



Ensure equal opportunity for women

PM tells Iranian president

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged Iranian President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi to make efforts to ensure that women in his country could live with dignity and honour with equal opportunity for education and work with their male counterparts.

She made this call when the president phoned her in the afternoon. The two leaders shared views on bilateral, regional and international interest issues, said a press release issued by the Prime Minister's Office.

Hasina said Bangladesh abstained from voting on the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution to remove Iran from the Commission on the Status of Women.

During the 22-minute tele-conference, the PM recalled that Bangladesh and Iran, being members of the OIC and D-8, have often been supportive to each other.

She reiterated Bangladesh's readiness to extend support to Iran in multilateral platforms, especially in the UN.

The premier appreciated that the new Iranian administration was reaching out to Bangladesh to expand and consolidate bilateral ties.

Hasina said that the bilateral trade volume between the two countries was far below the true potential, and that both sides should hold further engagements to enhance trade and business.

Stressing the need for forming a Joint Business Commission (JBC) between the chamber bodies of the two countries, the PM said meetings of the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) should be held regularly.

She congratulated Iran for restoring diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia. She said this was a classic example of a successful diplomatic maneuver that would lead to greater regional stability in the Gulf and beyond.

Hasina invited the Iranian president to visit Bangladesh at his convenience. She wished him and the people of Iran a happy Eid-ul-Fitr.



Ignoring the risks involved, homeless people stay on the roof of a footbridge in the capital's Purana Paltan. The photo was taken around 1:30pm on Sunday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Fighting rages in Sudan

Death toll passes 100; UN, US urge 'immediate cessation of violence'

AFP, Khartoum

Explosions rocked the Sudanese capital Khartoum yesterday as fighting between the army and paramilitary forces led by rival generals raged for a third day with the death toll surpassing 100.

The violence erupted Saturday after weeks of power struggles between the two generals who seized power in a 2021 coup, Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The conflict, which has seen air strikes, tanks on the streets, artillery fire and heavy gunfire in crowded neighbourhoods both in Khartoum and other cities across Sudan, has triggered international demands for an immediate ceasefire.

As the fighting showed no sign of abating, Daglo took to Twitter to call for the international community to intervene against Burhan, branding him a "radical Islamist who is bombing civilians from the air".

"We will continue to pursue Al-Burhan and bring him to justice," he said, adding: "The fight that we are waging now is the price of democracy."

In his only statement since the fighting flared, Burhan told Al Jazeera on Saturday that he was "surprised by Rapid Support Forces attacking his home" and that what was happening "should prevent the

formation of forces outside the army".

The conflict has claimed the lives of at least 97 civilians and "dozens" of fighters from both sides, medics said, adding about 942 people have been injured.

But the number of casualties is thought to be far higher, with many wounded unable to reach hospitals due to difficulties in movement amid the fighting.

Doctors' union warned the fighting had "heavily damaged" multiple hospitals in Khartoum and other cities.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday called on warring parties to "immediately cease hostilities, restore calm, and begin a dialogue to resolve the crisis."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged the warring rivals to agree an "immediate cessation of violence" and start talks.

The doctors' union warned the fighting had "heavily damaged" multiple hospitals in Khartoum and other cities, with some rendered completely "out of service".

The World Health Organization had already warned that several of Khartoum's nine hospitals receiving injured civilians "have run out of blood, transfusion equipment, intravenous fluids and other vital supplies".

Repeal DSA and other repressive laws

Demand 31 organisations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirty-one social and cultural organisations yesterday demanded the scrapping of the Digital Security Act and other repressive laws to ensure people's freedom of expression.

The organisations, including Bangladesh Udichi Shilpigossthi, also demanded stopping harassment and arbitrary arrests on charges of hurting religious sentiment; releasing those arrested under the repressive laws; withdrawal of cases under those laws; and ensuring people's freedom of expression, right to food, and right to enforce strike by the working class.

They announced a protest programme at the capital's Shahbagh on May 6 to press home the demands.

They made the decision at a meeting on Sunday at the Udichi office on Topkhana Road with its President Badiur Rahman in the chair, said a press release yesterday.

The organisations urged the people, especially cultural activists, writers, artists and journalists to attend the May 6 programme, the time and venue for which will be announced later.

Foreign secretary flies to China: source

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen yesterday left for Beijing on a two-day visit, a diplomatic source told The Daily Star.

"He flew today and will be returning home on April 19," the source said.

This paper, however, could not learn the details of his visit.

Holy Shab-e-Qadr tonight

STAR REPORT

Muslims across the country are set to observe the holy Shab-e-Qadr tonight with due religious solemnity.

The night marks the revelation of the first verses of the holy Quran to Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH).

Muslims traditionally observe the occasion through nightlong prayers, milad mahfils, Quran Khwani, and religious discussions at homes and mosques.

Devotees also visit graveyards to seek divine blessings for the eternal peace of the departed souls of their near and dear ones.

Meanwhile, President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday greeted the countrymen on the occasion of the Shab-e-Qadr, reports BSS.

In separate messages, they prayed for continuous peace, progress and prosperity of the country, the whole world and the Muslim Ummah.

Crash claims 3 lives

UNB, Bhola

Three people were killed and three others were injured yesterday as a lorry hit a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in Bhola's Doulatkhan upazila.

The victims were Sujit Goldar, 30, Subho Chandra, 20, and Liton Hawladar, 38, of Barguna.

Zakir Hossain, OC of Doulatkhan Police Station, said the accident took place around 1:30pm when the Charlesson-bound lorry hit the auto-rickshaw on Bhola-Charlesson highway, killing two people on the spot and injuring four others.

Another died on the way to a hospital.

Two journos beaten up in Narayanganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Two journalists were beaten up allegedly by brokers of private clinics while collecting information in Narayanganj General (Victoria) Hospital yesterday.

The victims are Abdullah Al Mamun, a cameraperson of DBC news, and Abir Shikder, Narayanganj correspondent of Dhaka Post, an online news portal, said Anisur Rahman Molla, OC of Narayanganj Model Police Station.

According to witnesses, a scuffle broke out when people, who came for seeing doctors, protested the breaking of queues by some people in front of the hospital's emergency unit around 2:30pm.

The journalists, who were present there for collecting information, were beaten up while taking pictures of the incident.

Rain at last, relief in Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

After almost two weeks of severe heatwave, finally rain poured down in different upazilas of Sylhet.

It started raining in Companiganj upazila around 8:50pm last night. Later around 10:00pm, there was a hailstorm in the area.

At the same time, it rained in Zakiganj, Beanibazar, Jaintiapur upazilas, several locals confirmed.

Besides, stormy and cold winds were also blowing across Sylhet city and its surroundings.

Earlier in the evening, the bulletin issued by the Meteorological Department in Sylhet mentioned the possibility of rain at night.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bringing relief after a spell of heatwave, it is raining in Companiganj upazila of Sylhet. The photo was taken around 10:00pm yesterday.

Rooppur loan to be paid in yuan

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The move to solve the impasse comes after the International Monetary Fund has stipulated no arrears on foreign loan payment as part of its \$4.7 billion loan programme.

Contacted, ERD Secretary Sharifa Khan, who chaired the meeting, said: "I am not authorised to speak on the matter – only the science and technology ministry can. We [at ERD] have done the negotiations on behalf of the ministry."

The central bank, which would ultimately be shouldering the responsibility to arrange the payment in yuan, has not been informed officially of the development by the ERD, which is handling the matter, said its spokesman Md. Mezbaul Haque.

"The Chinese currency is an official currency for us since 2019

and we have been doing regular trade settlements with this. We settle many Japanese loans in yen. And we invest a portion of our reserves in yuan," he added.

As per the loan agreements signed with Russia for the power plant, Bangladesh was supposed to repay the loan in dollars.

But after Russia invaded Ukraine in February last year, loan servicing in dollars became unfeasible: some of the largest banks of the Soviet nation were expelled from the SWIFT financial system, which handles the vast majority of cross-border payments.

The Bank for Development and Foreign Economic Affairs (VEB), a Russian state-owned institution handling transactions for the Rooppur project, was among those expelled.

Although payment for the \$11.39 billion loan for the nuclear power plant's construction would not begin from March 2027 or two years after commercial operation begins, Bangladesh is currently servicing a \$500 million loan agreed upon in 2013 for the project's primary work.

Subsequently, in June last year, Moscow sent a proposal to Dhaka seeking loan repayment in the rouble, which was not agreed upon by the Economic Relations Division, the finance ministry wing that negotiates foreign loans.

Under the proposed arrangement by the Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh would deposit money in a Chinese bank account of the Bank of Russia. But Russia has been insisting on direct payment in roubles.

Now it appears Russia has softened its stance on this.

Extreme heat elevating fire risks

FROM PAGE 1

Some business establishments use sub-standard wires that wear and tear more easily, he said, urging everyone not to cut corners while buying cables.

"Besides, flammable objects like foam, and plastic are used in markets for decorative purposes. These are making the markets particularly vulnerable," he told The Daily Star.

Debashish Bardhan, a former deputy director of fire service, said it had been taking longer to douse flames in recent weeks because of the heatwave.

Lt Col Mohammad Tajul Islam Chowdhury, director (operation) at fire service, said, "A small fire can turn into a big one if it cannot be doused at the primary stage. Besides, the heatwave is making everything flammable and causing fires to spread rapidly."

A fire that broke out at the New Super Market around 5:40am on Saturday took almost 27 hours to douse.

At least 23 firefighters had to be hospitalised after they fell sick while working at the scene. Besides, six members of Ansar and other forces had to be treated at hospitals.

Doctors said the firefighters were at increased physical risk these days. The unusually high temperatures

are making them feel weak, sick and dehydrated.

They recommended that the first responders take rest after working at a site for around one and a half hours.

Dino Moni Sharma, deputy director (Dhaka division) of fire service, said the heatwave was making the firefighters' job more difficult.

Prof Samanta Lal Sen, national coordinator for plastic surgery and burn projects, told this newspaper that the firefighters treated at hospitals mainly fell sick because of dehydration and inhalation of smoke.

A firefighter, who worked at the New Super Market on Saturday, said, "We have to take a break, drink water, and pour water on our heads due to the heatwave to keep from feeling exhausted while working."

Babul Chakraborty, deputy director (planning) at fire service, told this newspaper that the firefighters were trained to work in hostile conditions.

"But to deal with special situations like a heatwave, we have the option to replace one team with another, so that no one gets exhausted by working six to eight hours at a stretch," he said.

Asked if this was possible with the current workforce, he said, "We replace the teams by getting teams from stations in adjacent districts.

Searing heat to continue till Thursday

FROM PAGE 1

or two places in Barishal, Chattogram and Sylhet divisions today.

"Weather may remain mainly dry with temporary partly cloudy sky in the country. Rain or thundershowers may occur at one or two places in Chattogram and Sylhet divisions,"

according to a bulletin of Bangladesh Meteorological Department issued at 6:00pm yesterday, which would remain valid for 24 hours.

People have been hit hard across the country in the last few days by the extreme hot and dry weather.

In Chuadanga, the number of patients with heat-related diseases are on rise. Hospitals are struggling to deal with the rush of patients. Many are staying at hospitals' corridors as the beds were not enough to meet their needs.

At least 642 people received treatment for different heat-related diseases in Chuadanga Sadar Hospital over the last one week, according to hospital sources.

"My two-year-old boy is suffering from diarrhoea. We are staying at the hospital's corridor as we could not avail a bed," said Mita Khatun the hospital

yesterday.

Dr Khalequzzaman, associate professor at the Department of Public Health and Informatics of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said hot weather is suitable for the spread of many germs which cause diarrhoeal diseases.

"So, people can get diarrhoeal diseases easily if they do not maintain hygiene like hand washing, drink safe water and eat safe food," he told The Daily Star recently.

A correspondent from Chuadanga contributed to this report.