

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



1,865
New cases in 24hrs



5,62,752
Total cases



8,608
Deaths



5,15,989
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



2,686,941
Deaths



121,592,985
Total cases

World leaders hail Bangabandhu

Xi, Modi, Trudeau, Suga deliver special messages on his birthday

UNB, BSS Dhaka

Chinese President Xi Jinping has said he will work with President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to strengthen the complementarities between two development strategies, advance Belt and Road cooperation, and take the strategic partnership of cooperation to a new height.

"We must always remember what the elder generation of leaders did for growth of China-Bangladesh relations, and shall pass on the baton of the China-Bangladesh friendship to future generations," he said.

In a pre-recorded speech, President Xi wished Bangladesh prosperity and its people happiness. "May the China-Bangladesh friendship last from generation to generation!"

The Chinese president made the remarks marking the celebrations of Mujib Borsho and the Golden Jubilee of Bangladesh's independence, reports UNB.

President Hamid, his Maldivian counterpart Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, PM Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana were present at the function held at the National Parade Ground.

The Chinese president said 50 years ago, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had founded the People's Republic of Bangladesh. "A man who devoted his whole life to his country and people, he is fondly remembered by the people in Bangladesh to this day."

He said the "Sonar Bangla" Bangabandhu envisioned is still galvanising the 160 million Bangladeshi people in their pursuit of national rejuvenation.

"Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was an old and good friend of the Chinese people. On his two visits to China in 1952 and 1957, he forged friendships with Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai, and other Chinese leaders of the elder generation," he said.

As a Chinese saying goes, Xi said, "Do not forget those who dug the well when drinking water from it."

Over the five decades of independence, the people of Bangladesh have stayed true to their conviction and triumphed over challenge one after another, he added.

"The two countries have supported each other and made progress together. Today, both countries are at a crucial stage of revitalisation and development. The Chinese dream of great national renewal can well connect with the 'Sonar Bangla' dream."

Xi said his country would not forget that at the height of its fight against the novel coronavirus, the Bangladesh government and people donated a large quantity of medical supplies to China.

TRUDEAU DELIVERS MESSAGE

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in a video message said the independent and democratic Bangladesh was built based on Bangabandhu's love for his people.

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Politics on reverse gear

Says President Hamid

UNB, Dhaka

President Abdul Hamid has said politics in Bangladesh is now moving in the opposite direction and some opportunists have made politics a profession.

"The cardinal motto of politics should be -- party takes precedence over person and country over party. It seems that politics is moving in the opposite direction," he said.

The president was addressing the inaugural ceremony of a 10-day special programme at the National Parade Ground yesterday, marking the 50 years of Bangladesh's independence and the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Hamid delivered the welcome speech at the programme, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

He called upon the politicians to learn from the life and deeds of Bangabandhu and devote themselves to serving the country and its people.

"Politics and profession is not the same thing. With a profession, one earns a livelihood for himself and his family. Politics is a greater field to work for the welfare of the country and its people. If one considers politics as a profession then he will have to reel in the family cycle forgetting the country and the people," he said.



Neither family happiness nor comfy life could distract the Father of the Nation from his goal, Hamid said, adding that if Bangabandhu wanted he could have become the prime minister of undivided Pakistan and spent his days happily with his family.

"He could have immersed himself in wealth. But he very easily rejected all this and took the interest of the country and people as his vow of life."

The president said Bangabandhu always dreamt of building a happy and prosperous country along with political independence.

The incumbent Awami League government under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is making relentless efforts to realise his dream, he added.

Praising the current development

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Hefajat supporters attack Hindu homes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Several hundred supporters of Hefajat-e Islam attacked, vandalised and looted at least 75 Hindu houses in Sunamganj's Noagaon village yesterday morning over a Facebook post.

Thirty-five houses were damaged badly and 40 more partially in the attack, said Md Jahangir Hossain, deputy commissioner of Sunamganj.

"We have assured the victims of all sorts of help from the administration. We've told them that the attackers and their patrons will be identified and legal action will be taken against them," he stated.

The attackers also vandalised several idols and looted valuables from the Hindu houses in the village under Shalla upazila, locals said, alleging that police were late in reaching the spot.

Carrying locally-made weapons, Hefajat supporters from villages adjacent to Shalla upazila started gathering at a bazar in Noagaon village around 9:00am and launched the attack about an hour later.

The mayhem continued for nearly an hour till police reached the spot at about 11:00am and brought the situation under control.

However, no one was arrested and no case was filed over the attack.

Rontu Das, a resident of Noagaon village, said locals from adjacent villages carrying weapons started gathering near the village yesterday morning even though police on Tuesday night arrested the young man, also a resident of his village, who made

posts on Facebook about a Hefajat leader.

"All of a sudden they attacked our village. We ran for our lives, leaving everything behind. The attackers kept ravaging our houses until police arrived," he said.

Sajal Chandra Das, another resident of the village, said, "The attackers were mostly from nearby Nachni, Chandipur, Santoshpur and Samangal villages of Derai upazila and Kalimpur of Shalla upazila."

Mizanur Rahman, superintendent of police in Sunamganj, said, "On information of the attack by Hefajat supporters, police and officials of the local administration rushed to the spot, pacified the angry mob and brought the situation under control."

On Monday, Hefajat unit of nearby Derai upazila, organised a rally in the upazila where the organisation's Ameer Junayed Babunagari and Joint Secretary General Mamunul Haque spoke.

At the rally, Mamunul criticised the celebration of Bangabandhu's birth centenary and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit marking the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence, according to local media reports.

The following day, Jhumon Das Apon, a youth from Noagaon village, made posts on his Facebook wall, slamming Mamunul for trying to create a religious divide, said Nazmul Haque, officer-in-charge of Shalla Police Station.

At this, Hefajat supporters became

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Now time to forge ahead

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celebrations beginning yesterday in the presence of foreign dignitaries.

It started with the musical item "Anandaloke, Mongolaloke Birajo Sotro Sundaro..." around 4:30pm, performed by 100 children at the National Parade Square at the capital's Tejgaon, which was decorated with colourful billboards welcoming the foreign dignitaries.

As the children performed patriotic songs, an animated film on Bangabandhu was screened at the venue. Earlier, President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and his wife First Lady Madam Fazna Ahmed, and Sheikh Rehana, daughter of Bangabandhu, and National Professor Rafiqul Islam took seats on the stage after being invited by cultural personality and former minister Asaduzzaman Noor.

Verses from the holy books -- the Quran, the Geeta, the Tripitaka and the Bible were read.

"Ebarer Sangram, Amader Muktir Sangram; Ebarer Sangram, Swadhinatar Sangram" -- the historic call of Bangabandhu for emancipation was being played through loudspeakers, reminding the audience of the unequivocal call for independence of Bangladesh.

Eminent musicians sang "Tumi Banglar Dhrubo Tara, Tumi Hridoyer Batighar" [you are the polar star of Bangla and you are the lighthouse of heart], the theme song of the programme, written by poet Kamal Chowdhury and composed by Nakib Khan.

A video of Bangladesh Air Force places in formation in the shape of "100" was also screened, leaving the audience, which included cabinet ministers, government officials and foreign diplomats, impressed. The event was limited to people due to the pandemic.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Japanese counterpart Yoshihide Suga delivered video messages addressing the people of Bangladesh on the occasion.

Presiding over the inaugural event, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, "On this day in 1920, a child was born in a secluded village of Tungipara. The child, who came to this earth enlightening the lap of mother Sheikh Sayera Khatun and father Sheikh Lutfur Rahman, illuminated the life of the Bangladeshis and brought them freedom."

She said the freedom of the country came as a result of the continuous struggle initiated by Bangabandhu on March 11, 1948, with the ultimate target of political-economic and cultural emancipation of the Bangladeshis.

"It was a war-ravaged country, which was under hundreds of years of subjugation. In just three and a half years, he carried out the mammoth task of building a fully-fledged sovereign state where people were suffering from exploitation, deprivation, hunger, and poverty."

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had done many things which seemed impossible. Hasina said, expressing sincere gratitude to all the friendly countries and leaders who extended necessary help during the Liberation War and post-war reconstruction of the country.

She said Bangladesh is going to celebrate the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation and the golden jubilee of independence at a time when the country is well on track to graduate from the LDC status to that of a developing nation.

She stated that the country's per capita income has exceeded \$2,000; the poverty rate has declined below 20.5 percent; the country has become self-sufficient in food grain production and the average life expectancy has increased to 73 years.

Hasina warned about the active threat of "anti-Bangladesh forces" both

at home and abroad, saying, "They want to disparage this achievement through various malpractices."

"On the birthday of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib, let us, in a united manner, resist all evil-sprouts and take the beloved motherland forward towards the path of development and progress."

"Now it's time to move forward. There is no chance to look behind. Overcoming all obstacles, we shall establish this country as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's exploitation-free, deprivation-free, hunger-free, poverty-free, illiteracy-free, non-communal Golden Bangladesh."

Addressing the event, National Prof Rafiqul Islam said the Bangladeshis were an unfortunate nation, and their bitter experiences are unforgettable. The nation had always been under the foreign rulers and looters.

"To rid the nation of foreign rule, one leader was born. He is no other than Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who throughout his life fought for the oppressed people," he said.

Bangabandhu had to sacrifice his own life and that of most of his family members in a military coup on August 15, 1975.

"However, today he remains immortal. His most important contribution is an independent country, liberation from the curse of slavery. We are indebted to him forever," Prof Rafiqul Islam said.

Today, Bangladesh is advancing in an irresistible speed, he said, adding that the theme of yesterday's event, therefore, has been set as "Bhengechhe Duar, Eshcheche Jyotimoy, Tomari Hok Joy".

British Journalist Sir Mark Tully, BBC's Indian affairs correspondent in 1971, who covered Bangladesh's Liberation War, in his recorded video message said he shared to the world the pain and anguish of the Bangladeshis during that time.

Now that the country is advancing, he rejoices in the celebrations. Tully recalled the memories of Bangabandhu, saying he was a great leader as well as very affectionate as a human being.

He congratulated Bangladeshis and the leadership for the progress it made over the decades.

Audiovisuals, animated films and cultural shows performed at the programme yesterday featured the life and legacy of Bangabandhu, his struggles for peoples' rights and independence. Cultural troops from India and Bangladesh took part in the cultural show that began around 6:30pm and continued till 8:00pm.

Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa will arrive on March 19, Nepalese President Bidya Devi Bhandari on March 22, Prime Minister of Bhutan Lotay Tshering on March 24 and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 26 to attend the celebrations.

Besides, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen would deliver recorded speech on March 18, OIC Secretary General Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimeen on March 20, Unesco DG Audrey Azoulay on March 23, Pope Francis on March 24, South Korean Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun and Japanese friend of Bangladesh Takashi Hayakawa's son Osamu Hayakawa on March 25.

The theme of today's event is "Mohakaler Tarjoni"; "Jatokal Robe Padma, Jamuna" on March 19; "Tarunner Alokshikha" on March 20; "Dhangshastoope Jiboner Gaan" on March 21; "Banglar Mati, Amaar Mati" on March 22; "Narimukti, Sammya O Swadhinata" on March 23; "Shanti, Mukti O Manabatar Agradooti" on March 24; "Gonohattay Kalratri O Alover Obhijatra" on March 25 and "Swadhinatar 50 Bochor O Agragotir Subamarekha" on March 26.

The programmes would be broadcast live on electronic and social media platforms.



Charred and melted medical equipment at the ICU of Dhaka Medical College and Hospital after a fire yesterday morning swept through this critical care unit causing the deaths of at least three Covid-19 patients.

PHOTO:
PALASH KHAN

3 patients die after ICU fire

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deployed at the unit, said, five of them were inside the ICU ward when the fire broke out.

"Five others were inside the nurse staff room," she added.

After the smoke spread out, the hospital officials instructed all the patients to be shifted to the nearby CCU, she said.

"We have managed to take more than 15 different ICU devices to the safe zone," she added.

According to officials, the main ICU unit of the country's largest tertiary hospital has around 900 Covid-19

dedicated beds at a time.

Since this Covid-19 unit was launched after the coronavirus transmission started in the country in March last year, these 14 ICU beds had "never been vacant" so far, they said.

There was no injury directly caused by the fire, the hospital authorities said in a press release.

Three committees -- a five-member committee on behalf of the health ministry, a nine-member committee on behalf of the DMCH, and another four-member committee on behalf of the fire service -- have been formed to

investigate the fire incident.

In the recent past, at least three fire incidents took place at the DMCH, including one in the general ICU of the hospital in early January.

Brig Gen Nazmul Haque, director of the hospital, told The Daily Star yesterday that the adjacent 20-bed Post-CCU unit has been kept closed but will be resumed within days.

"As we will need time to resume the Covid-19 ICU unit, we will convert the 10-bed high-dependency unit at the burn unit to ICU within a week," he added.

A symbol of democracy, freedom

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of honour at the official ceremony marking the Birth Centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The event was held at the National Parade Square in the capital.

Solih said throughout his life, Bangabandhu was a firm advocate of democracy and political liberty and that he advocated those ideals which resonated with people from all walks of life.

Despite the tragic circumstances of his death, Bangabandhu would always have an honoured place in the hearts of those who yearn for democracy and freedom, the president added.

He shed light on Bangladesh's extraordinary work in uplifting the lives of its people and developing the nation.

The Maldivian leader expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the Bangladeshi government for the assistance it has

provided to the Maldives. He praised the welcome presence of a team of healthcare professionals from the Bangladesh Air Force. They have travelled to the Maldives twice to assist the country in curbing the spread of Covid-19.

Solih extended invitations to President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to visit to the Maldives at an opportune time.

DGHS wants full lockdown

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"We have just presented those points for discussion. Those were our proposal for discussion. We have discussed, but the authorities concerned will decide. But we have been asked to vigorously run campaigns on health guidelines," Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), told The Daily Star last night.

In this context, there was discussion on social media whether tomorrow's 41st public service examinations will be held or not.

"We have only one day left before the

exams. We have sent question papers and other logistics to different exam centres. Examinees have also come to the divisional cities. It is tough to stop the exam now," Shahjahan Ali Mollah, a member of Public Service Commission, said last night.

In the last 10 days, the transmission of novel coronavirus had been gradually rising every day with experts fearing spread of the new strains of novel coronavirus, including those first detected in the UK and South Africa.

The meeting also discussed several other issues, including the stop to mass gathering, limiting different

markets, political gatherings, election, tourist gathering, religious meeting, and iftar events; strengthening screening at all entry points to the country -- airports, seaports and land ports -- and quarantining people who come in contact with any infected people.

The new Covid-19 strain was found in 10 European Union returnees, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said yesterday, UNB adds.

He was speaking at a programme marking the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

BUSINESS

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USE OF FOREX RESERVE

Caution in the air

pace to the economy. Alarm, because of the existing track-record of project implementation and fraudulences in financial sector. Economists and development experts gave a mixed bag of reactions when approached by The Daily Star. The fate of the reserved fund is going to be sorely tested by the good governance or the lack of

it, they observed. In a nutshell, the government will take loan from the reserved state coffer for government projects to be implemented by the government. And, for loan repayment, it's also the government, who would give the sovereign loan guarantee and pay it back in case of defaulted loan.

So, what's going to happen if the good development stumbles on to poor monitoring, lack of transparency and quick-fix mechanism? The government will have to fork out the penalty from its one pocket to another. It will be the public money that is destined to be wasted. "Forex reserve plundered" will replace in the typical headlines of "public bank plundered".

STORY ON B1