

Hasina invited to visit Japan

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is likely to visit Japan this year as the two countries want to further strengthen relations.

"Our prime minister has been invited. It will be a priority visit," State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam told reporters on Sunday after his meeting with Honda Taro, parliamentary vice-minister for foreign affairs of Japan.

The state minister said the visit would take place at a time convenient to the both sides. He termed the Bangladesh-Japan relations "very deep and comprehensive".

The two sides discussed ways to strengthen political and economic relations, with continued support from Japan to Bangladesh in the post-LDC era.

They also discussed ways to expedite Rohingya repatriation efforts and cooperation on mega projects.

The Japanese parliamentary vice-minister termed his meetings with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen fruitful and meaningful.



Erosion has hit a 200-metre stretch of the Jamuna riverbank in Sirajganj's Kazipur upazila. The Water Development Board is dumping sand-filled bags in the area to reduce the damages. The photo was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Over Tk 86,811cr lost to floods

More than 28 lakh people in 18 districts affected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The recent devastating floods in 18 north and northeastern districts caused damages worth over Tk 86,811 crore, State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Enamur Rahman said yesterday.

The deluge claimed 12 lives and injured 2,880 people. Over 28 lakh people were affected by the floods, he added.

The state minister was speaking at a press conference at the secretariat after an inter-ministerial meeting, organised to discuss flood damages and what to do in this regard.

The floods were triggered by torrential rains beginning in the second week of May.

Enamur said the deluge completely damaged crops worth Tk 1258.53 crore and partially damaged crops worth Tk 55957.21 crore.

Besides, damages caused to fully destroyed houses was worth Tk 368.84 crore, while the figure for partially damaged houses was over Tk 1,355.03 crore, he added.

He said the flood completely destroyed 229 bridges, 664km concrete roads, 315km brick roads, 721km dirt roads and 169km stretches of embankments, which financial damages of which amounted to around Tk 240.65 crore.

A total of 1,496 bridges, 1,886 km concrete roads, 676 km brick roads, 6,085 km dirt roads, and 2,882 km stretches of embankments were party damage, causing financial losses of

about Tk 4,442 crore.

The damages to schools, colleges, madrasas, mosques, and temples were estimated at Tk 68.83 crore.

Heavy rains in the bordering Indian states of Meghalaya and Assam and onrush of water from the upstream aggravated the flood situation, the state minister said.

"The Surma was flowing above the danger mark from May 13 due to torrential rains and onrush of water from upstream, causing floods in Sylhet, Sunamganj and their adjacent areas."

The government has allocated 4,400 tonnes of rice, Tk 8.45 crore in cash, dry foods worth Tk 1.22 lakh, Tk 40 lakh for baby food, Tk 40 lakh for fodder and 8,000 bundles of corrugated iron-sheets for the flood victims.



Poor in India can dream

Droupadi Murmu says after taking oath as 15th president of the country

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's first president from a marginalised Santal community, Droupadi Murmu, said yesterday after being sworn in that her election was an "achievement of every poor person in the country".

Murmu's elevation to India's highest constitutional post has been seen as an important gesture of goodwill by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the communities that make up more than 8% of its 1.4 billion people ahead of a general election due by 2024.

Murmu, a former teacher and state minister from Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was born into a poor family of the Santal community from the eastern state of Odisha.

She is the 15th president of India and the second woman head of state after Pratibha Patil. Murmu succeeds Ram Nath Kovind whose five-year-term ended on July 24.

Members of parliament and of state legislatures elected Murmu last week for a five-year term after she was nominated by the BJP.



Police on the hunt for five men for gang rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, BAGERHAT

Police are looking to arrest five men for gang-raping a woman in Dema union of Bagerhat Sadar upazila.

The victim filed a case with Bagerhat Model Police Station accusing Saiful Islam, 25, Rabbi Howlader, 22, Zahidul Howlader, 35, Sajeeb Howlader, 25, and Riaz Howlader, 23, yesterday evening, said KM Azizul Islam, OC of the police station.

Quoting the case statement and the victim, the OC said the incident took place around 12:10am yesterday when the victim left her house in the union's Bashbaria village to go to toilet.

The victim was sent to a local hospital for medical examinations. Police have launched an operation to arrest the perpetrators, Azizul added.

5 Covid patients die, positivity rate 7.84%

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five Covid-19 patients died in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, up from four fatalities the previous day.

The number of new cases during that period also increased to 548 from 430 the previous day, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Against a total of 6,987 samples tested countrywide, the positivity rate was 7.84 percent, whereas it was 7.04 percent the previous day.

With the latest counts, 29,271 Covid patients have died in the country since the first death was reported on March 18, 2020, and a total of 20,02,323 people have tested positive.

At least 1,277 patients have recovered from Covid during the 24-hour period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 19,37,240 and the recovery rate at 96.75 percent, said DGHS.

Private producer to set up 3MW hybrid power plant

UNB, Dhaka

The government has signed a contract with a private company to set up a 3 MW hybrid power plant – a combination of solar, battery and diesel-run generator – at southern Monpura Island in the Bay of Bengal.

As per the contract signed on Monday, Western Monpura Solar Power Limited (WMSPL) will set up the power plant from which the state-owned West Zone Power Distribution Company Limited (WZPDC) will purchase electricity over the period of 20 years.

The power will be supplied to consumers in Monpura, an island of about 77,000 inhabitants living in an area of 373 square km in Bhola.

Nirodh Chandra Mondal, joint secretary of the Power Division, Md Alamgir Kabir, secretary of the WZPDC, and Bashir Ahmed, managing director of the WMSPL, signed the implementation agreement and power purchase agreement on behalf of the respective sides at a function at the capital's Biduyt Bhaban.

Cabinet gives the final nod

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footprints, signatures and certificates will also be admissible as evidence before a court.

After yesterday's cabinet meeting, held virtually and chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who joined it from the Gono Bhaban, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said, "Since the digital [virtual] court has been given recognition, it was felt that there should be some amendments to the [evidence] act."

"Data along with information can be used as evidence [under the amended law]."

The instruction has been issued to incorporate both "information" and "data" in the Evidence Act, 1872 that deals with raising questions over the character of a witness or victim.

"There is a tendency of raising questions about a victim's character through obnoxious questions. Restriction has been imposed on it. No such question can be asked straightway without the permission of a court," said Anwarul Islam.

If it is completely repealed, bad people will take advantage, he added.

On March 14, the Cabinet approved the draft in principle. At that time, the cabinet secretary said the amendment had been brought to eliminate future legal complications over the trials held virtually during the Covid pandemic.

Barrister Jyotirmoy said they had long been demanding inclusion of digital evidence in the act.

Citing the example of Bangabandhu murder case, he said there was video evidence of murderers but it could not be used against them.

The amendment will benefit both the prosecution and defence but there remains concern over the handling of

digital evidence.

Recently, he said, there has been a trend that a Facebook account of a person is hacked or a fake account is created to write status demeaning religion, leading to communal violence. Afterwards, an innocent gets framed for inciting the violence but those who are behind it remain scot free.

This can be an example of how digital evidence can be abused, explained the lawyer.

The Cabinet yesterday adopted a condolence motion on the demise of slain former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe.

Sheikh Hasina recalled Abe's role in several mega projects of Bangladesh.

The Cabinet also approved the final draft of Bangladesh Industry-Design Act, the draft of Gram Adalat (Amendment) Act in principle and draft of Marine Fishing Guideline.

Govt formally seeks \$4.5b from IMF

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percent, said finance ministry officials informed on the matter.

To begin the talks, an IMF mission is expected in September, when the terms and conditions for the loan will be thrashed out.

By December, the deal is expected to be locked in for placing at the IMF's board meeting in January, the officials added.

Loans from the IMF typically come with tough reform plans, which often end up being too exacting to implement for many countries.

The conditions that Bangladesh would be subjected to can be gauged from the concluding statement of the IMF staff mission's nine-day tour to Dhaka that ended last week.

According to documents seen by The Daily Star, implementing a fuel pricing mechanism, removing the interest rate caps on lending and borrowing, resetting the methodology to report on foreign

currency reserves, increasing revenue base, and strengthening corporate governance in the banking sector top the recommendations made by the mission.

Removing energy subsidies that cushion prices for consumers remain a key demand of the IMF while negotiating financial packages with countries.

The government would most definitely be pulling back the fuel subsidies, said a top official of the energy ministry informed of the proceedings.

"We are negotiating with the transport service providers such that they do not pass on the burden of higher fuel prices to the consumers. We will make up for this through other ways," he said on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

The cap on interest rates, a phenomenon found only in Bangladesh that broke down the

monetary transmission mechanism, would also be lifted as per the IMF's demand, said a top official of the central bank.

"We are working out if the caps would be lifted for all or certain sectors," he added.

UK's Sunak vows to get tough on China if he becomes PM

AFP, London

Rishi Sunak on Sunday promised to get tough on China if he becomes Britain's next prime minister, calling the Asian superpower the "number one threat" to domestic and global security.

The former finance minister's pledge comes after his rival in the final two of the race to lead the ruling Conservative party, Liz Truss, accused him of being weak on China and Russia.

It will create another crisis

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scheduled to be held in late December 2023, in a free and fair manner.

The commission in its latest series of dialogues has held meetings with 18 parties until yesterday.

Bangladesh Muslim League and Workers Party of Bangladesh, who joined the talks yesterday, and at least eight other political parties raised the demand for bringing the public administration, home, local government, defence and information ministries under the EC during elections to ensure free and fair polls.

"They have said the Election Commission should be entrusted with many things to strengthen it during elections. I doubt if we can take it [responsibility of running ministries] even if we are entrusted with by the government in line with the constitution," Awal said at the meeting with Workers Party in the afternoon.

"Because everything about how the cabinet will be formed, and who will be its members is mentioned in the constitution. The Election

Commission is not a ministry. But I would then become the home minister, the defence minister or any other minister, and that may create another crisis," he added.

Responding to Workers Party General Secretary Fazle Hossain Badsha's question about what the EC would do if there was support for a particular party from foreigners, Awal said the issue of foreign "interference" has to be addressed by political parties politically and the commission has nothing to do about it.

Speaking at the meeting with Muslim League in the morning, the CEC said holding a national election is a "tough task".

He said there would be a government during the elections and the EC would have "control over it".

"We will seek assistance. We believe that that government will not be able to say 'no'. If they say 'no', then the elections will be questioned."

Muslim League proposed forming an election-time government with representatives from all registered political parties. The party opposed use of EVM in elections and

suggested dissolving parliament three months prior to the national elections, appointment of a judge equivalent to the rank of the district judge as the returning officer in each constituency during the national polls.

Workers Party, a component of the ruling Awami League-led 14-party alliance, proposed a proportional representation in parliament on the basis of votes. It recommended that the election-time government should perform routine day-to-day activities, Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (which allows voters to verify that their votes have been cast) should be added to the EVMs and army should be deployed if it is of utmost necessity.

Meanwhile, the EC yesterday postponed the July 27 by-election to the chairman post of Najirpur Tatherkhathi union in Patukhali's Bauphal upazila.

The development came after a supporter of the ruling Awami League candidate on Saturday said that they would "come to know which voter cast vote for whom as the polls would be held using EVMs".

Natore court asks 3 cops to explain

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Friday evening.

The victim could identify the robbers, Swapan and Alhaj, both residents of Moddhompara area.

Within hours, he caught the two with the help of a local ward councillor. Then, a mob beat them and handed them over to police around 2:00am on Saturday.

Police took the accused to Gurdaspur Upazila Health Complex for treatment and then to the custody.

Later on Saturday, police filed a narcotics case stating that the two were caught by locals while selling cannabis and handed over to police. Around 20 grams of cannabis were recovered from them, according to the case statement.

Sub-Inspector Mahabur Rahman filed the case that was endorsed by Akhtaruzzaman, who was acting as the officer-in-charge of the police station that day. SI Zahid Hossain was appointed as the investigation officer of the case.

Police produced the two accused to the court the same day. While giving depositions before the court, Swapan and Alhaj admitted that they robbed the rickshaw-van puller but claimed that they carried neither cannabis nor any kind of drugs.

Hearing their statements, the court scrutinised medical report of the doctor who provided treatment to the duo at the health complex.

The magistrate found reasonable ground to believe the statements of

the accused and asked the police officers to appear before the court and submit written explanations, said Md Shahiduzzaman, stenographer of the court.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, ward councillor Md Mokhlesh said he did not find any drug from the two robbers when they were held by the mob.

Contacted, both Md Mahabur Rahman and Zahid Hossain claimed police recovered cannabis from the duo and police have evidence to back this up. Akhtaruzzaman could not be contacted over phone despite repeated attempts.

The police station's OC Abdul Matin said they will act as per the court directive.