

Spread Bangla culture, literature across world

PM says at Ekushey Padak ceremony, hands awards to 21 recipients

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the need for paying special attention to further spread Bangla literature and culture in the world.

"We are Bangalees. Our cultural practices will also continue. We have to pay special attention so that our literature and culture could be spread further in the international stage," she said.

The PM was addressing a programme marking the distribution of Ekushey Padak-2020, the second highest civilian award, at the capital's Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

Hasina said though there was need to learn other languages, the own language (mother tongue) should not be forgotten. Those who stay abroad

for different reasons would have to respect their mother tongue, she added.

"Ekush [February 21] has taught us not to bow down. Ekush taught us the sense of self-esteem."

Mentioning that the bloodshed on February 21, 1952, paved the way for Bangladesh's independence in 1971, she said, "Ekush is a very glorious day for us. We want our next generations to know this glorious history."

About the contributions of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the Language Movement, the PM said he had to face imprisonment and harassments time and again for going to wage the movement.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with the winners of Ekushey Padak, the second highest civilian award in Bangladesh, at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

4 killed in 'gunfights' with police

STAR REPORT

Four alleged criminals, including two robbers, were killed in "gunfights" with police in Dinajpur, Pabna, and Chapainawabganj early yesterday.

In Dinajpur, two members of a robber gang -- Rafiqul Islam, 28, of Gaibandha, and Wazed Ali, 30, of Dinajpur -- were killed in a "shootout" with police in Nawabganj upazila.

Police arrested the duo from Nawabganj on Wednesday.

Gleaning information from the two, a police team took the duo with them and raided Chhoto Magura village to recover firearms around 3:00am, said Ashok Kumar Chauhan, officer-in-charge of Nawabganj Police Station.

Sensing the law enforcers' presence, other members of the gang opened fire. Police retaliated, claimed the OC.

Rafiqul and Wazed were shot dead when they were trying to escape from police custody. However, others managed to flee, he added.

Four police personnel were injured in the incident, the OC claimed.

Rafiqul was accused in three robbery cases and Wazed in two robbery cases, said police.

The two bodies were sent to M Abdur Rahim Medical College in Dinajpur for autopsies, he added.

In another "gunfight", a suspected

drug dealer, Habban Ali Sheikh, 45, of Pabna town, was killed in Pabna.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team conducted a drive in Char Shibrampur area of Pabna Sadar upazila around 2:00am, said Rafiqul Islam, superintendent of Pabna police.

When police reached the spot, the criminals fired on police. The law enforcers returned fire. After the "gun battle", police found bullet-hit Habban lying on the spot, he said.

Habban was declared dead after being taken to Pabna Sadar Hospital, the SP said.

He stood accused in 12 cases filed with different police stations, the police official added.

Four police personnel were hurt in the incident and they were admitted to Pabna General Hospital, the SP said, claiming that police recovered a firearm and five bullets from the spot.

In Chapainawabganj, the key suspect in a seven-year-old girl murder was killed in a "gunfight" with police at Horishpur in Sadar upazila yesterday afternoon.

Torikul Islam alias Saddam, 32, of Manik Hajir Tola village under the same upazila, was accused of killing the girl after rape.

Our Dinajpur, Pabna, and Chapainawabganj correspondents contributed to this report.

Pay Tk 1,000cr by Monday

FROM PAGE 1

petition, Grameenphone's counsellor AM Amin Uddin requested the SC to grant the operator six months to pay Tk 500 crore out of the court's earlier order for payment of Tk 2,000 crore.

In response the chief justice said: "You feel that the court of Bangladesh is very small. It is very painful. This is the highest court of the country."

He also said: "BTRC's claim is Tk 12,000 crore. We had asked you to pay Tk 2,000 crore. Are you ignoring the order of the Appellate Division?"

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, who represents the BTRC, told the court that no money was paid by Grameenphone to the telecom watchdog after the court delivered the order.

But the full amount will be collected once an administrator is appointed for running the carrier, he added.

Mehedi Hasan Chowdhury, one of the lawyers fighting for Grameenphone, told The Daily Star the compound interest rate was applied on the Norwegian Telenor Group's subsidiary's late fees.

But in the case of Robi, which was locked in a similar tussle with the telecom regulator, simple interest rate was used, he said.

NO OPTION BUT TO PAY TK 1,000CR: BTRC

After the court order, BTRC Chairman Md Jahurul Haque told The Daily Star that Grameenphone now has no option but to pay the Tk 1,000 crore.

"It is my personal opinion that this time Grameenphone will pay the public money," he told the correspondent yesterday at his office following the apex court's order.

After receiving the Tk 1,000 crore, the telecom regulator will decide whether the bar imposed on Grameenphone for network equipment import and package approval will be lifted.

If Grameenphone refuses to pay the sum on Monday, the BTRC would proceed as per the telecom act, which empowers it to appoint an administrator.

And the telecom regulator has taken all preparations for appointing the administrator should Grameenphone fail to pay up on February 24.

The BTRC chairman even met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office on Monday and discussed a few potential candidates for the panel of administrators.

"But everything will depend on Monday's order. We do not intend to embezzle from Grameenphone. Rather, we want to collect public money. The administrative panel's main responsibility will be to realise

the amount."

The administrator will enjoy full authority over hiring and firing of employees just as a chief executive officer would, while the remuneration will be similar to that of the company's top brass, he added. **GRAMEENPHONE'S OPTION TO ARRANGE THE SUM** Contacted, Grameenphone said: "We have not received the relief that we were seeking in our review petition. We have no further comments at the moment."

The operator declined to disclose whether it will pay the sum.

But arranging the sum stipulated by the apex court is unlikely to be too difficult for the operator.

The operator logged in Tk 3,450 crore as net profit in 2019. After disbursing 130 percent cash dividend for 2019 to the 135.03 crore shares, the carrier still has Tk 1,695 crore.

Including money retained from the previous year, the carrier has Tk 2,123.26 crore.

Given the substantial amount retained from net profit, Grameenphone Chief Executive Officer Yasir Azman was pelted with the question in his first press conference two weeks ago: was it for depositing to the national coffers?

He, however, remained circumspect.

Govt initiative faltering

FROM PAGE 1

Only 38.60 percent of the 4,204 ethnic community teachers in the three hill districts have attended a 14-day training on their respective languages in the last three years.

The training, organised by the district councils in Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban, were only intended to introduce the alphabets to the teachers.

A Chakma teacher who took part in the training told The Daily Star that she could not learn much from the training and that it was not sufficient at all.

"I have been acquainted with the Chakma letters, but I still don't know how to read or write a sentence properly," the teacher said, wishing anonymity.

Several district education officials also admitted that the training was not adequate to make the teachers have a good grip on their languages.

Khorshed Alam, district primary education officer of Rangamati, said, "The training provided by the government was of good quality, but its duration was not enough."

Echoing his view, Siddiqur Rahman, assistant primary education officer in Bandarban, said more training is required for the teachers.

In December last year, the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) started providing a 10-day training to the ethnic language teachers in the hill districts, but there is still a long way to go.

In Sylhet, the situation is even worse as no training programme has so far been organised for ethnic language teachers, depriving students of the opportunity to begin their schooling in mother language.

Contacted, AKM Shafayet Alam, deputy director at the DPE in Sylhet

division, told The Daily Star the crisis of Garo and Tripura language teachers was so acute that conducting training for ethnic language teachers there was almost impossible.

"We discussed the issue [absence of training] with the primary education ministry and the NCTB," he said, adding they were yet to receive any instructions from the higher authorities in this regard.

Against this backdrop, teachers in classrooms prioritise Bangla textbooks over the ones written in ethnic languages for imparting lessons.

Sunali Deb Barma, a student of class II at Daluchhara Government Primary School in Moulvibazar's Sreemangal upazila, told the Moulvibazar correspondent of The Daily Star that they received their books in Tripura language at the beginning of the new year, but no class has been taken using these books.

Moreover, there is no clear instruction for teachers on how to impart lessons in a class where there are students from more than one community.

"When we take classes of Marma and Chakma students, Tripura students find nothing to do and loiter around," said a Chakma teacher at a Khagrachhari school.

Experts say establishing mother tongue-based education at the primary level is not only limited to distributing books.

"It also requires proper training for the teachers and guidelines regarding the teaching method as multilingual teaching system is different from traditional teaching," said Prof Sourav Shikder, a teacher at Dhaka University's linguistics department.

He suggested that the teachers be given a minimum three months of

training.

Rabindranath Soren, president of Jatiya Adibasi Parishad, said ensuring proper training is necessary for ensuring the quality of the teaching.

"Besides, we need to keep our languages alive," he added.

Abdul Hye Al Hadi, an anthropologist and chief executive of Save the Heritage and Environment, said the ethnic languages in Sylhet region are disappearing due to the dominance of Bangla.

The ethnic people, particularly their children, can't practise their languages at schools and other places. At one stage, they hesitate to speak in their language even in the family atmosphere.

Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples' Forum, said the United Nations Charter gives all communities of the world the right to get educated in their mother languages and Bangladesh is a signatory to the charter.

He recommended a special teachers recruitment process for the schools in indigenous communities.

The teachers said that they also found it hard to decide which language to use in the question papers.

"When we ask, the upazila primary education officer they can't give us any specific direction," said a teacher in Rangamati.

Contacted, Primary and Mass Education Secretary Akram-Al-Hossain said, "If more training is needed, we will arrange that by talking with the officials concerned and indigenous community leaders."

Asked about the evaluation, he said, "There will be no internal exam for students up to class III as these students are subjected to formative assessment."

Iraq PM-designate calls for confidence vote Monday

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi prime minister-designate Mohammad Allawi called Wednesday for parliament to hold a confidence vote on his government early next week.

Nominated as a consensus candidate among Iraq's divided political parties, Allawi emphasised that his cabinet was not drawn from the political elite, a key demand of the protest movement sweeping the country's capital and south since October 1.

In a speech broadcast on state TV, Allawi said he was proposing "an independent government without any party candidates for the first time in decades".

Iraqi officials have quietly expressed scepticism that such a government would earn parliament's approval.

Allawi said he was calling on parliament, which is currently on a break, to sit for a confidence vote on February 24.

He was charged with forming a new government on February 1, after President Barham Saleh gave political parties an ultimatum, saying he would name a new premier unilaterally if they did not agree on a candidate.

Addressing the Iraqi people, Allawi warned Wednesday that if no government is formed by the March 2 constitutional deadline, "it will be because there are indeed parties that

are working for instability" in order to maintain "confessionalism and corruption".

Outgoing premier Adel Abdel Mahdi had also applied pressure earlier Wednesday, saying it would not be fair for him to hold his post beyond the constitutional deadline for confirming his replacement and warning against a "very dangerous" vacuum.

Abdel Mahdi stepped down in December in the face of the unprecedented anti-government protests demanding an end to corruption, an independent prime minister and a total government overhaul.

Man stabbed to death in Bogura

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A man was stabbed to death and his brother injured allegedly by rival groups over a previous feud in Bogura Sadar upazila yesterday, police said.

The dead, Apel Mahmud, 30, was from Palashbari village in the upazila and an activist of Gokul union BNP unit, said Sumon, general secretary of the Gokul Union Swachhasebak Dal, adding that his brother Al Mamun, 40, was also an activist of the same unit.

Both the brothers were butchers in profession, Suman said.

The incident took place in the upazila's Buzrukbari village as about 10 people, led by one Mizanur Rahman, swooped on the two brothers with sharp weapons at a litchi garden around 8:30am, said Rezaul Karim, inspector of Bogura Sadar Police Station.

The inspector said Mizanur had a long-standing rivalry with Mamun, who is accused of killing a follower of Mizanur in 2018.

Quoting Mamun, the inspector said an unknown person called Apel and told that he wanted to set a goat.

As Apel and Mamun went to Chandihara Bazar area, Mizanur's accomplices took them to a nearby litchi garden and stabbed them with machetes, the inspector said.

Later, local rescued them and sent them to the Bogura Shaheed Ziur Rahman Medical college hospital where doctor pronounced Apel dead, the inspector said, adding that Mamun is undergoing treatment at the same hospital.

No case was filed till filing of this report last night, Inspector Rezaul said.

Lassa fever hits Lagos as Nigeria deaths top 100

AFP, Lagos

An outbreak of Lassa in Nigeria has killed 103 people this year, health authorities said, as the first confirmed case was reported in the economic hub Lagos.

"Cumulatively from week 1 to week 07, 2020, 103 deaths have been reported with a case fatality rate of 17.6%," said the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in its latest statistics on the virus released on Wednesday.

The overall number of confirmed cases rose by 115 last week to a total of 586 across the country.

Separately, health authorities in Lagos, Nigeria's most populous city with 20 million inhabitants, said an infected person was diagnosed there on February 17 and being treated in isolation in hospital.

"Sixty-three people that may have been in contact with the patient and who may have been infected in the process have been identified and are being monitored," the state government wrote on Twitter on Thursday.

Endemic to Nigeria, Lassa fever belongs to the same family as the Ebola and Marburg viruses, but is much less deadly.

The disease is spread by contact with rat faeces or urine or the bodily fluids of an infected person.

The majority of those infected do not show symptoms but the disease can go on to cause severe bleeding and organ failure in about 20 percent of cases.

An outbreak of Lassa fever killed some 170 people around Nigeria last year.

The number of cases usually climbs around the start of the year linked to the dry season.

While the overall number of confirmed cases and deaths is up this year on the same period in 2019, the mortality rate is lower.

Twenty health workers across the country have been confirmed as contracting the disease so far in 2020.

The virus takes its name from the town of Lassa in northern Nigeria, where it was first identified in 1969.