

BANGLADESH UPDATE



6,959
New cases in 24hrs



14,25,861
Total cases



24,349
Deaths



13,01,966
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

4,380,382
Deaths



208,318,655
Total cases

Is America back or has it turned its back?

UK leads criticism of US policy as Taliban take Afghanistan

AGENCIES

The humiliation of the lightning Taliban takeover in Afghanistan after a 20-year war that cost hundreds of thousands of lives has raised a question for the United States' staunchest European ally: Is America really back as President Joe Biden promised?

Britain fears the Taliban's return and the vacuum left by the West's chaotic withdrawal will allow militants from al-Qaeda and Islamic State to gain a foothold in Afghanistan, just 20 years after the Sept 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace cast the 2020 Doha withdrawal accord struck by US President Donald Trump's administration as a "rotten deal". Wallace said Biden's decision to leave Afghanistan was a mistake that had enabled the Taliban to re-emerge in power.

Such questioning and such emotion - Wallace was on the brink of tears in one interview - is rare for Washington's closest European ally, which has stood by the United States in almost every major conflict since World War Two apart from Vietnam.

After the tumult of Trump's presidency, Biden has repeatedly promised that "America is back". Some British diplomats are questioning not only that assessment but also the implications for long-term national security.

"Is America back or has it turned its back?" one British official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "It looks very much as if the Americans have gone home in a rather Trumpian manner - rushed, chaotic and humiliating."

Western security sources fear al-Qaeda, whose founder Osama bin Laden was harboured by the Taliban before 9/11, could regain a foothold in Afghanistan within months. Such a scenario, they say, would threaten both the United Kingdom and the wider West.

Yesterday, Wallace doubled down on the issue saying the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan is a "failure of the international community".

"All of us know that Afghanistan is not finished. It's an unfinished problem for the world and the world needs to help it," he told BBC television.

Biden is facing a barrage from opponents and allies, including Democratic lawmakers, former government officials and even his own diplomats over his handling of US exit from Afghanistan.

The essence of frustration focuses on the administration's lack of preparations - both in getting at-risk Afghans out even if they had months to plan and doing little to ensure some advances made on women's rights do not evaporate overnight.

"If President Biden truly has no regrets about his decision to withdraw, then he is disconnected from reality when it comes to Afghanistan," Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said on Twitter.

Republican Representative Jim Banks, a member of the House armed services committee, told Fox News: "We have never seen an American leader abdicate his responsibilities and leadership like Joe Biden has. He's in hiding. The lights are on at the White House, but nobody's home. Where is Joe Biden?"

HR McMaster, the former US national security adviser sacked by Trump in 2018, accused his country of "wilful ignorance" for its failure to realise the Taliban would swiftly take control.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel also hinted that the US decision to withdraw troops was motivated by "domestic political reasons", sources in her party told AFP.

British diplomats compared the scale of the West's humiliation to the 1975 fall of Saigon that ended the Vietnam War, or to the 1956 Suez Crisis, a strategic blunder which confirmed the loss of Britain's imperial power.



An image grab taken yesterday from Qatar-based Al-Jazeera television, shows Members of Taliban taking control of the presidential palace in Kabul after Afghanistan's president fled out of the country.

PHOTO: AFP

Chaos in Kabul

FROM PAGE 1

Hours after the disruption, a US source told Reuters that the flight operation would start soon.

Summing up the desperation of people to flee from the Taliban, a footage published by Afghan outlet Awwaka showed three stowaways falling to the deaths after clinging on to the wheels of a military plane as it took off from Kabul airport. Video posted later appeared to show residents collecting their bodies from a roof in Kabul.

"Everyone is worried," a former government employee now in hiding in Kabul said. "They're not targeting people yet but they will, that's the reality. Maybe in two or three weeks, that's why people are fighting to get out now."

The United States has sent 6,000 troops to the airport to ensure the safe evacuation of embassy staff, as well as Afghans who worked as interpreters or in other support roles. Western nations, including France, Germany and New Zealand, said they were working to get citizens as well as some Afghan employees out.

Amid fierce criticism from home and abroad, President Joe Biden was to break his silence yesterday over the US fiasco in Afghanistan with an address to the nation from the White House, as a lightning Taliban victory sent the Democrat's domestic political fortunes reeling.

Cutting short his planned vacation, Biden helicoptered back to Washington from the Camp David presidential retreat. His speech on Afghanistan was due at 3:45pm (1945 GMT).

The United States had earlier released a statement with more than 65 nations urging the Taliban to let Afghans leave the country, warning of accountability for any abuses.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council yesterday called for talks to create a new government in Afghanistan and an end to fighting and abuse after UN chief Antonio Guterres warned of "chilling" curbs on human rights and mounting violations against women and girls.

The 15-member council issued a statement, agreed by consensus, after Guterres appealed to the body to "use all tools at its disposal" to suppress a global terrorist threat from Afghanistan and guarantee respect for human rights.

"We cannot and must not abandon the people of Afghanistan," Guterres told the Security Council.

Suhail Shaheen, a spokesperson for the Taliban, said in a message on Twitter that their fighters were under strict orders not to harm anyone.

Earlier, Mohammad Naem, spokesman for the Taliban's political office, told Al Jazeera TV that the Afghan people and the Taliban had just witnessed the fruits of their efforts and sacrifices over 20 years.

"Thanks to God, the war is over," he said.

Al Jazeera broadcast footage of what it said were Taliban commanders in the presidential palace with dozens of fighters.

Naem said the form of the new regime in Afghanistan would be made clear soon, adding the Taliban did not want to live in isolation and called for peaceful international relations.

The militants sought to project a more moderate face, promising to respect women's rights and protect both foreigners and Afghans.

Afghan leaders said they had created a coordination council to meet with the Taliban and manage the transfer of the power. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban's chief negotiator who has been in peace negotiations with the Afghan government in Doha, Qatar since last year, said the Taliban wanted to build an "open, inclusive Islamic government".

The Taliban are expected to proclaim a new Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in the coming days.

Despite the Taliban's claims to want peace for Afghanistan, many Afghans fear the Taliban will return to the cruel and repressive practices that defined their previous period in power between 1996 and 2001. They enforced a strict interpretation of sharia, Islamic religious law, which meant women were banned from schools and workplaces and forced to cover up their face and body if they left the house, while archaic punishments such as stoning, whipping and hanging were applied to those who violated the draconian laws.

In some regions recently captured by the Taliban, women have already been prevented from attending schools and universities and banned from leaving the house without a male escort.

Ban all kinds of destructive online games

HC asks government

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the telecom regulator to ban for three months online games PUBG, FreeFire and others that it deemed destructive.

The court said the move was aimed at saving children and adolescents from social degradation.

The court also issued a rule asking the authorities concerned of the government to explain in 10 days why their inaction to ban online games and apps including TikTok, Likee, Bigo Live, PUBG and FreeFire should not be declared illegal.

In the rule, the court also asked the authorities to show causes as to why they should not be directed to form a technical committee to monitor the online games and apps and to make necessary recommendations to this effect and why they should not be ordered to formulate a code of conduct or guideline in order to relieve the victims of such harmful games and apps.

The authorities have also been asked in the rule to explain why they should not be directed to assess how much money has been spent on such online games and apps and to bring the people involved in the transactions to book.

The HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Kamrul Hossain Mollah gave the order and

issued the rule following a writ petition seeking necessary directives, Assistant Attorney General Golem Sarwar Payel told The Daily Star.

On June 24 this year, Supreme Court lawyers Mohammad Humayun Kabir Pallob and Mohammed Kawsar filed the writ petition with the HC as a public interest litigation on behalf of rights organisation Law and Life Foundation.

In the petition, they requested the HC to order the authorities concerned of the government to identify the individuals involved in the transaction of crores of taka and money laundering behind such apps and games.

The petitioners also urged the HC to form a committee with technologists, educationists and lawyers to make recommendations to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission for stopping games and apps that are harmful for the young generation.

The petitioners said the young people have become addicted to online games and apps like TikTok, Likee, Bigo Live, PUBG and FreeFire, and therefore, social values, education and culture are being harmed.

Using such online games and apps, the youth are being involved in violence and unethical activities and that is why such games and apps need to be banned on an urgent basis, the petitioners said.

On edge, 17 Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 1

"We are hearing sounds of gunfire from the compound," Razib said.

Another Bangladeshi, Md Kamruzzaman, an engineer who worked for BSS & RF Operations of Afghan Wireless, said, "We don't know what will happen. I have been working here for the last 18 years. We are used to experiencing pressure. But this time it's too critical. Our families are more concerned."

Other Bangladeshi engineers of the group include Md Imran Hossain, Mohammad Nazrul Islam from Feni, Abu Zafar Md Masud Karim from Thaukargaon, Shek Farid Uddin from Gaibandha, Muhammad Manirul Haque of Gazipur and Mohammed Sohrab.

Sohrab, who works for Grand Technologies Resources, had returned to Afghanistan after enjoying his leave in Bangladesh just one week ago.

"We didn't understand the situation. I am now seriously worried," he said.

Apart from these eight engineers, there are at least nine other Bangladeshis who are stranded in Afghanistan.

Bangladesh Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Zahangir Alam, who also has concurrent accreditation to Afghanistan, told the correspondent that six officials of Brac International are scheduled to fly back to Bangladesh on August 18. They contacted him,

expressing their concern over their return.

"We have contact with all of them. They are all safe but eager to return home at the soonest. We told them we would help them in whatever ways we can," Zahangir Alam said.

Six of their Brac International's 12 Bangladeshi staffers in Afghanistan have already been evacuated.

Two other Bangladeshis who work for Afghanistan's sewerage department, and another -- Moin Al Mesbah, who was freed from jail recently -- are also trying to return home.

Zahangir said he has contacted the Afghan foreign ministry seeking assistance in tracing and repatriating Bangladeshi nationals. The Bangladesh embassy also opened two hotlines for Bangladeshis in Afghanistan.

Besides, he said, they could not trace two Bangladeshis -- Kawser Sultana and Obaidullah -- who were jailed about four years back allegedly for conducting illegal VoIP businesses.

The Taliban stormed a central jail and Moin Al Mesbah came out, but the two others were in another jail.

The ambassador said he did not know for certain the exact number of Bangladeshis living in Afghanistan, but a foreign ministry official said it would not be more than 30. They are all professionals and the respective companies were helping them return home.

Local start-up shines thru gloom

FROM PAGE 1

The ventilator, named the "Rapidly Developable Low Cost and Power Efficient Portable Turbine-Based Emergency Ventilator", is turbine-based and works like any other commercial ventilator but more energy efficiently, said Nabil. Its noise level is almost half compared to the others and it is functional in PVC, PCB, SIMV and BiPAP modes, he added.

CRUX developed a pressure release mechanism instead of solenoid and a PEEP valve which is 35 percent more energy efficient and inexpensive. "It's also functional with any available patient circuit," he said, adding that it also has a large screen to display important real-time data.

A commercial medical ventilator's price is approximately between Tk 10 lakh and 30 lakh while this open source ventilator can be commercially produced spending only around Tk 1-2 lakh, including manufacturing and other related costs, said Nabil.

Nabil also said that the ventilator is a modular design which means that it can be maintained for a long time, by replacing only the part that's damaged and replacements from any manufacturer can be used.

Prof Dr Sabyasachi Roy, former head of the anaesthesiology department of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, said, "I've tested the ventilator as a professional and can tell that this works perfectly for any general or Covid-19 patient; it works properly like any ICU ventilator available in the market."

The ventilator would still need Bangladesh Medical Research Council's (BMRC) approval before its industrial production and use in intensive care units. "If any company comes forward

for its mass production, it can be very useful amid a crisis of ventilators," he said.

Dr Tanzilur Rahman, a biomedical engineer and assistant professor of the electrical and computer engineering department of North South University, said during the pandemic, ventilators have become a life-saving device.

"As they have researched and developed it in Bangladesh and made it open-source, it can be produced by anyone in the country or any other country in the world with the available technology," he said.

Munir Hasan, general secretary of Bangladesh Open Source Network, said Bangladeshi developers are known globally for developing open-source software over the years. "For decades, we've been software focused. But CRUX showed the world that Bangladesh has started contributing to the hardware field too."

"It will encourage the youth and help us become a hardware developing nation."

To the CRUX researchers also, being the first Bangladesh open source hardware to be recognised by the international association and being accepted at the conference in Kyoto portrays the potential of Bangladeshi youths to the world.

"We dedicated our effort, valuable time, and merit -- along with a lot of money -- to developing such an important medical device. Anyone can now develop the medical ventilator to save lives," said Nabil.

Though the project is a matter of pride for Bangladesh, CRUX faced financial hurdles as there were no sponsors interested in initially funding the project.

Open source projects can also be

commercially viable but they ultimately decided to keep the technology open for all, Nabil added.

"Still, this gave us recognition internationally as a startup and as researchers, and we're happy with it."

Dhaka denies

FROM PAGE 1

the US after receiving the request.

The US side first reached out to the Bangladesh ambassador in Washington with the request which was later conveyed to Dhaka.

Momen said Bangladesh wanted to know the name of the countries that the US requested for giving people from Afghanistan temporary shelters and how many people were to take the shelter. "No specific reply was found."

Earlier, the foreign minister said Bangladesh will welcome the new government in Afghanistan if it is a government supported by its people.

"We believe in people's government. We believe in a government which is liked by its people. We believe in democratic government," he said, adding that Bangladesh's door will surely remain open if the Taliban government becomes a government supported by its people.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a statement, said Bangladesh is carefully observing the fast-evolving situation in Afghanistan, which, Bangladesh believes, may have an impact on the region and beyond.

"We urge all stakeholders in Afghanistan to maintain peace and calm ensuring safety and security of all including foreign nationals," said the statement.

174 more die, 6,959 get Covid

STAR REPORT

At least 174 more people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services.

The death toll from coronavirus reaches 24,349 and the death rate is 1.71 percent.

At least 6,959 new infections were recorded during the period, taking the number of people infected to 1,425,861, said the release.

The current positivity rate is 21.08 percent while the overall positivity rate stands at 16.89 percent.

A total of 33,015 samples were tested across the country during the period.

At least 9,268 more Covid-19 patients recovered. The recovery rate stands at 91.31 percent.

Among the 174 deceased, 90 were men and 84 women.

Of them, one was aged between 11 and 20; three were between 21 and 30; 12 between 31 and 40; 21 between 41 and 50; 41 between 51 and 60; 52 between 61 and 70; 33 within 71-80; seven between 81 and 90; three between 91 and 100 and one was over 100 years old, added the release.

Dhaka to welcome govt formed by Afghans

Says foreign minister

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh will welcome any government in Afghanistan if that is formed by the people of that country, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has said.

"If Taliban forms the government, which is of the people, our door will remain open for sure for them," Momen told journalists after the signing of a memorandum on bottling, labelling and dispensing of China's Sinopharm Covid vaccines in Bangladesh yesterday.

The minister made the comment as the Taliban took control of Afghanistan on Sunday following the withdrawal of US forces. How the government is going to be formed is yet to be clear.

Momen said Afghanistan is a member of Saarc and is a friendly country of Bangladesh.

"We want their development. We will accept whoever come in the government, if that is a government of the people."

Asked on the statement of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Md Shafiqul Islam that some Bangladeshis left for Afghanistan to join the war as part of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the minister said there were a few terrorists who were trained in Afghanistan.

"But we have already neutralised them. Now there are no such terrorists in our country. We hope such terrorists will no more grow up here."

Meanwhile, in a statement earlier in the day, the foreign ministry said Bangladesh urges all stakeholders in Afghanistan to maintain peace and calm while ensuring safety and security of all, including foreign nationals.

It said Bangladesh is carefully observing the fast-evolving situation in Afghanistan, which may have an impact on the region and beyond.

It said Bangladesh is committed to working with Afghanistan for fulfilling the visionary policy of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that the region must grow and prosper together for development to be sustainable.

Bangladesh and Afghanistan share historical and cultural links and Afghanistan is a fellow member of Saarc and an integral part of South Asia. Bangladesh recalls the invaluable support extended by the government and the people of Afghanistan to Bangladesh during its Liberation War, the statement added.

Bangladesh believes that a democratic and pluralistic Afghanistan as chosen by its people is the only guarantee of stability and development in the country. In this regard, Bangladesh considers itself a potential development partner and a friend of Afghanistan.

"We stand ready to share our best practices with Afghanistan in a range of areas, such as basic education, community healthcare, sanitation, human resources development, agriculture, climate change adaptation, disaster management and ICT-enabled public service delivery," the statement said.

The successful outreach of Bangladeshi NGOs who have been operating in Afghanistan for the last 20 years has demonstrated that expertise, the statement mentioned.

Bangladesh firmly believes that it falls upon the people of Afghanistan to rebuild their country and decide the course of the future themselves.

Bangladesh would be happy to continue to work with the people of Afghanistan and the international community for the socio-economic development of the country, the statement added.