

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



1,134
New cases in 24hrs



4,96,975
Total cases



7,192
Deaths



4,31,590
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,663,094
Deaths



74,979,143
Total cases

BANGLADESH-INDIA VIRTUAL SUMMIT

Hasina for further integrated economies

Bss, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday suggested further integrating the economies of Bangladesh and India to consolidate the global and regional value chains cashing on the available synergies.

"I believe both our countries can move up the global and regional value chains by further integrating our economies taking advantage of available synergies," she told her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi in an India-Bangladesh virtual summit.

Describing the ongoing connectivity initiatives between the two next-door neighbours as catalysts in this regard, Hasina said a prime example was the resumption of Chilahati-Haldibari rail link which was inaugurated yesterday.

The PM led the Bangladesh delegation from the Gono Bhaban in Dhaka while Modi led the Indian delegation from New Delhi.

Talking about the growing dependency of economies of the two friendly countries, the premier said, "We happily recognise the growing mutual dependency of the economies of Bangladesh and India. A good number of Indian nationals are employed in the manufacturing and service sectors of Bangladesh and are remittance earners for India. On the other hand, India receives its highest number of tourists and medical patients from Bangladesh."

Hasina said Bangladesh-India relations have embarked on a landmark moment. "Yesterday [Wednesday], Bangladesh celebrated 50 years as an independent nation. Bangladesh and India have also stepped into the 50th year of establishment of diplomatic relations."

Bangladesh is also celebrating the 100th birth anniversary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, she said. "Just a few months ago, we concluded celebrations of the 150th birth anniversary of your Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi."

The PM recalled her last meeting with Modi at the grand Hyderabad House in New Delhi in October last year. "Much has changed since then. The world has witnessed an upheaval and mankind's ability to counter the unknown has been put to the test. Millions of lives have been lost, livelihoods destroyed, economies slowed down, societies disrupted."

She said throughout 2020 Bangladesh and India witnessed a number of initiatives such as trade through rail routes, high level visits and meetings, capacity-building initiatives, the first trial run of Indian cargo from Kolkata to North-East India and cooperation on Covid-19.

Hasina paid rich tribute to the members of Indian armed forces martyred in the 1971 Liberation War and the Indian government and people who extended their wholehearted support for the cause of Bangladesh's liberation.

Going down memory lane, the premier said, "Today [December 17] is a special day for us. My mother, younger sister Sheikh Rehana, Russell, four-month old little Joy and I were under the captivity of Pakistani occupation forces. Col Ashok Tara, who was then major, of India freed us from captivity in the morning of December 17, 1971."

She expressed her sincere gratitude to Col Ashok Tara. The PM also paid deep homage to the three million martyrs who laid down their lives and more than two hundred thousand women who sacrificed their honour for Bangladesh's independence in 1971.

Relations with Bangladesh a priority: Modi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, NEW DELHI

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asserted that Bangladesh remains a "significant pillar" of his country's Neighbourhood First policy.

Addressing the Bangladesh-India virtual summit, Modi told his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina that his government focused on maintaining strong relations with Bangladesh right from day one it came to power in May 2014.

"It has been a priority of my government to bring depth and strength in ties with Bangladesh," he said and pointed to the resolution of the land boundary issue and enhanced cross-border connectivity.

Modi lauded Hasina's leadership, which he said "reflected the traits of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman".

Cooperation between India and Bangladesh has been good notwithstanding coronavirus pandemic, the Indian PM observed.

Seeking to strike an emotional chord with Bangla-speaking people, Modi greeted Hasina by speaking in Bangla -- "Bijoy dibosher onek onek abhinandan aar poush parbon-er shubhechha" -- before he began his speech.

Modi said it was a matter of pride for India to celebrate with Bangladesh the latter's victory over anti-liberation forces. He paid tributes to those who sacrificed their lives to win the Liberation War.

He congratulated Hasina on behalf of the people of India on the birth centenary of Bangabandhu and thanked her for inviting him to visit her country next year. He said it would be a matter of pride for him to pay tributes to Bangabandhu at that time.

The Indian premier said Bangabandhu's messages are eternally relevant.

The two leaders jointly opened the "Bangabandhu-Bapu (Mahatma Gandhi) Digital Exhibition".

Referring to the inauguration of the exhibition, Modi expressed hope that the two leaders would inspire the youths of the two countries.

The Digital Exhibition, which pays tribute to Bangabandhu and Mahatma Gandhi, will initially be on display in New Delhi before travelling to different locations in Bangladesh and the UN and culminating in Kolkata in 2022.

The two prime ministers also inaugurated the Chilahati-Haldibari rail link between India and Bangladesh, reviving a connectivity that was snapped by the India-Pakistan war in 1965. The move will help strengthen movement of people and goods between Bangladesh and West Bengal and north-eastern Indian states.

Initially, the link will be used to transport goods. Movement of passengers will start once the infrastructure is ready.

The two countries have already reopened four out of six rail links that were suspended in 1965: Petrapole-Benapole, Gede-Darshana, Singhabad-Rohanpur and Radhikapur-Birol. The Haldibari-Chilahati link was part of the main broad gauge route between Kolkata and Siliguri.



A man selling ducks on Holy Cross Road in the capital yesterday. Demand for duck rises in winter and each one sells for about Tk 250, depending on the size.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

India pledges vaccine support

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of India for Covid-19 vaccines.

"Whenever vaccine is produced, India will give us three crore vaccines," said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen at a press conference at State Guesthouse Padma after the PM-level summit, which lasted for an hour and 15 minutes.

The vaccines will be purchased at a "friendship price", he said.

In a separate press conference, Indian High Commissioner Vikram Doraiswami said India is working quietly and strategically on best practices, supply chain and management of the vaccine not only with Bangladesh, but also with Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives and Mauritius.

"We will be very willing if the Bangladesh side wants us to help improve facilities and also facilitate co-production here," he said.

The summit was held at a historical time as the countries are in their 50th year of diplomatic relationships. Bangladesh is also celebrating the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and preparing to celebrate its 50th independence anniversary next year.

Sheikh Hasina said India is a true friend of Bangladesh and expressed her gratitude to the country and the Indian Army for their support during the 1971 Liberation War.

The two premiers inaugurated a postal stamp of Bangabandhu and the Bangabandhu-Bapu digital exhibition. They also inaugurated the Haldibari-Chilahati rail link, which remained unused since the India-Pakistan war in 1965, and inaugurated two community development projects.

They also signed seven MoUs and adapted a 39-point joint statement following the meeting.

Both countries will also organise commemorative activities next year, including a biographical film on Bangabandhu by acclaimed director Shyam Benegal, to be shot in Bangladesh and India early next year.

TEESTA AND OTHER RIVERS

According to the joint statement, Hasina sought early signing of the interim agreement for sharing of the Teesta waters, as agreed upon by both governments in 2011.

In response, Modi reiterated India's sincere commitment and continued efforts in that regard.

Indian High Commissioner Doraiswami said he could not give any specific timeframe for signing of the deal, but was working on it.

However, he said that a joint technical committee is working on water sharing of six other rivers -- Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar. The committee would meet before the Joint Rivers Commission at the soonest possible time.

Dhaka requested Delhi to allow excavation work on the remaining portion of the Rahimpur Khal for utilisation of the water of Kushiyara river for irrigation.

Both countries agreed to carry out necessary work to convert the international boundary along the Kuhsiyara river into a fixed boundary.

Bangladesh reiterated its request for 1.3km of "Innocent Passage" along the Padma river near Rajshahi. The Indian side assured that they would consider the request.

Momen said Bangladesh also requested the early demarcation of Muhuri, Ichhamoti, Kalindi, Raimangal and Hariabhang rivers.

He said both sides agreed to hold an early meeting of the Joint Boundary Conference to prepare a new set of strip maps along the stretch of the rivers. The joint statement, however, omitted the river Muhuri.

BORDER KILLINGS

Bangladesh expressed concern over the loss of civilian lives at the India-Bangladesh border. India shared the concern and directed border forces concerned to enhance coordination measures to work towards bringing such border incidents

Bilateral documents signed

- Framework of understanding on cooperation in hydrocarbon sector

- Framework agreement on high impact community development projects

- Protocol on trans-boundary elephant conservation

- MOU on supply of equipment and improvement of garbage/solid waste disposal ground in Barishal City Corporation

- MoU on cooperation in the field of agriculture

- MoU between the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Museum, Dhaka National Museum, New Delhi

- Terms of Reference of India-Bangladesh CEOs Forum

to zero.

Doraiswami said Modi gave clear instructions to the Border Security Force (BSF) that lethal force is to be used only as the last resort. PM Hasina also acknowledged that Indians are also killed and injured in such incidents.

"We don't want any black spots in our relationship," Foreign Minister Momen said, adding that some criminal activities also take place at the borders where some illegal traders from Bangladesh are also to blame.

Both sides agreed to facilitate the completion of border fencing at all pending sectors as soon as possible, beginning with the Tripura-Bangladesh sector.

TRADE, ECONOMY, CONNECTIVITY

Both countries expressed their commitment to strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation on trade and connectivity, emphasising on removing non-tariff barriers so that both countries can take full advantage of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) flexibility.

Momen said Dhaka requested Delhi to remove anti-dumping/anti-circumvention duties on export of jute products from Bangladesh. Delhi expected a quick resolution.

Bangladesh requested India to convey in advance any amendments to India's export policy of essential commodities to Bangladesh. The Indian side took note of this request.

Momen said the issue was significant as Bangladesh had to face trouble after India this year restricted onion exports without prior information.

Both prime ministers directed officials to expeditiously conclude the ongoing joint study on the prospects of entering into a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement as Bangladesh graduates from the LDC list in four years.

The two leaders welcomed the signing of the second addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT), trial run of trans-shipment of Indian goods from Kolkata to Agartala via Chattogram and the operationalisation of the Sonamura-Daudkandi Protocol route, and sought speedy operationalisation of trans-shipment of Indian goods through Chattogram and Mongla Ports.

Doraiswami said Bangladesh can also use the Indian ports for third-country export.

Bangladesh sought quick operationalisation of BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) Motor Vehicle Agreement through signing of protocols among India, Bangladesh and Nepal to commence movement of goods and passengers, with provisions for Bhutan to join at a later date.

Hasina sought to join the ongoing India Myanmar Thailand trilateral highway project to enhance connectivity between the regions of south and south-east Asia.

The Indian side requested Bangladesh to allow connectivity from West Bengal (Hilli) to Meghalaya (Mahendraganj) via Bangladesh.

Hasina proposed that Bangladeshi trucks avail the Feni Bridge, once completed, for transportation of goods from Chattogram port to north-eastern India.

Modi invited Bangladesh to join the New Development Bank of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Hasina expressed willingness to join it considering concessionary loans for infrastructure projects.

In response to Bangladesh's request for India's assistance in quick Rohingya repatriation, India said they agree that the solution to the crisis lies in sustainable repatriation.

Indian High Commissioner Dowaiswami said India, alongside Japan, is investing for development in Rakhine for creating a conducive environment for repatriation.

Give couriers access to NID server

FROM PAGE 1

DNC, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The DNC recovered 21,614 yaba tablets from the consignments, and nine cases and four general diaries were filed over the incidents, he said.

Besides, two other consignments -- 12.32kg of amphetamine powder booked for Australia and 39,000 yaba pills booked for the Middle East -- were seized by the law enforcers from the cargo village of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka in September and October this year.

It needs to be mentioned that Bangladesh does not produce any narcotics, and the syndicates smuggle in the amphetamine from India and yaba tablets from Myanmar, say investigators.

Rameshwar said in a majority of the cases, the senders' addresses were found to be fake.

"For this reason, we are recommending NID server access for couriers so that they can check the details and photographs of the senders before receiving any package," he said.

The DNC also suggested that couriers bring all their offices under CCIV camera surveillance, verify phone numbers of senders and share real-time information with law enforcers whenever any suspicious

issues come to notice.

The recommendations were made at a workshop titled "Preventing narcotics smuggling through courier services and export cargo" organised by the DNC on December 13.

Representatives from the home ministry, police, Rab, National Security Intelligence, National Board of Revenue, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, Bangladesh Border Guard, Coast Guard, directorates of posts, and Ansar & VDP, Civil Aviation Authority, Chattogram and Mongla ports, Bangladesh Land Port Authority and chairman of the Licencing Authority (Mailing Operator and Courier Services) were present at the workshop.

Muhammed Ahsanul Jabbar, director general of DNC, shared the recommendations with the media on Tuesday.

He said they are committed to curbing the narcotics smuggling.

"We have found that couriers are being used to smuggle in yaba tablets, which is alarming. We are recommending providing NID server access for couriers, like banks, to verify sender information," said the DG.

At the workshop, the participants also requested the posts and telecommunications ministry to ban

the activities of the couriers having no licence.

Hafizur Rahman Pulok, president of Courier Service Association of Bangladesh, told The Daily Star yesterday that there are some 800 courier service operators in the country, but only 150 of them are registered with the association.

Of the 150 couriers, only 30 have government registration. So, it is really alarming how these couriers are operating without licences, he said.

Regarding the NID access, Pulok appreciated the recommendation and said it would definitely help improve the service and smuggling of contraband items would be reduced.

Brig Gen Mohammed Saidul Islam, director general of NID wing, told this correspondent that they are always ready for the optimum utilisation of the NID server for the country's betterment.

About the security threat, he said, "If any formal application comes to us, we will check their demands and how much information access they need. We will verify and evaluate their proposal and then we may make a decision."

"But we are positive and ready to provide any kind of support," he added.

Hefajat leader Mamunul

FROM PAGE 1

Moin's lawyer Abu Hanif.

"The court heard our statement and then we presented our arguments before it. After that, the magistrate passed the order, taking the case into cognisance," he told reporters at the Chattogram Court Building.

Apart from Mamunul, top Hefajat leaders Nasir Uddin Munir, Azizul Haque Islamabadi, Mir Idris, Habib Ullah, Ahsan Ullah, and Noman Foyzi are among the 36 accused.

Hefajat insiders said the accused are known to be close associates of Babunagari, who was elected ameer through a council on November 15 following Shafi's demise.

In the case statement, Moin Uddin alleged that Shafi was killed in a pre-planned manner through collaboration between the accused at the direct and indirect instigation by Mamunul, joint secretary general of Hefajat, and Nasir Uddin.

"Shafi was mentally tortured and his oxygen support was removed. Apart from that, the ambulance carrying him while he was in a critical condition was stopped on its way to the hospital. All these killed

my brother-in-law," Moin Uddin told The Daily Star.

Those people tried to create unrest at Al Jameyatul Ahlia Darul Ulum Moinul Islam Madrasa, popularly known as Hathazari madrasa, also took away Tk 60 lakh, he said in the case.

After the death of the Hefajat chief on September 18, his followers, including his son and Moin Uddin, on November 15 at a press briefing alleged that Shafi was murdered by a section of Hefajat men, who are followers of Babunagari.

They also alleged that Babunagari's men snapped Shafi's oxygen support which sent him into coma. Also, Shafi faced obstruction at different places on his way to hospital.

Shafi died a couple of days after unrest gripped the Hathazari madrasa. The unrest stemmed from madrasa students demanding permanent removal of Shafi's son Anas Madani from the madrasa administration.

Several Jamaat leaders were seen taking part in Shafi's namaj-e-janaza. Amid apprehensions that Jamaat

was trying to take the helm of the madrasa, Babunagari was made the new Hefajat chief.

Shafi's supporters could not even make it to the 151-member new committee of Hefajat.

They demanded the committee be dissolved.

BABUNAGARI BLAMED

On Wednesday, a section of Hefajat leaders, who are followers of Shafi, blamed Babunagari for what happened at the capital's Shapla Chatter on May 5, 2013.

They claimed that then Hefajat secretary general Babunagari, without taking permission from Shafi, made Hefajat activists stay overnight at the Shapla Chatter.

The leaders were speaking at a discussion on the life and works of Shafi at the press club in Chattogram.

On May 5, 2013, thousands of members of Hefajat, a Qawmi madrasa-based Islamist organisation, clashed with law enforcers and ruling Awami League men, turning Motijheel and Paltan areas into a battlefield.