

BANGLADESH UPDATE



3,587

New cases in 24hrs



5,84,395

Total cases



8,797

Deaths



5,29,894

Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

2,759,394

Deaths



125,601,278

Total cases

BLAZE AT REFUGEE CAMP

Around 600 children still missing

Claim 27 NGOs in joint assessment

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, from Cox's Bazar

Rohingya parents are enduring an agonising wait as they hope to be reunited with their children who were separated in the massive fire that raged through four camps on Monday in Balukhali of Cox's Bazar's Ukhya upazila.

The primary registration of missing children rose to 600 while some children have started reuniting with their families at camp-8(e), according to a joint assessment of 27 NGOs working at the camps.

The rapid assessment says 66 percent of the four camps have been affected by the blaze, while 10,000 shelters -- including medical care facilities, learning centres, women and child support centres -- were razed to the ground by the inferno.

Yesterday, this correspondent came across the "Lost and Missing Child Information Centre" at Balukhali camp set up by Brac, where parents crowded to report their missing children.

At the centre, this correspondent talked to Mohammad Azmat of camp-8(e).

"When the fire broke out, we ran for our lives. But my seven-year-old son has been missing since. I registered

his name here, in the hopes of getting him back," said Azmat, who was one of those in the queue to report their missing children.

"Without my child, I can't even focus on rebuilding my shelter," he added.

An NGO official, preferring not to be named, told The Daily Star that 150 such information centres have been set up across the four affected camps, where parents come to submit their child's name every day.

Humanitarian organisations, including Brac, International Refugee Council and Danish Refugee Council, are working and coordinating on the ground to generate information about missing children.

Apart from this, child protection agencies established child-friendly spaces to receive lost children.

As of Wednesday, 24 children were received by child protection units and 17 were reunited with their families, a camp-in-charge who wished to remain anonymous told The Daily Star.

According to the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner's office, the fire that raged in four camps on Monday claimed 11 lives, burnt down 10,000 shanties and displaced around 50,000 people.

50 injured in clashes between protesters, cops, BCL activists

2 journos beaten up by BCL men

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 50 people, including students, were injured in separate clashes involving police, Bangladesh Chhatra League activists and protesters in Motijheel and Dhaka University areas yesterday.

BCL activists severely beat up DU correspondents of Prothom Alo Asif Hawlader and Bangla Tribune Abid Hasan Rasel in the university area while the two were covering the protest programmes.

The first clash ensued when Bangladesh Chhatra and Jubo Adhikar Parishad brought out a procession protesting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bangladesh visit from Bijoyanagar area around 11:30am.

Over 500 protesters took part in the procession, led by former Ducusu VP Nurul Haque Nur. When it reached near Shapla Chattar in Motijheel around 12:30pm, police obstructed them and the clash ensued, witnesses said.

The demonstrators threw brick chunks when police charged batons, fired teargas shells and bullets to disperse them.

Parishad leader Faruk Hasan said at least 25 protesters were injured in the clash.

Syed Nurul Haq, deputy commissioner of Motijheel division, said seven police personnel, including the officer-in-charge of Paltan Police Station, were also hurt. Police detained 33 protesters from the spot, he added.

Vehicular movement at Bijoyanagar,

Paltan intersection, Shapla Chattar and Dainik Bangla intersection remained halted for about half an hour due to the clash.

In another development, BCL men attacked DU correspondent of Bangla Tribune Abid with bamboo sticks in TSC area around 5:30pm while he was covering a programme by a platform named "People of Bangladesh" protesting Modi's Bangladesh visit.

Abid alleged that the attackers also snatched his mobile phone and press card. Later, he was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Hours after the incident, the BCL men swooped on protesters of leftist students' alliance when they brought out a torch-procession from TSC area around 7:30pm, triggering a clash, witnesses said.

At least 15 demonstrators took treatment at DMCH.

DU correspondent of Prothom Alo Asif was severely beaten up by the BCL men while he was covering the incident, witnesses said.

He had four stiches on his head. Later, he was taken to a private hospital.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not reach BCL President Al Nahyan Khan Joy and Secretary Lekhak Bhattacharjee for comments.

DU BCL unit President Sonjita Chandra Das told The Daily Star that he heard about the clashes and the attacks on the journalists.

He added that they would take action if any BCL men is found involved in the attack on the journalists.

Empower kids with digital access: UN watchdog

APP, Geneva

Proper digital access is no game for children, it is a right that each and every country should guarantee, a UN watchdog said Wednesday.

Images of children huddled in store parking lots to access the wifi needed for their online schoolwork have been common during the pandemic, while sexual predators have long stalked children in online

chatrooms.

In its first such analysis, the Committee on the Rights of the Child found that countries are responsible for rectifying such situations by ensuring children have "meaningful" and safe access to digital technologies.

"Governments really need to think about giving as much access to the digital environment as possible to all children," committee member Philip Jaffe told APP.

Presenting various statistics on the country's development, she said, "This achievement is the achievement of the common people of the country... My government created a congenial environment by providing only policy support. You [people] proved that if people of Bangladesh get a favourable environment, they can make anything impossible, possible."

The premier greeted all Bangladeshis at home and abroad on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Independence.

She also remembered with gratitude the roles of the friendly

states, institutions and individuals who extended their support to Bangladesh during its extremely bad times in 1971.

Hasina said, "Sheikh Mujib is the founder of a country and a nation state. That's why we are celebrating together his birth centenary and the Golden Jubilee of Independence."

Describing the sacrifices made by the country's people during the Liberation War in 1971, the PM said people had expectations that the country would be liberated and they would live in peace. "Today, we have been able to fulfill their expectations to some extent."

The premier greeted all Bangladeshis at home and abroad on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Independence.

She also remembered with gratitude the roles of the friendly

states, institutions and individuals who extended their support to Bangladesh during its extremely bad times in 1971.

Hasina said, "Sheikh Mujib is the founder of a country and a nation state. That's why we are celebrating together his birth centenary and the Golden Jubilee of Independence."

Presenting various statistics on the country's development, she said, "This achievement is the achievement of the common people of the country... My government created a congenial environment by providing only policy support. You [people] proved that if people of Bangladesh get a favourable environment, they can make anything impossible, possible."

She concluded her speech reciting a few lines from the lyrics of a song by Rabindranath Tagore.



University students march against the ongoing coup in Dawei, Myanmar, yesterday. Security forces yesterday opened fire on anti-coup protesters in Myanmar's eastern Karen state, as demonstrators took to the streets in nationwide dawn rallies to demand a return to democracy.

PHOTO: REUTERS

From empty coffers to hope, cheers

FROM PAGE 1

Aid-dependence significantly declined from 14 percent of the GDP in the 70s to less than 1.5 percent now.

Life expectancy is 72 years, much higher than neighbouring Pakistan and India. People can now send their children to schools and access primary health care.

With policy support of the government, Bangladesh has become a key supplier of readymade garments worldwide. Major brands of the world have their products made here.

This industry alone brings in about \$34 billion a year and employs millions, the lion share of which are women.

Another key driver of the economy was manpower export. Around 10 million Bangladeshis are abroad seeking their fortune in countries in need of workers.

They send in around \$15 billion every year and that amount is ever increasing. This allowed Bangladesh to have a huge foreign currency reserve.

More than one crore people took shelter in India to flee the genocide committed by the Pakistan Army in 1971. Now Bangladesh, with its economic might, is able to open its doors to nearly a million Rohingyas escaping persecution in Myanmar.

Bangladesh has met all three conditions for graduating from the grouping of the least-developed countries twice. The United Nations Committee for Development Policy has already recommended the country's graduation in 2026.

Bangladesh's economy was one of the few economies that posted positive growth in 2020 when growth went south for most because of the pandemic.

The secret of Bangladesh's success was its education and girls, as American journalist and political commentator Nicholas Kristof put it.

"Bangladesh invested in its most underutilised assets — its poor, with

a focus on the most marginalised and least productive, because that's where the highest returns would be."

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said the central bank did not have a machine to print money after independence. The geopolitical situation was not in favour of Bangladesh as the new country was aligned with the left-leaning bloc.

Since the severe famine of 1974, Bangladesh has not faced any major food crisis, greatly aided by the green revolution that was sweeping across the world at the time.

"This has been a major achievement," he said.



A major paradigm shift was moving away from a nationalised economic policy stance perceived in the 1970s to a private-sector-led economy with liberalisation, deregulation and denationalisation in the 80s and 90s, according to Manzur Hossain, research director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

"Bangladesh has disproved all predictions and progressed at a good pace," said AB Mirza Azizul Islam, a former bureaucrat and finance adviser of the government.

Muhammad Abdul Mazid, a former chairman of the National Board of Revenue, said all governments took note of the importance of the agriculture sector to feed the growing population amid shrinking land. The sector gave

the much-needed resilience to the economy.

"Our people are resilient and proactive in driving the economy forward. And they have been supported by appropriate policies," said Prof Shamsul Alam, member of the General Economics Division under the planning commission.

Zaid Bakht, a former research director of the BIDS, credited public expenditure and investment for the surprising turnaround.

"All countries do this. But ours was more focused and intense. Governments have given emphasis on rural infrastructural development. This has a tremendous impact on the economy."

There has been economic diversification. Cropping intensity has been increased. Non-farm activities have gone up, he said.

He said microcredit organisations and NGOs have worked in empowering women. Governments set up roads and bridges, kept the labour market flexible, gave mobility and education to women and girls, and made some improvements in the health sector.

"All these created a virtuous cycle," Bakht said.

Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka Office, gave credit to the steady economic growth, social policies aimed at population control, rural roads, education and electrification, primary education, female education, local low-cost health solutions for immunisation and communicable diseases, access to finance through microcredit, last-mile service delivery by NGOs, and demographic dividend for the turnaround of the country.

The latest testimony to Bangladesh's astounding achievement came when Nicholas Kristof advised US President Joe Biden to look to Bangladesh to find the answer to how to bring down the rate of poor children.

The naysayers got the answer.

Modi arrives today

FROM PAGE 1

Today, after 50 years, Bangladesh is an economic miracle in South Asia and is reputed globally for its policy of "friendship to all and malice to none" and of standing for the oppressed anywhere in the world.

The friendship between Bangladesh and India is also dubbed as "golden chapter", with the two neighbours solving a myriad of challenges, including demarcating maritime and land boundary, cross-border terrorism, while boosting trade and commerce.

Over the last decade, the two countries have also largely broadened connectivity through rail, road, water and seaways with experts saying both the countries can grow faster with seamless connectivity.

Bangladesh is also one of the first countries to have received Covid-19 vaccine shots, which has helped it begin the inoculation of its people early. More will be coming from the Serum Institute of India in the coming months under a trilateral deal.

Modi would be the last global leader to join the 10-day twin celebration programmes that began on March 17 at the National Parade Square in the capital. The Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, Nepal President Bidya Devi Bhandari and Bhutanese Prime Minister Lotay Tshering visited earlier.

World leaders, including Chinese President Xi Jinping, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Pope Francis, and England's Queen Elizabeth II, also sent messages on the occasion.

"The main purpose of Narendra Modi's visit is the celebration of the golden jubilee of our independence," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told journalists on Wednesday.

Modi will hand over 109 ambulances to Bangladesh. He will also hand over 12 lakh doses of AstraZeneca vaccine as a gift.

Minister Momen said some MoUs will also be signed during the meeting, but he did not disclose details.

Modi will also call on President Abdul Hamid at the Bangabhaban before flying back to India tomorrow evening.

Modi is scheduled to land at

11:00am. He will be received by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and a red carpet will be rolled out to welcome him.

He will then pay tribute to the martyrs at the National Martyrs' Memorial in Savar.

Later, he will visit the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi-32 to pay homage to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In the afternoon, Minister Momen will call on the Indian premier at Hotel Sonargaon.

Modi will deliver a speech at the celebrations at the National Parade Square today afternoon.

In the evening, Hasina and Modi will visit Bapu-Bangabandhu Digital Museum at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

Tomorrow, Modi will visit Bangabandhu's graveyard in Gopalganj's Tungipara and visit two temples -- Jashorehswari Kali Temple in Shyamnagar of Satkhira and the other at Gopalganj's Orakandi, the birthplace of Harichand Thakur, the founder of the Matua community.

In the afternoon, the two premiers will hold a meeting at the Prime Minister's Office, according to the schedule of his visit.

<p