

# Drives against graft, terror to continue

Says PM at Armed Forces Day programme

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday reiterated that the ongoing drive against corruption, terrorism and militancy would continue.

Addressing a civic and military gathering at a reception arranged at Senakunja in Dhaka Cantonment on the occasion of the Armed Forces Day 2019, Sheikh Hasina also urged the Bangladesh Armed Forces to continue its role in building the country.

"If peace and order prevail in the country, the progress is inevitable. So, the ongoing drive against terrorism, militancy and corruption will continue. We want to ensure that the people of the country live in peace and safety," she said.

Sheikh Hasina asked the Armed Forces to continue its contributions towards upholding the democratic tend through their efforts for maintaining the maximum sense of responsibility and the discipline.

"I believe our Armed Forces will continue to play their role in building the country following the chain of command and being accountable to the Constitution under all circumstances," she said.

The PM urged all, including the

Armed Forces, to work together to develop Bangladesh as a developed and prosperous country being imbued with patriotism.

Highlighting the socioeconomic uplift of people and progress of the country, Hasina said Bangladesh already got recognition as a developing country after coming out from the least-developed status. "We'll have to move forward retaining this recognition (status) of the developing country."

She said Bangladesh attained 8.13 percent GDP growth in the last fiscal year and 8.20 percent GDP growth has been targeted for the current fiscal year.

Noting that the poverty rate declined to 21 percent now from 41 percent in 2006, the Prime Minister said her government wants to lower the poverty rate further.

"If we can bring down the poverty rate at 15-17 percent, we'll definitely get recognition of a poverty-free country," she said.

Mentioning that Bangladesh economy is now strong enough, Hasina said, "We want to stand on our own feet. We want to build Bangladesh by ourselves. I want you all to build

SEE PAGE 17 COL 5



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina meets family members and relatives of Bir Shresthas and other gallantry award-winning freedom fighters at a reception at the Army Multipurpose Complex in Dhaka Cantonment yesterday. The programme was organised to mark the Armed Forces Day 2019.

PHOTO: PID

## The shady 'recycle-man'

FROM PAGE 1

correspondents were waiting outside one of his scrap shops in Old Dhaka's Islambagh, when the sound of a motorcycle alerted them to his arrival.

At the time, not more than 10 minutes before that, the correspondents had walked into that shop to talk to two men resting there.

The workers in the shop were explaining how they cut large plastic junks before feeding those to a machine. The machine would turn the plastics into smaller pieces.

They said they got medical plastics like used syringes, saline bags and blood bags, and salvage parts for different industries.

Cut-out pieces of medical items were protruding out of sacks at the time.

Asked about their supply chain, the workers refused to talk. No names would be taken.

Amid the conversation, the motorcycle screeched to a stop before the shop.

"Our boss is coming. You ask him what you wanted to know from us."

When Jonny walked in, the correspondents directed their questions towards him. He, too, was evasive and refused to identify himself. Although the correspondents stood before the man they had been chasing, they still did not know that.

Jonny said the shop gets plastic wastes mostly from local electronics manufacturers and it cuts those down to small pieces for sale in the recycling industry.

He then showed the correspondents the way out.

During several other visits to the area dotted with small and big workshops, many spoke of Jonny Mia, as the brains behind the businesses of collecting plastic medical waste,

washing and cutting those, and turning them into fine pellets used to make finished products.

The correspondents wondered who Jonny Mia was, not knowing they had already met him.

Then on October 12, the name came up again at the office of PRISM Bangladesh Foundation in Matuail.

He is the one who collects disinfected medical scraps from PRISM every week, said Mazharul Islam, programme coordinator of PRISM. The company Jonny owns is Islam Plastic Industries.

This time, the correspondents had a phone number next to the name. A phone call there resulted in a meeting.

On the day, Jonny was waiting at another shop of his, where workers had earlier refused to talk to The Daily Star and give his contact number.

Seeing the man, and realising he had been met before, came as a little shock.

Jonny said he got 12-14 tonnes of medical waste from PRISM, the lone organisation to collect medical wastes from healthcare facilities across Dhaka and treat those before safe disposal. There were nearly 18 other tonnes he bought from illegal channels.

Pointing to some collection tubes, he said, "These are from PRISM." Queried further, he said they were bought from other sources.

Jonny has 45-50 people working for him in his eight outlets, with CCTV cameras mounted in each of them so that he can remotely oversee operations.

As to whom he supplies medical plastics, he said he had to maintain secrecy of the business. But at one point even he admitted that the mishandling of medical waste could spread infection.

## Tests await beneath pink parade

FROM PAGE 1

second of the series, were sold out.

Kolkata, which has seen the likes of Shoaib Akhter bowling at high pace to Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid at the Eden Gardens, were now thrilled by the prospect of watching a battle between Virat Kohli and Abu Jayed or Rohit Sharma against Al-Amin Hossain or Mustafizur Rahman.

There may be a gulf in the level of competition but one also has to consider that the last Test played here was back in 2017. However, it was the use of the pink ball under lights that has roused the public's interest. The historic Test has been promoted extensively and there was a festive atmosphere ahead of the Test with landmark sites of the 'City of Joy' adorned with pink while the BCCI has organised several functions and special guests to commemorate the occasion.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee are going to be present as the historic Test unfolds and the players who played in Bangladesh's debut Test against India in November 2000 have also been invited. Bangladesh's famous singer Runa Laila will sing before the toss. Indian cricket legends Sachin Tendulkar, Sunil Gavaskar, Kapil Dev and Rahul Dravid will also be present.

If you have been in Kolkata for the past week and witnessed the excitement, there is no getting away from how big the occasion is set to be. It is a challenge for the organisers and all signs pointed to them acting it.

It is also the perfect venue for Bangladesh to play a historic Test, situated as it is in West Bengal. With there being no language barrier, players have been seen conversing with locals, and there has been a general air of bonhomie.

Beneath it all, however, is a Test match and the auspicious nature of the game will do little to change the

realities in each camp. For Bangladesh it is a game where they will need to show a level of fight and gumption to validate all the buzz and fanfare surrounding the match. Having lost the first Test inside three days, the team needs to perform. Like everyone else, captain Mominul Haque spoke of the excitement, but he knew that Bangladesh would need something more than just going out there to be a participant in a historic occasion.

"Neither of the teams have played pink-ball Tests. It's something new and both teams are excited," Mominul said. "Everyone in Kolkata wants to be part of this match and to come here with their families and close ones. It's an exciting prospect for all."

Mominul however was not worried about the occasion putting extra pressure or causing a loss of focus. "I don't feel that the things happening outside the sphere of cricket will affect us as professionals. One should not feel the pressure due to such atmosphere. We are focused on what we have to do. There is no chance that there will be pressure because of that."

Meanwhile, India skipper Virat Kohli has experienced an atmosphere similar to this when they took on Pakistan in the T20 World Cup in 2016 at the same ground. Instead of feeling pressure, he was focused on the crowd boosting his team and saw the match as a matter of honour.

"It can be daunting or intimidating, but it's also very exciting. When a batsman goes out, he'll have a lot of support. When a bowler is standing at his mark and 80,000 people are cheering for him with the new ball, which is not easy to play against, he will be boosted. The first session, the first hour, I think will be very exciting, because the energy will be high. And the people will enjoy it a lot. So obviously this is a landmark occasion and like I said before, we're lucky that we're starting this new trend. It's a matter of honour," Kohli said.

## Do not pay any heed

FROM PAGE 1

if there was no onion, salt or any other item (in the market) and thus efforts were made to confuse the people.

"I know this would be done. It's normal. We have to move on facing all these issues. Today, we are self-sufficient in food. Bangladesh is now a food-surplus country."

Mentioning that the production of fish and vegetables increased significantly, she said her government pays its due attention to food and nutrition.

Talking about freedom fighters, the PM urged them to share the stories of the Liberation War with the new generation and local people so that they could know the history.

"We're a victorious nation. We achieved victory in the Liberation War.

[share the stories of the war] so that our future generations can know how we became a victorious nation.... The Bangladesh can never suffer any defeat."

Hasina said the government was trying to preserve the massacre spots of the Liberation War.

She said Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had engaged himself in rebuilding the war-ravaged country. He developed every force -- Army, Navy, Air Force, BGB, police and Ansar -- and made them fit for an independent country.

Bangabandhu had realised the recognition of Bangladesh from 126 countries and many international agencies, including the United Nations, OIC and Commonwealth.

Unfortunately, the Father of the Nation was killed when he was taking

the country towards development with a GDP growth rate of over 7 percent, the PM said. "The man who made huge sacrifices for the country's independence was killed so brutally."

A total of 101 family members of seven Bir Shresthas, gallantry award-winning freedom fighters, and their family members attended the function. The premier handed over cheques of honorarium to them.

She also handed over "Shantikalin Padak 2018-2019" (peace medals) to 13 members of the armed forces -- eight from the Army, two from Navy and three from Air Force.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque, PM's Security Affairs Adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique and the chiefs of the three services were present.

## Safety takes a back seat

FROM PAGE 1

thriving black-market industry which has grown by taking advantage of an ineffective system put in place in 2005 to ensure safe disposal of medical wastes.

In this industry, safety takes a back seat to money-making. The whole operation is run by a syndicate of hospital staffers, collectors of recyclables, scrap shop owners and recycling businesses. The lack of monitoring by the authorities is an added benefit for them.

To tackle the problem, a non-profit organisation, PRISM Bangladesh Foundation, has been made legally bound to manage medical waste in Dhaka since 2005.

It received approval from the Department of Environment (DoE) and has been functioning under the supervision of the Dhaka city corporations; a primary condition of the approval is that it does not cause any harm to public health or the environment.

A month-long investigation by The Daily Star has found that the recyclable medical wastes PRISM collects from about 1,000 healthcare facilities across Dhaka is a small portion of the total waste generated.

Sohrab Ali, of Dhaka metropolitan office of the DoE, said his office doesn't look after the management of solid wastes from hospitals.

"It is done as per the agreement between the city corporations and PRISM."

STAGE ONE Visits to government and private hospitals, scrap shops which sprawl across Old Dhaka, and interviews with people representing all stages of this industry shed light on how much of the unaccounted medical plastics reach the black market.

According to PRISM, it operates following the core guideline on medical wastes of the World Health Organization and in compliance with the Medical Waste Management Rules, 2008.

The rules formulated under Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act 1995 requires healthcare facilities to segregate wastes into three categories -- infectious, sharp and recyclable waste.

PRISM is to collect the waste from the facilities separately and transport those in closed containers to a treatment plant in Dhaka's Matuail. Sharp and infectious waste materials are to be incinerated and disinfected before being disposed of.

Only plastic items -- syringes, saline bags, gloves, etc -- are chemically treated to free those of germs and then shredded into micro plastics at the PRISM plant before being sold.

There is no official data on how much medical waste is generated in the capital on a daily basis.

PRISM, during a survey in 2018, estimated that at least 4,000kgs of plastic medical wastes is generated in Dhaka city every day. But PRISM only gets 500kgs of plastic items a day (as its data shows), which means more than 87 percent slips through the system.

Where do the missing medical plastic wastes end up?

FROM WASTE TO WHAT?

A six-foot-by-ten-foot scrap shop beside a narrow alley close to the Eidgah Ground in Islambagh might be one of the answers to where medical wastes go.

Shop owner Khalil Mian said he buys about 7,500kgs of saline bags at Tk40 a kg every month. The plastic is then scrapped. He sells those for Tk60 a kg.

It's a small mark-up, but the quantity sold more than makes up for it.

At the narrow alley near the Eidgah Ground, at least 20 such scrap shops can be found, inconspicuously located between hole-in-the-wall restaurants and tailors.

At another such shop, two women were seen cutting blood and urine bags with their bare hands. They said the plastic pieces would be cleaned in another place.

Moving onwards, a 10-minute walk out of the alley towards the road by the Buriganga river would take one to the scrap shop of 73-year-old Nurul Islam. There, more dialysers can be seen being cut into pieces on the ground floor of a three-storey structure. Nurul rented out the remaining two floors to another businessman.

Climbing up the incomplete staircase to the second and third floors, the correspondents stumbled over piles of "collection tubes" that laboratories use to keep samples of blood and urine.

Five to six people were busy removing labels and cleaning those.

Asked about the next destination of those tubes, Majnu Miah, an employee, said only their boss knew the answer to that.

"I should not talk to you as there are CCTV cameras mounted here. We would be rebuked if seen talking to you," he said in a hushed tone.

SUPPLY CHAIN OF USED MEDICAL ITEMS

The lure of making money encourages hospital staffers to move aside plastic materials from other waste and keep those under their care. This becomes easy since most of the facilities don't have designated waste management officials, although it is required by the 2008 rules, according to PRISM.

On the footpath opposite Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), medical plastics were found stowed under the cover of a tarpaulin, beside tea and other roadside food stalls.

Staffers who handle general wastes of DMCH and small vendors nearby said the plastic items had already been sold at Tk 25-30 a kg. The man found to be handling the items there said his cousin was the one running the business.

The trial ended there. Brig Gen AKM Nasir Uddin, director of DMCH, said the hospital was trying to improve its waste management over the last one and a half months.

"We had discussions with ICDDR,B and began trying to implement the decisions that came up."

A team of 16 people is now deployed at the hospital to collect hazardous waste twice from different units and to

seal the cracks through which plastic wastes go to the wrong hands.

When questioned about negligible plastic waste that Mitford generated every day as per records, ward master Sazzad Hossain said plastic items like saline bags that were supplied from the hospital's medical store were not given to PRISM. Those were dealt with separately.

But Abdur Rahman, who oversees the operation of the store, says all medical plastics are given to PRISM.

Posing as a hospital staffer, these correspondents tried to find more about the medical waste industry.

At least half a dozen waste collectors agreed to buy plastic wastes in bulk at Tk 25-30 a kg. They said they were deployed area-wise to collect waste and sell those to scrap shops in their respective areas.

At Ananda Bazar and Islambagh, comparatively larger scrap shops buy items like syringes and saline bags in large quantities from small traders at Tk 60-70. A young man named Rana, in his twenties, said he would pay well if the items were clean.

Mazharul Islam, PRISM programme coordinator, claimed medical waste falls in the wrong hands because of "fourth-class employees" at government hospitals.

Though he didn't mention who were to take the blame in case of private hospitals, he said mismanagement of wastes took place because of top officials not paying any heed to the matter.

"Waste is not a concern for them," Mazharul added.

Mohammad Selim, office secretary of the association of plastic flakes businessmen in the capital's Urdu Road, said medical plastics were transparent and of good quality.

"There is a good demand for those in the recycling market."

While medical plastics are sold for a minimum of Tk 60-70 at scrap shops, drinking water bottles go for nearly half that price, Selim said, adding that the plastics are recycled in factories of shoe, furniture and kitchen utensils.

The scrap shops cut the plastic items into pieces and then the pieces would be shredded into flakes.

In Urdu Road, there are around fifty small factories that appear to be residential units from outside, processing flakes into pellets. The alleys ring loud from the constant roars of the machines inside the factories.

Plastic pellets of different qualities and colours are showcased at shops lined up by the roads, not very far from those factories, where the roars from the machines fade and are replaced by the honks of vehicles.

By the time pellets are moulded into finished products, the price rises to Tk 90 a kg, Selim said.

Looking at white rice-grain-sized flakes and pellets in Urdu Road, it is impossible to track those back to medical wastes.

They are brand new products unto themselves and their origins are left unexplored. And then it becomes business as usual.

## Mamata to meet Hasina in Kolkata

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will hold a brief one-on-one meeting at the Taj Bengal hotel in Kolkata this evening on the sidelines of the India-Bangladesh cricket test match.

Talking to reporters in Kolkata yesterday, Mamata said there would be a "courtesy meeting" between Hasina and her.

"Tomorrow [today] Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will be coming to the city to watch the day-night India-Bangladesh cricket test match. Apart from being present at the ground during the inauguration and felicitation programme, we will also have a one-on-one courtesy meeting at 6:00pm [India time]," she said.

There was no official word on the meeting agenda and it remains to be seen if the Teesta river water-sharing agreement would be discussed by the two leaders. Both New Delhi and Dhaka have been keen on sealing the deal since September 2011.

Mamata, a key stakeholder in the issue, has opposed the proposed agreement saying that it would affect the people of the northern part of West Bengal.

The Teesta water-sharing agreement was to be signed during the then Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Bangladesh in September 2011, but it had to be deferred due to objections raised by Mamata who had also dropped out of the Indian PM's delegation.

Earlier this month, Bangladesh Foreign minister, AK Abdul Momen during his visit to Kolkata expressed hope that the issue would be resolved when Hasina meets Mamata during the cricket match.

## Three navy ships held by Russia return to Ukraine port

AFP, Kiev

Three navy vessels that Moscow seized last year and handed back to Ukraine have arrived at a Ukrainian port, though Kiev said they were stripped of equipment.

The Nikopol, the Berdyansk and the Yany Kapu were seized in November last year in the Kerch Strait, in the most serious confrontation between Russia and Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict in east Ukraine in 2014.

The two gunboats and a tugboat were handed back this week after they were held in evidence following what Moscow says was an illegal breach of the Russian border.

The ships were welcomed back on Wednesday evening by the Ukrainian navy and President Volodymyr Zelensky, who reviewed them in the Black Sea navy port in Ochakiv.

"I am very happy that our navy vessels are back where they belong. As promised, we have brought back our sailors and our ships," Zelensky said. "Some of the equipment is missing, as well as some weapons," he said. "There will be an investigation. We will see all of the details."

The vessels had to be towed to their destination by other Ukrainian ships and were greeted from the shore by Ukrainians holding national flags.

The Ukrainian defence ministry said that "the Russians have dismantled some communication and navigation equipment on board," and the ships will be examined by Ukrainian investigators and military prosecutors.

This will permit Ukraine to use the information "for judicial review of Russia's actions in Ukrainian and international courts," Admiral Igor Voronchenko said in a statement.

## More pvt firms

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, CityGroup and Meghna Group, two local business giants, have also started importing onion via air, the PR official said, adding that two large consignments of onions are scheduled to land at HSIA today morning.

The two companies have also opened LCs for importing a substantial quantity of onion via sea very soon, he said.

Nawshad Enterprise, another local private firm, has already imported 82 tonnes of onion from Pakistan on Wednesday.

"So, onion is imported by both via air and sea routes. We hope the price of onions will come down further with the improvement of supply," he said.

The public relations officer also said the government will provide incentives to the companies that are importing onion at an emergency basis.

The TCB is currently selling onions in 50 trucks in the capital, Bakshi said, adding that the state-run trading organisation would continue selling onions at divisional and district level based on the availability of imported onions, he said.