

Jaishankar to fly in today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is expected to land in Dhaka today for his on a one-day visit.

He will meet Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen to discuss the dates of the Joint Consultative Commission and the Joint River Commission, the Teesta water agreement, the issue of border killings and India's imposition of anti-dumping duty on Bangladesh's jute.

Momen had mentioned these as the topics of discussion while speaking to journalists at the foreign ministry on Tuesday. He also mentioned his counterpart's visit may carry good news and a surprise.



Jaishankar will also be carrying the formal invitation letter of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to visit India, reported Indian media quoting current Indian Foreign Secretary Harsha Vardhan Shringla.

India's newly-appointed foreign secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra will also join Jaishankar in the visit.

A statement by Indian External Affairs' Ministry said that Jaishankar's visit is part of an intensified engagement between the two countries.

"It may be seen in the context of frequent bilateral high-level visits and exchanges particularly as both sides commemorate fifty years of the establishment of diplomatic ties," it read.

Jaishankar last visited Bangladesh in March 2021, said the statement, adding that prior to meeting Momen, the Indian minister will visit the Prime Minister.

Concluding his Dhaka visit, the Indian minister will travel to Bhutan to discuss hydropower cooperation, among other issues.

Nearly 60 percent of US population had Covid by February

AFP, Washington

By February of this year, 58 percent of the US population -- more than 190 million people -- had been infected with Covid, according to an antibody survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published Tuesday.

The figure is far higher than the 80 million officially recorded cases, with the majority of infections undiagnosed, asymptomatic or unreported.

Roughly 75 percent of people under 18 had been infected, according to a paper based on a nationally representative study of antibody levels.



People take part in a rally demanding international leaders to organise a humanitarian corridor for evacuation of Ukrainian military and civilians from Mariupol, amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in central Kyiv, Ukraine, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

EID RUSH AT FERRY TERMINALS

Hundreds stuck in gridlock

ZAHANGIR SHAH and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Hundreds of Eid holidaymakers are suffering at ferry terminals as long tailbacks causing them wait for hours.

An insufficient number of ferries, technical failures and growing number of vehicles are the main reasons behind the sufferings, alleged passengers and transport operators.

The major ferry routes in the country are Paturia-Daulatdia, Aricha-Kazirhat, Shimulia-Banglabazar and Shimulia-Majhikandi.

Of them, Paturia and Aricha are in Manikganj whereas Daulatdia, Kazirhat, Shimulia, Banglabazar and Majhikandi are in Rajbari, Pabna, Munshiganj, Madaripur and Shariatpur respectively.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) operates the ferry services on these routes.

As there is almost no coronavirus restriction this time, the tailbacks would be longer than the previous

two years, feared the authorities.

Experts estimated around 1.2 crore people would be leaving Dhaka ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

In such a situation, transportation is being hampered on the Jamuna river due to shortage of ferries. Only three ferries ply on Aricha-Kazirhat route.

Around 350 vehicles cross the river using these ferries in regular times. However, the numbers of vehicles doubled, said BIWTC officials.

Sources at BIWTC's Aricha Regional Office said all the three ferries are old and ply at a snail's pace.

In fact, one of the ferries -- Ranikhet -- faced technical failures thrice on Tuesday, they added.

Mahtab Pramanik, a truck driver from Pabna, said, "I arrived at Aricha Ghat at 2:15am Tuesday. I could not get on the ferry till 4:00pm. I don't know when I will be able to board on a ferry."

More than 100 trucks are stuck at Aricha Ghat, he added.

Contacted, BIWTC's Assistant General Manager (Marine) Abdus

Sattar said they have a plan of adding another ferry in the fleet to cope with the Eid rush.

On Shimulia-Banglabazar and Shimuli-Majhikandi routes, eight small ferries remain operational.

Only private cars, microbuses and covered vans can board ferries on this route.

BIWTC Chairman Ahmed Shamim Al Razi said two more ferries would be included in the fleet by Friday.

However, a terminal source said these ferries were not enough as seventeen to eighteen ferries used to ply during eid rush in the previous years.

Awlad Hossain, a private car driver who was traveling from Dhaka to Barishal, said, "I reached Shimulia terminal around 4:00am today (yesterday) and I could board ferry after waiting for around five hours."

Contacted, BIWTC's Manager (Commerce) at Shimulia Ghat Jamal Hossain said around 500 vehicles were in the queue yesterday morning.

Vaccine plant

FROM PAGE 1

Even before the PM's announcement in parliament, Health Minister Zahid Maleque told reporters on June 26 last year that he had asked officials to make a project profile.

Weeks later, the ministry formed a nine-member technical committee on vaccine production on July 12.

The committee recommended signing a contract with the US biotechnology firm Dyadic International for vaccine technology transfer and initiating discussions for producing protein-based Covid vaccines.

But the work of the committee seems to have stopped after that.

Abdur Rahman, a member of the committee and dean of the Faculty of Pharmacy at Dhaka University, told The Daily Star, "We had no meeting since we made those recommendations last year. I have no idea about the latest situation."

Regarding the slow pace of the project, Ehsanul Kabir Jaglul, coordinator of the project and managing director and CEO of Essential Drug Company Ltd, told The Daily Star, "We are working to build a state-of-the-art vaccine production and research facility so that we can develop our own expertise. It is a huge job. So, the delay is normal."

"The primary reason behind the delay is that some of the landowners lodged cases with the court. We could resolve the issue only last month. Without land, we can't go ahead," Kabir said.

He hoped that land

acquisition would be done in three months (by July).

About the delay in preparing the DPP, he said, "We have already submitted the pre-DPP to the ministry, and are progressing with other work based on it. We can't finalise the DPP before we ensure land acquisition."

Kabir said the initial project cost is estimated to be around Tk 3,000 crore and it would be completed within five years.

About the deal with Dyadic, he said, "We have sent the draft MoU to the health ministry a month ago. The law ministry has given the go-ahead. It is waiting for the foreign-ministry vetting."

He said that there was a meeting between the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and officials of Economic Relations Division and Essential Drug officials on April 4.

"We are hopeful of getting \$300 million in loans from the bank," Kabir said.

"We are now working on finalising the DPP. We will start training people within the next month [May] with support from the ADB."

Prof Nazrul Islam, a member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19, told The Daily Star last week, "Such delay for a priority project is not good at all."

"When there is urgency from the top executive [the prime minister] of the government, officials work, otherwise they do not ... this is a very bad culture."

"A vaccine institute is urgent not only to meet the Covid-19 vaccine demands but for other vaccines too," Nazrul stressed.

What sort of a mindset is it?

FROM PAGE 1

In the US is far better placed than ours but shouldn't his first port of call have been the Bangladeshi community? Wouldn't that have been more honourable and dignified? What message does it convey when our foreign minister prefers to appeal to the community of another country -- however friendly -- and not to his own? Over the years, our own community's power and prestige have risen and with it its ability to lobby and influence. Having lived there for years and last as our representative at the UN, he should know it better than many others.

What is most frustrating is our refusal to accept that the sanctions as something far more than a lobbying issue. It is about how our law enforcement agencies function, how respectful they are of our own laws, how much they respect an individual's human and fundamental rights, and their rules of engagement in dealing with suspects in particular and the public in general. It is more about the process and general functioning of the institution concerned. We just don't seem to get it.

The sanctions against Rab were imposed under The Global Magnitsky Act by the US Department of Treasury and deal with financial transactions of Rab. The sanctions stipulate that Rab members "will neither be allowed to own properties in the US nor engage in transactions

with anyone in the US".

However, only seven former and current officials of Rab will be restricted from entering the US.

So we are using our valuable bilateral relations with India to get US visa restrictions lifted for seven officials and for facilitating commercial activities of Rab members. For this we are also appealing to the Indian diaspora in the US to lobby for us? So today it's Rab, and if police tomorrow and the BGB the day after face questions on their performances, instead of addressing them, are we going to rush to another country for help? Is this how we conduct our foreign policy?

On addressing internal governance of our law enforcement agencies, our foreign minister said we have inbuilt mechanisms of accountability. May be we have. But are they working? When we last checked, custodial deaths hadn't stopped. What about disappearances? Why do people who reappear after a period of "disappearance" never talk about where they were, how they were treated and most importantly who kept them confined? Do all of them suffer from amnesia just for those days? Or is it because he doesn't want to recall the memories of that harrowing experience? Or is there something else at play?

There is a bigger danger awaiting us under the so-called Leahy Law of the US. This law restricts

assistance to entities accused of committing human rights violations, specifically governing assistance by state and defence departments. (See our report dated January 16, 2022, by Zyma Islam). It is awaiting our consent. If we agree to abide by it, then every dollar we get as US assistance for security agencies has to be accounted for. If we don't consent, then the assistance will dry up and along with it, some defence collaboration.

Why should we be in a position of fear that scrutiny by a foreign power will reveal serious shortcomings in how some of our institutions function? Why shouldn't we concentrate on reforming our errant law enforcement institutions -- demand for which is widespread, and acting on it will greatly improve the government's public standing -- instead of going from door to door pleading for assistance to extricate ourselves from humiliating laws imposed by others.

When our prime minister says that Bangladeshis will walk tall and with their heads held high it resonates with us, and fills our hearts with pride. This pride is hurt when other countries sanction us. Our pride is wrenched from inside when we read reports of international bodies revealing facts that we are too afraid to reveal ourselves. We bow our

heads in shame when we know things to be true and yet see those in power blatantly deny them and blame others for it.

However, the way out of this world of such "untruths" is not through lobbying or pleading with others for a good word here or compliment there. The way out is through genuine and comprehensive reforms that we can truly believe in. We are economically strong. Let us now become morally and ethically robust. Let that be a part of our graduation to a middle income country.

India too hot Says Modi, sends fire warning nationwide as Delhi landfill burns

REUTERS, New Delhi

India is getting too hot too early, raising the risk of fires, Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned yesterday, as New Delhi sweltered in extreme heat and a burning landfill on the outskirts of the capital spewed toxic smoke into the air.

"Temperatures are rising rapidly in the country, and rising much earlier than usual," Modi told heads of India's state governments in an online conference.

"During such a time, we are seeing increasing incidents of fires in various places - in jungles, important buildings and in hospitals - in the past few days."

SSC, equivalent exams from June 19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

This year's Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and its equivalent examinations will begin on June 19, about three and a half months later than usual.

Theoretical exams will end on July 6, and practical tests will be held between July 13 and 19, according to an order.

Students will take the Bangla 1st paper test on the first day of the exams, which will start at 2:00pm.

They will take tests on more subjects this year compared to last year.

Like the previous year, SSC exams this year will also be held on a shortened syllabus and for fewer marks than usual.

Last year, SSC candidates sat for tests on only three optional subjects with a shortened syllabus and fewer marks due to the pandemic.

This year, candidates will have to sit for tests on Bangla, English, Mathematics, and a fourth subject, besides the three optional subjects.

They will not need to sit for exams on religion, ICT, Bangladesh and Global Studies, and Science.

Shab-e-Qadr tonight

BSS, Dhaka

The holy Shab-e-Qadr, also known as Lailatul Qadr, when the first verses of the holy Quran were revealed to Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH), will be observed across the country tonight.

Muslim devotees will pass the night offering special prayers, reciting the holy Quran, holding zikr and performing other religious activities, seeking blessings of almighty Allah for long life, peace and progress for themselves, their families, relatives, friends as well as the nation and the Muslim Ummah.

Meanwhile, President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have greeted the countrymen and the Muslim Ummah on the occasion.

Friday will be a public holiday.

Five killed in road crashes

STAR REPORT

Five people were killed and five others injured in road accidents in three districts yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Mymensingh, a microbus collided with a truck in Tarakanda upazila around 9:00am.

Two passengers of the microbus -- Hanufa Begum, 50, and Mahmudul Islam, 30 -- died on the spot and five others were injured in the accident, said SI Abdus Saboor of Tarakanda Police Station.

In Gaibandha, two people were killed when a Panchagarh-bound bus from Dhaka rammed a vegetable-laden auto-rickshaw in Maheshpur area of Palasbari upazila, said Noor Nabi Pradhan, in-charge of Govindganj highway police outpost.

The deceased were identified as Taju and Sohel.

In Chattogram, Mohammed Hossen, 55, a security guard, was killed after a bus hit him while he was walking along Bayezid Link Road in Arelinnagar, said Kamruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Bayezid Police Station.

Police seized the bus but its driver managed to flee.

Home boss yet to find a solution

FROM PAGE 1

the wall is erected, it will not be possible for Eid prayers to be conducted there," she said.

Meanwhile, leaders of different organisations planted trees along the under-construction boundary walls of the field.

They also set up a banner with the picture of the Detailed Area Plan (2015-2035), in which the playground is earmarked as an open space.

Rasheda K Chowdhury, vice president of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon and former adviser to a caretaker government, said, "It is alarming that police are grabbing a playground to build a police station... If such practices continue, children will have no playgrounds to play on."

"Salaries of law enforcers come from the citizens' tax money. So, as taxpayers we are demanding that the authorities stop the construction of the station on the playground as early as possible and that it be kept open for all."

Terming the field the lungs or breathing space for the area, Zafarullah Chowdhury, founder of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, said, "The destruction of the playground [and such open space] will result in the destruction of my own lungs, and those of the prime minister and home minister."

Mohammad Arif Hossain, a fifth grader, said they have been playing on

the field for the last eight years.

"They [the authorities] are suggesting we go to Kalabagan playground but it is far away from our home. It is also not easy to get a chance to play there."

AL men

FROM PAGE 1

working on it.

As per the Zila Parishad Act, 2000, amended in 2022, the administrator will be in office until a new administration is formed. However, the term of the administrator will not be over 180 days and an individual cannot be the administrator more than once.

According to the law, only the elected representatives of different local government bodies like city corporations, upazila parishads, union parishads, and municipalities will vote to elect a chairman and general members and women members in reserved seats in each district council.

Earlier, LGRD Minister Tajul Islam said the EC could not hold elections to all union parishads due to the pandemic.

Union Parishad members are also voters of zila parishads.

However, EC officials said they could not hold the Zila Parishad polls as amending of the Zila Parishad Act, 2000, was under process and Ramadan had begun.