



Hasina to hold talks with Zelensky in Munich

Leaves for Germany today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky will have a bilateral meeting on the sideline of the Munich Security Conference in Germany.

The PM is scheduled to leave for Germany today and return on February 19, Foreign Minister Hassan Mahmud told a press briefing at the ministry yesterday.

The PM will also call for an end to the Russia-Ukraine war and other conflicts across the world, he said.

"The Ukrainian president sought an appointment and our prime minister agreed to meet him," he said.

The meeting will not affect the friendly relations between Bangladesh and Russia, he added.

"Russia is a very close friend of ours. Our ties go way back to the days of our Liberation War. During the war, a Russian soldier was killed while minesweeping at Chattogram port."

Peace and economic prosperity cannot be achieved without ending conflicts, he said.

Repatriation of displaced Myanmar people will be widely discussed at the Munich conference which will be attended by representatives from around 60 countries, he said, adding that Bangladesh will seek support for Rohingya repatriation.

Responding to a question, he said the PM is not likely to visit India before the neighbouring country's national polls in May.

The foreign minister and Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen will also visit Germany to attend the conference.

The PM is also scheduled to have bilateral meetings with the German chancellor, prime ministers of the Netherlands and Denmark, and foreign minister of India on the sidelines of the conference.



A girl pushes a cart loaded with a jerry-can while walking past the rubble of a building that was destroyed during Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Gaza ceasefire talks end inconclusively

Panic mounts as Palestinians crammed into last refuge in Rafah

AGENCIES

Palestinians jammed into their last refuge in Gaza voiced growing fear yesterday that Israel will soon launch a planned assault on the southern city of Rafah after truce talks in Cairo ended inconclusively.

The talks in the Egyptian capital, involving the United States, Israel, Egypt and Qatar, ended without any sign of a breakthrough later on Tuesday and no date was announced for the next meeting.

The lack of agreement dealt a new blow to the more than one million Palestinians crammed into Rafah, next to the border with Egypt, where many are living in tent camps and makeshift shelters after fleeing Israeli bombardments elsewhere in Gaza.

"The news was disappointing, we hoped there could be a deal reached in Cairo. We are now counting down the days before Israel sends in tanks. We hope they don't but who can prevent them?" Said Jaber, a Gaza businessman who is sheltering in Rafah with his family, told Reuters via a chat app.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, who was expected to hold talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said an Israeli army offensive

on Rafah would "completely jeopardise the humanitarian situation."

Israeli forces shelled eastern areas of Rafah overnight, Palestinian witnesses said.

➔ Eastern areas of Rafah shelled overnight

➔ Israel continues to isolate 2 hospitals in Khan Younis

➔ Hamas delegation heads to Cairo truce talks

Israeli planes and tanks pounded several areas of Khan Younis in southern Gaza, and there was heavy fighting in some parts of the city, residents said.

At least 28,576 Palestinians have been killed and 68,291 injured in Israeli strikes on Gaza since October 7, the health ministry in Gaza said yesterday. In the 24 hours, 103 Palestinians were killed and 145 injured, the ministry's statement added.

The health ministry in the Hamas-governed enclave said Israeli forces were

continuing to isolate the two main hospitals in Khan Younis, and that sniper fire at the city's Nasser Hospital had killed and wounded many people in recent days.

Speaking in a video from inside Nasser Hospital, one doctor said the facility had been under siege by Israeli forces for 22 days and that bulldozers protected by tanks had knocked down the hospital's northern gate.

Rafah residents said on Tuesday that dozens of displaced people had begun to leave Rafah after Israeli shelling and air strikes in recent days.

Rafah neighbours Egypt, but Cairo has made clear it will not allow a refugee exodus over the border.

Meanwhile, negotiations to pause the Israel's offensive in Gaza and free the remaining hostages headed into a second day in Cairo yesterday.

A Hamas source told AFP that a delegation was headed to the Egyptian capital to meet Egyptian and Qatari mediators.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was also due in Cairo yesterday for talks with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

Ukraine destroys Private university enrolment looking up

FROM PAGE 16

that, before the attack, it had spent some 10 days at a loading site used by the Russian military.

It published grainy footage on Telegram purporting to show several naval drones approaching a large vessel at night and at least one large explosion.

Reuters was able to verify the ship in the video as the Russian Black Sea Fleet's Tsezar Kunikov based on its main mast, antenna, bridge and deck.

The location and date the footage was filmed could not be independently verified.

Some of the footage at the end appeared to show major damage with the vessel listing heavily to one side.

"In summary, Tsezar Kunikov received a critical breach on the port side and started sinking," the GUR agency said in a statement.

The Project 775 warship, one of Russia's newest vessels, has a crew of 87 and took part in wars in Georgia, Syria and Ukraine, GUR said in its statement.

A Ukrainian news outlet published several videos showing a column of smoke rising over the sea off the southern coast of Crimea with helicopters flying overhead.

Fakhrul and Khasru set to walk out of jail

FROM PAGE 1

lawyers submitted separate petitions, seeking bail in the case, defence lawyer Zaynul Abedin Mesbah told The Daily Star.

"Now there is no legal bar for my clients' release," he said.

The two top BNP leaders are set to walk out after languishing in jail three and a half months, said Sagir Hossain Leon, another defence lawyer.

Fakhrul was denied bail four times by the High Court and lower courts in the case filed with Ramna Model Police Station on October 29 last year by Sub-inspector Mofizur Rahman. Khasru had also been rejected bail in

Private university enrolment looking up

FROM PAGE 1

Of the 114 private universities, only 15 to 20 are providing quality education, said MA Mannan, a former UGC chairman.

"There is no point in setting up new universities without preparing the teachers," Mannan added.

The profiteering attitude of many trustees is a big barrier for private universities in ensuring quality education, said AK Azad Chowdhury, another former UGC chairman.

"They do not want to invest in appointing qualified teachers, vice-chancellors and developing the infrastructure," he added.

The situation centring the number of vacant seats in private universities has actually improved, said Biswajit Chanda, the UGC member who monitors private universities.

"The observation that the quality issue decreases enrolment is by and large accurate. It is like survival of the fittest. If you cannot ensure facilities to maintain the standard of education, you have to face consequences."

the same case.

On October 28 last year, BNP activists and police clashed during the party's grand rally in the capital. Over the incident, 11 violence cases were filed against Fakhrul, while Khasru was made accused in 10 cases.

Earlier, Fakhrul was granted bail in 10 cases and Khasru in nine cases.

Of the 11 cases against Fakhrul, seven were lodged with Paltan Model Police Station and the rest with Ramna Model Police Station.

Besides the 11, around 110 cases, most of them lodged over political violence against Fakhrul, are in different stages of trial. He is now on

However, it is at universities outside of Dhaka where the number of vacant seats is high, Chanda said.

"Everyone wants to come to Dhaka to study, particularly the insolvent ones as they get the scope to do part-time work."

At present, Dhaka has 57 private universities and Chattogram has 11.

However, the private universities in outlying districts where there is no public university do lack qualified teachers, Chanda added.

Most of the private universities, especially those situated in outlying districts, usually fail to ensure the standard of education, said Dil Afroza Begum, a former UGC member.

In places where the government has set up new public universities, the private universities are seeing low enrolment, said the APUB president Hossain.

When asked if new private universities are getting approval on political considerations, he said: "I don't agree at all."

bail in the cases, say BNP sources.

The charges in the last 11 cases include the killing of a police constable, illegal gathering on the streets, vandalising vehicles, rioting, snatching a police weapon, damaging properties, assaulting police personnel, and preventing them from discharging their duties.

On October 29, Fakhrul was arrested in a case filed with Ramna Model Police Station over the attack on the residence of the chief justice.

Four days after his arrest, Khasru was held in a case lodged over the death of a police constable in a clash during the BNP's grand rally.

Plan to phase out fossil

FROM PAGE 1

master plan (IEPMP-2023)," he told a roundtable discussion at the BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium.

Moazzem said the government knew that power demand would not increase as per the projections. "Then why did they continue pushing for increasing the generation capacity? And now it is in a position where it cannot move towards a transition to renewable energy."

"Despite knowing the potentials of the gas reserves, why did the government choose to import expensive LNG? Why didn't they do the seismic surveys in 2017?"

The government has still not given enough attention to the exploration of domestic gas, he said. Rather, the focus is on import of LNG.

"BPC [Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation] and Petrobangla have been failing to settle the import bills of LNG and fuel oil. An outstanding bill of \$700 million to global suppliers is yet to be paid by the two state owned companies. Recently, they have signed a \$2.1 billion loan agreement with the IIFC to pay the import bills."

"If the sector further follows the IEPMP fuel mix target depending on imported LNG, the debt burden will continue to increase."

Replying to a question, he said, "We are not talking about phasing out all fossil fuel based power plants overnight, we are talking about the process of energy transition."

The country's power generation capacity from renewable sources stands at four percent of the total power generation capacity.

Prof Mohammad Tamim, dean of Chemical and Materials Engineering at Buet, said, the first thing required in the energy sector is good governance.

"Until 2012, there was a 'war like' situation when the speedy enhancement act [Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provision) Act 2010] was initiated. But after that, we have been taking long-term projects but we haven't taken the time to verify the competitive pricing by floating tender. This act must be scrapped immediately, there is no justification

for the act," he said.

It is possible to produce around 3,000MW of electricity from renewable sources as per the current structure, he said.

He also recommended forecasting power demands in the new reality and new assumptions.

In 2010, the government passed the quick enhancement of electricity act for a limited period for facilitating effective and urgent measures to enhance the generation, transmission, and marketing of electricity and energy. The act was later extended until 2026.

Prof Badrul Imam, who teaches geology at Dhaka University, said Bangladesh's high hydrocarbon potential is among the least explored in the world.

Power Cell Director General Mohammad Hossain said, "We negotiate the electricity price with the investors just like people in the Gulistan markets do. We start by offering them half of what they propose."

Besides importing electricity from Nepal and Bhutan, Bangladesh has plans to export power to those countries in winter months when the demand rises in those countries. "But we need cooperation from the country [India] in the middle."

Tanvir Shakil Joy, member of the parliamentary standing committee on power, energy and mineral resources, said using khas lands for solar power is not possible.

"The first priority for such lands are homeless people and then farmers," he added.

CPD Executive Director Fahmida Khatun presided over the programme while former chairman of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission Shafiqul Islam Bhuiyan, former member of Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission Maqbul-E-Elahi Chowdhury, Director of Centre for Energy Research at United International University Shahriar Ahmed Chowdhury, former lawmaker Akhtaruzzaman, and energy analyst of the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis Shafiqul Alam also spoke.

SSC exams start today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Secondary School Certificate and its equivalent examinations for 2024 begin today.

This year, 20,24,192 examinees are expected to sit for the tests at 3,700 centres from 29,735 educational institutions, according to the Secondary and Higher Education Division.

Of the candidates, 10,31,314 are girls. A total of 1,606,879 students are expected to sit for SSC exams under nine general education boards, 2,90,940 for Dakhil tests under madrasa education board, while 1,26,373 vocational students are to appear for the exams under the technical education board.

The education ministry asked the authorities to ensure that all coaching centres remain closed from February 13 to March 12, aiming to prevent question leak.

No mobile phone and electronic devices will be allowed in the exam centres and only the exam centre secretary can use a feature phone.

Students will have to enter the exam halls 30 minutes before a test starts.

Arsa 'second-in-command' arrested from Rohingya camp

UNB, Cox's Bazar

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) has arrested three members of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (Arsa), including its "second-in-command", from a Rohingya refugee camp in Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar.

According to Rab the arrestees are "Arsa second-in-command" Abu Hashim 31, Hossain Johar alias Ali Johar 32, and Md Alam alias Shayer Musa 35.

Two foreign-made weapons, one locally-made firearm, and four rounds of cartridges were seized from their possession, said Rab-15 Commanding Officer Lt Col HS Sazzad Hossain at a press briefing in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The Rab official said Rab-15 started an operation to arrest those involved in the murder of a youth, who was killed in the 20th extension Rohingya camp of Ukhiya on Sunday.

Tipped off, a team of RAB-15 conducted a special drive at the camp on Tuesday midnight and arrested the three, he added.

New edu system will build a meritorious nation: minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Government wants to focus more on the proper implementation of the new education system rather than changing it, Education Minister Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury told the parliament today.

Replying to a query, the minister also said that the country's new education system will create a meritorious nation.

"The new education system ... will facilitate our next generation to survive in the competitive world during fourth industrial revolution, globalisation, climate change, and transition from middle income country to developed country," he said in a scripted answer.

The students will be able to face the challenges of the new era more effectively through the current merit-based education system rather than the previous rote learning and certificate-based education system, he added.

"Despite knowing the potentials of the gas reserves, why did the government choose to import expensive LNG?"

Khondaker Golam Moazzem
CPD Research Director

RECOMMENDATIONS (SHORT TERM)

- ➔ Revise power demand forecasting
- ➔ Payments for power in local currency
- ➔ Competitive bidding for power plants
- ➔ Audit plants' efficiency
- ➔ Promote biogas use in rural areas
- ➔ National campaign for renewables

RECOMMENDATIONS (MID TERM)

- ➔ Phase out rental, inefficient plants
- ➔ Abolish Power Plant Indemnity Act
- ➔ Streamline land acquisition process
- ➔ Incentives for large-scale solar plants
- ➔ Import cap on fossil fuels
- ➔ Mini- and micro-grid technology in rural areas
- ➔ Modernise transmission facilities