

Hasina's call to Modi 'reflection of cordial ties'

India says

BSS, New Delhi

India has termed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's telephone call to greet her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on his victory in the Lok Sabha Elections 2019 as a "reflection of the extraordinarily close and cordial ties between the two neighbours".

"Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina became one of the first foreign leaders to congratulate the prime minister, thus reflecting the extraordinarily close and cordial ties between India and Bangladesh, and the excellent rapport that the two leaders enjoy," according to a statement issued on Thursday evening by Indian Prime Minister's Office.

"The two leaders pledged to continue to raise the India-Bangladesh relationship to unprecedented new heights," the statement read.

Sheikh Hasina phoned Modi on Wednesday evening to extend her heartfelt congratulations to him on the resounding victory of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under his dynamic leadership in the 17th Lok Sabha Elections.

During the five-minute telephonic conversation, they also recognised the importance of rapidly completing ongoing plans for deepening the partnership in security trade, transportation, energy and people-to-people ties, the statement said.

"Doing so within the next three years would have specific significance in view of the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 2020 and the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's Liberation in 2021," it added.

According to the statement, the two leaders also agreed to identify dates for a meeting at the earliest to resume work in service of the bilateral relationship.

During the conversation, Sheikh Hasina told Modi that "this emphatic verdict is a reflection of the trust and confidence reposed on you by the people of India."

Describing the victory as historic one, she said the people of South Asia will be happy over this win and they could work together.

The prime minister, in the conversation, invited Narendra Modi to visit Bangladesh and wished him success and good health and a long life.

Earlier in a congratulatory message to Modi, Sheikh Hasina said Bangladesh attaches highest importance to its multifaceted relations with India which is driven by genuine goodwill, mutual trust and respect.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets President Ram Nath Kovind to tender his resignation along with the council of ministers yesterday.

PHOTO: ANI

House full as Tigers train

FROM PAGE 1

talismanic skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and the ever-popular Tamim Iqbal -- both of whom were granted a break after the Ireland series -- joined the team.

The team were accorded a reception by the students as they entered the premises, before making their way down a slope that led to an expansive field with three centre wickets. Mashrafe, who arrived in Cardiff on Thursday night after attending the official captains' press conference in the afternoon, was the only one of the 15 who did not physically take part in the practice but the inspirational leader was seen discussing strategy with the coach and later cracking jokes with teammates on the sidelines.

Tamim, upon whose opening salvos the health of Bangladesh's innings often depends, was among the first batch of batsmen to head to the centre wickets, along with Mushfiqur Rahim and Sabbir Rahman. Shakib Al Hasan joined them not long afterwards.

Quader hopes

FROM PAGE 1

In reply to a query over BNP's allegation that the government wants to kill Khaleda Zia without providing her treatment, Quader said the AL government was not so cruel that it would push the BNP chief on the verge of death, depriving her of treatment.

Shutdown for six months

FROM PAGE 1

and 24 days for midterm and final exams, in 2012.

"We had made the proposal so teachers can complete the syllabus in time," he said, adding that they were yet to get a response from the authorities.

He is also in favour of cutting the duration of public exams. "SSC and HSC exams should not take more than 20 days. And there is no need for holding JSC exams at all."

In addition to the annual holidays and other shutdowns, natural disasters such as floods often lead to unplanned closures. Also, headteachers have the authority to close their school for three days in a year.

Jahangir Hossain, a director at the

Mahmudullah Riyad, who is still recovering from a shoulder injury, rolled his arm over a few times, tossing full tosses to spin consultant Sunil Joshi. Mahmudullah did not seem too happy with his progress because he winced in pain after each arm roll and asked physio Thihan Chandramohan for an extra layer of strapping on his shoulder. Mainly a middle order batsman, his shoulder troubles will not prevent him from playing matches in the World Cup, but his useful and canny off-spin is crucial to the team's balance and the Tigers will be hoping that Mahmudullah returns to bowling fitness sooner rather than later.

Yesterday was a continuation of the feel-good factor that has characterised the Bangladesh team's training sessions in the UK so far, with an example being teammates vociferously cheering on Rubel Hossain in an impromptu fast bowlers' race with Abu Jayed, which Rubel appeared to win at the last moment.

However, the Tigers' good cheer will soon be put to the test when they take on Pakistan tomorrow in a warm-up encounter at Sophia Gardens. That will be followed by a second warm-up match at the same venue against India on Tuesday. Mashrafe and Co will be hoping that the fun and intensity sustains through those encounters and into the deadly serious matter of their World Cup opener at The Oval in London against South Africa on June 2.

DSHE, said they were planning to set up public exam centres in each of the 491 upazilas so that there is no need for schools to suspend class for exams.

"The education ministry asked us about a month ago to submit a project proposal for the construction of exam centres," he told The Daily Star early this month.

Officials are now working on the proposal.

According to the initial plan, there will be one exam centre for every 4,000 students. If an upazila has more than 4,000 students, there will be more than one centre.

Each room will have seating arrangements for 100 students, and it will have multimedia projectors, CCTV cameras, and fire safety equipment.

following months of Brexit-fuelled political paralysis, which intensified following disastrous results in the May 2 English local elections.

The Conservatives are expected to fare even worse in this week's European Parliament elections when results are announced tomorrow.

"Politically she misjudged the mood of the country and her party," said Nigel Farage, whose new Brexit Party is predicted to emphatically win the contest in Britain.

May had previously vowed to step aside once her unpopular EU divorce deal had passed parliament, and this week launched a short-lived bid for lawmakers to approve it in early June.

MPs have overwhelmingly rejected the agreement three times, weakening May on each occasion.

Her latest effort to force it through the House of Commons, which included giving MPs the option of holding a referendum on it, proved her final undoing, prompted a furious reaction from Conservatives, including cabinet members.

Her departure kickstarts a Conservative Party leadership contest -- already unofficially under way -- that is expected to encompass more than a dozen candidates and favour an ardent Brexitier.

Modi begins talks for new cabinet

FROM PAGE 1

needed to get Leader of Opposition position in Lok Sabha. It won just 52 seats, compared to its worst-ever tally of 44 seats in the last general election.

Newly-elected MPs of the BJP-led NDA will meet today to formally elect Narendra Modi as their leader, setting in motion the process of formation of the new government.

The BJP said the meeting will take place in parliament's Central Hall at 5:00pm.

Modi has not yet set an inauguration date for the administration, but BJP officials said he was expected to move quickly to put together a new cabinet as focus shifts back to an economy which is slowing.

Modi and BJP president Amit Shah, his closest aide, are believed to be keen on including newer faces in the council of ministers. West Bengal, where the BJP has made a phenomenal career advancement,

jumping from two to 18 seats, could get big representation.

The PM and Shah have so far not indicated a decision on the "Big 4" ministries - home, finance, external affairs and Defence.

An immediate decision will be whether to keep senior BJP leader Arun Jaitley as finance minister despite his poor health, or assign Railways and Coal Minister Piyush Goyal to the job of leading Asia's third largest economy.

Goyal, 54, had stepped into the role twice in the Modi government when Jaitley was ill. Goyal presented an interim budget before the election and a full budget is due after the new government takes office.

Amit Shah, who is credited with crafting the political strategy that helped the party retain its base in northern and western India but also advanced in the east, is tipped to be the home minister, a powerful

post with control of security and intelligence services.

Smriti Irani, who was textiles minister, is expected to get a weighty reward for emerging as the BJP's crown jewel of the election season by defeating Congress President Rahul Gandhi in Amethi - the constituency held by his family for four decades. Gandhi himself was elected thrice from Amethi. It took Irani just five years to eject him - she ran against him unsuccessfully in 2014, then reversed that on Tuesday.

Gandhi remains an MP - he also contested the Wayanad constituency of Kerala and won it easily, but the combined disaster of Congress and his unceremonious ejection from Amethi has constructed a new crisis for both his leadership and his party.

The Congress, which has ruled India for the longest time, has drawn a blank in 18 states and Union Territories -- an indicator of its decimation in the Lok

Sabha polls.

The Congress has been completely routed in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Dadar and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Lakshadweep, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Delhi, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura and Uttarakhand.

"It is astonishing that Rahul Gandhi has not yet resigned as Congress president," historian Ramachandra Guha said on Twitter.

"Both self-respect, as well as political pragmatism, demand that the Congress elect a new leader. But perhaps the Congress has neither," he added.

Despite the dominance of the BJP and its allies in the lower house of parliament, analysts say it does not yet have the numbers in the upper house for tougher reforms such as relaxed labour and land laws sought by the business community.

\$1.2b loan deal likely

FROM PAGE 1

importance," Izumi also said in his speech on May 16 at Japanese embassy that arranged a reception marking Emperor Naruhito's accession to the Imperial Throne.

The year 2021 is the 50th anniversary of the independence of Bangladesh, and 2022 will mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relationship between Japan and Bangladesh, he said.

To mark these anniversaries, a number of big development projects are underway, including construction of three bridges on the Shitalakhya, Meghna and Gumti rivers, Jamuna Railway Bridge, Dhaka international airport 3rd terminal, Dhaka Metro Lines and Matarbari Port and Power Plant, Izumi said.

Last year, the amount of ODA to Bangladesh was about \$1.8 billion, the largest ever loan support to Bangladesh for a year.

"This fact is attracting Japanese companies to Bangladesh increasingly, and now 279 Japanese companies are working in Bangladesh," Izumi said, adding, "I am expecting that this number will rapidly increase in the coming years. I always have this in mind that we are creating Bangladesh's bright future together with all of you."

A finance ministry official said the four projects under the 40th

ODA agreement of over \$1.2 billion to be signed include Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Development Project (Line-1), Matarbari Port Development Project (I) in Maheshkhali of Cox's Bazar, Foreign Direct Investment Promotion Project (II), and Energy Efficiency and Conservation Promotion Financing Project (phase-2).

The agreement of loan for Matarbari Ultra Super Critical Coal-Fired Power Project (V), which was supposed to be signed during the PM's forthcoming visit, is not being inked because the project is not ready yet, said the official, requesting anonymity.

MRT Line-1, the country's first underground railway, will connect the capital's airport and Kamalapur. Its construction is scheduled to begin in July this year. It is estimated to carry 14 lakh people a day.

MRT Line-1 is second among the five MRT lines to be built under state-owned Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd.

Japan is also funding Bangladesh's first elevated metro rail, MRT Line-6, from Uttara to Motijheel. It's now under construction.

The loan under the Foreign Direct Investment Promotion Project means to develop infrastructure at the economic zone of Mirersharai

of Chattogram. Japanese companies will be able to establish industries there, officials said.

Other than that, some Japanese companies may also sign agreements with Bangladesh's Public-Private Partnership Authority for investments in some of the projects in Bangladesh, finance ministry officials said.

During the meeting with Japanese premier Shinzo Abe, Hasina would seek financing of at least 10 other future projects requiring over \$10 billion.

The projects include revitalisation of small rivers, canals and wetlands all over the country; Jamuna-Padma stabilisation and land reclamation project; land reclamation of Hatiya-Dhamar Char-Nijhum Dwip; development of Bhola-Kukri Mukri and Char Montaz; and irrigation projects in Kurigram and Rajshahi.

The projects also include water resources management in Haldia-Karnaphuli and Sangu-Matamuhuri river basins.

A finance ministry official said Japan is also interested in financing urban development and city governance projects in Rangpur, Gazipur, Narayanganj, Cumilla, Mymensingh and in two municipalities in Faridpur and Cox's Bazar.

Three survivors return home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three Bangladeshis who survived a boat capsized in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Tunisia on May 9 returned home yesterday.

A Turkish Airlines plane carrying them reached Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 5:38am, said Tanveer Hossain, assistant director of Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training.

The three are Mahfuz Ahmmad, Billal Ahmmad and Bahadur.

Their identities were being verified through local police stations of the survivors," Tanveer told The Daily Star over phone.

At least 40 Bangladeshi migrants died after a boat carrying 80 people capsized in the Mediterranean Sea. Tunisian fishermen and coastguard rescued them the next morning, around nine hours after the capsizing.

Eleven more Bangladeshi survivors now in Tunisian Red Crescent camp, three of them will be repatriated soon, ASM Ashraful Islam, labour counsellor of Bangladesh embassy in Libya, told this correspondent by phone.

Meanwhile, Libyan coastguard on Thursday rescued 290 Europe-bound migrants, including 14 Bangladeshis, AP reported yesterday.

Asked about it, Ashraful said they were trying to verify the identities of the Bangladeshis.

PM to open 2nd Meghna, Gumti bridges

FROM PAGE 1

Kanchpur, Meghna and Gumti 2nd bridges construction and existing bridges rehab project, said with the newly built Kanchpur bridge already in operation, the two new additions are expected to bring relief to travellers on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway, especially during this Eid holidays.

On March 16, the PM inaugurated the Second Kanchpur Bridge on the Shitalakhya river.

Nuruzzaman said Japanese contractors -- Obayashi Corporation, Shimizu Corporation, JFE Engineering Corporation, and IHI Infrastructure Systems Company Limited -- started constructing the Second Kanchpur Bridge along with the 2nd Meghna and 2nd Meghna-Gumti bridges on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway in January 2016.

The cost of the three bridges was estimated at Tk 8,487 crore, of which Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) provided Tk 6,430 crore.

The cost of the project may be over Tk 1,000 crore less than what had been estimated, he added.

As per the contract, the project director said the Japanese firms began work in January 2016 and it was scheduled to complete within June 2019. "But the progress of the work was halted for around four months after the Holey Artisan café attack in July 2016."

Several Japanese citizens were killed in the terror attack in the capital's Gulshan area.

He added that so the government extended the deadline for six months by fixing December 2019. "But construction of the bridges has been completed around seven months before [the schedule]."

restoration work of the old bridge."

He said construction of the new 930-metre Meghna and 1,410-metre Gumti bridges was completed at a cost of Tk 1,750 crore and Tk 1,950 crore respectively.

Nuruzzaman added that the flyover on the east end of Kanchpur bridge would be opened to the public on May 31 to ease Eid journey.

Dual carriageway between the port city and the capital shrinks to a single one at the Meghna and Gumti bridges. The old Kanchpur bridge is technically a dual carriageway, but its width is not adequate.

In this situation, traffic often crawls to a halt at the approaches to the bridges. The situation worsens ahead of Eid and during weekends as more vehicles ply the roads.

Often, travellers and truckers can find themselves stuck on the 192-km highway -- the busiest in the country -- for 10 to 12 hours, instead of the expected five hours.

'SHOOTOUT' 'Drug dealer' killed in Cumilla

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A suspected drug dealer was killed in a "gunfight" with police early yesterday.

Jakir Hossain alias Kala Jakir, 36, of Shashon Gachha area, was killed in Palpara Bridge area of the city around 1:45am, said Abu Salam Mia, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Model Police station.

He added that a team from the police station raided the area after being tipped off about the presence of drug dealers.

During the drive, the suspected drug dealers started shooting at policemen, who retaliated with gunfire. After the suspects fled the scene, the bullet-hit body of Jakir was found at the scene, the OC said.

Police recovered a firearm and 1,200 Yaba pills on him, he claimed. Jakir was accused in multiple criminal cases, Salam said.