



Independence Day celebrated



BSS, Dhaka

The nation yesterday celebrated the 51st Independence Day with a call for building "Sonar Bangla" as envisioned by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

This year's festivities coincided with the 10-day grand celebrations of the birth centenary of Bangabandhu and the Golden Jubilee of Independence.

The celebrations marked the physical attendance of five heads of state and government and virtual attendance of other global leaders.

The programme began on March 17 at the capital's National Parade Square in the presence of Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. It ended yesterday with the attendance of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in person as the guest of honour.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, US President Joe Biden, Russian President Vladimir Putin, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson,

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50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her younger sister Sheikh Rehana hold high the Gandhi Peace Prize-2020 awarded to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman posthumously by the Indian government. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seen applauding next to them on the final day of twin celebrations at the National Parade Square yesterday.

PHOTO: PID



"At such a joyous moment, let us pledge to forget all the divisions, work for the development of people and establish a prosperous South Asia."

SHEIKH HASINA

"For our millions of people, for their future, for our fight against poverty, for the fight against terrorism... our goals are common. Therefore, our efforts should be united."

NARENDRA MODI

Daily Covid-19 cases highest since July 2020

3,737 more test positive, 33 die

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh recorded 3,737 fresh Covid-19 cases, the highest daily count since early July last year, a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services said yesterday.

"Thirty-three more Covid-19 patients died in the last 24 hours, increasing the death toll from the pandemic to 8,830," the release said, adding that the tally of infections surged to 5,88,132 as 3,737 new cases were confirmed in the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

During the late winter season, infection rate started decreasing sharply as the country reported 2.30 percent coronavirus positive cases on February 8 this year, while the figure has surged significantly at recent times.

Of the total samples tested in the past 24 hours, 13.69 percent were positive, while 12.95 percent cases were detected from the total tests conducted so far, the release continued.

Some 27,299 samples were tested at 224 authorised laboratories across the country during the time.

The recovery count rose to 5,31,951 after another 2,057 patients were discharged from hospitals during the period.

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Let's work together for us, entire South Asia

Hasina, Modi reaffirm their commitment as the Indian PM joins Bangladesh's Golden Jubilee and Mujib Borsho celebrations

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

With Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Indian premier Narendra Modi sharing the stage during the celebrations of the country's golden jubilee of independence yesterday, Bangladesh expressed profound gratitude to India for its support in the Liberation War.

At the National Parade Square, Hasina and Modi paid tributes to the freedom fighters and members of the Indian military who sacrificed their lives to liberate the Bangalees from the occupation forces of the then West Pakistan.

Stating that the two countries have their bond written in blood and share the same values of democracy, Modi and Hasina reaffirmed their commitment to further the unity and work together for the two countries and the entire South Asia.

"For our millions of people, for their future, for our fight against poverty, for

the fight against terrorism... our goals are common. Therefore, our efforts should be united," said Modi.

"We have no time to lose, we must move forward for change, and we cannot delay any further."

He said the two countries have the power of democracy and a clear vision for moving forward.

"India and Bangladesh moving forward together is equally important for the development of the entire region," Modi said.

Hasina said Bangladesh always remembers with great respect the immense contribution of India and the Indian people during the Liberation War.

"About one crore people from Bangladesh took shelter in India in 1971 when the Pakistani military murdered the civilians. The Indian government and its people provided them with food and medical treatment. India also trained the

freedom fighters and provided arms and helped us diplomatically," she said.

Victory was achieved by the joint forces of India and Bangladesh towards the end of the war, she said. A good number of Indian soldiers sacrificed their lives in the war. The contributions of India and its people are unforgettable, she said.

President Abdul Hamid, Bangabandhu's youngest daughter Sheikh Rehana, Liberation War veterans from Bangladesh and India, MPs, officials and diplomats were present on the last day of the celebrations, which began on March 17.

Yesterday's theme was "Fifty years of independence and golden line of progress".

Earlier, The Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, Nepal President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and Bhutanese Prime Minister Lotay Tshering attended the celebrations of golden jubilee of

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World leaders congratulate Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

World leaders, including the UN secretary-general and the US president, have congratulated the people of Bangladesh on the golden jubilee of the country's independence.



Antonio Guterres

While Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended in person yesterday's concluding event of the nationwide 10-day celebrations, others sent video messages that were projected at the programme at the National Parade Ground in the capital.

Messages were sent by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, United States President Joe Biden, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Russian President Vladimir Putin, French President Emmanuel Macron, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"The people have made tremendous strides over the past five decades, particularly on issues of social development and disaster preparedness. I congratulate you on this progress, including your graduation from the category of least developed countries," said Guterres in a congratulatory message.

"Bangladesh is playing a very important role in the world stage as the largest contributor to the UN Peacekeeping operations, chair of the Climate-Vulnerable Forum and host to hundreds and thousands of refugees from Myanmar.

"The UN is your steadfast partner in all these areas. We will continue to stand beside Bangladesh in tackling the climate crisis and working towards the sustainable development goals," he noted.

Joe Biden sent a message, read out by US

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Hat-trick for Mamata or win for BJP?

1st of 8-phase WB assembly polls today

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

West Bengal goes to assembly polls today to determine whether the Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress will score a hat-trick or if the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party's lotus will blossom in Bengal.

BJP, which won only three seats in the last West Bengal assembly elections in 2016, emerged as a strong challenger this time for Mamata's Trinamool, which bagged 211 out of 294 seats in the last polls with its election symbol of "twin flowers in grass".

The ruling party of India gained strength in the last five years and managed to get 18 out of 42 seats in West Bengal in the Lok Sabha (general) elections in 2019. Trinamool secured 22 seats in the polls while National Congress got two seats. In that election Trinamool secured 43.69 percent of the votes while BJP bagged 40.64 percent.

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Firefighters spray water on a microbus which caught fire after colliding head-on with a bus on Dhaka-Rajshahi highway in front of Katakhal Police Station in Rajshahi yesterday. The accident left 17 people dead and two injured. Inset, the charred remains of the microbus.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

17 killed in deadly road accident

Bus, microbus collide head-on, then the microbus and a parked human haulier catch fire in Rajshahi

ANWAR ALLI, Rajshahi

A deadly crash on Dhaka-Rajshahi highway left at least 17 people dead, 11 of whom were burnt to death after one of the vehicles caught fire.

Witnesses said the microbus involved in the crash near Katakhal Police Station yesterday afternoon went up in flames after a loud bang and it kept burning for almost 10 minutes until the firefighters arrived.

There were four children and five women of four families among the 11 people who were burnt to death, said Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee, deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police.

It happened when a bus collided with the Toyota HiAce coming from the opposite direction. The HiAce then hit a human haulier parked by the road, the officer added.

Taslina Khatun, who lives near the scene, said she went outside hearing what she thought was a bomb explosion and witnessed the most distressing scene of her life.

"Men, women and children got burnt alive before my eyes. But I could not do anything," she said, adding that policemen near the scene didn't let anyone go near the vehicle.

"When I opened the door of my house, I saw the totaled HiAce just yards away and the large bus of Hanif Enterprise had fallen off the road on the other side.

"I saw a man lying on the road near the HiAce. A woman might have tried to come out of the vehicle through a window, but her legs got stuck in the window. She was screaming. The front-left corner of the vehicle caught fire first."

She added that she then went back home and called the fire station.

She also saw a toddler being thrown out of a widow. "A woman inside the vehicle was asking me to save the child. Police didn't let anyone go near the vehicle."

"Within moments, the vehicle went up in flames that killed everyone. The parked human haulier also caught fire and got burnt."

She added that no one could go near the vehicle and try to save the people trapped inside.

"When the firefighters arrived, there was nothing to be saved."

Banerjee said it appeared that both the drivers of the vehicles were driving recklessly.

The policemen didn't allow anyone to go near the burning vehicle to avoid any further damage to human life, he added.

"The fire appears to have been caused by the impact. The fire started in the engine bay and then gas pipes leaked, causing the massive flames," said Abdur Rashid, assistant director of Rajshahi Fire Service and Civil Defence.

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