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Independence Day celebrated



STAR REPORT

The nation yesterday celebrated the Independence Day with a vow to build the country as "Sonar Bangla" as envisioned by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

This year's Independence Day bore more significance as the country celebrated the Golden Jubilee of independence alongside the birth centenary of Bangabandhu.

A 10-day special programme marking the two occasions ended at the capital's National Parade Square yesterday.

Indian Prime Minister Modi joined the celebrations.

Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, Nepalese President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and Bhutanese Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering also attended the 10-day special programme in person.

On March 26, 1971, the Father of the Nation had

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her younger sister Sheikh Rehana hold high the Gandhi Peace Prize-2020 while Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi applauds at the city's National Parade Square yesterday. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has been awarded the prestigious prize posthumously.

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

World leaders congratulate Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Antonio Guterres

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, recalling their shared values with the nation.

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.

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

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

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.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

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 tribute 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 and looted 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.

Final 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. This contribution of India and its people is 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 in person. Global leaders

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

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 ruling 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 got 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 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 vote while BJP bagged 40.64 percent.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



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 ALI, 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 went up in flames after a loud bang and it kept burning for almost 10 minutes yesterday afternoon before 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 Banarjee, deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police.

It happened when a bus collided with the 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 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 black 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."

Officer Banarjee 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.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1