



Top left, Army Chief General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed distributing relief materials among flood-affected people in Sylhet's Companiganj yesterday; **bottom left,** flood-affected people going from one place to another using a raft made of banana trees in Kurigram Sadar upazila; **people commuting on a bike on a submerged road in Sylhet.**

PHOTO: ISPR/STAR/REUTERS

BNP slams govt for ‘inadequate’ support for flood victims

UNB, Dhaka

Slamming the government for inadequate allocation of money and relief for flood victims, BNP yesterday called upon the government to focus on easing sufferings of disaster-affected people by stopping the grand opening of Padma Bridge.

“Hundreds of crores of taka are being allocated for the grand celebration of Padma Bridge opening. But the allocation for nearly one crore flood-hit people in the country’s Sylhet, Sunamganj, Netrokona and northern districts is totally inadequate,” said party Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi.

He said the government has so far provided 100 tonnes of rice, Tk 30 lakh and dry food worth Tk 5,000 for the flood victims. “They also assured of allocating Tk 60 lakh. It means only Tk 1.5 per person.”

“We demand that the Padma Bridge inaugural festivities be stopped. You please stop the ostentatious display to get public attention,” he said during a press conference at BNP’s Nayapaltan central office.

Ukraine war could last for years

Warns Nato chief; Zelensky vows to retake south from Russian forces

AGENCIES

The war in Ukraine could last for years, the head of Nato said yesterday, calling for steadfast support from Ukraine’s allies as President Zelensky vowed that his forces “will not give away the south to anyone” after visit to the southern frontline.

Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said supplying state-of-the-art weaponry to Ukrainian troops would boost the chance of freeing its eastern region of Donbas from Russian control, Germany’s Bild am Sonntag newspaper reported.

After failing to take the capital Kyiv early on in the war, Russian forces have focused efforts in recent weeks on trying to take complete control of the Donbas, parts of which were already under the control of Russian-backed separatists before the February 24 invasion.

“We must prepare for the fact that it could take years. We must not let up in supporting Ukraine. Even if the costs are high, not only for military support, also because of rising energy and food prices,” Stoltenberg was quoted as

saying.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson also said on Saturday it is important Britain provide support for the long haul, warning of a risk of “Ukraine fatigue” as the war drags on.

In an opinion piece in London’s Sunday Times, Johnson said this meant

“We must not let up in supporting Ukraine. Even if the costs are high, not only for military support, also because of rising energy and food prices.”

Nato chief

ensuring “Ukraine receives weapons, equipment, ammunition and training more rapidly than the invader”.

“Everything will depend on whether Ukraine can strengthen its ability to defend its soil faster than Russia can renew its capacity to attack,” he wrote.

Zelensky said he had visited troops in several places, including the southern Mykolaiv region, about 550 km south of Kyiv.

“I talked to our defenders - the military, the police, the National Guard,” he said in a video on the Telegram message app yesterday that appeared to have been recorded on a moving train.

“Their mood is assured: they all do not doubt our victory,” Zelensky said. “We will not give the south to anyone, and all that is ours we will take back.”

Mykolaiv is a key target for Russia as it lies on the way to the strategic Black Sea port of Odessa, reports AFP.

Meanwhile, the eastern industrial city of Severodonetsk faced heavy artillery and rocket fire again.

Analysts at the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, wrote in a note that “Russian forces will likely be able to seize Severodonetsk in the coming weeks, but at the cost of concentrating most of their available forces in this small area”.

Serhiy Gaidai, the governor of Luhansk, told Ukrainian television: “All Russian claims that they control the town are a lie. They control the main part of the town, but not the whole town.”

Main Eid jamaat at 8am

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main jamaat of Eid-ul-Azha will be held at 8:00am on the Eid day at the National Eidgah in the capital if the weather is favourable.

In case of inclement weather or any other unavoidable reason, the main congregation of Eid will be held at 8:30am at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque.

The decision was taken at an inter-ministerial meeting held at the meeting room of the Ministry of Religious Affairs yesterday.

State Minister for Religion Md Faridul Haque Khan presided over the meeting, during which various decisions were taken for the celebration of Eid.

Eid-ul-Azha is expected to be observed on July 9, subject to the sighting of the moon.

Verdict on Tarique, wife’s fugitive status on June 26

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court will deliver its verdict on June 26 on whether BNP’s acting chairman Tarique Rahman and his wife Zubaida Rahman, who have been in London since 2008, are fugitives in connection with a Tk 4.82 crore corruption case filed during the caretaker government in 2007.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Kazi Md Ejarul Haque Akondo yesterday held a hearing on the issue and fixed the date.

The question was raised before the bench on June 5 when it was dealing with three separate writ petitions filed 15 years ago by Tarique and Zubaida challenging the filing and initiation of the case under the then Emergency Power Rules (EPR).

PM to visit

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by central Awami League leaders in charge of the respective districts, said Biplab Barua, AL office secretary.

Meanwhile, Hasina yesterday said the Padma Bridge will be a blessing to the people of the South, according to a UNB report.

“I think the inauguration of Padma Bridge on June 25 will come as a blessing from Allah, as we will be able to establish rapid communication with the southern region and promptly help the people in case of floods [and other natural disasters].”

Shesaid thisat a reception for 2021 SAFF Champions – the Bangladesh Under-19 Women National Football Team – at her office in the capital.

Noting that the country’s north-east has been massively hit by floods this time, she said such deluges will affect the southern regions too.

The premiere said she opened the Bangabandhu Bridge over the Jamuna just before the long-lasting 1998 flood across the country.

“The flood had affected the southern region and the people of this area got help from the northern districts as the bridge helped maintain communication for uninterrupted transportation of goods and other essentials.”

The PM said crossing the river like the Padma becomes dangerous due to strong current during such floods and disrupts the communication.

“When the Padma Bridge opens, we’ll get the scope to

continue relief operations and provide other assistance and medicines in the flood-hit areas.”

She said the government has taken all measures, including providing relief and assistance to the flood-hit people by the Army, Navy, Air Force, and all government agencies concerned.

Besides, leaders and activists of the ruling Awami League and its affiliates are also helping the flood victims in their respective localities, said Hasina, also the AL president.

“When the water recedes from the north-east, other regions downstream will be flooded. So, our Mymensingh and Rangpur divisions are also likely to face it. We [the government] are taking precautionary measures in this regard,” she said, adding they have also taken preparations for the post-flood situation.

About sports, she emphasised on the arrangement of inter-college and inter-university competitions to pick players for national sports teams.

The PM also urged the industrialists and businesspeople to come forward in helping the players and thus promote sports.

“It is not right that you would just do business, set up industries and make money. You will have to do something for the country.”

Zahid Ahsan Russel, state minister for Youth and Sports, and Kazi Salahuddin, president of Bangladesh Football Federation, also spoke.

Talks get nowhere

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regular meetings of JWG and Technical Working Group for early commencement of Rohingya return.

Experts think that in the name of verification, Myanmar is basically buying time, and if the root causes of the Rohingya genocide are not addressed, the repatriation will not begin anytime soon.

They also said the international community must put pressure on the Myanmar rulers to take back Rohingyas and grant them citizenship.

“Western countries imposed a number of sanctions on Russia over the Ukraine crisis. If half the sanctions were for Myanmar, the military government would have started the repatriation,” Prof Imtiaz Ahmed of Dhaka University international relations department told The Daily Star yesterday.

He, however, warned that the Myanmar government may start a token repatriation but Bangladesh should be very cautious.

“Through this token repatriation, the Myanmar government will try to prove that there was no genocide in that country. So, the Rohingyas should be given citizenship by the Myanmar government first and the rest will follow,” said Prof Imtiaz, also director at the Centre for Genocide Studies, Dhaka University.

Bangladesh had handed over the names of 8.4 lakh Rohingyas to Myanmar but so far only about 42,000 have been verified.

Despite a number of attempts, the Rohingyas

could not be repatriated as they refused to return on the grounds that the conditions in Rakhine State were not conducive and there was no guarantee of citizenship back home.

In January’s technical-level meeting of “Ad-Hoc Task Force for Verification of the Displaced Persons from Rakhine”, Bangladesh expressed dismay over the slow pace of verification of past residency by Myanmar.

Dhaka also offered all cooperation under the three bilateral instruments for fast completion of the verification process.

In the meantime, humanitarian agencies need more than \$881 million this year for humanitarian support to Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar and Bhasan Char, and also the host communities, according to the UNHCR.

But as of last month, only 13 percent of the fund required for the Joint Response Plan has been received.

The situation is so grave that United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi in a visit to the Rohingya camp appealed to the world for sustained and predictable support to Rohingya refugees and the local host communities in Bangladesh.

“The world must remember the crisis that Rohingya refugees and their hosts have been facing for the last five years. The refugees’ lives depend on how the international community responds in caring for them,” Grandi said, after visiting the refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar and Bhasan

Char island, on May 25.

He also said, “The Rohingyas I met reiterated their desire to return home when conditions allow. The world must work to address the root causes of their flight and to translate those dreams into reality.”

Nearly 7,50,000 Rohingyas faced a brutal military crackdown in Myanmar’s Rakhine State in August 2017 and took shelter in Bangladesh to join around three lakh others who fled previous waves of persecutions.

Despite global pressure, including a genocide case under trial at the International Court of Justice, the Rohingya repatriation did not happen.

“Repatriation is a critical issue for both the government and the Rohingyas,” said Jahangirnagar University International Relations Professor Shahab Enam Khan.

“Bangladesh has pursued a multi-track approach to facilitate repatriation, but the process continues to remain stalled due to a lack of meaningful commitment and initiatives from the Myanmar side, particularly Tatmadaw [the armed forces of Myanmar].”

He thinks repatriation will become appealing to the Rohingyas only if Myanmar guarantees that none of them will end up in internally displaced person (IDP) camps or become subject to further persecution.

To change the stalemate in Rakhine State, opening channels of communication

with Myanmar’s national unity government in exile or perhaps empowering the Rohingyas to negotiate with the Tatmadaw seems to be a necessity, Prof Shahab added.

“The global community should take note that the Rohingya issue can go out of control for the regional countries with far-fetching spillover effects,” he told this correspondent in a WhatsApp message.

Major General (Retd) ANM Muniruzzaman, president of Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), said the whole dynamics of the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh is changing.

“Primarily, the reason for the change is their longer stay in Bangladesh without any practical hope of going back to Myanmar.”

Rohingyas are now becoming a source of security threat, which is manifested in various activities like drug peddling, human trafficking, presence of small arms presence and trafficking and other criminal activities, he added.

“There is a potential link with other groups outside Bangladesh. The Rohingya refugee crisis is now entering a phase where they are becoming a security threat for Bangladesh and also for the region.”

According to sources in law enforcement agencies, a total of 104 were killed, 89 women were raped, 52 abduction incidents were reported, 34 cases of human trafficking were recorded in the last four years and Rohingyas were involved in

all these incidents.

Besides, the presence of a Myanmar insurgent group called Arsa in Bangladesh has been widely debated in recent time as refugees and experts believe its members are active in the Cox’s Bazar Rohingya camps.

The issue came to the fore prominently after the murder of popular Rohingya leader Mohib Ullah last year.

However, the government has maintained this group does not exist in Bangladesh and that some criminals might have falsely identified themselves as Arsa operatives to intimidate the refugees.

Malls, stores

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learnt from those in attendance.

The monthly losses on gas imports have reached Tk 2,500 crore from Tk 1,500 crore.

“Not only that, the crisis has become so acute that we can’t import even after having money,” Ali said.

Helal Uddin, president of the Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity, said they have always been respectful of the government’s decisions.

“We don’t disagree with the Prime Minister’s directive. We will implement it tomorrow,” he said, while requesting the government to extend the duration by two hours to 10 pm from July 1 to July 10 for Eid-ul-Adha shopping.

In response, Monnujan said they will send the proposal of the Dokan Malik Samity to the prime minister for approval.

It may get

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Sylhet’s Divisional Commissioner Muhammad Mosharraf Hossain said at least four million people have been affected by the flood in the region and the number is increasing.

Locals said many people have taken shelter on nearby highways or river banks as the flood centres are either overcrowded or located far away from their homes.

Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Navy, police, Border Guard Bangladesh and several other agencies along with local administration have been working to rescue stranded people.

Meanwhile, train services on the Dhaka-Sylhet route resumed yesterday noon after suspension of around 24 hours as the flood water receded in some areas, said railway officials.

Electricity supply also resumed in some areas of Sylhet city since Saturday night, said locals.

Spanish PM faces regional election test in Andalusia

AFP, Seville

Andalusia votes yesterday in an early regional election that the incumbent conservative Popular Party is expected to win comfortably, dealing a blow to Spain’s Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez ahead of a national vote expected at the end of 2023.