



Build a society free from discrimination, sectarianism PM urges all on eve of Genocide Day

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called upon all to build a society based on equality and free from all kinds of discrimination and sectarianism.

She said this in a message yesterday on the eve of Genocide Day-2023.

Bangladesh will observe the day today to commemorate brutalities of the Pakistan army during “Operation Searchlight”, launched on the night of March 25, 1971.

“Operation Searchlight” was a last resort of Pakistan to try and suppress the will of the Bangalees who would get an independent country in less than nine months.

During the operation, the Pakistan forces indiscriminately killed the Bangalee members of the East Pakistan Rifles and police, students, teachers and common people.

They also set fire to houses and looted business establishments, leaving a trail of destruction.

The night also witnessed Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s proclamation of independence before he was arrested by the Pakistani troops and subsequently flown to West Pakistan.

The day is being observed as Genocide Day officially for the seventh time in the country since the parliament unanimously adopted a resolution on March 11, 2017.

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A BRTC bus was mangled after it hit an electricity pole and a tree in Jhalakathi’s Rajapur yesterday morning. Two people died in the crash that took place on Barishal-Patharghata road after the driver lost control of the vehicle.

PHOTO: KM HABIBUR RAHMAN

Russia attacks along Ukraine front

3 killed in strike on shelter in Bakhmut

REUTERS, Near Kremlinna

Russian forces attacked northern and southern stretches of the front in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region yesterday, pressing on with their offensive despite assertions from Kyiv that Moscow’s assault was flagging near the city of Bakhmut.

Ukrainian military reports described heavy fighting in the northern sector along a stretch of front running from Lyman to Kupiansk, as well as in the south at Avdiivka on the outskirts of the Russian-held city of Donetsk.

Both are parts of the front that have been major Russian targets in a winter offensive campaign to fully capture Ukraine’s industrialised Donbas region. The Russian offensive has so far yielded scant gains despite thousands of troops killed on both sides in the bloodiest fighting of the war.

At a Ukrainian artillery position in lush pine forests behind the northern stretch of the front, troops fired 155 mm rounds from a French TRF-1 howitzer towards a highway used as a supply road for the Russian-held stronghold of Kremlinna.

For now, Ukrainian forces are still focused on preventing the Russians from advancing along more than 300 km of Donbas front, from Kupiansk in the north to Vuhledar in the south.

In Kostiantynivka, west of Bakhmut, a Russian missile slammed into a refuge offering a warm shelter for civilians, killing at least three women, local officials said.

In the northern Sumy region, an administrative building, a school building, and residential buildings were among those damaged from Russian shelling that killed two civilians, President Volodymyr Zelensky’s office said.

US imposes fresh sanctions on Myanmar

Targets jet fuel suppliers

REUTERS, Washington

The United States yesterday announced further sanctions against Myanmar, targeting people and entities tied to Myanmar’s military as Washington seeks to increase pressure on the ruling junta following the 2021 coup.

The US Treasury Department in a statement said it imposed sanctions on two people and six entities connected to Myanmar’s military that Washington accused of enabling its continuing atrocities, including through the import, storage and distribution of jet fuel to the military.

Since a junta seized power in February 2021, Myanmar has been plunged into chaos, with a resistance movement fighting the military on multiple fronts following a bloody crackdown on opponents.

Ex-AL leader shot dead in Khulna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Unidentified miscreants shot dead a former Awami League leader in Khulna city yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Sheikh Ansar Ali, former cultural secretary of the district’s Digholia upazila unit AL.

The miscreants shot him in front of the Linda Clinic in Shironani area around 2:00pm, said Md Kamal Hossain Khan, officer-in-charge of Khanjahan Ali Police Station.

Quoting locals, OC Kamal said Ansar Ali was returning home after Juma prayers. When he reached Linda Clinic around 2:00pm, some miscreants stopped and shot him, leaving him dead on the spot.

On information, police recovered the body and sent it to Khulna Medical College Hospital for autopsy, the OC added.

Police officer stabbed during raid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A police officer was stabbed allegedly by a drug trader during an anti narcotics drive in Dhaka yesterday.

Shahinur Rahman, 45, sub-inspector of Turag Police Station, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said police.

Around 7:00pm, a police team, led by Shahinur, conducted a raid at a building in Fulbaria area, Moudut Hawlader, officer-in-charge of the police station.

One drug trader named Abdur Rouf stabbed the policeman in his chest. He was rushed to a local hospital and later referred to DMCH, said the OC.

Police are conducting drives to arrest Rouf and other drug traders, he further said.

2 teens arrested over murder of SSC candidates

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police early yesterday arrested two teenagers in a case filed over the murder of two schoolboys in Patuakhali’s Baulal upazila.

Both accused, aged around 14 years, were arrested in a drive led by Saheed Ahmed, additional superintendent of police (Baulal Circle).

Law enforcers are trying to arrest the other accused, Nargis Begum, mother of Nafis, one of the victims, filed a murder case with Baulal Police Station accusing nine teenagers, including three unnamed ones.

On Wednesday, Maruf, Nafis and Siam -- all 15 years old and students of class 10 -- were on their way home around 4:30pm after a farewell ceremony of Indrakul Secondary School’s SSC candidates.

Five ninth-grade students of the same school attacked them and, at one stage, stabbed them and fled.

KSA to re-establish ties with Syria

Say sources; both countries agree to reopen their embassies

REUTERS, Beirut/Riyadh

Syria and Saudi Arabia have agreed to reopen their embassies after cutting diplomatic ties more than a decade ago, three sources with knowledge of the matter said, a step that would mark a leap forward in Damascus’s return to the Arab fold.

Contacts between Riyadh and Damascus had gathered momentum following a landmark agreement to re-establish ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, a key ally of President Bashar al-Assad, a regional source

aligned with Damascus said.

The re-establishment of ties between Riyadh and Damascus would mark the most significant development yet in moves by Arab states to normalize ties with Assad, who was shunned by many Western and Arab states after Syria’s civil war began in 2011.

The two governments were “preparing to reopen embassies after Eid al-Fitr”, a Muslim holiday in the second half of April, a second regional source aligned with Damascus told Reuters.

Improve safety at 2,000 level crossings

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dedicated manpower.

According to BR data from August, 2022, there are 3,111 level crossings in the country.

Of those, 1,886 are authorised, but 948 are unmanned.

A total of 1,225 level crossings are both unauthorised and unmanned. With the unmanned authorised crossings, there are 2,173 level crossings without dedicated manpower in the country.

Different government agencies have been involved in constructing unauthorised level crossings, with LGED having constructed 510, the highest, show BR documents.

According to the Road Safety Foundation, at least 37 people were killed in 36 rail-related accidents in the first two months of this year.

Last year, at least 326 people were killed and 113 were injured in 354

such accidents, the foundation said, adding that most of them had taken places at level crossings.

Safety issues at level crossings took centrestage after 11 people died as a train hit a microbus at a level crossing in Chattogram’s Mirsharai upazila on July 29 last year. Two more succumbed to their injuries later.

After the incident, the railways ministry held an inter-ministerial meeting and asked both the BR and LGED to complete the survey as soon as possible.

The survey was completed last year but the report was given to BR headquarters last month, BR sources said.

Another recommendation made in the survey was to upgrade classes of 108 level crossings.

There are several grades of level crossings -- Special, A, B, C and D -- based on train movement frequency

The decision was the result of talks in Saudi Arabia with a senior Syrian intelligence official, according to one of the regional sources and a diplomat in the Gulf.

The Saudi government’s communication office, the kingdom’s foreign ministry and the Syrian government did not respond to requests for comment.

Saudi state television later confirmed that talks were ongoing with the Syrian foreign ministry to resume consular services, citing a Saudi foreign ministry official.

and locations; and staffers are deployed on the basis of the grade.

Contacted, BR Director General Quamrul Ahsan said they have sent the survey result to the railways ministry, which will send it to the LGED ministry.

As per the previous decision, LGED will take up projects to ensure safety at level crossings with the help of BR in terms of implementation.

He said BR will have to talk to the Roads and Highways Department about constructing the overpasses and underpasses at level crossings, because they will have to be made on roads built by RHD.

Replying to a question, Ahsan on March 16 told The Daily Star, “We have taken initiatives to establish automated level crossings. We are going to close some level crossings on insignificant roads.”

“He will have to vacate his official residence but every MP gets 30 days to relocate,” said one Congress lawmaker, adding that legal experts in the party were preparing to file an appeal in a higher court.

Several Congress lawmakers and leaders of regional opposition parties said Gandhi was being punished for speaking the truth and safeguarding democracy.

Shashi Tharoor, an MP from Gandhi’s party, expressed his shock on Twitter, saying: “I’m stunned by this action and by its rapidity, within 24 hours of the court verdict and while an appeal was known to be in process. This is politics with the gloves off and it bodes ill for our democracy.”

“We will fight against the injustice legally and politically,” said Jairam Ramesh, a Congress lawmaker.

Death knocked on their doors at sundown

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In the early hours of March 26, the Pakistan army started the systematic destruction of the neighbourhood. The soldiers started to fire arbitrarily at the doors and windows of the houses on both sides of the lane where Dulal Sadhu’s family lived.

“We guessed what might happen to us, so we took shelter deep inside our two-storey home. However, one of the stray bullets hit our servant Harihar, a 10-year-old boy, who died instantly,” he said.

The rest of the residents of the house, including Dulal, managed to escape later.

The soldiers also threw grenades and firebombs through the windows inside several houses, killing the inhabitants and setting fire to a large part of the locality, he recounted.

“Through the bullet holes, I tried to observe whether soldiers were going to set fire to our house. Then I saw that a team of five soldiers took position in front of a house just opposite ours. It was owned by the Saha family.”

One of the soldiers smashed the door of that house by spraying it with machine gun shots and two other soldiers threw bombs inside. With massive explosions, the ground floor collapsed instantly and the house was ignited.

“The soldiers also fired at the burning wreck. I heard heart-wrenching screams and shrieks with the rattling of machine guns. All of the inhabitants of that house were killed by gunshots or were burnt alive,” said Dulal Sadhu, narrating the horror.

Just a few metres away from Saha’s house was the residence of renowned physician Nishikumar Nag. His son Sadananda Nag, who was in his early 20s then, shared his traumatic experience of how he witnessed his father’s murder.

“We were horrified when soldiers started banging on our door. They were shouting and calling my father,” said Sadananda.

“My father was a renowned physician and he was fluent in Urdu and English. He opened the door. As he tried to explain to the soldiers something in Urdu, one of the soldiers punched him and kicked him, and he fell to the floor.

“Pakistani soldiers surrounded the entire Shankhari Bazar neighbourhood in the evening before starting the raid. We were getting deafening sounds of explosions and gunfire from the nearby areas. Rattling sounds of burning wrecks

and screams of the victims pierced through our ears. We were trembling and awaiting our fate like a mouse caught in the trap.”

Sadananda was watching it through a window blind and trying to calm his mother and siblings. The soldiers searched for him and other family members but could not find them as they were hiding in a secret storeroom.

Failing to catch them, the soldiers vandalised the entire house. They tortured Dr Nag to make him reveal the hiding place of his family members. He did not utter a word.

“Suddenly two of the soldiers held my father and made him stand up and another soldier charged a bayonet right into his abdomen. He charged the bayonet again into the chest of my father. Seeing the horror, we left our house through the backdoor.”

Another group of soldiers attacked the temples of the neighbourhood and completely demolished them. Many of the priests had already fled. However, the army identified those who could not flee by their shaved head, clothing and pigtail.

Around 20 of them were crammed into a room and a soldier fired his machine gun at the crowd, finishing off all of them. Another soldier shot from his pistol at those who seemed still alive.

This terrifying scene was witnessed by Gaur Sur, whose 30 family members were killed in the massacre.

He said, “The Sur family was one of the wealthiest and most influential families in the neighbourhood. While the soldiers were destroying the temple, one of the officers of the Pakistan army told my uncle Chandan Sur and his brothers and sons to come down [from the first floor of the house] and talk to their senior officer.

“The officer assured us that they would not harm us at all and they only wanted to talk to my uncle. However, whenever Chandan and his brothers went down, they were killed instantly by machine gun fire. Then my brothers and cousins were also picked up from our home, lined up on the street and gunned down. Only a few lucky ones like me saved lives by hiding in the sewerage line.

“Pakistani soldiers also kidnapped many women from the neighbourhood, who could never be found.”

Dulal Sadhu, Sadananda Nag and Gaur Sur are three of the last survivors of the carnage, still alive and still living in the area. Most of the witnesses of the horrific incident that

took place 53 years ago either passed away or left the country.

Sadananda, who now runs a shankha store in the area, never could get over the trauma.

“I could never forgive myself for not doing anything to save my father. I had to endure that nightmare just to save my mother and my younger siblings. Still, in my sleep, I can hear my father’s scream and yelling of Pakistani soldiers,” he said.

The carnage continued till March 28 and by that time, the entire Shankhari Bazar was abandoned. At least 212 Hindus were confirmed dead and many more went missing and they could never be found.

Gaur Sur said, “When we fled to India, many people who sheltered us told us not to return to Bangladesh. They said we would not be able to live harmoniously with the Muslims.

“However, we did not pay heed to them. We have been living here since the Mughal period. This is my ancestral land. I want to live here till my last breath.”

Large liquor consignment seized at Ctg port

UNB, Ctg

The customs department seized a large consignment of foreign liquor from the Chittagong port on Thursday as the goods were imported under a false declaration.

Chattogram Customs House seized the container loaded with 16,840 litres of foreign liquor during a special drive, said Audit Investigation and Research (AIR) Unit Revenue Officer Nizam Uddin.

As the shipments contained foreign liquor with high duties, importer Bismillah Corporation tried to evade the government’s revenue of Tk 149 million, he added.

“We had information that the 40ft container was loaded with foreign liquor,” he added.

Dhaka wants

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After he was accused in the murder case, Rabul fled to India and managed an Indian passport under the name Arav Khan. With that passport, he went to Dubai where he started jewellery business.

His criminal record came under the spotlight after he invited cricketer Shakib Al Hasan and several other celebrities to open his jewellery store in Dubai.