

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



3,587
New cases in 24hrs



5,84,395
Total cases

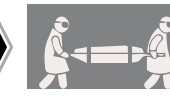


8,797
Deaths



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 Ukhiya 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.



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

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 Bijoynagar area around 11:30am.

Over 500 protesters took part in the procession, led by former Ducus 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 Bijoynagar,

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 stitches on his head. Later, he was taken to a private hospital.

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

DU BCL unit President Sonjit 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.

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 AFP.

Empower kids with digital access: UN watchdog

AFP, 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

Forget all divisions to build

FROM PAGE 1

The premier said, "We are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Independence. But the celebration should not be only a formality. We have to take oath on the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation and the Golden Jubilee of Independence that we will take the country to a new height."

Describing the sacrifices made by 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.

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.

is an important pillar of our Neighbourhood First Policy, and we are committed to further deepen and diversify it. We will continue to support Bangladesh's remarkable development journey, under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's dynamic leadership," Modi tweeted last night, ahead of his Dhaka visit.

Earlier in the day, in a statement, the Indian PM said he was happy to visit Bangladesh with which India shares deep cultural, linguistic and people-to-people ties.

"I will be having substantive discussions with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, following our very productive virtual meeting in December last year. I also look forward to my meeting with His Excellency President Abdul Hamid, and to interactions with other Bangladeshi dignitaries," he said.

"My visit will not only be an occasion to convey appreciation for Bangladesh's remarkable economic and developmental strides under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visionary leadership, but also to commit India's support for these achievements.

"I will also express India's support and solidarity for Bangladesh's fight against Covid-19."

He also said Bangabandhu was one of the tallest leaders of the last century, whose life and ideals continue to inspire millions.

Talking about Modi's visit, Dhaka University International Relations Prof Imtiaz Ahmed said this is truly a joyous occasion for Bangladesh and India, and the Indian PM's main purpose is to join the celebrations.

"I don't think issues like the Teesta water sharing deal or border killing will come up during the meeting this time," he told The Daily Star.

He, however, said as the main occasion is golden jubilee of independence, it also reminds people of the genocide in 1971.

"Now that there is an issue of Rohingya genocide, and that Aung San Suu Kyi has been ousted by the military, we can expect Narendra Modi to take a stand for the Rohingyas," Imtiaz added.

Imran writes to Hasina

Greets her on golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has written a letter to his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina, congratulating her on the occasions of the Golden Jubilee of Independence and Mujib Borsho.

"We would like to fortify our existing bonds with brotherly Bangladesh and build new ones for our succeeding generations, as we believe the destinies of our two peoples are intertwined," he said in the letter, copies of which were sent to media offices by the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka yesterday evening.

Imran, who tested Covid-19 positive last week, in the letter wrote: "On this occasion, let us renew our resolve to jointly work for a better future for our peoples and closer ties between our two countries."

He said, "The centenary events to commemorate late prime minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman are reflective of the deep affection and esteem in which he is held by yourself and the people of Bangladesh."

A cricketer-turned politician, Imran said Pakistan deeply values its fraternal ties with Bangladesh, which are based on "shared history, common faith, and convergent interests in promoting lasting peace and security as well as sustainable prosperity in the region and beyond".

Imran invited Hasina to visit Pakistan at the earliest convenience, saying he was confident that this would open a new chapter in fraternal relations.

He wished Hasina a long life, health and happiness and prayed for the continued peace, progress and prosperity of Bangladeshis.

On Tuesday, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said PM Hasina wrote a message to Imran, wishing him a quick recovery from Covid-19.

On the occasion of Pakistan Day, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also wrote to Imran, saying India desires "cordial relations" with its neighbour.

According to an Indian media outlet, The Wire, Modi in the letter on March 22 said: "As a neighbouring country, India desires cordial relations with the people of Pakistan. For this, an environment of trust, devoid of terror and hostility, is imperative."

3 stabbed to death at arbitration

A CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Three people died after they were stabbed on Wednesday night during an arbitration meeting over stalking a girl in Uttar Islampur of Munshiganj town.

The dead -- Emon Pathan, 23, Mahbub Hosen Sakib, 19, and Awlad Hosen Mintu, 47 -- were residents of Uttar Islampur.

Emon and Mahbub were HSC students at Government Haraganga College. Awlad contested January 30 Munshiganj municipality polls as an independent ward councillor candidate.

Locals said Awlad called an arbitration meeting on Wednesday night outside his home to settle a feud between two groups of local youths over stalking a girl. More than 20 people joined the meeting around 11:00pm.

At one stage, the group, led by one Sourav, stabbed the three and fled the area.

Locals then rushed Emon to Munshiganj General Hospital where doctors declared him dead around 11:30pm.

Mahbub died of his wounds at Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 12:30am yesterday while Awlad breathed his last at the same hospital around noon.

Superintendent of Munshiganj Police Abdul Momen visited the houses of Emon and Mahbub yesterday. He said three people were detained in the town in connection with the incident.

Awlad was also a member of Mushiganj District Sports Association and treasurer of Mushiganj District Football Association. His elder brother Fazlul Haq Fazal said Awlad might have been killed over election rivalry.

Meanwhile, locals brought out a protest procession carrying Emon's body in Uttar Islampur area yesterday demanding exemplary punishment for the killers.

Additional policemen were deployed in the area to avoid any untoward incident.

No case was filed in connection with the incident till filing of this report last night.