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Padma Bridge a symbol of nat'l pride

Says PM; 'no room for doubt about work quality'



UNB, BSS, Dhaka

Describing the Padma Bridge as the symbol of national pride, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said no one can raise questions about the quality of the bridge which opens on Saturday.

"We have not compromised on the construction standards of the Padma Bridge. It has been built using the world's latest technology and materials. The total construction process has been completed maintaining the highest standards," she said.

The PM was speaking at a press conference at her office in the capital.

Citing remarks of some critics of the government over the bridge issue, Hasina said, "I hope no one can raise any criticism of the quality of the Padma Bridge."

Replying to a question, she said Bangladesh got back its dignity with the construction of its longest bridge with its own funds in a brave move after the World Bank withdrew from the project.

"I thank them [World Bank]. Because we constructed the Padma Bridge with our own funds with courage after that incident took place."

The premier said Bangladesh will never bow down to any pressure, rather it will march forward with the strength of the people.

Hasina said the government has constructed the bridge overcoming all conspiracies and obstacles. She thanked the country's people and expressed gratitude to them for standing by her government.

Talking about the cost of the bridge, Hasina said as per the revised DPP, the total allocation is Tk 30,193.39 crore, but the allocation for the main bridge is Tk 12,133.39 crore (including Tk 1,000 crore for installation of 400-KV electricity transmission line and gas pipeline).

She explained the reasons behind the rise in project cost. Those include increasing the length of the bridge from 5.8 km to 6.15 km, changing

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In this photo released by state-run news agency Bakhtar, Afghans look at destruction caused by an earthquake in the province of Paktika, eastern Afghanistan, yesterday.

PHOTO: CNN

Earthquake kills 1,000 in Afghanistan

Toll expected to rise; hundreds more injured in the country's deadliest tremor in 20 years

AGENCIES

The death toll from a powerful earthquake in Afghanistan yesterday hit 1,000, disaster management officials said, with more than 600 injured and the toll expected to grow as desperate rescuers dig through collapsed dwellings.

Houses were reduced to rubble and bodies swathed in blankets lay on the ground, photographs on Afghan media showed.

Helicopters were deployed in the rescue effort to reach the injured and fly in medical supplies and food, interior ministry official Salahuddin Ayubi said. "The death toll is likely to rise as

some of the villages are in remote areas in the mountains and it will take some time to collect details," he said.

Yesterday's quake was the deadliest in Afghanistan since 2002. It struck about 44 km (27 miles) from the southeastern city of Khost, near the border with Pakistan, the US Geological Survey (USGS) said.

Disaster management officials said at least 1,000 are dead and 600 injured. However, local officials put the number of injured higher.

"1,000 dead, 1,500 injured, and this number might go up, many families have been lost. Injured people have been taken to Kabul and Gardez," Mohammad Amin Hozaiifa, information

and culture director of Paktika, told Reuters.

"People are digging grave after grave," he said. "It is raining also, and all houses are destroyed. People are still trapped under the rubble."

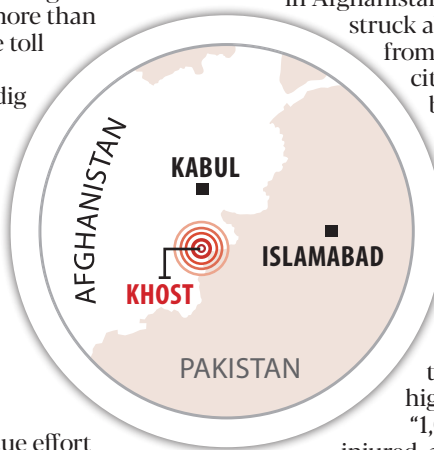
Photographs and video clips posted on social media showed scores of badly damaged mud houses in remote rural areas. Some footage showed local residents loading victims into a military helicopter.

Most of the confirmed deaths were in the eastern province of Paktika, where 255 people were killed and more than 200 injured, Ayubi added. In the province of Khost, 25 were dead and 90 had been taken to hospital.

Haibatullah Akhundzada, the supreme leader of the ruling Taliban, offered his condolences in a statement.

Mounting a rescue operation will prove a major test for the Taliban, who took over the country last August and have been cut off from much

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Businesses get loan repayment relief

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN and MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

Large industries, SMEs and the flood-hit agriculture sector will enjoy a flexible loan repayment facility up to December this year as Bangladesh Bank yesterday revived the partial loan moratorium amid a deepening economic crisis.

The central bank move came after the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), the country's apex trade body, pushed for a relaxed loan classification policy till December.

The managing directors of banks and economists, however, opposed any relaxation of the loan repayment rules since it worsens the financial health of lenders and nurtures a bad habit among borrowers.

They argued that though the relaxed loan repayment facility brings down the amount of bad loans for the time being, it ultimately pushes up the amount of defaulted loans.

Yesterday, the BB said it noticed that borrowers are struggling to repay loans due to the hike in prices of raw materials and other inputs as well as transport costs.

It pointed to the negative impacts of the lingering coronavirus pandemic, rising virus infections, floods in the northern and northeastern regions and escalated commodity prices globally for the Russian-Ukraine war.

The deferral support is aimed at retaining the momentum in economic activities and the credit growth in the private sector, the BB said in a notice.

As per the BB's latest instructions, borrowers in large industries would be able to avoid falling into the defaulted loan category by repaying half of the loans payable for the April-June period.

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Flood affected people stretch their arms to collect relief material near a flooded area following heavy monsoon rainfalls on the outskirts of Sylhet yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

A week on, relief still elusive

42 confirmed dead in floods

STAR REPORT

At least 42 people have died in the devastating floods that have hit the country's northern and northeastern districts, while lakhs are stranded as new areas are inundated every day.

The Directorate General of Health Services in a press briefing yesterday said 13 people died in Sylhet, five each in Sunamganj, Mymensingh, Netrakona and Jamalpur, three each in Sherpur and Moulvibazar, two in Kurigram and one in Lalmonirhat between May 17 and June 22.

Meanwhile, the cry for relief is intensifying in flood-affected areas as thousands of people are still awaiting relief materials even after more than a week of flooding.

"There has been chest-high water in our village for the last six days, but no one gave us anything. Give us something!"

This was the plea of a middle-aged woman from Majergaon village upon seeing a correspondent of this newspaper on Banglabazar British Road in Sunamganj's Dobarabazar upazila.

She finally received some relief around the same time the correspondent reached the spot.

"This is the first relief we received since we took shelter on the road."

It took five hours by boat to reach the spot from Gobindaganj area of Chhatak upazila. A

Bangladesh Army speedboat with relief materials also reached the spot yesterday for the first time after a week of flooding.

But according to Debajit Singha, additional divisional commissioner of Sylhet, there are many villages in the bordering areas of Sunamganj where no help, even from the army, could reach.

"We could not reach remote villages or establish contact with them for the first three or four days. But now that mobile networks have been back up, we have learnt that no one actually went hungry as locals came forward with support and youths played an important role in standing beside the affected people," he said.

The flood situation is improving in Sylhet and Sunamganj, but deteriorating in Moulvibazar and Habiganj in the northeast and Kurigram, Sirajganj, Bogura, Gaibandha and Tangail in the north, according to yesterday's bulletin of the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre.

"It's been seven days since we are in the flood shelter after our village was flooded, but no relief has reached us," said 65-year-old Nabir Hossain of Purbo Daikhavara char in Kurigram's Ulipur upazila on the bank of the Brahmaputra.

Azizul Haque of Bamongram village in Sirajganj's Shahzadpur upazila said, "I first lost my house in the floodwater and then the house we took shelter in was flooded. We are now barely surviving and in need of food and drinking water."

Jahurul Islam of Manik Bair char in Sariakandi upazila in Bogura said, "The swelling Jamuna river not only flooded but also eroded 200 houses. We have nowhere to take shelter and no safe place to go."

Meanwhile, in Tangail, many people were seen taking

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3 reportedly shot dead in CHT

Police say no bodies or evidence found yet

STAR REPORT

Unidentified armed criminals reportedly gunned down three people and injured three more, including a child, in a remote hilly area of Rangamati's Bilaichari upazila on Tuesday evening.

Police and locals said the incident took place at Saijam Para in Ward-2 of Baratholi union.

However, upon visiting the spot yesterday police and army officials could not find any bodies there.

One of the dead was identified by locals as Sitaram Tripura of the Tripura community.

The Daily Star could not independently verify the identities of the dead or the injured.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Mir Mudasser

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