

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,861

New cases in 24hrs



4,85,965

Total cases



6,967

Deaths



4,10,452

Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



1,580,300

Deaths



69,507,519

Total cases



PM reiterates call for co-op on regional development

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the need for regional development and cooperation, reaffirming that Bangladesh follows its policy -- "Friendship to all, malice to none."

"I believe in regional development and cooperation," she said when Indian High Commissioner Vikram Kumar Doraiswami met her at the Gono Bhaban.

PM's Deputy Press Secretary Hasan Jahid Tusher briefed reporters after the meeting.

Recalling India's contributions to Bangladesh's glorious War of Liberation in 1971 and also post-war reconstruction of the country, Hasina said as far as Bangladesh is concerned, all Indians are united in their voice, which was exemplified during the ratification of the much-desired Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) in Indian parliament.

At the meeting the Indian envoy conveyed his government's support to Bangladesh's candidature for the South-East Asia Regional Office (SEARO) of WHO.

Referring to the ongoing process to deliver 30 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine through Serum Institute to Beximco, Doraiswami said they were also willing to increase the capacity of the Bangladeshi health professionals for an effective delivery of the vaccine.

To establish "Golden Bangladesh" as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Indians are willing to be part of Bangladesh's development journey, he said.

The Indian envoy briefed the premier about the forthcoming activities to commemorate "Mujib Borsho" marking the birth centenary of Bangabandhu, 50 years of Bangladesh's independence and establishment of Bangladesh-India diplomatic ties.

He also mentioned that all Indians, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, possess good wishes for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and all the Bangladeshi.

The PM thanked and conveyed her regards to her Indian counterpart Modi.

PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikai and Military Secretary Maj Gen Nasib Ahmed Chowdhury were present.

PM SEEKS MORE INVESTMENT

Hasina yesterday invited South Korea to invest in Bangladesh, particularly in the Hi-tech Park.

She said this when newly appointed Ambassador of South Korea to Bangladesh Lee Jang-kuen met her at the Gono Bhaban.

During the meeting the premier sought Korea's continued support to help Bangladesh ensure sustainable and dignified repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar.

In another meeting with Swiss Ambassador to Bangladesh Nathalie Chuard at the Gono Bhaban, Hasina yesterday urged Switzerland to increase its investment in Bangladesh.

Focusing on the immense potential for investment in Bangladesh, the PM said the country has a highly skilled large young generation.

Expressing interest to cooperate with Bangladesh in developing human skill, Nathalie Chuard said Switzerland is ready to extend all sorts of cooperation to the Bangladesh government's efforts for skill development.

She said Switzerland is ready to offer any type of assistance in implementing the Vision-2041 and the Delta Plan-2100 of Bangladesh.

Hasina welcomed the new ambassador and assured her of extending all cooperation during her stay in Dhaka.

Moments of joy

FROM PAGE 1 although it was hard to see the installation work from afar due to poor visibility.

One end of the bridge's is located at Mawa point of Munshiganj and the other point is located at Jajira point in Shariatpur.

"Now, our area will see huge infrastructural development quickly. For example, our road from Dhaka to Mawa has been widened because of the bridge. It's a great achievement for us," said Awlad Hossain, a fish trader at Mawa kitchen market.

Siraj Bepari, a local, said, "We hope to see huge industrialisation centring the bridge and highways. There will be huge employment opportunities for people of this area."

Another resident of the area, Shajahan Miah, said, "Mawa has now become a tourist spot. The number of visitors will rise because of the bridge."

Some commuters said the bridge will see an end to the harassments they face at the speedboat terminal as recently the fare of crossing the river on speedboat has increased to Tk 200 from Tk 140.



Clockwise from left, engineers working on the Padma Bridge construction hold two Bangladeshi flags on the floating crane while celebrating the installation of the last span of the bridge around noon yesterday. The festive atmosphere also spread among journalists who boarded boats and trawlers to witness the historic occasion.



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ/ COLLECTED

Bangladesh tells a story

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all lay the iron will of the prime minister to complete the bridge regardless of the cost.

The bridge had been transformed into a national challenge when World Bank, ADB, JICA and IDB injudiciously and without much self-examination refused to extend fund due to "corruption intention" charges that later proved unfounded. It was definitely the highhandedness and arrogance of the donors that moved them into such one-sided action. But it did tremendous damage to our image and reinforced the stereotype of a corruption ridden Third World country, the forever "basket case".

It was that "arrogance" and "highhandedness" and damage to our prestige that Sheikh Hasina decided to challenge. The disappointment

of not having the bridge must have been tremendous but it was the deep wound to our self-respect that drove Sheikh Hasina to withdraw our loan application in 2013 and declare "We will have to shrug off our begging mentality", following on her earlier decision to build the bridge with our own resources.

Many thought her decision was reckless and feared diversion of our scarce resources from more urgent sectors. But Sheikh Hasina held firm. Whether the bridge that cost Tk 30,193 crore, originally estimated to cost Tk 10,161 crore, is fully justified is a question to be determined by auditors. For the PM it was the national prestige that held supreme and nothing else mattered.

One of the things that I admire most

about her is her constant urging that we hold our heads high, that we prove to the world that our abilities are no less than that of others, that we never lose the confidence that we can survive and face challenges howsoever formidable. This is a very important message particularly for a country that many thought was not viable, that we would drown under our own weight of deficiencies. For a people known more for their external dependencies than for their internal capabilities the Padma Bridge stands today as a symbol of proving all the above to be fundamentally wrong.

Some may say why is building a bridge such a big deal? Pay the price and the competent companies will build it for you. Such critics miss the point that technical projects sometimes acquire larger than life symbolic values -- values

of self-respect, of national self-belief, of how we want to be seen or treated by others and whether we can become dependable partners in global affairs. By building it we have truly held our heads high.

Our high growth, our living up to the MDG and then SDG goals, our graduation from the category of least developed country and, according to IMF our growth in 2020 being the highest in Asia at 3.8 percent in spite of Covid-19, together tells a story of a steady, competent and confident Bangladesh that many developing countries can look up to and the rest of the world can work with as a well performing partner.

Let the Bangladesh story energise us and the world bestow confidence on us.

The railway stringers, which went into the Padma due to erosion at a yard, have to be brought in from Luxembourg and this may cause some delays, officials said.

The main bridge construction achieved 91 percent progress while river training, another important component of the project, has made 76 percent progress, they said.

The overall progress of the project is 82.5 percent.

Belayet said they were hopeful of completing the rest of the work within 15 months, as the pandemic had slowed down the construction work.

Two Chinese companies are implementing the project. One is constructing the bridge while the other is doing the river training.

Grit and glory

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The span was then slowly taken towards pillars-12 and -13 at the Mawa end.

There was a little uncertainty as there was fog yesterday morning but visibility improved as the day progressed. When the sun emerged around noon, the entire span was glimmering in the sunshine.

As the work progressed, over 100 reporters and photographers documented everything from trawlers and speedboats from a safe distance.

Apart from taking photographs and footage for their respective media houses and going live on Facebook and YouTube, many were seen taking selves with the bridge in the background.

A crew member of a TV channel had painted his face like a tiger and held the national flag in his arms. He was

celebrating in a manner usually seen when Bangladesh cricket team, known as the Tigers, achieved something very big.

"This is a big deal for the people of the southwest. They have been enduring huge sufferings [to cross the Padma river]," Aynal Mridha, a trawler driver said as the last span was being installed.

The 25-year-old from Munshiganj recalled, "I had to carry a dead body in my trawler as the ambulance it was in could not cross the river due to unavailability of ferries."

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said, "The prime minister, defying all challenges, proved that Bangladesh is a nation of warriors. We can do it."

Quader, also the general secretary of the ruling Awami League, informed the

premier immediately after the span was installed, sources said.

Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam, who served as bridge division secretary for eight years, yesterday said, "It [Padma bridge] is now physically possible ... I think by June 2022, we will open the Padma bridge ... This is a great achievement."

WHAT'S LEFT?

Roadway deck and railway stringers are being installed now.

Of the 2,917 roadway slabs of the bridge, 1,333 have been installed as of yesterday while 1,942 railway slabs out of 2,959 have been installed.

Besides, some other work including installation of electricity and gas transmission lines have to be completed before opening the bridge for the public.

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Govt hints at fresh stimulus

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Despite sluggish external demand, the country has managed a moderate growth in fiscal year 2019-20 with its domestic demand. The provisional growth has been 5.24 percent against an original target of 8.2.

The revenue to GDP ratio declined to 9.40 percent in fiscal year 2019-20 from 9.91 percent the previous year. Moreover, NBR Taxes to GDP ratio fell to 7.68 percent from 8.60 percent.

Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) President Nihad Kabir said, "In June-July, the recovery was good, but the second wave of Covid has been a matter of concern. Some sectors have yet to become fully active."

Ninety percent of the small businesses have reopened, but the demand and prices of commodities dipped, she said.

The government needs to provide both policy and financial support and the packages may need expansion. The major goal should be to keep wage employment going, she added.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, Centre for Policy Dialogue research director, said coverage of the social safety net programmes need to be expanded as some 17.5 million new poor have been created due to the pandemic.

He said the social safety net programme like Vulnerable Group Feeding has covered only 33 percent of those eligible for the programme. The urban poor also need to be covered by the safety net.

"We need to consider how the unemployed, the people of ethnic minorities and chars can come under the safety net," Moazzem said.

European Union Ambassador Rensje Teerink said the pandemic is

an opportunity as the authorities can now strengthen social security, not only through relief but through other institutional measures like health and farm insurance.

Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said the next one year is going to be tricky.

"Some of our export items are facing difficulties because of low demand," he said, seeking cooperation from the businesses and experts.

Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Minister Tazul Islam said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's strong leadership and prudent decision have kept the country's economic situation better than most of the countries in the region.

Engagement of all can surely help overcome the challenges, he said.

The economy should continue to reopen, but the focus also should be on health-related measures like mandatory use of masks and hand washing.

Economic Research Group Executive Director Sazzad Zohir suggested taking measures that augment local markets since the recovery could be slow due to the second wave of the pandemic globally.

The policy should be such that the local industries grow, he said.

Economists also suggested continuing open market sales of food and renovating rural infrastructure, particularly in the flood-prone areas.

Dhaka University Economics Professor Firdous Naher suggested considering the nutrition aspect in the food distribution programmes.

European Union Ambassador Rensje Teerink said the pandemic is

entering country without Covid-19 negative certificate.

"Another problem is the DGHS does not provide real-time information on hospital bed vacancy for people," he added.

About vaccination, he said there is good progress, but it is not known "what should be done if adverse effects arise two or three months later."

In a presentation, Engineer Qazi M Arif highlighted their charitable activities including distribution of medical equipment, financial support to poor BUET students and staffs, food aid to poor villagers, development of medical equipment by BUET faculty, 24-hour telemedicine service for all and awareness campaign.

Presided over by Engineer Muniruddin Ahmed, acting president of BUET Alumni, Prof Satya Prasad Majumder, vice-chancellor of BUET, DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam, Director General of DGHS Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, President of BGMEA Rubana Haque, Rotary International's Bangladesh Governor Rubayet Hossain, President of the Editors' Guild Mozammel Babu, Bangladesh Scouts' Senior Leader Prof Nizamuddin Ahmed, BRAC's Director Liakath Ali, Asian Development Bank's Senior Project Officer Farhat Jahan Chowdhury, and UNDP's Program Specialist Arif Abdullah Khan spoke at the seminar among others.

He stressed on ensuring nobody

US concerned

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violence, human trafficking and illegal drug trading, it said.

The US said it appreciates Bangladesh's hosting of the nearly a million Rohingya. At the same time, the Bangladesh government needs to demonstrate respect for the human rights of refugees in Bhasan Char, including freedom of movement, by facilitating refugees' ability to move to and from Cox's Bazar.

Refugees on Bhasan Char should have access to livelihoods and basic services, such as education and health care, Brown said.

With the UN and like-minded donors, the US has asked for Bangladesh to accept the UN's offer of thorough and independent technical and protection assessments to determine the safety, feasibility, and desirability of relocating refugees there, the US official said.

The US also calls again upon Myanmar to create the conditions conducive for Rohingya refugees' voluntary, safe, and dignified return.

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