, 2013, pp.46-47] MUJIB'S NEW DIRECTIVES

Bangabandhu in his new directive issued on March 14, 1971, called upon people to continue the non-cooperation movement. He further said that the people had shown how to resist the conspiracy of the oppressors.

Referring to the new marital law order, Bangabandhu said that the people would continue with their struggle despite such attempts of intimidation as they know that no force can withstand the strength of the united people. His statement fell short of saying that defence installation employees should not report to work.

Bangabandhu issued 35-point directives on the future course of the non-cooperation movement. He suspended collection of income taxes by the central government and barred remittance of customs and excise duties and sales taxes, which were normally sent to the central

government.

KISSINGER'S ASSESSMENT

Henry Kissinger, the US president's assistant for National Security Affairs, wrote in his memorandum (dated March 13, 1971) to President Nixon: "It is not necessary for us to shift now to a more activist approach since Yahya knows we favor unity and is doing everything possible to achieve a political settlement."

Referring to Yahya's upcoming visit to East Pakistan, Kissinger suggested three possible outcomes: 1) Yahya could decide not to take [Sheikh Mujibur] Rahman's challenge lying down and to retaliate, perhaps to the extent of arresting Rahman and the other leaders, and attempting to clamp a military lid on East Pakistan. 2) A static waiting game could develop with neither the army nor the civilians prepared to take a bold initiative to break the deadlock and each hoping the other will break first, and 3) There might be more tactical political moves by Yahya, Rahman or Bhutto designed to probe for areas of accommodation and buy more time without giving up anything.

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Prices spike a month ahead

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At Shewrapara bus stop kitchen market, broiler chicken was being sold for Tk 160 a kg and the chicken of Sonali variety for Tk 360. A month ago, the prices ranged between Tk 120 and Tk 130, and Tk 200 and Tk 220 respectively.

Ahsan Habib, who runs a fast food shop on a van, said prices of chicken shot up by Tk 10 to Tk 40 a kg in a day.

"To compete with other fast food shops, we make a minimum profit.... My daily sales dropped significantly after I hiked the price of fried chicken early this month," he said.

Taking an undue advantage of the high prices of chicken, meat traders at some kitchen markets in the city hiked the prices of beef by Tk 20 to Tk 30 a kg about a month ago. Yesterday, beef was sold for Tk 550 to Tk 580 a kg.

Munzur Murshid Khan, secretary general of Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association, said the price of chicken feed has gone up from Tk 25 a kg to Tk 35.

"On the other hand, bird flu and some other diseases have hurt many small poultry farms recently. That's why there is a dearth in the supply and subsequently, the prices of chicken have shot up," he told The Daily Star.

There is no respite for consumers in prices of summer vegetables either. Yesterday, they had to spend Tk 60 to Tk

100 for a kg of okra, long bean, pointed gourd and bitter gourd.

Rickshaw-puller Enamul Molla of the capital's Ibrahimpur said his income has dropped due to the closure of educational institutions.

"A few months ago, I could buy daily essentials for my family spending Tk 350. Now I need to spend Tk 400 on daily essentials," he said.

A private company employee, aged about 40, said he went to Karwan Bazar from Tejgunipara yesterday to buy vegetables and daily essentials at cheaper prices.

"My expenditure on food has shot up by 10 percent in a month whereas my annual pay increase remains suspended. My monthly salary was cut by 20 percent due to pandemic," he told this newspaper, preferring anonymity.

The employee, who runs a four-member family, said he cannot save money anymore after paying house rent, utility bills and spending money on food.

SM Nazer Hossain, vice-president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB), said the government failed to monitor the market effectively.

"The authorities are not punishing those responsible for the unusual price hike of essentials. As a result, many traders feel encouraged about manipulating the prices," he said.

Plug leaks to the media

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mentioned that no information can be leaked to the media as per the 'work discipline' of the G-to-G [government to government] projects," reads the letter.

"ERD requested taking steps in this regard following the Chinese embassy letter," it said.

The BR director general has been asked to take steps or send an opinion about the letters from the ERD and Chinese embassy.

Expansion of the existing Joydebpur-Ishwardi section is one of the four projects that are being or were supposed to be implemented by Chinese firms with Chinese funds under G-to-G initiatives.

The Chinese funds are given in soft loans and contractors are selected through a limited or no tender process.

The Tk 14,250.61 crore project to turn the 174km Joydebpur-Ishwardi section into dual-gauge double lines was taken in November 2018. It was supposed to be implemented between January 2019 and December 2024, according to BR documents.

In March 2019, the railways ministry sent a letter to the Chinese government, requesting it to sign the

deal. In the last two years, the ministry wrote to the Chinese government three times, but failed to get a response. The last letter was sent in January, ministry sources said.

The projects made headlines last year after the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in September formed a committee to review negotiated contract costs for three of the projects.

The committee later directed the railways ministry to significantly reduce the cost of two of the projects.

As per the PMO directives, the BR has to cut Tk 3,354.31 crore from the project to convert metre-gauge lines to dual-gauge lines between Akhaura and Sylhet. The amount is about 20.8 percent of the total cost.

Besides, the PMO asked for slashing Tk 1,495.52 crore from the Joydebpur-Ishwardi rail line expansion project. The amount is 12.91 percent of the contract price.

The committee also gave directives on the Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur dual-gauge double lines project.

BR is implementing the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project with Chinese loans. The 169km line will connect the capital with Jashore at a cost of Tk 39,246 crore.

12 killed in Myanmar

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family friend said.

A spokesman for the junta did not answer phone calls from Reuters seeking comment. Junta-run media MRTV's evening news broadcast labelled the protesters as "criminals" but did not elaborate.

More than 70 people have been killed in Myanmar in widespread protests against the military's seizure of power, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners advocacy group has said.

The deaths came as the leaders of the United States, India, Australia and Japan vowed to work together to restore democracy in the Southeast Asian nation and the acting leader of the country's ousted civilian government addressed the public for the first time.

"As longstanding supporters of Myanmar and its people, we emphasise the urgent need to restore democracy and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience," the four leaders said in a statement released by the White House.

Mahn Win Khaing Than, who is in hiding along with most senior officials from the ruling National League for Democracy Party, addressed the public via Facebook, saying, "This is the darkest moment of the nation and the moment that the dawn is close."

He was appointed acting vice-president by representatives of Myanmar's ousted lawmakers, the Committee for Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), which is pushing for recognition as the rightful government. The group has announced its

intention to create a federal democracy and leaders have been meeting representatives of Myanmar's largest ethnic armed organizations, which already control vast swathes of territory across the country.

"In order to form a federal democracy, which all ethnic brothers, who have been suffering various kinds of oppressions from the dictatorship for decades, really desired, this revolution is the chance for us to put our efforts together," Mahn Win Khaing Than said.

He said the CRPH would "attempt to legislate the required laws so that the people have the right to defend themselves" and that public administration would be handled by an "interim people's administration team".

A civil disobedience movement that started with government employees such as doctors and teachers has expanded into a general strike that has paralysed many sectors of the economy and taken a large portion of the workings of government out of the military's hands.

Yesterday's protests erupted after posters spread on social media urging people to mark the death anniversary of Phone Maw, who was shot and killed by security forces in 1988 inside what was then known as the Rangoon Institute of Technology campus.

His shooting and that of another student who died a few weeks later sparked widespread protests against the military government known as the 8-8-88 campaign, because they peaked in August that year. An estimated 3,000

people were killed when the army crushed the uprising.

Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as a democracy icon during the movement and was kept under house arrest for nearly two decades.

She was released in 2010 as the military began democratic reforms. Her National League for Democracy won elections in 2015 and again in November last year.

On Feb. 1 this year, the generals overthrew her government and detained Suu Kyi and many of her cabinet colleagues, claiming fraud in the November elections.

United Nations human rights investigator Thomas Andrews on Friday dismissed as "absurd" comments by a senior Myanmar official that authorities were exercising "utmost restraint".

Addressing the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, he called for a united approach to "strip away the junta's sense of impunity".

Former colonial power Britain on Friday warned its citizens in Myanmar to leave and South Korea said it would suspend defence exchanges and reconsider development aid to Myanmar.

The Kremlin said Russia, which has close ties to Myanmar's military, was concerned over the mounting violence and was "analysing" whether to suspend military-technical cooperation.

The UN Security Council this week dropped language from a statement that condemned the army takeover as a coup, due to opposition by China, Russia, India and Vietnam.

India to review side effects

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Denmark, Norway and Iceland paused use of the drugmaker's shot as a precaution after isolated reports of recipients developing blood clots.

"We are looking at all the adverse events, particularly serious adverse events like deaths and hospitalisation. We will come back if we find anything of concern," NK Arora, a member of India's national task force on Covid-19, told AFP.

India has given at least 28 million shots in its vast vaccination programme, most of them AstraZeneca's which are produced at the Serum Institute of India.

New Delhi has also gifted and allowed exports of millions of these jabs to around 70 countries over the last few weeks as a part of its vaccine diplomacy.

Arora said there was "no immediate issue of concern as number of adverse events (in India) is very, very low. We are relooking at (adverse events that were reported) to see if there was any issue of blood clotting."

"As of yesterday there were 59 or 60 deaths, and they were all coincidental," the doctor said, adding

hospitalisation cases were being re-examined.

The World Health Organization, which said its vaccines advisory committee was examining the safety data coming in, has stressed that no causal link has been established between the AstraZeneca vaccine and blood clotting.

"Yes, we should continue using the AstraZeneca vaccine," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris said Friday, stressing that any concerns over safety must be investigated. AstraZeneca insisted its job was safe, adding there is "no evidence" of higher blood clot risks.

Meanwhile, the European Union's coronavirus inoculation programme suffered fresh setbacks yesterday after Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca said production problems and export restrictions would reduce planned deliveries of its vaccine. AstraZeneca blamed production problems and export restrictions for the latest shortfall, a major setback in efforts to fight a pandemic that has claimed 2.6 million lives worldwide.

In contrast, the United States has

ramped up its vaccination programme after a shaky start.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said 100 million vaccine doses have been administered in the US, around 30 percent of the world's total of shots given so far.

Ethiopia also gave out its first doses of vaccine yesterday, as the health ministry warned of an "alarming" increase in Covid-19 cases there.

Africa's second most populous country last week received 2.2 million doses of the AstraZeneca jab, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, and will give jabs to health workers in the first phase.

While the pandemic is slowing for some time now, a surge of cases in Italy, France, Germany and Brazil have caused an alarm bell that the pandemic is still potent.

Italy on Friday announced tough new restrictions in much of the country, with Prime Minister Mario Draghi warning it faced "a new wave" of infections. Schools, restaurants, shops and museums were ordered to close across most regions of Italy, including Rome and Milan from next week.

BRUR VC

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The teachers brought 111 allegations against the VC in connection with corruption, anomalies, and for being arbitrary.

Prof Kalimullah said a section of teachers raising allegation against him was nothing new. As a probe committee of University Grants Commission (UGC) would visit the campus today, the white paper was released to "influence the probe committee members", he said.

At the press conference, Prof Mohammad Motiur Rahman of Management Studies Department, also convener of the parishad, read out the keynote paper.

The white paper claimed that Prof Kalimullah preferred to stay in Dhaka instead of the campus and that he had set up a "liaison office" in Dhaka in 2017, which has been used as the university's principal office.

The office is being used for various corruption, including recruitment and tender manipulation. Even the syndicate meeting has also been held at that office, the paper claimed.

So far, the VC unilaterally suspended at least 14 officials and staffers without launching any investigation. The victims went to the court for justice, the teachers alleged.

Corruption allegation was also brought against the VC regarding the construction of a portrait of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the campus.

Violating the rules, he had been holding posts of deans in four faculties. Later, he quitted from three. Now, he occupies the dean post of social science faculty, the teachers said.

They accused the VC of indulging in irregularities while holding the three posts.

The VC is also a supervisor of Dr Wazed Research and Training Institute. He has also taken the responsibility of teaching in 26 departments, they said.

An UGC probe body found financial irregularities against the VC and recommended taking action, the teachers claimed, adding that the VC promoted people close to him and deprived senior and dedicated teachers and staffers.

Mahmudul Haque, member of Odhikar Surakkha Parishad and a teacher of Mass Communication and Journalism Department of the university, told The Daily Star that copies of the white paper will be submitted to the President's Office, Prime Minister's Office, education ministry and UGC for their intervention and prompt action.

Kishore in post-op

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12:30pm and the surgery ended at 1:45pm, Ahsan Habib said.

Kishore had gone to court on March 10 and told the court that he was tortured in custody, after being picked up by unidentified personnel in May last year.

"At one stage of the interrogation, one of the men got up and slapped me on my ear so hard that I lost consciousness for a while," Kishore said in a statement submitted to the court, adding that soon after he felt blood coming out of his ear.

"I am still recovering from the torture, my ear is still seeping. I cannot walk," he had said.

Kishore was released from prison on March 4, after being granted bail in a Digital Security Act case that was filed against him and ten others last year in May.

Sri Lanka to ban

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that killed more than 250.

Later that year, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, best known for crushing a decades-long insurgency in the north of the country as defence secretary, was elected president after promising a crackdown on extremism.

Rajapaksa is accused of widespread rights abuses during the war, charges he denies.

Weerasekera said the government plans to ban more than a thousand madrasa (Islamic schools) that he said were flouting national education policy.

"Nobody can open a school and teach whatever you want to the children," he said.

The government's moves on burqas and schools follow an order last year mandating the cremation of Covid-19 victims - against the wishes of Muslims, who bury their dead.

This ban was lifted earlier this year after criticism from the United States and international rights groups.

Sea slugs lose

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head from its body.

"I was surprised and thought it was going to die, but it continued to move around and eat quite energetically," Mitoh said. "I kept an eye on it for a while, and it regenerated its heart and body."

That prompted a study showing that five of 15 lab-bred slugs and one from the wild split its body off from a particular point on the neck during their lives. One did so twice. Each time, the animal's heart was left behind in the body, which continued to live for some time, but didn't regrow a head.

"One of the amazing things about stem cells is that they can be used to regenerate a heart and body from the edge of the animal's head," Mitoh said. "With further study, we may be able to apply these findings to regenerative medicine, but that's still a distant hope at this stage."