



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her daughter Saima Wazed in front of a mural of Bangabandhu and the PM in Mawa, Munshiganj, after the formal inauguration of the Padma Bridge.

PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

PADMA BRIDGE

It'll boost growth, reduce poverty

Says World Bank country director

STAR REPORT

The Padma Bridge will boost inclusive economic growth and reduce poverty in Bangladesh, Mercy Tembon, World Bank country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan, said yesterday.



Mercy Tembon

"As a long-standing development partner of Bangladesh, the World Bank recognises the many benefits the Padma Bridge brings to the people and economy of Bangladesh by boosting inclusive growth and reducing poverty," she said.

Tembon shared her immediate reaction with The Daily Star following the inauguration of the bridge by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Constructed at a cost of Tk 30,193 crore from the state coffers, the 6.15km bridge connects the southern region with the rest of the country.

The World Bank initially agreed to co-finance the project but later backtracked on it. The government then decided to construct it with its own funds.

PADMA BRIDGE INAUGURATION

Celebrations at home and abroad

STAR REPORT

The long-awaited inauguration of the Padma bridge yesterday was cheered at home and abroad, in a rare unifying moment for the country.

As soon as the curtains came down on the opening ceremony, which was held at Mawa point, people joined in colourful processions and released balloons, doves and festoons into the sky.

Over at the capital, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police brought out a colourful procession from Mintoo Road to Razarbagh police lines. The Hatirjheel bridge was illuminated; there was water dance and fireworks. Jubo League Chattogram South unit brought out a procession at DC hill area of the port city.

Ashraf Uddin, the divisional commissioner of Chattogram, led a jubilant rally that started from MA Aziz Stadium and concluded at the same venue after parading different

city streets.

Rajshahi's district administration had arranged a ceremony at the Freedom Fighters Memorial Stadium.

In Rangpur, government officials released balloons and doves and organised essay writing, art and poetry recitation competitions for children. In the morning, Abdul Wahab Bhuiyan, the divisional commissioner, brought out a colourful rally from the town hall premises to Zila School ground in the city.

In Mymensingh, a colourful grand rally, organised by the district administration, was brought out from the town hall premises to Rafique Uddin Bhuyan Stadium.

As soon as PM inaugurated the Padma Bridge, Talukdar Abdul Khaleque, the Khulna City mayor, and other top divisional government officials released colourful balloons at Khulna stadium. Special video clips made on Padma bridge were screened

at different places in the city.

In the morning Khulna Metropolitan Police brought out a colourful rally marking the inauguration of the bridge.

Khulna University authorities distributed sweets among students and teachers to mark the opening of the bridge, which connects the southwest region with the rest of the country.

Barishal district administration brought out a colourful procession from the Circuit House to Shilpakala Academy. Later, an exhibition and discussion on the inauguration ceremony of the Padma Bridge were organised at the Shilpakala Academy.

Local administrators of Sylhet organised a curtailed event to mark the inauguration of the bridge as the district is almost inundated with flood water. Authorities held a live screening of the inauguration and released balloons.

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Bangladesh invites Biden

UNB, Dhaka

US President Joe Biden has been invited to visit Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States M Shahidul Islam has met the US President at the White House and conveyed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's invitation to President Biden.

Biden, during the meeting, said Bangladesh is an important country.

"Honored to have an audience with US President in the Oval Office, White House," said the Bangladesh Ambassador.

Bangladesh and the United States had a series of bilateral meetings this year as both sides want to strengthen the ties addressing the challenges.

Schoolgirl killed 'after rape' in Feni

A CORRESPONDENT, Feni

Police recovered the body of a six-year-old schoolgirl, suspected to have been raped before murder, from Feni's Daganbhuiyan upazila yesterday afternoon.

The victim, Jannat Afra, was a resident of South Newazpur village in the same upazila. She was a pre-primary student at a local school. Her body was recovered from a bush on the bank of a pond behind the school around 2:00pm. The body was hanging from a tree branch.

Victim's aunt Tohora Akhter said Jannat went to school yesterday morning and went missing around 10:00am. As she didn't return home, family members started looking for her.

After a frantic search, Jannat's body was found in the bush, Tohora added.

Police said the body bore evidence of rape and torture. It was sent to Feni General Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Bullet-hit body recovered in Rangamati

STAR REPORT

Police recovered the bullet-hit body of a man from Rangamati's Rajasthali upazila yesterday morning after a "gunfight between two armed groups".

The dead is Abhishek Chakma, 35, said Puchingmong Marma, chairman of Gainda Union Parishad. Police, however, could not confirm the identity of the deceased till last night.

Mir Muddasser Hossain, superintendent of police in Rangamati, said the body was riddled with bullets. It was sent to Rangamati General Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

He said a case would be filed in this regard. According to locals, the "gunfight" took place in Rajasthali's Ogari Para around 9:00pm on Friday.

On Tuesday, unidentified armed criminals reportedly shot three people dead and injured three others, including a child, in a remote hilly area of Rangamati's Bilaichhari upazila.

She's done it!

FROM PAGE 1

The place was adorned with placards bearing photos of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, President Abdul Hamid, and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina along with the photographs of different stages of the project works.

High-profile invitees, including ministers, lawmakers, judges, diplomats and political leaders, started to gather there from the morning amid tight security. By 9:00am, the venue was almost filled up with guests who were waiting for the prime minister to arrive.

Hasina appeared on the stage at 10:03am amid a huge applause from the audience. Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam and Padma Bridge Project Director Md Shaiful Islam shared the stage with the PM.

The programme started with the theme song on the Padma Bridge. The cabinet secretary, in his introductory speech, said the PM's steadfast leadership made the bridge a reality. "Otherwise, it would have taken 20 years and \$15 billion."

The bridge was built at a cost of over Tk 30,000 crore (\$3.868 billion). Its construction began in November 2014 and the last span was installed only in six years, on December 10, 2020, linking the two sides of the mighty river and making the bridge visible.

After the cabinet secretary's speech, a documentary on the bridge was screened, showing the

glimpses of construction work from the very beginning till the end.

Obaidul Quader delivered in his speech said the Padma Bridge is the symbol of the nation's capability and Sheikh Hasina will be remembered with respect as long as the bridge will exist.

Then came the most auspicious moment when Hasina took the podium.

Touching upon almost every aspect relating to the project, she said the people's power was the supreme strength that had driven her to construct the Padma Bridge. She reiterated her promise to work for the welfare of the nation alongside ensuring a better life for the next generation even by risking her life if necessary.

"As you [the countrymen] have been by my side, I have the courage to make this impossible possible. And my father, the Father of the Bangalee Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and my mother Begum Fazilatun Nessa gave me courage and blessings from heaven," she said.

The premier released commemorative postage stamps to mark the historic moment. She also had a photo session with various local and foreign teams involved in the project.

Then, along with cabinet ministers, diplomats and some other dignitaries, she went to the place where the inauguration plaque was located near the main bridge at the Mawa end.

A munajat led by the cabinet secretary was offered at the inauguration site. After this, the PM

unveiled the plaque by pushing a button. The murals of Bangabandhu and Hasina were also unveiled amid huge cheers and applause.

PM's daughter Saima Wazed Putul took selfies with her mother after the inauguration. Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury also accompanied Hasina.

Former communications minister Syed Abul Hossain, former Bridges Division secretary Mosharruf Hossain Bhuiyan and her ex-economic affairs adviser Mashhur Rahman were with Hasina at the programme.

The presence of the three apparently bore significance in that they were among those who were subjected to the allegation of corruption conspiracy involving the project.

Abul Hossain had to step down after the World Bank backed out of the mega project, cancelling its \$1.2 billion credit as other international agencies followed suit.

Mosharruf was sent to jail in this connection and the World Bank even pointed fingers at Mashhur Rahman.

But the allegation was later found to be untrue. A Canada court in 2017 dismissed a case over bribery conspiracy linked to the Padma Bridge construction.

After the unveiling of the plaque, a motorcade took the premier to the main bridge by crossing the toll plaza. Being the first person to get on the bridge, she paid the total toll of her motorcade.

As her motorcade was slowly moving down the bridge, it stopped in the

middle for an air show exhibited by an Airforce team. The PM got off from her vehicle and enjoyed the show with five choppers carrying the national flag and flags representing Bangabandhu and Hasina, the Padma Bridge and national slogan "Joy Bangla".

A number of fighter jets displayed a colourful fly-past and aerobatics show to mark the historic event. In addition, leaflets were dropped from a helicopter for the guests attending the ceremony.

The PM's motorcade drove to the Zanjira end where she unveiled another inaugural plaque before joining a public rally, organised by the ruling Awami League. Thousands of people, especially leaders and workers of AL from 21 districts, chanted slogans "Joy Bangla", "Joy Bangabandhu", reverberating the area.

The occasion was more befitting for the people of these districts who have been facing untold miseries while crossing the mighty river by ferries, launches and boats.

The primer responded to the audience by waving. Men and women attired in colourful dresses and bearing large portraits of Bangabandhu and Hasina, placards, festoons and banners came to the rally.

The venue and its adjacent areas were decorated with festoons, placards and digital banners. Large screens were installed at different points to broadcast the rally proceedings.

A large spectacular stage was built in the style

of Padma Bridge at the rally venue and a boat was floating on the water right in front of the stage.

Addressing the mammoth gathering, Hasina recalled her announcement in parliament: "Bangladesh will not sit idle, rather it will construct the Padma Bridge with self-finance" after the WB suspended its funding.

Many people had tried to create obstructions and thought it was impossible to build the Padma Bridge with own funds, she said. "But I had confidence in the power of the masses. The people of the country had come forward, which inspired me to construct the bridge."

After the inaugural ceremony was over, thousands of enthusiastic people headed to the bridge at the Mawa end to have a glimpse of the mega structure. Many of them reached the main bridge and took selfies. At one point, law enforcers pushed them back.

Rabi Babu came all the way from his Jashore home a few days ago to see the inauguration of the bridge. He stayed in his relative's home in Mawa.

"I had to endure suffering to cross the river when I arrived here in Mawa a few days back. But from now on, we will not have to face such a problem as we can cross the river using this dream bridge," said Rabi, who came with her granddaughter.

The bridge, which is expected to unlock huge economic potentials for the 21 south-western districts in particular and the nation in general, will be opened to the public today.

DSA chills journalism

FROM PAGE 14

test of legality, legitimate aims and necessity set out in article 19 (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

"An example of such flawed legislation is the Digital Security Act of Bangladesh, which imposes draconian punishments for a wide range of vaguely defined acts encompassing national security, criminal cyberlibel and disinformation, and bestows significant and highly intrusive investigative, search and seizure powers on the authorities," she said in the report.

It said the use of the law has led to the arbitrary detention, torture and custodial death of journalists, and chilled journalism online and offline.

The special rapporteur repeated her call for the law to be repealed.

According to the report, other examples of countries that have recently adopted or enforced legislation that is not compliant with international standards include Cuba, France,

Italy, Malaysia, Qatar and Singapore, among others.

Describing the global situation on media freedom, Irene said digital technology has enabled groundbreaking investigative reporting, new models of cross-border collaboration, cooperative fact checking with audiences and access to treasure troves of data and diverse sources with a mouse click.

However, it has also given rise to unprecedented challenges and changes for the news industry, aggravating existing threats and creating new ones. Longstanding problems of violent attacks on and legal harassment of journalists with impunity, censorship of content and manipulation of regulatory authorities have been entrenched, aggravated and augmented by digital technology, the report said.

Notable new manifestations include gender-based online violence, targeted surveillance of journalists, legislation restricting information online, "media capture" by state or

corporate interests and viral disinformation campaigns that undermine public trust in independent journalism, it added.

The UN special rapporteur recommended that at the national level, states should develop and implement national action plans, based on human rights obligations and tailored to online as well as offline issues, to advance the freedom, independence and pluralism of the media.

Irene also said states should consult with civil society and journalist organisations in developing, monitoring and assessing their national action plans in a transparent and inclusive way.

The Human Rights Council should encourage states to use the universal periodical review and the voluntary national review of the Sustainable Development Goals to report on compliance, challenges and good practices relating to media freedom and the safety of journalists.

The 15th session of the UN rights body began on June 13 and ends on July 8.

Dream of millions comes true

FROM PAGE 1

Rahman and the PM on their outfit and body.

As the day progressed, it became difficult for people to stay under the glaring sun. Many of the several thousand people, who came to Shibchar in around 100 big launches, stayed in the vessels to avoid the scorching heat.

"We reached Shibchar from Barishal on Friday night. Over 5,000 leaders and activists of Barishal Sadar Awami League

attended the rally," said Hanif Mia.

Sheikh Oliullah, who came from Bagerhat, said around 500 people came from his union parishad.

People said the dreams of millions of people of the southern districts have been realised under the leadership of Hasina.

"My mother died at Kathalbari while waiting for a ferry on her way to a hospital in Dhaka. We had to wait for three hours for the ferry. But she didn't

make it. She might have survived if travelling across the river didn't take that long," said Monir Hossain, a resident of Shibchar.

Mannan Mia, who came from Uzirpur, Barishal, said, "Our long-cherished dream is now reality. The bridge will change the fate of the people of southern Bangladesh.

"Sheikh Hasina has made our dream come true. We have come to see the bridge. There is so much to see. We feel so happy to be here."