

## Princess Kate announces she has cancer

REUTERS, London

Kate, Britain's Princess of Wales, said yesterday she was undergoing preventative chemotherapy after tests taken following her major abdominal surgery in January revealed the presence of cancer.

Kate, 42, the wife of heir to the throne Prince William, spent two weeks in hospital in January after undergoing what her office said at the time was successful, planned surgery for an unspecified but non-cancerous condition.

However, in a video message, Kate, dressed in jeans and a jumper and looking pale and tired, said subsequent tests had revealed cancer had been found. She said she was well and getting stronger.

"My medical team therefore advised that I should undergo a course of preventative chemotherapy and I am now in the early stages of that treatment," Kate said in the video which was filmed on Wednesday.

"This of course came as a huge shock, and William and I have been doing everything we can to process and manage this privately for the sake of our young family."

The news is the latest major health blow for the British royal family after King Charles revealed in February that he too was to have treatment for cancer, meaning he has had to postpone his public royal duties.

Kate's office, Kensington Palace, said it would give no further details about the type of cancer that had been found, saying the princess had a right to medical privacy. It said she was on a recovery pathway and the preventative chemotherapy had begun in February.

After her operation, the palace said the princess, still popularly known by her maiden name Kate Middleton, would not return to official duties until after Easter, which falls at the end of this month. But her absence from public life has provoked intense speculation and wild rumours on social media.

She and William had wanted privacy about the cancer until their children, Prince George, 10, Princess Charlotte, 8, and Prince Louis, 5, began their school holidays which started yesterday.



Palestinians walk in front of a house damaged in Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said a major military operation by Israel in Rafah would be "a mistake".

PHOTO: AFP

## More land crossings into Gaza can prevent famine

Says WHO as Israel blocks large scale deliveries to the enclave

REUTERS, Geneva

The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Thursday that only an expansion of land crossings into Gaza could help prevent famine in the densely populated Palestinian enclave.

Children are dying from the effects of malnutrition and disease, and from a lack of adequate water and sanitation, Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"The future of an entire generation is in serious peril," he said.

Five months of war have created critical food shortages among Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians that in some areas now exceed famine levels, according to the United Nations.

"Recent efforts to deliver food by air and sea are welcome, but only the expansion of land crossings will enable large scale deliveries to prevent famine," Tedros said.

"Once again, we ask Israel to open more crossings and accelerate the entry and delivery of water, food, medical supplies and other humanitarian aid into and within Gaza."

UN aid agencies have said "overwhelming obstacles" to moving aid to the north of Gaza will only be overcome with a ceasefire and the opening of border crossings closed by Israel after its October 7 offensive.

Tedros said WHO requests to deliver supplies to the enclave were often blocked or refused.

**Children are dying from effects of malnutrition and disease, and from a lack of adequate water, said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.**

Israel says it puts no limit on humanitarian aid for Gaza and blames slow aid delivery on a lack of capacity or inefficiency among UN agencies.

Most aid that comes into Gaza by land is cleared by Israel at Kerem Shalom, a customs station at the border point between Egypt, Israel and Gaza and then brought in through the southern city of

Rafah, the main passenger crossing point between Egypt and Gaza.

After allowing six aid trucks into northern Gaza through a crossing in the security fence last week, Israel said more such convoys would follow as well as deliveries from other entry points.

Israel's offensive on Thursday focused on the Al Shifa hospital, the only partially working medical facility in the north of the Gaza Strip, for a fourth day.

Tedros said the WHO was particularly concerned about the military operations inside and around the facility.

"A planned mission to Al Shifa today had to be cancelled due to lack of security ... Once again, we call for health care to be protected and not militarized," he said.

Israeli forces have detained hundreds of Hamas fighters including a number of security officials and military commanders during the raid. Hamas denies its fighters were in the compound and says those killed there were civilians.

Israel issued pictures of hundreds of men it said were fighters captured in the hospital, then later acknowledged that some were not captives.

## 8m women's contraception needs unmet

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over 8 million women in that age group, or 17 percent, are unmet.

This group includes women who are currently unintentionally pregnant, those who recently gave birth but are not using contraception despite not wanting their last pregnancy, and women who wish to delay or prevent future pregnancy but are not using birth control.

Another study, the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2022, published a year ago by National Institute of Population Research and Training, however, showed that the number was 12 percent of women in the reproductive age bracket.

Md Alamgir Hossen, project director of BBS, said the data in the BDHS survey was drawn from BBS data, and was based on a smaller sample size.

According to BBS, contraceptive needs going unmet cause significant negative impacts, including unintended pregnancies, unsafe or induced abortions, delayed or no antenatal care, and maternal and neonatal deaths.

Alamgir pointed to some worrying trends in the total fertility rate (TFR) and contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR).

"New data revealed that the TFR has increased to 2.20 from 2.05 as reported in Sample Vital Registration System-2021. Simultaneously, the contraceptive prevalence rate has dropped from 67 percent to 63.3 percent."

Under the fourth Health, Population, and Nutrition Sector Programme, the health ministry aimed to lower the TFR to 2.0 by 2023. Conversely, the programme aimed to boost the CPR to 75 percent by 2023.

Analysing regions, it was found that Khulna has the highest percentage of women (19.2) with unmet contraceptive needs.

"In line with this, the contraceptive prevalence rate in Khulna has also decreased from 63 percent in 2021 to 59.3 percent in 2022," added Md

Alamgir.

Monjun Nahar, head of advocacy at Marie Stopes Bangladesh, highlighted the reasons behind the high unmet needs.

"Many women lack awareness of where to get contraceptives and don't know which method to use. They also face pressure from family and in-laws when making decisions about having children, and often can't access services."

"On the supply side, mass campaigns educating women about contraception have been running at an extremely slow pace, nearly unnoticed for over a decade, hindering information spread."

She added, "Moreover, there's a shortage of family welfare assistants visiting door-to-door to distribute contraceptives due to retirements without replacements."

"Additionally, generalised programmes that don't cater to the needs of diverse populations exacerbate the situation."

However, according to the World Health Organization, the unmet contraception needs serves as a critical indicator of women's ability to achieve their desired family size and birth spacing, reflecting the effectiveness of reproductive health programmes.

This rights-based indicator evaluates how well a country's health system and social conditions support women in deciding the timing and number of children they have, it mentioned.

According to BDHS 2022, the private medical sector, including pharmacies and drugstores, is the primary source for modern contraception for 60 percent of women in Bangladesh, showing a steady rise from 42 percent in 2011.

Government health facilities serve 37 percent of those who use modern methods, with experts emphasising that people below the poverty line are the primary users of these services.

If these government services do not operate effectively, many of them may struggle to afford contraceptives,

worsening the situation, they said.

However, the 2022 vacancy data provided by the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP) indicated alarming rates of vacancies in positions critical for family planning services, which hampered the activities of the programmes.

According to it, the vacancy rate was 98 percent of a total of 464 assistant family welfare officers; 53 percent of 517 family planning officer; 75 percent of 495 assistant family planning officer; and 39 percent of 636 family welfare visitor.

Furthermore, despite issuing a circular in March 2020 to recruit 1,080 family welfare visitors, the DGFP cancelled the recruitment almost four years later in January, citing irregularities in the written exam.

As of January 31 this year, according to the health ministry's data, the national stock of condoms stood at 50.7 lakh, projected to last until February 2024. Additionally, the stock of injectables, currently at 4.14 lakh vials, was expected to be depleted by mid-February 2024.

Although it has been mentioned that procurement is underway, according to DGFP officials, it typically takes nearly a year to acquire the necessary stock.

The Daily Star contacted three top officials of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, but none agreed to talk on the increasing rate of unmet needs for contraception.

Monjun suggested that family planning programmes can address this barrier by offering comprehensive counselling on available methods, improving client-provider relationships, and involving men in discussions and service-seeking behaviours to create a supportive environment for both sexes.

Family planning specialist Pulak Raha, CEO of Team Associates, emphasised that the government should expand door-to-door distribution of contraceptives by deploying additional personnel to address this issue.

## Let us hope

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MUJIB MEETS WEST WING LEADERS

Five West Wing leaders representing smaller parties met the Awami League chief, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, jointly and later called on the president at the latter's house. The five leaders were Mian Mumtaz Daultana, president of Council Muslim League, Khan Abdul Wali Khan, president of NAP, Maulana Mufti Mahmood, general secretary of Jamiatul Ulama-e-Pakistan, Maulana Siih Ahmed Noorani and Sardar Shaukat Hayat Khan.

After their meeting with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Mian Mumtaz Daultana said they did not discuss any particular proposal. Asked how long the dialogue would continue, he said, "We like that everything should be over in matter of minutes for the betterment of the country." He was hopeful about the talks. Interjecting at this stage, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said, "Let us hope for the best and remain prepared for the worst."

RESISTANCE DAY OBSERVED

Today was Pakistan's Republic Day. But the situation was totally different in East Pakistan. The day was observed as Protirodh Dibos (Resistance Day). The whole city was covered with the "Bangla Desh" flag. The Pakistani flag could be seen only at two places - the president's house and Martial Law Headquarters.

Awami League activists went to consular establishments requesting, and sometimes demanding, that the "Bangla Desh" flag be flown. The Soviets and British had hoisted the "Bangla Desh" flag while the Iranian, Indonesian and Nepalese had flown the Pakistani flag. The Chinese had initially hoisted the Pakistani flag but were forced by students to replace it with a "Bangla Desh" flag. The Americans did not fly any flag. [Archer K Blood, The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh, UPL 2006, pg-192]

## Jubo League man

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"We learnt that two teen gang members threatened to kill Shimul a few days ago," the police official said, adding that they were trying to identify and arrest the attackers.

A case was filed with Kotwali Police Station.

## Gunmen kill 40 at Moscow

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were being taken.

It was not immediately clear who the gunmen were. Russian news agencies said 70 ambulance crews had been sent to the scene.

"A terrible tragedy occurred in the shopping center Crocus City today," Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said. "I am sorry for the loved ones of the victims."

Russia's foreign ministry said it was a "bloody terrorist attack".

"The entire world community is obliged to condemn this monstrous crime," Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said. "All efforts are being thrown at saving people."

In one unverified video posted on social media, men with automatic weapons were shown firing repeatedly at screaming civilians, including women, who were covering below what looked like an entrance sign to "Crocus City Hall", reports Reuters.

## Delhi CM remanded

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She said, referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party.

Earlier yesterday, AAP workers protested in Delhi and the states of Punjab, Haryana, Odisha and Gujarat, among others. Dozens were detained by police. Police in Punjab, the only other state AAP rules beside Delhi, and Haryana, used water cannons to disperse protesters.

AAP has called for more protest on Sunday and Tuesday.

## Russia, China

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Israel's offensive has killed more than 32,000 Palestinians, according to health authorities in Hamas-ruled Gaza.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday told visiting US Secretary of State Antony Blinken that Israel remained determined to send troops into Rafah, where more than 1 million Palestinians are sheltering, and would do so without US backing if necessary.

In Gaza, Israel claimed to have killed or captured hundreds of Hamas fighters in a five-day operation at the Al Shifa hospital complex, one of the only medical facilities even partially functioning in the north. Hamas and medical staff deny fighters were present there.

## Modi in Bhutan to shore up ties with eye on China

AFP, New Delhi



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi landed in Bhutan yesterday for a two-day state visit to the tiny but strategic Himalayan nation also being courted by China.

Landlocked Bhutan, known for its policy of prioritising "Gross National Happiness" over growth, has long been regarded by New Delhi as a buffer state firmly within its orbit. India is determined not to let China gain further toehold across what it sees as its natural sphere of influence, following trade and infrastructure deals Beijing sealed over the years with other neighbours. "The visit is in keeping with the tradition of regular high-level exchanges between India and Bhutan and the Government's emphasis on its Neighbourhood First Policy," said a statement from Modi's office announcing his arrival. India effectively oversaw Bhutan's foreign policy until 2007, the year before the kingdom's first multi-party elections. Bhutan does not have formal diplomatic relations with China but the two countries inked a "cooperation agreement" last October after talks over their long-disputed frontier.

## Lanka PM to visit China March 25-30: Beijing

AFP, Beijing

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena will visit China, his country's biggest bilateral lender, next week, Beijing's foreign ministry said yesterday. "At the invitation of Premier Li Qiang of the State Council, Prime Minister... of Sri Lanka Dinesh Gunawardena will pay an official visit to China from March 25 to 30," Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian said in a statement. Beijing accounts for around 10 percent of the island's total foreign debt. Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$46 billion external debt in April 2022 after the country ran out of foreign exchange to finance even essential imports such as food, fuel and medicine. It secured a \$2.9 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout last year, with the programme conditional on a debt deal that satisfies foreign creditors. The IMF said this week that it had reached a staff-level agreement with Colombo to clear the way for the release of \$337 million, the third instalment of the four-year bailout. But it said the "critical" next steps were to finalise agreements with creditors. Beijing said yesterday Gunawardena would meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping during his visit for "an in-depth exchange of views on continuing China Sri Lanka traditional friendship". "China attaches great importance to the development of China Sri Lanka relations," Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin said.