

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,632
New cases in 24hrs



4,95,841
Total cases



7,156
Deaths



4,29,351
Recoveries



1,645,908
Deaths



74,013,450
Total cases

PM greets freedom fighters on Victory Day

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday greeted all valiant freedom fighters of the country on the occasion of the 50th Victory Day.

Like previous years, the premier sent flowers, fruits and sweetmeats to the freedom fighters at War-wounded Freedom Fighters' Rehabilitation Centre on Gaznavi Road in the capital's Mohammadpur.

Officials of the Prime Minister's Office, Assistant Private Secretary Gazi Hafizur Rahman Liku and

Assistant Press Secretary ABM Sarwer-E-Alom Sarker handed the items to the freedom fighters.

The valiant freedom fighters thanked the PM and expressed their gratitude to her for remembering them on every national day and festival like the Independence Day, Victory Day, Eid and Pehela Baishakh.

They also wished the premier good health and a long life.

The nation celebrated Victory Day yesterday marking the country's victory against the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971.

IS steps up Sinai fight with bombs in civilian homes

AFP, Cairo

Residents of Egypt's restive North Sinai region ran for their lives when an Islamic State group affiliate occupied their villages. Now, they are returning to find their homes booby-trapped.

"I lost my sister-in-law and her nine-month-old baby when an explosive device planted in their home went off," said a young resident of Aqtiya village, who asked not to be named for fear of repercussions.

Around 15 people have been killed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) since mid-October in villages around Bir al-Abd, in the northwest of the troubled province, say Egyptian security sources.

The IED attacks that have multiplied in the vast, remote and sparsely populated region which authorities have declared off-limits to journalists recall those the IS launched to sow terror in Iraq and Syria.

Stay firm on non-communal

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only think about how much we could contribute to the country rather than listening to what others say. Then we will be able to make right decisions and do the right thing."

Hasina said the country's intellectuals were killed on the eve of the final victory in 1971 so that there was none having knowledge and qualities left to take Bangladesh forward.

The premier said she can feel the pain of those who lost their relatives as she herself lost her near and dear ones. "Many did not find the bodies of their near and dear ones after the killing of intellectuals which had begun on December 9, 1971."

After the killing of Bangabandhu along with most of his family members in 1975, many leaders and activists of AL, Chhatra League and other organisations were killed and their bodies were also not found, she added.

The PM said such torture of people is still going on. "We have seen arson attacks, militancy, and terrorism."

Thanking the party men for standing beside the people during the Covid-19 pandemic, Hasina urged the AL leaders and activists to strengthen the organisation and spread the ideology of the Father of the Nation to the mass people.

About Unesco's international award to be given in honour of

Bangabandhu, the PM said the UN body announced the prize in the name of the Father of the Nation. She said the defeated forces had tried to erase his name from the history.

"I think this is a great gift for the Bangalee nation in the birth centenary of Bangabandhu," she said.

It has been decided that "Unesco-Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman International Prize" will be given in the field of creative economy to promote creative industries that provide youths, women and migrants with sustainable jobs globally.

The PM urged the people to follow the health guidelines properly amid a fresh surge in Covid-19 cases.

Hasina, also the AL president, said her party's job is to serve the people and the party was providing the service which would continue in future.

On Victory Day, the PM also remembered the support and contributions of different countries and their people to the Liberation War and to Bangladesh during its post-independence period.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, presidium members Matia Chowdhury, Abdur Razzaque, Jahangir Kabir Nanak and Abdur Rahman, among others, also spoke at the programme, moderated by Publicity and Publication Affairs Secretary Abdus Sobhan Golap.

Project hamstrung

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Tapan, however, said the work is now progressing fast and hoped that it would be completed within the new deadline.

Project Director Abdul Hakim said, "Usually we build memorials on khas land, but we had to buy land for four sites of this project. If we were to buy lands for all sites, the project cost would have increased manifold."

He said the total project cost would be more than the original estimate because of the rising costs of many things.

Project officials said construction work at 124 sites are progressing, estimates for 60 other sites are under process and 45 are still at the designing stage. Tendering is going on for four sites.

Besides, 23 sites have land-related problems, they said.

Usually, eight decimals of land are required to build a museum while around five decimals are needed to construct a memorial.

THE PROJECT

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council approved the project in October 2017.

The government is constructing memorials in combinations of red

and green. The main deck will be red and the free spaces will be filled with green grass. There will be a small place where two rides will be installed for children.

The main deck will also be used as a podium for staging programmes. There will be separate places for placing floral wreaths, according to the project officials.

Memorabilia related to the Liberation War will be exhibited at the museums and there will be a library at each museum, featuring books on the Liberation War.

Each site will contain its short history, said Rejwonul Haque, a project official.

Liberation War researcher Prof Muntassir Mamoon said many historical places linked with the liberation war are gradually disappearing due to a lack of preservation and maintenance.

"Proper preservations do not take place due to the lack of commitment of political leadership and bureaucrats," he said.

He proposed that upazila chairmen and upazila nirbahi officers should be given the responsibility to identify war-related sites and the maintenance of recognised sites.



Thousands of people poured in at the National Martyrs' Memorial in Savar to pay tributes to the martyrs who laid down their lives for the country in 1971.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Nation renews resolve to uproot fundamentalism

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Suhrawardy Udyan after the nine-month war.

The journey of a non-communal Bangladesh began 49 years ago but the spirit of non-communalism has been attacked time and again. Just weeks before this Victory Day, radical Islamist groups opposed the government plans to construct Bangabandhu's statues.

In her address to the nation on the eve of Victory Day, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued a stern warning to religious extremists.

"We won't allow anyone to create any division and anarchy in the name of religion,"

The day began with a 31-gun salute at National Parade Square, followed by rich tributes by President Abdul Hamid and the prime minister at the National Martyrs' Memorial in Savar to the martyrs who laid down their lives for the emancipation of the nation.

On behalf of the president, his military secretary SM Shamim-uz-Zaman and on behalf of the prime minister her military secretary Maj Gen Naqib Ahmed Chowdhury placed floral wreaths at the memorial.

A smartly turned out contingent drawn from the Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Navy, and Bangladesh Air Force presented a state salute on the occasion when bugles played the last post.

After the president and the prime minister paid their tributes, different socio-political, educational, cultural institutions and organisations placed floral wreaths at the memorial in Savar.

Awami League General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader after paying homage to martyrs in Savar said poisonous fundamentalist forces should be uprooted from the society.

"There will be no compromise with anyone on the questions of Liberation War and independence," he said.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam after paying tributes said they were struggling to restore democracy in the country.

Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Md Shah Alam told The Daily Star that the people established language-based nationalism in place of communal nationalism. Secularism is the essence of language-based nationalism, he said.

"The party which led the Liberation War is in power now but we are making compromises. Textbook changes took place on the demand of Qawmi and Hefajat forces," said Shah Alam, also a freedom fighter.

"We will need to keep the people, workers, and farmers away from the ideologies of Hefajat, Qawmi and Jamaat, for a sustainable secular Bangladesh."

Jatiya Party, Gonoforum, Ganashanghati Andolan, Nagorik Oikya, Bikalpadhara Bangladesh, and other political parties also paid tributes.

Freedom fighters, government and non-government organisations, and universities in the capital also paid tributes at Savar.

People from all occupations poured on to the streets around the memorial in Savar to join different programmes to

celebrate the day, a public holiday.

Many were seen visiting the memorial dressed in red and green, colours of the national flag. At the gate of the memorial some were seen selling national flags and green and red scarves. Some painted their faces red and green.

The national flag was hoisted atop government, semi-government and private offices as well as offices of autonomous bodies across the country.

Different government and non-government offices and establishments were decorated with colourful lights. Patriotic songs played over loudspeakers in many areas.

The president and the prime minister issued separate messages on the occasion and national dailies across the country published special supplements.

State-owned and private television channels and radios broadcast month-long special programmes highlighting the Liberation War. Different organisations held discussions where Liberation War related documentaries were screened.

Special prayers were offered in mosques and other places of worship, seeking eternal peace for the souls of the martyrs, and peace, progress and prosperity for the country.

Special dishes were served in jails, hospitals, orphanages, and vagrant homes across the country.

The poor and disadvantaged children had parks and other recreational centres opened to them for free across the country.

Celebrating victory, Bangladesh missions abroad observed the day with various programmes.

Talks to focus on water sharing, connectivity

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year due to the pandemic, agreed to attend the Independence Day celebration in Dhaka on March 26 next year if the Covid-19 situation improved, officials said.

Today's summit, which follows the prime minister-level meeting in Delhi early October last year, is, however, likely to set aside concerns that were expressed in Bangladesh over India's National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

WATER ISSUES

Bangladesh and India have 54 rivers in common, but treaty on water sharing was signed only on two -- the Ganges in 1996 and the Feni river in 2019. Though negotiations were finalised, the two countries failed to sign the Teesta Water Sharing Agreement due to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's last-minute opposition in 2011.

"We expect India to honour its international commitment," Momen said.

A water resources ministry official said it is reported that a few irrigation projects were implemented in the upstream of the Teesta in Sikkim and that can impact the water flow downstream. Dhaka will urge Delhi to ensure that Teesta water downstream is not affected, he said.

Dhaka will also request Delhi to speed up water-sharing deals on six other small rivers -- Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar. Joint technical committees were formed after a secretary-level meeting in August last year -- one on conducting feasibility study on the optimum use of water received under the Ganges treaty and the other on collection of data on the six rivers.

An official of the Joint River Commission said data on the rivers had already been collected. Based on

that, modalities on water sharing will be finalised. Today's meeting could call for early finalisation of the modalities that can lead to signing of the deal, said the official.

"As the Ganges Water Treaty expires in 2026, the Ganges-Padma Barrage construction to maximise the use of water is a must. But the two countries need to agree on design and financing mode. This issue could come prominently in the meeting," said the official of the water resources ministry.

The official said Dhaka would propose signing of an MoU with Delhi on withdrawal of 153 cusec of water from upper Koshiyara river for irrigation purpose. India has been withdrawing 100 cusec of water from the common stretch of the river for long, he said.

Dhaka also seeks formation of a sub-regional working group for basin-wide water management. Discussions with India, Nepal and Bhutan were imperative towards that end. The issue may be raised in the meeting, he said.

REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Foreign ministry officials said Dhaka, during today's summit, would seek India's help in signing of Motor Vehicle Agreement with Nepal and Bhutan for direct transportation with these countries. Once signed and operationalised, the regional trade and investment can see a big boost, officials said.

Dhaka may also request India to allow third country export facility under Coastal Shipping deal signed between India and Bangladesh in 2015. Presently, 15 Bangladeshi ships are running under the agreement and the demand is increasing, officials said.

Dhaka may also propose short distance bus service between the nearby towns of Bangladesh and India. The possible towns of Bangladesh are

Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Dinajpur, Khulna and Jashore.

PROJECTS UNDER LOC

Between 2010 and 2017, India provided Bangladesh with LoC of \$7.86 billion for infrastructure projects, but their implementation was slow. So far, less than nine percent of the money was disbursed. One of the reasons for slow implementation is that 75 percent of raw materials need to be procured from India.

Delhi has agreed to relax this condition, but this needs to be further looked into, said an official at the Economic Relations Division.

As there is access to low-cost market borrowing and high foreign currency reserve in Bangladesh, the official said, the government wants to make the LoCs more effective.

Dhaka could also request Delhi to remove the non-tariff barriers for export of Bangladeshi products to India as part of its goal to reduce trade imbalance. The volume of export to India is now slightly over \$1 billion.

The progress in construction of a trans-border pipeline for petroleum products from Assam via West Bengal to Dinajpur in Bangladesh and a sub-regional electricity grid sharing project, involving Bhutan and Bangladesh, are also likely to come up for discussion.

"During the summit, the two leaders [Hasina and Modi] will hold comprehensive discussions on the entire spectrum of the bilateral relationship, including further strengthening cooperation in the post Covid era," according to a statement of Indian Prime Minister's Office.

The Bangladesh government and Beximco Pharmaceuticals have already signed separate deals with Serum Institute of India for getting three crore

Clashes mar Victory Day celebrations

STAR REPORT

Members of Bangladesh Chhatra League allegedly attacked some followers of former Ducusu vice-president Nurul Haque in Brahmanbaria while they were paying homage to martyrs marking the Victory Day yesterday.

At least eight to 10 activists were injured in the attack that took place around 9:00am near the district town's Faruki Park memorial, claimed Nurul's organisation Chhatra O Jubo Odhikar Parishad.

According to witnesses, Nurul's followers went to pay homage to martyrs under the banner of Chhatra O Jubo Odhikar Parishad.

On the way, Brahmanbaria Chhatra League President Rabiul Hossain Rubel and his followers tried to bar them and tagged them as Jamaat-Shibir men.

At one point, Chhatra League men swooped on Nurul's followers when they were leaving the area after paying homage. Both groups locked in a clash which created panic in the area, the witnesses added.

Jewel Mia, general secretary of the parishad's Brahmanbaria unit, alleged that only three to four members of their group were allowed inside the park to pay homage to the martyrs whereas at least 40 of them were present outside.

They came under attack suddenly when they were returning after paying homage. Ashraful Hasan, president of the parishad's Brahmanbaria unit, was injured in the attack, he added.

Asked, Brahmanbaria Chhatra League President Rabiul said Jamaat-Shibir men, under the banner of the parishad, chanted provocative slogans.

As a result, students chased them away and BCL activists brought out a procession against anti-Liberation War forces.

Contacted, Abdur Rahim, officer-in-charge of Brahmanbaria Police Station, said he was unaware of the incident.

In separate incidents, fractions of teachers at Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) and officers at Islamic University (IU) in Kushtia locked in altercation while paying homage marking the day.

At PUST, two groups of teachers locked in altercation while placing floral wreaths as homage at the Liberation War Memorial on the campus.

As a result, the organisers postponed a pre-scheduled Victory Day programme, reported our Pabna correspondent, quoting university sources.

The incident took place when a group of teachers led by PUST Teachers Association President Omar Faruk and its secretary Fazlul Haque went for paying homage to the martyrs at memorial on the campus ground.

Another group of teachers led by Kamal Hossain, assistant professor of business administration department, tried to stop them which sparked altercation between two groups of teachers.

Kamal, however, denied allegation against him.

Prof Abdul Alim, a senior teacher of the university, said the incident was unwanted.

Contacted, PUST Vice-chancellor Prof M Rostom Ali said the university authority will investigate the matter.

In Kushtia, an altercation ensued between two groups of officers while they were paying homage around 11:00am, reported our Kushtia correspondent.

There are allegations that some members of Officers' Association who belong to BNP and Jamaat and patronised by a former vice-chancellor went to the altar with putting shoes on feet.

As Chhatra League men, who were volunteers, and some officers from rival groups protested the incident, an altercation ensued between the two groups.

Proctor Paresh Chandra Burman said he was present at the spot but unable to do something.

IU VC Prof Abdus Salam said the incident was unwanted.

8 still missing in Meghna trawler capsized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

At least eight people have remained missing till 4:00pm yesterday since a trawler capsized in the Meghna on Tuesday.

The missing passengers are Zakia Begum, 55, Mohammad Hasan, 7, Nargis, 4, Halima, 4, Lamia, 3, Niha, 1, Amir Hossain, 2, and Alif, 1.

Meanwhile, seven persons, including three children and a newlywed bride, died in the accident.

The dead are bride Taslima Begum, 22, Afrin Akhtar Lamia, 2, Lili Akhter, 8, Asma Begum, 19, Hosnara Begum Rupa, 5, Rehana Begum, 30, and Noor Jahan 65.

Ekrum Ullah, in-charge of naval police out post, said there were around 50 male, female and children in the small fishing trawler carrying wedding guests.

Bride Sharif Uddin, of Kalatali village in Monpura upazila, went to East Azim Nagar village in Chandni union of Hatia and left the place around 3:00pm.

When the trawler reached Tankir Khal-Ghashiar Char it tilted in one side as the guests were enjoying in the boat and there was high tide, he said.

Some fishermen who were nearby came forward and rescued some of them and many could reach ashore by swimming.



A 3D rendition of the memorials being built at the historic sites of the Liberation War.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

WHO's Covid vaccine scheme risks failure

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to mitigate them," it said. "It therefore requires intensive mitigation efforts to bring the risk within risk appetite."

Gavi hired Citigroup last month to provide advice on how to mitigate financial risks.

In one November 25 memo included in the documents submitted to the Gavi board, Citi advisors said the biggest risk to the programme was from clauses in supply contracts that allow countries not to buy vaccines booked through COVAX.

A potential mismatch between vaccine supply and demand "is not a commercial risk efficiently mitigated by the market or the MDBs," the Citi advisors wrote, referring to multilateral development banks such as the World Bank.

"Therefore it must either be mitigated through contract negotiation or through a Gavi risk absorption layer that is carefully managed by a management and governance structure."

Asked about the documents, a Gavi spokesman said the body remains confident it can achieve its goals.

"It would be irresponsible not to assess the risks inherent to such a massive and complex undertaking, and to build policies and instruments to mitigate those risks," he added.

The WHO did not respond to a request for comment. In the past it has let Gavi take the lead in public comments about the COVAX programme.

Citibank said in a statement: "As a financial advisor, we are responsible for helping Gavi plan for a range of scenarios related to the COVAX facility and supporting their efforts to mitigate potential risks."

COVAX's plans rely on cheaper vaccines that have so far yet to receive approval, rather than vaccines from frontrunners Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna that use more expensive new mRNA technology.

The Pfizer vaccine has already been approved for emergency use in several countries and deployed in Britain and the United States, and the Moderna vaccine is expected to be similarly approved soon.