

Hasina opens Bangabandhu Military Museum

UNB, DHAKA

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday opened a world-class architecture, “Bangabandhu Military Museum”, in the capital to exhibit the country’s military history, heritage and success, particularly its incredible valour and bravery throughout the Liberation War.

The prime minister virtually inaugurated the eye-catching museum from the Gono Bhaban.

The Bangabandhu Military Museum was built on a 10-acre land adjacent to Bangabandhu Novo Theater (Planetarium) in the city’s Bijoy Sarani area having a collection of military hardware, weapons and equipment.

The museum has six separate parts, including designated galleries for Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force.

To exhibit the glorious history of the Bangladeshi military forces, Bangladesh Military Museum was established in 1987 in Mirpur Cantonment, which was later shifted to the present location at Bijoy Sarani in 1992.

The military museum was modernised under Bangabandhu Military Museum Project to showcase the glorious past, challenges, achievements, and key success of the Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force.

Addressing the function, the prime minister said the young generation would be inspired to join the Armed Forces and work for protecting the country’s independence and sovereignty, visiting the Bangabandhu Military Museum.

“This military museum is not merely for exhibition. Instead, it’ll inspire the young generation with patriotism further. Being imbued with patriotism, they’ll join our Armed Forces in order to protect the country’s independence and sovereignty,” she said.

Hasina said she was very glad to see the features of the eye-catching museum virtually and wanted it to be developed as the most beautiful one with a collection of modern technology among all the military museums across the world.

Noting that there are limited recreational sites for the people of the country, the PM said the government has an effort to create further scopes for the recreation of people.



Locals gather as firefighters douse flames at a high-rise in Banglamotor area in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

NARAYANGANJ CITY POLLS

Ivy showing off her work, Taimur banks on sentiment

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA AND SANAD SAHA

Awami League mayor nominee Selina Hayat Ivy in her re-election campaign is highlighting her development activities while her main rival, independent runner and BNP leader Taimur Alam Khandakar, is trying to cash in on the anti-government sentiment by mobilising support from all opposition parties.

The two heavyweights in the Narayanganj city polls, however, are yet to get all-out support from their respective parties, said locals.

Being the candidate of the ruling party, former mayor Ivy has to endure anti-government criticism. She banks on development works carried out during her previous tenures to fend off the criticism.

Taimur wants support from all opposition parties as he insists that voting for “elephant” (his electoral symbol) would mean “freeing Narayanganj City Corporation from the clutches of contractors’ syndicate”.

Narayanganj city will go to polls

on January 16. A total of seven candidates are running for mayor.

Ivy had been the Narayanganj city mayor for two terms. She also served as chairman of the erstwhile Narayanganj municipality for a five-year term.

“Selina Hayat Ivy has charisma. Our election strategy is very simple -- we will go door to door to win support for her.”

“Selina Hayat Ivy has charisma. Our election strategy is very simple -- we will go door to door to win support for her,” Adinath Basu, chief election agent of Ivy, told The Daily Star.

Asked whether the party nomination is a blessing for Ivy, he said, “No individual is bigger than the party.”

On the other hand, Taimur had

to quit the 2011 electoral race just five hours before the start of voting in line with a party order. His supporters said BNP has a vote bank in Narayanganj city and they are now trying to bring all opposition parties together to woo voters.

The BNP, which is boycotting the January 16 polls, recently relieved Taimur of two party posts. A section of party leaders and activists, who are still campaigning for him, said BNP men may refrain from casting ballots, but they will not vote for Ivy.

Taimur’s chief election agent ATM Kamal, also the general secretary of Narayanganj city BNP, said: “The city residents are deprived of development. They have been burdened with taxes. People want a change and we are contesting the polls to make this happen.”

“Our candidate is an independent runner. We don’t represent any particular political party, rather we represent the city dwellers. So we are seeking assistance from all people irrespective of party, cast, creed and religion,” he added.

Palestinian killed by Israel army in West Bank: medics

AFP, NABLUS

A Palestinian was killed by the Israeli army in the occupied West Bank early yesterday, Palestinian medical and security sources said.

Bakir Hashash, 21, of the Balata refugee camp, was shot in the head after the Israeli army entered an area east of the northern city of Nablus to make arrests, the sources said.

The Israeli army said its troops had shot at an armed man who fired on soldiers during an operation to arrest a wanted suspect in Nablus.

“A casualty was identified,” the army said, adding that there were no casualties among its troops.

Clashes break out frequently in Palestinian population centres in the West Bank when Israeli troops mount incursions to carry out arrests.

Murad’s wife calls 999

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“He has been hurling abusive words at me and my children. Around 2:45pm [yesterday], when he was about to beat me up again, I called 999,” she mentioned in the GD.

Talking to The Daily Star while at the police station, Jahanara said Murad left their Dhanmondi home yesterday 30 minutes before police arrived.

“He didn’t come back to the house after his return from Canada. He went there eight to 10 days ago and started torturing me,” she told The Daily Star.

The children, aged 11 and 16, were also at the police station.

Earlier, on December 7, Murad resigned from the cabinet after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked him to step down

over his offensive and derogatory remarks on women.

The 47-year-old doctor-turned-politician drew huge criticism for his offensive remarks about BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman’s daughter Zaima Rahman during an interview on Facebook page NahidRains Pictures, posted on social media on December 4.

He then became embroiled in another controversy when an audio clip of a phone call between him and actor Mammun Hasan Emon and movie actress Mahiya Mahi leaked and went viral on social media.

He tried to enter Canada recently but was denied entry. He then came back home.

Bike numbers and risk rising

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A total 3.75 lakh bikes got registered with BRTA last year -- 1 lakh of those in Dhaka alone, shows BRTA data. In other words, 1,028 bikes hit the streets everyday across the country and 274 in Dhaka.

In 2020, the number of bikes registered in Bangladesh and Dhaka was 3.11 lakh and 78,551 respectively.

On the other hand, 1,168 people were killed in 994 road crashes involving bikes last year, says ARI. It was 1,097 and 958 respectively in 2020.

The highest number of deaths and accidents, 1,198 and 1,108 respectively, occurred in 2019, when the highest number of vehicles and bikes got registered -- 4.97 lakh and 4.01 lakh.

A report of the Road Safety Foundation also indicated the magnitude of bike accidents.

Of the total 418 people who were killed in road crashes last month, 178 perished in bike-related accidents, accounting for 43.60 percent, it found.

Both ARI and the foundation prepared their reports based on news articles, so the number would be more as many such incidents go unreported.

WHY THE NUMBER OF BIKES RISING?

Prof Hadiuzzaman said the government’s “favourable policy” regarding the bike registration is a major reason behind the rise. When everyone is talking about the risks involving bikes, the government halved the registration fee last year.

Besides, the local

production of motorcycles and availability of bikes on various e-commerce platforms at cheaper prices and on instalment are some other factors.

Hadiuzzaman added that a very poor public transport system, especially in Dhaka, is another reason behind people opting for bikes.

BRTA data shows the number of buses and minibuses is declining gradually. Only 1,909 buses and minibuses got listed last year, while it was 3,015 in 2020.

Amid perennial traffic congestion in Dhaka city, bikes take people to their destinations faster weaving through jams, he said.

Introduction of ride-sharing apps in 2016 was another reason for the increase in number of bikes.

Hadiuzzaman said Covid-19 situation has made many people jobless, so they somehow managed a bike and start carrying passengers using app or negotiated fare.

BRTA spokesperson Mahbub-E-Rabbani too observed that an increasing number of people are buying bikes to navigate through traffic congestion in Dhaka city and many use bikes as a means of livelihood.

BIKES MAKING ROADS RISKY

Citing examples, Hadiuzzaman said there is a direct link between the number of bikes and road crashes.

In 2010, Japan had a total 12.5 million bikes. Bringing down the number to 10 million in the last 10 years, they were able to cut 50 percent road crashes

involving bikes, he said.

Vietnam had taken a decision to make seven major cities off limits to bikes after 2030 but they brought the deadline forward to 2025 as the number of bike accidents is increasing, he said.

“We have lessons to learn from these countries,” he said.

Poor infrastructure, especially lack of dedicated bike lanes, is another reason for bike accidents. Both the biker and pillion rider remain relatively unprotected and exposed to accidents compared to drivers and passengers of cars and buses, he said.

A big chunk of bikers are young and they do not have licences, let alone training.

Citing a recent survey, on an average, a biker in Dhaka city changes lanes six times a minute and violates rules, he added.

Replying to another question, he said sub-standard helmets are a major reason behind high casualties in bike accidents.

A quality helmet can cut deaths by 50 percent and injuries by 70 percent in bike accidents, he said, citing a World Health Organization report.

Asked if they have taken any steps to reduce bike accidents, Rabbani, also director (road safety) of BRTA, said they hold awareness campaigns and different ride-sharing companies are giving training to their bikers.

Asked about the huge number of riders without licences, he said their mobile courts often conduct drives against errant riders.

America-led coalition under fire

AFP, BAGHDAD

The US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group came under fire Wednesday in Iraq and Syria but reported no casualties, in the latest of several attacks that Washington blamed on “Iran-backed groups”.

The surge of attacks targeting bases used by the coalition comes as Tehran and its Middle East allies held emotional commemorations marking the second anniversary Monday of the assassination of Iranian commander General Qasem Soleimani and his Iraqi lieutenant in a US drone strike at Baghdad airport.

Woman

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and killing my wife. Please try to save her.’ After that, I could not reach him anymore.”

The men later blindfolded Rethoi and took him away, he claimed.

“Rethoi is famous in the area’s Marma community as he was a flautist and used to play the traditional Marma Ney flute,” Soichasing added.

SP Jerin said the villagers have also been alleging that the Mogh Party, a criminal gang, was behind the incident.

“Even though there are no members of the Mogh Party in Bandarban, we are investigating the allegation.”

Gono Front wants ex-CJ as next CEC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Gono Front yesterday recommended former chief justice Fazlul Karim Chowdhury for the post of chief election commissioner of the next Election Commission.

During its dialogue with President Abdul Hamid at the Bangabhaban, the party also recommended former foreign secretary Toufique Hossain, former secretaries MA Quader Sarker and Murtoja Hossain Munshi and Major General (ret’d) Siddiquir Rahman for the posts of election commissioners.

A seven-member Gono Front delegation, led by its Chairman Zakir Hossain, also put forth a 14-point proposal that include formation of a polls-time government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The party in its written proposal said the president should take measures to enact a law on formation of the EC in line with the constitution.

It said steps should be taken so that the government cannot interfere in the election.

The Gono Front suggested picking election commissioners from senior High Court judges, former senior secretaries or retired officials of the armed forces.

Welcoming the Gono Front delegation to the dialogue, Hamid said healthy politics is essential to ensure the welfare of the people.

“Political parties need to develop a sound political culture so that the parties and their leadership are able to gain trust and confidence of the people,” he said.

Meanwhile, Liberal Democratic Party didn’t attend the talks, saying that the dialogue was “meaningless”.

Hamid has so far held dialogues with 16 political parties on formation of the EC.

The BNP, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal, and Islami Andolon Bangladesh also refused to join the dialogue terming it “meaningless”.

The talks kicked off on December 20 with the participation of the main opposition, Jatiya Party.

The tenure of KM Nurul Huda-led EC will expire on February 14.

The president will have to form the new EC before the expiry of the incumbent EC, according to the constitution.

Japan, Australia sign defence treaty

AFP, TOKYO

Japan and Australia yesterday signed a “landmark” treaty to strengthen defence ties, saying the accord would contribute to regional stability, as China expands its military and economic clout.

While Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison did not mention Beijing directly in a statement released ahead of the signing, the agreement is seen as another step by the regional allies to signal their concern over China’s military expansion.

10 new cases raise

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Prof Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, president of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19, added, “We are not saying right now that the Omicron has spread to the community level. But the number of Covid cases, including those infected with Omicron, is higher than those detected.”

Another expert, however, claimed Omicron has already spread at the community level.

“Laboratory data is too inadequate to reach such a conclusion, but clinical data suggests it has already spread at the community level across the country,” said Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist.

Experts have meanwhile said the government mulling actions to curb Covid cases is a positive sign.

“It will create pressure on people for being jabbed. But implementing the actions will be challenging since a huge number of the population is still unvaccinated,” Prof Ridwanur Rahman said.

As of yesterday, only 31 percent of the targeted population have received both doses of the vaccine.

CABINET MEETING

Apart from discussing its other agendas, the cabinet meeting yesterday discussed ways to fight Omicron, said Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam.

Sources said the prime minister asked the health ministry to lower the age limit for booster doses to 50 from 60.

She directed them to strengthen vaccination

and vaccination awareness campaigns to contain the virus, the sources said.

At a press briefing after the meeting, Anwarul said no students above 12 would be allowed to attend in-person classes without having received at least one dose of the vaccine.

“The education ministry has already given instruction in this regard. The issue was raised at an inter-ministerial meeting on January 3 and it was approved today,” he said.

He said people would need to carry vaccine certificates to eat meals in restaurants, travel by trains, buses and visit shopping malls.

These would be implemented soon upon getting opinion from the national committee on Covid, he said.

Talking about ways to fight Omicron, he said wearing masks in public is a must.

If the Covid-19 situation deteriorates, the number of passengers in public transport will be halved, he said.

Replying to a query, he said they have not yet taken any decision to impose a Covid lockdown in the country.

Huda, Talukdar

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Ahead of the last parliamentary polls, Mahbub said a level playing field was not there.

“Mahbub Talukdar did not speak the truth. The overall election atmosphere is good,” the CEC said in response.

Tenure of the current commission expires on February 14.