



2 US Congressmen to sit with political parties today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Two US Congressmen -- Rich McCormick and Ed Case -- will be holding meetings with major political parties today in Dhaka, including the ruling Awami League, the opposition BNP, and the Jatiya Party.

Republican Congressman Richard McCormick from Georgia's 6th Congressional District arrived yesterday, while Democrat Ed Case, who represents Hawaii's First Congressional District, is scheduled to arrive early today.

They will hold meetings with politicians today and also call on Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen at the ministry, a politician who is invited to the meeting told The Daily Star.

A US embassy official said this is not a state visit, so the embassy is not engaged with the activities of the two Congressmen.

Tomorrow, they are scheduled to visit the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar.

The visit is being considered significant ahead of the country's general elections, as Washington has already put considerable pressure on Bangladesh to hold free and fair elections due late this year or early next year.

On May 24, the US announced a visa policy for Bangladesh, saying it would not issue visas to those who undermine the democratic election process.

As things stand, there is a stalemate over election-time government, with the AL wanting polls under the current regime and the opposition calling for an interim government.

Awami League lawmaker Nahim Razzaq said, "It's good that the US Congressmen are coming to Bangladesh. This will help them better understand Bangladesh's situation and improve bilateral relations."

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Omen said the main purpose of the visit of the US Congressmen is to visit Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar as the US is the largest donor to the refugees. "The Congressmen will see how their taxpayers' money is being spent."

"It will be good if they provide humanitarian assistance for the Rohingyas because their monthly food ration has recently been cut down to \$8 from \$12," he told this correspondent.



This is the state of the Majed Sarder road in the capital's Bangshal after water from the open drains flowed onto it during waterlogging, owing to the rain over the past few days. Once the water dried up, all that is left on the road is pure sewage, making it difficult for transport or people to move without slipping. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Hawaii seeks answers as fire death toll climbs to 80

AFP, Lahaina

The death toll from a horrific wildfire in Hawaii climbed to 80 as residents confronted the devastation and criticisms grew Saturday over the emergency response.

Over 2,200 structures were damaged or destroyed in the fire, the Federal Emergency Management Agency said, estimating that it would cost some \$5.5 billion to rebuild affected communities.

Hawaiian authorities said they were opening a probe into the handling of the fire as a congresswoman from the state's Big Island acknowledged that officials had underestimated the dangers.

In the historic resort city of Lahaina on the island of Maui, resident Anthony Garcia said the fire had gutted the apartment he was renting and destroyed all his belongings and memories.

"It took everything, everything! It's heartbreaking," the 80-year-old California native, who has lived in Lahaina for three decades, told AFP. "It's a lot to take in."

The town of 12,000, once the proud home of the Hawaiian royal family, has been reduced to ruins, its lively hotels and restaurants turned to ashes.

A majestic banyan tree that has been the centre of the community for 150 years

has been scarred by the flames, but still stands upright, its branches denuded of green and its sooty trunk transformed into an awkward skeleton.

Hawaii's Attorney General Anne Lopez said her office would examine "critical decision-making and standing policies leading up to, during and after the wildfires on Maui and Hawaii islands this week."

Maui County officials on Friday, revised the death toll to 80 and Governor Josh Green warned that the number of fatalities was sure to rise further.

Late Friday, Maui County officials revised the death toll to 80 and Governor Josh Green warned that the number of fatalities was sure to rise further. Over 1,400 people were in emergency evacuation shelters.

"We underestimated the lethality, the quickness of fire," Hawaii Congresswoman Jill Tokuda told CNN yesterday morning.

Maui suffered numerous power outages during the crisis, preventing many residents from receiving emergency

alerts on their cellphones -- something, Tokuda said, officials should have prepared for.

"We have got to make sure that we do better," she added.

The fires follow other extreme weather events in North America this summer, with record-breaking wildfires still burning across Canada and a major heat wave baking the US southwest.

Europe and parts of Asia have also endured soaring temperatures, with major fires and floods wreaking havoc. Scientists have said global warming caused by carbon emissions is contributing to extreme weather.

For some of those who made it back into Lahaina, there was a momentary sense of elation when they tearfully reconnected with neighbours they feared might not have gotten out alive.

"You made it!" cried Chyna Cho, as she embraced Amber Langdon amid the ruins. "I was trying to find you."

For some of the luckiest, there was joy -- albeit tempered by the scale of the tragedy that counts among the worst natural disasters to hit the state of Hawaii.

"I just couldn't believe it," Keith Todd told AFP after finding his home intact.

"I'm so grateful, but at the same time it's so devastating."

Fears of diseases grow as waters begin to recede

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floods on August 4. As the heavy shower continued, much of Chattogram division came to a standstill in the following days.

Meanwhile in Bandarban, roads to Lama, Ruma and Thanchi upazilas are still closed because of mudslides.

Residents are still left without safe water, electricity, and cellular networks.

But rapid erosion of the banks of the Sangu river, which flows through Bandarban town, is wreaking havoc in several neighbourhoods.

A two-storey building and seven small houses crumbled into the river in the last two days. Besides, over 100 huts on the banks are still under water, reports our correspondent in the district.

Officials have asked residents of Ujani Para, Madham Para, Marma Bazar, Barishaila Para, Puran Bridge Para, Islampur and anybody who lives on the banks of the Bokshi Khal not to return home because of the risks of erosion, said Purnochandra Mutsuddi, assistant director of the fire service office in Bandarban.

At least 50 huts and buildings may get washed away by the river anytime, said officials.

Mudslides killed at least 10 people and affected around 75,000 in Bandarban Sadar upazila, according to the district administration.

The floods have also damaged 8,253 hectares of farmland, officials said.

The residents of Bandarban town were still dependent on dry food and safe water provided by different government agencies yesterday as access to drinking water had not been restored.

DISEASE OUTBREAK LOOMS

In Chattogram's Satkania upazila, Sarwar Uddin Ahmed, former union parishad chairman of Amilaish Union Parishad, said many children and elderly in the area had contracted

cold-related diseases.

Abdullah Al Noman Begh, former chairman of Dohazari Union Parishad in Chandanaish upazila, said people of his community were already suffering from diarrhoea, stomach problems and skin diseases.

Afrin Sultana, emergency medical officer at Satkania upazila health complex, said most of the people arriving at the medical facility over the last few days had injuries they received when they tripped over something on flooded streets.

Chattogram Civil Surgeon Ilias Chowdhury said health workers had the necessary preparations in case there is an outbreak of waterborne diseases.

RANGAMATI

At least 69 primary schools, and over 39,000 people in 199 villages had been affected by the flood in four upazilas of the district, officials said.

Deputy Commissioner Mosharraf Hossain Khan said 380 tonnes of rice and Tk 7 lakh were distributed among residents of the town. But officials have not been able to reach the remote areas.

The extent of damage to lives and property in several upazilas remains unknown, officials said.

COX'S BAZAR

Fazlul Karim Saidee, chairman of Chakaria Upazila Parishad, said paddy and rice stored in people's houses had been almost completely ruined.

Besides, villages in Shaharbeel, Badarkahli, Konakhali and Demusha unions are still flooded, he said, adding that hundreds of residents were living in shelters for over five days, and they were solely dependent on relief provided by the government and NGOs.

Earthen houses that are common in Chakaria have been washed away or damaged beyond repair in most villages, said Helal Uddin, chairman of Fasiakhali Union Parishad.

Death toll in IS attack on Syria army bus rises to 33: monitor

AFP, Beirut

An attack by Islamic State group jihadists on Syrian government forces in the war-torn country's east has killed 33 soldiers, a monitor said yesterday, revising an earlier toll of 26 deaths.

The shooting Thursday evening on an army bus was the extremist group's deadliest attack on government forces this year, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Despite losing their last piece of territory in Syria in 2019, IS has maintained hideouts in the vast Syrian desert from which it has carried out ambushes and hit-and-run attacks.

"The death toll from the army bus attack rose to 33 soldiers," said Rami Abdel Rahman, who heads the British-based monitoring group which relies on a wide network of sources inside Syria.

The jihadists surrounded the bus in the desert near Mayadeen, in Deir Ezzor province, and opened fire, the Observatory reported on Friday.

IS claimed the attack later Friday, saying its fighters had carried out an ambush "on two military buses", targeting them "with heavy weapons and rocket-propelled grenades" and setting one on fire, according to a statement from the jihadists' Amaq news agency.

Syrian state news agency SANA said the "terrorist attack" had caused a number of military casualties, citing an army source.

Abdel Rahman said IS "has recently been escalating its deadly military attacks... aiming to cause as many deaths as possible".

By doing so, the jihadists are trying to show that IS "is still active and powerful despite the targeting of its leaders", he told AFP.

Last week, IS announced the death of its leader Abu al Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi, who it said was

killed in clashes in northwestern Syria, and named a successor.

IS members in recent weeks have increased their attacks in Syria's north and northeast.

Earlier this week, 10 Syrian soldiers and pro-government fighters were killed in an IS attack in the former jihadist stronghold of Raqa province, the Observatory said.

Syria's war broke after President Bashar al-Assad's government crushed peaceful protests in 2011. It has since drawn in foreign powers and global jihadists.

The conflict has killed more than half a million people and driven half of the country's pre-war population from their homes.

Uncapped Tanzid

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A major talking point was Mahmudullah Riyad's potential inclusion based on experience but the BCB left the veteran out as they opted for Afif Hossain and Shamim Hossain for the lower middle-order role.

Shamim, who is yet to make his ODI debut, might just get the nod owing to Afif's underwhelming form in recent matches.

Off-spinner Sheikh Mahedi made a return to the national fold after a one-year hiatus and will feature for the Tigers in a 50-over game after a gap of more than two years.

The choice for a second left-arm spin option was between Nasum Ahmed and Taijul Islam but the former got the nod, with Taijul being named as a standby option.

The most stable department, the pace brigade, had no surprises as all five expected candidates—Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, Shoriful Islam, Ebadot Hossain, and Mustafizur Rahman—made the cut.

Bangladesh play their first Asia Cup match on August 31 against Sri Lanka in Kandy.

WHO issues 'high risk' alert

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meaning 12 lakh bags per month.

"However, not all pharmaceutical companies are currently capable of producing such a substantial amount of saline ... That is why instructions have been given, if necessary, to import saline from abroad."

Injectable saline solution, an essential fluid used for treating dengue patients, has become scarce in retail drug stores in Dhaka due to the high demand.

Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) officials said they would sit with the pharmaceuticals and importers in this regard.

"Local companies are still meeting the entire demand; they said they would be able to fulfil nearly the entire demand [in the future]. But we are preparing for imports and boost the stock [to tackle future needs] if dengue cases rise further," Maj Gen Mohammad Yousuf, director general of the DGDA, told The Daily Star yesterday.

WHO'S ASSESSMENT

The WHO's assessment of Bangladesh's dengue situation was published on its website under the "Disease Outbreak News" category on Friday.

The organisation has called for efforts to control the mosquito vector population and minimise individual exposure by using mosquito repellents and wearing long-sleeved clothes.

The outbreak, which has escalated rapidly since late June, has seen a total of 80,074 confirmed cases and 373 related deaths between January 1 and August 11, according to the UN health agency. The cases were reported from all 64 districts in the country.

In July alone, 43,854 cases and 204 deaths were reported, accounting for 63 percent of the total cases and 62 percent of the deaths. The sharp increase in numbers, compared to the past five years, emphasises the gravity of the ongoing outbreak.

"The higher incidence of dengue is taking place in the context of an unusual episodic amount of rainfall, combined with high temperatures and high humidity, which have resulted in an increased mosquito population throughout Bangladesh," WHO said.

It called for integrated vector management to control mosquito populations and reduce human-vector contact, including removal of potential breeding sites, reducing vector populations, and minimising individual exposure.

Specific actions involve vector control strategies for larvae and adult mosquitoes and source reduction, especially of water storage practices, and include covering, draining and cleaning household water storage containers on a weekly basis, using insecticide-treated nets and indoor space spraying (logging).

Experts, meanwhile, said that the WHO's news on the outbreak highlights the urgency for policymakers to act more proactively.

"This is the first time WHO has issued an alert regarding dengue in Bangladesh. There is a message for the policymakers in the alert. It highlights the need for a coordinated and multi-sectoral immediate approach," Dr Mahmudur Rahman, former director at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He added that the measures taken by different government bodies are not adequate or effective enough.

The health expert urged the government to arrange emergency funds for research and arrange other preventive measures to control the outbreak.

Govt misses

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"It seems the ministries didn't get the memo about savings," said Selim Raihan, a professor at the University of Dhaka's economics department.

To make the austerity stance work, coordination, institutional strength, political commitment and accountability were needed.

"But it was completely lacking.

Why was there no quarterly or half-yearly monitoring at the ministry level to see if they were adhering to the austerity measures?" said Raihan, also the executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling.

MEDICAL ADMISSION

CID arrests 12 over question leak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has arrested 12 people, including seven doctors, in connection with leaking question papers of the centralised medical college admission test.

CID media wing additional police superintendent, Azad Rahman, confirmed the matter to The Daily Star last night.

CID Chief Additional IGP Mohammad Ali Mia will brief the media about the incident at the CID Headquarters in Malibagh today.

Met office forecasts rain in all divisions

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Meteorology Department forecast light to moderate rain or thundershowers along with temporary gusts of wind in all eight divisions of the country in 24 hours commencing at 9:00am yesterday.

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers along with temporary gusts of wind may occur at most places in Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Khulna, and Sylhet divisions and also in many places of Barishal and Chattogram divisions in this period, it said.

Some places may experience moderately heavy to heavy precipitation, with day and night temperatures remaining nearly unchanged.

The country's maximum temperature on Friday was recorded at 36.0 degrees Celsius in Rajshahi, while yesterday's minimum temperature was 23.0 degrees Celsius in Cox's Bazar.

The highest rainfall in the last 24 hours till 6:00am yesterday was recorded at 85mm in Rangpur.

The sun set at 6:35pm yesterday and rose at 5:33am today in the capital.

TCB's August sale starts today

BSS, Dhaka

The state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) is set to start selling essential commodities at subsidised prices today for the month of August.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi will formally inaugurate the operation at the west-side road of the Town Hall Market in the city's Mohammadpur.

Some 1 crore cardholder families would be able to buy subsidised lentil, edible

oil, and rice nationwide, said TCB spokesperson Humayun Kabir yesterday.

Beneficiaries will find these items at their designated areas or designated distributors in their respective areas.

Each cardholder is eligible to buy two litres of soybean oil, two kg of lentil, one kg of sugar, and five kg of rice.

The Directorate General of Food began selling subsidised rice last month, with each family purchasing a maximum of 5kg of rice.