

## Difficult to adjust ties with Russia

Says foreign secretary

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh continues to maintain very close relations with Russia and it is “very difficult” for the country to try to “adjust” the relationship, even if anyone would like it to amid the current situation in Ukraine.

Talking to a small group of reporters on Monday, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen conveyed that Bangladesh has taken its positions on the successive UN resolutions in line with its “historical relations” with Russia.

Foreign Secretary Masud recently visited the United States and accompanied Foreign Minister Abdul Momen at the bilateral meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the US State Department on April 4.

The foreign secretary also led the Bangladesh delegation at the 8th Bangladesh-US Security Dialogue held in Washington.

The Russia-Ukraine war was discussed in the regional and international contexts and Bangladesh conveyed its position to the United States, highlighting Bangladesh’s relations with Russia which are still extensive and close.

The foreign secretary also said Bangladesh will continue to focus on its economic priorities like the Rooppur project, which Bangladesh wants to complete.

He reiterated that Bangladesh wants to have friendly and diversified relations with all countries.

## Global police shut down online hacker’s market: Europol

AFP, The Hague

International investigators have shut down a massive online forum that sold access to hacked databases stolen from US corporations, Europe’s policing agency Europol said yesterday.



Students of Fine Arts at Dhaka University are busy making preparations for the Mangal Shobhajatra, an essential part of the Pahela Baishakh celebrations in the city. The Bangla new year begins tomorrow.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

# Peace talks hit a dead end

Says Putin, defends ‘noble’ war in Ukraine amid allegations of rape, brutality, chemical weapons

AGENCIES

President Vladimir Putin said yesterday peace talks with Ukraine had hit a dead end, using his first public comments on the conflict in more than a week to vow that his troops would win and to goad the West for failing to bring Moscow to heel.

He said Moscow would achieve its goals as Russian troops massed for a new offensive amid allegations of rape, brutality against civilians and possible use of chemical weapons.

Ukrainian officials urged civilians to flee eastern areas ahead of the anticipated offensive, while the battle for the southern port city of Mariupol was reaching a decisive phase, with Ukrainian marines holed up in the Azovstal industrial district.

Addressing the war in public for the first time since Russian forces retreated from northern Ukraine after they were halted at the gates of Kyiv, Putin promised that Russia would achieve all of its “noble” aims in Ukraine.

In the strongest signal to date that the war will grind on for longer, Putin said Kyiv had derailed peace talks by staging what he said were fake claims of Russian war crimes and by demanding security guarantees to cover the whole of Ukraine.

“We have again returned to a dead-end situation for us,” Putin, Russia’s paramount leader since 1999, told a news briefing during a visit to the Vostochny Cosmodrome 3,450 miles (5,550 km) east of Moscow.

Asked by Russian space agency workers if the operation in Ukraine would achieve its goals, Putin said: “Absolutely. I don’t have any doubt at all.”

Russia, he said, would “rhythmically and calmly” continue its operation.

Putin said Russia had no choice but to fight because it had to defend the Russian speakers of eastern Ukraine and prevent its former Soviet neighbour from becoming an anti-Russian springboard for Moscow’s enemies, reports Reuters.

The West has condemned the war as a brutal imperial-style land grab targeting a sovereign country. Ukraine says it is fighting for its survival after Putin annexed Crimea in 2014 and on February 21 recognised two of its rebel regions as sovereign.

Putin dismissed the West’s sanctions, which have tipped Russia towards its worst economic contraction since the years following the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union, as a failure.

“That Blitzkrieg on which our foes were counting did not work,” Putin said.

He dismissed Ukrainian and Western claims that Russia had committed war crimes as fakes.

Ukrainian Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Malyar, meanwhile, said the government was checking unverified information that Russia may have used chemical weapons while besieging Mariupol.

“There is a theory that these could be phosphorous munitions,” Malyar said in televised comments.

The withdrawal of Russian forces from the outskirts of Kyiv brought more allegations of war crimes, including executions and rape of women.

United Nations official Sima Bahous told the Security Council on Monday: “We are increasingly hearing of rape and sexual violence.”

Kateryna Cherepakha, president of rights group La Strada-Ukraine, told the council via video: “Violence and rape is used now as a weapon of war by Russian invaders in Ukraine.”

Russia’s deputy UN ambassador denied the allegations.



## India hopes for Pakistan reset after Sharif election

AFP, New Delhi

India hopes that Pakistan’s new prime minister will herald a diplomatic thaw between the two nuclear-armed foes after years of tensions, analysts say.

The pragmatic and business-friendly Shehbaz Sharif faces daunting challenges as leader -- among them relations with a neighbour his country has fought three wars against in the past 75 years.

But he hails from an elite political family seen in India as conciliatory towards New Delhi and willing to settle disputes with dialogue instead of denunciation -- unlike his immediate predecessor.

“He is not someone who will go to the extreme of antagonising India,” Ajay Darshan Behera, a professor of international studies at New Delhi’s Jamia Milia Islamia university, told AFP.

## A book and a bloodthirsty

FROM PAGE 1  
around 8:00pm, according to the police probe report.

Minhaz was with a machete, JMB’s killing squad member Noor Mohammad alias Shamim had a knife while Anwarul Alam alias Bhagne Shahid and Nurullah alias Hafiz carried bombs in gunny sacks.

Around 9:15pm, when Prof Azad was walking towards the TSC coming out of book fair, Minhaz and Shamim hacked him indiscriminately in the shoulder, head, face, throat, hands and different other parts of the body.

Soon Alam and Nurullah exploded bombs to create panic, melted into the crowd and fled the scene.

The physical and mental wounds led to the death of Prof Azad in August during his stay in Munich, according to the charge sheet and death certificate.

Arrested in 2006, Rahman and Sunny

admitted to carrying out the attack. Both were executed along with four other top JMB leaders on March 30, 2007 for killing two Jhalakathi judges.

The JMB had killed and maimed many people during their decade-long underground operations that climaxed with around 500 nearly synchronised blasts in all but one district on August 17, 2005.

A spate of deadly suicide bombings following hard on the heels soon put the people’s nerves on edge. The attacks left at least 30 people dead and those included judges, lawyers and policemen.

The outfit and its offshoot Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh also killed at least 22 people and injured scores others in vigilante operations in Rajshahi, Naogaon and Natore in the name of ridding the northern districts of underground ultra-left parties in 2004.

## An evening soaked in blood

FROM PAGE 1  
passed, but the horrific events of that day still seem so vivid.

I was then a second-year student at DU and had just begun my journalism career. As I was a member of Dhaka University Film Society, I used to go to TSC regularly after finishing my classes, and would stay there until 10:00pm.

February 27, 2004 was no exception.

It was around 9:30pm. I was enjoying a rehearsal of a music festival with my friends outside TSC that winter evening. The Amar Ekushey Boi Mela was going on with people coming out in numbers.

Our attention was suddenly diverted by what seemed like the sound of an explosion. It was something that will remain in my mind for the rest of my life.

When I saw Prof Azad, it was a horrific scene.

He was stabbed so brutally that his face was split open. I tried to hold the skin together. My only thought then was to take him to the hospital as soon as possible. As it was night, there were no vehicles available.

A white, private car was coming from the direction of TSC. I went to the passenger in the front and requested him to take Prof Azad to the hospital, but the driver turned the car around and left. I saw a police truck near TSC and rushed to it. After some persuasion, they agreed to take him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

When I was putting him in the truck with the help of an officer, photojournalist Pavel Bhai appeared and

started taking photos.

I was feeling very helpless but was relieved to see Bitu Bhai, one of our seniors in the university. He came as soon as I called him. We boarded the truck with Azad Sir, and I held him close to me.

“Where are you taking me?” he asked.

“To the hospital. You will be fine soon,” I replied.

“Why are you taking me on a police truck?”

“Sir, we are your students. We’ll get down soon.”

Dhaka Medical College Hospital seemed too far away. When the vehicle finally stopped, Bitu bhai and I took sir to the emergency department.

In the emergency department of DMCH, a slip worth Tk 5 had to be taken for every patient. I quickly took a slip and doctors advised me to take Prof Azad to Ward 32 for an emergency operation. The doctors there again asked for the slip.

I tried to get the slip out from my pocket but it was soaked in blood, as was my t-shirt.

The doctor asked me to bring another slip. By the time I returned, sir’s treatment had started.

The doctors were trying to stop the bleeding and asked me to bring some medicine. Bitu Bhai and I brought those. The doctors said they needed more medicine, but we had run out of money. We requested a police officer to make the arrangements for the medicine and he was kind enough to do so.

By then, many – including the then vice-chancellor of Dhaka University [Prof SMA] Faiz Sir – had come to DMCH.

Later, we heard that we were able to take sir to hospital within 10-12 minutes of the attack. Doctors said if it was a little later, he could have bled out. We felt thankful that we were able to save our sir. But he died in Germany six months later.

I was a resident of Zahrul Haque Hall which was a little distance away from DMCH. So, I went to Fazlul Haque Hall with Bitu Bhai. I took a bath and changed my clothes. As I started heading toward my hall, I found a procession had already started on the campus protesting the attack. I joined it immediately. Later, I went to my hall.

The next day, I heard that Prof Azad was taken to Combined Medical Hospital at night. Intense agitation started on campus demanding justice for Humayun Azad. Posters and a photo of me holding sir were pasted on the walls.

I felt like the police were following me. Some of my friends said I should go home and take some rest. I did so. But I realised later that the police were actually following me.

Around two months after the incident, Prof Azad returned to campus after being treated in Bangkok. I thought I would tell sir and his family what had happened that night. One day, I went to his house on Fuller Road but he was not home.

That conversation never happened.

[This is the abridged version of the write-up] Shariful Hasan is a freelance journalist writing for The Daily Star.

## Sri Lanka defaults on foreign debt

FROM PAGE 1  
Bangladesh was supposed to provide \$250 million in exchange for an equivalent amount of Sri Lankan rupees, but it ended up providing \$200 million seeing the worsening economic crisis in the South Asian nation.

“If Sri Lanka says that we will give you LIBOR + 4 percent if you take the money after two years, it would be wise to turn down the offer. That would never materialise given Sri Lanka’s financial position,” he said, adding that the IMF is unlikely to provide its own funds to repay loans.

Sri Lanka has previously entered into 16 relief programmes with the IMF and has stayed the course for only half of those.

The country’s foreign debt to GDP ratio is to the north of 60 percent and the total debt to GDP ratio is more than 100 percent.

Not just that, its external debt carries high-interest rates and has short repayment tenure, according to Hussain.

In its statement yesterday, Sri Lanka’s finance ministry said creditors were free to capitalise any interest payments falling due after 5 pm local time at an interest rate not higher than the normal contractual rate applicable to the credit.

Capitalisation is the addition of unpaid interest to the principal balance of a loan. The principal balance then increases and more interest is accrued over the life of the loan.

Or, creditors can choose to receive repayments in Sri Lankan rupees.

The latter option would have been acceptable had the Sri Lankan rupee plunged to a record low to become the world’s worst-performing currency --

worse than the currency of Russia, which is facing a cocktail of economic sanctions from the west.

The Bangladesh Bank though remains unruffled. “We are not concerned yet -- Sri Lanka still has time to pay back,” BB Spokesperson Md. Serajul Islam told The Daily Star yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina though called for caution when it comes to foreign debt even though it is far below risky levels.

Following a presentation yesterday on “offshore tax amnesty” and “a review of Bangladesh’s macroeconomy against the backdrop of Sri Lankan economic crisis” by the National Board of Revenue and the finance division, she directed all concerned to take necessary measures so that Bangladesh could maintain its current position regarding foreign debt.

## Crocodile rescued from shrimp farm

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

The forest department yesterday rescued a crocodile from a shrimp farm in Mongla, Bagerhat.

Shrimp farmer Akram said he saw the crocodile in his shrimp enclosure in the morning and called the forest department.

Azad Kabir, in-charge of Karamjal Tourism and Wildlife Breeding Centre at the East Sundarbans Division, said the saltwater reptile appeared to be aged between eight and nine, weighing 10kg.

It could have ended up in the enclosure during high tides in the Gona river, he said, adding that the animal was released in a river.

This has been the second crocodile to be found on private properties in the district in two weeks.

## Man found dead by rail bridge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Locals found the body of a 42-year-old man beside a rail bridge in Kalihati, Tangail, yesterday.

Govinda Chandra Ariya’s body was found about 2km away from his home in Nagarbari area.

He was an area manager of an ayurvedic medicine company and also the organising secretary of the local Puja Udjapan Parishad.

His cousin Apan Ariya said Govinda was missing since Monday evening and his family members were looking for him.

Saiful Islam, an assistant sub-inspector of railway police, said the body bore multiple injury marks and it was sent to a morgue for autopsy.

## Businessman abducted for ransom

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A renowned businessman of Patuakhali and his driver were abducted while returning to the town from Galachipa upazila around 9:00pm on Monday.

Businessman Shibu Lal Das’s family members said someone called his wife around 3:00am yesterday and demanded Tk 20 crore for his release.

Mohammad Shahidullah, superintendent of Patuakhali police, said six police teams were formed to rescue them.

Police said Shibu’s car was found in Amtali area hours after he reportedly went missing.

## Dozens dead after gunmen ransack central Nigerian villages

AFP, Jos

Gunmen have killed dozens of people after ransacking villages in central Nigeria, local sources said, in the latest violence blamed on heavily armed criminal gangs.

The attacks on Sunday on villages in Plateau state left more than 100 people dead with scores of homes destroyed, two local community leaders and the commander of a local vigilante force said Tuesday.

Details of the attack are sketchy, with local officials and security forces confirming the assault but declining to give a death toll.

## HSIA to stay open 24/7 from May

FROM PAGE 1  
Some 90 to 110 flights now depart and land within the 16-hour window, they added.

Several passengers said they had to suffer a lot due to mismanagement and the chaotic situation at the airport due to lack of manpower, additional ground handling facilities and other necessary services.

Passengers have been suffering a lot as mismanagement and chaotic situation prevails

everywhere at the airport including inside and outside the terminal, airlines’ check-in counters, immigration and boarding bridges.

Every day, 28 airlines operate 90 to 100 flights, carrying around 15,000 passengers to different destinations from HISA.

Chairman, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh, Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman said the runway will be open for 24 hours flight operation from the next month as the ongoing

work for construction of the high speed taxiway will be completed by the end of this month.

The CAAB chairman said when the third terminal will be open by the end of 2023, many aircraft will come to the runway.

Since the runway at Dhaka airport is one, the construction of two additional high-speed taxiways has been undertaken to reduce the duration of the aircraft on the runway and to enable it to exit the runway faster.