

BANGLADESH UPDATE	2,809 New cases in 24hrs	5,73,687 Total cases	8,720 Deaths	5,24,159 Recoveries	GLOBAL UPDATE	2,732,066 Deaths	124,161,483 Total cases
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Dhaka, Kathmandu sign four MoUs

BSS, Dhaka

Dhaka and Kathmandu yesterday signed four Memorandum of Understandings to enhance cooperation between the two countries in different areas, including tourism, sanitation, cultural exchange and railways link.

President Abdul Hamid and his Nepalese counterpart Bidya Devi Bhandari, who is in Dhaka on a two-day visit, witnessed the MoUs signing ceremony.

The MoUs were inked after the bilateral talks between Bangladesh and Nepal at the Credential Hall of Bangabhaban in the evening.

These are: MoU on Tourism Cooperation jointly signed by Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary Mokammel Hossain from Bangladesh side and Nepalese Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Secretary Yadav Prasad Koirala.

MoU on Strengthening Sanitary and Phytosanitary Cooperation signed by Bangladesh's Agriculture Ministry's Senior Secretary Mesbaut Islam and Secretary of Industry, Commerce and Supplies Ministry of Nepal Dinesh Bhattarai.

MoU on Cultural Exchange Programme for the year of 2022-2025 signed by Bangladesh's Cultural Affairs Secretary Badrul Arefin and Nepalese Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Secretary Yadav Prasad Koirala.

And Bangladesh's Commerce Ministry Secretary Jafar Uddin and Nepal's Industry, Commerce and Supplies Ministry Secretary Dinesh Bhattarai signed the MoU on Letter of Exchange on Rohanpur-Sigshad Railway Route amendment to Nepal-



Abdul Hamid

Bidya Devi

Bangladesh Transit Agreement on behalf of their respective countries.

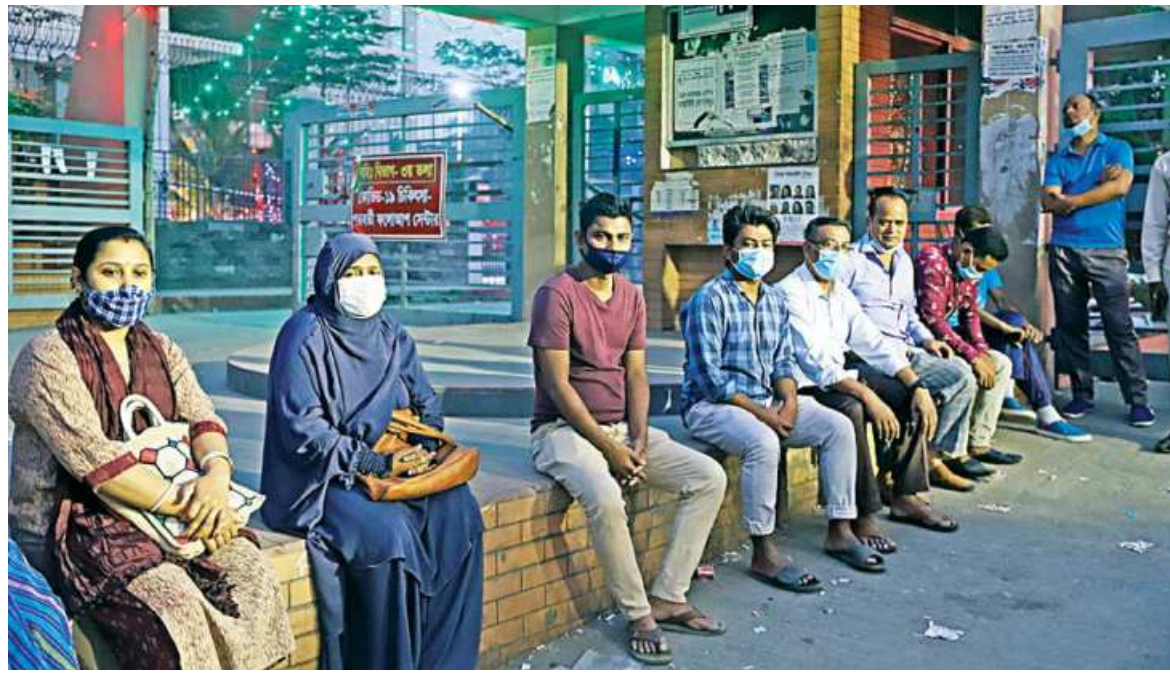
From Bangladesh side, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, Health Minister Zahid Maleque, Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, State Minister for Cultural Affairs KM Khalid and State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mahbub Ali were present.

From Nepal side, daughter of Nepalese president Usha Kiran Bhandari, Foreign Affairs Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, Expert of the President's Office Tika Prasad Dhakal, Foreign Secretary Bharat Raj Paudyal, among others, were present on the occasion.

Earlier, on arrival of the Nepalese president at the Bangabhaban, she was received by President Hamid and his wife Rashida Khanam.

The MoU signing ceremony was followed by a cultural programme and dinner.

President Hamid hosted the dinner at the State-Dining Hall in honour of his Nepalese counterpart, who is in Dhaka to attend the twin historic celebrations -- Bangladesh's independence golden jubilee and birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.



People queue up at the Mugda Medical College Hospital around 6:00 in the morning to get tested for Covid-19 yesterday. Many of them had failed to give sample the day before and decided to make sure they get tested by queuing early in the morning.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Vaccine drive loses steam

FROM PAGE 1

This correspondent interviewed more than 50 people from different occupations in and around Tetulia bazar in the second week of this month.

Most of them said they were yet to get the jabs, while only a few said they or elderly members of their families got vaccinated.

According to upazila health officials, 3,550 doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines had been supplied to Tetulia upazila, and around 3,000 of those were administered till yesterday.

Launching the campaign on February 7, the government planned to inoculate 70 lakh people across the country in the first month. But it missed the target as a total of 49,11,902 people have so far been vaccinated.

Yesterday, the daily count of people who took jabs dropped to 70,933, which was around two lakh in the third week of February.

Talking to The Daily Star, Dr Md Abul Kashem, upazila health and family planning officer in Tetulia, said, "I make phone calls to those who got registered. We make public announcements in the bazar area twice a week. However, the response remains very poor. Only 34 people came to get jabs yesterday [Sunday]."

Between March 6 and 12, this correspondent interviewed around

a hundred people in different parts of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh.

The level of awareness about vaccination was found to be low among most of them especially the day labourers.

Nasima Begum, a health assistant at Rangpur Sadar Hospital, said, "I visit the households in my area regularly and encourage people to take vaccines. Most of the time, I doubt whether they will actually take jabs."

"REGISTRATION A BIG DEAL" The government started the vaccine registration process on www.surokkha.gov.bd on January 27.

To take vaccine, one has to sign up with necessary information, including national identification number and mobile phone number.

Upon completion of registration, the recipient has to carry a printed copy of the registration document to the vaccination centre.

Amid poor response, the government lowered the minimum age for getting the vaccine to 40 years. Despite this, the response has not increased notably.

As of yesterday afternoon, a total of 62,82,884 people got registered.

Experts say the entire registration process is a "big deal" for the majority of people as it is quite complex and full of hassles.

In a recent visit to Moghbazar, Shantinagar and several other neighbourhoods in the capital, scores of small shops were seen displaying advertisements offering help for Covid-19 registration in exchange for Tk 50.

Dr Shafiq Shimul, associate professor of health economics at Dhaka University, pointed out three reasons behind the low response to the vaccination campaign.

"Firstly, many people do not know well about the vaccination campaign. Secondly, the registration is a big deal, and lastly, there is reluctance among people to get jabs," said Shafiq, who is leading a Covid-19 vaccine response study.

Echoing his view, Dr Zakir Hussain, member of the working group of Bangladesh Health Watch, said, "The government could not sensitise people to the fact that everybody is at risk of Covid-19. The government's current method of communication is not appropriate for the masses."

He is also of the opinion that there should be no age limit for getting vaccinated.

"People aged below 40 go outside every day. They are the super-spreaders. But we have excluded them from the priority list. It should be revised," he noted.

50YRS OF INDEPENDENCE

Queen Elizabeth sends felicitations

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom has sent a message of felicitation to President M Abdul Hamid on the occasion of Bangladesh's 50 years of independence.

In the message sent on Sunday, the Queen conveyed her warmest congratulations to the president and best wishes for the people of Bangladesh.

She also hoped for further progress and prosperity of the country, according to a statement issued by the Bangladesh High Commission in London yesterday.

"On the special occasion of your 50th Independence Day, I am delighted to convey to Your Excellency my



congratulations, together with my best wishes to the people of Bangladesh," the Queen said.

She said the UK and Bangladesh share ties of friendship and affection, which remain the foundation of the partnership and are as important today as 50 years ago.

"After what has been a difficult year, I hope we may look forward to overcoming global health challenges and to better times in the future."

Bangladesh is now holding 10-day celebrations on the occasion of Mujib Borsho and the golden jubilee of independence. The celebrations began on March 17 at the capital's National Parade Square.

Atiqullah Khan Masud no more

FROM PAGE 1

He was suffering from breathing problems, he added.

His namaj-e-janaza was held at the mosque inside the cantonment.

The body will be kept in the mortuary of a hospital in Shahbagh. He will be laid to rest after his elder son arrives home from abroad.

Soon after news of Atiqullah's death spread, a pall of gloom descended on the people of the media community and other spheres.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed profound shock and sorrow at the death of the veteran journalist.

In a message of condolence, President Hamid prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed his sympathy to the bereaved family.

The prime minister also prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and offered sympathy to the family.

Sampadak Parishad (Editors' Council) President Mahfuz Anam and Secretary General Naem Nizam in a condolence message expressed deep shock at the demise of Atiqullah and also prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed sympathy to the family.

"With the death of Atiqullah, the country lost a renowned editor and non-communal voice. The freedom fighter made Janakantha a strong pro-Liberation force," the Sampadak Parishad said.

Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab) President AK Azad condoled the demise of Atiqullah.

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury also expressed shock.

A host of ministers and state ministers expressed shock at the loss.

They include Road Transport and Bridges Minister and ruling Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, Law Minister Anisul Huq, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque, Education Minister Dipu Moni, Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud, Health Minister Zahid Maleque, State Minister for Labour and Employment Begum Monnujan Sufian and State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Choudhury.

Jatiya Party, Dhaka University, National University and other socio-economic organisations also condoled the death.

When the body was taken to Janakantha Bhaban, which houses the newspaper and Globe Janakantha

Shilpa Paribar Limited offices, his long-time colleagues and others paid their last respects.

Atiqullah, who was born on August 29 in 1951 in Munshiganj, was also a former vice-president of Brothers Union Club and general secretary of Shishu Shasthya Foundation.

He founded Janakantha in 1993. At the beginning, the paper was the only daily in Bangladesh that was printed and published from different regions of the country simultaneously through its microwave system with its own set-up of local press and offices and distributed early in the morning all over the country. But currently Janakantha is being printed, published and circulated throughout Bangladesh from its Dhaka office.

Atiqullah was arrested by law enforcers in March 2007 and faced a number of false cases on different charges, including patronising criminal activity, corruption, and "carrying out propaganda against the government."

He was even sentenced to jail for over 40 years. Atiqullah was relieved from all cases after the Awami League government came to power in 2009.

Atiqullah established the Globe Janakantha Shilpa Paribar in early 1969 when he was 17 and a college student. He started the business by borrowing Rs 1,200 from his brother and brother's friend on a commitment to give them 50 percent of the profit that he would earn from the business.

In the meantime, he got a golden opportunity in the month of March 1971 when the price of betel leaf (pan) jumped to Rs 175 a kg in West Pakistan. The leaf cost only Rs 3 a kg in then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.

Atiqullah joined the Liberation War and fought at sector-2. After the war, he completed his graduation and engaged himself in full time business with the money he earned before independence.

He founded Globe Insecticides Ltd in 1978, the pioneer and the largest manufacturer of domestic insecticides -- mosquito coils, smokeless MAT with electric mosquito destroyer and aerosol insecticides -- with the technical cooperation of Earth Chemical Company Ltd, Japan.

In 1990, with a technical assistance from China, Atiqullah established a heavy industry called Globe Metal Complex Ltd.

He also founded Globe Khamar Prokhalpa Ltd in 1997 and Globe Construction Ltd, a real estate company, in 1998.

Better use of resources can be a game changer

FROM PAGE 1

Bhandari arrived at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 9:30am. She paid tribute to the memory of martyred freedom fighters at the National Memorial in Savar. She also planted a flower sapling named "Uday Padma" on the memorial premises and signed the visitors' book. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen called on Bhandari at Hotel InterContinental.

Bhandari held a meeting with Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid at the Bangabhaban and attended a banquet hosted by the president.

Sheikh Hasina said Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had always fought for freedom of the people from exploitation and deprivation.

"He was on a mission to ensure basic rights like food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and education for all. It was very unfortunate that the progress of Bangladesh came to a halt after the assassination of Bangabandhu... on August 15, 1975," she said.

In the last 12 years, treading the path set out by Bangabandhu, Bangladesh has achieved successes beyond imagination in all socio-economic indicators and last month received a final recommendation to shift from least developed country to developing country status. She congratulated Nepal, which has also achieved the same.

However, noting the huge number of people still living in poverty, she said, "We will continue our efforts to transform the region into a poverty-free and developed one by maintaining friendly relations with each other."

The PM said South Asia is a region prone to natural disasters. Countries in the basin of the Himalayas are prone to earthquakes, cloudbursts, avalanches, landslides, flash floods, while coastal regions like Bangladesh are under threat of frequent floods, tidal surges, earthquakes, heavy rains, or droughts.

"Global warming, climate change has made the countries of our subcontinent the most vulnerable. We are the worst sufferers of the consequence of climate change, though we are not contributing to this change. We can temporarily protect ourselves through adaptation, but the adaptation process will fail to provide sustainable protection unless the current trend of climate change is restricted."

The premier said as the current president of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, Bangladesh has been urging world leaders to take immediate steps to tackle climate change. The Dhaka office of the Global Climate Adaptation started working on tackling the effects of climate change in South Asia.

"This auspicious moment of celebrating the birth centenary of our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the golden jubilee of independence, I call

upon the world to ensure sustainable development."

Hasina expressed gratitude to Nepal and its people for their support, including weaponry for the freedom fighters. In January 1972, Nepal formally recognised Bangladesh and since then developed an excellent relationship. Both the countries hold a similar position on various regional and international issues.

Cooperation between Bangladesh and Nepal in affairs of trade, road-rail-air communications, power-energy (particularly hydropower), tourism and water management is increasing day by day. Nepal also signed the BBN agreement. Bangladesh has also given Nepal access to use Saidpur Regional Airport as well as Mongla and Chattogram sea ports.

"As a result, mutual cooperation between the countries of the region will be revamped," the PM said.

At the event at the National Parade Square, the Nepali president congratulated Bangladesh on the occasion and for the socio-economic progress made by the country, while also calling for stronger connectivity in air, water and road as well as trade relations for improving the lives of people.

She said Nepal and Bangladesh are rich in terms of natural and human resources, and proper utilisation of these resources will be catalytic in transforming the development landscape, creating prosperity and happiness for the country's people.

She said the two countries are actively engaged in promoting common interest at multilateral forums through mutual support and cooperation, but both countries need to advance the partnership.

Elimination of trade barriers, development of infrastructure and easy market access could significantly boost the trade relationship, she said.

Bhandari said energy is an important area of cooperation. The two countries have already signed a MoU in cooperation in power.

"Nepal's hydropower and Bangladesh's natural gas can be the game changers for our development needs. For our energy trade, it is imperative to strengthen trilateral cooperation among Nepal, Bangladesh and India."

She suggested adding more flights to the existing Kathmandu-Dhaka route and connect by air major regional cities like Saidpur of Bangladesh and Biratnagar of Nepal.

Bhandari said linkage of Nepal's rivers with that of India and Bangladesh will help develop waterways, which can reduce the cost of transport and trade. She also suggested upgrading roadways and railways and expansion of mutual cooperation in the tourism sector.

Stating that both Nepal and Bangladesh have been adversely affected by the impacts of climate change without being a cause for it, she said, "In

order to address this problem, we need to strengthen bilateral cooperation, including mobilising international support."

Bhandari said Bangabandhu pioneered the independence movement of Bangladesh ever since his youth and his incessant struggle gave birth to Bangladesh. He had showed unswerving leadership and unremitting action for it.

She said Bangabandhu had deep love and esteem for the Bangla language. He was the person who championed the cause for the protection and promotion of Bangla with the support of Bangladeshi people.

Bhandari said Bangabandhu had great compassion for the weak, downtrodden, poor and other citizens in difficulty. He is a widely revered leader of this region.

She also said that in her country, the government of Nepal has dedicated all its efforts towards realising the common national aspiration of "Prosperous Nepal, happy Nepali".

"Our efforts are focused on turning Nepal into a prosperous nation. I believe that the development efforts of Nepal and Bangladesh will contribute to socio-economic progress of the whole of South Asia."

UNB adds: President Abdul Hamid urged the government and political parties to stay beside people irrespective of political mindset.

"When the government and political party work for people with honesty and sincerity, the nation achieves progress and well-being," he said.

"If we can stay beside people irrespective of political mindset in order to fulfil their basic needs, it will bring about a new chapter in the politics of Bangladesh. This will be the best achievement of Mujib Borsho."

Mentioning the celebration of Mujib Borsho as an appropriate attempt to disseminate the life, thoughts and political philosophies of Bangabandhu to all, the president said there is no scope to separate Bangabandhu and Bangladesh.

"Let Bangladesh move ahead towards a hunger- and poverty-free status, with the ideals of the Father of the Nation and the spirit of the War of Liberation," he said.

"As long as there will be Bangladesh, there will be Bangalee people, Bangabandhu will remain as the source of inspiration till that day as he has enlightened the whole world as a guiding star for the emancipation of the oppressed and exploited people."

He also asked the concerned to take steps so that future generations grow up imbued with the principles and ideals of Bangabandhu and the spirit of the Liberation War.

President Hamid recalled Nepal's moral and material support extended to Bangladesh during the Liberation War and recognition of Bangladesh in January, 1972.

Massive fire

FROM PAGE 1

"The administration will hold a briefing in the morning," an official said last night, requesting not to be named.

The fire reported around 4:00pm was the third in Balukhali camp in the last four days, locals said.

"At least one child has been admitted at a medical centre with 25 percent burns. There are some other injured too. Most of the people got injured while fleeing the scene," Health Coordinator Sarowar Jahon of the Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner's office, told this newspaper.

Mohammad Shamsudoza, additional refugee, relief and repatriation commissioner, said 1,500-2,000 houses were completely burnt down while 5,000-6,000 other houses were damaged.

"Two children got killed and many others injured," Rohingya community leader Jamal Hossain Lahu of Camp no-9/A-2 told our Cox's Bazar correspondent.

The camp-in-charge, police and fire service officials made no comments in this regard.

Reuters reported that a video shot by a resident showed a blaze ripping through the camp, with people scrambling to recover their possessions amid burning shanties and tents.

"Fire services, rescue and response teams and volunteers are at the scene to try to control the fire and prevent it from spreading further," said Louise Donovan, spokesperson for UN refugee agency UNHCR in Cox's Bazar, where refugees live in ramshackle huts.

Chattogram Fire Service and Civil Defence Headquarters Divisional Director Md Azizul Islam said, "Two burnt bodies were recovered as per the report from Cox's Bazar fire service officials as of 11:30pm."

"Due to poor cell phone signal in the camp area, the details of casualties or any update of the fire is not being reported over the phone," he said.

The official also said firefighters with fire engines from Cox's Bazar, Ramu, Chakaria, Ukhiya, Satkania, and Teknaf stations are trying to control the blaze.

APBn and police sources said the fires were raging at Camp-8 East, 8-, 9-, and 10- West.

Contacted, Mamunur Rashid, deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar, told The Daily Star that he had yet to receive any report of casualties.

Offices of IOM PHC Balukhali, Turkish Hospital, and MSF were completely burned.

Over a million Rohingyas live in the camps in southern Bangladesh. The vast majority of them fled Myanmar in 2017 amid a military-led crackdown that UN investigators said was executed with "genocidal intent".

"The fire spread so fast that it caught our house before we understood what was happening. People were screaming and running. Children were also running," said Tayeba Begum, a volunteer of Save the Children.

The risk of fire in the densely populated camps is high, and yesterday's blaze was the largest yet, said Onno Van Manen, country director of Save the Children, Bangladesh.

"Just a couple of days ago, we lost one of our health facilities in another fire," he said.

The UNHCR said humanitarian partners had mobilised hundreds of volunteers from nearby camps for the support operation, as well as fire safety vehicles and equipment.

"So far the fire has affected shelters, health centres, distribution points and other facilities," Donovan said.

Gandhi Peace

FROM PAGE 1

members, the Chief Justice of India and Leader of the single largest Opposition Party in Lok Sabha.

Two eminent members are also part of the jury. They are: Om Birla, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, and Bindeshwar Pathak, founder of Sulabh International Social Service Organisation.

The past awardees include luminaries like Julius Nyerere, former president of Tanzania; Gerhard Fischer, Federal Republic of Germany; Ramakrishna Mission; Baba Amte (Shri Murlidhar Devidas Amte); Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa; Grameen Bank of Bangladesh; Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa; Shri Chandni Prasad Bhatt & Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

Recent awardees include Vivekananda Kendra, India (2015); Akshaya Patra Foundation, India, and Sulabh International (Jointly, for 2016); Ekal Abhiyan Trust, India (2017); and Shri Yohei Sasaki, Japan (2018).

The award carries an amount of Rs 1 crore, a citation, a plaque, and an exquisite traditional handicraft or handloom item.

PM Modi has said that Bangabandhu was a champion of human rights and freedom and is a hero to Indians as well.

He also said the legacy and inspiration of Bangabandhu has made the heritage of both countries more comprehensive and deep-rooted, and that the path shown by Bangabandhu has laid a strong foundation for the partnership, progress and prosperity of both countries.

Bangladesh government has acknowledged with deep gratitude the decision of India to confer the Gandhi Peace Prize-2020 to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, posthumously for the first time.

"It is an honour for Bangladesh and its people for the Father of the Nation to be bestowed with this prestigious award," said the foreign ministry in a statement.

The honour assumes special significance on the 50th year of Bangladesh's independence when the country is on the verge of becoming a developing country, through political, economic and social transformation, the foundations of which were laid by Bangabandhu, it said.