



Stay alert so that none can mislead people using religion

Says President Hamid

BSS, Dhaka

President M Abdul Hamid yesterday asked all to remain vigilant so that none can mislead the people by using religion to further their narrow interests.

"Communal harmony is the eternal tradition of Bangladeshes There is no room for majority or minority here," he said while exchanging Durga Puja greetings with leaders of the Hindu community at the Bangabhaban, and urged everyone to work together to advance this tradition in the greater interest of the country.

The head of state also wished all the Hindus across the world including Bangladesh.

He said, "We must celebrate Durga Puja but we must remember that our neighbours, friends and relatives should not be deprived of this joy."

Referring to the deaths of 70 pilgrims after a boat carrying them capsized in Karatoa river in Panchagarh on September 25, the President expressed profound shock and sorrow over the casualties and wished immediate recovery of the injured.

Abdul Hamid also conveyed deep sympathies to the bereaved families.

Noting that the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequently the Russia-Ukraine war have created global unrest and conflict, President Hamid said the people of the world are passing their days in extreme uncertainty, and the situation has wreaked havoc on the world economy, hit by recession.

"There is no alternative to absolute tolerance, mutual trust and confidence and cooperation to overcome the prevailing situation," he observed.

Referring to the unexpected power outage on Tuesday, the president said there was some disruption due to this.

He, however, expressed hope

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A BM-21 'Grad' multiple rocket launcher fires at Russian positions in Kharkiv region on Tuesday, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine. PHOTO: AFP

Ukraine fight to 'stabilise'

Says Putin, formalises annexation of four partially-occupied regions; Kyiv presses counterattack

AGENCIES

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that he expected the situation to "stabilise" in Ukrainian regions annexed by the Kremlin after Moscow suffered military setbacks and lost several key towns to Kyiv.

Ukraine earlier claimed victories over Russian troops in the eastern region of Lugansk as the Kremlin vowed to recapture territory lost in a lightning Ukrainian counteroffensive.

In recent weeks, Ukraine's forces, bolstered by Western weapons, have wrested Russian troops out of a string of towns and villages in the southern Kherson region and the eastern separatist strongholds of Lugansk and Donetsk.

"We are working on the assumption that the situation in the new territories will stabilise," Putin told Russian teachers during a televised video call.

Just hours earlier, the Ukrainian-appointed head of Lugansk Sergiy Gaiday announced that the "de-occupation of the Lugansk region has already officially started".

A senior Russian lawmaker called on military officials to tell the truth about developments on the ground in Ukraine following the string of bruising defeats.

"We need to stop lying," the chairman

of the lower house of parliament's defence committee, Andrei Kartapolov, told a journalist from state-run media.

"The reports of the defence ministry do not change. The people know. Our people are not stupid. This can lead to loss of credibility."

"The Ukrainian army is quite rapidly and powerfully advancing in the south."

Ukrainian President
Volodymyr Zelensky

Putin yesterday signed into legislation his annexation of four Ukrainian territories – including Lugansk – as the European Union agreed a new round of sanctions against Moscow in response.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow would take back land it lost to Kyiv within the annexed regions, vowing they would be "Russian forever and will not be returned."

Putin last week signed agreements with the Moscow-installed leaders of the four regions to become subjects of the Russian Federation, despite condemnation from Kyiv and the West.

Russian forces do not have full control

over Kherson or Zaporizhzhia and recently lost control of several settlements in Donetsk, reports AFP.

"The way we are regrouping (our forces) along the front means that we can gather strength and strike back," Kirill Stremousov, the Moscow-appointed deputy head of Kherson region, told the RIA Novosti news agency.

Ukraine's forces "won't enter Kherson. Its impossible," he said referring to the region's eponymous main city.

On Tuesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his forces had retaken "dozens" of villages in the east and south. "The Ukrainian army is quite rapidly and powerfully advancing in the south," Zelensky said in his daily address on social media.

The latest battlefield maps from Moscow showed that Russian troops had left many areas in Kherson, including along the west bank of the Dniro River.

While Russian authorities remain largely silent about the extent of the setbacks, war correspondents of pro-Kremlin media admitted that troops were in trouble.

"There won't be any good news in the near future. Not from the Kherson front nor from Lugansk," newspaper journalist Alexander Kots wrote on his Telegram channel with over 640,000 followers.

PM to brief media on UK, US trips today

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will address a press conference today at 4:00pm at her official Gono Bhaban residence to share the outcome of her recent official trips to the UK and USA, said Ihsanul Karim, the PM's press secretary.

Hasina travelled to London on September 15 to attend Queen Elizabeth II's funeral and a reception hosted by King Charles III.

She left London for New York on September 19 to attend the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly held on September 23.

She departed for Washington DC the next day.

2 die from Covid, 549 get infected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people died from Covid while 549 became infected with the virus in 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday.

The daily positivity rate slightly rose to 13.86 percent from the previous day's 13.80 percent, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services.

The new cases were recorded after 3,961 samples were tested across the country during the 24-hour period.

With the latest numbers, the total number of Covid deaths in the country rose to 29,374. The death rate stands at 1.45 percent.

Meanwhile, 293 Covid patients recovered during the same period. The recovery rate is 97 percent.

Both the dead were males, aged between 41 and 60.

Teen raped in Noakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A 15-year-old girl was raped in Noakhali's Kabirhat upazila on Tuesday night.

According to the victim's family, the girl and her family were attending a wedding in Kabirhat Pourashava.

A garment worker of about 25 years of age, also a distant cousin of the victim, took her to the roof of a residential building and raped her.

He ran away from the scene after the girl started bleeding profusely.

The locals informed the mayor of Kabirhat who called the police.

The victim's father filed a case with the Kabirhat Police Station yesterday, accusing the garment worker of rape.

The teen has been hospitalised. Police will record her statement and proceed with a medical examination as soon as her health improves.

"The accused is absconding while his family members are also in hiding. We are trying our best to track them and make the arrest," said Rafiqul, officer-in-charge of Kabirhat Police Station.



Durga Puja

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This year's puja was held amid festivities after low-key celebrations in the last two years due to the pandemic.

Durga Puja, also known as Sharadiya (autumnal) Durga Utsab, is the worship of the divine force embodied in goddess Durga. It symbolises the battle between good and evil in which the dark forces eventually succumb to the divine forces.

The festival began on Saturday on a happy note as goddess Durga came to earth riding an elephant with her daughters Saraswati and Lakshmi and sons Ganesh and Kartik, symbolising good harvest. The mother returned to her in-laws' house in Mount Kailash riding a boat.

Yesterday, Hindu devotees from different parts of the capital came to the bank of the Buriganga on trucks carrying the idols. They sang hymns to Durga with the sounds of musical instruments such as Shankha, Khol, and Dhak.

Devotees with tearful eyes were seen bidding farewell to the mother deity and her children, wishing Durga's return next year.

On Bijoya Dashami, Hindu families visited each other to share sweets. As part of the main rituals of Dashami Puja, female devotees gave vermilion at the feet of Durga at mandaps and temples as part of the traditional "Shidur Khela".

The ritual follows Hindu women putting vermilion on each other aspiring for prosperity in lives.

This year, Durga Puja was celebrated at 32,168 mandaps across the country, including 241 in the capital, according to Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad.

Rice import plan receives tepid response

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The price spiral put the consumers, already struggling to cope up with rising prices of other essentials, in a tight spot.

To encourage rice imports, the government slashed the import duty to 25 percent from 62.5 percent in June and then to 15 percent in August.

Officials said rice production has been hampered this year due to floods and also for less-than-normal rainfall. Aush yield was around seven lakh tonnes lower than the target of 27 lakh tonnes this season. Moreover, the production of Boro, the biggest crop, was also hit hard by flashfloods.

The Department of Agricultural Extension fears Aman yields may also fall short of the target because of less rain this year.

Talking to this newspaper, Md Shahjahan Kabir, director general of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute, said the annual demand for rice for human and nonhuman consumption is around 3.5 crore tonnes, and the country produces more than 3.7 crore tonnes a year.

In reply to a query, he said the

government allows rice import to contain price spiral in the domestic market.

According to the food ministry, the government had a stock of 17.5 lakh tonnes of rice in August, which dropped to 15.17 lakh tonnes on October 2. A stock of 12 lakh tonnes is considered safe in terms of tackling any food emergency.

Against this backdrop, the government moved to import rice through G2G arrangements and also private entities.

Chitta Majumder, proprietor of Majumder Traders, a leading rice importer, said the government's sale of rice at subsidised prices through OMS and other food distribution channels and also strict measures against hoarding could be the reasons for low import of rice.

"We would buy rice from India at Tk 48 a kg and sell it at Tk 49. But now we have to sell it at Tk 46 as the price has come down in the domestic market," he claimed.

Several other importers said India recently imposed export duty up to 20 percent on various types of rice,

including Atap. This pushed up the costs of rice import from India.

Though traders are allowed to import rice from any country, they prefer India, the world's largest rice exporter, for low price of the staple there and also low transportation costs, they mentioned.

Officials said the low volume of import by private entities would not create any problems in the domestic market, as the country still has a very good stock, and the Aman harvest will begin next month.

"This will have no impact on the local rice market. The market will become more stable once the Aman crop hits the market. There is no reason to panic or get worried," said the food secretary.

Ismiel also said the government was considering extending the deadline for opening LCs for rice import by private entities.

Besides, he said, the government plans to import another three to four lakh tonnes of rice from various sources.

Asked about rice import under G2G arrangements, Raihanul Kabir,

director of the Directorate of Food, said several consignments of rice will arrive this month and the rest by December.

He, however, didn't give any details. Officials said the government has already opened LCs to import one lakh tonnes of rice from India.

"A consignment of 30,000 tonnes of rice has already reached Chattogram port. It will be unloaded soon," said an official of the Directorate of Food, seeking anonymity.

The official said the government has also opened LCs to import two lakh tonnes of rice from Myanmar. The first consignment of 30,000 tonnes will arrive by this month and the rest in phases by December.

Apart from these, the government has already signed an agreement with Vietnam to import 2.30 lakh tonnes of rice, including 30,000 tonnes of Atap rice.

"An LC has been opened to bring the consignment of Atap rice, which is expected to arrive by this month. The government is yet to open LCs to import the rest of the rice," said the official.

Result of neglect, lessons not learnt

FROM PAGE 1

"This would not have happened if there was a smart grid," said prominent energy expert Prof M Tamim.

In a smart grid, the engineers would have instantly noticed the fall in demand and adjusted electricity generation accordingly, he said.

The government had not made enough investment to make use of digital technology in the national grid, he said.

A lot of money has been spent over the last three fiscal years to set up new power transmission lines. But the existing lines should have been modernised.

According to PGCB data, from fiscal year 2017-18 to 2021-22, the 400kV lines increased by 114 percent, the 230kV lines increased by 20 percent and 132 kV lines increased by

17 percent.

As of June 2022, the PGCB had 1,494 km of 400kV line, 4,018 km of 230kV line and 8,186 km of 132kV line.

But the capacity of substations that transform voltages has not increased accordingly, said a PGCB official requesting anonymity.

The National Load Dispatch Centre (NLDC) regulates the generation, transmission, and distribution of electricity.

But the NLDC's job is mostly done over phone calls from the power stations and distributors, Energy expert Prof M Shamsul Alam told The Daily Star.

"This creates risks of failure. If there was an automated system, the NLDC technicians would have been able to see voltage and frequency real time."

PGCB Managing Director Golam Kibria could not be reached for comment.

In 2017, the PGCB began a project to integrate power generators to the NLDC's SCADA-EMS system, which is supposed to be completed by 2024, said an official.

MINISTRY YET TO FORM PROBE COMMITTEE

The power ministry was yet to form the probe committees that State Minister Nasrul Hamid said would be formed to find out the exact cause of Tuesday's grid failure.

Meanwhile, a committee formed by the PGCB with its Executive Director Yeakub Elahi Chowdhury as the chief has started an investigation.

The six-member committee yesterday visited the control room and examined the equipment at the Ghorashal power plant in Narsingdi

and then went to Ashuganj Power Station in Brahmanbaria, reports our correspondent in Narsingdi.

Yeakub Elahi Chowdhury told reporters in Narsingdi that the exact cause of the failure will be found once the control rooms of all the affected power stations are examined.

He added that no major problems were identified in Ghorashal.

Mohammad Hossain, the director general of Power Cell under the power division, told The Daily Star that in primary investigation, it seemed that the source of the problem was at one of the substations in Ghorashal.

Gonotantro Mancha, an alliance of different political parties, in a statement yesterday said the grid failure was a result of the government's inefficiency in management and lack of willingness to reform the system.

Families' wait now shorter, yet harder

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proud of my brother that he joined the UN mission. The light of our family went off with his death," he added.

Sharif, son of Lebu Talukdar, of Berkharia village in Sirajganj's Belkuchi municipality area, was the first man of his family to get a government job, family members said.

"Sharif was the eldest son of his family. With his death, the family has lost its dreams." Sharif's neighbour Abdur Rahman said.

Peacekeeper Jasim's father Abdun Noor, a valiant freedom fighter, and his elder brother Julhas Uddin were in severe shock.

Jasim's wife Sharmin Akter fell silent after losing her husband after eight years of their marriage.

Such a heartbreaking scene was seen at Jasim's native home at Khatinga in Brahmanbaria's Bijoyagar upazila on Tuesday.

Jasim is the second of the two sons Abdun Noor had with his first wife.

Visiting Jasim's home, this correspondent found that his father became speechless after hearing the news of his death.

Jasim last talked to his family members on Monday. His brother Julhas, assistant platoon commander of Ansar-VDP, said Sylhet's 61 Bengal Regiment called him and reported Jasim's death around 9:00am on Tuesday.

Nine months ago, Jasim went to Africa for the first time in his 10-year-long career to participate in the UN peacekeeping mission. He has two sons aged six and four, Julhas said.

Julhas also said, "My father fought for the country in 1971 and now my brother also gave his life for the country. So, I demand the government bring my brother's body home as soon as possible. I also demand the government do something to support his family and two children."