

## A historic gift from a friend of Bangladesh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian President Pranab Mukherjee yesterday handed over a "historic audio-visual gift" comprising recordings of transmissions made by All India Radio and Doordarshan during the 1971 Liberation War to his visiting Bangladeshi counterpart Abdul Hamid.

The two heads of state met at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi yesterday evening, said an Indian government statement.

During the meeting, Mukherjee told Hamid that New Delhi attaches the highest importance to relations with Dhaka, saying a strong, stable and prosperous Bangladesh is in India's interest.

The Indian president also recalled Bangladesh's valiant freedom fighters who fought along with Indian troops for Bangladesh's liberation and expressed the hope that the recordings would remind the people of Bangladesh about those momentous events.

Expressing similar sentiments, Hamid praised Mukherjee for having been a friend of Bangladesh for long and said the people of Bangladesh

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President Abdul Hamid meets his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: PIB, INDIA

## Banquet for Hamid brings together two foes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A banquet for Bangladesh President Md Abdul Hamid last night provided an occasion for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his bitter political foe West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to meet and exchange pleasantries.

As Modi arrived at the banquet, hosted by Indian President Pranab Mukherjee at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, he shook hands with the Indian delegation lined up for customary introduction to the visiting head of state.

Modi stopped for a while and exchanged greetings with Mamata. After exchanging pleasantries with her, he walked ahead along the line and stood with former Indian premier Manmohan Singh while Mamata talked to External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.

This was the first time Mamata met Modi in the backdrop of weeks of a bitter war of words between BJP and Trinamool Congress on a range of issues including Saradha chit fund scam, Burdwan blast and communal

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## Indo-Bangla river development plan needed: experts

THE HINDU

Highlighting the intricate and complex river system shared by India and Bangladesh, experts from both the countries stressed on developing a comprehensive river development plan which involves water management, sediment management, navigation and inland transport.

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), under its initiative "Ecosystem for Life" which has been emphasising on management of shared river ecosystem of the two countries, on

Thursday launched a documentary "River Highways" on the theme of inland navigation between the two countries.

The documentary, which is a result of a joint research between the two countries, points out that despite huge economic demand for the river route, water is receding in the rivers and they are turning non-navigable.

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## Modi hopeful but gives no timeframe

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drug trafficking, highlighting three Ds of the menace -- darkness, destruction and devastation.

MAKE IT QUICK

Meanwhile, a Congress member in Lok Sabha yesterday asked the Indian government to expedite introduction of a constitution amendment bill to give effect to the LBA with Bangladesh and asked it to explain the delay.

"The Parliamentary Standing Committee unanimously cleared the 119th Constitution (Amendment) Bill with a lot of painstaking efforts. Several parties, which were previously opposed to it, came around to support it," said Shashi Tharoor, who headed the committee.

The report was tabled in parliament on December 1. "Yet there is no action on the matter. I have to demand that the government should explain to the House why it has delayed bringing the bill," Tharoor said.

"The Bangladesh president is in India. Why are you not proceeding in this matter?" he said.

Tharoor, who was supported by CPI(M) member Mohammad Selim, said the agreement was aimed at putting an end to a serious anomaly plaguing the two countries since the Partition in 1947.

Selim also wanted to know why the government was not bringing the legislation for passage in Parliament.

Responding to the two members, Parliamentary Affairs Minister M Venkaiah Naidu said the matter has been taken note of and would be conveyed to External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj who "will respond to it when she finds it convenient."

It appears unlikely that the bill will be passed in the current winter session of parliament with just four days left for its end.

CONGRESS BACKING LBA

India's main opposition Congress party yesterday said it will extend "whole-hearted" support to BJP-led NDA government for passage of a constitution amendment bill seeking ratification of the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh.

This was conveyed by Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad when he called on President Abdul Hamid.

Azad also said India and Bangladesh "should explore cooperation in new areas such as space, nuclear technology and maritime issues".

He told Hamid that India has always believed that a strong, stable and prosperous Bangladesh is in "our country's" interest and that "we remain fully committed to be a partner in the progress and prosperity of Bangladesh".

Responding to the urge of Bangladesh government for early ratification of LBA, Azad said the previous Congress-led UPA government had introduced the bill in the Rajya Sabha and remains committed to its early passage in parliament.

"Congress party will extend whole-hearted cooperation to the NDA government for its early passage," he told the president.

A constitution amendment is required in India to implement LBA

because it involves exchange of land between the two countries.

Azad appreciated the security cooperation extended by Bangladesh and expressed hope that both the countries will continue to jointly combat insurgency, militancy and terrorism as these have emerged as a huge threat to peace and stability in the region.

He said he would like India-Bangladesh border to be an interface of friendship and peace.

TWO WAR HEROES

At the start of the meeting with Modi which began at noon, Hamid recalled with gratitude the contribution made by the government and people of India to the Liberation War, 1971.

For his part, Modi said the month of December was "very significant" because it was the "month of victory", a reference to December 16 when occupation Pakistani troops surrendered to the joint command of Bangladesh and India.

Modi recalled that in the space of four days, he was lucky to meet two war heroes -- Gen (Retd) JFR Jacob

who played a key role in Bangladesh Liberation War on December 16 and the Bangladesh president who also took part in the independence struggle.

Earlier in the morning, India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj called on Hamid at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, where Hamid is staying as a guest, and told him that India has wish and will to support Bangladesh in its development, Karim said.

Swaraj also said Bangladesh is not only a neighbour but a dependable friend.

She agreed when Hamid said Bangladesh-India Parliamentarians Friendship Group should expand its activities. The minister wanted more contacts between lawmakers of the two countries.

The Indian foreign minister expressed satisfaction at the exchange of high-level visits between the two countries in the last six months.

Sushma and her deputy Gen (retd) VK Singh had visited Dhaka in last six months.

## College student

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celebrations in the area. Love-related feud between the two might also be the reason behind Rubel's murder, added police.

When Rubel was going to a mosque in Mijmiji area to attend Friday prayers yesterday, Shawon along with his group members stopped and stabbed the victim repeatedly, killing him on the spot, said police.

Later, the body was sent to Narayanganj General Hospital for autopsy.

Mohammad Alauddin, officer-in-charge of Siddhirganj Police Station, said they detained three people for interrogation after the incident.

"We are trying to unearth the real mystery behind the killing," he added.

Rubel's mother Jamila Khatun demanded the killer be punished immediately. "My innocent son was killed without any reason".

## Bangladeshis most active

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The report examines patterns of political participation in a variety of activities, including voting, protesting and online engagement in the surveyed nations. It also looks at political efficacy and the perceived effectiveness of these political activities in these countries.

A total of 1,000 Bangladeshis aged over 18 were interviewed face to face from April 14 to May 11.

Eighty percent of them choose voting as the most useful form of political engagement with 78 percent saying they have voted in the last 12 months or in the more distant past.

One-third of the participants say that they would never engage with political parties.

Forty-eight percent respondents in Bangladesh said they attended politi-

cal events or speeches of political leaders in the last one year while 37 percent participated in an organised protest of any kind, says the survey.

About one-third of the Bangladeshis claimed to be active members of political organisations, and to have contacted government officials and participated in labour strikes.

Twenty-four percent Bangladeshi respondents say they phoned a television or radio show to express an opinion on political issues while the worldwide percentage in this category is nine.

Less than one-fourth people claim to have signed a petition about a political issue, and posted online comments on political affairs and online links to political articles.

According to the survey conducted

among about 38,000 people in 33 developing countries between March 17 and June 5 this year, Pakistan has the lowest level of political engagement with only 12 percent of its people having higher participation.

VOTING MOST EFFECTIVE

Among the forms of political engagement included in the survey, voting in an election is seen as the most effective way to influence what a government does.

Eighty percent Bangladeshis think voting is very or somewhat effective, while 58 percent say that attending campaigns or speeches and participating in organised protests are effective means of political change.

Roughly half of those surveyed believe membership in a political organisation and participation in labour strikes are effective means of

political engagement. More than one-third respondents believe phoning a live radio or TV show to express an opinion and signing a petition about a political issue are useful ways to affect political change.

Only 27 and 31 percent see posting links to political articles online and posting online comments on political issues as useful tools of governmental change.

The survey says that 69 percent Bangladeshis believe the government officials do not care about what they think. A meagre 19 percent claim that they are cared.

YOUNG AVOID CONVENTIONAL WAYS

The study reveals that young people are much less likely to engage in some traditional forms of political participation, including voting and contacting

government officials.

In 21 countries, the young are significantly less likely to vote compared with those aged 50 and older with differences of 15 percentage points or more in about half of the countries surveyed.

They often participate in less traditional ways than their older counterparts, especially through online activity. This is due at least in part to the fact that younger people are also more likely to use the internet.

In 22 of 31 countries, 18 to 29-year olds are more likely to post links to political articles and post their own comments or thoughts about politics online.

No such details about Bangladesh were given in the poll report.

For more details, see [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org)



Indigenous people at Suridaspara Bazar in Rangamati where they had been gathering to protest the attack by Bangalee settlers on their homes since Tuesday.

## Mistrust, blame rule

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The army and the police have intensified their patrol in the area. A military van had been stationed at Suridaspara Bazar throughout the day yesterday. Several other vehicles were kept on the Rangamati-Khagrachhari road.

"The settlers cannot be trusted. They might attack us again. So we keep vigil all the time," said Ananda Chakma, a union parishad member who is mobilising the victims.

Sitting at Suridaspara Bazar, which is the centre of the agitation against the arson attack, he demanded that the authorities build new homes for the victims and compensate them.

An arson victim there said the Tuesday's attack was part of a conspiracy to oust the indigenous from the hills.

Protesting the attack, several ethnic organisations were enforcing an indefinite blockade of Rangamati-Khagrachhari road.

A kilometre away, a group of Bangalee were seen agitated alleging that all focus was on the "pahari people".

"They chopped down lakhs of pineapple plants and 20,000 saplings of teak, causing a huge loss for the Bangalee farmers," said Kamal, who was about to harvest 1.40 lakh pineapples before they were destroyed.

Others expressed apprehension that the victim settlers might not get any compensation while local and international "relief and cash pouring in on the

ethnic people".

"We can't even move freely in the hills as the paharis [people of the hills] have firearms. They cannot accept us and thus always try to put us in trouble," said Kamal Islam, a shopkeeper at the bazaar.

Many of the 300 Bangalee families living in the area were in trouble as they could not buy daily necessities, like rice and oil, due to the blockade enforced by the indigenous people.

Subedar Rajab Ali of a nearby police camp said they along with army personnel had been keeping their eyes on the indigenous and the Bangalees since the Tuesday incident.

"We are trying our best to bring back normalcy," said Shaktiman Chakma, chairman of Naniarchhar upazila parishad.

He said the administration has decided to rebuild all the damaged houses in phases. "Initially, 15 houses will be built," he told The Daily Star.

After the arson attack, the district administration gave a committee led by him the responsibility to sit with the indigenous and the settlers for an amicable solution and peaceful co-existence.

He is yet to sit with them.

Naniarchhar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mohammad Nuruzzaman said they were going to start building the 15 houses this morning. "We have already bought all the house-making materials."

PHOTO: STAR