

Dhaka to push for stronger ties

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Adviser Ajit Doval following a dinner. Meetings with the other Indian ministers will be held today.

Mahbubul said the foreign minister is also scheduled to hold courtesy meetings with Indian Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar, and Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri.

Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, in a post on X last evening, welcomed Khalilur, writing, "India and Bangladesh share warm and historic ties anchored in strong people-to-people relations. The visit will further bolster the India-Bangladesh partnership."

The Indian external affairs ministry, in a schedule published on its website yesterday, termed the visit "official".

It said Khalilur will also meet with

Indian Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal.

This is the first ministerial visit to India since the formation of the BNP government.

Both countries have moved to mend bilateral ties that were strained following the political changeover after the July 2024 uprising.

Key issues likely to be discussed include the resumption of visa services for Bangladeshi citizens, enhancing energy cooperation, strengthening border management, resolving pending river water-sharing matters, and boosting trade facilitation.

Diplomatic sources said Bangladesh will reiterate its request for the extradition of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and those accused of the murder of Inquilab Moncho convener

Sharif Osman Bin Hadi.

Dhaka will also urge a more positive approach from India regarding the full resumption of visa services.

On border management, it will emphasise that it does not want to see any loss of life along the border.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already invited Prime Minister Tarique, his wife Dr Zubaida Rahman, and their daughter Barrister Zaima Rahman to visit India at a convenient time.

"The visit of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman may also come up during the foreign minister's meeting with his Indian counterpart," said a foreign ministry official.

Asked whether Tarique would consider India for his first bilateral visit, the source said Bangladesh would take a "creative" decision on the matter.

No bail, no remand for Shirin Sharmin

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contact for a while until she suddenly called him a day before and said she would come over for a visit.

"In the evening [Monday], she [Shirin] arrived with her husband and a small piece of luggage. I was happy, thinking she would stay with us for a couple of days. We had dinner and were chatting afterwards," he said.

Around midnight, members of the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrived at Arif's apartment on Road 8/A.

From the ground floor, they contacted him through the intercom, identified themselves, and said they had information that the former speaker was at his residence and that they wanted to conduct a search.

"I did not lie. I informed my cousin [Shirin] about the matter and allowed the law enforcers to enter the apartment. They told her that they had been ordered to take her with them. She complied," Arif said.

Arif further said that when Shirin called to say she was coming over, he assumed the cases against her had been resolved, since the government had earlier stated she was in custody.

After the 2024 July uprising, many Awami League leaders took refuge in the cantonment. On May 22 last year, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) released a list of those who had sought shelter, which included Shirin's name.

Shirin resigned from her post of Jatiya Sangsad speaker on September 2, 2024 – 27 days after Sheikh

Hasina's government fell.

Since then, the 60-year-old former Jatiya Sangsad speaker had been in hiding at various locations, a DB source told Prothom Alo.

Following the 2008 election, Abdul Hamid was elected speaker when the Awami League came to power. After he became president, Shirin was elected speaker on April 30, 2013, and had held the post since then.

NO BAIL, NO REMAND

Around 1:50pm yesterday, a white microbus carrying the ex-speaker arrived at the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court in Dhaka. She was then kept inside the CMM Court lockup for about 75 minutes.

At 3:13pm, Shirin was brought to the packed courtroom, and she proceeded to stand in a corner of the dock.

Minutes later, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Jewel Rana took his seat.

After the court allowed the case investigating officer DB inspector Mohsin Uddin to speak, he began his submission in the case filed over the shooting of one Mohammad Ashraf in Dhaka's Lalbagh area during the quota reform protests on July 18, 2024.

On May 25 last year, the victim, Ashraf, filed a case with the court accusing deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 129 others. The officer in charge of Lalbagh Police Station later recorded it as a First Information Report (FIR) on July 17 the same year following a court

directive.

Dhaka Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Omar Faruq Faruqi argued in favour of granting investigators remand to interrogate the accused, describing Shirin as an "associate of the fascist government".

At 3:22pm, defence lawyer Abul Hasanat Imrul Qausar opposed the prosecution's submissions and explained why she should not be placed on remand.

"My client was only the person who resigned. No specific evidence has been found against her," he told the court.

He asked, "Did she shoot the victim? She was a neutral person."

The defence also mentioned Shirin's illness. "She has been very sick. As she remained in hiding for a long time, she fell ill," Hasanat said.

During the hearing, the former speaker remained mostly silent inside the dock.

After hearing both sides, the magistrate sent her to jail, rejecting both the two-day remand prayer and the bail petition.

Around 3:35pm, she was taken back to the court's lockup amid a chaotic situation inside the courtroom. During the rush and commotion, she fell on a staircase of the court building, and female police officers helped her up.

Meanwhile, a group of defence lawyers chanted "Joy Bangla" slogan on the court premises, prompting a scuffle to break out when pro-BNP lawyers tried to stop them.

Parents keep vigil thru' restless nights

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hospital in the capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar area, 14 of whom were in the ICU.

Sonia's daughter, Tasnia, is among them. Speaking to this correspondent at the dedicated measles ward, Sonia, who came from Nabinaagar Upazila of Brahmanbaria, said her elder daughter Sumaiya developed a fever during Eid.

The 11-year-old girl underwent treatment at two local hospitals. During the treatment, she developed pneumonia, and, after a few days, contracted measles.

"At one stage, the local hospital advised us to take her to Dhaka as her condition deteriorated. We tried to admit her to government hospitals but failed, so we were forced to admit her to a private hospital," she said.

Last week, her younger daughter, Tasnia, also contracted measles. This time, they were able to admit her to Shishu Hospital on Saturday.

"I can't explain what a difficult time we are going through – only God knows," Sonia said.

A bed away, Sania Akhter was helping her mother care for her nine-month-old son, Mahmudullah, from Muksudpur Upazila in Gopalganj.

Mahmudullah was admitted to the same hospital on March 22 with pneumonia and was discharged after recovery.

"He was in good health for only three days after we returned home. This time, he developed a fever again and later contracted measles," Sania said.

A cannula could not be set in his hands, so it was installed in his upper forehead. "He had to be on oxygen for a day. His condition has improved a little now," she added.

Measles patients often develop pneumonia and diarrhoea as their immunity declines, said Mirza Md Ziaul Islam, head of the hospital's paediatrics department.

Hospital-acquired infections also contributed to their condition.

Since January, a total of 209 suspected measles patients have been admitted to their hospital, and alarmingly, 63 of them are under six months old, he said.

The hospital has prepared an 18-bed ICU for measles patients and will expand it if necessary.

"We are providing our best services to save the children," he told this correspondent.

The hospital recorded four suspected measles deaths so far.

Nazma Begum came out of the Child Ward of the DNCC Dedicated Covid-19 Hospital and walked down the corridor to calm her two-year-old son, Ibrahim, who was crying loudly.

Ibrahim developed symptoms of measles on Friday, and they brought him from Meghna Upazila in Cumilla to Dhaka on Sunday night. After failing to get him admitted to two government hospitals, he was finally admitted here.

"Doctors advised some tests, and we are waiting for the results," Nazma told this correspondent.

The large Child Ward on the hospital's first floor was full of children infected with measles, with several doctors and nurses attending to them.

Asif Haider, the hospital's administrative officer, said they have prepared 300-bed isolation wards for measles patients, including 56 ICU beds.

A total of 290 measles patients were in the hospital yesterday, with 48 of them in the ICU, he said.

Many children are arriving late, already suffering from pneumonia, diarrhoea and encephalitis, which makes treatment difficult.

Most of the children with measles symptoms were unvaccinated, and many are under six months old, Haider said.

The hospital recorded four suspected

measles deaths so far.

The 100-bed Infectious Diseases Hospital began struggling with the growing number of measles patients at the beginning of last month and pressure has come down a little lately as other government hospitals were admitting measles patients.

A total of 745 patients received treatment at the hospital since January, with 18 new patients admitted in the last 24 hours, said FA Asma Khan, the newly appointed superintendent of the hospital.

The facility recorded 29 suspected measles deaths, while 15 were confirmed, she said.

In the 24 hours to 8:00am yesterday, ten more died of suspected measles, taking the total number of suspected measles deaths to 128 since March 15, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Among the 10 new deaths, eight were reported from the Dhaka division, while one each was recorded from the Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions.

Besides, 1,236 new suspected cases were recorded during this period, taking the tally to 9,883 since March 15.

The DGHS, however, said it has confirmed a total of 21 deaths as measles-related, along with 1,398 confirmed cases so far.

Samples from suspected measles patients are tested at reference laboratories in Dhaka, a process that takes considerable time.

Meanwhile, suspected cases are included in the list and confirmed cases are updated later, creating a discrepancy between the two figures.

Besides, rash and fever, the main symptoms of measles, are common to several other diseases, officials said.

Therefore, not all suspected cases are ultimately confirmed, which contributes to the difference between suspected and confirmed deaths, they added.

BNP, Jamaat in 'back-channel dialogue'

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announced a series of protest programmes outside, reiterating the same demands.

According to the schedule, leaders and activists will carry out leaflet distribution and public outreach programmes nationwide from April 9 to April 15.

A BNP Standing Committee member said the party has not changed its position on the Constitution Reform Council, arguing that its members are not required to take an oath and that the proposed structure may conflict with the existing constitution, raising legal and procedural concerns.

Ruling party leaders have also indicated in parliament that they wish to amend the Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance.

Law Minister Md Asaduzzaman said the International Crimes Tribunal Act already includes enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity and sets out trial and investigation procedures.

"At the same time, in the Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance, we are proposing a separate investigation process. Under the ICT Act, the maximum punishment is either death or life imprisonment, but in the ordinance, the maximum sentence has been limited to 10 years," he said in parliament on Sunday, while responding to Jamaat MP Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, who criticised a parliamentary committee's refusal to ratify the ordinance as a law.

Quasem said that if the government wants changes, it should first approve

the ordinance, turn it into law, and then amend it later. He warned that if no action is taken, the law will expire on April 11, leaving no legal definition of enforced disappearance from the following day.

According to constitutional obligation, the House must convert ordinances into laws within 30 days of the commencement of parliament, or they become defunct. To this end, a special committee was formed, comprising 13 lawmakers and chaired by BNP leader Zainul Abedin.

The committee said the anti-enforced disappearance ordinance should be tabled as a bill only after further scrutiny.

Meanwhile, parliament on Tuesday passed the amended International Crimes Tribunal Bill.

Astronauts head back home after lunar flyby

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"I can't say enough how much science we've already learned," Kelsey Young, lead scientist for the Artemis II mission, told the astronauts.

"You really brought the Moon closer for us today, and we cannot say thank you enough."

But even after becoming the furthest humans ever to travel from Earth, their day was not over: the beary-eyed astronauts remained in good spirits as they took a late-night

call from US President Donald Trump.

Unlike the Artemis astronauts and Nasa administrator Jared Isaacman, Trump at age 79 is old enough to remember the Apollo programme.

"You've really inspired the entire world," Trump said, calling them "modern-day pioneers" who have "a lot of courage doing what you're doing."

The journey wrapped up late Monday and had plenty of milestones, including when the Artemis II team broke the distance record set by

the 1970 Apollo 13 mission, which they surpassed by more than 6,000 kilometres when they reached the journey's furthest distance from Earth 406,771 kilometres.

Astronaut Jeremy Hansen said the moment should "challenge this generation and the next, to make sure this record is not long-lived."

The Orion capsule will now travel back to Earth in a so-called "free-return trajectory," a trip that will take about four days.

Families must be told within 12 hours

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clarified before presenting the bill.

Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmad reminded members to keep remarks confined to parliamentary discussions and external commentary should not influence proceedings.

In Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain's absence, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed introduced three bills: the Smoking and Tobacco Products Use (Control) (Amendment) Bill, the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (Amendment) Bill, and the Sheikh Hasina Medical University (Amendment) Bill.

While introducing the second bill, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed quipped, "It's unfortunate that after speaking so much, I now have to say [the name of] Sheikh Hasina again."

Later, Health Minister Sakhawat joined the session and placed the Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Medical University, Sylhet (Amendment) Bill.

The bills confirmed the renaming of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib

Medical University to Bangladesh Medical University, Sheikh Hasina Medical University to Khulna Medical University, and Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Medical University to Sylhet Medical University.

Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury placed the Appropriation Supplementary (2024-25) Bill, the Appropriation (2025-26) Bill, and the Commercial Court Bill, 2026.

Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmud moved the Speedy Supply of Power and Energy (Special Provisions) (Repeal) Bill.

State Minister for Local Government Mir Shahe Alam placed the Academy for Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development (Amendment) Bill and the Sheikh Russel Rural Development Academy, Rangpur (Amendment) Bill.

Besides the provision on informing families, the CrPC amendment bill stated that arresting officers must carry and show visible ID cards and arrestees must be allowed to consult

Cox's Bazar hills going by truckloads

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An excavator and a dump truck used in the illegal operation were seized and handed over to Ramu Police Station. A case has been filed against 23 people, including 12 unnamed individuals, over their alleged involvement.

Ramu Upazila Nirbahi Officer Fazle Rabbani Chowdhury said drives remain ongoing, but many culprits evade legal action during mobile court drives. "Under mobile court rules, punishment cannot be imposed without catching offenders red-handed," he noted.

Advocate Mujibul Haque, chairman of Youth Environment Society, said, "The scale of hill cutting in Kauarkhop and South Mithachhari during the Eid holidays has surpassed all previous records."

Recently, the Cox's Bazar South Forest Division also seized a dump truck and filed a case against four people over hill cutting in South Mithachhari union.

Meanwhile, there have also been reports of indiscriminate hill razing in Chaillatoli along the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway.

On March 10, the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) sent a legal notice to 12 senior government officials demanding action against those responsible.

The notice referred to a High Court directive issued on March 19, 2012, banning hill cutting in five districts of Chattogram division. The directive stated that any housing project or

brick kiln built by cutting hills must be demolished.

In Pekua upazila's Toitong union, nearly one-third of a hill known as "Asmaner Khuti" has already been flattened. Locals said the 2.5-acre hill was levelled day and night using excavators.

Barbakia Range Officer Md Khalequzzaman said the hill is not part of a reserved forest, limiting the forest department's authority. "However, the local administration and the Department of Environment have taken legal steps."

Local sources said the hill belongs to expatriate Aman Ullah, who sold the soil to influential individuals.

By law, hills cannot be cut even if privately owned. The Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995 (amended 2010) provides for up to two years' imprisonment, a fine of Tk 2 lakh, or both for illegal hill cutting.

Khalequzzaman added that similar incidents occurred in Shilkhali under Pekua upazila, but action could not be taken as the land is privately recorded.

Abdus Salam, senior chemist at the Cox's Bazar DoE, said no hill – government or private – can be razed. He added that approval has been sought from higher authorities in Chattogram to file separate cases over hill cutting incidents in Toitong and Shilkhali.

In Ukhiya upazila, allegations surfaced of hills being flattened after purchasing forest land in Thoiyngakata to build houses.

Fuel queues stretch despite improved stock

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depots. The queues are mostly for octane, with some motorcycles lining up for petrol.

Most of the pumps continued to fix an amount per vehicle: up to Tk 500-600 for motorcycle and up to Tk 1,500-2000 for cars.

One such desperate motorcyclist is Rashidul Islam, who needed to refill his fuel tank with octane yesterday or stop using his bike entirely.

"For the last couple of days, I checked out all pumps but due to the long queues, it was not possible for me to refill my tank," he told The Daily Star as he queued up outside Keeco Filling Station near Banasree for an hour.

The pump faced multiple queues of hundreds of bikes before the dispenser started pumping fuel for the day at around 1:00pm.

Monir Hossain Chowdhury, joint secretary (operations) of energy and mineral resources division, told The Daily Star that they have arrangements for octane supply over the country for the next three months.

The shortage at the pumps is mostly due to panic buying as the supply did not drop until now.

"We are supplying fuel at the same level that we were supplying at this time last year. But due to the huge rush in pumps, the supply is lasting for shorter periods."

Asked about whether the supply would be increased once the octane shipments arrive, he said: "We can assure that the supply will be stable

and aligned with the previous year's demand."

Meanwhile, Iqbal Hassan Mahmood Tuku, the minister for power, energy and mineral resources, yesterday indicated that the government may consider increasing the fuel prices from next month if needed.

Responding to a notice of urgent public importance raised by MP Shawkatul Islam in the Jatiya Sangsad, he said the fuel prices are adjusted monthly in line with the existing law.

"There is a law regarding fuel price adjustments. According to that law, we review prices every month. Last month, we did not increase the prices. We are currently working on pricing for next month. If, after review, it appears that a price increase is necessary, the matter will be discussed and placed before the cabinet for consideration."

The ongoing Middle East crisis has strained fuel supply across South Asia.

Pakistan has raised prices by around 50 percent, Sri Lanka has introduced rationing and reduced working hours, while India, Afghanistan, Bhutan, the Maldives and Nepal have already increased the fuel prices.

Bangladesh, however, has kept prices unchanged despite global volatility, considering industrial activity and the livelihoods of ordinary people.

"The government has explored all possible sources to maintain a steady

supply of fuel in the country."

The country has 1,64,644 tonnes of diesel in stock, with another 1,38,000 tonnes expected by April 30. Besides, a total of 71,543 tonnes of octane is due by the end of the month and 36,000 tonnes of petrol are due.

"Bangladesh currently holds sufficient fuel reserves."

Between March 3 and April 4, the authorities conducted 342 drives against illegal fuel hoarding, filing 2,456 cases. As many as 31 individuals were jailed, fines amounting to Tk 1.25 crore were imposed and 404,456 litres of fuel were recovered, Tuku said.

Of the seized fuel, 333,157 litres were diesel, 36,405 litres octane, and 78,894 litres petrol, he added, noting that such drives will continue.

Meanwhile, in a briefing at the secretariat yesterday, Zahed Ur Rahman, the prime minister's adviser for information and broadcasting, shared a comparative analysis of fuel supply during March last year and this year. The analysis showed lower diesel and petrol supply but higher octane supply in comparison to last year.

Earlier in the parliament, while providing data between March 1 and 23, Tuku said the supply increased.

Last month, the government supplied 3.63 lakh tonnes of diesel, which was 3.96 lakh last year. Petrol supply was 39,918 tonnes, in contrast to 46,371 tonnes last year, data shows.

The octane supply was increased by 457 tonnes in March this year from 37,439 tonnes last year.