

BANGLADESH
UPDATE1,637
New cases in 24hrs8,24,486
Total cases13,032
Deaths7,61,916
RecoveriesGLOBAL
UPDATE3,803,257
Deaths176,221,511
Total cases

'Tramplimg of efforts for democratisation'

Japan parliament condemns coup in Myanmar, passes resolution

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Japan's House of Councilors has unanimously passed a resolution, condemning the coup d'état in Myanmar and calling for early recovery of the democratic political system.

At the main meeting on Friday, bipartisan lawmakers of Japan's upper house of the parliament, such as the Liberal Democratic Party and the Constitutional Democratic Party have submitted resolutions to the House of Councilors over the situation in Myanmar, according to Japan Broadcasting Corporation, NHK.

It pointed out that the coup d'état that occurred in February was "a tramplimg of efforts and expectations for democratisation, and the legitimacy of the current system by the military is not recognised at all" to civilians by the military and police.

"Westrongly condemn the situation where the violence continues and many people are killed or injured. On top of that, we urge military leadership to immediately stop atrocities against civilians and immediately release detained Aung San Suu Kyi and others," the resolution said.

In addition, the House of Councilors said they will make full use of all diplomatic resources for the government of Japan, make every effort to realise an early recovery of the democratic political system, provide emergency assistance to displaced people, and work toward a ban on arms exports to the military.

A similar resolution has been passed by the House of Representatives regarding the situation in Myanmar last Tuesday.

The move reflects Japan's intention to show its opposition to the Myanmar junta as Group of Seven summit happens in UK.

It said the military junta "cannot be justified at all" and expressed "solidarity with the people of Myanmar", in reference to peaceful protesters.

The resolution said Tokyo would have no choice but to review its existing development aid toward Myanmar and that investment by Japanese firms could suffer if the situation does not improve.

"We will decide our economic cooperation going forward based on how Myanmar addresses these issues," Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said at a press conference, reports Kyodo News.

Japan has put on hold new official development assistance for the Southeastern Asian country in response to the coup.

More than four months after the military takeover, the junta's violence against civilians continues with the number of people killed surpassing 850, according to a human rights group monitoring the situation in Myanmar.

Myanmar military took over power on February 1, ousting the elected leaders of the National League of Democracy (NLD), alleging elections fraudulence in November last year.

Following the coup, NLD leaders and some other independent and ethnic leaders formed the National Unity Government in exile and last month formed Peoples' Democratic Forces, an armed wing of the shadow government.

UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet on Friday said the violence was escalating across Myanmar, warning that the country had plunged into a "human rights catastrophe" since the February 1 coup.

Shakib handed 3-match ban

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during Mohammedan SC's clash with Abahani Limited.

Shakib, the skipper of Mohammedan, kicked the stumps over in a fit of rage after umpire Imran Parvez denied an LBW appeal in the fifth over of their game against Abahani. He was seen threatening the umpire and soon after, when the umpire called for the covers due to increasing rain, uprooted the stumps and slammed them onto the ground.

Shakib was also seen exchanging heated words with Abahani staff and their coach Khaled Mahmud in particular before the all-rounder was dragged away to the dressing room by teammates. That misunderstanding was sorted when Shakib went to the locker room after and offered his apologies.

Interestingly, the drama that the top all-rounder created on the field was matched by the BCB in meting out a punishment regarding the offence. According to standard practice, a decision on the matter should have come within a few hours of the game as the ICC-mandated rules for such offences are very clear.

"They [match officials] were thinking on what level the breach was made. The procedure is that the match referee will notify the accused player of the charges for the breach and if the player accepts the charges, then the charges will stand as is. But if the player objects to the charges, then a hearing will be held. Sorting out all these steps took this much time," explained a BCB official.

The BCB official also conceded that it should not have taken so long for a decision to be made.

"The decision should have come just [a few hours] after the game when the match report was submitted. As it is a level 3 offence, this issue should not have been dragged till the forming of a technical committee. If it were a level 4 offence, that entails a minimum 1-year suspension. Only in that case a technical committee is needed to be formed," added the BCB official.

The decision, which should have been a very straightforward one, finally came yesterday evening only after BCB president Nazmul Hassan held a meeting with a few of the board's directors at his residence.

Hajj again

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"Operation of hajj flights is one of the major sources of Biman's yearly income. The latest Saudi decision will badly affect the revenue income of the national flag carrier," Biman Managing Director and CEO Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal told The Daily Star yesterday.

Talking to this correspondent, Haab President M Shahadat Hossain Taslim said the Saudi government's decision came as a big blow to the private hajj agencies as they would not be able to earn Tk 2,500 crore by sending pilgrims to the Gulf country.

He said the private agencies' estimated revenue loss related to hajj and umrah was around Tk 6,100 crore last year.

Some 1.30 lakh Bangladeshis performed hajj in 2019. Of them, 7,000 were sent by the religious affairs ministry and the rest by private hajj agencies, sources at the ministry and Haab said.

This year, some 63,000 Bangladeshis had completed registration for hajj. The ritual is likely to be held on July 18, subject to sighting of the moon.

Haab leaders said several lakh people and many related industries, including textiles, leather, hotel, and medical centre, would also be badly affected by the Saudi decision.

They said around 50,000 more people, who deal with the Bangladeshis pilgrims in Saudi Arabia, would be affected as well.

The Saudi authorities on February 26 last year suspended performing umrah by pilgrims from abroad to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Although umrah can be performed

round the year, most Bangladeshis pilgrims perform the ritual during the November-April period, sources at Haab said.

Eyaqub Sarafati, senior vice president of Haab and also the managing director of Air Touch Limited, said his agency used to send around 1,200 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia each year to perform umrah and hajj.

"But my agency could not send a single pilgrim to Saudi Arabia since early last year due to the pandemic, leading to a revenue loss of around Tk 9 crore," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Costs of umrah packages ranges from Tk 80,000 to Tk 2.3 lakh per person.

Mizanur Rahman, proprietor of Shamim Travels, said around 300-400 pilgrims used to fly to Saudi Arabia each year to perform hajj under the arrangement of his agency.

However, the firm could not send a single pilgrim last year and the situation would remain unchanged this year due to Covid-19. This would lead to huge revenue loss for the agency, he added.

Haab sources said around 2.5 lakh Bangladeshis perform umrah each year under private management.

Almost 45 percent of umrah pilgrims visit Saudi Arabia during the lunar months of Rajab, Shaban and Ramadan, making it the busiest season for hajj for agencies economically dependent on religious tourism, according to Turkish state-owned media outlet TRT World.

Performing hajj, a week-long Islamic ritual, at least once in a lifetime is a must for financially capable Muslims.



A crowd of low wage workers travelling to their workplaces on the payload bay of a truck. They appear to prefer saving on bus fares over safety. The photo was taken on Sylhet Airport Road yesterday.

PHOTO:
SHEIKH NASIR

Pressing issues left unaddressed

FROM PAGE 1

the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, said, "Ignoring public health, we will not be able to become a developed nation. If people of the country survive, the economy will grow a lot in future.

"We go to parliament only to say yes or no. In fact, we cannot discuss a lot there on the budget."

Speaking on those who have been pushed below the poverty line by the pandemic, Saber said the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) should come up with the exact number of poor and new poor as there are gaps on different estimates on the numbers.

Responding to reporters' queries last week, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said he did not agree regarding the data regarding the new poor. He made the comment after several research organisations found through surveys that the country's poverty rate jumped to 42 percent from 20.5 percent in the pre-pandemic period.

CPD Chairman Rehman Sobhan said the US, which was grappling with the highest rates of Covid infection, has now been reporting the lowest rates because it vaccinated its people.

He also suggested the government create an unemployment insurance scheme for garment workers in collaboration with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) to help them survive.

Besides, the CPD chairman suggested the government come up with some programmes to provide employment opportunities to people. He also said measures should be taken so that the Cottage, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (CMSMEs) can create such opportunities.

Nihad Kabir, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

and Industry (MCCI), suggested gradually lowering the corporate tax to help attract investment and creating employment.

She said the financial support for the CMSMEs did not reach the beneficiaries properly. "Here only the financial support is not enough, policy support from the government is also required."

Speaking on Covid-19 vaccination, she said it would take four years to inoculate all people in the country if the vaccination progressed at the current pace. "The vaccination rate should be expedited."

Md Jashim Uddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said, "If the government gives the CMSMEs a special fund, they can provide employment."

The FBCCI chief also said the repayment period for loans from the stimulus funds for the CMSMEs should be extended to December 31 from June 31 as businesses were struggling amid the pandemic.

Salehuddin Ahmed, former governor of Bangladesh Bank, said the proposed budget ignored the needs of the poor and the marginalised.

He also suggested a reform in the banking sector, stock markets and Bangladesh Energy Regulations Commission.

Rumeen Farhana, a lawmaker from the BNP, said the lives and livelihoods of people were under threat because of the Covid-19 fallouts.

The healthcare sector has been ignored in the budget. The spending of 72 percent of the budget allocation even in the Covid-19 time indicates that a massive reform is needed in the healthcare sector, she said.

She also said although it would take four years to vaccinate 13 crore people, the proposed budget did not provide any guideline on how the people would be vaccinated.

The government's allocation for the social safety net is also minimal. Many

would be left out of the support, she added.

Kalpona Akter, executive director of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity (BCWS), said some three lakh workers lost their jobs during the pandemic, but the government did not have any allocation for them.

Also the workers in the agricultural sector did not get any allocation in the budget, she said. So, the government should bring them under the proposed unemployment insurance scheme.

Shahidullah Azim, vice-president of the BGMEA, demanded 10 percent cash incentive on export of garments made from man-made fibre so that new investment came in this potential sector.

Mirza Nurul Ghani Shovon, president, Central Executive Committee of the National Association of Small and Cottage Industries of Bangladesh (NASCIB), said the actual disbursement of the Tk 23,000 crore fund for the CMSMEs is 25 percent although some quarters have been saying it is 72 percent.

While she was presenting the keynote paper Fahmida Khatun, executive director of CPD, said the target of revenue collection and expenditure in the budget might be very difficult for the government to achieve.

While addressing the dialogue, Planning Minister MA Mannan said the BBS would start working on the new poor soon.

He said the government had been discussing launching a universal pension scheme. Mannan said he faced many difficulties when he took the task of reforming the Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation Division (IMED) under the planning ministry for more transparency in government spending.

He also said VAT was supposed to be a good source for revenue generation, but the VAT system is not working properly.

Low forms over Bay

STAR REPORT

The maritime ports of Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Mongla and Payra have been advised to hoist local cautionary signal no-3 as a low pressure has formed over northwest Bay and adjoining coastal areas of Bangladesh.

Under its influence, deep convection is happening over the North Bay and adjoining coastal areas of Bangladesh, said a warning message on the website of the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

Squally weather is likely to affect the maritime ports, North Bay and adjoining areas, the message adds.

All fishing boats and trawlers over the North Bay have been advised to come close to the coast and proceed with caution till further notice.

Meanwhile, light to moderate rains or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind are likely to occur at many places over Rangpur, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Chattogram divisions, according to regular weather bulletin by the Met office.

Moderate rains or thundershowers are also likely to occur at a few places over Dhaka, Mymensingh and Sylhet divisions.

The day and night temperatures may remain nearly unchanged over the country, the bulletin adds.

Dhaka asks Riyadh to waive quarantine for Bangladeshi workers

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has requested the Saudi government to waive the seven-day mandatory quarantine for Bangladeshi workers in the Kingdom as Dhaka will ensure quarantine here before their departure.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen made the request during a telephone conversation with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan yesterday.

"We have requested them to waive seven-day quarantine in Saudi hotels and instead we will ensure quarantine [for the same duration] in Bangladesh prior to their departure," Momen said.

The Saudi foreign minister replied that he would convey this message to relevant authorities, added Momen.

If the Saudi government agrees, it will help reduce the financial burden of Bangladeshi workers going to the country, said the foreign minister.

At present, Bangladeshi workers must stay in seven-day institutional quarantine once they reach Saudi Arabia.

Momen thanked the Saudi government for allowing Bangladeshi workers in the country despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Saudi foreign minister conveyed to his Bangladeshi counterpart that no one from outside Saudi Arabia will get the opportunity to perform Hajj this year due to the pandemic.

Expel errant

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member of Sylhet district AL, for Sylhet-3.

A total of 94 aspirants collected nomination papers to get AL tickets for the three constituencies. Of them, 34 nomination papers were sold for Dhaka-14, 25 for Sylhet-3, and 35 for Cumilla-5.

The by-polls are slated for July 28.

The three parliamentary seats became vacant due to the deaths of the MPs. Sylhet-3 MP Mahmud Us Samad died on March 11, Dhaka-14 MP Aslamul Haque breathed his last on April 4 and Comilla-5 MP Abdul Matin Khasru died on April 14.

When the feud between Faridpur AL President Subal Saha and General Secretary Syed Masud Hosen was discussed and Hasina learnt that two separate committees were proposed for Faridpur, she ordered dismissing both the committees, the sources added.

She asked the central leaders to sit with Faridpur AL president and general secretary to resolve the conflict. If need be, the two leaders should be summoned to Dhaka.

She also suggested taking action in line with the party constitution against any leader unwilling to resolve in-party disputes.

She also told the AL leaders that the country will get more coronavirus vaccines soon and asked them to be cautious about the coronavirus, but not to panic.

Closure of schools

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all schools to contain the spread of coronavirus. It led to cancellation of exams and left academic calendars in disarray.

The HSC and its equivalent exams, slated for April 1, 2020, got cancelled. The government also cancelled Primary Education Completion, Junior School Certificate and their equivalent exams amid the pandemic.

Secondary and primary students were promoted to the next classes this year without examinations.

To avoid health risks, the government ordered schools to enroll students of all grades for the next academic session on the basis of a lottery.

The government also didn't hold the Textbook Festival on January 1 when textbooks are handed to primary and secondary students for free.