Blinken calls Momen

Discusses bilateral issues

UNB, *Dhaka*

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made a phone call to Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen yesterday evening and discussed issues of mutual interests.

The two sides discussed bilateral issues and areas of cooperation between the two countries.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam said Blinken and Momen spoke at length on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Victory of Bangladesh.

"Both renewed the resolve to take further forward the relationship. They also agreed to increase engagement while celebrating 50th anniversary of bilateral relationships," the state minister tweeted.

Further details could not be known. The foreign minister is expected to talk about the phone call during his media briefing today afternoon regarding the Indian president's visit.

On Saturday, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Earl R Miller was summoned by Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen on Saturday to convey Dhaka's "discontent" over the sanctions imposed by the US Departments of Treasury and of State on some present and former Rab officials.

He expressed Bangladesh's disappointment that the decision was taken "unilaterally" by the US administration without prior consultation with the Government of Bangladesh.

Ambassador Miller took note of the concerns raised by the Government of Bangladesh, and assured of conveying the same to his government, said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Health officials collect swab specimen for Covid-19 testing at a drive-through testing site on Bondi beach in Sydney, Australia yesterday, as rapidly-growing Omicron and Delta clusters brought more than 2,700 new cases nationally.

PHOTO: AFP

Bangladesh wins freedom

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Indira Gandhi said, "I have repeatedly declared India has no territorial ambitions. Now that the Pakistani armed forces have surrendered in Bangladesh and Bangladesh is free, it is pointless in our view to continue the present conflict.

"Therefore, it is our aim to stop further bloodshed and unnecessary loss of life. We have ordered our armed forces to cease fire everywhere on the western front with effect from 8:00pm tomorrow, December 17. It is our earnest hope that there will be a corresponding and immediate response from the Government of Pakistan," she added.

KISSINGER'S MESSAGE TO FARLAND

In a backchannel message, US President's Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger informed US Ambassador to Pakistan Joseph Farland today, "I believe it is essential that [Pakistan President] Yahya move as quickly as possible to publicly accept Indian ceasefire proposal on a purely bilateral basis which would deprive Indians of any pretext for claiming Pakistani delays have justified continuation of fighting in the West.

"I have just learned from British that Indians intend to keep their ceasefire offer open for only 24 hours. I have also learned that Soviets may move a formal resolution in the UN Security Council tonight which could be the source of extended controversy," he added.

"For this reason," continued Kissinger, "A unilateral announcement by Pakistan would then allow sufficient time to hammer out an acceptable UN resolution which would formalise the bilateral agreement between the two governments. In his unilateral acceptance Yahya could also recommend a formalization of the procedure within the UN forum."

YAHYA ACCEPTS DEFEAT

In a broadcast today Pakistan President Yahya Khan accepted that "we have been overwhelmed in the eastern sector". He, however, vowed to continue the fight in the western sector.

"We may lose a battle, but final victory in this war of survival shall Inshallah be ours. At this time, our hearts go out to our brethren in East Pakistan, who are being relentlessly subjected to terror and tribulation by the warlords of Bharat. To them we say: This is not the end," added Yahya.

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Understanding types of hair

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usually a cause for alarm.

However, if you lose more than that, you have a condition called hair loss or alopecia.

There are many types of alopecia:

Involutional alopecia is a natural condition in which the hair thins with age. More hair follicles go into the resting phase, and the remaining hairs become fewer in number. If cared for properly, the hair loss can be delayed.

Androgenic alopecia is hereditary and can affect both men and women. Men with this condition, called male pattern baldness, can begin suffering as early as in their teens or early 20s. Women with this condition, called female pattern baldness, usually don't experience thinning till their 40s.

There is no cure for androgenetic alopecia. However, it can be slowed down with the help of dermatologists and proper care.

Alopecia areata often starts suddenly and causes patchy hair loss in children and young adults, sometimes resulting in complete baldness. Hair usually regrows automatically. Treatment can help.

Alopecia universalis is the advanced stage of Alopecia areata which causes all body hair to fall out.

Scarring alopecia develops when inflammation destroys hair follicles. Once a hair follicle is destroyed, it cannot regrow a hair. However, catching this condition early can prevent further hair loss.

Doctors are yet to know why certain hair follicles are programmed to have a shorter growth period than others. Reasons like medication, scalp infection, styling, hormonal imbalance, medication and psoriasis can also lead to the loss of hair.

'Tortured, under surveillance'

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Banani Police Station, said they arrested Iftekhar and produced him before a court. The court put him on a three-day remand.

The duo got married in April this year. After three months of their marriage, Iftekhar moved to Canada. He returned on Saturday.

On Tuesday, he called Meghla's mother over the phone and said that her daughter was seriously ill and she was being taken to United Hospital.

According to the inquest report, there were marks of several injuries on different parts of her body.

Although Iftekhar's family termed it a "suicide", Meghla's parents, relatives, teachers and friends said that she was tortured to death by her husband and in-laws.

Talking to The Daily Star, Meghla's father Saiful Islam said she had been complaining about abuse by her husband and in-laws. They seized her mobile phone, forced her to wear hijab, and restricted outdoor movements.

"After a week of her marriage, Meghla came to know that Iftekhar had a previous marriage with a woman in France and they had a 12-year-old daughter.

"Few months after the marriage, I realised that it was a wrong choice. I even asked my daughter to return to our home, ending the marriage. She insisted to stay and adjusting with her in-laws."

"MEGHLA WAS UNDER SURVEILLANCE"

Teachers and students of the Department of Dance at Dhaka University formed a human chain in front of Aparajeyo Bangla yesterday, demanding justice for Meghla.

Her classmate Ariful Islam said, "Meghla was very friendly. After marriage, we saw how she moved away from her normal self. Her husband would stop her from communicating with us. She could not even get out of the house. When she went out, she was accompanied by a bodyguard, and her husband used to supervise everything she did via video call."

Her other classmate Jannatul Ferdous said that they could not communicate with her ever since Meghla got married.

"We found her phone switched off or her in-laws used to receive the calls whenever we called her," she said, adding that Meghla last came to the university to attend an exam in September.

Tamanna Rahman, a teacher of the victim, said a man, like a bodyguard, accompanied the student when she came to the department to attend the exam.

Rezwana Choudhury, chairperson of the department, said, "Why did she have so many bruises if her death was natural? We demand a fair investigation and a fair trial."

BNP 'doesn't know' about president's talks

FROM PAGE 16

to hold dialogues with 39 registered political parties at the Bangabhaban from December 20 over the formation of a new EC.

On the first day, Jatiya Party, the main opposition in parliament, is scheduled to discuss the matter with the president, he added.

The talks have been initiated by the president as the tenure of the current EC, under the leadership of Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda, expires on February 14.

The next parliamentary polls will be held under the new commission formed through a "search committee" set up by the president.

As a result, under whom the next election will take place and how the commission will be formed have become crucial issues for parties.

In the political arena, it is widely believed that the commission and its members were chosen mainly by the ruling Awami League and its allies in 2012 and 2016.

This time too will not be an exception, said different political parties, adding that, as a result, the dialogue with the president is a mere formality.

Fakhrul on Tuesday told journalists the party's standing committee will discuss whether it will join the talks after they receive a formal invitation in this regard.

AL sources said the EC will be formed the way as it was before – the president will first hold talks with the registered parties, then form a search committee, headed by a senior judge of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division, who will seek names of eligible candidates from the parties.

The committee will then prepare a shortlist and give it to the president, who will then appoint a chief election commissioner and other commissioners from the list.

Due to the absence of a specific law regarding the formation of the EC, the president in 2012 and 2016 had formed search committees to appoint the CEC and other commissioners.

Meanwhile, against the backdrop of apathy among voters and distrust towards the EC, the formation of a new commission is back in the spotlight with the national polls around two years away.

The BNP and the Jatiya Party, along with many eminent citizens, have been demanding the framing of a specific law, as mandated by the constitution, to appoint election commissioners.

Even 49 years since the constitutions prescribed a specific law, successive governments chose not to enact any.

Most South Asian countries, however, have laws in this regard.

Partners in progress

FROM PAGE 1

of pluralism and democracy, the visiting Indian president said Bangladesh is a development partner of his country.

"Our partnership is comprehensive and vibrant," Kovind said when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina met him.

PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters after the meeting, reports UNB.

The Indian president said he was happy to be in Bangladesh as it marks three great occasions -- birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Golden Jubilee of Bangladesh's Independence and 50 Years of Indo-Bangla diplomatic relations.

Talking about the pandemic, Kovind said Covid-19 is an "unseen power" that destroyed everything.

He said Bangladesh was the first country to receive Covid vaccine from India. He thanked Bangladesh for sending medicine to India to tackle the virus.

The Indian president hoped that Bangladesh will emerge as a more prosperous and developed country under Hasina's leadership.

Appreciating Bangladesh's support to India in different international forums, Kovind said the Bangabandhu-Bapuji joint digital exhibition was remarkable.

"And Bangabandhu Chair has been established in Delhi University," he said, adding that India is focusing on connectivity between the two countries.

The Indian president thanked Hasina for sending a very good gift of mangoes to Indian leaders.

Stating that Bangladesh considers India as a great friend, Hasina recalled the crucial role played by the then Indian government and its people during Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971.

She described 2021 as a landmark year for Bangladesh as the country is celebrating the birth centenary of Bangabandhu, Golden Jubilee of Bangladesh's Independence and 50th anniversary of the establishment of Indo-Bangla diplomatic relations.

The premier recalled the historic and successful visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh in March this year to join the celebrations of the three events.

"The exchange of visits between the two countries, even amid the Covid-19 situation, is the testimony of the warm relationship between the two countries."

Speaking about enhancing contact, she said the communications between the two countries through various routes got snapped after the 1965 India-Pakistan war. She emphasised the need for restoring those.

Hasina expressed satisfaction at the ongoing cooperation between the two countries in various areas despite the ongoing pandemic.

"Both countries supported each other by sending medicine, vaccines and Covid-19 protective equipment as a goodwill gesture and symbol of cooperation."

Upholding the secular character of Bangladesh, Hasina said: "Religion is for individuals but festivals for all; and all are free here to enjoy their own religious rights and perform rituals as there is no barrier in Bangladesh."

Asked on border killing, Harsh Vardhan Shringla said all the border-related issues would be discussed at higher level and they will try and work out how to resolve that.

"We have a comprehensive border management plan. Effective border management is very critical. This is something that both sides will be working on," Shringla said.

On regional hydropower trade, the official said India has just issued a cross-border power trade policy, which allows India to be used as transit point for the exchange of power between the neighbouring countries. So, there will be bar on export of power from Nepal or Bhutan through India to Bangladesh.

However, there is the lacking of border transmission infrastructure now that they are working on now.

"We also have a project to connect the 760 KV line from the Northeast India through Bangladesh that will provide scope for hydro power export to Bangladesh," he said.

Noting of an Line of Credit of $500 million, he said under this, several defence items have been identified and fast tracked. They are fairly in advanced stages of being processed.

"I think we will see certain defence items exports from India coming to Bangladesh. This is something that we would like to see essentially the entire gamut of cooperation whether it is training, exchanges, joint manufacturing in the defence sector. This is something that we would like to see enhanced."

MOMEN MEETS KOVIND

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said based on the existing "golden chapter" of bilateral ties with India, Dhaka wanted to resolve all pending issues.

"[We do believe] it is possible to resolve any issue between Bangladesh and India through dialogues," he told the media at Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel.

Momen along with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam appeared before the press after they called on the Indian head of the state.

They subsequently accompanied Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as she made a courtesy call on President Kovind, reports BSS.

Momen said he told the Indian president that Hasina brought stability in Bangladesh through achieving tremendous success in socio-economic development and that she would like to extend her efforts for "stability" in the region.

The foreign minister said Bangladesh and India were on the same page at different international forums and "Dhaka wants to continue it".

"Bangladesh and India are enjoying golden chapter of bilateral ties which other countries can follow," he said, adding that he thanked Kovind for India's vaccine donation to Bangladesh amid the pandemic.

Bangladesh rolled out a red carpet to welcome the Indian president, his wife Savita Kovind and daughter Swati Kovind along with an official delegation as he arrived in Dhaka yesterday morning on a three-day visit.

President Abdul Hamid along with his wife Rashida Khanam received his Indian counterpart at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

India's education minister and two parliament members alongside several senior officials are accompanying the Indian president.

GIFTS FROM PRESIDENT FOR PM

The visiting Indian president brought cakes, sweetmeats and biscuits specially made at Rashtrapati Bhavan for PM Sheikh Hasina.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar said the PM gladly received the sweetmeats, cakes and biscuits from the Indian president, reports UNB.

India's leading media outlets widely reported on Hasina's gift of sweet Haribhanga mango that had been sent to Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other political leaders in India in July.

Some of the Indian media described the gift as "mango diplomacy" while Dhaka says it is just sharing happiness with friends and neighbours in this historic year.

At the invitation of President Hamid, the Indian president will attend the 50th Victory Day celebrations of Bangladesh, closing ceremony of the birth centenary of Bangabandhu and 50 years of Bangladesh-India diplomatic relations today.

On the third day of his visit tomorrow, the Indian president will inaugurate and inspect the newly renovated section of the "Kali Mondir" at Ramna.

The Indian president will leave Dhaka for New Delhi tomorrow noon.

Khaleda's health worsens again

Says Fakhrul

UNB, *Dhaka*

The health of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, now undergoing treatment at a city hospital, has deteriorated again.

"Madam's [Khaleda Zia's] health has worsened again. There has been a downward trend in different parameters of her health since yesterday [Tuesday]," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

Speaking at a press conference at BNP Chairperson's Gulshan office yesterday, he also said the level of hemoglobin in Khaleda's blood was also falling.

Replying to a question, Fakhrul said Khaleda did not suffer from further internal bleeding sinceTuesday.

He said they have long been demanding the government allow Khaleda to go abroad for better treatment but the government is paying no heed to it as there is no democracy and human rights in the country.

Fakhrul said people cannot enjoy human rights and personal security when democracy remains absent in a country. "The government's obstruction to sending three-time former prime minister Khaleda Zia abroad is the latest example."

Khaleda, 76, has been receiving treatment at Evercare Hospital for various health complications since November 13.

Her medical board members said Khaleda immediately needs to go abroad for better treatment as she was diagnosed with liver cirrhosis.

On behalf of her family, the BNP chairperson's younger brother, Shamim Iskander, submitted an application to the home ministry on November 11 urging the government to allow her to go abroad for better treatment.

CJ urges law

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The chief justice made the remark while addressing his farewell at the Chief Justice's court in the SC's Appellate Division.

Justice Mahmud Hossain, who will retire on December 30, sat in the courtroom for hearing and disposing of cases on his last working day yesterday, as the court will go on a two-week annual vacation today.

"I'm happy to learn that the government has started working to formulate a law for the appointment of judges for the Supreme Court.

"If the law is made, the appointment of judges will be transparent and speedy and the baseless confusions among people about the transparency in the appointment of judges will be removed and the appointments will be made fast," the chief justice said.

He said the number of judges is inadequate considering the number of pending cases.

The number of judges need to be doubled in phases at all tiers of courts across the country to reduce the backlog of cases, said Justice Mahmud Hossain.

The chief justice said the judges will have to work harder to reduce the case backlog and keep the people's faith in them.

If the judicial functions are simultaneously run in-person and virtually, cases will be disposed of more quickly, he said.

He said the people's faith is the source of the powers of an independent judiciary.

The judges will have to have high ethical values and impeccable character and remain conscious about continuously improving and changing laws, technological developments and social values, added Justice Mahmud Hossain.

Attorney General AM Amin Uddin and Supreme Court Bar Association Vice-President Muhammad Shafique Ullah accorded the farewell to the chief justice.

Pro-BNP lawyers, led by SCBA Secretary Md Ruhul Quddus Kazal, boycotted the farewell ceremony claiming that the SCBA secretary was not invited to the programme.

Russia detains coal tycoon over deadly Siberia mine blast

AFP, *Moscow*

Russian investigators said yesterday they had detained tycoon Mikhail Fedyayev after a blast at a coal mine in Siberia that killed 51 people last month.

The Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said in a statement that it had charged the owner of the SDS-Ugol company and three other people with violating "industrial safety requirements" and "abuse of authority" that led to "grave consequences" at the group's Listvyazhnaya mine.

The mine is in the Kemerovo region, in southwestern Siberia.

Russia has seen a number of deadly mine blasts in recent years but this was the first time investigators detained the top owner of a mine.