

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



5,819
New cases in 24hrs



6,84,756
Total cases



9,739
Deaths



5,76,590
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



2,946,040
Deaths



136,499,214
Total cases

ESTABLISHING WORLD PEACE

Pandemic poses unprecedented challenges

Says Foreign Minister Momen at Army Chiefs' Conclave; urges mutual cooperation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen underscored the need for meaningful mutual cooperation, improvement in response to health-related emergency situations, and an increase in female participation to tackle the challenges posed by the unprecedented pandemic in establishing world peace.

Speaking at a seminar on "Army Chiefs' Conclave" yesterday, Momen said Bangladesh is committed to maintaining stability and peace in the world.

Bangladesh Army organised the seminar with the participation of local and foreign military and civilian dignitaries.

The main discussion of the seminar was "Future Trend of Global Conflict: Role of UN Peacekeepers".

Keynote speakers at the event were Chief of Army Staff of Bangladesh General Aziz Ahmed, Chief of Army Staff of India General MM Naravane, Deputy Chief of Operations of Bhutan Army Brigadier General Darji Rinchen, Force Commander of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated

Stabilization Mission in Mali Lieutenant General Dennis Gyllensporre and Force Commander of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Region Lt Gen Sidki Daniel Traore, says an ISPR media release.

Bangladesh Army Chief General Aziz Ahmed said due to the rise of anti-state elements, use of modern technology, political crises, changing geo-politics and geo-strategic locations, it has gradually become challenging and complicated to carry out UN Peacekeeping operations.

He emphasised upon strengthening capacity of peacekeepers by modern training, community-based information sharing, using modern technology, revising the UN charter and building institutional infrastructure.

Indian Army Chief General MM Naravane pointed out the current challenges of peacekeepers.

To overcome the challenges, he placed emphasis on participatory peacekeeping activities, proper logistical support, increase of budget and flexibility in UN's stance.



Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, centre, poses for a photograph with participants of the "Army Chief's Conclave" held at the Army Multipurpose Complex in Dhaka Cantonment yesterday.

PHOTO: ISPR

Govt outlines fresh curbs

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in this regard today, they said.

Chaired by Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam, yesterday's meeting was attended by secretaries of the ministries concerned.

Though the fresh restrictions will be imposed for a week, the authorities are thinking of keeping those in force till April 30, the sources said.

The country is going to be put under strict restrictions amid a worsening Covid situation as the ongoing restrictions have apparently proved less effective in containing the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, the government has extended the ongoing restrictions on long-route transport services -- bus, train, launch and regular flights -- till 6:00am on April 14.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) has suspended around 500 international flights to and from Dhaka for a week from April 14.

Yesterday, people were seen leaving the capital in rickshaw vans, auto-rickshaws and pick-ups, assuming that the government would extend the ongoing restrictions.

Shopping malls and stores selling essential goods saw a huge rush of buyers.

All these developments came at a time when the country witnessed the highest number of Covid deaths in a day.

Seventy-eight people died from the virus in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, taking the total number to 9,739. Besides, 5,819 new infections were recorded during the period, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

Earlier on April 4, the Cabinet

Division issued an 11-point directive with a set of restrictions effective from 6:00am on April 5 to 12:00am on April 11 to contain the spread of Covid. It said violators of the directives would face punishment.

Various offices, mills and factories were exempt from the restrictions and the government allowed resumption of bus services in all 11 cities from April 7.

On April 8, the government announced that shops and malls could be kept open for eight hours from April 9 to April 13 despite concerns from health experts.

People in large numbers were seen coming out on the streets to buy commodities from shops or go to offices and businesses. People began hanging out at tea-stalls in their neighbourhoods. Very few steps were noticed in enforcing the restrictions.

Experts doubted whether the half-hearted enforcement of restrictions would be effective at all.

On Friday, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader and State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain said the country would be put under strict restrictions for a week from April 14.

CAAB has suspended international flights for a week from April 14 as it will be very difficult for passengers to reach Dhaka Airport amid the strict restrictions all over the country.

"It will not be possible for air passengers to reach the airport to catch flights," CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mahfud Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

He, however, said there would be no restrictions on chartered flights, cargo flights, air ambulance and special

flights.

EXPORT-ORIENTED FACTORIES

Textile and garment manufacturers and exporters have urged the government to allow factories to operate during the restrictions to help them offset losses.

The leaders of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), and some top garment manufacturers and exporters made the call at a joint press conference at a city hotel yesterday.

The business leaders also held a meeting with Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi to place their arguments for keeping the export-oriented factories out of the purview of fresh restrictions, sources said.

Talking to this newspaper, infectious diseases specialist Prof Ridwanur Rahman said the government can allow some economic activities if Covid tests and treatment for workers can be ensured.

As there is a high risk of infection at the community level, the workers can get infected even if the factories are closed, he pointed out.

In that case, factories can stay open given that the authorities ensure enough Covid tests as well as treatment for workers, he added.

Last year, the government had kept almost all public and private offices shut and suspended public transport, except for emergency services, from March 26 to May 30 to contain the spread of Covid-19.

However, it had allowed garment factories to operate in the middle of the shutdown.

Khaleda tests Covid positive

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has been suffering from mild fever and little cough. At present, the symptoms are not too serious yet..." the relative, said wishing anonymity.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday at an emergency press conference at the BNP chief's Gulshan office, said Khaleda Zia's condition is completely stable with no symptoms of Covid-19, even though she has tested positive.

"Our leader has undergone the coronavirus test. Her samples were taken to icddr,b yesterday [Saturday]. We came to know she tested positive for the virus," he said, adding the BNP chief is now being treated under her personal physicians, led by respiratory medicine expert Prof Dr FM Siddiqui, who will take further steps for her treatment if necessary.

"She's stable and fine. She has no high fever or other visible Covid symptoms," the party secretary general said.

"Her health condition is completely stable and her treatment is already ongoing. We would like to assure people that she is fine..." Fakhrul added.

Khaleda's relatives told The Daily Star that Dr Zubaida Rahman, daughter-in-law of the BNP chief, who

has been staying in London with her husband Tarique Rahman since 2008, is arranging all possible medical facilities required for Khaleda.

"If needed, she [Khaleda] would be shifted to hospital," said the relative.

Fakhrul in the briefing said Khaleda urged the country's people to pray for her speedy recovery. "I, especially urge our party's leaders and activists at every level to seek divine blessings for our leader's quick recovery."

Asked whether Khaleda's domestic help, Fatema, and others who stay in her Gulshan residence, underwent the Covid-19 test, he said he has no idea about it.

"I only got information about our leader."

Earlier in the day, the health ministry's senior information officer Maidul Islam Prodhan said the BNP chief underwent the test on Saturday evening and the results came positive.

Khaleda's personal physician Mohammad Mamun told The Daily Star that around five-six days ago, a staffer at her house started feeling feverish. Three days ago, he tested positive for Covid-19.

Later, all six staffers living with there at that time also tested positive.

Two persons who stay with the

BNP chief were also tested positive for Covid-19.

He said a cabin has already been booked for Khaleda at a private hospital. Moreover, all the arrangements, including oxygen, have been ensured at her home.

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, the government freed Khaleda Zia from jail for six months through an executive order suspending her sentences on March 25 last year.

She was released from the prison cell at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) the same day and, since then, has been staying at her Gulshan residence.

On August 27 last year, the government extended her release for six more months and it was extended again for the same amount of time on March 15.

On February 8, 2018, Khaleda was sent to the Old Dhaka Central Jail after a lower court sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. The High Court later doubled her jail term.

Khaleda was found guilty in another corruption case the same year. Her party claims both the cases are politically motivated.

Provide food, cash aid to ultra poor

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(CPD) Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan, CPD Distinguished Fellow Mustafizur Rahman, former Bangladesh Bank governor Dr Atiur Rahman and former finance minister M Syeduzzaman were among 30 economists who took part in the meeting.

Discussants at the meeting informed The Daily Star that the economists suggested that the government go for more allocation for health sector, specially in the tertiary and mid-level in the upcoming budget.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Dr Atiur Rahman said he told the meeting that steps should be taken to provide money to the poor through mobile financial services with the help of local representatives.

If not, the poor people would not heed the "lockdown", he said at the meeting.

"Those who are facing food crisis can call the hotline and the government will get the food to them," Atiur said at the meeting.

Bangladesh Bank can take steps in this regard, like the way it earlier provided salaries to garment workers during the first phase of lockdown last year, he said.

"This year's budget should be aimed at saving people's lives. Let's save people first so that they do not die from hunger," he said.

Terming the average five percent annual increase in the budget for the health sector "business as usual", Atiur said such incremental increase in expenditure for health will not do; instead, the sector requires a major jump this time.

Earlier, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said intensive care units (ICUs) would be set up in every district but it could not be implemented, he said.

Eminent economist Dr Binayak Sen, research director at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), supported Atiur's proposal of sending money to the ultra-poor during "lockdown".

He said it would be enough if there is six percent GDP growth.

Sen said instead of putting greater focus on growth, steps should be taken so that more people can be reached digitally.

Finance Minister Kamal at a press briefing following the meeting said the upcoming budget would not be formulated as usual. It would be made considering the exceptional time of pandemic.

"We need to formulate the budget keeping the current problem which is prevailing globally," said the minister. "We usually do not face such adversity."

All sectors related to life and livelihood would get priority in the budget, he said, adding that they would

focus on rural infrastructure and have plans for more allocation for agriculture and health.

"On one side we have to spend more in the health sector and to expand resources, [but] we also need to ensure quality service out of that resource for the people," the minister said.

During the initial outbreak of coronavirus in March last year, poor people were the worst sufferers during the 66-day countrywide shutdown.

Strict Covid restrictions are expected from April 14.

Last year, Tk 1,258 crore was allocated under a stimulus package, which aimed to provide the poor with Tk 2,500 each.

Although the government had initially planned to provide the cash incentives to 50 lakh families under this package, only 35 lakh families received the incentives. And the initiative had to be stopped midway following allegations of anomalies over the list of beneficiaries.

An OMS rice programme was also undertaken last year to allow the poor in urban areas to buy rice at Tk 10 per kg, but that programme was also abandoned because it was not viable without a list of beneficiaries.

A survey carried out by South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM) in November and December last year found that 42 percent of 5,577 households went below the poverty line due to the pandemic.

BSF shoots teen in Kurigram

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Indian Border Security Force shot and injured a citizen of the country when he was entering Bangladesh through Kurigram's Fulbari border on Saturday night.

Nageshwari police rescued and admitted the youth to Kurigram General Hospital with bullet wounds, said Lt Col Touhidul Alam, commanding officer of BGB-15 Battalion in Lalmonirhat.

The victim, Milon Miah, 18, of Shahidalar Kuthi village in India's Cooch Behar, was illegally crossing the border to visit his maternal grandfather's house in Nageshwari upazila, police said.

Talking to reporters at the hospital, Milon said after being shot, he took treatment at Nageshwari Upazila Health Complex and went to his grandfather's house.

When police came to know that, he was rushed to Kurigram General Hospital around 3:30am.

His condition is now stable, said Pulol Kumar Sarkar, resident medical officer of the hospital.

Bangladesh Border Guard will take further decision on whether any legal action will be taken against the youth.

"We are looking into it. We will convey our decision through a press release later," said Lt Col Touhidul Alam.

JMB men lead

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details from Reza."

"We are now analysing the information to know the outfit's activities in India," he added.

Salehin went into hiding and took shelter in India after he was snatched from a prison van in February 2014, along with Boma Mizan.

After the two fled to India, the outfit's activities speeded up in the country and a new chapter -- Jama'atul Mujahideen India (JMI) -- was declared in 2018, say investigators.

But conflicts developed between Salehin and Mizan over procedure. Salehin was busy establishing the outfit's network between Bangladesh and India but Mizan wanted immediate actions.

For this reason, in 2017, Mizan formed a separate faction with Indian national Ezaj, said a high official of CTC unit, quoting Reza as saying.

"Mizan and Ezaj, however, formed separate factions after Mizan started suspecting Ezaj to be an Indian intelligence agent," said the official, requesting anonymity.

On August 6, 2018, India's Intelligence Bureau and elite anti-terror probe body, National Investigation Agency, arrested Mizan from Bengaluru.

The CTC official in Bangladesh said they believed Ezaj was also arrested by Indian law enforcers, but did not get any confirmation.

"We are now trying to find out who is leading the factions of Ezaj and Mizan in their absence," the official told this newspaper.

Of the three factions, Salehin's group is the strongest in India and it has supporters in most states of the country, the official said, quoting Reza as saying.

JMB leaders Soleman, Firoz, Tareq and Jamai were mainly working for Salehin's faction in India and spreading the network, said investigators.

However, Soleman and Jamai are believed to be in Indian jails, following their arrest by Indian law enforcers. There has been no trace of Firoz and Tareq for a long time, they said, based on the outfit's international communication details.

Reza told investigators that Salehin has been staying in isolation for this reason for a long time and he has no connection with other leaders of the outfit in India now.

"We have learnt that Salehin did not take any financial support from Bangladesh to operate the outfit's activities in India. We are now trying to find out from where and how money is going to JMI," said another CTC official.

Rahmatullah, also the additional deputy commissioner of CTC unit, said they were trying to find out details of JMB's network between Bangladesh and India.

Egypt train crash driver was 'not at the controls': prosecutor

AFP, Cairo

Neither the driver nor the assistant of an Egyptian train that crashed at speed into another last month were at the controls during the deadly accident, the prosecution service said yesterday.

The prosecutor also alleged that the assistant of the stationary train and a track signalman were under the influence of the powerful painkiller tramadol, while the former had also used cannabis.

At least 20 people died and 199 were injured in the March 26 crash near Sohag in southern Egypt, according to the authorities' latest count.