

Bangladesh asks Canada

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which has halted export of vaccines because of its high demand amid severe Covid-19 infections.

Canadian Procurement Minister Anita Anand recently said Canada might distribute excess stockpiles of the AstraZeneca vaccine among the developing countries.

Momen urged the envoy to pursue with his government for at least two million doses so that Bangladesh receives those directly, not through the Covax facility of the World Health Organization.

He also proposed that Canada may help vaccinate the Rohingyas in Bangladesh separately.

Bangladesh is also trying to acquire vaccines from some other countries, including China, Russia and the US.

In response, the Canadian high commissioner assured the minister of following up the request with his

government.

Momen also requested Canada to extend duty-free, quota-free access to Bangladeshi exports till 2027, while commencing negotiation for a Free Trade or Preferential Trade Agreement with Bangladesh soon.

He also reiterated Bangladesh's strong expectation that Nur Chowdhury, the convicted killer of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, would be sent back to Bangladesh in near future.

High Commissioner Préfontaine stated that Canada would continue its humanitarian support for displaced Rohingyas and host communities at the same scale for next three years, as was reflected in their budgetary framework for next three years.

He also stressed that Canada is willing to enhance its economic cooperation with Bangladesh, including in areas of trade and investment.

2 'muggers' killed

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The DC said they have been setting up several checkpoints at Khilkhet area to ensure security for people returning to Dhaka as incidents of mugging -- with muggers posing as fellow passengers in auto-rickshaws and minibuses -- have led to killing and injuring several people before Eid.

Around 2:15am, as law enforcers signalled an auto-rickshaw at a check post to stop, its driver refused and tried to speed his way towards Purbachal area. The DC team then informed another one of their teams ahead who intercepted the auto-rickshaw, he said.

Then, two of the muggers came out of the auto-rickshaw and started firing at the law enforcers, who fired back in self-defence, leaving the men bullet hit, claimed the DC.

They were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared them dead.

Detectives claimed to have arrested two more muggers -- Nayan and Yeamin -- and recovered the auto-rickshaw, a pistol, two bullets, a sharp weapon, a scarf and an ointment from

their possessions.

DB officials said this gang, along with others, offered ride-sharing to people on auto-rickshaws and minibuses when they saw commuters waiting for transport.

On the way, they used to mug those people and many of their victims sustained injuries due to their torture. A Dubai expat, who was travelling from Bogura to Dhaka earlier this month, was strangled to death by one such gang, law enforcers said.

His body was found on the Kuril flyover in the capital.

The arrestees told detectives that they gathered in Tongi area yesterday to pick up unsuspecting victims. As they did not find anyone there, they were heading toward Dhaka, DC Mashur said.

Nayan and Yeamin said they used to snatch valuables from victims. If anyone tried to resist, they used to strangle him with a towel or scarf. They used to carry firearms as well, he said, quoting the arrestees.

Those arrested are accused in several cases for mugging, robbery and drugs, police said.

Donors pledge \$340m for

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appeal was just 59.4 percent funded.

Aid agencies made the united call on the international community to step up support to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh, which has now entered its fourth year.

The JRP seeking \$943 million is to meet the needs of over 880,000 Rohingya refugees and 472,000 vulnerable Bangladeshis in Ukhiya and Teknaf Upazilas in Cox's Bazar district.

In total, the JRP aims to protect and assist 1.4 million people this year. More than half of this population are women and children.

"The appeal focuses on strengthening the protection of Rohingya refugees, delivering quality lifesaving assistance to those in need, fostering the well-being of the communities surrounding the camps, and helping Rohingya refugees build their skills and capacities towards sustainable return and reintegration in Myanmar, on a voluntary basis, when conditions allow them to do so, in safety and in dignity," said ISCG in a statement.

The most commonly reported needs among the host communities

include access to food as well as cash, along with essential health services, reflecting the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak and associated measures needed to mitigate the spread of the virus on food security and livelihoods among the people of Bangladesh, it said.

The Covid-19 pandemic has compounded vulnerabilities for them as well as Rohingya refugees.

"More than 40 percent of this year's financial appeal focuses on two of the most basic and critical human needs, food security and health," says Nicole Epting, senior coordinator for the ISCG.

In addition, the priorities for this year include water, sanitation and hygiene, wider health needs including sexual and reproductive health with a focus on women and girls, education, and addressing the protection concerns of the Rohingya refugee population in the camps.

UN Refugee Agency Head Filippo Grandi appealed to the global community to show compassion and solidarity with the Rohingyas and continue supporting Bangladesh who has generously sheltered and is bearing the brunt of it.

269 doctors died in 2nd wave

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the first wave of the pandemic.

India's total tally of coronavirus cases now stands at 25.23 million, health ministry data showed, following 263,533 new infections over the past 24 hours, while fatalities rose by a record 4,329. The official total death toll is now 278,719.

The government said about 98% of India's population of 1.3 billion remained susceptible to infections.

Only the United States has had more cases, or a worse single day death toll, when it lost 5,444 people on February 12. But whereas the epidemic peaked months ago in the United States, there is no certainty that India's infections have.

Though the official count shows new infections subsiding, there are fears that the new, highly infectious B.1.617 variant, first found in India, is out of control and that many cases are going unreported due to lack of testing.

Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state, has suffered a 30% increase in infections since May 2, while the total number of vaccinations it administered last week was just 1.1 million - half the total of a month earlier.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal yesterday urged the government to immediately cancel all air services with Singapore, saying a new strain of coronavirus in that country is said to be "very dangerous" for children.

This new strain of virus could be in India in the form of a third wave, he said in a tweet.

Kejriwal also said children whose parents died because of Covid-19 will get Rs 2,500 per month (till they turn 25) and their education will be paid

for by the Delhi government.

'GOD'S MERCY'
In the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, home to more people than Brazil, rural areas have been severely hit, as healthcare systems have struggled to cope.

Incensed by scarce testing and tracing, a state court said on Monday the situation was turning to "God's mercy" and hurtling towards a third wave.

"If this is the state of affairs of five districts, one can guess where we are leading people of this state to, i.e. (a) third wave of the pandemic," said the Allahabad High Court.

Chandrakant Lahariya, a public policy and health systems expert, said in the Hindustan Times newspaper that India's vaccine policy urgently needed a reset.

"For six weeks now, India's vaccination drive has been struggling," he said. "The political leadership should give a free hand to technical experts to decide and implement new strategies."

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said continuous efforts were being made to increase the supply of vaccine on a very large scale.

"The Health Ministry is streamlining the system and process of vaccination. Attempts are being made to give a schedule of the next 15 days to the states in advance," Modi said.

EXPORT OF COVID JABS

India is unlikely to resume major exports of Covid-19 vaccines until at least October as it diverts shots for domestic use, three government sources said, a longer-than-expected delay set to worsen supply shortages from the global COVAX initiative.



A health worker wearing PPE suit (Personal Protection Equipment) attends a coronavirus patient outside an emergency ward at a hospital in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Bangladesh Liberation

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repatriated at the earliest possible time. U'Thant had under consideration a request from Pakistan for food and equipment to ease the situation in Bangladesh.

BANGLADESH LIBERATION COUNCIL ESTABLISHED

Noted intellectuals of Bangladesh today formed Bangladesh Liberation Council with Dr AR Mullick, vice chancellor of Chittagong University, as president. Aims of the Council included support to the Bangladesh government in the war, mobilisation of the displaced intellectuals and publicity for the liberation movement at national and international level.

The council would also produce feature and documentary films on the Bangladesh Liberation War, send abroad intellectual squads to organise an international conscience troop for defence of human rights and democracy. Famed writer and film director Zahir Raihan is the secretary of the council.

ARAFAT CONVEYS GOOD WISHES TO BANGLADESH

The Palestine guerilla leader Yasser Arafat conveyed his good wishes to Bangladesh through Indian political leader Jayaprakash Narain who called on him yesterday. Jayaprakash Narayan arrived in Cairo on a two-day visit in the course of a global tour he had undertaken on behalf of the Gandhi Peace Foundation and Sarva Seva Sangh to mobilise public and government opinion about the situation in Bangladesh.

Yasser Arafat was found "very understanding and sympathetic" about Bangladesh developments. He told the Indian leader that he could quite understand the military character of the Pakistan regime because "we have suffered in Jordan", where the Pakistan army helped the Jordanian army to fight the commandos.

PAKISTAN REJECTS INDIAN PROPOSAL

In Islamabad, it was stated that Pakistan had rejected an Indian proposal that a Swiss representative should visit Dhaka to try to resolve the difficulties facing members of the

Indian diplomatic mission there. COLD LONDON WELCOME FOR YAHYA'S ENVOY
MM Ahmad, special envoy of Pakistan President Yahya Khan, had talks in London today with Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the UK Foreign Secretary. They discussed emergency food supplies and Pakistan's financial crisis. MM Ahmad had previously had discussions with US President Richard Nixon and the United Nations Secretary General U Thant. Although no statement was issued, MM Ahmad was believed to have received in London the same correct and chilly treatment he had in America.

Basically, Britain and the United States, supported by Canada, West Germany, and other governments in the World Bank aid consortium, were saying that Pakistan must reduce expenditure on troops in East Pakistan, and put her finances in order, if she expects assistance.

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'Free Rozina now' reverberates

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has raised questions on the government's willingness in protecting the rights to freedom of expression and ensuring the security of the journalists of the country," said Faruq Faisal, regional director, ARTICLE 19, Bangladesh and South Asia.

"Moreover, after detaining her for 5 hours, filing a case against the journalist over the incident almost at midnight has also created the impression that the entire matter is intentional," he added.

Terming the matter a threat to the practice of journalism in Bangladesh, ARTICLE 19 expressed grave concern and condemned such harassment of a senior journalist.

The rights organisation also demanded the unconditional release of the victim, withdrawal of the case, fair investigation into the incident and punishment of the officials and staff members involved.

The incident has unveiled that the practice of free and fair journalism is absence in the country and that all media workers are performing their duties under tremendous risks and continues threat.

ARTICLE 19 also expressed grave concern over such a wrath on free media and investigative journalism.

In a joint statement, 11 eminent personalities yesterday condemned the assault on Rozina by government officials at the Secretariat when she was collecting information from the health ministry.

Besides, they condemned the filing of the case against her over "stealing classified information".

They mentioned that the government and the public are jointly working to tackle the Covid-19 situation at present and the health ministry and health workers are playing a significant role in this regard.

But at the same time, the government was embarrassed by irregularities by some officials and employees of the ministry at different times. It also took action against them, they said.

In those cases, the government was benefitted due to investigative reports by journalists like Rozina Islam.

"In this situation, we demand the government enquire the reason behind the incident and also identify those who assaulted Rozina Islam, and conduct an investigation on their activities."

Nasiruddin Yusuf, Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, Prof Muntassir Mamon, Shahriar Kabir, Ramendu Majumdar, Hasan Azizul Haque, Anupom Sen, Sarwar Ali, Mofidul Haque, Mamunur Rashid and Abdus Salim signed the statement.

In another statement, Editors Guild expressed serious concern over the incident, saying that Rozina Islam was kept detained at the Secretariat for more than five hours and taken to Shahbagh Police Station after she was tortured physically and mentally.

Signed by Mozammel Haque Babu, president of Editors Guild, the statement strongly condemned the way Rozina Islam was treated while she was carrying out her professional duty at the health ministry.

Editors Guild thinks that it is unjust to detain a well-known journalist for hours and hours. "There is a need for a proper investigation into the reasons for her detention and why she was not taken to the hospital even after she fell ill. We also need to find out who is responsible for harassing Rozina," the statement said.

Editors Guild said when the policy of the government focuses on freedom of the media, it is also necessary to investigate who is doing these things inside the bureaucracy or within the administration and thus turning the media against the government.

Editors Guild also thinks that it is journalism's job to expose the truth, to expose lies, and to expose corruption. Rozina Islam was doing that. If there is any deviation from the law, it is desirable to seek redress through the legal process. But physical and mental torture for hours is not a normal process, the statement added.

It also urged the government to launch an impartial investigation into the incident and punish the perpetrators.

Besides, it demanded that the case against Rozina be withdrawn immediately.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) also strongly condemned the way Rozina was confined at the health ministry for a long time while she was performing her professional duties.

In a statement, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman called for the immediate withdrawal of the case and Rozina's unconditional release.

At the same time, TIB urges all the authorities concerned of the government to show prudence by ensuring exemplary punishment of the culprits through proper investigation into the incident.

"I think this is a warning message from the corrupt for those who are doing journalism with principle and dedication, despite hundreds of adversities, trying to protect the public interest through investigative journalism."

In a statement, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) strongly condemned the physical and mental abuse of Rozina Islam.

Shaheen Anam, executive director, MJF, demanded the journalist's immediate release.

After Rozina fell ill, she was taken to a police station, instead of a hospital. It was inhumane, she said in the statement.

MJF demanded a fair investigation into the incident and a fair trial.

In another statement, Forum for Freedom of Expression, Bangladesh (FFExB), a network of media rights organisations in Bangladesh, said it

protested the arbitrary arrest of Rozina Islam for "breaching" the Official Secrets Act.

In Dhaka, journalists protested in front of Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) at the city's Segunbagicha.

DRU leaders at the programme said they would wage a tough movement if Rozina was not released immediately.

Journalists in Chattogram, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Tangail, Lalmonirhat and Kurigram also demonstrated and formed human chains, seeking justice for Rozina.

Bangladesh Secretariat Reporters' Forum (BSRF) yesterday decided to boycott all events of the health ministry until Rozina was released.

Journalists have also decided to form a human chain in front of Jatiya Press Club at 11:00am today, demanding unconditional release of Rozina, withdrawal of the case filed against her and action against those who assaulted and confined her.

The BSRF yesterday also boycotted a press conference organised by the health ministry. The press conference was scheduled for 11:00am.

Jana Sanghati Andolon also staged a protest programme in front of the Jatiya Press Club.

In separate statements, BNP, National Human Rights Commission, Jatiya Press Club, Workers Party, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Human Rights Support Society, Adibasi Forum, Bangladesh Chhatra Union, Karmajibi Nari, Aviation and Tourism Journalist Forum of Bangladesh, Diplomatic Correspondent Association of Bangladesh, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, SAARC Human Rights Foundation, Capital Market Journalist Forum, Economic Reporters' Forum, Bangladesh Muktijoddha Mancha, National Girl Child Advocacy Forum, Udichi Shilpo Gosti and Labour Party also demanded immediate release of Rozina and withdrawal of the case against her.

Meanwhile, 57 noted citizens in a joint statement said the harassment of Rozina Islam has undermined independent journalism, human rights and human dignity of the people of the country.

They said those who have been infuriated by Rozina for practicing media freedom and publishing reports against various corruptions and irregularities, have harassed her and filed a case against her to muzzle journalism.

Serajul Islam Choudhury, Sultana Kamal, Rasheda K Chowdhury, Hafizuddin Khan, Hossain Zillur Rahman, Debapriya Bhattacharya, and Hamida Hossain are among the signatories.

Besides, journalists from Prothom Alo and The Daily Star formed human chain programmes in front of their offices in the capital yesterday, protesting the arrest of Rozina.

3 more cases

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60 while the rest were aged between 31 and 60, the DGHS said in its daily bulletin.

The overall death rate stood at 1.56 percent till yesterday, it mentioned.

At least 1,272 new infections were recorded, raising the total number to 782,129. The positivity rate was 7.55 percent with 16,855 samples tested across the country in 24 hours. The overall positivity rate now stands at 13.64 percent.

Besides, 1,115 Covid patients recovered during the period, taking the total number to 724,209.

Bangladesh sends

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Tk 20 crore.

Mostafizur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Benapole Customs House, said around 3:30pm, the items were sent to India after completing all the formalities of customs.

Riazul Islam, a counsellor of Deputy High Commission of Bangladesh in Kolkata, Port Director Abdul Jalil and other officials were present at the handover ceremony.

2 West Bengal

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Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal and Justice Arijit Banerjee.

The Narada case will come up for hearing before the bench today when India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which arrested ministers Hakim, Mukherjee, Mitra and Chatterjee is expected to move the High Court to shift the trial in the case outside Bengal.

Mamata's six-hour sit-in protest at the CBI office at Nizam Palace after the arrests, TMC activists hurling stones at the office and taking to street protests in several parts of Bengal yesterday was disapproved by the High Court, which stayed the bail granted by Bankshall court in Kolkata to the four arrested politicians.

In its eight-page order late on Monday evening, the HC bench observed that "confidence of the people in the justice system would be eroded if such incidents are allowed to happen in matters where political leaders are arrested and are to be produced in court."

"Public trust and confidence in the judicial system is more important. They [people] may feel that it is not the rule of law that prevails but a mob has an upper hand, especially where it is led by the CM in the CBI office and by the Law Minister [of West Bengal] in the court," read the order.

The bench said it was "not touching the merits of the controversy but the manner in which pressure was sought to be put".

The High Court made the observations while staying the bail granted by a trial court in Kolkata on Monday, hours after the four politicians were arrested.

Five ministers of Mamata's cabinet, including the law minister, were reportedly present in the court on Monday.

Opposing the bail granted to the four politicians, CBI contended before the High Court that their judicial custody was necessary because they are "influential" persons who could "tamper with evidence and influence" witnesses.

Hakim, Mukherjee, Mitra and ex-TMC leader Sovan Chatterjee were caught on camera accepting money in a sting operation by news portal Narada in 2014. The video tapes were released before the assembly polls in 2016.

The Calcutta High Court had ordered a CBI probe into the case in 2017 and the probe agency filed a chargesheet against Hakim, Mukherjee, Mitra, Chatterjee and a former police officer, SMH Mirza who was arrested earlier and is now out on bail.

Mamata had staged a sit-in protest in Esplanade area of Kolkata in 2019 to protest against CBI's move to question the then Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar in the multi-crore rupee Saradha chit fund scam case.

Meanwhile, Mitra, Chatterjee and Mukherjee were admitted to the VIP Woodburn Ward of state-run Seth Sukhlal Karnani Memorial Hospital in Kolkata yesterday after they complained of ill health.

Mitra complained of breathlessness and was given oxygen support for a while immediately after his admission to the hospital and again later yesterday. The condition of Mitra, who tested positive for Covid-19 a month ago, was stated to be stable.

Subrata Mukherjee too was admitted to the hospital after complaining of difficulty in breathing.

Firhad Hakim, Transport and Housing Minister, has been in Presidency Jail since Monday.

Nasa spacecraft

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be the noise of the universe beyond our own neighbourhood.

The drone appears to be emitted by interstellar gas or plasma waves that are out in the largely empty space between the stars.

"It's very faint and monotone, because it is in a narrow frequency bandwidth," said Stella Koch Ocker, a Cornell doctoral student in astronomy, who found the emission. "We're detecting the faint, persistent hum of interstellar gas."

The findings suggest there is more going on in interstellar gas than scientists had previously thought. Scientists are not sure what low-level activity could be causing the noise, but suggest it might be the result of "thermally excited plasma oscillations".