



People gather at Shibbarir Mor in Khulna, right, Raju Bhaskariya at Dhaka University, top left, and Chouhatta in Sylhet city, bottom left, to express solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza as the nation erupts in protests against Israeli brutalities yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh's relief team treats 619 in Myanmar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The rescue, medical, and humanitarian relief operations led by the Bangladesh Armed Forces in Myanmar after the devastating earthquake have entered their second week.



The special team, deployed under the directive of the Bangladesh government, remains actively engaged in supporting the quake-affected population.

The Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR) Directorate disclosed the updates in separate press releases yesterday.

At the request of Myanmar's deputy prime minister, the Bangladeshi rescue team launched operations at the collapsed building of the

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Dhaka seeks 3-month pause on new tariffs

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requirements, rationalising packaging, labelling and certification requirements and undertaking trade facilitation measures such as simplifying customs procedures and standards."

These measures, Yunus emphasised, are aimed at creating a more open and predictable trade environment that supports increased US exports to Bangladesh.

The letter did not explain the reason behind choosing a three-month timeframe for the deferral request. Different international media outlets reported that Vietnam has also sought a three-month deferral of the reciprocal tariff on Vietnamese goods.

Trump has remained defiant since unleashing the blitz of levies on stunned countries around the world on April 2, insisting that his policies "will never change" even as markets went into a tailspin.

But his staggered deadlines have left space for some countries to negotiate, even as he insisted he would stand firm and his administration warned against any retaliation, the AFP reported.

In a post on Truth Social yesterday, Trump threatened to terminate talks with China concerning their requested meetings with the US if China did not withdraw its retaliatory tariffs.

He, however, added that negotiations with other countries, which have also requested meetings, will "begin taking place immediately".

More than 50 countries have sought

talks with Trump to negotiate relief from the punitive tariffs on exports to the US, the White House said Sunday, as trade partners braced for fallout, the AFP said.

Yunus, in his letter to Trump, said that Bangladesh was the first to take "such a proactive initiative", mentioning the visit of his High Representative Khalilur Rahman to Washington, DC, in February, which indicates Bangladesh's intent to substantially increase imports from the US.

The chief adviser also said his government executed the necessary steps to launch Starlink, a US-based satellite internet provider owned by billionaire Elon Musk, in Bangladesh.

"This momentum ushers a new era for US businesses in Bangladesh across a number of advanced tech sectors including civil aviation and defence. We will complete the ongoing and planned actions within the next quarter."

The chief adviser said that Bangladesh, having the lowest tariff on most US exports in South Asia, commits to a zero tariff on American agricultural commodities, as well as on scrap metals.

A key focus of the government's action on the tariff issue is to significantly increase imports of US farm products, including cotton, wheat, corn and soybean, Yunus said.

The government was also finalising a dedicated bonded warehousing facility in Bangladesh where US cotton

will have duty-free access, he added.

Yunus also said Bangladesh is the first country to enter into a multi-year agreement to import liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the US, and has been exploring further collaboration since Trump lifted the freeze on LNG export permits.

Commerce Adviser Bashir Uddin, in his letter to the USTR, said the Yunus government was planning a long-term LNG deal with the US.

He mentioned that Bangladesh has a 6.10 percent weighted average tariff on US products, where raw cotton and steel scrap face 0 percent and 1 percent tariff, respectively.

He said the government had already held meetings with the trade wing of the US Embassy in Bangladesh to identify trade barriers and "agreed a number of measures to resolve".

The government also initiated reforms to enhance mutually beneficial trade, he said. The reform initiative includes import policy order, simplification of customs procedure, enforcement of intellectual property rights, and protection of trademarks and patent rights.

The government will encourage US private equity access to healthcare and other service sectors of Bangladesh, he said.

Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman said the government will also accept the US's reciprocal certification on import of different American food items.

Govt goes big to woo global investors

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"We are exploring solar and power projects in several economic zones. We also see great potential in developing the semiconductor industry here provided there is robust infrastructure and supportive policy," said Amit, a New York-based non-resident Bangladeshi.

Kaniz, director of marketing development at China State Construction, expressed interest in Bangladesh's progress, citing the success of existing foreign ventures.

She plans to report back to her headquarters but acknowledged that final investment decisions would take time. She also flagged the need for more clarity on utility and infrastructure services.

The low labour costs are an attractive proposition, said Kevin Wu of Mega Rich Industries (HK).

Jack He, managing director of MYSKY, praised Bangladesh's affordable labour market, but he remained undecided due to limited knowledge about long-term business prospects and foreign investment regulations.

Addressing the delegation, Abdulla Al Faruque, project director of the National Special Economic Zone (NSEZ), outlined the benefits offered by the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority, including land allocation, tax holidays and full profit repatriation.

He highlighted the NSEZ's strategic location across Mirsarai, Sitakunda and Sonagazi, covering 33,800 acres with strong road, port, and air connectivity.

BEZA's one-stop service centre currently offers 60 online services to ease the process of setting up and operating businesses, Faruque said, adding that the zone is targeting industries such as garments, steel, leather, electronics and agro-processing.

Over at Intercontinental Dhaka, there were three sessions to highlight the country's start-up ecosystem in a programme titled "Bangladesh Startup Connect". About 1,500 delegates attended the sessions.

The government is creating an ecosystem to make business operations in Bangladesh much easier, said Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun, executive chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA).

"What we need to probably continue to focus on as an investment promotion agency of the government is how we create that bridge between the assets we have in the country and the potential liquidity that is available globally," he said at the opening session.

Not just cheap and trainable labourers, Bangladesh's utility services are cheaper than in Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia, he

said.

BIDA is not expecting investments straight away since the summit has been organised to build confidence among investors.

"Sometimes investors express interest, but until the investment is delivered, there is no bridge between the government and the investors, resulting in low confidence among them," Ashik said.

"We will keep track of all of them individually," he added.

There were three start-up investment announcements on the first day, said Faiz Ahmad Taiyab, special assistant to the chief adviser for the ICT Division.

The first announcement was made by Incepta, which will invest \$1 million through youth summits and universities as either equity finance, grants or loans.

Besides, the Bangladesh Bank has announced two funds of Tk 800 crore and Tk 400 crore for start-ups, he said, adding that the central bank has been adopting a policy that will remove the obstacles for accessing funds by start-ups.

In addition, there was a positive note on mobilising funds from the budgetary support of JICA as a fund of funds – an investment vehicle that holds shares in other funds rather than in individual securities or private assets.

Bangladeshi banks among most exposed

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Roughly 20 percent of Bangladesh's banking sector exposure is linked to the garment industry, making it particularly susceptible to credit deterioration, according to Moody's.

Moody's warned that loan quality in the garment sector is likely to deteriorate further, increasing strain on a banking system already facing negative outlooks. While Bangladeshi banks have relatively low direct lending to small and midsize enterprises – less than 10 percent, compared to around 20 percent in Thailand and Vietnam – their sector concentration in garments adds a different kind of vulnerability.

"Among the three banking systems most affected, banks in Bangladesh and Vietnam have the lowest capital and provisioning buffers against

potentially higher problem loans," Moody's said.

Banks in Vietnam and Thailand, while also highly exposed, have slightly more diversified economic bases or stronger credit loss absorbing capacity. Thai banks in particular have longstanding challenges with SME loans but benefit from more robust provisioning.

In contrast, the impact of the tariffs on larger Asia-Pacific economies like China, India, Japan and South Korea is expected to be moderate. These countries either export less to the US relative to GDP or have more diversified industrial bases.

For example, China's US-bound exports made up less than 3 percent of GDP in 2024. Additionally, Taiwanese chipmakers – some of the

region's largest exporters – have been exempted from new tariffs.

Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and the Philippines face the lowest additional tariff rates and are expected to see limited financial spillovers.

Across the region, Moody's expects central banks to respond with interest rate cuts or regulatory relief to cushion borrowers in export-facing industries. But for countries like Bangladesh, the credit rating agency said such moves may not be enough without broader structural reforms.

"The asset quality for RMG and related sectors will deteriorate," Moody's said, underscoring the need for policy support and longer-term export diversification to protect financial stability.

A show of solidarity with Gaza

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In different parts of the capital, protesters – many waving Palestinian flags – chanted slogans such as "Free, Free Palestine" and "Stop Genocide in Gaza." Some carried effigies of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and placards criticising the silence of world leaders, particularly those from the Muslim world.

In Dhaka, hundreds gathered near the US Embassy in Gulshan from the morning. A group of students gathered around 1:45pm at the footbridge opposite the embassy and chanted slogans like "Trump-er dui gaaley, juta maaro taley taley" and "Who are we? Who are you? Palestine, Palestine."

Earlier in the day, a youth-led procession halted traffic in front of the embassy. Police and armed forces personnel were heavily deployed in the area, with officers forming human barricades and checking passers-by.

Around 4:00pm, hundreds of protesters, including students, professionals, and other citizens, gathered on Manik Mia Avenue in the capital. They held Palestinian flags, photo cards, and banners, calling for an end to the destruction of Gaza.

The protest began with a one-hour gathering in front of the parliament building, followed by a march through the avenue. Protesters chanted slogans such as "To stand with Palestine, one must be human" and "Free Palestine".

Meanwhile, the National Citizen Party's metropolitan unit held a programme at Shahbagh around 4:00pm.

Member Secretary Akhter Hossen said, "As long as Palestine is not recognised as an independent state and its people do not attain freedom, our oath of independence will not allow any friendship with Israel."

He called on the United Nations to take steps to stop the war immediately, stating that Netanyahu must be punished for committing crimes against humanity.

"The common people of every country in the world are protesting against the atrocities in Gaza, while the world's Muslim leaders are still silent. Some of the world's superpowers are still defending Israel."

SCHOOLS SHUT

As part of the movement, academic and administration activities were suspended at several universities. Dhaka University halted classes and closed offices between 9:00am and 11:00am. Students and members of the public, including children, gathered in front of TSC, carrying Palestinian flags and chanting slogans against Israel's military offensive.

Speaking to reporters, a protester at TSC said, "We are on the streets because the world has forgotten the people of Palestine. We demand freedom for Palestine and the trial of Israeli leaders for war crimes."

BUET students and faculty formed a human chain on campus. BRAC University students also staged a demonstration in front of their university, holding banners and placards.

Students of Eden Women's College held a protest march on the college campus in the capital. They chanted slogans like "Free Palestine," "Stop Brutal Genocide in Gaza," and "Justice for Palestinians," while holding placards.

At the University of Asia Pacific, students formed a human chain, while students from private universities across the capital – especially in Bashundhara and Bhatara – participated in protest marches.

Students from Dhaka Medical College, North South University, East West University, and many other institutions joined the movement. Many demonstrators avoided institutional banners, instead waving Palestinian flags and wearing keffiyehs, a symbol of Palestinian nationalism.

Jahangirnagar University suspended all academic and

administrative activities for two hours from 10:00am. It also postponed all classes and exams scheduled for the day. Confirming the suspension, Public Relations Director Mohammad Mohiuddin said it was done in support of the global movement.

Teachers and students of Jagannath University formed human chains and held rallies on campus, calling for a boycott of Israeli products and urging Muslim-majority countries to unite against Israeli aggression.

Speakers at the rally also slammed international bodies for what they termed as "criminal silence" on the Gaza crisis.

NATIONWIDE UPROAR

In Rajshahi, students, teachers, and staff of Rajshahi University staged a rally from Paris Road around 11:00am, carrying Palestinian flags and banners. They displayed images of US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with messages condemning their role in the conflict.

In Chattogram, students from Chittagong Medical College brought out a procession at 11:00am, marching across the campus. Students from Chittagong College, Government Hazi Muhammad Mohsin College, Commerce College, and Hazera Tajul College also joined the movement.

In Narsingdi, thousands of school and college students blocked the Dhaka-Sylhet highway for about an hour, calling for a boycott of Israeli products and the punishment of Israeli leaders.

In Cumilla, students, residents, and political leaders formed human chains and marched through the Pubali Chattera Kandirpar area.

In Chandpur, students from several institutions, including Chandpur Government Medical College and Chandpur Nursing Institute, took to the streets in large numbers. A protest rally was also held at the 250-bed Chandpur Government General Hospital.

In Pabna, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami organised a rally on Abdul Hamid Road in the town centre.

In Patuakhali, thousands gathered near the Circuit House in Jhautola from 10:00am. The crowd included students, political party workers, professionals, and families.

In Narayanganj, around 10:00am, demonstrators began gathering at the Central Shaheed Minar in Chashara in small processions. They later took to the streets in protest.

In Bandarban, a protest rally took place at the central bus terminal, followed by a protest gathering in front of the Bandarban Press Club. Speakers at the rally called for strong international intervention to immediately stop the Gaza genocide.

The protest rally saw participation from students, members of civil society, social organizations, and people from various walks of life.

In Gazipur, a protest march was held in the Chandana Chowrasta area this afternoon. The march circled various roads in Gazipur.

In Cox's Bazar, a protest march began around noon from Shaheed Daulat Maidan in front of Cox's Bazar Public Library, proceeding through Holiday Intersection, Laboni, and ending at Kolatoli.

In Sylhet, thousands of people from all walks of life joined a protest at the Central Shaheed Minar area at 3:00pm.

In Tangail, students of Alokito Hriday School suspended classes and exams. They held a demonstration on the school premises from 9:20am to 1:00pm. Children displayed handmade banners and posters bearing messages such as "The World for Gaza," "Stop War," and "Stop Genocide."

In Bogura, thousands of students and people staged a large protest rally from morning to afternoon, condemning the attacks on Palestinians and demanding a boycott of Israeli products.

The people of Kishoreganj and

Kushtia also organised similar programmes.

Jamaat-e-Islami's Dhaka Metropolitan North Unit also held a rally and procession in the capital to protest Israel's attacks and genocide in Gaza.

VANDALISM MARS PROTEST

Rowdy elements from yesterday's protests committed vandalism and carried out looting at various business outlets, including restaurants and shoe stores, in multiple districts, including Sylhet, Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Khulna, Gazipur, and Bogura.

They tore down billboards and banners, stormed inside, trashed the properties, and looted the products on display. They alleged that those establishments sell pro-Israel and pro-American products.

In Cox's Bazar, at least five restaurants were attacked in the tourist zone.

Locals said the protest programme began around 12:00pm from the town's Shaheed Daulat Maidan area and proceeded through Holiday Intersection, Laboni, and ended at Kolatoli.

At one point, a group of unruly protesters carried out vandalism on the pretext of boycotting Israeli products.

Several tourists were reported to have been injured during the vandalism.

Firoz Ahmed, manager of Kacha Lanka Restaurant, said, "There was a 7UP advertisement on our signboard, and they used that as an excuse to vandalise our restaurant."

Confirming that matter, Cox's Bazar Sadar Police Station OC Elias Khan said police were deployed during the protest programme and they could bring the situation under control immediately.

In Bogura, riotous elements from the protest vandalised a shoe outlet in the town's Satmatha area around noon.

Witnesses said a group of people, who were chatting anti-Israel slogans, hurled bricks and stones targeting the store. Within moments, all the windows were smashed.

The incident triggered panic and other shoe outlets in the town were closed following the incident.

Contacted, Bogura Sadar Police Station's OC SM Moinuddin confirmed the incident.

GOVT CONDEMNS GAZA GENOCIDE

Besides the citizen protests, the interim government yesterday strongly condemned Israel's ongoing military assault on Gaza, describing it as a gross violation of human rights. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement condemning Israel's indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilian areas in Gaza and accusing Israel of attempting ethnic cleansing.

The statement called for an immediate halt to Israel's military operations, urging the country to adhere to international humanitarian law. Bangladesh also appealed to the international community, especially the United Nations, to take immediate action towards an unconditional ceasefire and ensure the protection of civilians and the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Furthermore, Bangladesh reiterated its support for Palestine's right to self-determination and its call for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The country also urged a return to peace talks for lasting stability in the Middle East.

Since October 7, 2023, Israel's military campaign on the 365 square-kilometre Gaza Strip has left at least 50,695 Palestinians dead and 115,338 injured, according to figures from the Palestinian Wafa news agency.

The United Nations reports that 69 percent of Gaza's infrastructure has been either destroyed or severely damaged, leading to a humanitarian catastrophe.