

MOVE TO DEFUSE TENSIONS

Jordan hosts Israeli-Palestinian talks

REUTERS, Amman

Jordan hosted a meeting between top Israeli and Palestinian officials yesterday to try to halt surging violence, an official said, as Washington and its Arab allies seek to defuse tensions that have led to concern of a wider escalation. The discussions are part of stepped-up Jordanian diplomacy with Washington and Egypt to address violence, as anxiety mounts of escalation in the run-up to the holy Muslim month of Ramadan that begins in late March. The meeting at the Red Sea port of Aqaba brought together top Israeli and Palestinian security chiefs for the first time in many years, officials said, and aimed to restore calm in Israel, the Israeli-occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip. US President Joe Biden's Middle East adviser Brett McGurk is attending, along with Jordanian and Egyptian officials. Underlining the challenges, the Palestinian Hamas group - which governs Gaza - criticised the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority (PA) for taking part, calling it a "stab in the back of the Palestinian people".



Police use water cannons and tear gas shells to disperse activists of the opposition National People's Power (NPP) party during a protest held to urge the government to hold local council election as scheduled in Colombo, Sri Lanka yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Four killed, 14 hurt in Pak market blast

DAWN ONLINE

At least four people were killed and 14 wounded in an explosion inside the Rakhni market in Balochistan's Barkhan yesterday morning, police and health officials said. Barkhan District Health Officer Dr Abdul Hameed confirmed the death toll to Dawn.com, adding that the injured persons had been moved to the Rakhni Hospital. According to Barkhan Deputy Commissioner Abdullah Khoso, the blast occurred when an improvised explosive device (IED), planted on a motorcycle, exploded. Khoso said the police have arrived at the site and cordoned it off. "Teams have begun collecting evidence from the site," he added. Unverified videos making the rounds on social media show volunteers carrying bloodied victims away as a crowd gathers at the purported site of the blast. Mangled motorcycles and charred vegetables can be seen strewn about on the road. There was no claim of responsibility as yet.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Prakashon Vishwavidyalaya, Dhaka. It includes the university logo, name in Bengali, English translation, website URL (www.buet.ac.bd), and detailed admission guidelines for the 2022-2023 academic year. The guidelines cover application procedures, exam dates, and fees for various programs.

It forces' monitoring won't do any good

FROM PAGE 1 Directorate of National Consumers Right Protection (DNCRP) with businesses and other stakeholders to discuss ways to curb the spiral of essential commodities. At the discussion, two leaders of kitchen markets in Dhaka proposed engaging joint forces to contain the prices of essentials during the month of Ramadan. "A trader cannot reduce a product's price when he sees its price rise in the international market," Uddin said at the event held at the premises of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh. Most of the time, everyone blames the local business community for any abnormal price hike. "Some bad businessmen increase the prices increase

abnormally but the entire business community is held responsible." Businessmen who view Ramadan as a month to bag higher profits should leave this mentality, Uddin added. "If the commerce ministry can ensure that the dollar will not appreciate during Ramadan, we will take responsibility for ensuring that the prices of the six daily commodities do not increase during the fasting month," said Helal Uddin, president of the Bangladesh Shop Owners Association. DNCRP has already started working to control the price of goods during Ramadan, according to its director general AHM Shafiguzzaman. There is adequate stock of edible oil, sugar, chickpeas and dates.

"So, there is nothing to stress about the price increase of these products. There is no shortage of products, but there is a shortage of management," he added. According to a commerce ministry paper, the import of crude soybean oil declined 47 percent, gram 21 percent and dates 3 percent in the first half of fiscal 2022-23. The opening of letters of credit for the import of raw sugar slumped 28 percent year-on-year to 3.75 lakh tonnes in the last quarter of 2022. It dropped 47 percent to 75,319 tonnes for chickpeas and 30 percent to 21,980 tonnes for dates. In the case of chickpeas, it was 47 percent lower at 75,319 tonnes. For dates, it was 30 percent lower at 21,980 tonnes. There are currently

5-6 privately-owned oil and sugar refinery mills in Bangladesh and all are under the control of the government, said Kazi Salahuddin Ahmmed, senior general manager of S Alam Group. "The process of pricing is quite transparent. It is sold according to government rules - there is no way to bypass it," he said. Traders blame each other for the rise in prices during Ramadan, said Commerce Secretary Tapan Kanti Ghosh. "Some say refiners are charging higher prices, while some say it is the wholesale traders. Others say it is the retail traders. So, who's right? Not everyone can be right at the same time. Surely, someone is taking the opportunity. That's why the price goes up," he said.

A year on, EC yet to earn trust

FROM PAGE 1 in up to 150 constituencies. However, the government in January shelved a plan to buy two lakh EVMs that would be needed to use in 150 constituencies. The last two general elections were not held in a free or fair manner, and that eroded the general public's faith in ECs, said Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shusashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan). The current EC has yet to do anything that would change people's perception, he said, adding that the EC's first year was marred by controversies. In 2014 national polls, 153 of the 300 MPs were elected unopposed, and in 2018, widespread ballot box stuffing was reported the night before the election day. The commissions that held the polls were widely criticised for these matters. The current EC took office on February 27, 2022. The next day, Chief

Election Commissioner Awal urged political parties to stay in the election race. However, the current election commissioners on several occasions said it was not their job to ensure all parties participated in polls. Since its formation, the EC's discussions on the preparation of an election roadmap and the use of EVMs were shunned by the BNP and several other political parties. BNP Standing Committee Member Hossain said, "Our decision is that we will not participate in an election under the current government. We were not part of the process in which this Election Commission was formed, had not given them recognition, and had not taken part in any activities of the commission. We have not changed our stance and that is why we did not join the talks." It is impossible for

the EC to hold a free and fair election under the incumbent government, he added. In June, the EC asked Awami League MP AKM Bahauddin Bahar of Cumilla-6 to leave the constituency for allegedly violating the electoral code of conduct by joining the campaign trail of an individual running for mayor. Days later, Awal said Bahar was not asked, but merely requested to leave Cumilla ahead of the city corporation polls. In May, Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman told an event in Madaripur that the CEC would give \$10 million to anyone who could find EVMs faults. A few days later, CEC Awal denied making any such offer. At a meeting among deputy commissioners and superintendents of police in October, there was a commotion after Anisur

talked about allegations that many officers were biased, and they did not properly spend the government funds. Contacted, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (Retd) Ahsan Habib Khan said, "The controversies that are being talked about are no big deal. In some cases, misunderstandings led to controversies." The EC earned praise from many after suspending Gaibandha-5 by-polls in October amid numerous reports of irregularities, said election expert Abdul Alim, adding that the way it held the Cumilla city polls was also praiseworthy. "But the six recent by-elections were marked by poor turnout of voters," he said. Meanwhile, CEC Awal yesterday again urged the major political parties to reach a consensus so that a participatory and acceptable election could be held.

Govt doing its best to keep the economy

FROM PAGE 2 Hasina said her government has been building Bangladesh with the ideals of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. "We have been able to transform Bangladesh into a developing country. One day this Bangladesh will be built as a developed and prosperous country," she

said. The PM recalled the contribution of Dr Malek in implementing the ideology of Bangabandhu and spreading the spirit of the Liberation War. "He was always very sincere to implement the ideology of Bangabandhu and bear the spirit of the Liberation War," she said. The premier said

Bangabandhu Parishad was formed to protest the assassination of Bangabandhu and raise his ideology before the people after the 1975 15th August carnage. "Dr SA Malek is one of them who played a key role to put forth the ideology of Bangabandhu before the people," she said.

UKRAINE INVASION Blinken eyes US inroads in Central Asia

Secretary of State Antony Blinken is heading to Central Asia hoping that greater US engagement will reassure former Soviet republics rattled by the Ukraine war, although Russia's historic clout limits the extent of cooperation. Days after the anniversary of the Ukraine invasion, the top US diplomat will hold talks Tuesday in Kazakhstan and then Uzbekistan and meet jointly with foreign ministers of all five ex-Soviet Central Asian states in Kazakhstan's capital Astana. Donald Lu, the top US diplomat for South and Central Asia, said the United States was realistic that the five nations were not going to end their relationships with Russia or their other giant neighbor, China, which has been boosting its own presence.

Bangladesh to pay through the nose

FROM PAGE 2 practical point is missing in the resolution." The UN General Assembly last week adopted a new resolution calling for Russia to withdraw immediately from Ukraine, in line with the UN Charter, and end the war. A total of 141 member states voted in favour of the resolution and seven - Belarus, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua, Russia and Syria -- voted

against. Bangladesh, China, India, Iran, Pakistan and 27 other states abstained from voting. The Russian embassy in Dhaka later tweeted: "The non-binding 'anti-Russian' resolution of the #UNGA will not bring the world closer to ending the #Ukraine conflict, the country called for a cessation of hostilities in Ukraine and remains steadfast in its commitment to upholding the UN Charter. Bangladesh continues

to remain concerned over the situation in Ukraine, particularly the loss of lives, the deteriorating humanitarian situation in conflict zones and consequential socio-economic fallout around the globe, Sabrin said. Subsequently, the country called for a cessation of hostilities in Ukraine and remains steadfast in its commitment to upholding the UN Charter.

Handwritten signature and date: 26/02/2023, রেজিস্টার