

Uphold own culture for next generations

Says PM at Ekushey Padak ceremony

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the importance of protecting and practicing own languages and cultures for making a healthy environment for the future generation.

"It's our duty to protect, exercise and take forward our independence, language rights and culture as well as create a decent environment for the next generation," she said while addressing a function marking the distribution of Ekushey Padak-2019 in the city.

The cultural affairs ministry arranged the programme at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

Urging all to come forward to build

the motherland, she said, "We want the next generation to have a decent life and enjoy the benefits of what we've achieved through our struggles."

Noting that Bangladesh was marching forward and would continue to do so, she said the people of the country would move ahead at the global stage keeping their head high as the Ekushey (Language Movement) taught them not to bow down.

"Ekushey has taught us how to protect our own existence, mother tongue, culture and tradition as well as show respect to all this."

She said her government's goal was to take Bangladesh to a dignified position and it had been working to accomplish that goal.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and winners of this year's Ekushey Padak pose for a picture during the award-giving ceremony yesterday in the capital's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

PHOTO: PID

Jamaat should apologise for '71 role

Says BNP's Nazrul

UNB, Dhaka

BNP standing committee member Nazrul Islam Khan yesterday said Jamaat-e-Islami should apologise to the nation for its anti-liberation role in the 1971 Liberation war.

Speaking to reporters after placing a wreath at the grave of BNP founder Ziaur Rahman, he also said their party wants the trial and punishment of all anti-liberation war elements.

"An apology by the Jamaat is now demanded by all. The Jamaat should be ashamed of its anti-liberation war role and should apologise for it. It's a logical demand," said Nazrul, also the coordinator of the BNP-led 20-party alliance.

Nazrul further said those who

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No list yet as HC order unheeded

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Rafique said that the committee members, as well as officials of cultural affairs ministry, all unanimously took the decision.

Talking about it, former Bangla Academy director general Shamsuzzaman Khan, a member of the committee, said when they began making the list, "hundreds of people" came to them and claimed that they had participated in the movement.

"We faced problems in verifying their claims."

He also said the committee members faced trouble in defining a "language movement hero."

"If anyone who joined the rally on February 21, 1952 now claims they are a language movement hero, how we will denounce that?" said Shamsuzzaman.

He said the committee suspended making the list as they had seen the debate about the freedom fighters list

where many fake freedom fighters somehow got their names in.

Shamsuzzaman proposed engaging senior cultural activists to make district-wise lists.

Bhasha Andolon Museum Executive Director MR Mahub said those who were there during the Language Movement and knew many war heroes could help in this regard.

Contacted, MR Mahub said in order to "preserve the memories of the country" and present it properly before the new generation, a full and authentic list of language movement heroes was a must.

"Language Movement veterans who could tell the next generation about our glorious past will not be with us forever. We have already lost many of them. So we must bring together their memories and the important evidence of the movement," he said.

The committee members said a proper definition of a "language movement hero" had to be worked out.

Rafique echoed Shamsuzzaman's views and said the work was suspended considering how difficult it would be to get accurate information six decades after the movement.

Ninety percent of the people who joined the movement had already died, he said.

"The list should have been prepared long ago. But none of the successive governments bothered about it much," he said.

Rafique said young researchers could be hired to make the full and authentic list.

Contacted, Manzil Murshed, who moved the petition on behalf of the HRPB, a human rights platform, said, "As the court has asked them [the government] to prepare a list, they have to do it. They have obligation to

do it." Meanwhile, cultural affairs ministry officials said that they had not seen any move from the government during the last few years to prepare the list.

Talking to this newspaper recently, Cultural Affairs Secretary Abu Hena Mostfa Kamal said, "We will take necessary steps regarding preparing the list of language movement heroes."

"We cannot discard the High Court directive," he added.

Back in 2010, the HC had issued the eight directives to uphold the dignity and sanctity of the Shaheed Minar, which was set up to maintain the spirit of the Language Movement and pay tribute to the heroes.

Apart from making the list, the government had been asked to ensure that all language movement heroes get government facilities and be invited to all state programme.

The court also directed the government to honour the language heroes, both dead and alive, with posthumous and other awards for their contribution to the movement.

The court ruled that the government would provide financial support to the language heroes if they applied for such assistance.

The Language Movement began in 1948 when Pakistan imposed Urdu as the only official language, discarding the claim of Bangla. The movement reached its peak in 1952 and culminated with the adoption of Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan.

The events of the language movement led to other landmark movements, including the historic Six-Point Movement of 1966, Mass Uprising in 1969 and finally the War of Independence in 1971 through which Bangladesh was born.

FREEING KHALEDA Fakhru, Maudud under fire for lack of action

UNB, Dhaka

Two senior BNP leaders -- Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir and Moudud Ahmed -- came under fire by the party rank and file at a discussion programme in the capital yesterday for lack of action programmes to free its chairperson Khaleda Zia from jail.

They also voiced frustration over the thin presence of party leaders and activists yesterday's programme.

The BNP arranged the discussion programme at the Institution of Engineers', Bangladesh, marking the Shaheed Day and International Mother Language Day today.

As BNP standing committee

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8yrs gone, only 51pc utilised

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Officials of both countries are now pushing for quicker implementation of the projects.

As part of the move, a joint monitoring team comprising officials from both sides will sit to "resolve the issues" of every project on February 25. It will be the second such meeting in three months.

Officials from the ministries and agencies concerned, the Economic Relations Division (ERD), the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, EXIM Bank of India and contractors of the projects will join the meeting in Dhaka.

Dhaka and Delhi signed the first LoC in August 2010 to implement 15 projects. Till December last year, \$440.87 million has been used and the work of 12 projects have completed.

Majority of the 12 projects, involv-

ing \$352 million, was related with procurement of buses, passenger coaches, wagons, locomotives and a dredger from India, which is why these projects faced little delay.

But the lion's share of the money is meant for three railway projects, which are facing delay.

Zahidul Haque, additional secretary of the ERD, said disbursement has been a "little slow" since these projects involve large funds.

Initial delays in appointment of consultants, finalisation of the projects and acquisition of land are to blame for the slow progress, he added.

"In the last one year, all these problems have been solved and works of those projects are now going on in full swing," he added.

THREE PROJECTS DRAG ALL
The three rail projects involve \$510.12 million, of which only \$87.70 million

has been used till December, officials said.

Meanwhile, the cost of one project -- construction of 3rd and 4th dual gauge track between Dhaka-Tongi section and doubling of dual-gauge track between Tongi-Joydevpur -- has gone up by \$112 million. The EXIM Bank of India has already approved the additional amount, said an official involved with project.

Project Director Shahidul Islam said the project is behind the schedule by two years as a result of the delay in finalising the design and appointing the consultant and complexity over the tender process.

"Almost all these problems have been resolved and contractors have started work at the Joydevpur site," he said.

"We hope to complete the work within 2022."

The project was scheduled to be completed by June this year.

About the rise in project cost, Shahidul said change of design, upgradation of quality of materials and rise in prices with time are to blame.

Construction of Khulna-Mongla Port Rail Line with a bridge over the Rupsa river was scheduled to be completed by June 2020. It may take at least one more year.

The third rail project involving \$78 million for rehabilitation of Kulara-Shahbazpur of dual gauge rail line is also facing delay. Only \$7.64 million of the project fund has been used.

The project was due to complete in June this year.

SECOND AND THIRD LOCs
India approved the \$2 billion second LoC in March 2016 to implement 16 projects.

About three years after the deal, 12 projects were approved by the Bangladesh government.

Two of the projects involve procurement of trucks and buses for Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) and equipment from India. Some of the vehicles arrived in Dhaka last month, while the rest is expected by April, officials said.

Work of the rest of the projects are yet to begin.

The deal for third LoC was signed in October 2017. A fourth of the \$4.5 billion is meant for the Rooppur nuclear power plant.

Sixteen projects have been identified for implementation with this loan, but not a single dollar of the fund has been used in the last one and a half years.

The loan, at 1 percent interest, is payable in 25 years, including a five-year grace period.

Put pressure on Myanmar to take back Rohingyas

President urges Austria

UNB, Dhaka

President Abdul Hamid yesterday urged the visiting Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl to keep Myanmar under pressure to ensure safe, orderly and sustainable return of the Rohingyas to their homeland.

He also thanked the Austrian government for its support to Bangladesh over the Rohingya issue.

He said these during the Austrian minister's courtesy call on the president at the Bangabhaban.

The president sought Austria's moral support to raise the voice in the international forums for safe Rohingya repatriation.

Welcoming the Austrian minister, the president recalled the moral support extended by the government and people of Austria to Bangladesh during the Liberation War in 1971.

He also mentioned that the then Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky was honoured by Bangladesh with the "Friends of Liberation War Honour Award" in 2012.

Austria was one of the first countries in Europe as well as in the world which recognised Bangladesh on February 4, 1972.

The Austrian minister lauded Bangladesh's socio-economic development, especially describing the development in the agriculture sector as exemplary.

During the visit of Bangladesh's Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister to Austria in May 2017, the

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Battling to keep mother tongue alive

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The first thing that struck Bivuti, who studied up to the HSC level, was that Bangla was widespread in every form -- on desktop, internet, mobile phones and social media platforms. He, however, could not even write anything on his personal computer in his mother tongue, let alone communicate with others using it.

This prompted Bivuti to start work on creating a digital font called ASCII that would enable Chakma people to write in their language on desktop computers. Meanwhile, in an online interaction he met Jyoti, a student of computer science engineering at Dhaka International University, who also wanted to do something for the language.

As the duo discovered that they shared a passion for their language, they took it upon themselves to create digital tools to facilitate and popularise e-communication and e-learning using it.

Together, Bivuti and Jyoti have passed one milestone after another since 2011.

Making waves on the digital platform, Bivuti and Jyoti communicated with Microsoft and Google to upgrade their systems so that they can operate websites in the Chakma language.

An application, Easy Chakma Keyboard, has been designed to write in Chakma on Windows, IMAC, Android and iPhones.

Jyoti says the language of a minority community is often threatened due to different forms of pressure to communicate in the language of the majority population.

About 1 crore Chakmas now live across the world; they can now access the learning materials of their language by going to <https://hilledu.com/>.



Chakma keyboard on android devices.



Logo of the Wikipedia in Santali.

The journey has been quite long and arduous, said Jyoti in an interview with The Daily Star on Monday.

Meanwhile, Santali Language Wikipedia (<http://sat.wikipedia.org>) was launched on August 2 last year.

Manik Soren, who led the initiative, thanked teams of the Bangla Wikimedia community who encour-

aged him to create the Santali Language Wikipedia in 2012. The move taken initially slowed down only to gain momentum five years later.

To take the Santal movement forward, Santali Wikipedians from Bangladesh, India and Nepal have joined Manik to make the project a success.

At the beginning, there was a debate over which alphabet they should use since the use of Bangla or Roman alphabet was more popular.

But they finally chose to use Ol Chiki script developed by Santal pandit Raghunath Murmu in 1925.

The script draws influence from tools and signs that Santali people use in their everyday lives and so it reflects their culture, Manik said. The Wikipedia till now has 566 articles and 1,063 users.

While Manik is looking to enrich the Santali Wikipedia, the next project of Bivuti and Jyoti is to develop a translator that would convert Bangla statements to Chakma and vice versa.

"It will take time," Jyoti said.

Myanmar has failed to act

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When asked whether the international community is doing enough to put pressure on Myanmar, Hasina said, "Actually they are trying. No doubt about it. But somehow, I don't know why it is not working well."

The PM said she is hopeful about Rohingya repatriation. "Some day will come when Myanmar will also realise that this is not the way. They [Rohingya] are their citizens and definitely they should take them back."

Hasina refuted allegations that her country was in a hurry to send back the Rohingya refugees despite the unsafe conditions.

"It is not true. But how long can people live in a refugee camp? Those who are saying this, they have never been to a refugee camp. And perhaps, they have not lived as a refugee. But I can understand."

INDIAN CITIZENSHIP BILL
Hasina said she did not understand the purpose of the Indian Citizenship Amendment Bill passed by the lower house of Indian parliament to give Indian citizenship to minorities that faced "religious persecution" in neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh.

"Why this bill ... I don't understand," she said and asked with a smile, "Is it for election purpose?"

In an interview with Gulf News on Tuesday, the PM said she never felt that the bill meant to blame Bangladesh for religious persecution of minorities in the country.

"I don't think so. There is no such [religious persecution] in Bangladesh. Some incidents have happened. But we took immediate action."

Hasina said religious extremism and terrorism are a global problem. "It is not in Bangladesh alone."

She said her understanding was that people in India are also not happy with the bill. "I think they [India] should not do anything that creates tension."

'MIGRANT WORKERS DOUBLE'
In another development, Hasina said the number of Bangladeshis going for overseas employment has been doubled in the last four years, although it has not positively reflected in remittances to the country.

In the Bangladesh financial year 2014-2015, 453,398 Bangladeshis got overseas employment and in the financial year 2017-2018 it became almost double -- over 867,128, she told Gulf News.

However, the increase in number of overseas workers has not positively reflected in the overall remittances to Bangladesh during the same period, as per the figures provided by the PM.

In 2014-15, the total inward remittance was \$15,316 million, which dropped to \$14,931 million in 2015-16 and to \$12,769 million in 2016-17.

"But the situation has improved in 2017-18 with a total remittance of \$14,981 million due to some policy measures taken by the government to use formal channels. The trend of this year is robust -- \$9,087 million in seven months. Hopefully, it will cross \$15,000 million at the end of the fiscal year," Hasina mentioned.

In her meetings with top UAE leaders, Hasina said she would like the UAE to become a prominent development partner.

"Investment is a potential area of cooperation. There are several proposals of UAE investment in the area of power, energy, special economic zones etc. in Bangladesh," she said.

The UAE-Bangladesh annual bilateral trade stands at \$1.2 billion and there are huge potentials to further expand the trade, the PM added.