

500 Indian MPs urge

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economic and military aid to the Pakistan government until the situation returned to normal in East Pakistan. NEW YORK TIMES JUSTIFIES BANGALEE ENVOYS' DECISION In an editorial published today, The New York Times said the resignation of 14 diplomats of Bangalee origin from the Pakistani embassy in Washington and the United Nations mission refuted the charge of Pakistan President Yahya Khan that the Bangalee uprising was merely the work of "mischief mongers, saboteurs and infiltrators".

"It also casts doubt on his claim that the resistance has been 'crushed'," added the American daily.

It further commented, "Islamabad's current policies cannot bring stability to East Bengal. In trying to impose law and order by force of arms -- mostly American arms -- instead of through

political accommodation, the military regime is merely fueling the fires of Bengali rebellion."

The New York Times called for immediate suspension of aid to Pakistan, except for emergency relief to the starving, for establishment of genuine stability in the subcontinent. A UN TEAM IN GENEVA TO DIRECT PAKISTANI AID UN Secretary General Thant reported today that the UN relief effort in Pakistan would be coordinated by a United Nations working group based in Geneva. Thirty-eight people from various countries would be recruited to serve as staff members at the initial stage. All the expenses would be borne by voluntary contributions made in response to the secretary general's appeals.

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Allegations serious if reports

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Guild of India and senior journalist N Ram, to serve the copies of the pleas seeking probe into the Israeli spyware matter to the Indian government so that somebody from the government is present to accept a notice.

The bench posted the matter for hearing on August 10.

The apex court bench was hearing nine petitions, including those filed by the Editors Guild and senior journalists seeking independent probe into the alleged Pegasus snooping matter.

An international media consortium has reported that over 300 Indian mobile phone numbers were on the list of potential targets for surveillance using Pegasus spyware.

As the opposition continued to disrupt parliamentary proceedings of the monsoon session on the Pegasus and other issues, Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the opposition of trying to score self-goals and stalling parliament while the country was keen to march ahead.

"These parties are trying to stop the transaction of business in Parliament," he said in a no-holds-barred attack on the opposition.

"On one hand, our country is scoring goal after goal of victory (an apparent reference to Indian hockey

teams in the Olympics), on the other, some people, due to political self-interests, are doing such things which make it seem that they are scoring 'self-goals,'" Modi said.

The opposition was not concerned about what the country wants, what it is achieving or how it is changing. "These people are hurting both the spirit and the time of the country for their selfish reasons. They are continuously insulting Parliament of India for their self interests," he added.

"The great people of this country cannot become hostage to such selfish and anti-national politics," he said alleging the sole intention of the opposition parties is to create roadblocks on the path of development.

On the other hand, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday attacked Modi over the Pegasus snooping row, saying the Israeli spyware was a tool to "silence people."

Addressing a "Sansad Gehrao" protest in New Delhi by the Indian Youth Congress, he said "your mobile phone is your voice. Narendra Modi has put the idea of Pegasus in the mobile phone of every youth, not just mine.

"This idea is that if you speak the truth, Narendra Modi and Pegasus are there in your phones."



Police use water cannon to disperse supporters of India's main opposition Congress party during a protest against what they say inflation, farm laws, unemployment and Pegasus snooping, in New Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Global Covid cases cross 200m mark

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its sixth lockdown.

Little more than a week after Melbourne's last lockdown ended, Victoria premier Daniel Andrews said he had "no choice" to lock down the city and the rest of the state.

Around two thousand protesters took to the streets chanting "no more lockdown", and the police responded in huge numbers, making arrests and using pepper spray to disperse the crowd.

MAJOR NATIONS STICK TO VACCINE BOOSTER PLANS
France yesterday became the latest country to announce it would rollout a third booster shot of a Covid vaccine from September, joining Israel and Germany.

President Emmanuel Macron's statement came just a day after the World Health Organization called on all nations to halt booster shots until at least the end of September to help ease the drastic inequity in dose distribution between rich and poor nations.

However Washington swiftly shot

down the WHO's proposal.

"We definitely feel that it's a false choice and we can do both," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

SOUTHEAST ASIA RAVAGED
The Delta variant has been running rampant in Southeast Asia, with Thailand recording 20,000 new daily cases for the first time on Wednesday -- and again yesterday.

The country also announced 160 deaths in 24 hours, as exhausted morgue workers struggle to cope with the mounting bodies.

Indonesia's total Covid death toll passed 100,000 on Wednesday after it recorded 1,739 of the 10,245 fatalities registered worldwide, the global toll rising past 4.25 million.

Japan's capital Tokyo had a new record number of daily cases with 5,042, just three days before the end of the Olympics.

INDIA BATS FOR LOCAL CURBS
Meanwhile, the Indian government has asked state authorities to impose restrictions ahead of festivals across the country, warning that overcrowding

could lead to "super spreader" events and a new surge in infections.

India has reported an average of 30,000 to 40,000 new coronavirus cases every day since July, and the federal government has warned that although cases have dipped from a high of 400,000 daily at the peak of the deadly second wave, the danger has not abated yet.

India's busy festival season begins this month, with several celebrations dotting the calendar until November, when the Hindu festival of lights, Diwali, celebrated by millions, takes place.

Yesterday, India reported 42,982 new cases of COVID-19 and 533 deaths in the last 24 hours, the federal government said, taking its total caseload to 31.8 million.

US INFECTIONS AT 6-MONTH HIGH
The United States remains the country with the highest number of deaths and infections. However, it said that it plans eventually to begin allowing fully vaccinated foreigners back in.

Now a trial run tomorrow

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the duration of the special vaccination drive from six days to one day due to a shortage of jobs.

Professor Dr Be-Nazir Ahmed, a former DGHS director, said, "The last-minute change in decision exposed the government's poor planning. If it [the government] had done its homework, it would not have retreated from the decision."

Ahmed, also a member of the National Immunisation Technical Advisory Group (NITAG), said such abrupt changes in decisions will call the credibility of the government into question.

"Vaccination is a serious issue and any sort of decision in this regard should be well thought out."

Prof Muzaherul Huq, a former adviser to WHO South-East Asia region, said a strategic plan must be framed to achieve any target.

"But it seems the government lacked proper planning and preparation before coming up with the announcement of vaccinating one crore in six days."

"Since the government has one crore vaccines in hand, if it inoculates the whole doses then the regular vaccine campaign will be hampered.

Besides, the second dose of that one crore people will be uncertain."

He, however, said the one-day trial run will help the government gather experience before launching the special drive.

The country has so far vaccinated around 1.44 crore people. And only around 44 lakh of them received both doses.

According to the World Health Organization, at least 80 percent of the population has to be inoculated to contain the spread of coronavirus. In Bangladesh's context, around 12 crore people must be vaccinated in this regard.

Bangladesh so far has 2.55 crore vaccine doses of different brands -- 1.19 crore Oxford-AstraZeneca, 81 lakh Sinopharm, 55 lakh Moderna and 1.06 lakh Pfizer.

Currently, China's Sinopharm vaccine doses are being administered in rural areas and district towns while the Moderna vaccine is being used in city corporation areas.

Contacted, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said trial run will allow the government to identify the problems and fix those accordingly before the main drive.

"We will resume vaccination in the rural areas before August 14 if we get enough vaccines in hand."

The minister said they will not administer all the shots at the same time and will keep half of them for second doses.

"As the supply of Sinopharm is smooth, we may use more than half of what we have in hand. By that time, we will receive more vaccines from China."

He said the special vaccination campaign was to raise awareness about vaccination among people, especially those living in rural areas.

"We are, to some extent, successful in raising awareness. Already more than 30 lakh people have taken vaccines in the last 10 days. This was thanks to our campaign."

The health minister said one of the challenges was manpower.

"Four types of vaccines were administered in the existing centres and that required huge manpower. To launch it in rural areas, we will need more, but we have constraints. So, we have to keep that in mind."

Bangladesh, till yesterday, recorded 13,22,654 Covid-19 cases and 21,902 deaths. Over 79 percent of those who died were over 50.

Tagore's 80th death anniversary

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enriched the Bangla language and literature and elevated their positions in the global arena.

His novels, short stories, songs, dance dramas and essays spoke to political and personal topics.

Gitanjali (Song Offerings), Gora (Fair-Faced) and Ghare-Baire (The Home and the World) are his best-known works. His short stories and novels were acclaimed for their lyricism, colloquialism, and naturalism.

Rabindranath became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913.

Sometimes referred to as "the Bard of Bengal", Tagore's poetic songs were viewed as spiritual and mercurial.

His compositions were chosen by two nations as national anthems: Bangladesh's "Amar Sonar Bangla" and India's "Jana Gana Mana".

ministry, Bangla Academy and different other government and non-government institutions and cultural organisations are holding virtual programmes to mark the day.

Bangla Academy will hold a discussion and cultural event virtually. State Minister for Cultural Affairs KM Khalid will join the programme as the chief guest.

Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar and private television and radio stations will air special programmes on the occasion.

The youngest of 13 children of Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi, Tagore, nicknamed "Rabi", was born on 25th of Baishakh, 1268 (May 7, 1861) at the Jorasanko mansion in Kolkata.

In his endeavors in different genres of Bangla literature, the great poet

Tale of an upazila in throes

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Bari Khan, one of the village elders present in the arbitration in 2017, told The Daily Star recently.

Wadud Mahmud, chairman of Shatgram Union Parishad, who was also present during the arbitration, said, "No one thought they would become extremists."

The story came to light after July 11 this year when the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CITC) unit of police raided two hideouts of the IS-inspired militant outfit Neo JMB in Atrahaz upazila and arrested two suspects.

Seven others were arrested in the following days and police are looking for other suspects, said Rahmat Ullah Chowdhury, in-charge of the bomb disposal division of CITC.

"We are now collecting information," he added.

CITC sources say the officers are looking for at least 25 to 30 youths, who appear to have left their houses to join militant outfits.

Some villagers in Shatgram said the number of traceless young men would not be less than 40.

Chairman Wadud told this newspaper that the union parishad started collecting information about the missing youths.

Anichur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Atrahaz Police Station, however, said local police have yet to get any specific information about any missing youth.

During a visit to Shatgram Union Wednesday afternoon, this correspondent found Hafiz's house locked. Neighbours said His brother Akram Ali and father Kari Akram Ali have been traceless. While entering the area, several villagers even asked this correspondent to steer clear, saying that there are extremists in the neighbourhood who might do

something untoward if they heard that a journalist was visiting the area.

A CITC official said that during a raid in the upazila, they came across a suspect's mother who, noticing the police team, dug a hole in the floor and buried her phone.

She later told officers that she tried to hide the phone because her son used the phone.

Family members of the suspects did not talk to this correspondent.

"Our son was doing good for Islam," said the mother of a suspect.

Faizul Bari Khan, a village elder, said people of the communities were also trying to identify the militants.

In Atrahaz, there were Ahle Hadith followers in at least 65 villages.

Investigators learnt that JMB leader Shaikh Abdul Rahman and Neo JMB and ABT members wanted to set up a safe house in the upazila.

Rahman's father Mawlana Abdullah Ibne Fazal, who is from Jamalpur, was an Ahle Hadith scholar who used to give sermons in the villages, say locals.

Fazal had a very good relationship with an influential local named Mia Shaheb -- the grandfather of Faizul.

In 2003 and 2004, Rahman, who was hanged in 2007, used to send Jihadi books to a group of enthusiastic readers in the villages, they added.

Rahman managed to create JMB followers in the villages, say locals.

Faizul Khan said in 2005, Rahman visited their house and wanted to set up a shelter home.

"But we refused to accept his proposal and asked him to leave," he said.

He was later found involved in bank robberies and a series of bomb blasts, said Faizul.

CITC Chief Asaduzzaman told The Daily Star that his unit has information about the missing youths. "We will raid after analysing information."

Sheikh Kamal faced malicious

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About Kamal's organisational competence, Hasina said he played a very active role in different movements after the Six-Point Demand was placed in 1966. He also conducted a campaign competently before the 1970 election.

Earlier, the PM distributed Sheikh Kamal National Sports Council Award-2021 among 10 sports personalities and two organisations.

On behalf of the prime minister, Senior Secretary of Youth and Sports Akhter Hossain handed the awards to the winners under seven categories.

Mahfuza Khatun Shila (swimming), Ruman Sana (archery) and Mabiya Akter Simanto (weightlifting) received the award in the athlete category.

The award in the emerging athlete category was handed to Akbar Ali

(captain of U-19 Cricket World Cup winning team), Fahad Rahman (chess) and Unnati Khatun (football).

Kazi Mohammad Salahuddin was given the lifetime honour award.

Manzoor Quader and Kya Shai Hra won the award in sports organiser category, while Muhammad Kamruzzaman in the sports journalist category.

Bangladesh Cricket Board received the award in the federation/association/organisation category while Walton received it in the sports patron/sponsor category.

Hasina also unveiled the cover of an illustrated memoir on Shaheed Captain Sheikh Kamal.

At the event, a documentary titled "Sheikh Kamal: Uttal Taronyer Nabik" was screened with focus on the life and works of the sports organiser.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel, also the NSC chairman, presided over the event, joining it virtually from Japan.

Two sports organisers -- Swadhini Bangla Football Team Manager Tanvir Mazahar Islam Tanna and Youth and Sports Affairs Secretary of Awami League Harunur Rashid -- highlighted the life and works of Sheikh Kamal.

POSTAGE STAMP RELEASED
Yesterday, the prime minister released a commemorative postage stamp, an opening-day cover and a data card marking the 72nd birth anniversary of Sheikh Kamal.

Hasina unveiled the Tk 10 stamp along with a Tk 10 opening-day cover and Tk 5 data card at a function at the Gono Bhaban, said PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim.

2 AL men killed in Laxmipur, Gaibandha

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district town.

The deceased, Monjurul Hasan Likhon, 38, was a resident of the town's Pashchimpara area.

Although he did not have any post in the incumbent committee, he was a potential candidate to secure a vital post in Jubo League's district unit's next committee, said local AL and Jubo League men.

Quoting witnesses and family members, police said Likhon went to buy fruits in Hawkers' Market area on Wednesday afternoon. At that time, he had an altercation with fruit vendor Sharif Miah, 25, over price. But the issue was settled with the interference of others.

Later, around 8:00pm, Likhon went to Circular Road area. At that time, the fruit vendor, along with four to five

of his associates, attacked Likhon and beat him up indiscriminately, leaving him severely wounded.

Locals rushed him to the district's Sadar Hospital. Later, he was shifted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital where he passed away yesterday.

Meanwhile, agitating AL men set fire to some fruit shops in the Hawkers' Market area yesterday evening, said locals.

The fruit vendor, Sharif, went into hiding after the incident. Police detained four people for interrogation, said Masudur Rahman, OC of Gaibandha Sadar Police Station.

No case was filed till filing of the report around 6:00pm.

[Our Noakhali and Bogura correspondents contributed to this report.]

Tigers on verge

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remained compact and top-notch in the first two games.

Youngsters like Afif Hossain, Shoriful Islam, newcomer Nasim Ahmed and 27-year-old wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan Sohan have been pivotal in complementing the efforts of a handful of experienced players like Shakib Al Hasan, skipper Mahmudullah Riyad and Mustafizur Rahman in the Tigers' squad.

Bangladesh would like the same combo to work in today's game as well while eyeing to better their performances with the bat, which have been middling till now.

A 131-run total in the first game and a successful chase of a 122-run target in the second T20I might have been enough to beat the Aussies, but the batting display in both the games left a lot to be desired, especially in a series considered part of preparations for the upcoming T20 World Cup.

India builds

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of that.

"The road at Umlingla Pass constructed at an altitude of 19,300 ft betters previous record of a road in Bolivia at 18,953 ft. Umlingla Pass is now connected with a black top road to enhance socio-economic condition and promote tourism in Ladakh," the government said in a statement on Wednesday.

Infrastructure development in such harsh and tough terrain is extremely challenging. In winter, the temperature falls to -40 degree Celsius and the oxygen level at this altitude is almost 50 percent less than at normal places.

"The Border Roads Organisation or BRO achieved the feat due to the grit and resilience of its personnel who work in treacherous terrain and extreme weather conditions," the government said.

Rohingya 'robber'

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declared him dead, the Rab official said.

The elite force claimed to have recovered two firearms and four bullets from the spot. The Rab claimed two of its members also sustained injuries during the incident.

The body was sent to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital for an autopsy.

Bangladeshi youth

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president of Beanibazar Social and Cultural Association Pennsylvania Inc, said Saju was with friends on the streets of South Philadelphia on Tuesday night when a masked gunman tried to rob them.

A scuffle took place between the two sides and the gunman shot Saju, leaving him seriously injured.

He was rushed to Jefferson University Hospital where doctors pronounced him dead.

Philadelphia police have not yet arrested anyone in connecting with the killing.

Police said the gunman was wearing a black dress and covered his face with a mask.

Delhi for quick

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Bangladesh rightly pointed out that the entire world, in particular the South Asian region, is witnessing frequent climate-related disasters, Jaishankar said in the letter.

"Capacity building, learning from each other's best practices, as well as extending support to each other is the need of the hour," he added.

The two countries will enhance cooperation in the field of relief, response and reconstruction upon request from either party in the event of a major natural or man-made disaster in their respective territories, as per the letter of intent.

It also speaks of exchanging remote sensing and other scientific data, best practices on disaster response, recovery, mitigation and capacity building to ensure disaster tolerance.

The letter of intent also spoke of enhancing advanced information technology, early warning systems, remote sensing, navigation services and real-time data sharing to strengthen disaster preparedness, response and mitigation skills.

The two sides will set up a communication centre to conduct activities.

As per the letter of intent, Bangladesh would be joining the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, a partnership of governments, the United Nations, multilateral lenders and the private sector to promote the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks.

Jaishankar said these mechanisms will help the two countries remain better prepared for natural disasters in the future, according to the Bangladesh foreign ministry.

Asked about the matter, Disaster Management Secretary Md Mohsin said his ministry has already been named the focal point. An action plan will be prepared to implement the letter of intent, he added.

"As neighbouring countries, we face similar types of disasters like flood, cyclone and landslides. Sharing real-time data on weather and water flow can greatly help us. Both the countries can also help in rescue operations in the cases of disaster," Mohsin said.