

‘Disaster if world views it as TV show’

PORIMOL PALMA

Iurii Melnyk, an associate professor of journalism at the Ivan Franko National University of Ukraine's Lviv, is keeping the world posted after Russia began its invasion on February 24. The Daily Star's Diplomatic Correspondent Porimol Palma caught up with him on Friday for on-the-ground information.

DS: Is Lviv – the largest city in western Ukraine – now relatively safe?

Melnyk: Currently there is no safe place in Ukraine. On Friday morning, we had an air alarm advising the people of our city to get to the safe shelters in the basements. Luckily, the attack did not happen. Eastern Ukraine is a priority for Russians because they consider Russian-speaking Ukraine to be theirs. That is their interest, not Ukrainian-speaking Ukraine.

DS: Are Ukrainians leaving the country?

Melnyk: Yes, many people are trying to leave but it is getting more and more difficult. We have general mobilisation in Ukraine – people aged between 18 and 60 are supposed to go to the army and not leave the country. You come with a passport and get a weapon and you are ready to fight the Russian force.

DS: You are in that age group – what is your plan?

Melnyk: I can volunteer but I don't have any military training. So, I am trying to be useful by spreading information, helping people and journalists.

DS: What is the mood of the general Ukrainians?

Melnyk: I met a friend who was in front of the military recruiting office. He said he will join the army, stop the Russians where they are and not allow them inside our house. At the same time, I saw some soldiers and their families who were saying goodbye and crying.

DS: The Ukrainian president said the Western countries are not helping much. What is your understanding of the statement?

Melnyk: Much of the responsibility for what is happening in Ukraine also lies with the Western countries. The day before the attack, US President Joe Biden was asked if he would support Ukraine if Russia attacked. Biden said he would impose sweeping sanctions but not send troops on the ground. This was a blunder. He could have said that all options were open. By doing so, he could have stopped the Russian aggression. He was saying

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Local shopkeepers hold a fire hose as they try to extinguish a fire at a kitchen market in Paschim Rupsha area of Khulna city. At least 30 grocery stores and several nearby houses were gutted by the flames yesterday morning. Story on page 5.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

165 Bangladeshis reach safety

Hundreds in queues at Polish border

PORIMOL PALMA

About 150 Bangladeshis have entered Poland from Ukraine over the last two days, fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine that began on February 24.

Two officials of the Bangladesh embassy in Warsaw told The Daily Star yesterday evening that several hundred Bangladeshis were waiting in the cold in long queues on the other side of the border to get into Poland.

"It is expected that Poland will be prioritising their own citizens and Ukrainians at the border. There is a long queue as thousands of people are fleeing Ukraine," said an official of the embassy, which also oversees diplomatic relations with Ukraine.

A team from the embassy is working at the Ukraine-Poland border to provide consular services to Bangladeshis. Two other teams – one from Italy and the other from Germany – were on the way to the border.

The Bangladesh embassy and

the Polish government are jointly arranging accommodation for those arriving in Poland, the officials said.

Meanwhile, at least 15 Bangladeshi students from Uzhhorod, a western Ukrainian city close to the Hungarian and Slovakian border, were being processed for entry into Hungary, said Deputy Chief of Mission Rahat Bin Zaman at the Bangladesh embassy in Vienna, Austria.

He said after the foreign ministry published contact numbers for the Bangladeshis in Ukraine, the students contacted him. He then drove to the Hungary-Ukraine border to facilitate their immigration.

"We have arranged train tickets for the students to Budapest where the authorities of a university have agreed to provide accommodation," Rahat said.

Since the Russian attack began last Thursday, many of some 2,000 to 2,500 Bangladeshis, mostly students, began to move to the western borders.

There were troubles on the way caused by shortages of fuel and long queues as thousands of foreigners

and Ukrainians were fleeing the country to take refuge in Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and Moldova.

The Bangladesh foreign ministry has said it was planning to charter flights to bring the Bangladeshis home.

While most of the Bangladeshis were leaving Ukraine, some chose to stay.

Khaled Mosharrar has been living in Ukraine for more than three decades and is now a Ukrainian citizen. He said he did not leave Kyiv because he had thought that there would not be street fighting.

"Sure, there are missiles targeting the military infrastructures. However, missile targets are also failing and striking the civilians," Khaled told The Daily Star yesterday from Kyiv.

He said he lives 20km away and heard explosions only a few kilometres away.

"We take cover in the basement when the sirens go off. But, if missiles hit our building, we will face what is in store for us," he said.

Man found dead in Patuakhali hotel

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police recovered the hanging body of a youth from a residential hotel in Patuakhali town early yesterday.

The dead is Shamim Akon, 30, of Itbaria union in Sadar upazila, said police, adding that he was an office assistant at the local clinic.

Mohammad Nurul Islam Majumder, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Patuakhali Sadar Police Station, said the body was sent to Patuakhali Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Police detained the hotel manager and a woman for interrogation in connection with the incident.

One shot dead in Bandarban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An indigenous man was shot dead in remote Rowangchhari upazilla of Bandarban yesterday noon.

The dead is Mong Shing Shwe, 40, of Natun Para in the upazila, said police.

Abdul Mannan, officer-in-charge of Rowangchhari Police Station, said a group of five unidentified criminals shot Mong at a local shop around 12:00pm.

"We are working to know the political identity of Mong and the reason behind his murder," the OC said.

Covid-19 cases drop below 1,000 after 7 weeks

STAR REPORT

At least 759 new infections were recorded and eight people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, read a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The current positivity rate is 4.15 percent while the total positivity rate stands at 14.54 percent.

The total number of Covid-19 deaths in the country now stands at 29,024 and the mortality rate stands at 1.49 percent.

Meanwhile, the total number of cases rose to 1,941,816, added the release.

A total of 18,375 samples were tested across the country in 24 hours.

At least 7,343 patients have recovered from Covid-19 during the period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 1,800,425 and the recovery rate at 92.72 percent, added the release.

22 Mro villagers arrested in Bandarban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police arrested 22 villagers over the murders of a Karbari and his four sons in remote Mro Para of Bandarban's Ruma upazila Thursday night.

Abul Kashem, officer-in-charge of Ruma Police Station, said, "The 22 villagers primarily confessed that they killed the Karbari and his four sons over a land dispute."

Locals said some residents of remote Abui Para suddenly attacked Lakrui Mro, the Karbari and his sons with sharp weapons around 10:00pm on Thursday.



KAZI HABIBUL AWAL

Born in 1956, Awal did his LLB and LLM from Dhaka University. He retired as a senior secretary to the defence ministry in January 2015. During the army-backed caretaker government, Awal was appointed as the acting law ministry secretary, but the High Court, following a writ petition, in 2008 declared his appointment illegal. The Supreme Court upheld the HC's verdict next year.



RASHIDA SULTANA

Born in 1961, Rashida obtained her secondary and higher secondary certificates from Sirajganj. She completed her graduation and post-graduation from Rajshahi University's law department in 1982 and 1984. Rashida, who joined the judiciary in 1985, retired as a district judge in 2020. After her retirement, she did not engage in any other services.



AHSAN HABIB KHAN

Brig Gen (ret'd) Ahsan Habib Khan was the vice-chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) from August 2014 to August 2017. He was also a director general (spectrum) of BTRC prior to becoming the vice-chairman of the regulatory body. He also worked as a top official of a World Bank project at BTRC. Brig Gen Ahsan retired from the army in 2013.



MD ALAMGIR

Alamgir was a former senior secretary at the Election Commission. He also worked as secretary to the Technical and Madrasah Education Division. Besides, he served as secretary to the education ministry and as director general of the Directorate of Primary Education. He was also the director general of the Bureau of Non-Formal Education, and additional secretary at the expatriate welfare and overseas employment ministry.



ANISUR RAHMAN

Born on December 31, 1962, in Shariatpur, Anisur obtained his honours and masters' degrees from Dhaka University's geography and environment department. Before his retirement as senior secretary of Energy and Mineral Resources Division, Anisur, who was a civil servant of the BCS 1985 batch, served in various capacities in the civil service. He was also the secretary to the religious affairs ministry.

Kazi Awal at the EC helm

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time government.
R E A C T I O N S OF ELECTION COMMISSIONERS
Rashida Sultana said, "I will work with everyone for the welfare of the country. I will sit with all the commissioners and then I will be able to give more details."

Former senior secretary Alamgir said, "I had the chance to closely observe the inner workings of the Election Commission while I was at its secretariat. We will try to take lessons from the mistakes of the past."

He hoped that the new commission would work to win the confidence of all political parties.

Former senior secretary Anisur Rahman said, "We will sit and then decide our next course of action." He

added that he will carry out his responsibilities with honesty.

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said as long as the Awami League remains in power, the EC cannot hold a free and fair election.

"It has been proven that the Awami League picked its own people in the new Election Commission. This Election Commission won't be able to hold any polls independently," he said.

Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said the five individuals forming the commission had in the past performed their duties with integrity and efficiency.

"The new EC will meet the people's expectations," he said.

FORMATION PROCESS
On February 5, the president formed a search panel, headed by Justice Obaidul Hassan, after holding talks with 25 political parties.

The new committee asked the political parties, professional bodies and individuals to make recommendations for the EC. It also held meetings with eminent citizens, media personalities, university teachers and election experts.

After receiving the recommendations, the committee published the names of over 300 nominees. On February 24, it submitted to the president a list of 10 names for the five-member EC. The president picked the CEC and the four commissioners.

Kyiv repulses Russia attack

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described as "terrorists" and "a gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis."

In Kyiv, residents took shelter in the subway system and in cellars and basements.

"We thought something like this might happen but we were hoping until the end that it wouldn't," Irina Butyak told AFP in one shelter.

Ukrainian Health Minister Viktor Lyashko said 198 civilians, including three children, had been killed in the conflict and 1,115 wounded.

In Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron warned that the world must brace

for a long war.

"This crisis will last, this war will last and all the crises that come with it will have lasting consequences," Macron said. "We must be prepared."

After speaking to Macron, Zelensky tweeted to thank "partners" for sending weapons and equipment.

Several Nato members have sent weapons and ammunition to Ukraine in recent weeks, including Britain, the United States and ex-communist countries in Eastern Europe.

In another video address, the 44-year-old leader also said that his country had "derailed" the Russian plan

of overthrowing him and establishing a puppet state in Ukraine.

In the early hours of yesterday, AFP reporters in Kyiv heard occasional blasts of what soldiers said were artillery and Grad missiles being fired in an area northwest of the city centre. There were also loud explosions in the centre.

Emergency services said a high-rise apartment block was hit by shelling overnight, posting a picture that showed a hole covering at least five floors blasted into the side of the building.

"The night was difficult, but there are no Russian troops in the capital," Kyiv's mayor, Vitali Klitschko,

said. However, he said, sabotage groups might have infiltrated the capital.

Hours later, AFP saw a destroyed Ukrainian military truck in the city centre. The city said it was toughening a curfew in place and anyone on the streets after 5:00 pm would be considered "members of the enemy's sabotage and reconnaissance groups".

Canada, the United States, Britain and the European Union on Friday said they could act to exclude Russia from the SWIFT global interbank payments system in a further round of sanctions aimed at halting Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Russia has brushed off international condemnation and increasingly stringent sanctions adopted by the West, including against Putin himself and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Russia said sanctioning the pair was "a demonstration of the complete impotence of the foreign policy" of the West.

"We have reached the line after which the point of no return begins," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

On Friday, Nato said it was deploying its rapid response forces for the first time to bolster defences on its eastern flank.

Tariqat delivers, again!

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was at the eighth position on Tariqat's list of 10.

This means two out of the five members of the new EC are from the party's list.

Tariqat, which has two lawmakers in parliament, in 2017 recommended five names and three of those were picked for EC posts.

The three are: former CEC Huda, and election commissioners Rafiqul Islam and Brig Gen (ret'd) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury.

Tariqat Chairman Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizbhandari yesterday said he along with his party

was very happy to see their recommendations valued.

Asked about the secret of his party's successful choices, Maizbhandari told The Daily Star, "It is a very difficult to find appropriate persons for appropriate positions and we did it."

He hoped the new EC would conduct elections, including the 12th parliamentary polls, in a credible manner during its five-year tenure.

Habibul's name was also proposed by Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, but the name was at the bottom of his

eight-name list.

Those with FROM PAGE 12

yesterday.
Travellers who have received a booster dose after two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine will no longer need a 72-hour RT-PCR Covid-19 test certificate to travel to India, Benapole Immigration authorities said.

However, when they return to the country at the end of their travel, they would have to present a 72-hour Covid-19 test certificate from India, said Dr Zahidur Rahman, in-charge of Benapole Immigration Health Department.