

COVID COOPERATION
Dhaka, Delhi model of good neighbourhood diplomacy: PM



UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the exchange of Covid-related medicines and medical equipment between Bangladesh and India during the pandemic is a role model of "good neighbourhood diplomacy".

"The whole world has seen how two neighbours support each other and work together during the time of crisis," she said in a video message to the inaugural ceremony of the Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (GCTM) at Jamnagar in the Indian state of Gujarat.

"I believe if traditional medicine is practiced in tandem with modern medicine, we may expect better outcome in ensuring basic healthcare for all, as envisioned in the SDG goal 3," she said.

The prime minister also said the Covid-19 pandemic showed the need to revisit focus on ensuring good health and wellbeing of the people.

She expressed confidence that the Global Centre for Traditional Medicine will emerge as a global hub for evidence-based research and standards for traditional medicine.

She appreciated the Centre's strategic focus on sustainability, equity and innovation.

"It is important that the ancient knowledge-base of traditional medicine be combined with modern science and technologies to optimise its benefits," she said.

Hasina said traditional medicine has always been part of Bangladesh's cultural tradition. "Our government integrated traditional medicine into our National

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A group of traders and their staffers vandalise an ambulance on the road in front of New Market during clashes between traders and Dhaka College students yesterday. Armed with sticks and sharp weapons, both groups pelted each other with brick chunks, leaving at least one dead and 50 people, including eight journalists, injured.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Battle for Donbas intensifies

Kyiv defiant as Moscow urges Ukrainian forces to lay down arms

AFP, Kramatorsk

Moscow launched dozens of air strikes across eastern Ukraine overnight, its defence ministry said yesterday, with Russia's top diplomat acknowledging "another phase" of the conflict was beginning as fighting raged in the Donbas region.

Russia's defence ministry said that "high-precision air-based missiles" had hit 13 Ukrainian positions in parts of the Donbas while other air strikes "hit 60 military assets", including in towns close to the eastern frontline.

Ukraine's armed forces also confirmed that fighting had increased throughout the east, just hours after President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia had kicked off the

widely anticipated offensive in the Donbas, Ukraine's industrial heartland.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov appeared to acknowledge the new offensive during an interview with a leading Indian media outlet.

"Another phase of this operation is beginning and I am sure it will be a very important moment in this entire special operation," Lavrov told India Today yesterday.

Ahead of the advance, Ukrainian authorities had urged people in Donbas to flee west to escape, even as officials called off evacuations for a third straight day from frontline cities due to ongoing fighting.

"No matter how many Russian soldiers are brought here, we will fight. We will

defend ourselves," Zelensky said on Telegram late Monday.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said he launched the so-called military operation on February 24 to save Russian speakers in Ukraine from a "genocide" carried out by a "neo-Nazi" regime.

But in the Donbas town of Novodruzhesk, Nadya, 65, said "we are bombed everywhere".

"It's a miracle that we're still alive," she said, her voice trembling.

Control of Donbas and the besieged port of Mariupol would allow Moscow to create a southern corridor to the Crimean peninsula that it annexed in 2014, and deprive Ukraine of much of its coastline and a major revenue resource.

It will harm media and journalists

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Revenue from advertisements has dropped significantly. Newspapers have shifted to digital platforms. Newspapers are going through a difficult period. And in this moment of crisis, the "Mass Media Employees (Services Conditions) Bill" was placed in parliament on March 28, the statement said.

Upon analysis of the proposed law, the Editors' Council observed that 37 out of its 54 provisions are not journalist friendly.

The council said it believes that the proposed law would bring the media industry and mass media employees under further control of the

bureaucracy in the name of protection.

The editors' platform said formation of a media tribunal would create legal complications for media workers. Besides, a tribunal like this would create obstacles in operating media outlets independently, it added.

If the proposed law is implemented, there is apprehension it can completely destroy editorial institution, said the statement signed by Mahfuz Anam and Dewan Hanif Mahmud, president and general secretary of the council respectively.

The proposed law pits media outlet owners against

media employees and there is fear that this can create divisions among them," the statement said.

It said although the newspaper industry is privately owned, the proposed law would open the path for government intervention in the operations of media outlets.

"If the proposed law is passed, the space for independent media and freedom of expression will be curtailed further, thereby preventing media from flourishing."

The council mentioned that discussions with stakeholders must be held before the passage of a law like this one.

An overnight brawl, daylong battles

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In the past, traders claimed that many such incidents originated from customers underpaying at food stalls and other shops, while students alleged that the shopkeepers often misbehaved with them and harassed them if they did not agree to buy products.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan told reporters yesterday that the incident had started over a trifling matter.

"Those who did this will surely face the law. Our law enforcement agencies have been monitoring and taking action with utmost patience. We heard that some people were injured in the clashes," he said yesterday afternoon.

Hours after the home minister remarked that the situation would come under control, police chased both parties and used tear gas shells. At about 2:45pm, they were found taking position to disperse the crowd.

FIVE SHOPS GUTTED
Our correspondents found five shops completely gutted and six others partially damaged by fires.

After two years of losses due to Covid-induced restrictions and closures, traders were hoping to rebound through this year's sales.

"I've invested Tk 20 lakh and stacked clothes for Eid ... all were burnt down," said Mir Sentu, one of the victims of the fire.

"It was robbed," he said, bursting into tears.

DMP Commissioner Md Shafiqul Islam said students threw bricks and

stones on the road from a 10-storey building. "We are trying to convince the workers [traders] to return to the market."

"Not just New Market, workers from all nearby markets joined the clash. The situation is not as simple as it seems. Police are trying to deal with the students delicately."

BOTH AGGRIEVED
Protesting students said the traders misbehaved and charged high prices whenever the students visited the shops.

Halud Uddin, president of Bangladesh Shop Owners Association, said some students involved in politics have long been extorting traders in the area.

"About two months ago, they stabbed and wounded five traders. A vendor had supplied faulty air conditioners to Chistia Market and so the traders refused to pay. They [students] came to settle it on behalf of the vendor," he said.

"Traders were not able to operate businesses because of Covid in the last two years. Today's agitation is an outcome of their accumulated grievances," Halud said.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Dipu Moni said if law enforcers had reached the spot earlier, the situation might not have turned so serious.

"It is very sad.... We often see there are arguments between students of Dhaka College and other establishments nearby and it turns into a conflict."

The college and hostels will reopen on May 5. We'll

Eight journos attacked

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whenever they tried to take photographs or video footages of the violence.

At least four of the injured journalists received treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Asif Zaman said he and his cameraperson were attacked when they were covering the clash near Gausia Market.

"As we were about to go live, some traders and shop employees started beating our cameraperson with sticks and iron rods. When I tried to save him, they attacked me too."

Asif needed four stitches on his head.

Two groups of reporters were covering the clash — one near the Dhaka College end and another near the New Market end, said bdnews24.com Senior Correspondent Kamal Hossain.

At one point, the shopkeepers attacked the media personnel for carrying still and television cameras. Some journalists were seriously injured, some were bleeding from their heads, he told The Daily Star.

On the other hand, The Daily Star's photojournalist Prabir Das was attacked by students while covering the violence near Dhaka College.

Nazrul Islam Mithu, president of DRU, and Nurul Islam Hasib, its general secretary, said attacking journalists is in no way acceptable, especially while they are on duty.

They pushed me to the ground and beat me with sticks and iron rods when I was taking photos. When I told them I was a college alumnus, they let me go. But then I saw, they started beating another journalist — Hasan Reza. I was able to save him and get ourselves

5 projects 52pc costlier now

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"There are some ground realities behind the increase in costs. Price hike of construction materials in domestic and global market is one of the reasons behind the rise in project cost," he said.

He also blamed individual corruption for the delay and increase in project cost.

Quoting the PM, State Minister for Planning Shamsul Alam said, "She [the PM] said I am approving the deadline extension on condition that there will be no further proposal for another revision."

According to meeting documents, the Local Government Department initiated the project to dig a 2.9-km long and 65 foot wide canal in the port city in 2014. But the CCC could not start work in time.

Asked, why the CCC failed to do so, CCC Mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury

said it was not possible to acquire land for the project with the allocated money as land prices had gone up.

At yesterday's meeting, the Ecnec also extended for the second time the deadline of the project titled "Border Roads (Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban Hilly Districts) Construction (1st Phase)" till June 2024, raising the cost to Tk 3,874.72 crore from Tk 1,699 crore.

Taken up in January 2018, the project was supposed to be completed by June 2021.

According to related documents, the project cost rose considerably due to land acquisition, and construction of Bailey bridges, safety barriers, helipads and dakh bungalow.

The Ecnec also okayed extension of the project on construction of a broad-gauge railway track from Chilahati in Nilphamari

six new projects.

to Chilahati border with India to facilitate rail communications between the two countries.

Initiated in August 2018, the project was scheduled to be finished by January 2021 at a cost of Tk 80 crore.

But according to the new deadline, it will be completed by June 2023 with the cost rising to Tk 141 crore.

The other two projects that got deadline extensions are "Upgradation of District Highways to Appropriate Standards and Widths (Cumilla Zone)" and "Nabinagar-Shibpur-Radhabika Regional Highway Construction and Development."

With the revision, the cost of the district highways project went up to Tk 735.22 crore from Tk 657.31 crore while that of regional highway to Tk 439.52 crore from Tk 343.60 crore.

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CASE AGAINST TARIQUE, WIFE

HC today to hear rules issued 15yrs ago

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court is today going to hear the rules questioning filing and initiation of a corruption case against BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, his wife, and her mother.

The HC issued the rules 15 years ago and stayed the trial proceedings.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Kazi Md Ejazul Haque Akondo yesterday set the date in response to a prayer filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission.

On September 26, 2007, the ACC lodged the case with Kafrul Police Station against Tarique, now in London, his wife Zubaida Rahman, and her mother Iqbal Mand Banu for amassing assets worth Tk 4.82 crore through illegal means and concealing information in their wealth statement.

Hriday Mondal returns to the classroom

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj