

GRADUATION FROM LDC It would have been faster if Bangabandhu was alive: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said had the Father of the Nation been alive, Bangladesh would have been a developing country within 10 years of its independence.

Hasina, also Awami League president, said this while addressing a discussion in the city.

The PM said Bangladesh, a war-ravaged country, had been categorised as a least developed country (LDC) within three years of its independence in 1975.

On Thursday, the UN declared that Bangladesh has fulfilled the criteria for graduating to a developing country from an LDC.

The ruling AL arranged the discussion at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, marking the 98th birth anniversary of Father of Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the National Children's Day.

The PM said, "We've got recognition as a developing country. We've been able to achieve it after 37 years since 1975, though Bangladesh could

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Five die as gas pipe explodes in lightning strike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Five people, including one child and two expectant mothers died in a fire originating from a gas line blast following a lightning strike in Golapganj upazila in Sylhet early yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Shebu Begum, 22, from Ponairchak village in Golapganj upazila, Taskima Begum, 30, from Khalermukh village in South Surma upazila, her two-year old son Tahmid and Shebul Miah, 16 of Nowai village of the same upazila.

The fifth deceased, aged around 16, could not be identified.

AKM Fazlul Haque Shibly, officer-in-charge of Golapganj Police Station said that the fire broke out in a gas pipeline adjacent to a room at Lailu Mia's colony (slum) in Lakkhanabanda Club Bazar area after lightning struck at around 3:00am during the midnight rain. The fire then spread into the slum.

He said that all deceased were residents of the slum. Quoting other slum residents, the OC said that both women who died in the fire were pregnant.

Two units of the Fire Service and Civil Defence worked for more than two hours to bring the fire under control.

Two other people injured in the fire are being treated at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College.

The dead bodies were sent to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital for autopsy, the police official said.

First encounter

FROM PAGE 1
Bangladesh.

Yahya and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman began talks. But 90 minutes into heated discussion, Mujib heard that the military had fired upon people at Tongi, Joydebpur and other places. After that, he found no reason to continue the conversation.

In Joydebpur, people locked into a clash with Pakistani army men.

At least two civilians died and around 200 were injured including three army men, leading to a curfew imposed by the Pakistani authority.

The problem was triggered when locals of East Pakistan put up a barricade on the road to prevent a military commander from returning to Dhaka, who had earlier travelled to Joydebpur.

The news of the attack angered the people of Dhaka. They immediately brought out spontaneous processions in the city.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave a swift response to the army shootings saying that if the junta thought it could suppress a popular movement by military action, they were living in a fool's paradise.

Condemning the killings, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said "No sacrifice would be considered enough to emancipate the people of Bangladesh. Bangladesh cannot be suppressed by force. If necessary we shall give the last drop of our blood to see that our posterity lived happily as a free citizen in a free country."

The meeting between Yahya and Bangabandhu had resumed after a break, but it was evident that the talks were leading nowhere.

War was coming either way. Source: Liberation War Museum and Bangladesh Genocide Archive



Shahin Bapari, one of the injured in the US-Bangla plane crash in Nepal. He was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital's burn unit after he returned home yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Captain's wife suffers stroke

FROM PAGE 1
today.

Mohammad Al Alamul Emam, first secretary and head of chancery of the Bangladesh embassy in Nepal, told The Daily Star yesterday that the bodies will be brought back by a special flight of Bangladesh Air Force.

The bodies were first taken to the Bangladesh mission in Kathmandu, Nepal, where their first namaz-e-janaza will be held this morning, he said.

Relatives of the 23 deceased will also arrive in Dhaka by a chartered plane of US-Bangla airlines today, said Emam.

Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR) said the bodies will be brought back in the afternoon to Hazrat Shah Jalal International Airport's VIP Tarmac 1 at the city's Kumitola.

In another development, Rijen Shrestha, assistant professor of forensic department of Kathmandu Medical College said the bodies of six more plane crash victims were identified yesterday. They are: Begum Hurun Nahar Bilquis Banu, Akhi Moni, F H Priok, Umme

Salma, Nazia Afrin Chowdhury and Sharmin Akhter (crew member).

With the six, 24 bodies have been identified so far. The two who are yet to be identified are Pias Roy and Alifuzzaman. Nuruz Zaman's body has been identified but will be flown back to Dhaka at a later time.

"NO TECHNICAL GLITCH"

"No technical glitch" was found during inspection of the US-Bangla aircraft before it took off for Kathmandu, Salahuddin M Rahmatullah, chief of Aircraft Accident Investigation Group (AAIG) of Bangladesh said yesterday.

He made the remark while talking to journalists before leaving for Kathmandu to join the investigation of the fatal plane crash.

Capt Rahmatullah is leading a team of Bangladeshi investigators in Nepal.

He also said that the pilot Abid Sultan was physically fit.

Rahmatullah said they are taking all flight details of the US-Bangla flight, and the pilot and crew members of the ill-fated

aircraft.

"We are giving emphasis on the black box and CVR (cockpit voice recorder) to learn the actual facts behind the crash," he also said.

Apart from the Nepalese probe committee, he said, representatives from the aircraft manufacturer -- Bombardier of Canada, engine manufacturer of the aircraft, and a British company will also join in the investigation.

"There will be no representative from US-Bangla airlines in the investigation procedure to make it unbiased," he added.

CONDITION IMPROVING

Prof Khan Abul Kalam Azad, principal of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), where six plane crash survivors have been undergoing treatment, said physical condition of those admitted at the hospital are now stable.

"Within one week, all the admitted patients are likely to recover," he said yesterday.

DMCH Director Brig Gen AKM Nasiruddin said the government has been

bearing all the passengers' treatment expenses at the hospital.

Prof Abul Kalam Azad, director general of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said the condition of one survivor, Rezwanul, who was sent to Singapore, is now better.

Another survivor, Imrana Kabir Hashi, was sent to Singapore from Nepal on Sunday for better treatment while Yakub Ali has been sent to New Delhi, said the DG.

Dr Samanta Lal Sen, coordinator of DMCH burn and surgery unit, said that the medical board, which was formed yesterday, examined every patient's condition.

Injured Shahreen Ahmed needs to undergo an operation which will be conducted when her mental condition will be stable.

Health Minister Mohammad Nasim, meanwhile, yesterday urged the ministers and the political leaders not to gather at the burn unit of DMCH to visit the survivors who are undergoing treatment there.

Pilots open up in private

FROM PAGE 1

"It's human lives that are at stake! This is what we pilots deal with every single day. It's a sacred duty, not the glamorous job the media portrays!" reads one of the passionate appeals that did the rounds on the social media.

The Daily Star talked with half a dozen pilots. None of them wanted to have their names revealed because they fear their services would be jeopardised. None of the allegations could be independently verified.

But since the allegations coming from a variety of aviators are similar, those deserve special attention for the sake of passengers' safety.

Though expressed in privacy, their opinions and concerns should be discreetly assessed by the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) and the government before appropriate actions are taken to address the grim issues.

One pilot wrote: "This accident was just waiting to happen. The safety culture or ... the lack of it in private sector is simply outrageous!"

He alleged that pilots are forced by management to operate in situations where it's prudent not to fly. Maintaining flight schedule and com-

mercial considerations take precedence over flight safety.

Another pilot, a captain, wrote: "We routinely observe private carriers shooting approaches well below the minimum visibility, departing for a destination with very marginal weather or visibility, compromising on technical issues, flying without weather radar, forbidding pilots to give entry in the engineering log especially at outstations as grounding would cost money!"

"I've often seen Biman or other foreign carriers holding for visibility to improve in winter when [names of two private airlines] not only commencing approach but landing!" he wrote.

One pilot shared how he was forced to fly while he was trying to apply "pilot discretion" in a foggy morning of December last year.

"There was no permission to fly from tower for low visibility. A phone call came [from the head office] moments after I declined to fly the plane to Chittagong. I was shouted at and told to take off on the dot," he told this newspaper.

"My employer is a time-freak, and has ways to manage the airport authorities," he said with a wry smile.

Many pilots also questioned how US-Bangla airlines could send a very inexperienced first officer as co-pilot to Kathmandu. The budget airline maintains such risky practice in the absence of expert manpower on its payroll -- an allegation it routinely refutes.

A Qatar Airways pilot believed that Captain Abid Sultan, pilot of the ill-fated US-Bangla plane, made a "massive pilot error" by doing dual jobs of communicating with the tower while landing at a dangerous airport like the one in Kathmandu.

"The captain took over communication and was also flying. And it's due to the inexperience of the first officer [who was reported to be on her first trip to Nepal]."

A very seasoned pilot of Biman Bangladesh Airlines wrote: "I've heard many harrowing stories from our first officers who were in the private sector before. Even if there are some exaggerations, even if I consider only 25 percent of what they say to be true, it is alarming."

"Biman doesn't allow such inexperienced first officers even to fly to Cox's Bazar!" he continues.

The companies don't accept "no" for an answer when it comes to flying even

in extreme conditions.

A captain, who flies Dreamliners for a Middle Eastern airline, alleged pilots were even fired from private companies for refusing to accept unsafe operation.

He mentioned that one local airline had its pilot fired because the aviator said he was "fatigued". And fatigue comes from overwork.

One pilot was fired because he did not take off as the weather at the destination airport was below the minimum required. Another aviator was fired because he complained about Saidpur airport's non-standard light.

A Bangladesh pilot working with a foreign airline thinks the reporting and follow-up at the Caab and within the airlines are not dependable. The airlines do not report safety issues to the Caab and the Caab also doesn't follow up.

Most of the pilots appeared quite critical of the role of some Caab officials.

They are the ones who keep the regulators' eyes and ears shut, alleged a Turkish Airlines pilot, who worked for a private airline a few years back.

"Compromise is for money and gifts," the pilot quipped.

Putin

FROM PAGE 1

for high voter numbers to give greater legitimacy to Putin's historic fourth term as Russia faces increasing isolation on the world stage over a spy poisoning in Britain and a fresh round of US sanctions.

About 107 million Russians were eligible to cast ballots and the central election commission said turnout was 60 percent, after the authorities used both the carrot and the stick to boost participation.

Selfie competitions, giveaways, food festivals and children's entertainers were laid out at polling booths in a bid to create a festive atmosphere around the election.

But employees of state and private companies reported coming under pressure to vote, while students were threatened with problems in their exams or even expulsion if they did not take part, according to the opposition-leaning Novaya Gazeta newspaper.

The exit poll by state-owned pollster VTsIOM at 1,200 voting stations around Russia projected that Putin had won 73.9 percent of the vote, up from 64 percent six years ago.

Communist candidate Pavel Grudinin performed better than expected, with 11.2 percent according to the exit poll, but the results of all other candidates including former reality TV host Ksenia Sobchak were forecast to be in single figures.

Navalny -- who called on his supporters to boycott the "fake" vote and sent over 33,000 observers across the country to see how official turnout figures differed from those of monitors -- said there had been "unprecedented violations".

His lawyer Ivan Zhdanov said the actual national turnout at 1700 GMT, when polls closed in Moscow, was 55 percent, according to data collected by monitors.

Navalny's opposition movement and the non-governmental election monitor Golos reported ballot stuffing, repeat voting and Putin supporters being bussed into polling stations en masse.

One election commission worker in the republic of Dagestan, which traditionally registers extremely high official turnout figures, told AFP around 50 men entered the station where he was working and physically assaulted an observer before stuffing a ballot box.

But the electoral commission dismissed most concerns, saying monitors sometimes misinterpret what they see.

Since first being elected president in 2000, Putin has stamped his total authority on the world's biggest country, muzzling opposition, putting television under state control and reasserting Moscow's standing abroad.

The 65-year-old former KGB officer used an otherwise lacklustre presidential campaign to emphasise Russia's role as a major world power, boasting of its "invincible" new nuclear weapons in a pre-election speech.

Casting his ballot in Moscow, Putin said he would be pleased with any result giving him the right to continue as president.

"I am sure the programme I am offering is the right one," said the man who is already Russia's longest-serving leader since Stalin.

Most people who spoke to AFP said they voted for Putin, praising him for restoring stability and national pride after the humiliating collapse of the USSR.

"Of course I'm for Putin, he's a leader," said Olga Matyunina, a 65-year-old retired economist.

"After he brought Crimea back, he became a hero to me."

Sunday marks four years since Putin signed a treaty declaring Crimea to be part of Russia in a move that triggered a pro-Kremlin insurgency in east Ukraine, a conflict that has claimed over 10,000 lives.

Ahead of the vote, a new crisis broke out with the West as Britain implicated Putin in the poisoning of former double agent Sergei Skripal with a Soviet-designed nerve agent.

Giant yellow

FROM PAGE 18

"I probably overestimated my ability and underestimated Daphne's hunger for freedom and she just bolted," Marr told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on Saturday.

"After 50 metres she was just gone baby, gone. I couldn't keep up."

The club has posted an appeal on Facebook for people to look out for the absconded bird, with a reward of free passes to next year's event as well as swimming merchandise if it is returned.

"We're expecting a ransom note," Marr quipped, adding that Daphne cost the club Aus\$900 (US\$695). "We'd look after them if they looked after us."

The ABC said there were rumours the duck had been spotted off the western coastal city of Geraldton, some 440 kilometres (270 miles) north of Perth.

Giant inflatable rubber ducks drew international attention in 2007 when Dutchman Florentijn Hofman created one as an artwork.

Hofman's 18-metre-tall (59-feet) bath toy travelled to different cities around the world, ranging from Brazil to Australia, and spawned many replicas.