

Tell govt about your demands for polls-time govt

CEC asks political parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All political parties should inform the government about their demands for an election-time government system, said Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal yesterday.

"You have different kinds of proposals regarding all-party government, an election-time government, an election-time caretaker government... These are political issues. You should inform the government about your demands and let it understand how much pressure there is..." Awal said while sitting with Bangladesh Jatiya Party at his EC office.

These are political issues and constitutional changes might be required, he said, adding that the EC would inform the government about the political parties' demands.

He said the EC was aware that many doubt and distrust EVMs and that it had not taken any final decision regarding the use of EVMs.

Hoping all political parties would join the next general polls, Awal said, "If all political parties do not join polls, we cannot force them, we will keep requesting them again and again."

He urged all political parties to take part in the 12th parliamentary elections.

Awal also said that active participation of the parties establishes a balance in the election process. Competitive elections and active participations of political parties can help curb possible irregularities, manipulation, corruption, use of money and muscle power, he said.

The CEC while taking with Gano Front in the afternoon again said the EC would carry forward all proposals of political parties on election-time government system to the government.

"There is need of a political dialogue on this [polls-time government]. You need to discuss among yourselves. You will also place your proposals to the government."

"I believe every government is sensitive and have a mindset to accept any proper proposal, for the sake of elections," Awal said.

Bangladesh Jatiya Party proposed forming an election-time government with representatives from all registered parties, and deploying army with magistracy power three months prior to the polls.

It also proposed holding division-wise staggered polls and not using EVMs unless all political parties agree.

Gano Front said EVMs should not be used unless the majority of political parties agree to use them.

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After bouts of heavy rain and devastating floods that damaged crops, many farmers of Sylhet region are now hurrying to get their land ready for the Aman season with renewed vigour. One such farmer is seen tilling a piece of land in Fatehpur area of Gowainghat yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Russia pounds Kharkiv

Resumes 'unstable' gas supplies to Europe via Nord Stream

AGENCIES

Russian artillery strikes pounded Ukraine's second largest city Kharkiv yesterday after Moscow announced it was expanding its war aims, even as Russian gas flows to Europe resumed through the Nord Stream pipeline.

The attacks on the eastern city -- scarred by weeks of Russian shelling -- came after 10 days of scheduled work ended on the Nord Stream gas pipeline that had spurred fears of a permanent cut-off.

Kharkiv's regional governor said two people were killed and 19 injured, four of whom were in a serious condition.

Three people were killed by strikes a day earlier in Kharkiv, where some semblance of normal life had returned in recent weeks after Ukrainian forces pushed back Russian troops from the city limits.

In Kramatorsk in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, which has seen some of fiercest fighting, a school that Ukrainian officials said was being used as a food aid storage point was also struck.

Russian troops invaded Ukraine on February 24 and the war has left thousands dead, forced millions to flee their homes and wrought havoc with the economy.

The central bank on Thursday said it

was devaluing the Ukrainian currency, the hryvnia, by 25 percent.

Meanwhile, the resumption of gas supplies from Russia to Europe through Germany came a day after Europe unveiled emergency measures to circumvent Russian energy "blackmail".

In its latest package of penalties Wednesday, the European Union targeted gold exports and froze assets at Russia's largest bank Sberbank.

In recent weeks, Russian forces have hit civilian targets in cities and towns far away from the frontline, leaving scores of civilians dead.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov yesterday said that Western sanctions imposed on Russia over its actions in Ukraine would not cause it to change course.

In a call with reporters, Peskov said: "Even the harshest sanctions have never made countries change their position."

"It's working," a NordStream spokesman said yesterday, without specifying the amount of gas being delivered.

Western powers have stepped up arms supplies to Ukraine but President Volodymyr Zelensky has asked for more

and speedier deliveries.

Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin said Wednesday Washington would send four more M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (Himars), which have notably boosted Kyiv's capabilities.

"Ukraine needs the firepower and the ammunition to withstand this barrage and to strike back," Austin told reporters, adding that the new shipment would bring the total of US Himars sent to Kyiv to 16.

Russia has warned about arms supplies and said it will no longer be focused only on wresting control of the east Ukraine regions of Lugansk and Donetsk, which have been partially controlled by pro-Moscow rebels for years.

In recent weeks, Russian forces have hit civilian targets in cities and towns far away from the frontline, leaving scores of civilians dead.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin yesterday said that Putin was in good health, dismissing what it called false reports he was unwell.

"Everything is fine with his health," Peskov said in reply to a question at his daily briefing.

"You know that Ukrainian information specialists, and American and British ones, have been throwing out various fakes about the state of the president's health in recent months - these are nothing but fakes," he added.

Covid cases cross 20m mark

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in the country, over the course of the pandemic, crossed the 20-million mark yesterday.

In the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the Directorate General of Health Services recorded 884 new cases and six new deaths.

The total number of Covid-19 cases rose to 20,00,279, while the number of deaths is now 29,256, according to the DGHS.

Yesterday, 9,010 samples were tested across the country and the positivity rate stood at 9.81 percent.

During the same period, 1,602 patients recovered from Covid-19. The total number of recoveries rose to 19,31,494.

Of those who died yesterday, four were male and two female. Their ages ranged from 21 to 100.

Man stabbed to death on Sunamganj court premises

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A man was stabbed to death on Sunamganj District Judge Court premises yesterday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Khokon Miah, 45, of Jagannathphur upazila.

Lawyers detained three people -- Fayed Ahmed, 30, Sajid Miah, 36, and Sebul Mia, 25 -- and handed them over to police.

Ikhtiar Uddin, OC of Sunamganj Sadar Police Station, said, "The victim and the attackers came to the premises for a legal battle. They locked in an altercation during which Fayed stabbed Khokon."

A case is under progress at the court in this regard.

Joypurhat DB arrests 3 organ traders

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Three members of an organ trading gang were sent to jail in Joypurhat on Wednesday.

The arrestees, Jewel Rana, 42, Jewel Rana, 28, and Firoz Hossain 39, were mainly involved in the illegal trading of kidneys.

Masum Ahmed Bhuiyan, superintendent of police in Joypurhat, at a press briefing yesterday afternoon, said the three were waiting for an organ donor at the Punat Bus Terminal in Sadar upazila, when a police team, upon information, raided the area and arrested them.

A case was filed in this regard. Police then produced the three before a court, which sent them to jail.

Biden positive for Covid Symptoms 'very mild'

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden tested positive for Covid-19 yesterday, with his doctors saying the 79-year-old leader was experiencing mild fatigue and would isolate at the White House while carrying out his full duties.

Biden had been due to travel to Pennsylvania during the day, the latest in a series of trips around the country as he seeks to revive waning Democratic Party fortunes ahead of midterm elections.

Noab hikes

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the middle of last year. The price has doubled in the last few months than in the first half of last year. In addition, the exchange rate of US dollar also increased. Printing costs have also soared because of the rise in prices of ink, plates and other necessary materials.

As transportation costs have also risen, the expenses of newspapers have doubled as a cumulative effect, it added.

On the other hand, Noab over the last few months has repeatedly sought government assistance, but has not received the expected response, said the statement.

"Even though all industries were given stimulus packages by the government, the newspaper industry did not receive any assistance. At the same time, corporate tax, import duty and other taxes [including VAT] remained unchanged in this fiscal year's national budget."

The Noab said the industry is going through an unprecedented crisis.

"We know that our readers and well-wishers are our biggest strength. We are pledge-bound to deliver the best possible newspapers to you. We seek cooperation from all our readers and well-wishers," said Noab.

However, it is to be noted that the price of The Daily Star will not increase because it was hiked to Tk 15 on July 1.

James Webb finds

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graduate student in the university's astronomy department, told New Scientist.

"If these galaxies are at the distance we think they are, the universe is only a few hundred million years old at that point."

It is possible that the James Webb Space Telescope will be able to see further back and discover galaxies only 200 million years old and could -- as the researchers say in their findings, published online -- be a "crucial step in fulfilling JWST's mission of charting cosmic dawn."

Largest loan from IMF on the cards

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Given the heightened uncertainty stemming from the war in Ukraine and volatile energy, food and fertiliser prices, it would be prudent to safeguard and rebuild reserves as a buffer against shocks.

The mission called for withdrawing the interest rate ceilings of 6 percent and 9 percent for deposits and loans respectively, which would help control inflation and also ease the pressure on reserves.

In June, inflation hit a nine-year high of 7.56 percent.

Reprioritisation of expenditures, which is much needed given the high subsidy expenditure and weak revenue collection, would also ease the pressure.

Subsequently, the mission called for gradually adopting a fuel pricing mechanism in line with the global prices to bring down the subsidy expenditure on energy.

This will also help accommodate additional social spending in the form of targeted aid to protect the poor.

"In the absence of adequate revenue mobilisation, budget financing is

increasingly relying on costly domestic debt, eroding fiscal space."

The mission recommended reforming the expensive National Savings Certificate programme by separating it from direct budget financing.

To increase revenue, which remains among the lowest in the world, a multi-pronged strategy -- including simplifying the value-added tax rate structure, modernising revenue administration and building compliance risk management capacity focusing particularly on large taxpayers -- is needed, the mission said.

"These recommendations are very pertinent to the problems facing Bangladesh at present. Regardless of where it came, these must be followed," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

Recommendations such as reforms in revenue policy and administration and removing the interest rate caps are international best practices, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of

Consider putting them on hold

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There are two education sector projects, two health sector projects, and one housing project, he said.

"It seems that the mega projects have come at the expense of fiscal allocations for social sectors including health, education and social protection."

The lack of transparency and accountability along with delay in implementation have affected the reserve.

LOAN AND REPAYMENT

Implementation of the 20 mega projects involve 40 loan packages and five grants.

Of the total foreign finance, almost 84.4 percent is in grants and concessional loans. Two semi-concessional loans (4.4 percent) are supposed to come from Russia while five non-concessional loans (11.1

percent) are supposed to come from China.

Thirteen loan packages amounting to \$32.26 billion are due for repayment by 2024.

Around 57.5 percent of the loans have a grace period of 10 years while 72.5 percent have repayment period of 20 years and beyond.

Debapriya said the review of terms and conditions of foreign loans for the top 20 mega projects are favourable as there are a good number of concessional loans along with grants.

The economist commented that he saw the negotiation between the government and International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a positive development because an IMF loan will help stabilise the economic condition and improve confidence of foreign investors and development partners.

Bangladesh.

"Why does the government administer the petroleum price? Nowhere in the world would you find this. The price should follow the ebb and flow of the global market."

The interest rate cap should have never been imposed, said Mansur, also the chairman of Brac Bank.

"Nowhere in the world would you find this. Now is crunch time. Inflation is high, so the interest rates have been hiked everywhere. But in Bangladesh that scope is not there because of the interest rate cap. Is this approach reasonable and sound?"

A big portion of the imports is liquefied natural gas, petrol and fertilisers, according to Mansur, a former economist of the IMF.

"If their prices are not hiked, how would their demand go down? This is a policy failure. The government is rationing the use of electricity but where is the savings? People are using generators and charger lights and fans. Only by raising the price do you get savings. If you follow such policies, you will only face misfortune."

Italian PM resigns

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early 2023.

In a speech to the Senate, Draghi had made a plea for unity and set out a series of issues facing Italy ranging from the war in Ukraine to social inequality and rising prices.

But the 5-Star once again decided not to back him, saying he had not addressed their core concerns. In addition, the rightist Forza Italia and League coalition parties decided to shun the vote, pushing for a government without 5-Star.

In a sign of the tensions brought to the surface by the end of the Draghi government, two ministers from Forza Italia said they would leave the centre-right party.

Public administration minister Renato Brunetta and Mariastella Gelmini, minister for regional affairs, both quit the party led by Silvio Berlusconi.

'You cannot remain silent'

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limitations in preventing passengers from travelling on the roof.

The HC bench then asked the official whether the passengers on the roofs pay fares.

If the passengers are allowed to travel on the roof even after they pay fares, it is outright corruption and must be stopped at any cost, the HC bench said, adding that accidents might take place if people are allowed to be on the roofs.

"You cannot remain silent. This cannot be allowed. You must discharge your duties properly," Justice Nazrul Islam Talukder told the officials.

Deputy Attorney General AKM

Murmu elected

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Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the post.

Modi tweeted to congratulate Murmu, saying her "exemplary success motivates each and every Indian".

"She has emerged as a ray of hope for our citizens, especially the poor, marginalised and the downtrodden."

Her closest rival, the opposition-backed Yashwant Sinha -- an ex-member of the BJP and former finance and external affairs minister, also tweeted his congratulations.

"India hopes that as the 15th President of the Republic she functions as the custodian of the Constitution without fear or favour," Sinha wrote.

Murmu will be the country's second woman president after Pratibha Patil, who held the position for five years from 2007, and succeeds Ram Nath Kovind, the second president from the Dalit community, the bottom of the Hindu caste system.

Born in Mayurbhanj district in the eastern state of Odisha, the president-elect began her career as a schoolteacher before joining politics.

She has held ministerial positions in the state government, and been governor of the neighbouring state of Jharkhand.

Amin Uddin Manik told the court the railway authorities have taken steps to form a committee to probe the mismanagement in services.

The issues came to the fore after Dhaka University student Mohiuddin Roni waged a protest lately.

On Wednesday, the HC bench wanted to know about the sit-in programme enforced by Roni demanding improvement of railway services and about the steps taken to this effect.

The bench delivered the order on a suo moto move following a photo of Roni and a caption published on The Daily Star yesterday.

Senior lawyer Khusrhid Alam Khan appeared for the Anti-Corruption Commission during the proceedings.

"As a tribal woman from remote Mayurbhanj district, I had not thought about becoming the candidate for the top post," she told reporters soon after her nomination this month.

Murmu's win was considered a certainty because of the strength of the ruling BJP and its allies in the parliament and state assemblies.

But the post is largely ceremonial and her election is not expected to make significant practical difference to the tribal community, which has long been relegated to the margins of society.

"We've been on the road fighting for tribal rights since the 90s," activist Dayamani Barla told AFP.

"Whatever agenda the BJP... has to place a politician from a tribal community in the post of the President, she will only be able to do anything if she is allowed to use her pen."

The prime minister and the cabinet wield executive powers in India, although the head of state can send back a few parliamentary bills for reconsideration and also helps in the process of forming governments.

"Sitting on the seat is not as big a deal as much as it is having the power to actually use your position," said Barla.