

Hasina, Biden have candid conversation

Momen says

PORIMOL PALMA

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her daughter Saima Wazed had a candid conversation with US President Joe Biden in New Delhi yesterday.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told The Daily Star how they came across Biden.

“We were going out of the main exhibition hall. I found Secretary of State Antony Blinken walking slowly and Biden talking to a leader,” Momen said, adding that he then approached Blinken and told him that Hasina would like to speak to Biden.

“Antony said, ‘why not?’”

“The prime minister told Biden that the people of Bangladesh are her only thoughts. She would like to do everything for the welfare of the people,” Momen said.

In response, Biden told her that he knows that she was working very well and made significant socio-economic progress.

“Our prime minister invited Biden to visit Bangladesh. Biden then asked ‘what is the good time?’. She said December, January and February are our winter, which is like spring in the US. Biden then said he would find time for visiting Bangladesh.”

Fake experts driving praises of govt achievements

AFP, Dhaka

Hundreds of articles praising Bangladeshi government policies apparently by independent experts have appeared in national and international media but the authors have questionable credentials, fake photos, and may not even exist, an AFP investigation has found.

Commentators say it is evidence of a sustained campaign of disinformation by unknown actors ahead of elections due by the end of January but appears to be intended to benefit the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Such articles have been published by Chinese state news agency Xinhua, leading media across Asia, and quoted by the South Asia Brief of the Washington-based Foreign Policy magazine.

Rights groups and foreign powers, including the United States, have long raised concerns over efforts by Hasina’s government to silence criticism and stamp out political dissent.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



US President Joe Biden takes a selfie with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her daughter Saima Wazed, chairperson of the National Advisory Committee on Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, on the sidelines of the G20 Summit at Bharat Mandapam Convention Centre in New Delhi yesterday morning.

PHOTO: PTI

Everything was shaking violently

Says Bangladeshi tourist in Morocco

JAMIL MAHMUD

Nasir Uddin Badal was having dinner at a restaurant in Marrakesh city of Morocco when the devastating earthquake struck the African country on Friday night (local time).

The 52-year-old Bangladeshi businessman first noticed the plate and cutlery on his table shaking at the eatery near the popular tourist spot Jemaa el-Fnaa square.

“Then it felt like the floor and everything else were shaking violently,” he said, adding that he immediately ran to an open space close to the square.

Within moments, thousands of people, many of whom are tourists from across the world, gathered at the square. A team of police arrived minutes later and asked people to calm down and not leave the square, said Nasir, a resident of Moghbazar in Dhaka.

He arrived in Morocco on August 30 as a tourist, and was scheduled to leave the country today.

“My hotel is a five- or six-minute walk from the Jemaa el-Fnaa square. But the police would not allow anyone to leave. And they kept asking people to remain outdoors.

“After the tremor stopped, sirens from ambulances and fire trucks ripped

through the midnight air. I tried getting my belongings from the hotel around 12:45am, over one and a half hours after the quake. But the hotel employees requested me to stay outside.

“While walking to the hotel, I saw the broken minaret of a mosque. There were large cracks on buildings. I spent the whole night out in the open. The hotel staffers let me in at the break of day.”

Nasir boarded a train around 6:50am and left for Casablanca.

The Bangladesh Embassy in Morocco said Bangladeshis in Morocco were unharmed.

“To our great relief, we found all Bangladeshi expatriates safe,” Ummul Husnaen, chargé d’affaires at the Bangladesh Embassy in Rabat, said in a WhatsApp message to this correspondent.

She added that the embassy was in touch with the Bangladeshis.

Around 50 Bangladeshis living in Morocco are enlisted with the embassy. Two of them are businessmen, one is a computer engineer and several others have blue-collar jobs.

According to the official, the capital city of Rabat is several hundred kilometres away from the epicentre.

The death toll from the earthquake crossed the 1,000 mark.

86pc DSA cases pending disposal: law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 7,001 cases have been filed under the Digital Security Act so far, and 5,995 or 86 percent of those cases are still awaiting disposal, said Law Minister Anisul Huq at a conference in the capital yesterday.

“When we observed that the law was being abused, we sat down to discuss how it could be amended,” the minister said while speaking at the fourth broadcast conference of the Broadcast Journalist Centre at the Bangla Academy Auditorium.

His comments come at a time when there are serious criticisms and reservations about the government’s decision to enact a new law – Cyber Security Act – replacing the controversial Digital Security Act.

The law minister defended keeping a provision for the police to conduct arrests without a warrant in the new bill.

Section 42 of the bill allows law enforcers to raid, search premises, or arrest persons based on a suspicion that a crime is being committed or about to be committed, or evidence will be destroyed. This provision is a replication of Section 43 of the Digital Security Act.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 3

Patient dies falling from hospital building

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

An 80-year-old female patient died after falling from the fourth floor of M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital in Dinajpur early yesterday, said police.

Amena Khatun, 80, was wife of the late Afsar Ali. She was from Shalandar (Noyapara) village under Parbatipur upazila.

Farid Hossain, officer-in-charge of Dinajpur Kotwali Police Station, said the woman was admitted to the female medicine ward on the fourth floor of the hospital for old age complications on September 5.

Mosreba Khatun, her daughter-in-law, was her attendant at the hospital.

Talking to the reporters, she said she woke up at around 3:00am and saw that her mother-in-law was not in her bed.

Later, after frantically searching for her, she was found on the slab of a drain on the ground. She was taken to the hospital’s emergency room, but the duty doctor pronounced her dead.

The woman either accidentally fell or jumped, according to the police.

Police sent her body to the hospital morgue for autopsy, said the OC.

7 arrested for severing youth’s wrist

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion yesterday arrested seven people for severing the wrist of a young man in the capital’s Mohammadpur.

The arrestees are – Ahmed Khan, 22, Hasan alias Gutti Hasan, 24, Hanif Hossain Joy, 24, Ramzan, 23, Raju, 19, Rafidul Islam Rana alias Rafat, 23, and Tusher Hawlader, 23.

The criminals filmed themselves publicly severing the wrist of a young man and uploaded it online, said Rab Legal and Media Wing Director Commander Khandaker Al Moin.

They were identified from CCTV footage, tracked down, and picked up from different areas of Dhaka and Bagerhat, the official added.

Jubo League man stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A Jubo League activist was hacked to death at a family arbitration that was called to settle a land dispute in Rangpur Sadar upazila on Friday night.

Rezaul Karim, 28, a resident of Lahirihat village, was an activist of Chandanpat union unit Jubo League. He was also the former Chhatra League president of the same unit.

According to locals, Rezaul and his relatives sat at a family arbitration to settle an ongoing land dispute amongst themselves on Friday afternoon. There, Rezaul and his cousin Rabbi got into a heated argument. At one point, Rabbi took out a sharp object and hit Rezaul on the head in front of all the members of the arbitration.

He was rushed to Rangpur Medical College Hospital, where he died undergoing treatment at around 7:30pm.

The police sent his body to the hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Macron due in town today Morocco quake kills over 1,300

FROM PAGE 1

both in economic and strategic terms to the European nation.

The visit is the first by a French president in 33 years.

Macron would be flying in the evening from New Delhi, where he is attending the G20 summit. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who will be returning from New Delhi in the afternoon, will receive him at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

She will host an official dinner in honour of Macron at a city hotel tonight. Tomorrow morning, he will pay homage to the memory of Bangabandhu at Dhanmondi 32 and visit the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum.

The two premiers will then hold a bilateral meeting at the Prime Minister’s Office.

Why is the visit important?

Over the last few years, the trade relations between France and Bangladesh have improved significantly.

Bangladesh’s first-ever satellite, Bangabandhu-1, was made by the French company Thales. During Macron’s visit, the two countries may sign a deal for the second satellite.

Thales manufactured the Bangabandhu-1 satellite, but it was launched into space by Elon Musk’s SpaceX.

“However, this time, Thales will both manufacture and launch the satellite. So far this has been the discussion,” a foreign ministry official told The Daily Star yesterday.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said Bangladesh agreed to buy 10 planes, including two cargoes, from Airbus, a European multinational in which France has a major stake.

Bangladesh also welcomes the French proposal of setting up a satellite manufacturing unit in Bangladesh.

“These are big deals,” the foreign ministry official said, adding that France has also been working on some important projects including airport radar systems in Bangladesh.

According to the French embassy in Dhaka, bilateral trade has gone from Euro 210 million in 1990 to Euro 4.9 billion today.

France is Bangladesh’s fifth-largest export destination. French companies

are now involved in various sectors including engineering, energy, aerospace and water.

Until now, France has approved 1.57 billion Euros as loans to Bangladesh and 31 million Euros as grants to support a total of 15 projects in key sectors including water and sanitation, according to the French embassy.

“We are thrilled to see a growing interest from both sides to enhance business, in particular, to build on French technology and know-how to support the move from Digital Bangladesh to Smart Bangladesh. The upcoming visit of Emmanuel Macron will be the occasion to concretise some projects and boost further economic relations,” it said.

Macron will continue to implement France’s strategy in the Indo-Pacific region.

“It will also be an opportunity to deepen our bilateral relationship with a country that is undergoing rapid economic growth, with France’s support and seeking to diversify its partnerships,” the embassy said on its official Facebook page.

Momen said France has taken the Loss and Damage initiative to support the climate-affected countries. Bangladesh, being at the forefront of climate victims, seeks the Loss and Damage initiative to be operationalised.

“We need a lot of funding for adaptation activities but the developed countries are yet to make functional the initiative. We would request the French president to take the initiative,” Momen said.

France, a leader in the EU and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has great weight in the international forums.

“We would seek their support for a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis,” Momen told reporters last week.

A foreign policy analyst said despite France being a powerful country both at the UN and EU, it has an independent foreign policy, which is not lecturing or pressuring other countries.

“France has a moderate way of talking about human rights and democracy. This is something that Bangladesh would like at a time when the US is pressuring Bangladesh for these issues,” he said, asking not to be named.

FROM PAGE 1

years,” said Bill McGuire, professor emeritus at Britain’s University College London.

“Where destructive earthquakes are rare, buildings are simply not constructed robustly enough... so many collapse, resulting in high casualties,” Bill added.

Updated interior ministry figures yesterday showed the quake killed at least 1,305 people, the vast majority in Al-Haouz, the epicentre, and Taroudant provinces.

Another 1,832 people were injured, including 1,220 in a critical condition, the ministry said.

Civil defence Colonel Hicham Choukri who is heading relief operations told state television

that the epicentre and strength of the earthquake have created “an exceptional emergency situation”.

Footage on social media showed parts of a minaret collapsed on Jemaa el-Fna square in the historic city.

An AFP correspondent said hundreds of people flocking to the square to spend the night for fear of aftershocks, some with blankets while others slept on the ground.

Houda Outassaf, a local resident, said she was “still in shock” after feeling the earth shake beneath her feet – and losing relatives.

“I have at least 10 members of my family who died... I can hardly believe it, as I was with them no more than two days ago,” she said.

The interior ministry said

climate change may drive 13.3 million people from their usual habitats by 2050.

“Though Bangladesh has little scope for mitigation, we have undertaken many transformative measures to tackle perilous impacts of climate change consistent with implementing the Paris Agreement, and achieving the SDGs,” Hasina said.

The PM said she had launched the Ashrayan project in 1997, under which nearly 840,000 landless and homeless families have been rehabilitated with houses and land free of cost till August this year.

“Our target is to have Bangladesh free of homeless and landless people.”

Hasina appreciated Indian premier Modi’s initiative for Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. Bangladesh joined the platform in July 2021.

Earlier, the Bangladesh premier was formally welcomed by G20 Chairman Modi at the opening session of the G20 summit.

GLOBAL BIOFUELS ALLIANCE

LAUNCHED

Yesterday, Hasina joined the leaders of seven other countries, including US President Joe Biden and Indian PM Modi, in launching the Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA) to help cut down on the world’s dependence on fossil fuel that

authorities have “mobilised all the necessary resources to intervene and help the affected areas”.

The regional blood transfusion centre in Marrakesh called on residents to donate blood for those injured.

Foreign leaders expressed their condolences and many offered assistance, including Israel with which Morocco normalised relations in 2020.

Neighbour and regional rival Algeria announced it was suspending a two-year-old ban on all Moroccan flights through its airspace to enable aid deliveries and medical evacuations.

US President Joe Biden said he was “deeply saddened by the loss of life and devastation”.

drives global warming.

Modi urged G20 countries to join the GBA initiative with a plea to take ethanol blending with petrol globally to 20 percent, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

The GBA is aimed at facilitating cooperation and intensifying the use of sustainable biofuels across sectors, including transportation.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni were present, among other global leaders, at the launch of the GBA on the sidelines of the G20 summit.

Besides India, the initiating GBA members include Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Italy, Mauritius, South Africa, the UAE and the US, while Canada and Singapore are observer countries.

HASINA JOINS ‘ONE FAMILY’

SESSION

Speaking at the G20 summit on the theme of “One Family”, Hasina yesterday asked the G20 to continue providing duty-free, quota-free market access and extending the unilateral tariff preferences for countries graduating from LDCs to developing nations.

She also called for the extension of TRIPS (Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights)

Chinese leader Xi Jinping expressed “deep grief for the victims” and hope that “the Moroccan government and people will be able to overcome the impact of this disaster”.

Pope Francis expressed “his profound solidarity with those who are touched in the flesh and heart by this tragedy”.

In 2004, at least 628 people were killed and 926 injured when a quake hit Al Hoceima in northeastern Morocco, and in 1960 a magnitude 6.7 quake in Agadir killed more than 12,000.

The 7.3 magnitude El Asnam earthquake in Algeria killed 2,500 people and left at least 300,000 homeless in 1980.

waivers for a significant period after the graduation to ensure smooth and sustainable transition, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

PM MEETS THREE PRESIDENTS

On the sidelines of the G20 summit, Hasina yesterday held bilateral talks with the presidents of the UAE, South Korea and Argentina, according to the Bangladesh foreign ministry.

UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan lauded Hasina for ensuring Bangladesh’s remarkable development and assured her of more investment in Bangladesh from UAE.

In her meeting with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, the PM appreciated South Korea for contributing to Bangladesh’s economy through investment.

Both the leaders agreed to further deepen cooperation in culture, trade and commerce and people-to-people contact.

Argentine President Alberto Fernandez said Bangladeshi people have won the heart of the Argentine people through their support for Argentine football.

Hasina thanked the Argentine president for opening an embassy in Dhaka and expressed her willingness to strengthen bilateral cooperation in different sectors including sports, trade, agriculture and agro-processing.