

A celebration like never before

Country observes 50th Victory Day

STAR REPORT

The country yesterday celebrated the golden jubilee of its victory, arguably the most precious moment for Bangladeshis so far. This year's Victory Day also brings with it a new dimension, as its celebration coincided with another massive occasion -- Bangabandhu's birth centenary.

Bangladesh became an independent country on December 16, 1971, under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, after the supreme sacrifice of three million people.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid tributes to the Liberation War martyrs by placing floral wreaths at the National Memorial in the morning.

Later on, people from all walks of life thronged the memorial to pay tributes.

After placing wreaths, top leaders vowed to build the country in line with the spirit of the freedom fighters -- free of poverty, discrimination and corruption.

A grand Victory Day parade was organised at the National Parade Ground, where President Abdul Hamid took the salute. His Indian counterpart Ram Nath Kovind joined the ceremony along with Sheikh Hasina.

Military contingents from three foreign countries -- India, Russia and Bhutan -- joined the parade for the first time since Bangladesh's independence, alongside Bangladeshi forces.

The US and Mexico sent military observer groups, which also took part in the parade.

Contingents of Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force, freedom fighters, paramilitary forces, law enforcement agencies, and various ministries participated in the parade.

Marking the two celebrations, Birth Centenary Celebration National Implementation Committee arranged a two-day special programme titled "The Great Hero of the Great Victory" at Jatiya Sangsad's South Plaza on December 16 and 17.

A cultural function will be organised today on Jatiya Sangsad premises.

Yesterday's official Victory Day programmes began by placing wreaths at monuments, and hoisting national flags atop all government, semi-government and private

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The entire nation celebrated the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's victory with due fervour, colours and festivities yesterday. *Clockwise*, in Savar's National Martyrs' Memorial, people from all walks of life paid their respects to the martyrs. In front of the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka, cultural programmes were staged throughout the day. At the port city's WASA Circle, multiple cyclist platforms came together to host a cycle rally. At Khulna Zila Stadium, school students put on displays. At Sylhet's Central Shaheed Minar, representatives from different organisations paid floral tributes to the martyrs. Meanwhile, an elderly citizen from the capital's Mohammadpur went all the way to the Martyrs' Memorial dressed as a freedom fighter.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN, RASHED SHUMON, RAJIB RAIHAN, HABIBUR RAHMAN, SHEIKH NASIR

Return of the sea robbers

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN, back from Barguna

With their hands and legs tied, they were kept confined for three days straight. None of them got anything to eat, and when anyone would ask for water, only seawater was offered.

Md Helal (24), an angler who was abducted by sea robbers on November 20, disclosed the ordeal while talking with The Daily Star recently.

Helal and seven other anglers were captured while they went for fishing on the Bay of Bengal, 30 to 35 kilometres off the coast of Barguna.

"They beat us badly on the legs, knees and back, just to collect ransom," he said.

"The robbers released us on November 22, after they got Tk 40,000," added Helal, who is still unable to walk properly due to the torture.

During a visit to Barguna's Patharghata upazila, this correspondent met around a dozen anglers who underwent such ordeals and returned from robbers' captivity.

Hasan Shikder, who has been a fisher for the last 14 years, said he was abducted by robbers around five times.

"The robbers first tied our hands and legs. They then started beating us with sticks and asked if we kept any money hidden inside the boat. Finally, they took away our fuel, groceries and the fish we had caught," Shikder said.

"Boat owners pay us only after they sell the fish we catch. If robbers take the fish away, we don't get any payment and our family suffers," he explained.

Due to regular drives, 328 robbers surrendered from 2016 to 2018 in Sundarbans

Some went into hiding after the drives

Now, those absconding have united again, targeting fishers around Barguna

In last few weeks, one fisher was killed, dozens were tortured by robbers

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HASAN SHIKDER
A fisherman

For the last two years, there was no disturbance from robbers, and yearly earnings of each fisher rose to around Tk 2.30 lakh to 2.50 lakh. When the robbers were more active, the earnings hardly crossed Tk 60,000 to 80,000, he said.

According to fishers and law enforcers, the robbers were mainly from Khulna region and used to hide inside the Sundarbans.

Due to continuous drives of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), the robbers were forced to leave their hideouts, and around 328 robbers of 32 groups surrendered between 2016 and 2018. On November 1,

2018, the Sundarbans was declared robber-free.

Some of the robbers went into hiding, leaving behind their criminal activities, taking shelter at different places, including India, locals claimed.

But now, the absconding robbers have united again and have chosen to target fishers in the sea around the Barguna region, as law enforcers' vigilance increased in Sundarbans area, they added.

In the last few weeks, a fisher -- Md Musa -- was killed and dozens were tortured by robbers for ransom.

Md Nasir, an angler of Barguna, said around 15 days back, the robbers targeted their boat, but he somehow managed to escape by swiftly manoeuvring the boat.

"These robbers were mainly youngsters, and some of them were talking in Hindi. Even the boat, which they were using, was Indian, and it moved faster than ours," he claimed.

Many other anglers who saw the robbers also made similar claims.

Golam Mostofa Rasel, president of Patharghata Trawler Owner Association, requested for increased vigilance on robbers who have surrendered. He also requested Rab to increase patrol in the sea and set up camps.

Addressing the issue, Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun, director general of Rab, said they have freed Sundarbans from robbers. "The sea remains in our control, and we will also make it robber-free."

"We have plans to set up a

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Police finally record Sergeant Mahua's case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have finally recorded the case of Traffic Sergeant Mahua Hajong, after her father Monoranjan Hajong was critically injured, as a private car rammed his motorcycle in the capital's Banani on December 3.

However, no name was mentioned in the case.

Nur-e-Azam Mia, officer-in-charge of Banani Police Station, told The Daily Star, "The registration number of the car is mentioned in the case, with three unnamed people, including the driver, made accused."

This comes after two weeks of refusal from police's side to record the case, which triggered an outpour of criticism on social media following media reports on the issue. Due to the accident, one of Manoranjan's legs had to be amputated. Despite this, Mahua had been struggling to get justice for her father.

She said the private car in question was being driven by the son of a "very powerful individual". The man's wife and a friend were also in the car

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It arrived a day later

While the rest of country rejoiced the day before, Khulna city finally tasted freedom today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

One day after the rest of the country, Khulna was freed on December 17, 1971.

On this day, the Pakistani occupation forces surrendered to the allied forces.

After freedom fighters had captured most of the Pakistani army and their local collaborators' camps in the district, by December 16, it was only a matter of time before their last bastion Khulna city was freed.

Many of the collaborators' camps, including Forest Ghat, Gallamari Radio Station, Khulna Lion's School, PMG Colony, Khulna Shipyards, Tootpara, Boyra Fire Brigade Station, Wapda Building, and more were still active. They served not only as the collaborators' bases, but also places for killing and torturing Bangladeshis.

"Khulna was like a capital of the Razakar. Jamaat-e-Islami leader AKM Yusuf was their founder and head of the peace committee in Khulna," said SM Babar Ali, second-in-command of the Mujib Bahini (BLF) in Khulna during the war.

On this day in '71, the freedom fighters started entering Khulna city following different routes, including Gallamari, Rupsha Ghat area via Senerbazar-Razapur, Crescent Jute Mill, Mongla, Batiaghata, and Phultala areas.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sk

Quamaruzzaman Tuku (79), Commander of the Mujib Bahini, reminisced the events of the day.

"We got news from our sources that most areas of the country had already achieved freedom before December 16. Then, on the day, we heard over the radio that the Pakistani army had surrendered everywhere, except for Khulna," Tuku said.

"This made our blood boil. We were determined to free our city as soon as possible."

Now district council chairperson of Bagerhat, Tuku recounted two battles that took place on the day. "One was in Shiromani area, the other at Khulna Shipyards area," he said.

"For the prior two days, the Pakistani forces were giving it their all," said SM Babar Ali, the second-in-command of the Mujib Bahini. "They were armed with several regiments of artillery, infantry and armoured divisions, including six tanks, in Shiromani."

"There used to be a cantonment at Shiromani. Our battle grew fiercer there," he continued. "The occupation forces used modern weapons, including anti-aircraft machine guns, mortars and rocket launchers."

The freedom fighters eventually came out on top of the skirmish. A total of 200

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'Spirit of freedom still absent'

Says Fakhru

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday alleged that the goal of the country's independence has not materialised yet.

"The spirit of independence was to establish a democratic state and society. The goal that led to the Liberation War has not materialised even after 50 years," he said.

He made the remarks while talking to reporters after paying homage to the martyrs of the Liberation War at the National Martyrs' Memorial in Savar with BNP leaders and activists on Victory Day.

The BNP leader alleged that the current "authoritarian" Awami regime is eliminating the opposition to establish a one-party rule in the country.

Fakhru said that their party chairperson was convicted and jailed in

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Putting their lives on the line, two construction workers were spotted applying cement on a high-rise building, without wearing proper safety gears. Despite being made to work in high-risk environments, negligence persists from their employers in providing appropriate safety equipment to the workers. This photo was taken recently from the capital's Rayer Bazar area.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Schoolgirl, 7 others die in road crashes

STAR REPORT

As many as eight people were killed in road accidents across the country in just one day yesterday, report our correspondents.

In Faridpur, a schoolgirl was killed as a bus ran her over while she was crossing the Dhaka-Khulna highway in Madhukhali Pilot High School area.

Fifth-grader Sazeda Khanam (12) of Damurdi village under Madhukhali upazila succumbed to her injuries on the way to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical College Hospital from Madhukhali Upazila Health Complex, said police.

Police seized the bus but its driver managed to flee the scene.

Meanwhile, in another accident in Faridpur, Nabirun Nacha (55) and her granddaughter Moyna Aktar (15) were killed and four were injured after an easy-bike hit a pick-up on Talma-Nagarkanda road in Maniknagar parishad area in Nagarkanda upazila, said the local union parishad chairperson.

Police seized both the vehicles. In Mymensingh, garment workers Imdadul Hossain (38) and his wife Nargis Aktar (35) were killed after their motorbike collided head-on with a truck on Trishal-Balipara road in Beltoli area of Trishal upazila, confirmed police.

In Natore, Sanwarul Islam (23) was killed after a bus hit him while he was crossing Bonpara-Hatikumrul highway at Naopara in Gurudaspur upazila.

In another accident in the district, Sabbir Hasan (11) was killed on the spot after a motorcycle hit him in Naopara village.

In Gurudaspur's Hazirama of the district, auto-rickshaw driver Abdur Rahman was killed on the spot after being hit by a human haulier, said police.