



A worker removing a mural of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Lalmonirhat's Liberation War Memorial, top, on Sunday. The original state of the murals, bottom left, and the murals covered with a cloth on Independence Day (March 26), bottom right.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY



LIBERATION WAR MEMORIAL 3 murals of Sheikh Mujib demolished in Lalmonirhat

S DILIP ROY

Three murals of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Liberation War Memorial in Lalmonirhat were demolished on Sunday afternoon.

The demolition work was carried out by two workers, who, seeking anonymity, told journalists at the scene that the action was taken on the instruction of the District Council authorities.

However, Rajib Ahsan, chief executive deputy director (additional charge) of Lalmonirhat District Council, told The Daily Star, "I'm not aware of any decision to demolish the murals at the Liberation War Memorial." He declined to provide further details.

The Liberation War Memorial, constructed in 2015, is located in front of the BGB camp on College Road in Lalmonirhat. It was built by the Lalmonirhat District Council at a cost of Tk 32.75 lakh.

The memorial features murals of or related to the 1952 Language Movement, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's March 7 speech, the formation of the Mujibnagar government, the reading of the Liberation War declaration, a rising sun, the 1971 genocide, commander-in-chief of the Mukti Bahini MAG Osmani, freedom fighters celebrating after the war, people holding the Bangladesh flag, the Seven Birshresthos, and the surrender of the Pakistani army.

On last year's Victory Day (December 16) and this year's Independence Day (March 26), the district administration covered the murals with a piece of cloth. According to it, this was done following demands of the July

SEE PAGE 10 COL 6

Holiday trip

FROM PAGE 1

"Eight people died on the spot, while two others succumbed to their injuries at CMCH," added the officer.

The microbus driver was killed instantly, while the bus driver fled the scene. What caused the accident remains unclear. However, initial investigations suggest that the road was slippery due to saltwater seeping out from salt-laden trucks, which may have caused the microbus to lose control," he said.

The incident was part of a larger tragedy unfolding on the highway during the Eid holidays. Within just 48 hours, three accidents in the Chhunati Jangalia area claimed the lives of 15 people and left at least 30 others injured, raising urgent safety concerns.

Drivers, police officers, firefighters, and locals attested to the treacherous nature of the hilly and slippery road due to salt transportation in the area. During the Eid holiday season, many drivers from outside the region, unfamiliar with these narrow and winding routes, fall victim to such fatal accidents.

According to Roads and Highways Department (RHD) officials, the 2-kilometre stretch from Lohagara Mazar Gate to Chhunati Bazar has emerged as the most accident-prone section of the Chattogram Cox's Bazar highway.

At least 28 people have been killed in road crashes along this stretch since January this year, according to the Doazari Highway Police Station.

"The road is sloped and uneven, causing an imbalance while driving, which often results in accidents," said OC Shuvo Chakma.

Additionally, the transport of salt and food makes the road slippery, further increasing the risk of accidents. Over-speeding is another major factor behind frequent crashes, he added.

According to him, the Jangalia, Jangalia Forest Gate, and Mazar Gate areas are particularly risky.

In terms of fatalities, six people were killed in January, three in February, eight in March, and 11 in the first two days of this month, he said.

The police have already sent letters seeking intervention from the Highway Police headquarters and the local RHD and Road Transport and Highways Division, he added.

Rokan Uddin Khaled Chowdhury, executive engineer and in-charge of the Chattogram South Road Division of the RHD, acknowledged the risks.

He said the 40-45-kilometre segment, from Chakaria to Patia's Indrapur, was marked risky a long time ago, and RHD put adequate roadside warning signs for drivers.

"The road at the accident site is only 22 feet wide and is surrounded by dense greenery. Salt-laden trucks travelling from Cox's Bazar spill saltwater onto the road, making it slippery, especially in the early hours. When vehicles travel at high speed, their brakes often fail to function properly, leading to such crashes," he said.

He said they have already engaged district administration officials and salt transportation workers regarding the issue.

"As a temporary solution, we are installing rumble strips to help control vehicle speed," he said.

"We are considering risk mitigation plans, as we cannot stop the transportation of salt. It's a big industry. However, measures can be implemented so that the workers maintain proper guidelines during transporting salt," he said, adding that workers often flout rules and do not use plastic wrapping to stop salt from spilling on the roads.

Next budget aims for 6% GDP growth

FROM PAGE 1
according to the Export Promotion Bureau.

"Political uncertainty is the main reason behind sluggish investment. It is highly unlikely that investment will see a turnaround soon, so to assume that would be impractical," Hussain said.

The surge in remittances since the political changeover on August 5 last year is unlikely to compensate for the private sector's declining appetite for investment.

Remittance inflow increased by nearly 28.5 percent to \$21.43 billion in the July to March 26 period of the current fiscal year, compared to the

same period in the previous fiscal year, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

"Remittance makes an indirect contribution to GDP," said Hussain, who was part of the 12-member committee that prepared a white paper on the state of the Bangladesh economy.

The IMF projects inflation to decline to 5 percent next fiscal year.

However, the 6.5 percent inflation target is achievable if the budget deficit remains below Tk 2,20,000 crore next fiscal year, according to Hussain.

Prof Selim Raihan, executive

director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling, rued the "missed opportunity to prepare a realistic budget."

The budget should be drafted on realistic figures. Since this is not a political government, there was no need to impress with numbers."

The size of the budget is not too important in the Bangladesh context, said Raihan, also a teacher at the University of Dhaka's economics department.

"We lack the capacity to fully implement the budget, so the government should have focused more on improving execution."

protecting all minority communities.

"The country's commitment to protecting its diverse population—whether Muslim, Hindu, Christian, or any other community—remains steadfast. While there will always be hardliners who spew hatred at rallies and on social media, it is our responsibility to deny them the oxygen their anger requires."

The NYT article said that the interim government struggled to contain these forces and that the Jamaat-e-Islami and local clerics were exploiting the political vacuum to advance religion-based politics.

The Jamaat aims to establish an Islamic welfare state modelled after Turkey, blending politics with religious principles, the article said.

It also mentioned the banned Islamist outfit Hizb ut-Tahrir's march for an Islamic caliphate and laws with the death penalty as punishment for blasphemy.

The article said future constitutional changes might remove secularism from the preamble, signalling a shift towards a more religiously defined state.

No room for extremism

FROM PAGE 1

"We firmly declare that the government will play a strong role in safeguarding Bangladesh's democratic system. No extremist activities will be allowed to rise."

Home Adviser Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury yesterday claimed that there was no rise in militancy across the country since the interim government took office. He was speaking to reporters after inspecting several police stations.

"Since we assumed responsibility, there has been no resurgence of militancy. We will work together with the people to resolve any issues that arise," the home adviser said.

The Chief Adviser's Press Wing lambasted the NYT article by calling it "oversimplified" and "misleading".

On its CA Press Wing Facts Facebook page, it said, "The New York Times article paints a troubling and one-sided view of Bangladesh, suggesting that the country is on the brink of being overtaken by religious extremism. This portrayal not only oversimplifies the political and socio-economic factors at play," it said.

The press wing also said the government was committed to

risks unfairly smearing an entire nation of 180 million people."

"It is crucial to acknowledge the progress Bangladesh has made over the last year and the complexity of the situation, rather than relying on selective, incendiary examples that paint an inaccurate picture," it said.

The press wing said that it was "unconscionable to define the entire country by a few isolated events".

It maintained that many attacks on minority groups were politically driven, not religious violence.

"Many of the clashes between different groups in the wake of Hasina's ouster have been misrepresented as sectarian violence, when in reality, they were largely political in nature. Political factions often use religion to galvanise support, which complicates the issue and risks conflating political unrest with religious persecution.

It is misleading to frame the entire situation as a sectarian conflict, as it ignores the true political and socio-economic factors at play," it said.

The press wing also said the government was committed to

protecting all minority communities.

"The country's commitment to protecting its diverse population—whether Muslim, Hindu, Christian, or any other community—remains steadfast. While there will always be hardliners who spew hatred at rallies and on social media, it is our responsibility to deny them the oxygen their anger requires."

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Dhaka hopeful of Yunus-Modi meeting

FROM PAGE 1

Delhi relations, Rahman said: "This is not a zero-sum game. We will try our best to engage all where and when we can. We want to go ahead with all, not excluding anyone."

About the summit, Rahman said that though the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was not able to achieve much over the last 25 years, Dhaka was expecting to boost regional connectivity and economic collaboration under the leadership of Bangladesh.

Apart from attending the summit on April 4, Yunus will deliver a keynote at the BIMSTEC Young Generation's Forum. He will be returning to Dhaka that evening.

The last summit was held three years ago, virtually in Colombo on March 30, 2022.

The theme of the 6th Summit is "Prosperous, Resilient, and Open BIMSTEC".

It aims to foster collaboration among the member states to address the shared security and developmental challenges and realise the goal of a prosperous, resilient and open BIMSTEC.

The summit agenda includes the adoption of the Declaration of the 6th BIMSTEC Summit; Bangkok Vision 2030; Rules of Procedure for the BIMSTEC Mechanisms; and Report of Eminent Persons Group on the Future Direction.

The agenda also includes signing of the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation, which aims at expanding maritime transport in Bay of Bengal with a view to enhancing transport of cargo as well as people to enable more trade and travel among the member states, and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between BIMSTEC and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and BIMSTEC and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, according to the BIMSTEC headquarters in Dhaka.

Bangladesh and Thailand will also sign a bilateral deal on preventing and fighting corruption.

This is the first time some focused areas of cooperation have been identified for the BIMSTEC region, and Bangladesh hopes for practical initiatives to be taken, Rahman said.

"We hope for the return of peace in Myanmar, and we can do a lot through regional cooperation," he said, noting that in the wake of global economic issues, the smaller countries need to collaborate for their own interests.

Asked if the Rohingya crisis would be discussed, Rahman said it was not supposed to be discussed in BIMSTEC as per its charter.

"That does not mean we will remain fully silent. We will try to engage with various parties. I keep engaged with them. Rohingya repatriation is the ultimate solution. Our goal will be to make progress in this effort," he said.

He said they have already engaged district administration officials and salt transportation workers regarding the issue.

"As a temporary solution, we are installing rumble strips to help control vehicle speed," he said.

"We are considering risk mitigation plans, as we cannot stop the transportation of salt. It's a big industry. However, measures can be implemented so that the workers maintain proper guidelines during transporting salt," he said, adding that workers often flout rules and do not use plastic wrapping to stop salt from spilling on the roads.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has called upon BIMSTEC member states to extend full cooperation in ensuring the timely finalisation of six key constituent agreements on trade in goods under the Framework Agreement.

The agreements are on the rules of origin, assistance in customs matters, dispute settlement procedures and mechanisms, trade facilitation, investment, and trade in services.

Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin made the call while leading a five-member Bangladesh delegation to the 25th session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials' Meeting in Bangkok yesterday.

Senior officials finalised the draft Provisional Agenda and draft Report of the 20th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, which is set to take place today. Additionally, they completed the drafts of the provisional agenda and declaration for the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit.

Jashim Uddin highlighted the progress made in the sector of "Trade, Investment, and Development, including Blue Economy", for which Bangladesh serves as the Lead Country.

Stressing the significance of a BIMSTEC Free Trade Area, he said its realisation was crucial for the collective economic progress of the region.

The NCP alleged that BNP leaders and activists in various places across the country were regularly intimidating NCP activists with threats of "taking revenge after seven or eight months".

BNP 'failing to control its grassroots'

FROM PAGE 12

severe injuries in the attack during a clash between local factions of Chhater Dal and Svechchhasebha Dal on March 30 at Ramganj upzila in Lakshmipur, the statement said.

In another attack on March 24 in Noakhali's Hatia, some BNP activists attacked NCP Joint Chief Coordinator Abdul Hannan Masud during a public meeting, the statement said.

The NCP alleged that BNP leaders and activists in various places across the country were regularly intimidating NCP activists with threats of "taking revenge after seven or eight months".

"It is unclear to the NCP what kind of reality will be created by local BNP men after seven or eight months that will allow them to take revenge," the statement said.