

## Pak PM lauds Bangladesh's economic progress

Says 'we feel ashamed when we look towards them'

AGENCIES

Lauding Bangladesh's economic growth, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has noted how "East Pakistan", which was "once considered" a burden on the country, made tremendous strides in industrial growth.

"I was quite young when... we were told that it's a burden on our shoulders... Today you all know where that 'burden' has reached [in terms of economic growth]. And we feel ashamed when we look towards them," said Shehbaz during an interactive session with the business leaders of Pakistan.

Sharif sat down with the business community at the Sindh chief minister's house in Karachi on Wednesday to find ways to uplift the economy, reports Dawn.

While the business leaders appreciated Sharif's determination to tackle economic issues, they raised concerns about the political instability in Pakistan in the wake of former PM Imran Khan's arrest.

Karachi's business community advised the prime minister to focus on bringing about political stability to "turn around" the economy.

They also asked Sharif to initiate the trade talks with India, according to the Dawn report.

The relations between the two countries nosedived after India revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcated it into two Union territories.



Polling officials check their Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and other polling materials, at a distribution centre in Bengaluru yesterday, on the eve of the second phase of voting of India's general election.

PHOTO: AFP

## 11.3m Bangladeshis faced acute food insecurity in 2023

Says FSIN report

STAR REPORT

As many as 11.9 million people, including more than 6,00,000 Rohingya refugees, were projected to have faced "high levels of acute food insecurity" in Bangladesh in 2023, according to the latest global report on food crises by the Food Security Information Network (FSIN).

Extreme weather events, economic shocks, global wars, and high levels of domestic inflation have particularly affected the acute food insecurity of these people, said the report.

The FSIN released its report on Wednesday. Sixteen international organisations, including the Food and

Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme, are members of the network. It is funded by the European Union.

The report also mentioned that food insecurity worsened around the world in 2023, with some 282 million people suffering from acute hunger due to conflicts, particularly in Gaza and Sudan.

"Cox's Bazar district has been included in the GRFC as a major food crisis since 2017, due to the arrival of around 7,50,000 refugees from Rakhine State in Myanmar," the report said.

According to the report, in 2023, an Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis expanded coverage

to approximately 30 percent of the country and 23 percent of its population, focusing on areas prone to climatic disasters – monsoon floods, cyclones, tidal surges, landslides and riverbank erosion – as well as forcibly displaced Rohingya refugees and host communities in Cox's Bazar.

"Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to disasters, and there is no prospect of dignified return of Rohingya refugees in the foreseeable future," the report said.

According to the report, food prices remained high with food inflation reaching 7.8 percent in January 2023 and 12.6 percent by the end of October, despite record cereal harvests in 2022 and 2023.

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## Secondary schools, colleges to open from Sunday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday decided to reopen all secondary schools, colleges, madrasas, and technical education institutions from Sunday amid the ongoing heatwave.

It also asked the authorities concerned to resume regular classes and activities in those institutes.

However, daily assemblies at these institutions will remain suspended across the country until the heatwave wanes, according to a press release issued by the Ministry of Education. It also directed that all activities that expose students to direct sunlight will have to be limited.

The directive also said the schools and colleges can hold classes on Saturdays to make up for the education gap created by the closures till further notice.

## Ruling party leader killed in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A former Krishak League leader was killed and another person was injured yesterday in a road accident on the Dhaka Mymensingh highway in Mymensingh's Trishal upazila.

The deceased is Shamim Parvez, 35, son of Azharul Islam, of Trishal municipality.

Shamim was the former organising secretary of Krishak League Trishal upazila unit, our Mymensingh correspondent reports quoting police.

Quoting locals, Md Kamal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Trishal Police Station, said Shamim was returning to Trishal from Mymensingh city on a private car after selling fish from his farm.

When Shamim and his aide Nazrul Islam Dipak reached Nurur Dukan area around 7:00am, the private car hit a roadside electric pole after its driver lost control over the steering, said the OC.

Shamim died on the spot and Nazrul sustained critical injuries, added the police official.

## Students suspend demonstration

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university, said they convinced the students to end their demonstrations.

The university syndicate will sit today to discuss keeping the dormitories open, he added.

After a meeting of its academic council around 4:00pm, the university yesterday afternoon issued a circular asking the male students to vacate the dormitories by 5:00pm yesterday and the females by 10:00am today.

Angered by the announcement, demonstrators locked the vice chancellor's office and the main entrance to the university. They also set fire to two buses of Shah Amanat Paribahan – one on the Chattogram-Kaptai road near the campus while the other on the campus.

Although students unlocked the VC's office after about an hour, the VC and his office staffers could not get out until the students left late at night.

The students continued demonstrations for the fourth consecutive day yesterday, Prof Rezaul Karim, director of the Directorate of Students' Welfare at Cuet, told The Daily Star.

"Later, the VC announced the closure of Cuet at an emergency academic council meeting. After the announcement, students set two buses on fire," Rezaul said.

According to witnesses, students blocked the Chattogram-Kaptai road in front of the main gate of Cuet in Raozan by placing logs, halting movement of traffic since Wednesday morning. They had only allowed emergency vehicles, including ambulances, to pass.

Yesterday afternoon, students held a press conference at the Cuet Shaheed Minar. Ashiqul Islam Tamim, a fourth year student of mechanical engineering, said, "We reject the university's decision of shutting the institution. We won't leave the campus until all our demands are met."

The two Cuet students were killed in a road accident around 3:30pm on Monday when their motorbike collided head-on with a bus of Shah Amanat Paribahan on the Chattogram-Kaptai road in Rangunia's Saptapir shrine area.

The deceased – Shanto Saha and Taufiq Hossain – were students of civil engineering.

Police seized the bus that day and arrested the driver on Wednesday.

Protesting the deaths, students had torched another bus of Shah Amanat Paribahan on Monday.

## Heatwave putting strain on kidney, heart hospitals

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inadequate, his son brought a table fan for him.

"We'll take him home once his condition improves, but we're worried he'll fall ill again there due to the heat," Jashim said.

Doctors said such hot weather can put extra pressure on the heart to pump blood, which can lead to chest pain, shortness of breath, and sometimes even a heart attack.

Patients with stents or valve disorders are more vulnerable during heatwaves, they added.

Kajal Kumar Karmakar, associate professor (cardiology) at NICVD, said the number of patients with hypertension has also risen sharply at the emergency and outdoor departments over the past two weeks.

"We are getting around 500 patients in our emergency regularly, which is higher than any time in the recent years.... The 1200-bed NICVD

has already added 200 seats, but they are occupied. We're struggling to cope."

Kidney patients too are being affected by the temperature.

Nur Islam, in his mid-70s, came from Chandpur for admission in the capital's National Institute of Kidney Diseases and Urology on April 15 after his condition deteriorated.

His family said the heat was causing him to sweat profusely, leading to dehydration.

His wife Monwara Begum said, "His daily water intake is 750ml but we aren't sure how much fluid he is losing from sweating so much."

Doctors at the institute said they were facing challenges to ensure proper water management for many of the kidney patients who sweat profusely.

The patients' organs, they said, are already working harder to function properly and the hot weather is

making matters worse.

Sheikh Moinul Ahsan, a doctor at the Kidney Foundation Hospital and Research Institute, said the treatment of patients with chronic kidney disease is challenging because they get dehydrated but cannot take in more water than prescribed.

"If the dehydration gets severe, the patient can suffer from organ failure."

He added that over the last few days, the Kidney Foundation received at least eight to 10 patients who fell sick due to the heat.

"They were very dehydrated but we couldn't allow them to drink more water than prescribed because they would strain their kidney function. It's a difficult situation."

Doctor have advised patients with the aforementioned conditions to stay indoors, avoid sunlight as much as possible and take plenty of rest.

## India votes in second phase of mammoth polls

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Over 15.88 crore voters are eligible to vote in the second phase including 3.28 crore first-time voters.

The vote pits Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) against an alliance of two dozen opposition parties that promise greater affirmative action and more handouts while stressing what they call the need to save democratic institutions.

Nearly 970 million people are eligible to vote in the seven-phase exercise, the world's largest election, which runs through the peak of summer until June 1, with results set for June 4.

The first phase of the election, held last Friday for 102 seats across 21 states and union territories, saw a voter turnout of around 65.5 per cent. Ten states and UTs were fully covered while 11 states and UTs were partially covered by polling in the first phase.

Compared to the first phase of the 2019 general election, the voter turnout was lower.

In the second phase, polling is scheduled in all 20 seats of Kerala, 14 of the 28 seats in Karnataka, 13 seats in Rajasthan, 8 seats each in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, 6 seats in Madhya Pradesh, 5 seats each in Assam and Bihar, 3 seats each in Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, and 1 seat each in Manipur, Tripura and Jammu and Kashmir.

In 2019, the BJP-led alliance won 56 of the 89 seats on offer in the second phase. The opposition block won 24.

After today's phase, polling will be over in Kerala, Rajasthan and Tripura.

Among the key contestants in the second phase are Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Shashi Tharoor, federal minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar of BJP and Bollywood actress Hema Malini.

The high-octane campaigning for the second round of polling saw Modi kicking up a row on Sunday while addressing a rally in Rajasthan's Banswara. Slamming the Congress manifesto, he alleged the opposition party was planning to give people's hard-earned money and valuables to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children". He referred to former prime minister Manmohan Singh's speech in 2006 to contend that the former PM had said Muslims have the "first claim" on the country's resources.

Congress quickly responded by saying that after facing "disappointment" in the first phase of Lok Sabha polls, the prime minister was resorting to "hate speech" to divert people from the real issues.

The party also filed a complaint to the Election Commission accusing Modi of "blatantly targeting" a particular minority in the campaign speech.

The world's most populous country is constitutionally secular and its election code bans canvassing based on "communal feelings".

The party urged the EC to take action against Modi for his remarks, alleging they were 'divisive', and 'malicious'.

However, the next day, addressing a rally in Uttar Pradesh, Modi again accused Congress of planning to redistribute people's property if it is voted to power but stopped short of saying that the wealth would go to Muslims.

Meanwhile, India's EC yesterday sought responses from the ruling BJP and opposition Congress to complaints of the alleged violation of the model code of conduct during the polls campaign.

In separate letters to BJP President J P Nadda and Congress President

Mallikarjun Kharge, the EC, without naming any leader, has sought their replies by April 29.

Opinion polls have suggested the BJP will easily win a majority, even though voters worry about unemployment, inflation and rural distress in the world's most populous country and fastest-growing major economy.

Hindu nationalism is a key election theme, especially after Modi's consecration of a grand temple to Lord Ram in January on a site in Uttar Pradesh believed to be his birthplace, more than three decades after a Hindu mob destroyed a 16th-century mosque that had stood there, leading to nationwide riots.

In 2019, the Supreme Court handed over the land to Hindus and ordered the allotment of a separate plot to Muslims to build a new mosque.

Critics accuse Modi's government and party of treating India's 200 million minority Muslims unfairly to please their hardline Hindu base – an accusation that both deny.

Modi aims to win 370 of parliament's 543 seats, up from 303 in 2019, hoping for a two-thirds majority that some analysts and opposition members fear could let his party usher in far-reaching constitutional changes.

In the first phase on April 19, polling was completed in all seats of Tamil Nadu (39), Uttarakhand (5), Arunachal Pradesh (2), Meghalaya (2), Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1), Mizoram (1), Nagaland (1), Puducherry (1), Sikkim (1) and Lakshadweep (1).

The third phase of the election is set for May 7, the fourth for May 13, the fifth for May 20, the sixth for May 25, and the final phase for June 1. Vote counting will take place on June 4.

## IMF suggests raising power

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government had any plans to increase allowance for the poor under social safety net programmes and what the government was planning next regarding the programmes.

Officials told the mission that they were going to increase the number of beneficiaries by around five lakh but there were no plans to improve the allowances due to fund constraints.

About 58 lakh elderly people are getting Tk 600 per month in the current fiscal year. Their number will be increased by two lakh in the next fiscal year.

All eligible senior citizens are

- Govt to hike power, gas prices to the level of production cost in 3 yrs
- Govt to keep on subsidising the farming sector
- 2.5 percent of GDP likely to be allocated for society safety nets next year
- IMF suggests international best practices in mergers of banks
- IMF believes hitting the inflation target will be challenging

programmes under a new structure to reduce waste, misuse, and corruption.

The IMF mission, during its meeting with the Financial Institutions Division officials, said it supported the policy of merging banks and laid importance on following international best practices while implementing the move. It said India took a similar move and it yielded good results.

The IMF mission recommended reducing state-owned banks' classified loans to 10 percent from over 20 percent and wanted to know what action the government was taking against wilful loan defaulters, meeting sources said.

The officials told the mission that commercial banks would send lists of wilful defaulters to the central bank and the central bank would take action as per the bank company law.

During another meeting, the Finance Division presented the country's macroeconomic projection before the IMF mission, sources said.

The officials told the IMF mission that they revised the GDP growth to 6.5 percent from 7.5 percent for the current fiscal year. The inflation target was revised to 8 percent from 6.5 percent.

The next fiscal year's GDP growth target is 6.75 percent and the inflation target is 6.5 percent, they said.

The IMF said the targets were challenging and laid importance on introducing market-based interest and exchange rates.

The IMF mission is in Dhaka for its second review of the \$4.7 billion loan programme before releasing the third tranche. Since it approved the loan in January last year, the multilateral lender has released \$1.16 billion in two tranches. The release of the third tranche would depend on the outcome of this visit.

getting the benefit in 262 upazilas. All eligible individuals in the remaining 233 upazilas will be brought under the scheme gradually.

The officials said about 2.5 percent of the GDP would be allocated for society safety net programmes next fiscal year.

The finance ministry issued two circulars to bring all safety net

## Barring miracle

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The Met office considers temperatures from 36 to 38 degrees Celsius as a mild heatwave, 38 to 40 degrees Celsius a moderate heatwave, 40 to 42 degrees Celsius as a severe heatwave, and temperatures above 42 degrees Celsius is considered as a very severe heatwave.

Scientific evidence and climatic records indicate an increasing trend in the frequency and duration of extreme temperature events in Bangladesh over the last few decades, experts said.

Rajshahi, Pabna, Chuadanga, and Jashore are particularly susceptible to heatwaves.

Recently published BMD report "Changing Climate of Bangladesh" observed that the minimum and maximum temperatures increased in the country but the maximum temperatures increased more rapidly.

Prof Rashed Chowdhury, senior global futures scientist of the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures

Laboratory at the Arizona State University, said El Niño is turning into La Niña. This year could be the hottest on record.

During El Niño, surface water in the equatorial Pacific becomes warmer than average and east winds blow weaker than normal.

During La Niña, surface winds across the entire tropical Pacific are stronger than usual, and most of the tropical Pacific Ocean is cooler than average.

British daily The Guardian on April 4 reported that according to climatologist and weather historian Maximiliano Herrera, a "historic heatwave" is being experienced across Southeast Asia.

Last month, the World Meteorological Organisation said even in February, the region was "gripped by severe heat conditions" as temperatures frequently soared into the high 30s, well above the seasonal average.