

Polls internal affairs of Bangladesh

Says Japanese envoy
DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Iwama Kiminori has said he will not comment on Bangladesh's upcoming national election.



Iwama Kiminori

"It is an internal affair of Bangladesh," he told a press conference at the Japanese embassy in the capital yesterday.

The envoy made the comments after a journalist asked whether Japan changed its position on the election after the Bangladesh-Japan relations were elevated to "strategic partnership" through the Bangladesh PM's recent visit to Japan.

The journalist referred to previous Japanese ambassador Ito Naoki's comment that he heard about ballot-box stuffing by police on the night before the polling day in 2018.

Naoki in November last year expressed optimism that Bangladesh's next parliamentary polls would be free and fair.

Yesterday's press briefing was organised to inform the media about the April 26 meeting between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida.

Kiminori said Japanese companies want Bangladesh to improve investment environment so that they can increasingly invest in the country.

Japan is now implementing some major infrastructure projects in Bangladesh and it wants to develop an industrial and connectivity hub centering Matarbari, he added.

The diplomat said that tax policy, duties and long delay in approving investment proposals remain some major issues that hinder foreign direct investment in Bangladesh.

He said getting duty-free facilities after the graduation from LDC status will be very difficult for Bangladesh, and the country has to be ready to face this reality.

Kiminori said Bangladesh and Japan were discussing an economic partnership agreement or FTA to take forward bilateral trade.

He said Dhaka and Tokyo are in talks over transfer of defence equipment and technology to Bangladesh. He, however, refused to disclose further details on this as discussions were underway.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addresses a high-level executive business roundtable titled "US-Bangladesh Economic Partnership: Shared Vision for Smart Growth" at the Great Hall of the US Chamber of Commerce in Washington DC on Tuesday.

PHOTO: PID

Clashes rock Sudan truce

Top UN official demands security guarantees to enable aid deliveries

AFP, Khartoum

Persistent fighting between Sudan's rival generals undermined efforts to firm up a truce yesterday, as a senior UN official arrived for talks on providing relief to millions of trapped civilians.

The visit by top UN humanitarian official Martin Griffiths comes one day after neighbouring South Sudan announced that the warring sides had agreed "in principle" to a seven-day ceasefire.

Griffiths insisted on the need "to be sure that we have the commitments publicly, clearly given by militaries, to protect humanitarian systems to deliver".

"We will need to have agreement at the highest level and very publicly," he told journalists via video link from Sudan.

Griffiths said he had been informed by the UN's World Food Programme that six trucks bringing aid to the country's western Darfur region had been "looted en route" yesterday, "despite assurances of safety and security".

He said the UN had a plan for delivering the aid and supplies needed to address the dire situation. But "we need access. We need airlifts. We need supplies that don't get looted", he insisted.

"Looting of humanitarian stocks across the country has been a very sad phenomenon of these past weeks."

Deadly violence broke out on April 15 between Sudan's de facto leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who commands the regular army, and his deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

At least 528 people have been killed and nearly 4,600 wounded, according to the latest health ministry figures, which are likely to be incomplete.

At least 528 people have been killed and nearly 4,600 wounded in the violence so far.

Ten of thousands of Sudanese have fled to neighbouring countries in an exodus that has sparked warnings of a humanitarian "catastrophe" with implications for the entire region

The two leaders have agreed multiple truces since the fighting began but none has effectively taken hold. The current truce was extended on Sunday by a further 72 hours and was due to expire yesterday at 2200 GMT.

Despite the truce efforts, witnesses reported warplanes over north Khartoum yesterday and fierce clashes near the state broadcaster's headquarters in the capital's twin city of Omdurman.

AL FACTIONAL CLASH Ex-UP member hacked to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A former union parishad member was killed and 10 others were injured in a factional clash between two groups of the ruling Awami League in Barguna Sadar upazila around 8:30pm on Tuesday.

The dead is Shafiqul Islam alias Panu, 40, former member of Ayala Patakata Union Parishad and joint general secretary of the union unit AL.

According to locals, some 10 to 12 criminals, followers of incumbent UP member Motaahar Mridha, attacked Panu with sharp weapons in Pakurgachia area of Barguna town.

The incident happened in presence of Motaahar. The clash broke out when followers of Panu tried to protect him from the attackers, they added.

Panu might have been attacked over a dispute with Motaahar during the last UP elections, said locals.

At least 10 people were injured during the clash. They were rescued and rushed to Barguna General Hospital. Of them, three were sent to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Panu died on the way to the hospital.

The Daily Star could not reach Motaahar as his phone was found switched off.

Ali Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Barguna Police Station, said additional law enforcers were deployed in the area to avert further clash. No case was filed in this connection as of 4:00pm yesterday.

US pick Ajay Banga confirmed as next WB president

REUTERS, Washington

The World Bank's 25-member executive board yesterday elected former Mastercard CEO Ajay Banga to a five-year term as president, effective June 2, ushering in an Indian-born finance and development expert charged with revamping the lender to tackle climate change and other global crises.

Banga, 63, was nominated for the post by US President Joe Biden in late February and was the sole contender to replace departing World Bank chief David Malpass, an economist and former US Treasury official during the Trump administration.



2 killed in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Two men were killed in a head-on collision between a rickshaw-van and a truck on Phulbari-Sayedpur highway in Dinajpur's Parbatipur upazila yesterday.

The dead are Abul Kalam, 55, and Ashrafur Islam, 24, said police.

According to locals, the driver of the speeding truck, heading towards Syedpur from Phulbari, lost control over the vehicle and hit the rickshaw-van. Two passengers of the van were killed on the spot.

Abul Hasnat Khan, officer-in-charge of Parvatipur Police Station, said the bodies were kept at Parbatipur Upazila Health Complex.

The truck was seized and its driver was arrested, he added.

Woman found dead at home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Police found the body of a woman at her home in Narayanganj city yesterday.

Victim Nurjahan Begum, 48, used to live in Adarshanagar area with her family, said Anichur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Narayanganj Sadar Police Station.

The victim's husband Ramzan Molla said he and his son had left for work in the morning. His daughter-in-law went to attend an exam.

Their neighbours noticed the body first and informed police.

The body was sent to Narayanganj General Hospital morgue for an autopsy, said the OC.

Shihab Ahmed, sub-inspector of Narayanganj Sadar Police Station, said the wrists and ankles of the body were severed.

Police primarily suspect that it was a murder, the OC said, adding that a case would be filed in this connection.

Impasse finally clearing up

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(AIIB) has expressed interest to be a co-financier, he said, adding that finance would not be an issue for the project.

Physical work is expected to start in late 2025, he added.

In March 2013, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved a Public-Private Partnership project to build an expressway. The government signed a deal with the ADB the following month to carry out a feasibility study and make detailed designs at a cost of Tk 97.87 crore.

Over two years later, the study was placed before Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who agreed to build the expressway that would have elevated sections. The estimated construction cost was \$2.5 billion, sources said.

Meanwhile in October 2016, the Bangladesh Bridge Authority took an initiative to build an elevated expressway between the two cities. Later, the road transport and bridges minister ordered the authority to drop the initiative.

But the prime minister in October 2019 ordered cancellation of the expressway project. She asked for construction of service lanes on either side of the four-lane highway, sources said.

In October 2021, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs formally scrapped the plan for the expressway. Abdus Sabur, then chief engineer of the Roads and Highways Division, told this correspondent that the prime minister was in favour of

building a high-speed rail system along the highway.

In 2017, Bangladesh Railway carried out a feasibility study and made a detailed design at a cost of Tk 110 crore.

The prime minister approved a 224.64-km long Dhaka-Narayanganj-Cumilla-Feni-Chattoogram route which would bring down the travel time from the capital to the port city to just 55-73 minutes. This will cost Tk 93,350.93 crore.

But the government decided to go slow because the cost was too high.

Asked about the delays, RHD Chief Engineer Md Ishaque said, "A major policy decision was involved here. It is not possible for me to comment on it."

Anti-bullying guidelines issued

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High Court asked the authorities concerned to formulate an anti-bullying policy following the death of Arity Adhikary, a ninth grader of Vigarunnisa Noon School and College, in December 2018, the official said.

Arity died by suicide after teachers insulted her parents in front of her because she had cheated in an exam, said family members and police.

Brac University Professor Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed said, "Formulating a policy is not enough, its proper implementation is very important to fight against bullying and ragging."

Bullying, prevalent at educational institutions, goes mostly unreported due to victims fearing they might not get help from authorities. This leads to consequences such as trouble concentrating on studies, absenteeism, and more.

A Unicef study in 2019 said one in every four students was bullied by

their peers in Bangladesh.

WHAT IS IN THE POLICY?

Hitting, slapping, kicking, pushing, punching, and spitting on others are included in the definition of physical bullying.

Meanwhile, cyberbullying and cyber ragging mean demeaning someone by writing or posting indecent content about them on social media.

Deliberately touching or attempting to touch one's private parts, offensive signs and gestures, and forceful stripping of clothes are considered sexual bullying and ragging.

Insulting and humiliating someone based on their race, caste, tribe, religion, profession, skin colour, and region are also considered bullying.

Furthermore, the policy proposes setting up CCTV cameras, installing complaint boxes, and observing anti-bullying and anti-ragging

days on campuses. Meanwhile, it directs hall authorities to inform the higher authorities about any incident of ragging and bullying or else they will be held responsible for their inaction.

If any member of the government and other bodies, teacher, non-teacher, official or student of an educational institution are found directly or indirectly involved in such incidents, disciplinary action will be taken against them according to the prevailing laws and rules, while action under the CrPC can be taken if necessary.

The complainant will need to submit an application to the head of the institution, after which an investigation committee must be formed.

The probe team will then need to submit a report within seven days, and the head of the institution will then submit it to the higher authorities and take the next steps.

Arsonists, killers

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The PM was speaking at a civic reception accorded to her at Ritz-Carlton hotel in Washington DC on Tuesday.

Hasina, now in the US on a six-day visit, said the BNP Jamaat nexus took Bangladesh on the verge of destruction during its rule.

She said her government has been able to put Bangladesh on the "highway to development" through hard work over the last 14 years.

"Bangladesh will keep moving forward. Bangladesh will be built as the developed and prosperous Golden Bangladesh of the Father of the Nation. And that is our aim."

Hasina said the government has built a digital Bangladesh.

"Taking advantage of the digital Bangladesh, they [BNP and Jamaat] are spreading lies against us. Please don't pay heed to their propaganda," she told her audience.

The socio-economic development of the country was possible as the Awami League continued to be in power, she said.

The premier said the AL is a pro-people party and it has always worked for establishing the rights of the masses. "The Awami League always works for the welfare of the people. The fate of the people changes whenever the party assumes office."

She said Bangladesh has become a developing country and the government is determined to build the country as a developed and prosperous one.

Hasina said Bangladeshi expatriates have made great contributions to the development of the country.

She requested them to send remittance home through legal channels as the government has announced a 2.5 percent incentive for this.

The PM said the wheels of the country's economy were running amid the global economic crisis caused by Covid-19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war due to the government's timely measures.

Stating that poverty rate has fallen

to 18.7 percent and hardcore poverty rate to 5.6 percent, she said there will be no extreme poverty in the country.

Hasina said the government is giving free houses with land under the Ashrayan project to the homeless and landless people across the country following the footsteps of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

She said the government has already given houses to 35 lakh people under the housing scheme and ensured their livelihoods.

"No one will remain homeless in the country," she said, adding that 60,000 more houses are being built for this purpose.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, among others, was present at the event moderated by Bangladesh Ambassador to the US Muhammad Imran.

Buddha Purnima

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Ideals and philosophy of Buddha can play an important role in establishing peace in society, removing unrest and intolerance from the world and saving people from moral degradation, he added.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in her message, said overcoming greed, hatred and lust, Gautama Buddha preached the messages of non-violence, friendship and compassion throughout his life for the peace, harmony and welfare of mankind.

"In today's world, it is necessary to follow the teachings of Buddha in order to suppress the brute force maddened by violence, prevent the degradation of values and build a peaceful society," the premier added.

The day is a public holiday. The celebrations usually start with lighting of lamps and hoisting of the national and religious flags atop the Mohabihar and chanting of sacred verses from Tripitaka.

The Buddhist devotees are expected to offer various gift items, including fruits, flowers and candles, to statues of Lord Buddha throughout the day.

258m needed urgent food aid in 2022: UN

AFP, Paris

Some 258 million people needed emergency food aid last year because of conflict, economic shocks and climate disasters, a UN report said yesterday, a sharp rise from 193 million the previous year.

"More than a quarter of a billion people are now facing acute levels of hunger, and some are on the brink of starvation. That's unconscionable," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

It was "a stinging indictment of humanity's failure to make progress... to end hunger, and achieve food security and improved nutrition for all," he said.

In 2022, 258 million people faced high levels of acute food insecurity in 58 countries or territories, up from 193 million in 53 countries the previous year, the report said.

More than 40 percent of those lived in the conflict-torn countries of Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Yemen, it said.

This overall figure of people in dire need of food aid has now increased for the fourth consecutive year in a row.

The report categorised them in a situation of "crisis", "emergency" or --worst-- "catastrophe".

In this last category, 376,000 people were on the brink of starvation last year, it said.

More than half of them lived in Somalia, a nation experiencing a devastating drought linked to climate change.

An international group of climate scientists, the World Weather Attribution (WWA), said last month that human-caused climate change had made agricultural drought in the Horn of Africa "about 100 times more likely".