



Prepare to play in the World Cup

PM urges footballers

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged football players to prepare themselves in such a way that they could play in the World Cup in the days to come.

"The World Cup ended a few days back, but Bangladesh could not qualify for the tournament. I hope Bangladesh will play in the World Cup in future and you [footballers] will have to prepare yourselves for this," she said.

The PM said this while distributing trophies and prizes among runners-up and champions of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman National Gold Cup Football Tournament Boys U-17 and Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib National Gold Cup Football Tournament Girls U-17.

The youth and sports ministry organised the programme at Bangladesh Army Stadium in the capital.

Referring to the participation of 1,10,552 boys and girls from upazila, district and national levels in the football tournaments, Hasina said, "It's a miracle. I think there is no country in the world where such a huge number of footballers take part in such tournaments."

Briefly describing her government's measures taken for the overall development of sports, she said, "Our target is to ensure sports for all."

Hasina said 40 boys and the same number of girls, who took part in the tournaments, would be given training for three months at the Bangladesh Krira Shiksha Protishtan (BKSP) and some of them would be sent abroad for training as they have the talent.

She added that they would establish BKSP in each division to ensure that sportspeople have the proper training.

The PM witnessed the second half of the girls' final football match between Rangpur and Khulna divisions.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel, MP, presided over the function. Chief of Army Staff General SM Shafiquddin Ahmed, among others, were present.



People waiting in long lines in front of counters to buy tickets to ride the metro at Agargaon Station yesterday, the first day the service is open to public. Enthusiastic people gathered at Agargaon and Uttara North stations to have the journey. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday inaugurated the Uttara to Agargaon section and took the first ride.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Russia fires missile salvo on Ukraine

Hits major cities; Lavrov says Kyiv's plan to get back annexed regions an 'illusion'

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russia fired scores of missiles into Ukraine early yesterday, targeting Kyiv, the northeastern city of Kharkiv, and other cities in a massive aerial bombardment that sent people rushing to shelters and knocked out power, Ukrainian authorities said.

In Kyiv, a team of emergency workers searched through the smouldering wreckage of a residential house destroyed by a blast, and footage showed the smoke trails of missiles lingering in the sky over the capital. In Kharkiv fire fighters worked to extinguish a blaze at an electricity station.

"Senseless barbarism. These are the only words that come to mind seeing Russia launch another missile barrage at peaceful Ukrainian cities ahead of New Year," Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweeted.

Ukraine's military said it shot down 54 missiles out of 69 launched by Russia in an attack that began at 7:00am local time. Air raid sirens rang out across the country and in Kyiv sounded for five hours - in one of the longest alarms of the war.

"This morning, the aggressor launched air and sea-based cruise missiles, anti-aircraft guided missiles and S-300 ADMS at energy infrastructure facilities of our country," wrote Ukraine's top general,

Valery Zaluzhny, on Telegram.

Brigadier General Oleksiy Hromov of the Armed Forces of Ukraine said the missiles were fired at "critical and energy infrastructure facilities in the eastern, central, western and southern regions".

The attacks followed an overnight assault by 'kamikaze' drones. Russia has mounted numerous waves of air strikes in recent months on Ukrainian critical infrastructure, leaving millions without power and heat in freezing temperatures.

The latest blitz came hard on the heels of the Kremlin's rejection of a Ukrainian peace plan, insisting that Kyiv must accept Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian regions.

Kyiv city military administration said two private houses in Darnytskyi district were damaged by the fragments of downed missiles and a business and a playground were also damaged. The mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, said 16 missiles were shot down over the capital and three people were injured.

Kharkiv mayor Ihor Terekhov said officials were clarifying what had been hit and whether there were casualties, while the mayor of Lviv, Andriy Sadovyi, said on Telegram that 90 percent of his city in western Ukraine was without electricity. The missiles had damaged an energy infrastructure unit.

In Odesa region, in southwest Ukraine,

air defence units shot down 21 missiles, its governor Maksym Marchenko said. The fragments of one missile hit a residential building, though no casualties were reported, he added.

Moscow has repeatedly denied targeting civilians, but Ukraine says its daily bombardment is destroying cities, towns, and the country's power, medical and other infrastructure.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, in a video address, urged Ukrainians to hug loved ones, tell friends they appreciate them, support colleagues, thank their parents and rejoice with their children more often.

"We have not lost our humanity, although we have endured terrible months," he said. "And we will not lose it, although there is a difficult year ahead."

Zelensky is vigorously pushing a 10-point peace plan that envisages Russia respecting Ukraine's territorial integrity and pulling out all its troops.

But Moscow dismissed it on Wednesday, reiterating that Kyiv must accept Russia's annexation of the four regions - Luhansk and Donetsk in the east, and Kherson and Zaporizhzhia in the south. It also says Ukraine must accept the loss of Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula annexed by Russia in 2014.

2 Bangladeshis shot dead by BSF

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Two Bangladeshis were shot dead by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) along the Barakhata Dolapara border in Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila early yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Monglu Mia, 42, of Barakhata Dolapara village and Sadik Hossain, 24, of Fakirpara village in Hatibandha upazila.

Confirming the matter, BGB-61 Commander Abdul Jalil said a patrol team of BSF Battalion-157 of Madhusudon Camp in West Bengal's Cooch Behar, opened fire on a group of Bangladeshi people.

The two were hit by bullets and died later, the commander said.

A protest letter was sent to BSF after the incident, Abdul Jalil added.

Contacted, Barakhata Union Parishad member Hafizul Islam said when a group of 18-20 Bangladeshi people crossed the border to bring cattle from India, a BSF patrol team opened fire around 12:30am.

The two died from their injuries after the other team members brought them back to Bangladesh territory. Their bodies were taken to their respective houses, the UP member added.

On information, Border Guard Bangladesh and police went to the houses.

Hatibandha Police Station Officer-in-Charge Shah Alam said the bodies will be sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy.

437kg of OMS rice seized from Jubo League leader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Around 437kgs of OMS (open market sale) rice was seized from the possession of a Jubo League leader in Dinajpur's Birampur upazila yesterday.

Abu Hena Md Mostafa Kamal, president of Dinajpur unit Jubo League and an OMS rice dealer in College Bazar area, was selling the rice to retailers in the afternoon instead of selling it to the needy who had been waiting to buy it since morning.

Locals informed the police after noticing nine sacks of rice being loaded onto a rickshaw-van.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Porimal Kumar Sarkar and Birampur Police Station OC Sumon Kumar Mohanta visited the spot and seized the goods. The rice was later sold to the locals by the authorities.

BNP leader Rizvi shown arrested in 3 more cases

COURT CORRESPONDENT

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi was shown arrested yesterday in three separate arson cases filed with Paltan and Badda police stations in 2012, 2013, and 2015.

Dhaka Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Tofazzal Hossain passed the order.

His lawyer Zaynal Abedin Mesbah moved the court in this regard so that he could later seek bail for Rizvi in these cases.

Rizvi, who is now in jail, was produced before the court during the hearing.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday issued arrest warrants against Rizvi and seven other party men in an explosion case filed with Pallabi Police Station in February 2020.

Rizvi was arrested on December 7 at the BNP's Nayapaltan office over an arson case filed against him with Paltan Model Police Station and has been in custody since then.

Metro rail opens to public

FROM PAGE 1

passengers to board.

Jannatul got on the train with her brother Al-Amin, who works on the metro rail project as a mechanical assistant, and dozens of other passengers - all cheering.

As the train jerked forward for its maiden journey, she held the safety rod tight. "It's so exciting," she said.

In just 13 minutes, they arrived in Agargaon - which would have been an implausible feat even two days ago.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Line-6 project, fundamentally changing the way many commuters in their day-to-day lives.

"I have toiled here for the last five years, so when I took the ride, I felt all my hard work was a success," said Al-Amin while getting off the train at the Agargaon.

Like Jannatul and Al-Amin, 3,855 others enjoyed the thrill of riding the country's first metro train on its opening day.

But getting on the joyride was not easy.

Braving the winter morning chill, a huge number of people gathered at both the Agargaon and Uttara North Station soon after Fajr prayer - a good few hours before the first train was scheduled to leave the Uttara North Station.

The queue stretched to nearly a kilometre from the two operational stations. Police and security personnel near the main gate of the stations were busy maintaining order.

Once the station gates opened, people dashed for the concourse.

"I started from my home as early as 6 am thinking that there would be a huge crowd as the day progressed. But as I reached, I found at least 50 people in front of me," said Hafiz Sarker, a resident of Pallabi in Mirpur.

Kamrul Hasan, an official at a private company, took half-day off yesterday and arrived at the North Station from Badda at 5:30 am.

"I wanted to be among the group of people taking the first trip - I am over the moon," he said.

Niloy, a student of Milestone School in Uttara, left home after Fajr prayers along with his friends to be part of the historic moment. After waiting for over an hour, he and his friends got on the train.

"I can't express in words how I am feeling. We cheered throughout our ride," he said.

Mohammad Mohsin, the founding captain of the Bangladesh Wheelchair Cricket Team, also enjoyed a ride on one of the 50 trips the metro completed yesterday.

"When I saw the inauguration of the metro rail, I could not hold my excitement. I wanted to see where our metro offers the same facilities that we saw abroad. I must say that I have done all things - from buying tickets to getting up on the platform - on my own without taking anyone's help."

But it was not smooth sailing at the two modern-looking stations throughout the day.

At one point, there was a queue at the concourse too due to ticketing glitches.

By 10:30 am, five out of six vending machines at Agargaon Station were out of order, leaving passengers to buy tickets manually, which ate up more time.

The authorities provided passes from four manual booths and one vending machine for quite some time. The two vending machines were eventually fixed.

Similar scenes were seen at the Uttara North Station. Even the money that the passengers inserted in the vending machine got stuck.

Many people were giving Tk 500 and Tk 1,000 notes at vending machines disregarding the instruction, said MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Company.

"That caused disruption." Besides, many people used old notes that got stuck inside the vending machines, he said, adding that they tried to fix the issue immediately.

The outcome of the disruption was reflected in the passenger count yesterday.

According to the pre-announcement, the authorities were

supposed to carry 200 people per train.

In that case, the authorities would have been able to carry 10,000 passengers. But about one-third of that number could make it to the train even though a huge number of passengers were seen outside of both stations.

Siddique said they have taken measures to supply adequate changes from today and will hang instructions on which notes can be read by the vending machines.

Metro rail passengers generally use long term passes.

Since it was the first day yesterday, people were buying their multiple-use passes as well as their single-use tickets.

"That's what took the time and caused the queue," Siddique said.

Of the passengers, 3,756 used a single-journey pass, 99 used a multiple-use MRT pass and two used the rapid pass for the service, he added.

Death toll from Philippine floods, landslides climbs to 39

AFP, Manila

Four people died in the southern Philippines after being hit by a landslide, authorities said yesterday, taking the nationwide death toll from recent rains to at least 39.

Rescuers were still searching for more than two dozen other people missing after heavy downpours over the Christmas weekend caused flooding and landslides across central and southern regions.

The latest deaths happened Wednesday in Mati City in the province of Davao Oriental on Mindanao island when a landslide buried four people as they fished, the national disaster agency said.

BNP's year of dramatic rebound

FROM PAGE 1

In the wake of the huge turnouts at the BNP rallies, the AL announced its own counter programmes.

And it turned up the political heat that eventually came down with a peaceful BNP rally in Dhaka on December 10, which drew considerable attention from home and abroad.

The year started with almost no political programmes, but things began heating up in the middle of the year due to price hikes of fuel and the deaths of two BNP men in Bhola, which the party claimed were in police firing.

The incident provoked the party activists to take to the streets.

President Abdul Hamid invited the BNP to join talks over the formation of the Election Commission - an invitation the party declined.

To mount pressure on the government, the party, at the end of January, decided to expand the alliance by bringing in more parties on a single platform and, in February, held talks with like-minded political parties.

Meanwhile, BNP leaders and activists have been worried over the health condition of Chairperson Khaleda Zia, who was diagnosed with liver cirrhosis and admitted to hospital in critical condition several times. Throughout the year, rumours over her health ran rife.

Much of the BNP's movement was focused on the demand for sending Khaleda abroad for better treatment. It went on to stage demonstrations in the district headquarters to drum up support for the demand.

On May 24, the party started holding formal talks with Nagorik Oikya to wage a simultaneous movement to demand an election under a non-partisan interim administration.

At the same time, it began holding rallies across the country to protest load shedding and price hikes of daily essentials. The two BNP leaders

were killed during one of the rallies held in Bhola.

The party observed similar programmes in wards, unions and upazilas across the country from August 22 to September 10.

They claimed the huge response from the people in those programmes inspired them to hold rallies in district headquarters.

However, in the district-level programmes, three party leaders and activists were killed.

The party then shifted the programme from districts to the capital city. It announced rallies in 16 spots in both Dhaka north and south and defied all obstacles to successfully hold them.

On September 17, the party observed a candlelight procession in Banani, during which senior leaders came under attack.

The BNP then started the second round of talks with like-minded parties to complete the process of waging a simultaneous movement from October 1.

Amid the talks, the party announced rallies in 10 of its organisational divisions to protest the price hikes of daily essentials, fuel prices, killing of its leaders and activists, and demanding the release of Khaleda Zia.

The BNP started its rallies from Chattogram on October 12. Leaders and activists had to face myriad obstacles while joining the rally.

However, the obstacles increased to a new level during the Mymensingh rally as a transport strike was suddenly called without prior notice.

Since then, transport strikes before every rally became a common feature.

Party leaders alleged that those were called only to bar BNP activists from joining the rally.

However, the activists joined every rally despite the strikes and some even took position from days earlier.

The political situation reached a climactic point ahead of the December 10 rally in the capital. BNP leaders alleged that police began mass arrests just ahead of the rally, while a drama over getting venue permission was also going on.

While the party wanted to hold its rally in front of its Nayapaltan office, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police was adamant on giving permission to hold it at Suhrawardy Udyan. A series of talks then took place between the party and the DMP, but no solution came.

A clash even erupted between cops and BNP activists at Nayapaltan, in which an activist was killed and many others were injured. Police went on to raid the office and arrest many leaders from the area.

Just one day before the rally, Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, the party's general secretary, and Mirza Abbas, standing committee member, along with many other senior leaders were arrested and sent to jail.

The BNP finally got the nod to hold the rally on the Golapbagh ground.

The rally was held peacefully, putting an end to the last-minute drama.

Though some mid-ranking leaders had threatened to unseat the government, the party at the rally instead unveiled a 10-point demand and plans to wage a simultaneous movement with other parties and platforms.

It also announced the resignation of its lawmakers from parliament.

On December 19, just as the year was coming to a close, the party announced a 27-point outline of the state's structural reform, with a provision stating that no individual will be eligible to serve as president or prime minister for over two consecutive terms.

The BNP-led 20-party alliance came into "dissolution" with 12 of the parties floating a new alliance for a simultaneous movement.