

India requests UN assistance

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Yahya's army. The Maulana appealed to the people of Bangladesh to forge a unity like steel and to be on alert against Mirzafars, the agents of the military junta and the vested interests. He told the people, "Our victory is certain. God hates the oppressors and traitors."

Maulana Bhashani also sent a telegram to US President Richard Nixon and appealed to him to do the needful to check use of US arms by Yahya's government for brutally slaying lakhs of innocent, helpless, unarmed masses in Bangladesh.

CHOLERA AND SMALLPOX REPORTED

The West Bengal state government reported today that cholera and smallpox had broken out among nearly half a million refugees who had fled to India from East Pakistan. The state commissioner for refugees, Benoy Mandal, appealed for foreign aid to meet the emergency.

Benoy Mandal told newsmen that 451,000 refugees had reached West Bengal. He said 107,000 were being accommodated in emergency camps and that 344,000 were staying with relatives and friends.

"The situation is approaching the magnitude of a national disaster," Benoy Mandal said. "It will cause a serious strain on India's national resources. But you may be assured that so long as we eat, so the refugees will eat."

It was also reported that India had requested United Nations assistance for the half million refugees from East Pakistan. The request was made today to Secretary General Thant by Samar

Sen, India's chief delegate.

United Nations sources said that Thant had been urging Pakistan to allow relief efforts and that both the United Nations and the Red Cross were prepared to act. But Pakistan government continued to refuse help. PAKISTAN REPORTS INDIANS DO NOT RECOGNIZE BANGLAHEES India gave assurances that she did not recognise the so called Bangladesh regime proclaimed by separatists in East Pakistan, the Pakistani radio said tonight.

The radio reported that the assurances were conveyed to the foreign ministry in Islamabad by BK Acharya, India's high commissioner there.

According to the broadcast, Acharya also said India would not "grant any diplomatic privileges" to M Hossain Ali, the former Pakistani deputy high commissioner in Calcutta, who few days ago proclaimed himself the Calcutta representative of Bangladesh.

IT'S A WAR BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES: BRITISH MP

B Douglas-Mann, Labour member of the British Parliament said in Calcutta today that what was going on in East Bengal was a war between two countries. He further said that East Bengal was no longer a part of Pakistan, nor a rapprochement now possible. He held that an economic blockade against Pakistan which was already on the verge of bankruptcy as a result of the war could bring about an immediate end to the war.

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'Business as usual approach'

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having links to the military as well as the members of the military, putting huge pressure on the Southeast Asian country.

The current state of Myanmar has become an issue of worries for Bangladesh because there is a fear that the Rohingya repatriation process seems stalled for now.

"Given the gravity of the crisis of over a million Rohingya and the mindset of the Myanmar authorities, the international community must not shy away from their responsibility to resolve the crisis and relieve Bangladesh from the burden that Myanmar has imposed upon us," Shahrir Alam said.

He was addressing a webinar titled "The Rohingya Crisis: Response of the International Community and the Repatriation Process" organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) yesterday.

Shahrir Alam said Myanmar authorities did not demonstrate the genuine political will to resolve the crisis but tried to make misrepresented facts, denied their obligations, and misguided the international community.

"Things are not looking good in Myanmar. It is worsening by the minute. We have further reason to be concerned to added problems," he said but allayed concerns over a further influx of ethnic minorities to Bangladesh -- a fear that was expressed by some analysts.

He said the ongoing judicial proceedings both at the ICJ and the ICC are of utmost importance to put an end to Myanmar's long history of persecution, a deep-rooted culture of impunity. The international community must remain focused,

vigorously pursue accountability and justice through these international judicial mechanisms.

Shahrir Alam said Bhashan char is not an issue now as the UN and foreign diplomats have expressed their overall satisfaction over it.

"The UN has some recommendations. We are hoping more Rohingyas will go there and that the UN will take responsibility," he said.

Former diplomat Humayun Kabir said as Myanmar is now under more global pressure and the democracy movement is getting stronger, the voice of the Rohingya should be incorporated in fast-evolving Myanmar.

He said India and Thailand are facing new refugees due to Myanmar's trouble and that Bangladesh needs to keep a close watch on the development and make sure that no new influx of Myanmar's ethnic minorities takes place.

Dhaka University International Relations Prof Intiaz Ahmed said Myanmar's military has been thriving amid chaos for many decades, always finding alternatives to the sanctions and other international restrictions.

Despite sanctions being imposed by some countries on Myanmar, China and Myanmar will remain beside Myanmar. For Bangladesh, the major issue is Rohingya repatriation. Therefore, Bangladesh must engage China and Myanmar more vigorously to address the Rohingya crisis, he said.

Security analyst Brig Gen (Retd) M Sakhawat Hossain, and former ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad also spoke at the webinar where foreign ministry's Director General (Myanmar) Delwar Hossain and BISS Senior Research Fellow Abu Salah Mohammad Yousuf presented papers.

3 Hefajat leaders held

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He was held in connection with the cases filed over violence by the Qawmi madrasa-based organisation in 2013.

So far, 13 top leaders of Hefajat, including its Joint Secretary General Maulana Mamunul Haque, have been arrested.

In another development, police arrested 11 more people, including organising secretary of Brahmanbaria Jubo Dal Hasmat Khandaker, in connection with plotting the attack on Brahmanbaria police lines during Hefajat's strike on March 28.

REMAND

Rafiqul Islam Madani, widely known as "Shishu Bokta" Madani, was placed on remand in two cases filed with Motijheel and Tejgaon police stations.

He was on a four-day remand in a case filed with Motijheel Police Station over the violence on March 25 this year and a five-day remand in a case filed under the Digital Security Act with Tejgaon Police Station.

On April 7, Rab held him from his ancestral home in Netrakona's Purbatola area.

Joint Secretary General of Khelafat Majlish Maulana Korban Ali Kasemi, also vice-president of Hefajat Dhaka Mahanagar committee, and Assistant Secretary General of Hefajat Mufi Shakhawat Hossain Razi were placed on a seven-day and a 21-day remand respectively.

Both Kasemi and Shakhawat were on remand in cases filed with Paltan Police Station over the 2013 mayhem in Dhaka.

Hefajat Assistant Secretary General Maulana Monzurul Islam Afendi was placed on a 14-day remand in two

cases lodged with the same police station over the recent violence in March while protesting against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh.

The four were placed on remand by Dhaka courts.

BRAHMANBARIA CASE

Jubo Dal leader Hasmat, 49, of Ghatura village in Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila, is the prime accused in the police lines attack case, said a press release of Special Branch of district police.

Police have so far arrested 328 people, including 287 activists and supporters of Hefajat, 38 BNP activists and three Jamaat-Shibir activists in the cases filed for violence.

According to police sources, activists of Hefajat carried out massive vandalism, arson attacks and violence across Brahmanbaria from March 26 to 28.

Contacted, Roish Uddin, additional superintendent (crime and administration) of Brahmanbaria police, told this paper that police started identifying the accused by scrutinising photos and CCTV footage.

Government and private establishments were vandalised and set on fire.

Following the violence, 56 cases have been lodged against 39,000 people naming only 414 people.

Of the cases, 49 are filed with Brahmanbaria Sadar Model Police Station, four with Ashuganj Police Station, two with Sarail Police Station and one with Akhaura Railway Police Station.

[Our Brahmanbaria correspondent contributed to this report]



Relatives wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) mourn a man, who died from the coronavirus disease, next to his funeral pyre at a crematorium in New Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Poet Shankha Ghosh passes away

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with the nuances of his poetic diction and by his brilliant academic record as a literary critic and researcher. No wonder, he was equally respected both in Bangladesh and West Bengal, once again driving home that culture knows no border.

Suave in nature and low-profile, Ghosh was always firm in his ideological conviction and he passionately clung on to his values and beliefs. That is why even in his advanced age with a frail health, he could never shy away from taking to the street and wielded his pen by writing a poem protesting against intolerance, authoritarianism and for the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which seeks to give Indian citizenship to religious minorities from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan, who came to India after facing "religious persecution."

He showed this trait in his character from as far back as the 1950s with the poem "Yamunavati", inspired by the killing of a girl during the movement against food price hike in Kolkata.

Ghosh's ideological convictions did not stop him from opposing the Left Front government in West Bengal after the police firing during the agitation by farmers against land acquisition for the industrialisation in Nandigram in 2007, an event that paved the way for Mamata Banerjee's rise to chief ministership. He did not spare Mamata Banerjee-led ruling Trinamool Congress either, particularly during the widespread violence and intimidation by the party in the 2018 panchayat polls in the state.

Ghosh tested positive for Covid-19 on April 14 but did not want to be taken to hospital. His condition

worsened on Tuesday night and he was put on ventilator support yesterday morning before he breathed his last at around 11:30am.

Ghosh left behind two daughters Semanti Ghosh and Srabanti Bhowmik, and was predeceased by his wife sometime back.

Born on February 5, 1932, as Chittopriyo Ghosh in Chandpur in what is now Bangladesh, the poet, however, belongs to Banaripara in Barisal.

He spent his formative years in Pabna, where he did his matriculation from Chandraprabha Bidyapeeth in 1947. He completed his BA from the prestigious Presidency College in 1951 and obtained his Master's degree from Calcutta University.

Son of a headmaster and Bangla grammarian Manindrakumar Ghosh, Shankha Ghosh spent several years in teaching in Bangabashi College and City College in Kolkata, Delhi University, University of Iowa, USA, and Visva Bharati, while also doing research in the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies in Shimla. He retired as a teacher in Jadavpur University in Kolkata in 1992.

A recipient of the Sahitya Akademi award in 1977 for his eponymous book of poems "Babarar Prathan" (1976), Ghosh was honoured with a second Sahitya Akademi award 22 years later for his translation of a Kannada language play in Bangla. He also won the Jnanpith award in 2016, Desikottama from Visva Bharati in 1997, Rabindra Puraskar and Saraswati Samman and several other prizes -- all these for a man who hardly cared about awards.

It was in keeping with his dislike for

the loud that Ghosh never wanted the customary 21-gun salute to accompany his final journey. He was given a state funeral sans the booming guns.

In 2011, he was conferred the Indian government's third highest civilian honour -- the Padma Bhushan.

He had written and edited several books.

Among his notable works are "Dinguli Raatguli", "Dhum Legeche Hritikomole" (1987) "Mukh Dheke Jaai Biggapon" and "Gaandharba Kobitaguchcha" (1994), Chander Bhitorey Eto Andhakar (1999) and "Jal-i Pashan Hoey Aache" (2004) -- all of which brings out the anger, anguish and sarcasm of Ghosh about the developments around him at the prevailing time.

If Ghosh's main domain was poetry, he was equally facile with his prose and he had particularly carved a niche for himself as an expert on Rabindranath Tagore. He was also the director of Rabindra Bhavan from 1989 to 1990.

Ghosh's poems have focused on the unfathomable depths of human sensibilities, putting the stamp of his inimitable personal style and conviction while giving voice to the people of his time -- a voice that transcended the confines of time and space. His creativity as a poet found ample reflection in his literary criticism, particularly in his interpretations of Tagore's work.

Condoling the death of Shankha Ghosh, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Ghosh "will be remembered for his contributions to Bengali and Indian literature. His works were widely read and admired. [I am] saddened by his demise. [I offer] condolences to his family and friends."

Hospitals in India nearly overrun

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pandemic.

On Tuesday, hospitals in Delhi, the capital, said they had enough oxygen left for just another eight to 24 hours, while some private institutions had enough for only four or five.

The situation was so severe that some people had tried to loot an oxygen tanker, forcing authorities to beef up security, said the health minister of the neighbouring state of Haryana.

"From now, I've ordered police protection for all tankers," Anil Vij told Reuters partner ANI.

Television showed images of people with empty oxygen cylinders crowding refilling facilities as they scrambled to save stricken relatives in hospital.

"We were completely blocked out of supplies yesterday but by the end of the day we received some and it is helping us today," said Charu Sachdeva, an official at the state-run Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute & Research Centre in the capital.

In the northern city of Lucknow, one man said a hospital had asked him to arrange oxygen supplies for his uncle or take him away since it had run out.

Delhi, a city of 20 million people, recorded 28,395 new cases and 277 deaths on Tuesday, its highest tally since the pandemic began. Every third person tested for coronavirus proved positive.

About 80 of 142 hospitals in Delhi

had no beds left for virus patients, government figures showed.

New Delhi businessman Saurabh Mittal said he called a hospital shown in a government database to have beds free, only to be told they were full up and could not take anyone.

"I told them there is online availability but they said the real-time data showed no beds," said Mittal, who had been trying to arrange treatment for a virus sufferer.

ENTRY BAN

India faces a coronavirus "storm" overwhelming its health system, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a national address overnight, adding that authorities were working with states and private firms to deliver oxygen with "speed and sensitivity".

Delhi, like large parts of India, let its guard down when the virus seemed to be under control, allowing big gatherings such as weddings and festivals as daily infections fell to fewer than 1,000 during the winter, health experts said.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has cancelled plans to visit India and the Philippines during his country's extended holiday starting in late April amid a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases, a senior government spokesman said.

Oman will bar entry to arrivals from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh starting April 24, as part of measures to contain the pandemic, Omani state TV reported yesterday.

India has administered more

than 130 million shots so far. Some local authorities have however been running short of supplies, and India has put the brakes on exports of the AstraZeneca shot.

Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, yesterday announced more than doubling of the price of its Covid vaccine Covishield from May 1.

SII CEO Adar Poonawalla said in a statement Covishield would be at Rs 400 per dose shot to Indian state governments and Rs 600 to private hospitals.

However, the Indian government hospitals would continue to get Covishield doses at Rs 150 each as decided before the launch of India's Covid vaccination drive on January 16, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

The announcement about increase in Covishield prices came days ahead of a new expanded phase of vaccinations across India from May 1 that will include all above the age of 18.

Meanwhile, India's only domestically developed Covid-19 vaccine, Covaxin, has been found to be 78 percent effective in a second analysis of clinical trials done around the country.

"I am very pleased to state that Covaxin ... has shown the efficacy of 78% in the second interim analysis," said Balram Bhargava, the chief of the state-run Indian Council of Medical Research that has created the vaccine with Bharat Biotech.

Movement

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street in the hope to get some aid," she said.

On Ring road at Mohammadpur, a queue was seen in front of a state-owned bank. Locals gathered there to pay their utility and other bills.

The scenes at kitchen markets were as usual -- teeming with people in the morning. At Mohammadpur Town Hall Bazar, the fish market was more crowded.

Meanwhile, the alleys remained as crowded as ever since many shops besides groceries and pharmacies are operating their businesses. Many had their shutters half-closed.

Visiting the Mirpur area in the afternoon, it was seen that many shops were operating even after 3:00pm disregarding the closure time.

With coronavirus cases continuing to rise alarmingly from mid-March, the government imposed a nationwide "lockdown" for one week from April 5 as part of its move to contain the virus's spread.

Later, a week-long "stricter lockdown" was declared from April 14, which has been extended till April 28.

Journo sued

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metropolitan magistrate court sent him to jail.

A hearing will be held today.

Scientists in Chile

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during the Cretaceous period 66-80 million years ago. Parts of the Atacama today, by contrast, have gone without rain for one hundred years and support little plant or animal life.

The discovery of a titanosaur on the west side of South America's Andes Mountains is rare, though several species have been found in Argentina and Brazil, further east.

The dinosaur's remains were first discovered in the 1990s and were described by the scientists in the journal Cretaceous Research.

Arackar also appears smaller in size compared with some other titanosaurs. The Argentinosaurus, discovered on the east side of the Andes in neighbouring Argentina, was more than four times as long, scientists say.

The dinosaur's remains will eventually be exhibited in Chile's Museum of Natural History, though that is currently closed due to coronavirus restrictions.

Russia, Cuba seek closer 'strategic partnership'

AFP, Havana

Russian President Vladimir Putin called communist Cuba's new leader Miguel Diaz-Canel Tuesday to discuss strengthening the two countries' "strategic partnership," the Russian foreign ministry said in a message retweeted by its embassy in Havana.

The call came the day after Diaz-Canel took over from Raul Castro as first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), the most powerful position in the one-party state that was an important Cold War ally of Russia.

Castro and his brother Fidel before him had successively held the post for more than six decades.

In Tuesday's call, Putin and Diaz-Canel "confirmed their mutual willingness to strengthen the strategic partnership as well as to coordinate efforts in the fight against the spread of #COVID19," said the tweet.

The Kremlin had earlier issued a statement congratulating Diaz-Canel and expressing willingness to "develop a constructive bilateral dialogue and mutually-beneficial cooperation" between the two nations.

While Russia seeks closer ties, Cuba's relations with the United States have been at a low since then-President Donald Trump reinforced sanctions following an historic but temporary easing of tensions under Barack Obama between 2014 and 2016.

Germany plans to pull troops out of Afghanistan from July 4

AFP, Berlin

Germany's defence ministry yesterday said it planned to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in early July, after the United States announced plans to pull out by September 11.

"The current thinking... is to shorten the withdrawal period. A withdrawal date of July 4 is being considered," a ministry spokesman told AFP, stressing that the final decision would be made by Nato.

Nato had agreed last week to begin their troop drawdown by May 1. The 9,600-strong Nato training and support mission, which includes the US troops and depends heavily on Washington's military assets, includes personnel from 36 Nato members and partner countries.

room for abuse of the technology by repressive governments.

China is moving ahead in the AI race, while the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of algorithms and internet-connected gadgets in daily life.

"On artificial intelligence, trust is a must, not a nice to have. With these landmark rules, the EU is spearheading the development of new global norms to make sure AI can be trusted," European tech chief Margrethe Vestager said in a statement.

The Commission said AI applications that allow governments to do social scoring or exploit children will be banned.

High risk AI applications used in recruitment, critical infrastructure, credit scoring, migration and law enforcement will be subject to strict safeguards.

Companies breaching the rules face fines of up to 6% of their global turnover or 30 million euros (\$36 million), whichever is the higher figure.

EU seeks global standards for AI, civil rights groups fret

REUTERS, Brussels

The European Commission yesterday announced tough draft rules on the use of artificial intelligence, including a ban on most surveillance, in an attempt to set global standards for a key technology dominated by China and the United States.

Civil rights groups, however, warned that loopholes in the proposal, which envisage hefty fines for violations and set strict safeguards for high-risk applications, could leave