

## US with all against attacks on minorities

Says US Ambassador-at-Large Rashad Hussain

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US stands alongside Bangladeshis of all faiths who came together to reject attacks against the minority communities, said US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain.

Hussain, who visited Bangladesh on April 17-20, emphasised the importance of the respect for freedom of religion or belief for all people, everywhere.

He visited a Hindu community whose temple was destroyed in a violence last October, a media statement of the US Embassy in Dhaka said yesterday.

Hussain praised the government's quick condemnation last October of the religiously motivated violence against Hindu communities.

The ambassador also spoke about the importance of supporting and protecting those working to advance human rights, fostering interfaith dialogue and tolerance, and combating the efforts of those who seek to stoke division and incite violence.

During his time in Bangladesh, he met Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar to discuss their experiences and learn more about the important role religion plays in providing hope and promoting resilience.

In Dhaka, Hussain met senior Bangladeshi government officials, including the state ministers for foreign and religious affairs.

In the meetings, he reiterated US support for religious freedom and freedom of expression. He expressed gratitude to Bangladesh for its generosity in hosting Rohingya refugees.

## ECONOMIC MELTDOWN

### Loyalists urge Sri Lanka PM to resign

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's beleaguered prime minister came under increased pressure to step down yesterday, as staunch allies broke ranks and backed street protests calling for resignations over a worsening economic crisis.

Media minister Nalaka Godahewa announced his support for the thousands outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office who are demanding he and other members of his family relinquish power.

Sri Lanka is suffering its most painful economic downturn since independence in 1948, with months of blackouts and acute shortages of food, fuel and other essentials.

The crisis has sparked nationwide protests, with angry demonstrators camped outside Rajapaksa's office for more than two weeks.

Under pressure, the president dropped two of his brothers -- Chamal and Basil -- and nephew Namal from the cabinet this month, but protesters rejected the changes as cosmetic.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A man walks amid damaged buildings in the southern port city of Mariupol, Ukraine. The photo was taken on Friday.

## Fighting rages in eastern Ukraine

Kyiv aims to evacuate civilians from Mariupol as hope fades for a truce

AFP, Zaporizhzhia

"Fierce battles" raged in eastern Ukraine yesterday all but killing hopes of an Easter truce as officials said they would make a fresh attempt to evacuate civilians from the war-torn city of Mariupol.

The war enters its third month today with civilians continuing to pay a heavy price amid the ongoing fighting.

Authorities in two eastern Ukrainian regions -- Kharkiv and Lugansk -- said fighting with Russian forces raged yesterday.

The governor of the eastern Kharkiv region, Oleg Sinegubov, said on Telegram that Ukrainian forces retook three villages near the Russian border after "fierce battles".

Sinegubov added that Russian forces had also attacked residential infrastructure, killing two people.

In nearby Lugansk, governor Sergiy Gaiday said shelling was "round the clock".

He called on people near the front to "evacuate if you have the chance", saying volunteers were helping people leave the area.

Nearly 5.2 million Ukrainians have fled the country of 37 million since Russia's invaded in late February, the

UN refugee agency said yesterday.

The fighting in the east came a day after a senior Russian military officer said "the second phase of the special operation" had begun, with the aim of controlling a huge, strategic part of Ukrainian territory.

"One of the tasks of the Russian army is to establish full control over the Donbas and southern Ukraine,"

**Nearly 5.2 million Ukrainians have fled the country of 37 million since Russia's invaded in late February.**

Major General Rustam Minnekaev said on Friday.

Russian forces, which withdrew from around Kyiv and the north of Ukraine after being frustrated in their attempts to take the capital, already occupy much of the eastern Donbas region and the south.

Minnekaev said their focus was now to "provide a land corridor to Crimea," which Russia annexed in 2014, and towards a breakaway pro-Russian region of Moldova, Transnistria, where the general

claimed Russian-speaking people were "being oppressed".

Ukrainian authorities have vowed to fight on and drive the Russian troops from their land, but they also sought an Easter pause.

"Unfortunately, Russia rejected the proposal to establish an Easter truce," said President Volodymyr Zelensky earlier this week.

In the south, authorities were set to make a fresh attempt yesterday to evacuate civilians from the besieged port city of Mariupol.

"Today we will again try to evacuate women, children and the elderly," Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said on Telegram.

The Kremlin has claimed the "liberation" of Mariupol, which is pivotal to its war plans, after President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Russia's Western-leaning neighbour.

In a phone call to Putin, EU chief Charles Michel appealed for humanitarian access to Mariupol, which has been devastated by weeks of intense Russian bombardment.

Putin however accused Kyiv of refusing to allow its troops to surrender in Mariupol.

## Worker dies in steel re-rolling mills

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A worker died after being hit in the head by a falling rod at a factory of Bangladesh Steel Re-rolling Mills (BSRM) Ltd in Bayezid Bostami area of Chattogram yesterday.

Ripon, 35, was sleeping at the delivery shed around 1:00pm when a rod fell on him, police said, quoting other workers at the scene.

He was taken to Chattogram Medical College Hospital where doctors pronounced him dead, said Inspector Sadekur Rahman of Panchalaish Police Station.

Tapan Sen, Deputy Managing Director of BSRM, said officials were trying to find out what caused the accident.

## BGB recoveres 7 lakh yaba pills

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Border Guard Bangladesh recovered around seven lakh yaba pills with a street value of Tk 21 crore in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar on Friday.

The BGB personnel also arrested five suspected traffickers, said a statement from 34 BGB Battalion Commander Lt Col Mehedi Hasan Kabir.

The yaba hauls and the suspects were caught in daylong raids in different areas of the district.

## 26 new Covid cases, no death in a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

No death from Covid-19 was reported in the 24 hours preceding 8:00 am yesterday, said a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

At least 26 new infections were recorded during the period, taking the total number of cases to 19,52,532, added the release.

The new cases were detected after testing 4,708 individuals.

At least 315 patients recovered from Covid-19 during the period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 18,93,131 and the recovery rate at 96.96 percent, added the release.

## Man wins \$1m after lottery ticket printing gaffe

CNN, Online

An Iowa man brought home a \$1 million lottery prize -- after the clerk made a mistake printing his tickets.

Josh Buster, a 40-year-old chef from West Burlington, asked for five "easy-pick" plays for the April 15 Mega Millions drawing at a convenience store, according to a news release from the Iowa Lottery.

But Buster says that the clerk initially printed just one play, and then printed the four remaining plays on a separate ticket.

"I feel like that changed the numbers that I would have gotten if he had put them all on one instead of making that mistake," Buster said in a news release from the Iowa Lottery.

Buster struggled to believe his luck at first. "I don't usually have good luck, so I thought it was a mistake and there was going to be an error," he said in the news release. "So I Googled the lottery numbers to make sure I had the right ones, and I did! And then the rest of the day, I'm just waiting to wake up from a dream."

## Laws in the offing

FROM PAGE 1

discriminatory...Were there any trans people in this committee?"

Shale Ahmed, the executive director of Bondhu, a gender rights organisation, said their recommendations had been taken but "operated on".

According to the provisions of the anti-discrimination act, anyone encountering discriminations will have to go through a period of at least 195 days just to get a verdict, pointed out Barua.

Filmmaker Belayat Hossain Mamun spoke about how over-the-top platforms were a way out from a repressive censorship regime and how the new regulations will completely clamp down on them.

"In the past, during stakeholder consultation sessions while the laws were being formed, the government did not take our recommendations," said Hossain. He said that all paths for the industry to flourish are being blocked.

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission also produced a set of regulations to govern the social media.

Speakers said the provisions are such that it becomes apparent the government is eager to identify those who are critical of it.

Abdullah Al Mamun, a Rajshahi University professor, asked, "We have so many laws to scrutinise the digital space, but why do we not see them being implemented to protect our rights?"

About the mass media employee bill, Jyotirmoy Barua said that with such laws, journalists are being hoodwinked into believing this is for their welfare and for their rights.

"When stakeholders are not consulted in the formation of a law, when the lawmakers do not have accountability towards citizens, [that is when] repressive laws are formed to only serve and protect the interests of the powerful," said CR Abrar, professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka.

## Forecast

FROM PAGE 1

Boro in the haors. We are hopeful that no more loss will incur due to flash flood."

According to the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) of the Bangladesh Water Development Board, the water level in the rivers of the north-eastern region is receding.

It will continue to recede as there is no forecast of torrential rainfall in the region and India's Meghalaya, the forecast added.

The Someshwari river in Netrokona's Kalmakanda and the Baulai river in the district's Khaliajuri are flowing above the danger level.

The bulletin circulated by FFWC Executive Engineer Ariefuzzaman Bhuiyan also stated that the water level of the rivers flowing through the north-eastern region is receding at 30 points out of 39 total measuring stations.

## Cops zero in on killers

FROM PAGE 1

The law enforcers, however, said police would go slow with drives to make arrests as they do not "want to create any more unrest right now".

Earlier on Monday night, at New Market, employees of the two shops engaged in a brawl, which spilled over into daylong pitched battles between Dhaka College students and shopkeepers the following day, leaving two dead and scores wounded.

Nahid was attacked in front of Nur Jahan Super Market's Khan Fashion store, just opposite Dhaka College.

A video footage of the incident went viral on the social media. Journalists of The Daily Star, who were present near the scene, also took photos of the gruesome attack.

The footage and the photos show Nahid lying motionless in front of Nur Jahan Super Market. A young man, wearing a black helmet, comes with a machete and starts hacking him indiscriminately. He steps back after being stopped by another man, who was wearing a yellow helmet. The two then walk back to the student's side.

Officials of the Detective Branch of police, which is investigating the murder case, said the young man who hacked Nahid has primarily been identified as Zakir. They said he is a BCL activist.

Nahid was first hit by Kaiyum, a Dhaka College

student. He was wearing a blue T-shirt with white stripes, they said.

They, however, said they were verifying all the details to be hundred percent



**Law enforcers identified the man in the photo as Dhaka College student Sujon Islam.**

PHOTO: COLLECTED

sure about the attackers' identities.

The man wearing the yellow helmet has been identified as Sujon Islam. He lives in Room-101 of the college's North Hall, they said.

Many of those who were carrying local weapons, rods and sticks during the clashes have also been identified.

One of them is Sadik Mirza, a member of the BCL unit's convening committee. He lives in Room-218 at the same dormitory. He was carrying a machete.

Kawsar alias Sada Kawsar, clad in a green T-shirt, was also carrying a machete. He is a student of Islamic history. He lives at the South Hall.

Another one, who was holding a hammer, has been

identified as Monayem. He is a member of Dhaka City (north) Chhatra League, said officials investigating the case.

HM Azimul Haque,

deputy commissioner (Ramna Division) of DB, told The Daily Star yesterday they got some names after analysing different photos and footage, with help from the media.

"We scrutinised every little detail that we got from different sources so that no innocent person finds themselves in trouble," he said.

Asked about an allegation that Chhatra League led the mob that attacked Nahid, Fuad Hasan, joint convener of the Dhaka College BCL committee, said on Thursday, "It's still not clear who was behind the murder."

Contacted, BCL General Secretary Lekhak Bhattacharjee yesterday said general students of Dhaka College took part in

the "protest".

No one joined it as members of Chhatra League, he claimed. "We are sure that no Chhatra League man was involved in the killing."

Four cases have been filed over the incident -- two by police and two by the family members of the two victims killed in the clashes.

Over 1,500 unnamed people were made accused in these cases. The two murder cases are being investigated by the DB while the others by New Market Police Station.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday placed BNP leader Mokbul Hossain on a three-day remand in the case filed over instigating the clashes. He is the owner of the shop where the brawl took place on Monday night.

The BNP will stage rallies in all metropolitan cities, including in the capital, on Tuesday, demanding Mokbul's release and withdrawal of the "false" case, party's Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir announced the programme at a press conference at the party chairperson's Gulshan office.

Fakhrul said it has been proved through different media reports that the "cadres of Chhatra League" were involved in the violence.

(Our Dhaka University Correspondent Sirajul Islam Rubel contributed to the report)

## Only 1 out of 594

FROM PAGE 1

frustrating that we have not got justice even nine years after the incident that left so many people dead."

On this day in 2013, Rana Plaza came crashing down in Savar, leaving at least 1,136 people, mostly garment workers, dead and over 2,500 others injured. One of the deadliest tragedies in the history of the industries sector raised questions over labour safety in Bangladesh.

A day after the incident, Wali Ashraf Khan, sub-inspector of Savar Police Station, filed the murder case against Sohel Rana, also a former Jubo League leader in Savar, and several others.

On May 24, 2015, Bijay Krishna Kar, senior assistant superintendent of police at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), pressed charges against Sohel Rana, his parents Abdul Khaleque and Morjina, and 38 others in the murder case.

The Dhaka District and Sessions Judge's Court on July 18, 2016 framed charges against the 41 accused.

Of the 41 accused, only Sohel Rana is now behind bars, 30 are on bail and seven are on the run. Three of the accused have died.

Khurshid Alam Khan, a noted criminal lawyer, said, "For public interest, the case should be transferred to a speedy trial tribunal for its quick disposal as it is one of the most sensational cases and its progress is very poor."

Public Prosecutor (in-charge) Bimal Samadder said the trial proceedings were stalled as some accused filed appeals with the High Court challenging indictment orders.

"So, it was not possible to record statements for a long time," he said, adding that the court recorded statements of one witness after the HC vacated the stay orders.

On August 29, 2017, Sohel Rana was sentenced to three years' imprisonment in a graft case.

## BUILDING CODE VIOLATION

The trial proceedings in another case, filed over violation of building codes, are now stalled due to High Court stay orders.

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) had lodged the case over violation of building codes in the construction of Rana Plaza on the day of the collapse.

Charges were pressed against Sohel Rana and 17 others in the case on May 24, 2015, and the court accepted the charges on June 14, 2016.

But the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court could not start recording statements of the prosecution witnesses due to the HC stay orders on the trial proceedings, said Additional Public Prosecutor Anwarul Kabir Babul.

[Our correspondent in Savar contributed to this report]