

Wait and watch

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Afghanistan's West-backed government, such as former president Hamid Karzai and former national reconciliation leader Abdullah Abdullah, has a place in the new government.

"The Taliban had promised an inclusive and pluralistic government, but they have included the old guards from their previous government of 1996 to 2001 when they were brutal in enforcing Shariah," said Bangladesh Enterprise Institute President M Humayun Kabir.

"This means they have not lived up to the promises they made, and the international community will surely not like it," said the former Bangladesh ambassador.

The US and EU have already criticised the new interim government. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington was "concerned by the affiliations and track records of some of those individuals."

However, China has endorsed the interim government, while Russia, Pakistan and Iran have also been supportive of the Taliban.

China's regional rival India is, however, critical of the interim Afghan government.

WHAT SHOULD DHAKA DO?

Foreign policy experts say as a SAARC member, Bangladesh wants a peaceful and stable region. Bangladeshi NGO Brac has development operations going on in Afghanistan. The bilateral trade between the two countries is less than \$20 million, but there are high prospects.

These are all good sides, but the concern is that in the recent past, a good number of Bangladeshis were trained by the Taliban in Afghanistan and they returned to Bangladesh and started militant activities. Though the Bangladesh government maintains a zero-tolerance policy against terrorism and hunted down many of the militants over the last few years, there are people who share the Taliban ideology.

Against this backdrop, Dhaka needs to be very cautious and also ready to tap positive possibilities, added the foreign relations experts.

"Taliban badly need the help of the international community because the economy is battered and there's a humanitarian crisis," M Humayun Kabir told this correspondent.

However, given the fact that the government is not inclusive, Dhaka needs to see how it evolves when there is a permanent government and how the international community coordinates in terms of helping and recognising Afghanistan.

Former foreign secretary Touhid Hossain said, "If Taliban don't do excesses and major powers recognise

and begin businesses, we too can think of recognising. There is no point cornering Afghanistan."

He said the Taliban want to keep good relations with India, which wants to connect to Central Asia and then Middle East through Afghanistan. Bangladesh too wants to develop connectivity to the Central Asia for regional trade and development.

Dhaka University International Relations Prof Dr Lailufar Yasmin said the Taliban have changed and that is apparent in how they are interacting with the media and the fact that they have already won over Doha and Beijing in terms of diplomacy.

"We cannot impose any standards or foreign cultures and customs on them. This is, however, obvious that fundamental human rights and women rights must be respected. Therefore, we still need to watch how the Taliban change," she said.

Lailufar warned that Bangladesh needs to be cautious that the country's youth in no way can be influenced by the Taliban. "We cannot recognise the Taliban if they maintain extreme ideologies and inspire the youth."

Brig Gen (retd) M Shakhawat Hossain, former election commissioner of Bangladesh and a regional security analyst, said the fog of war is still there in Afghanistan and the Taliban, which fought for two decades, know well that winning the battle was easier than governing a country that is so diverse in ethnicity and cultures.

Also, the Afghan society has changed to an extent and the Taliban know they won't be able to stay in power if they cannot govern the country.

He said isolating Afghanistan will bring no good result. Rather, the world should help it bring about the expected changes.

Shakhawat thinks Bangladesh needs to maintain communications with the Taliban through the back channel and provide humanitarian support to the Afghan people who are in dire need of food, health and education.

"Our homegrown Brac has large operations there. If needed, the government should support Brac in providing assistance in Afghanistan," he said.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam too said Bangladesh will join the UN and EU in a dialogue with the Taliban for providing humanitarian assistance.

On the question of recognising the Taliban, he said Dhaka will wait for a permanent government.

"However, we will not compromise on certain principles, including women's rights," he said.

Tk 130 a day to owning

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drive.

"He has amassed around Tk 460 crore, most of which he earned through illegal means," the Rab director told the press briefing.

Nurul has purchased at least six buildings and flats and 13 plots in Dhaka city. Besides, he has a total of 37 plots and houses in Savar, Teknaf, St Martin's island and Bhola, Moin said.

"To legalise his illegal income, he left his job as computer operator in 2009 and set up at least five companies -- export-import and real estate," he added.

The names of the companies are Al Nahian Enterprise, Miftahul Enterprise, Alka Enterprise, Alka Real Estate and Kaniz Enterprise.

Most of the properties are under the names of Nurul, his wife or his brother, the Rab director said. Nurul recently invested in a plot to build an amusement park in Savar and was also looking to buy a ship.

The Rab official said there are at least 15 persons involved in his racket

and that Rab are trying to arrest them.

Rab officials said they also found Nurul to be connected with drug smuggling.

While working as a computer operator till 2009, he built a relationship with clearing and forwarding agents, exporters and importers.

"We have come to know about his involvement with people of different sectors. We will inform the authorities concerned about them and will carry out operations based on evidence," he said replying to a query.

Replying to another query, Moin said Nurul was not directly involved with any political party.

As a computer operator, Nurul had good relations with many businesspersons and port officials and conducted illegal activities with their help, he said.

"In primary interrogation, he however did not give names of any specific persons," the Rab official said, adding they are yet to get names of any members of law enforcement involved with him.

Hand over Evaly case

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by Bangladesh Bank.

The companies are: Dhamaka, e-Orange, Sirajgonj Shop, Aladiner Prodig, Qcoom, Boom Boom, Adyan Mart, Need.com.bd and Alesha Mart, according to the commerce ministry.

However, the names of the nine companies would be sent to the home ministry for legal action after probe by the central bank, Hafizur said without citing any specific timeline.

Quoting lawyers, he said the commerce ministry cannot conduct audits against any private companies as the central bank on Sunday asked the ministry to conduct audits in nine e-commerce companies to find out their financial anomalies.

"We have already informed the home ministry about the financial anomalies of Evaly and some other e-commerce companies and again we will inform the home ministry for taking actions against the companies as per the recommendations of the national committee," Hafizur said.

The committee, headed by Hafizur, also the director general of World Trade Organisation (WTO) Cell under the commerce ministry, widely discussed the issues of some

e-commerce companies, especially Evaly, e-Orange and Dhamaka.

The committee, comprised of lawyers and officials of different ministries, suggested not taking any punitive actions against the errant e-commerce companies by the commerce ministry, but referring it to the home ministry.

The committee said the commerce ministry cannot take punitive actions against the errant e-commerce companies as it is an issue of the home ministry.

However, Hafizur, while talking to journalists, said the commerce ministry will further review the committee's recommendations as its ultimate target is to protect the customers' interests because many of the innocent people invested money in some of the flawed e-commerce companies and they are cheated.

"We will have to protect the interests of the innocent customers as they have invested knowingly or unknowingly in the e-commerce companies," he said in reply to queries from journalists.

The committee mainly discussed the next course of action against the errant companies for their wrongdoings.



A protester chants slogans as people gather with signs for a demonstration in support of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons, outside the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Big drop in antibodies

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evolving science on booster doses, the priority is to fully immunise India's 944 million adults. More than 60% of them have received at least one dose and 19% the required two doses.

Covid cases and deaths in India have come down sharply since a peak of more than 400,000 infections in early May. India has reported 33.29 million cases in total and 443,213 deaths.

The coronavirus has killed at least 4,636,530 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to an AFP compilation of official data yesterday.

NEW CLUSTER IN CHINA

Southern Chinese cities closed schools and ordered testing for millions yesterday in a race to curb a new Covid-19 outbreak which has sparked concerns over infections among unvaccinated schoolchildren.

Putian, a city of 3.2 million in coastal Fujian province, ordered testing of all residents after Delta variant cases linked to a returnee from Singapore

ballooned into a province-wide outbreak of more than 100 people.

China reported 59 new domestically transmitted cases yesterday, up from 22 the day before, all in Fujian province.

British health officials yesterday recommended all vulnerable people, frontline health staff and those aged over 50 be offered a booster shot.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's recommendation of a third dose six months after a second shot, paves the way for a broad revaccination programme in Britain, which has one of the world's highest death tolls from Covid-19.

It comes ahead of an announcement by the government on its strategy for taming infections this winter, with Prime Minister Boris Johnson and other officials warning that the battle against the virus was not over.

Covid-19 cases in the Australian city Sydney rose at the slowest pace in nearly two weeks yesterday, but officials said they needed to see a steady drop

in daily cases before deciding whether infections had peaked after 12 weeks in lockdown.

New South Wales (NSW) state reported 1,127 new local cases, the majority in state capital Sydney, down from 1,257 on Monday. Two deaths were reported.

The Philippines will ease coronavirus restrictions in the capital Manila to spur economic activity, officials said yesterday, despite record infection numbers and a warning from the WHO against the move.

Restaurants, churches and beauty salons in the national capital region will open at lower capacities from Thursday to get tens of thousands more people back to work.

"We should strive for total health and this can only be realised by carefully balancing our Covid-19 response by considering both the health of our people and the economic health of the nation," President Rodrigo Duterte's spokesman Harry Roque said.

Malraux wants to join

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of the enemies. In another operation, one Pakistan jeep was blown up in Khanpur area through mine explosion. Three Pakistani soldiers including one officer were killed.

Mukti Bahini engaged Pakistani troops in Mokrapur-Alinagar area and inflicted two casualties on the enemy. In Hatibandha area, Mukti Bahini fired on the Pakistan position killing 16 Pakistani soldiers. The

guerrillas raided Pakistani troops guarding a railway bridge in the same area and killed three Pakistani soldiers.

In the Mymensingh-Sylhet sector, Mukti Bahini today raided Pakistani positions at Kamarail and killed two Pakistani troops. In Mahabubpur, Mukti Bahini ambushed Pakistani troops and killed one enemy soldier.

LABOUR PARTY TO PRESS FOR MUJIB'S RELEASE

The Labour Party of Britain would

ask the government of that country to press for release of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, reported BBC. The party would also urge Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas Home to raise the Bangladesh situation, which the party thought posed a threat to peace in Asia, at the United Nations Security Council.

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Mass exodus from capital key reason

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enable mapping of SARS-CoV-2 lineages to inform health policy in Bangladesh", was conducted by a genomic epidemiology consortium.

The consortium comprised the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), icddr,b and Institute for Developing Science and Health Initiatives (IdeSHi).

After the first cases of Covid-19 were reported on March 8 last year, the government announced a national public holiday with stay-at-home order effective from March 26 to April 4 to contain the virus.

The closures were later incrementally extended until May 30 that year.

The researchers in the study analysed the population mobility data collected from Facebook and three mobile phone operators and genomics data.

Combining population mobility and genomics data revealed a direct link between the transmission of three dominant variants (Alpha, Beta and Delta) and the spread of the disease across the country during the first wave.

Prof Dr Tahmina Shirin, director of IEDCR, also a senior author of the article, said, "It is important that we continue to generate evidence to aid our policymakers to contain the spread of the virus successfully."

Dr Firdausi Qadri, senior scientist at icddr,b, also a senior author of the article, said, "Real-time genomic surveillance is critical to understand the efficacy of these vaccines and protection from previous Covid-19 infections and to devise relevant strategies for Bangladesh and beyond."

LOWEST DEATHS IN 3 MONTHS

While the positivity rate declined below seven percent, the lowest in six months, the number of new cases continued rising for the fourth consecutive day yesterday.

Against a total of 31,724 samples tested yesterday, the positivity rate was 6.54 percent, according to a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

On March 13, the positivity rate was recorded 6.26 percent against 16,206 tests.

Yesterday, 2,074 fresh cases were detected, suggesting a steady rise from

1,327 on September 11.

Meanwhile, DGHS reported 35 deaths from Covid-19 in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the lowest since June 7 when 30 deaths from the disease were recorded.

With yesterday's figure, the total number of confirmed cases reached 15,34,440 and the total number of fatalities 27,007.

The death rate now stands at 1.76 percent.

Of yesterday's deceased, 21 were men and 14 women. All of them died in hospital.

The highest, 15, died in Dhaka division followed by eight in Chattogram, four each in Rajshahi and Khulna, and two each in Barisal and Sylhet divisions.

Since the transmission of the Delta variant started dropping from early August, the number of deaths from coronavirus is also falling.

Experts, however, warned the transmission may rise again due to the gross violation of health safety guidelines and an inadequate number of people receiving vaccines.

Gold mask among

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standalone object, according to state-run press agency, Xinhua. It is thought to hail from the late Shang dynasty, which came to an end in 1046 BC.

The artifact is one of around 500 items uncovered from the pits in recent months, according to Chinese state media. Ivory relics were also among the discoveries, as was a jade knife, a ceremonial vessel known as a "zun" and several bronze figurines.

Archaeologists made a breakthrough at Sanxingdui in the mid-1980s, when they found two ceremonial pits containing over 1,000 items, including elaborate and well-preserved bronze masks.

After a long pause in excavations, a third pit was found in late 2019, leading to the discovery of five more in 2020. In March of this year, an earlier cache of over 500 items was unveiled by authorities, including another gold mask and a bronze vessel with owl-shaped patterning.

Many of the objects appear to have been ritually burned before being buried, leading experts to believe that the pits were used for sacrificial purposes.

Sanxingdui is thought to have sat at the heart of the Shu state, a kingdom that ruled in the western Sichuan basin until it was conquered in 316 BC. Findings at the site have offered evidence of a unique Shu culture, suggesting that the kingdom developed independently of other societies in the Yellow River Valley, which is traditionally considered to be the cradle of Chinese civilization. Silk fibers and the remains of textiles have also been found in the pits.

"The new discoveries demonstrate once again that imagination and creativity of the ancient Chinese far surpassed what people today had expected," Tang Fei, chief of the Sichuan Provincial Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute, told Xinhua.

Upazila admin

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occupied. This was found to be true as the company was not able to show required papers.

"The Cadastral Survey [survey relating to land boundaries and subdivisions] record showed there were canals, which have been filled up. However, in the RS record of 1977-78, there was no canal and the existence of a drain was listed.

"We will need the assistance of the NRCC to see whether the Meghnahas been occupied."

Mir Md Ferdaush, ward Awami League president, was present at the yard and said the company could not give any satisfactory answer after showing that only 0.8 acres of the land was mentioned in their documents.

Md Ataur Rahman, of the upazila, said the upazila administration had listed about 150 farmers and collected the documents regarding the lands during the investigation. "They [officials of the administration] stayed there for 40-50 minutes. So, they did not have the scope to check all the documents submitted. The local administration was requested to verify the documents of the two parties and settle the possession of the land."

Lokman Hossain, one of the directors of Three Angle Marine, said they purchased a maximum of 10 acres, of about 80 acres, from five people of the same family. Five other members of the family are now claiming ownership of the land. "We have applied to the Ministry of Land and the deputy commissioner regarding the government khas land."

He claimed that the original owners did not come during the investigation yesterday.

Syeda Yasmin Sultana, assistant commissioner (land), who went to the spot to inquire about the area of land occupied by Three Angle Marine Ltd and whether the farmers have any land, did not make any comments.

Asked how long the investigation would last and when the report would be submitted, Deputy Commissioner Kazi Nahid Rasul said as the investigation was ongoing, it would not be right to comment on the matter right now.

Apple issues

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to remain anonymous, Citizen Lab said.

Apple credited the Citizen Lab researchers for finding the vulnerability.

"Attacks like the ones described are highly sophisticated, cost millions of dollars to develop, often have a short shelf life, and are used to target specific individuals," Ivan Krsti, head of Apple Security Engineering and Architecture, said in a statement.

Krsti said Apple rapidly addressed the issue with a software fix and that the vulnerability is "not a threat to the overwhelming majority of our users."

Still, security experts encouraged users to update their mobile devices for protection.

In a statement, NSO Group did not address the allegations, only saying, "NSO Group will continue to provide intelligence and law enforcement agencies around the world with life saving technologies to fight terror and crime."

The firm has previously said its software is only sold to vetted customers for counterterrorism and law enforcement purposes.

Researchers, however, say they have found multiple cases in which the spyware was deployed on dissidents or journalists. In 2019, Citizen Lab analysts alleged that Pegasus was used on the mobile phone of the wife of a slain Mexican journalist.