

GAZA CRISIS

Making all-out effort to stop fighting top priority

Says Chinese envoy

STAR REPORT

The Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen has said his country believes that it is a top priority to make all efforts to stop the latest fighting in the Middle East as soon as possible, prevent it from spreading and avoid further deterioration of the situation.

Palestine, like Israel, has a right to statehood, and the root cause of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East was the failure to redress the historical injustice suffered by the Palestinian people, said the envoy, according to a press release issued by the Chinese embassy in Dhaka.

Yao said it is imperative to follow the international humanitarian law, make every effort to ensure the safety of civilians, open up a humanitarian rescue and assistance passage as quickly as possible, and prevent a severe humanitarian disaster.

The statement was issued after Yao met Palestinian Ambassador to Bangladesh Yousef Ramadan, during which they exchanged views on the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas.

He said the question of Palestine is at the heart of the Middle East issue and a wound that keeps being torn open in today's world.

Yao stressed that on the question of Palestine, China will continue to stand on the side of peace, justice, international law, shared aspirations of the majority of countries in the world, and human conscience.

He said the UN should play its due role in resolving the question of Palestine and that the UN Security Council needs to shoulder important responsibilities for this, build international consensus as quickly as possible and take real measures to that end.

The special envoy of the Chinese government on the Middle East issue will soon visit relevant countries in the region and make active efforts to facilitate a cessation of violence and de-escalate the situation, he added.



A part of the gathering at a “youth rally” in front of the Awami League headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday. Jubo League, youth body of the ruling AL, organised the event protesting the “terror and anarchy of BNP-Jamaat”. Story on page 14.

Take measures to protect rivers

PM instructs all concerned; inaugurates re-dredging schemes for 430 small rivers, canals, water bodies

BSS, DHAKA

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked all concerned to take proper steps to protect rivers and other water resources in the country.

In the name of development schemes, rivers, canals, beels, and ponds are being filled up around the country, she said, terming it “a very heinous act”.

“We have to undertake development projects by maintaining the flow of the water bodies, ensuring their protection,” she said.

Hasina asked that at least one water reservoir be built for every development project site, stressing the need for harvesting rainwater during the monsoon.

The premier made the remarks while virtually inaugurating 80 development



schemes, including re-dredging 430 small rivers, canals, and water bodies and laying the foundation stone of 20 new development projects under the Ministry of Water Resources, from the Gano Bhaban.

At that time, she also inaugurated one community eye centre each at 65 upazila health complexes in 28 districts in the fourth phase of the government's initiative to set up an eye centre at every upazila across the country under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Since the Awami League assumed power in 1996, Hasina said her government has been attaching priority to saving rivers, haor-baor, khal-beel, and other water bodies, following in the footsteps of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The premier said she has been talking about dredging rivers to save them since returning to the country after six years of forced exile.

She said her government has purchased 41 dredgers since taking office to this end.

The premier also said dredging should be carried out at regular intervals, which is required to keep the natural flow of water bodies intact.

“We have to take steps to save our natural resources,” she said.

The prime Minister also unveiled the cover of a book titled “Joyjatra” featuring the development schemes implemented in the last 15 years on the occasion.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid Maleque and State Minister for Water Resources Ministry Zaheed Farooque also spoke at the event.

Two separate video documentaries on the activities of the health and family welfare and water resources ministries were also screened at the programme.

Jubo League leader shot dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A Jubo League leader was shot dead in Manirampur upazila of Jashore last morning.

The deceased, Uday Shankar, 48, of Manirampur's Panchakardi village, was the president of Jubo League's Nehalpur union unit.

He was also a lecturer at Nehalpur School and College and president of the managing committee of Tekerghat Girls' School.

According to locals and police, Uday Shankar was returning home from a market in Tekerhat around 7:30am when armed criminals shot him and fled the scene.



Later, villagers took him to Khulna Medical College Hospital, where he died soon after.

On information, Assistant Superintendent of Police Ashek Mahmud, local police, and senior officials of the district administration visited the spot.

Worker dies two days after steel mill blast

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A worker who suffered 100 percent burns in an explosion at a steel mill factory in Narayanganj's Siddhirganj died from his injuries yesterday after battling for his life for two days.

Mozammel Haque, 30, a worker at Sharmin Steel Ltd, who was being treated at the ICU of Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, died around 4:00pm, said Residential Surgeon Dr Toriqul Islam.

A total of five workers were injured in the blast on Saturday around 4:30 am, said Siddhirganj Police Station Officer-in-Charge Golam Mostofa.

“A blast in a gas pipeline caused the fire,” the OC added.

The four other injured workers – Saiful Islam, 30, Iqbal, Hossain, 25, Shoriful Islam, 26, and Md Jakaria, 20 – are being treated at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery with 60 percent, 30 percent, 57 percent and 35 percent burns respectively.

“Their conditions are critical,” said Dr Toriqul.

40 shanties gutted

UNB, Chattogram

At least 40 shanties were gutted in a slum in the Kalurghat area of Chattogram yesterday afternoon.

Abdul Razzak, deputy director of Chattogram Fire Service and Civil Defence, said the blaze started in the slum in the area under the jurisdiction of Chandgaon Police Station around 1:25pm.

On information, four fire engines from nearby stations rushed to the spot and brought the blaze under control after nearly one hour.

The reason behind the fire could be known immediately. No casualties were reported till 3:00pm.

Talks necessary for holding free, fair election

2.4m trapped, denied aid in Gaza

FROM PAGE 1

of the elections as the ruling Awami League and main opposition BNP are at loggerheads over the polls-time administration.

BNP has demanded the resignation of the prime minister and a caretaker administration on the grounds that free and fair elections are not possible under the current administration as the 2014 and 2018 polls were mired in allegations of irregularities.

The ruling Awami League, however, says it is determined to hold the elections under the current administration.

The joint mission of the US-based International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) suggested open and substantive dialogue among the political parties after their Dhaka visit.

The mission also suggested moderating rhetoric, protecting freedom of expression, ensuring an open civic space, commitment to nonviolence and creating conditions to allow all parties to engage in meaningful political competition.

The primary problem is the lack of constructive engagement among key political actors, and it could lead to increased tensions and significantly escalate violence.

The US has been intensely

speaking of free and fair elections in Bangladesh and is enforcing a visa policy that denies visas to those who are involved in vote rigging and intimidation and their immediate family. Earlier in 2021, the US also imposed sanctions on Rab and seven of its current and former officials.

Numerous US officials visited Bangladesh over the last two years.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and other high officials also called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in New York and Washington last month and spoke of elections.

Akhter, who arrived in Dhaka early yesterday, held meetings with Khandaker Masudul Alam, director general (North America) of the foreign ministry, at the state guest house Padma before calling on Masud. US Ambassador Peter Haas was also present.

The US embassy in its Facebook post said they discussed the strong multifaceted bilateral relationship and its many aspects including investment and trade, development partnership, the Middle East conflict, supporting Rohingya refugees and government efforts to ensure the people of Bangladesh cast their votes in free, fair and peaceful elections.

Masud said he raised the issue of

withdrawing sanctions on Rab.

“Through our legal firm, we have submitted our report to the US Treasury Department. Reforms of Rab will take time, but if sanctions on individual members of Rab are withdrawn, they can help hold violence-free elections,” he said.

On the Rohingya issue, Masud said Bangladesh wants to continue the tripartite initiative of Rohingya repatriation, which is the ultimate solution.

The US has some concerns about the safety and security of the Rohingya in Rakhine and the voluntariness, he said.

“We said we will not do anything that goes against their safety and security,” Masud said.

Asked if a discussion on the election with the US officials is not interference with the internal affairs of Bangladesh as the foreign ministry earlier said, Masud said it can be so if they make unwanted comments publicly.

“As a friend and development partner, we can discuss any issue of our mutual interest,” he said.

Akhter will visit Rohingya camps today and may meet with civil society groups before leaving Dhaka tomorrow.

FROM PAGE 1

The entire region was “on the verge of the abyss”, warned UN chief Antonio Guterres, as cross-border fire also intensified between Israel and the Lebanese Iran-backed Hezbollah group, which has warned of retaliation if Israeli forces move into Gaza.

In Gaza, there were scenes of panic, anger and despair all around, as Palestinians heeded Israeli warnings to vacate the north.

But the arrival of hundreds of thousands of people in the south was putting severe pressure on a place which had little resources to begin with and from where it is impossible to leave.

“No electricity, no water, no internet. I feel like I’m losing my humanity,” said Mona Abdel Hamid, 55, who fled Gaza City to Rafah in the south, where she is staying with strangers.

With Israeli-controlled crossings closed and Egypt also having shut the Rafah border in the south, Gazans are effectively trapped.

Any departure of Palestinians from Gaza is a sensitive issue, with Arab nations fearing that it could lead to permanent expulsion, something which Blinken has also categorically rejected.

Reports had suggested that Egypt was blocking the passage of Gazans with foreign passports until relief supplies were allowed in.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office yesterday dashed hopes of a ceasefire deal, saying in a statement that “there is currently no ceasefire and humanitarian aid in Gaza in return for removing foreigners”.

German national Ahmed Al Qasas, who has been waiting at the border for three days for a chance to cross said “people here are barely receiving water and food”.

“In Gaza, in general, you can't say there is a safe zone for any person or for any animal or for even stones,” said Danish national Etaf Al Rai, also waiting at Rafah in the hope of leaving.

Lynn Hastings, the UN humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, accused Israel

of linking humanitarian aid into Gaza with the release of hostages abducted by Hamas.

“Neither should be conditional,” she insisted in a video posted by the UN.

“They have said they want to destroy Hamas, but their current trajectory is going to destroy Gaza.”

The World Health Organization yesterday warned that there were only “24 hours of water, electricity and fuel left” in the besieged Gaza Strip.

Hamas backer Iran has warned that an invasion of Gaza would be met with a response, threatening wider security in the volatile region.

But Germany warned Iran to “think twice” about inflaming the situation.

Fearful that the skirmishes with Hezbollah could escalate into a two-front war in Israel, the United States has sent two aircraft carriers to the eastern Mediterranean as a deterrent.

With tensions intensifying, the Israeli army said it was evacuating residents who live “up to two kilometres from the Lebanese border”.

A ship evacuating US nationals from Israel left for Cyprus from the Israeli port of Haifa yesterday, an AFP correspondent reported, in anticipation of intensifying hostilities.

The White House has voiced fears at the prospect of Iran becoming “directly engaged”.

US President Joe Biden reiterated US backing for Israel, but underlined that any move by Israel to occupy Gaza would be a “big mistake”.

The United States has appealed to China to use its influence in the region to ease tensions.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Sunday Israel's response had “gone beyond the scope of self defence”, and demanded that it “cease its collective punishment of the people of Gaza”.

Russia, which is waging war in Ukraine, called on both sides to “immediately cease fire and start the process of political settlement.”

The UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees said Sunday that one million Palestinians had already been displaced in the first week of the conflict – but the number was likely

to be higher.

In southern Gaza, the city of Khan Yunis, usually home to 400,000 people, has more than doubled in population within just days, with terrified families hunkering down in any available space, indoors and outdoors.

Power outages threaten to cripple life-support systems, from seawater desalination plants to food refrigeration and hospital incubators.

Even everyday functions – from going to the toilet, showering and washing clothes – are almost impossible, locals said.

And being in the south is no guarantee of safety from Israeli air strikes.

Pointing to a doctor's house that was targeted, Rafah resident Khamis Abu Hilal said: “All the family was wiped out.”

AL to sell, collect nomination forms online

FROM PAGE 1

of nomination forms. The decision also aims to ease the pressure that the party office staff face at the time, said party sources.

A large number of aspirants come to Dhaka to collect and submit nomination forms. In a show of strength, they bring along a huge number of supporters and followers each time.

“The showdowns by aspirants in the same constituency also led to confrontation,” one AL insider said.

In addition, many aspirants collect nomination forms only for publicity, knowing full well that they will not get the nomination.

For example, for the 11th parliamentary election in 2018, as many as 4,037 AL aspirants collected nomination forms. That is an average of 13 hopefuls in each of the 300 constituencies.

Considering all this, the AL decided to complete the whole process digitally, the sources said.

Under the election law, aspirants can submit their nomination forms online.